
I. Not the World You Thought It Was

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN ABUJA

Conference on Lake Chad Is Historic Breakthrough for Development of Africa

by Claudio Celani

March 6—The International Conference on Lake Chad (ICLC), which met in the Nigerian capital of Abuja February 26-28, marked an historic breakthrough for Africa and globally. The conference adopted a road map (“The Charter of Abuja”) towards a development plan centered around the most ambitious infrastructure program ever conceived for the African continent to reach this stage of implementation, and assigned the

study of its feasibility to a joint Italian-Chinese venture. During the three-day conference, a new awareness and assertiveness emerged from African nations, inclining them to “think big” and take their destiny into their own hands, inspired by the formidable example of China’s economic success. The conference also showed the emergence of a form of Europe-Africa-China tripartite cooperation that can be the model of international co-



A scene from the conference. When Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari addressed the conference, he called for an urgent and immediate action plan by African leaders and the international community to reverse the ongoing drying out of the lake.

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courtesy of the Government of Nigeria

On the extreme right is conference organizer Sanusi Imran Abdullahi, outgoing executive secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Committee. Left to right, beginning on the far left: Ana Lourenço, representing H.E. João Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola; H.E. Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of Gabon; H.E. Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic of Niger; H.E. Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; H.E. Idriss Deby Itno, President of the Republic of Chad; H.E. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic; H.E. Philemon Yang, Prime Minister of Cameroon.

operation in the true spirit of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

The "Charter of Abuja," approved by eight African heads of state and government (see "[Outcome of the Conference](#)", page 12) asserts that saving Lake Chad from extinction is a pan-African imperative, that the only way to restore Lake Chad is through water transfer from the Congo basin, and that the most viable option for that transfer is the Transaqua project.

Transaqua, as our readers know, is the idea of a 2,400 km waterway intersecting all the right-side tributaries of the Congo River, from southern Congo to the watershed between the Central African Republic (CAR) and Chad, able to carry up to 100 billion cubic meters of water annually, thus restoring Lake Chad to its original surface area of 25,000 square km, regulating river flows, producing hydroelectric power, and offering major transport infrastructure connecting the Great Lakes region to the Sahel. Lyndon and Helga LaRouche and the Schiller Institutes have fought for this plan for almost thirty years, most of that time alongside the project's inventors at the Italian engineering firm Bonifica SpA.

The Italian firm Bonifica, which developed the idea

in the seventies, and the Chinese giant, PowerChina, have recently concluded a strategic alliance to conduct the feasibility study for Transaqua. At the Abuja conference, where the two companies presented the project, the Italian government announced that Italy will donate 1.5 million euros so that the feasibility study can begin.

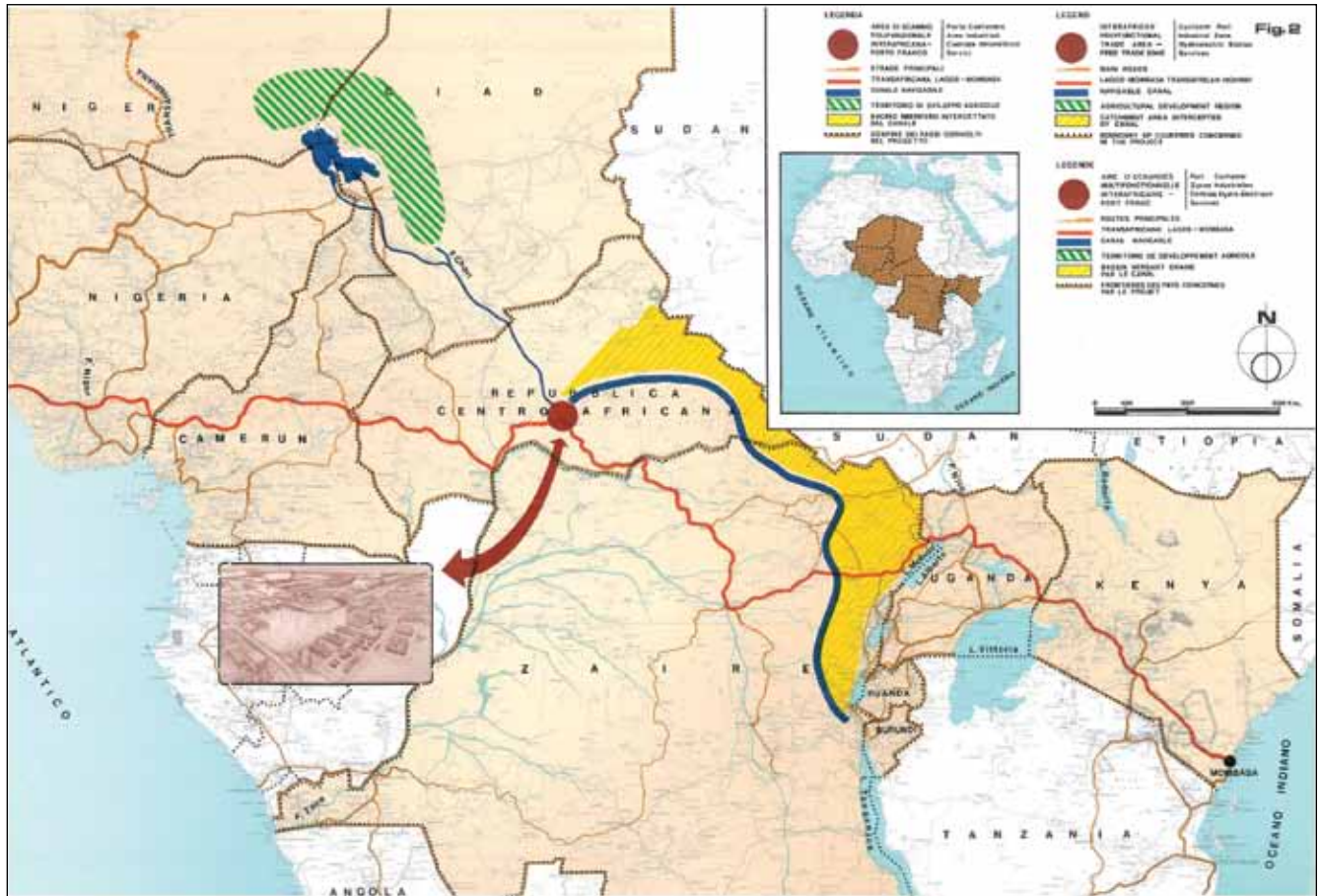
This author accompanied the Bonifica delegation to the conference and took part in both public and closed-door sessions, as well as bilateral talks. My colleague Sébastien Périmony from the French Schiller Institute was also present as an observer, and helped maintain a high level in the discussions of the plenary session and the various panels. We also had the opportunity to give

copies of the recent *Schiller Institute* report: [Extending the New Silk Road to West Asia and Africa](#) to various dignitaries, including the President and the Vice President of Nigeria, the President of Niger, and the Minister of Water Resources of Nigeria, who was the organizer of the conference, together with the Lake Chad Basin Committee (LCBC) and UNESCO.

To fully appreciate the importance of the decisions taken at the ICLC, one must know how dramatic the situation is in and around Lake Chad, where the existence of 40 million people is directly or indirectly threatened by the shrinking of the lake and by the proliferation of Boko Haram, the deadliest terror organization in the world.

The Lake Chad crisis is not new: it had already started in the Seventies. As LCBC outgoing executive secretary Sanusi Abdullahi stated in his introductory speech:

One proposal to transfer water from the Congo to Lake Chad called "Transaqua" was submitted to the LCBC in 1984 at the height of the most severe drought affecting the Lake Chad basin. This proposal was approved and shared by the then President Mobutu Sese Seko of Congo (former Zaire), but was considered too big,



hence a smaller proposal taking water from the Ubangi River to Lake Chad was adopted by the Member States of the LCBC as requested by the Government of the Central African Republic.

Indeed, Transaqua is not “too big” if one considers, as Périmony noted in an intervention from the floor, that France has built 10,000 km of waterways; in comparison, the 2,400 km length of Transaqua is a “small” figure. The idea that Transaqua is “too big, and too expensive” has been pushed by those who want to keep Africa backward, and in a special way by one former European colonial power, whose influence on some member countries of the LCBC is still present and was even felt at the conference.

However, with the brilliant work done by the LCBC, the alliance between Bonifica and PowerChina, and the Italian decision allowing the feasibility study to begin, all hurdles were overcome.

As early as the first panel of the conference, featur-

ing a presentation of the first project whose feasibility was explored by the LCBC, the Ubangi inter-basin water transfer project, it immediately became clear that there is no alternative to Transaqua. Mohammed Bila, a remote-sensing expert at the LCBC, gave a short but accurate report on the feasibility study conducted by the Canadian company CIMA, which concluded that the Ubangi water-transfer project was feasible, but (1) it would consume hydropower to pump the water uphill, while making no power available, and (2) the amount of water collected would raise the level of Lake Chad by a maximum of one meter.

So, Bila concluded, the Ubangi water-transfer project had been rejected by the LCBC, but it now considers Transaqua the only viable idea.

Transaqua Becomes the Focus

This presentation, done with scientific rigor and disarming candor, immediately shifted the focus onto Transaqua, even before the specific panel that had been

Italian Ambassador to Nigeria Addresses Final Plenary of Lake Chad Conference

March 3—After the formal greetings to authorities and dignitaries, Italian Ambassador Stefano Pontesilli read the following speech:

We know the problem; we know the time to act is now; we have a possible solution. It is called Transaqua.

It is an idea for a water, transport, energy and agro-industrial development infrastructure for west-central Africa. It is a simple idea: to explore the possibility of collecting enough water from the northern tributaries of the Congo River, in order to refill Lake Chad and eventually develop hydroelectric power and irrigation. Bonifica calculated that refilling Lake Chad to its original dimensions would require an annual addition of approximately 50 billion cubic meters of water. Bonifica engineers envisioned the construction of a 2,400 km system of reservoirs and canals that would collect twice this amount, totaling approximately 5-8% of the Congo River water.

The Transaqua canal would start in the south-eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), intersects all tributaries upstream, across the DRC and the Central African Republic (CAR), and reach the watershed between the CAR and Chad at approximately 500 meters altitude. Here, it pours into the Chari River, Lake Chad's tributary, having carried 100 billion cubic meters of water per year by gravity alone in a 10-by-100-meter canal. It will be a really a new, manmade river, with dimensions and flow comparable to the Nile at the Aswan Dam.

Along its path, Transaqua will create systems of reservoirs, water regulation, and hydropower production, benefitting every basin of the Congo tributaries, without negatively affecting their carrying capacity, fisheries, or navigability. Furthermore, a road will be built as necessary to serve the construction of the canal-dam system, which will remain as a modern transport connection in central Africa. The canal itself will be a magnificent waterway; and plans en-



movisol

Italian Ambassador to Nigeria, Stefano Pontesilli, makes a statement to the Lake Chad Conference.

vision building at least one major inland port and economic development area in the CAR.

We all know the benefits for the countries surrounding the Lake Chad basin, but let me dwell for a minute on the benefits for the CAR and DRC, which are not directly affected by the drought in the Sahel.

Transaqua will provide significant infrastructure. These two countries will indeed be major beneficiaries of the project, as they will have a waterway, hydropower, a road, and the benefits of productive employment and work experience for a large workforce over several years.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Italian government has expressed interest in the project. This is why: we believe that Transaqua addresses the root causes of the economic desperation that forces people living in the area to emigrate to Europe. It also gives a very concrete meaning to the proposals of launching a "Marshall Plan" to create jobs and development in the immigrants' countries of origin, some of them coming from the Sahel region.

To this effect, the Italian government has decided to pledge up to 1.5 million euros for the feasibility study for the Transaqua project. Thank you.

Coverage and video of the ambassador's remarks are posted to the website of Movisol, the International Civil Rights Solidarity Movement, the co-thinkers of Lyndon and Helga LaRouche in Italy, under the title: "L'ambasciatore italiano in Nigeria: l'Italia crede nel progetto."



Schiller Institute

Dr. Matthew Adepoju (second from left) and other members of the team from the Nigerian Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA). Dr. Adepoju, the head of Cadastral Mapping and Urban Space Applications for NASRDA, was a session chair. Also present are Sébastien Périmony of the Schiller Institute, France (third from left), and a journalist from Nigeria Magazine (second from right).

planned for it was held the following day. That panel on Transaqua included presentations by Bonifica and PowerChina. Many interventions from the podium and the audience showed strong support for the “big” project, and in some cases an astonishing degree of detailed knowledge of Transaqua.

For example, the next day, when a representative from Congo addressed the plenary session expressing solidarity with the Chad basin countries, but offering a list of reservations motivated by Congo’s aspiration to follow in the footsteps of African Unity pioneer Kwame Nkrumah, discussant Abubakar Bobboi Jauro replied that “the Transaqua idea was developed by the Italian firm Bonifica exactly in the spirit of Nkrumah’s vision.”

Then, when the breakout session with Bonifica technical director Franco Bocchetto and PowerChina deputy chief engineer Huang Ziping finally took place, there was a packed room with people standing in the back. In presenting Transaqua, Bocchetto showed, among other things, that the CIMA study presented by Engineer Bila had concluded that a dam on the Kotto River (a tributary of the Ubangi), would allow water-transfer to cross the divide with the Bamingui, a tributary of the Logone/Chari and therefore of Lake Chad, by gravity, exactly “at the end of the route of the Transaqua project.”

By itself, the dam on the Kotto River could provide

a limited amount of water transfer and have an insubstantial impact on the Lake Chad equilibrium. “But it represents the first link of a chain of similar reservoirs on the other tributaries of the Ubangi and Congo, to be connected by canals to form the Transaqua waterway.”

The priority stretch in the Central African Republic can be implemented by steps, each providing immediate local benefits: hydropower, irrigation, or flow regulation.

Mr. Bocchetto was followed by Mr. Huang, who showed and commented upon a video on the Central Route of China’s South-North Water Transfer Project, a 1,400 km canal built by PowerChina to bring water from the Yangtse River to the Beijing

region. Combined, the two presentations had a powerful impact: on one side, the project which critics scoff at as “pharaonic”; on the other side the demonstration that a similar “pharaonic” project has in fact been realized.

During the discussion, the PowerChina engineer answered a question from the audience by explaining that, although several years will elapse between the feasibility study and the completion of the project, we will not wait until the waterway is finished to “open the tap” and begin to re-fill Lake Chad. Water will start to flow as soon as the first dam is built—i.e. the last one on the route, the Kotto dam in the Central African Republic.

I intervened to announce that financing for the feasibility study had been secured. The Italian ambassador had told LCBC Executive Secretary Sanusi Abdullahi that the Italian government would provide half of the cost of the study—the other half to be supplied by PowerChina. The ambassador would announce that officially the next day, at the final plenary session.

In addition, I suggested that although Africans are quite right in considering the Lake Chad issue to be pan-African, yet the solution being considered also places a global responsibility on them. It is global because the emerging Italian-Chinese alliance to restore Lake Chad can become a model for successful Europe-China-Africa tripartite cooperation in the spirit of Chi-

Selected Press Coverage

The strategic importance of the Bonifica-PowerChina alliance was not missed by the international media present at the conference. A few hours later, AFP ran a report, published by many outlets in French and English, titled: “[Italy, China propose solution to Lake Chad water’s problem](#)”, while Radio France International (RFI) interviewed *EIR*’s Claudio Celani.

Too ambitious, too risky, too expensive? The reasons to oppose it are not lacking, but the project to fill Lake Chad is back. On Tuesday, Feb. 27 in Abuja, Nigeria, the titanic ambition to transfer the waters of the Congo Basin was on everyone’s lips, as reported by the Italian analyst Claudio Celani:

“People here are very convinced that water transfer is the only way to revitalize Lake Chad. They see big things. They understand that they need a big project, Transaqua, the big project that is intended not only to move water from point A to point B, but also to build a real modern infrastructure in the heart of Africa,” he explains.

RFI continues: “Transaqua is being reborn from its ashes. The Italian company Bonifica at the origin of the project, is now associated with the Chinese company PowerChina. A joint feasibility study will be funded by the Chinese and Italian governments. PowerChina’s chief engineer is pleased with this collaboration: ‘I believe we are at the beginning of a new cooperation. We look forward to starting this cooperation.’”

AFP quotes Lake Chad Basin Commission Executive Secretary Sanusi Abdullahi:

“Inter-basin water transfer is not an option but a necessity. We are faced with the possibility of Lake Chad disappearing, and that would be catastrophic to the entire African continent.”

Technical director Franco Bocchetto of the Italian engineering firm Bonifica, which first designed the Transaqua project some 35 years ago, is quoted, “The vision of hundreds of people dying in the Mediterranean Sea” had spurred the Italian government to support the project. “In recent years the situation has rapidly changed, and what did not seem possible in the ’80s has become of interest.”

AFP continues, “We work here for projects and we want to take social responsibility,” said Ziping Huang, an engineer at PowerChina.”

In a report on the Abuja conference headlined “Italy, China Ponder 2,400 km Canal To Save Lake Chad,” the London-based *Global Construction Review* includes a map from the Schiller Institute showing the extent of the project: “One version of the plan would involve damming a tributary [sic] of the River Congo in the Central African Republic and digging a 2,400-km-long canal to the River Chari, which feeds Lake Chad. A talk on the project given by Franco Persio Bocchetto, a director of Bonifica, to the Schiller Institute can be seen,” and the article provides the hyperlink to [Bocchetto’s November 2017 speech](#) at the Schiller Institute conference in Bad Soden, Germany.



Schiller Institute

Left to right: Conference participants Sébastien Périmony (Schiller Institute France), Franco Bocchetto (technical director Bonifica), Romina Boldrini (CEO Bonifica), Claudio Celani, and Ercole Incalza (foreign director, Bonifica).

na's Belt and Road Initiative. It is no secret that there is strong opposition to the Belt and Road in the West, and it must be defeated. The tripartite alliance for Transaqua is the best way to show that a win-win model is possible.

The moderator suggested that this proposition be included in the official record, along with other ideas emerging from the panel.

Later on, the same two speakers, Bocchetto and Huang, made a joint presentation during the closed-door session of the Council of Ministers of the LCBC.

The final day of the conference opened with the High Level Session, with the presence of Muhammadu Buhari, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Issoufou Mahamadou, President of the Republic of Niger and Acting President of the LCBC; Idriss Déby, President of the Republic of Chad; Ali Bongo Ondingba, President of the Republic of Gabon; Faustin-Archange Touadéra, President of the Central African Republic; and Filhomé Nyang, Prime Minister of Cameroon, representing President Paul Biya.

A problem emerged during the report on the plenary sessions and the breakout sessions, read by the official rapporteur. In contrast to the general thrust of the conference, the report on the breakout session with Bonifica and PowerChina censored the entire content, including the speakers and even the theme of the session. This prompted the moderator, LCBC scientific board deputy chairman Lawrence Freeman, to call on the rapporteur to correct his report, because it did not reflect the fact that Transaqua had been the leading issue in at least three panels.

Thereafter the Road Map was presented by Prof. Salihu Mustafa. It included the indication that Transaqua is the preferred solution for Lake Chad, and that a \$50 billion Lake Chad Fund should be created to finance water transfer and infrastructure (see box 1_page XX).

The final session, chaired by the Nigerian deputy foreign minister, was concluded with an address by Italian Ambassador Stefano Pontesilli (see box 2_page XX). His announcement of a grant for the Transaqua feasibility study was received with strong applause. Both the Nigerian deputy foreign minister and its water resource minister officially commended Italy for its support.

As Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche summed it up afterwards, "This is *really* good news for anyone who cares about the human species."

Outcome of the Conference

March 6—These are excerpts from the final version of the Road Map approved at the International Conference on Lake Chad, Abuja, February 26-28, 2018.

- The various studies carried out show that there is no solution to the shrinking of Lake Chad that does not involve recharging the lake by transfer of water from outside the basin.
- That Inter-basin water transfer is not an option; but a necessity.
- That failure to appropriate and timely action, will result in Lake Chad completely drying up soon, and that would cause humanitarian crisis and pose serious security challenges, not only for the region, but for the entire African continent and the World.
- The Transaqua Project which would take water from the right tributar[ies] of River Congo, conveying the water 2,400 km channel to Chari River is the preferred feasible option.
 - Consider the consequences of Lake Chad disappearing not only as a regional issue but, an African tragedy.
 - Endorse the Inter-basin Water Transfer (IBWT) initiative as a Pan-African project
 - To restore the Lake for peace and security to reign in the Lake Chad region and
 - The promotion of navigation, industrial and economic development in the whole Congo basin.
 - The African Development Bank to facilitate the creation of the Lake Chad Fund of USD 50 billion, to be sourced from African States and donations by Africa's Development Partners to fund the Lake Chad IBWT and infrastructure projects.

Strategy: Short Term Goals

- Review and adopt implementation plan for restoration and revitalization of Lake Chad
- Ameliorating security threat



Nigerian Ministry of Defence

Left to right: Ambassador Mamman Nuhu, the incoming Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari, and Engineer Sanusi Imran Abdullahi, the outgoing Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission during the recent conference on the Lake Chad Basin, in Abuja, Nigeria.

- De-silting, weeding and river training of rivers flowing into the lake
- Explore the possibility of rain water catchment alternative water scheme within the basin
- Build capacity of LCBC and Stakeholder Institutions through collaborative arrangements with regional capacity building networks
- Establish hydrologic and hydrogeological data networks and develop research to understand the hydrodynamics of the Lake
- Undertake studies to establish the hydraulic conductivity of the Nubian sandstone aquifer with the basin
- Finalize the ongoing feasibility study of Transaqua Project
- Conduct baseline survey of bio-diversity of the basin to develop a genetic data bank of plant and animal species in the basin
- Conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment study of the preferred option for restoring the Lake with corresponding Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP)
- Develop and implement a communication strategy for the restoration of the lake
- Review and implement a Master Plan for Lake Chad
- Initiate the process for raising the \$50 billion Lake Chad Fund

- Establish social mobilization and strengthen communication strategy to involve stakeholders, promote publicity, raise awareness and education on rational water use and environment management
- Advocacy for sustainable use of water resources and environmental restoration
- Strengthen local and regional partnerships amongst existing institutions, viz LCBC/CISCO.

Strategy: Medium and Long Term Goals

Medium Term Goals

- Produce detail design of the preferred project
- Implement ESMP of the preferred option for restoration of the Lake

- Explore the possibility of utilizing the abundant ground water reserve in the basin
- Develop and undertake catchment management of Logone-Chari and Congo watersheds and integrate with existing Kyobe and Yedseram/Ngadda CMP
- Develop and implement afforestation and greening programme of the Lake Chad basin to reduce evaporation loss
- Promote ecological and biodiversity advancement.

Long Term Goals

- Undertake the development of the Lake Chad to transform its environment for economic growth and stability of the region
- Implement the integrated catchment management plan for the watersheds.

Financing Strategy

- Secure the \$50 Billion Lake Chad Fund
- Adopt Tariff, Taxes and Transfer (3Ts) funding approach Explore social and economic principles, where Social component of project is funded through public sources (from riparian countries: commitment must be higher than the existing level) and Economic component is funded using public funds and loans.