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Voices from 'Ground Zero':

Interrogating History, Culture and Identity in the Resolution of Cameroon's 'Anglophone' Conflict

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List of Abbreviations

AAC	All-Anglophone Conference
ADF	Ambazonia Defence Forces
AGC	Ambazonia Governing Council
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ALC	African Leadership Centre
AMEF	Authentique Memorial Empowerment Foundation
AMF	Ambazonia Military Forces
AU	African Union
BIR	Brigade d'Intervention Rapide
CACSC	Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium
CAM	Cameroon Anglophone Movement
CATTU	Cameroon Teachers' Trade Union
CAWOPEM	Cameroon Women Peace Movement
CDC	Cameroon Development Corporation
FCFA	Central African Franc
CHRDA	Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa
CNU	Cameroon National Union
CPDM	Cameroon People's Democratic Movement
CSO	Civil society organisations
CTPSR	Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DfID	Department for International Development
FGD	Focus group discussion
FSLC	First School Leaving Certificate
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HARO	Hope and Rehabilitation Organisation
HD	Humanitarian Dialogue
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
KUNC	Kamerun United National Congress
LDA	Liberal Democratic Alliance
MND	Major National Dialogue
NA	Native Authorities
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
NPMB	National Produce Marketing Board
NSAG	Non-state armed groups
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OGTR	Operation Ghost Towns Resistance
PSC	Peace and Security Council
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SCAPO	Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organisation
SCNC	Southern Cameroons National Council
SCYL	Southern Cameroons Youth League
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SNWOT	South-West / North-West Women's Task
SOCADEF	Southern Cameroons Defence Forces
TAC	Teachers Association of Cameroon
UK	United Kingdom
UNOCA	UN Regional Office for Central Africa
UPC	Union des Populations du Cameroun
WCDA	West Cameroon Development Agency

Executive Summary

Peaceful resolution of the current 'Anglophone conflict' in Cameroon is urgently needed, not least due to its devastating impact on the civilian population. Now in its sixth year, this internationally neglected conflict is between government security forces and armed separatist groups calling for an independent state of Ambazonia in the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions. Such demands for secession have arisen out of historical marginalisation of the Anglophone regions, with the current conflict triggered by government repression of peaceful protests by lawyers and teachers in late 2016. This report highlights the voices of those most-affected civilians, inclusive of internally displaced persons and those who remain in the conflict zones, known locally as 'ground zero'. Such voices have hitherto been ignored and excluded from any official dialogue.

Prior to highlighting civilian voices, the report examines the root causes of the contemporary conflict in Cameroon's unique colonial history, as well as in post-independence developments under the Francophone-dominated government, notably the abolition of the federal structure in 1972. Further, the multiple grievances that have arisen in recent decades are explored. These are associated with different facets of marginalisation experienced by the Anglophone population and the attempted assimilation of their distinctive identity and institutions. The final background discussion is of the peaceful protests in 2016, their repression by the state and the subsequent rise of separatism and armed struggle.

The substance of the report focuses on civilians' experiences of the conflict, including mass displacement, human rights violations, sexual and gender-based violence, and psychological trauma. It examines the impact on incomes and livelihoods, the increase of insecurity and a decline in social cohesion and community life. It looks at the impact on different social groups, including women, young people, the elderly and disabled people. It explores grassroots perspectives on the current impasse in conflict resolution and outlines proposed strategies for peace. Research participants repeatedly stated the need for a ceasefire, military withdrawal and inclusive dialogue, one that includes the perspectives of those most-affected citizens. Participants were almost unanimous about the need for structural reform of the political system, with some supporting a return to a federal structure within Cameroon while others advocated for separation. A referendum amongst Anglophone citizens was seen as the mechanism by which to peacefully and democratically determine the future of the English-speaking regions. The report also examines international responses to the conflict, finding them woefully inadequate, and outlines local civilians' views on the potential role of international actors in peace negotiations. Civilian voices also identify a number of challenges to peaceful conflict resolution: the government's denial of a problem while pursuing a military solution; the intransigence and uncompromising nature of both warring parties; the self-perpetuating cycle of violence; and the constraints experienced by local actors advocating for peace, including personal security threats and the inability to advocate reform of the state without invoking state repression.

Research participants expressed a clear desire for an end to violence and a just resolution of the current conflict. Based on their voices, the following recommendations are made:

- Listen to the voices of affected civilians. Almost unanimously, they have called for a ceasefire by the warring sides and inclusive peace negotiations.
- Such negotiations should be mediated by an international third party, preferably the AU or UN.
- Negotiation and dialogue should include a bottom-up dimension through which representatives of affected communities can express their views and perspectives.
- Within a peace agreement, the Anglophone population should have the opportunity to vote for different political options by means of a referendum in the English-speaking regions.
- A Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be established in order to deal with war crimes and other human rights violations, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, committed during the conflict.
- In a federal option, official bilingualism should be included within the Constitution, with the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism given powers to implement bilingualism in the public domain.
- Reconstruction efforts should prioritise infrastructural development and financial support for local people, including women, in order to re-establish livelihoods and economic independence.
- Trauma healing services should be made widely available, including for survivors of sexual violence; and institutions should be established for children who have lost their parents during the war.

1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual overview

This report presents the findings of an empirical study that examines the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon through the voices of affected citizens. It explores the historical, cultural and identity dimensions of the conflict and seeks to contribute to its resolution. Now in the sixth year of armed conflict, the current crisis in Anglophone Cameroon was triggered in late 2016 when lawyers and teachers in the two English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions embarked on peaceful demonstrations to denounce the disparities within the country's judicial and educational systems. Despite their peaceful nature, these protests were met with an aggressive response from the Francophone-dominated government. Reacting to such state repression, the Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (Consortium) was formed and made demands for autonomy for the English-speaking regions. The government responded with more repressive purges, including the arrest of Consortium leaders. This marked the beginning of a spiral of radicalisation. New Anglophone leaders emerged, including from the diaspora, calling for the separation of the Northwest and Southwest regions, the former British Southern Cameroons, from French Cameroon. These demands culminated in a unilateral declaration of independence by separatist groups for the Republic of Ambazonia on 1 October 2017, accompanied by mass demonstrations across the Anglophone regions. The largely peaceful protests were met with a deadly response from state security forces, including the elite combat unit, the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), which further radicalised many people and increased sympathy for the separatist cause among the population (ACAPS, 2021). In response to the destruction and killings unleashed by the army in Anglophone towns, many young people began to take up arms to fight for separation. The violence that ensued between the Francophone-led army and the armed separatists plummeted the country into the current civil war.

Though the conflict is ostensibly between the military and armed separatist groups, it is civilians who have borne the brunt of the war. The conflict was ranked as the world's most neglected displacement crisis by the Norwegian Refugee Council for two years (2019 and 2020), and various reports indicate that, since the start of the conflict approximately three million citizens have been affected out of the official population of 3,606,086 in the Northwest and Southwest regions (National Institute for Statistics, 2014; UNFPA, 2016). Although official figures are not readily available and are often out-of-date, the numbers are stark. Reported deaths range between 4,000 and 12,000 (CHRDA, 2021; Kamguia, 2020); hundreds of villages have been burnt and pillaged (CHRDA, 2021); over 750,000 people have been internally displaced (UN OCHA, 2021c), with a further 60,000 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria (UNHCR, 2020), and an estimated 2.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance within Cameroon as a result of the conflict (UN OCHA 2021d). Additionally, 800,000 children were not receiving education due to a school's boycott enforced by separatists, with the many schools being burnt during violent clashes between the military and separatist fighters (Sixtus, 2019). While some schools reopened in September 2021, recent reports are that two-thirds of schools remain closed, with over 700,000 children and adolescents still out of school (UN OCHA, 2021a: 2). The incidence of rape, mass rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls is horrific, described as pervasive and rampant in a UN report that documented 4,300 cases in 2020 alone over the two regions (Craig 2021b). An earlier report stated that 'more than 75 per cent of women interviewed had experienced physical or sexual violence' (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019: 33). Gross human rights violations have been widely documented, inclusive of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest, unlawful imprisonment, torture and kidnappings (CHRDA, 2021; CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019; Willis et al., 2019; Willis et al., 2020). While human rights violations have undoubtedly been perpetrated by both warring sides, evidence indicates that the security forces are responsible for a majority of the killings and burning of homes, and for a greater level of indiscriminate violence (Willis et al., 2020: 35-36). Local people even described the situation as 'genocide' against Anglophone Cameroonians (*Guardian*, 2018).

In spite of ongoing humanitarian efforts by both international organisations and local civil society organisations (CSOs), violence and atrocities have continued unabated since 2017 and the Anglophone conflict remains one of the world's most neglected conflicts. National and global media attention on the conflict has been limited and funding support for humanitarian assistance remains inadequate. So far, 'just over 2 per cent of the 2021 funding requirements for the humanitarian response for the food security cluster and 20 per cent for the nutrition cluster have been met' (UN OCHA, 2021). Moreover, the main attempt thus far at conflict resolution has been the government-led 'Major National Dialogue' from 30 September to 4 October 2019. This was unsuccessful and was criticised for being elite-oriented and for excluding key actors (Hendricks and Ngah, 2019; Köpp, 2019). Not only were known separatist groups excluded (Chimtom, 2019), but also the participation of peaceful civil society groups, especially women's organisations, was limited (Ahmed, 2019). It should also be noted that the efforts of religious leaders, led by the (former) Archbishop Emeritus of Douala, Cardinal Tumi, to organise an Anglophone

General Conference in August 2019 prior to the Major National Dialogue, were thwarted by the government. This prevented various Anglophone actors from having the opportunity to articulate questions for the national dialogue's agenda, or to discuss who would represent the Anglophone regions (International Crisis Group, 2019). It is generally recognised that the dialogue failed (Hairsine, 2019; Hendricks and Ngah, 2019), with the war in the Anglophone regions intensifying immediately afterwards (Dupuis, 2019), and the government remaining intent on maintaining its military approach.

Calls for more 'inclusive dialogue' have come from Catholic bishops worldwide (ICN, 2020) and from the Swiss government, offering to mediate peace talks. However, such external calls remain top-down and elite-driven and continue to exclude those civilians most affected by the conflict, notably women and youth. In other words, grassroots voices, experiences and initiatives have been generally excluded and ignored throughout this conflict, impeding the prospects for its peaceful resolution. What is more, studies exploring the complexity and intricacies of the history, culture and identity in the resolution of conflict equally remain scant, thus demonstrating the urgency of this study.

One important contextual aspect is the importance of the two English-speaking regions to the Cameroonian economy as a whole. Most significantly, the Southwest and Northwest regions account for the bulk of Cameroon's agricultural exports and employment. The Southwest, in particular, is the site of large-scale agricultural plantations of palm oil, cocoa, coffee, bananas and rubber (World Bank, 2020: 21), as well as cash crop production by small-scale farmers. There is also an important tea industry, based more in the Northwest (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 3). The two regions are also vital to food crop production in Cameroon (maize, rice and plantain) (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). Although unaffected by the conflict, the off-shore oil and gas industries are located off the South-West region's coastline. Therefore, the two regions are crucial to the country's export production and tax revenue.

Funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the aim of this study was to contribute to greater understanding and peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict by answering the question: in what ways have Anglophone Cameroonians experienced the conflict, what are their perspectives on conflict resolution, and how can these influence dialogue and peace negotiation processes? More specifically, the study sought:

- to document the experiences of the conflict, and the perspectives on conflict resolution, of those Anglophone Cameroonian citizens most affected by the conflict, inclusive of both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and those that remain in the conflict zones ('ground zero');
- to enable these hitherto excluded voices from 'ground zero' to contribute to local and national dialogues on conflict resolution, giving particular emphasis to the voices of women and young people;
- to understand and explain the perspectives of these marginalised voices within the historical contexts of colonialism and post-colonialism that underpin the current conflict;
- to use sociolinguistic analysis to understand the cultural, identity and linguistic elements of the conflict, and to explore linguistic strategies to help resolve the conflict;
- to examine the conflict resolution activities of local CSOs, with a particular focus on women's organisations and their role in expressing the needs, interests and perspectives of conflict-affected communities and citizens; and
- to strengthen the network of CSOs working for peace in Cameroon and to enhance their capacity to bring the voices of most-affected people into the public domain and to influence dialogues for peace.

The study pursued the above objectives through data collection using semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), collage-making and consultative dialogue workshops. The study was conducted by a multidisciplinary and trans-geographical research team from the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, UK, the African Leadership Centre (ALC), Nairobi, Kenya, and the University of Buea, Cameroon.

The report is divided into seven main sections. The sections provide comprehensive discussions on the background of the conflict, its impact on Anglophone populations, possible strategies for peace and some challenges impeding the prospects for peace in Cameroon, substantiated with voices from the study population. The figure below provides a summary of the sections in the report.

Section 1	**Introduction:** This section highlights the background of the research, its aims and objectives. It further underscores an overview of the research methodology.
Section 2	**Historical Roots of the Conflict:** This section highlights the historical roots of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon, tracing the country's intricate colonial foundations (1884-1922), through to the transition into a United Nations (UN) Trust Territory in 1946 to subsequent independence in October 1961. It also expounds on the post-independence political landscape and dynamics, as well as the political liberation and rise of Anglophone opposition that emerged prominently from the 1990s to date.
Section 3	**Contemporary Crisis in Cameroon:** This section examines the contemporary crisis in Cameroon which began in 2016, unpacking the identity and socio-cultural underpinnings of the current conflict as well as the multiple protests and the armed struggle that followed.
Section 4	**Grassroot Voices and Experiences:** This section provides detailed discussions on the impact of the conflict authenticated through the voices of grassroots Anglophone populations in Cameroon. The many experiences and impacts highlighted include human rights violations, destruction of income and livelihood, psychological issues, breakdown of social cohesion and increase of insecurity and crimes. The chapter also underscores how different social groups such as women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IPSs) have been affected by the conflict.
Section 5	**Strategies for Peace and Challenges:** This section highlights the potential strategies for the resolution of the conflict, the contributions of local actors, the role of international organisations as well as the challenges that impede the potential for peace.
Section 6	**Challenges to Conflict Resolution:** This section highlights some of the challenges that are impeding the prospect of peace in Cameroon.
Section 7	**Conclusion**: This provides an overall summary of the study, providing concluding thoughts on the findings, and recommendations on the way forward.

Figure 1: Summary of report structure

1.2. Methodology and data analysis

The research methodology for this study is participatory and decolonial. Participatory methods were used to generate endogenous knowledge rooted in local histories, cultures, experiences and perspectives. In turn, this relates directly to the decolonial approach to knowledge production that seeks to enable marginalised and excluded social groups in Africa and elsewhere to represent the world in their own terms, what Santos (2014; 2018) has described as 'Epistemologies of the South'. This approach was especially relevant in giving voice in conflict resolution dialogue to those marginalised civilians most affected by the conflict, hitherto excluded from official dialogue.

The initial phase of the data collection was conducted in November 2020. This included semi-structured interviews at the community level with local leaders and key individuals involved in advocacy for peace. In addition, FGDs and collage-making were conducted with affected civilians (IDPs and conflict zone residents). According to Flicker et al. (2016), Veroff (2012) and Yuen (2016), among other scholars, art-based methods such as collage-making are believed to be appropriate as part of decolonising methodologies. The inclusion of collage-making created safe spaces for affected citizens to not only freely share their stories/experiences without fear of possible reprisals, but also to tell them from their own perspectives. A sociolinguistic approach was used in the data collection process to help understand the impact of language and identity, and how those have been used to marginalise local Anglophone populations.

For the interviews, FGDs and collage-making sessions, open-ended guides were developed, enabling participants to speak freely and to add new dimensions to the discussions in ways that contributed to the co-creation of knowledge. After the initial phase of data collection, a follow-up consultative dialogue workshop was organised with local CSOs on 7 July 2021 in Douala to understand their experiences and initiatives aimed at conflict resolution. These groups ranged from women's organisations, youth groups and religious organisations to humanitarian and development associations. They comprised of international, national, regional and local organisations mainly from the two Anglophone regions. Subsequently, a one-day workshop was held in Yaoundé on 27 August 2021 with policy actors, including Cameroonian government officials, UN agencies and diplomatic representation involved in humanitarian assistance programmes, to capture the views of influential national figures and discuss provisional findings from the research. Furthermore, historical data were collected from documents at the National Archives Buea, and data on contemporary issues came from a review of academic and grey literature and from civil society and government reports and communiques on the Anglophone conflict.

The field data, including collage interviews, were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The software was used to generate a systematic and categorical codification and identification of emerging themes from the dataset. In preparation for the data analysis, field notes and recorded interactions were transcribed to serve as a foundation for the analysis. To ensure the anonymity of research participants and prevent any possible reprisals, transcripts, particularly those of interviews, were coded (given code names). The transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software. The software was useful in enabling the research team to generate codes from the dataset highlighting the multiple opinions and key issues from the findings. In addition, collage data was analysed using thematic and content analysis. Given the volume of rich data collected from the focus groups and interviews in the field, a plethora of major and minor codes were generated. Major codes were then used as major themes while minor codes were either combined into main themes or used as sub-themes to elaborate on the major ones. These themes were used to produce this analytical report.

2. Cameroon: Historical Roots of Conflict

2.1. Colonialism (1884–1922)

Cameroon was colonised by Germany on 14 July 1884 after it signed treaties with the Douala Chiefs. Germany ruled the country until 1922, when Britain and France took control of one-fifth and four-fifths of the territory respectively as mandates of the League of Nations. Initially, Britain might have annexed the entire territory, but for the late arrival of Consul Edward Hewett on 19 July 1884. Chiefs of Douala had purportedly written and expressed the desire for Her Majesty Queen Victoria's government to take over control of their territory (Ngoh, 2019). The successful German annexation of Douala territory was facilitated by the trading firms of Woermann and Jantzen & Thormählen. Diplomatic manoeuvres and influence were used by these German trading firms to achieve their goal (Ngoh, 2019). After treaty signing and the hoisting of their flag to confirm effective occupation, the Germans began penetration of the hinterlands to control as much territory as possible. They also wanted to demarcate the boundaries of the territory they had just annexed. A spirited British effort to reverse the tide through annexation of Ambas Bay (Betley, 1969) was unsuccessful.

During the period of penetration into the hinterlands after annexation in 1884 and throughout the German administration of Cameroon, colonial officials introduced socio-economic and political reforms. These reforms were in the domain of language, education, health, the police, labour, taxation, communication and administrative units, among others (Rudin, 1938). There was resistance against their administration in different parts of the territory as a consequence of these reforms; this was, however, suppressed. The reforms were to become a source of conflict when the territory came under British and French administration. The two European countries embarked on a de-Germanisation process, which further compounded the problems of the people of Cameroon as Cameroonians had to learn English and French in order to cope in the new dispensation.

The outbreak of World War I and the subsequent German defeat by Allied forces, which were composed of troops under the control of the French, British and Belgians, led to the partition of Cameroon unequally between Britain and France.

2.2. International supervision (1922–1960/1)

The defeat of Germany in World War I and the seizure of her colonial possessions saw Britain and France divide the spoils of war in Cameroon. While Britain took control of one-fifth, France got the lion's share – four-fifths of the territory. Both countries governed their respective spheres of influence as mandated territories of the League of Nation according to the Mandates Agreement. Both Administering Authorities were expected to present annual reports to the League of Nations demonstrating the degree to which the territory under their control had been socio-economically and politically advanced in the reporting period. The separate administration of Cameroonians from the mandate period onwards led to the development of cultural, legal, educational, linguistic and socio-political differences, which later became a source of conflict (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019; Echitchi, 2014; Lekane and Asuelime, 2016). The British-administered part of Cameroon imbibed the values of free expression while, in the French-administered portion of the same territory, Cameroonians were subjected to centralisation of power epitomised in *plein pouvoirs* or discretionary powers. The use of English in British Cameroons[1] and French in French Cameroon became a major bone of contention, including in education (Dupraz, 2017; Gwanfogbe, 1995).

Differences in the British and French systems of administration resulted in different perceptions of the form of the state in Cameroon. The British policy of Indirect Rule in Southern Cameroons gave Native Authorities (NAs) a key role in the governance process, with British officials playing only a supervisory role while traditional rulers governed their people using, for the most, part indigenous institutions (Chilver, 1963). The French Assimilationist policy promoted centralisation of administration in the hands of a few individuals. It was, therefore, certain that, after independence and reunification, problems would emerge between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroonians.

The migration of many French Cameroonians into British Southern Cameroons during the period of international supervision of Cameroon by the League of Nations (1922–1946) and the United Nations Organisation (1946–1961) laid the foundation for future problems of identity and

1. The British-controlled territory was called British Cameroons as it was further divided into British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons.

belonging. This movement was triggered by harsh French policies of *corvée* and *prestation*, as well as insecurity caused by the demand of the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) for independence and immediate reunification, which were thwarted by French authorities in French Cameroon. In spite of efforts by politicians of the Kamerun United National Congress (KUNC) and the UPC for reunification (UN, 1954), differences soon emerged. While migrated French Cameroonians enjoyed and exploited economic opportunities in Southern Cameroons, English Cameroonians were always excluded from political participation and representation in the territory. The debate over their right to the franchise was always heated and Southern Cameroonian politicians were divided over their participation in the vote. Pro-unificationists supported them and pro-integrationists and autonomists were against their participation in the political life of the territory (Amaazee, 1994; Ngoh, 1979; Takougang, 1998). These divergences between Southern Cameroonian politicians over the franchise for French Cameroonians, from a political standpoint, were a harbinger of the conflict that broke out in 2016.

International supervision of Cameroon made it possible for the United Nations to determine the future of Cameroonians under British and French administrations. The two choices during the plebiscite of 11 February 1961 had implications after the reunification of Cameroon (Committee for the Decolonisation of the Southern Cameroons, 2015; Eyango, 2018; Southern Cameroons Plebiscite, 1961; Tembon, 2018). Many Southern Cameroonians wanted a third choice to be included in the plebiscite alternatives, but this did not happen. That created animosity between those who were for reunification, on the one hand, and those who favoured autonomy or integration with the Federation of Nigeria (Anjoh and Nfi, 2017; Nfi, 2012). Another worrisome issue was the question of why Britain ran two separate plebiscites in a territory handed to them after the defeat of the Germans in World War I – one for Northern Cameroons and the other for Southern Cameroons.[2] This contributed to laying a foundation for future problems for Cameroon, because questions have been raised with regards to Cameroonians who are now part of Nigeria following the 1961 plebiscite in Northern Cameroons.

The British rejection of Foncha's request that, upon the independence of the Federation of Nigeria, Southern Cameroons should continue under a period of trusteeship before deciding on its future, certainly contributed to the haste with which discussions were carried out between the Foncha-led government and President Ahmadou Ahidjo of the Cameroun Republic (LeVine, 1951: 7; UN, 1958;). Premier J. N. Foncha was compelled to obey the decision of the United Nations and Britain who administered the territory on behalf of the UN.[3] A period of trusteeship would certainly have given the Foncha-led government the opportunity to appreciate the government of Ahidjo before deciding whether to ask for reunification or not. The British had worsened matters because of the haste with which they wanted to leave Southern Cameroons while discussions were still on between Foncha and Ahidjo as to the best possible terms of a union between Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic (Kah, 2016).[4]

Landmark UN Resolutions on the fate of Southern Cameroons, and their interpretations, point to these as the basis of conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon today. There was resolution 1608 (XV) of 21 April 1961, which required the government of the United Kingdom (UK), together with those of Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroun, to engage in talks that would lead to the finalisation and implementation before 1 October 1961 of agreed measures for the political association of Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroun.[5] This resolution followed a vote at the UN General Assembly, where 64 countries voted in favour of independence for Southern Cameroons. It is argued that Britain did not ensure that the UN Resolution of 21 April 1961 was presented, and this explains the doubts today about the non-existence of a union treaty between the two territories.

The UK is also faulted for violating UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960. This is because before the UK left Southern Cameroons on 20 September 1961, sovereignty should have been handed to the elected government of the Southern Cameroons as required by international law; however, it was granted to a foreign country, the Republic of Cameroon.[6] Prior to 1961, UN Resolutions 1067 (XI) and 1207 (XII), passed in 1957, called on Administering Authorities to hasten arrangements for Trust Territories to become self-governing or independent.[7] Had Britain harkened to

2. Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly from 20 February to 13 March 1959. 1350 (XIII) The Future of the Trust Territory of the Cameroons under United Kingdom Administration, 2.
3. Communication 650/17 of the African Union. Kum Bezeng and 75 Others (Represented by Professor Carlson Anyangwe) vs The Republic of Cameroon, 2.
4. Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at Admiralty House, SW.1, on Tuesday 13 June 1961 at 10:30 am SECRET Catalogue Reference: CAB/128/35, 7.
5. Federal Republic of Ambazonia (Formerly – UN Trust Territory of British Southern Cameroons), 10; The Recolonisation of the Former United Nations Trust Territory of the Southern British Cameroons, 7.
6. Communication 650/17 of the African Union. Kum Bezeng and 75 Others (Represented by Professor Carlson Anyangwe) vs The Republic of Cameroon, 3.
7. Federal Republic of Ambazonia (Formerly – UN Trust Territory of British Southern Cameroons), 15.

the call, she would have prepared the territory towards independence rather than allow the UN to organise a plebiscite to determine its political future – a decision which has become a source of conflict today.

During meetings between Foncha and Ahidjo to negotiate the terms of reunification, there was insincerity. In the 1959 meeting at the United Nations, Ahidjo said that there would be mutual respect and consideration of the specificities of the two Cameroons in the discussions leading to reunification. Later on, the joint communiques issued by Foncha and Ahidjo were nothing but a divergence of views, which were carried into Foumban and manifested themselves after the Foumban conference. Ahidjo believed in centralisation and personalisation of power. Foncha's demands for a loose federation, where each of the states would carry out its activities without much influence from the federal government (LeVine, 1961; Ngoh, 1979; Southern Cameroons Gazette, 1962; UN, 1961), were thwarted by Ahidjo.

The Foumban Constitutional Conference of 17-21 July 1961 between the Southern Cameroons delegation and that of the Republic of Cameroon involved false negotiations, because one or both parties did not invest much in the preparatory process prior to this historic meeting. Again, while one party worked hard to stall the process, the other party was not willing to reach agreement (Fonkem, 2015). The meeting was, therefore, to agree to disagree. Here lies the crux of the matter: that the foundation of a reunited Cameroon was built on shifting sand, as one participant demonstrated in their collage (see Figure 2 opposite).

In the collage painting opposite, the participant traced the origin of the conflict to the 1961 Plebiscite (Figure 2). According to this participant, the manner in which it was conducted laid the foundation for the conflict, and the mistakes made by the United Nations then need to be addressed in a real dialogue for a sustainable solution to be found.[8]

While the Bamenda All Party Conference of June 1961 had agreed on a loose federal structure to maintain their cultural specificity, Ahidjo's delegation from the Cameroun Republic was keen on maintaining a centralised system of government. Although the federal system was eventually put in place at Foumban, it was a highly centralised one to the benefit of Ahidjo and detriment of West Cameroonians.[9]

During collage sessions and focused group discussions organised within the context of the current Anglophone crisis in Limbe, Douala, Dschang and Yaoundé, participants raised concerns regarding international supervision of Cameroon between 1922 and 1961.

Figure 2: Collage No. 7, Dschang, 28 November 2020

8. Collage Interview, Dschang, 28 November 2020
9. Collage Interview, Dschang, 28 November 2020

One participant argued that the decision to organise a plebiscite in 1961 was a top-down approach to determine the future of Southern Cameroons and should explain why there is a serious conflict in Cameroon today between the central government and Anglophone armed groups.[10] Others felt that the problem is that the United Nations separated Cameroon and united it again and so it would be impossible for the same organisations to come to the aid of Anglophones by separating them from the rest of the country.[11] Others, however, felt that the UN, through its Secretary-General, has the moral authority to come in and solve the crisis. Still others condemned the UN for knowing the truth but not acting to avert a calamity.[12]

Whatever opinions the participants held, it should be noted that, while some strongly believe in the UN for solving the problem, others feel that it created the problem in the first place, and this could only be solved when the common people suffering from the crisis are listened to. It was not, however the UN that separated Cameroon. Cameroon was separated under the League of Nations and inherited by the UN.

2.3. Post-independence and reunification (1961-1990)

Soon after reunification on 1 October 1961, Ahmadou Ahidjo introduced Federal Inspectors of Administration. The one in West Cameroon was not answerable to the Prime Minister of West Cameroon, the elected representative of the people, but to Ahidjo. This was problematic. Besides, Ahidjo reneged on his earlier promise that the Federal Republic of Cameroon would neither join the British Commonwealth of Nations nor the French Union by joining the latter, placing the whole of Cameroon under French influence as a member of *La Francophonie*. This had economic implications for West Cameroon (Heinzen, 1984: 80), with the country only joining the Commonwealth in 1995. Federalism did not allow for parity in cultural heritage. It was rather a shadow of what a federal system should be (Stark, 1976). The head of state exercised exclusive executive powers (Anttalainen, 2013: 11), which he could use to manipulate the Constitution according to his whims and caprices. The federal system contracted in Foumban in 1961 did not last because the Francophone-dominated government preferred a centralised, unitary state (Awasom, 2002). It was only used as a transitional phase towards the total integration of West Cameroon into a highly centralised unitary state (Sombaye, 2018: 28).

President Ahidjo went on to silence multiparty politics in favour of a single party, the Cameroon National Union (CNU), which was created on 1 September 1966. This contributed to limiting public debate and freedom of expression, especially in West Cameroon, where there had existed a thriving democracy and healthy debates among political parties within and outside the West Cameroon House of Assembly. Free-minded Anglophone Cameroonians like Gorji Dinka were forced to flee the country and Albert Mukong suffered several imprisonments (Tembon, 2018: 4-5). The emergence of several pressure groups and trade unions in Anglophone Cameroon in the 1990s like the Cameroon Anglophone Movement (CAM), Southern Cameroons Youth League (SCYL), Teachers Association of Cameroon (TAC), Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Ambazonia, Free West Cameroon and the Southern Cameroons Peoples' Organisation (SCAPO) were a response to the stifling of political space and freedom of association.

The 1972 referendum and the shrinking of the autonomous status of West Cameroon and its split into the Northwest and Southwest regions became a source of future conflict. Although centralised, the federal system was better than the unitary system because it preserved the bi-cultural and bilingual nature of Cameroon. West Cameroon kept its autonomous status, institutions, governance structures and state culture. The 1972 referendum erased all these including the West Cameroon House of Assembly, House of Chiefs and office of the Prime Minister (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019: 3,6).[13] The state was further partitioned into the Northwest and Southwest provinces which led to the emergence of provincial tendencies and the disappearance of the two stars in the flag that represented the two states of the federal period (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019: 19). Other West Cameroon state structures like POWERCAM, National Produce Marketing Board (NPMB), the Bota and Tiko Wharves, West Cameroon Lottery, West Cameroon Development Agency (WCDA) and Tiko Airport, among others, crumbled as a result of the centralisation of power (AAC Standing Committee, 1993). All these became a source of future strife.

The 1984 change of name, through a presidential decree, from the United Republic of Cameroon to the Republic of Cameroon, had legal implications in international law and was a factor in the current conflict (Lekane and Asuelime, 2016: 141-142). The name 'Republic of Cameroon' was

10. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
11. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
12. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
13. Communication 650/17 of the African Union, 3

the name of French Cameroon at independence on 1 January 1960. In international law, this meant that the reunification of the Cameroun Republic with Southern Cameroons on 1 October 1961 was abrogated following the presidential decree of 1984. The decree re-affirmed the statehood of the Republic of Cameroon without the inclusion of Southern Cameroons, that had joined it in 1961. This was in fact tantamount to the secession of French speaking from the union contracted in 1961. It gave Anglophones a legal basis to revive or call for the restoration of the statehood of Southern Cameroons prior to reunification (Tembon, 2018: 5).

Regular attempts to assimilate the Anglophone educational and legal systems by the central government in Yaoundé in the guise of harmonisation aroused anger among a cross section of Anglophones in Cameroon. At reunification, Cameroon opted to maintain the two subsystems of education with their specificities. Over the years, attempts were made to mutilate the English subsystem with purported harmonisation, but with mitigated success. The Anglophone students' riots in Yaoundé in the mid-1980s were in response to attempts to undermine the English subsystem of education (Nyamnjoh, 1995).

During interviews and FGDs organised within the context of this project, it was recognised that problems after independence and reunification were caused by the kind of constitution that was negotiated at Foumban and by the policies of Ahidjo and Paul Biya as presidents of Cameroon. In an interview in Buea, one participant argued that the Anglophone crisis had its roots in the history of the country.[14] Another argued that the problem lay in the federal constitution, which did not fully protect the interest of Anglophones.[15] A third blamed the government that failed to ask Anglophones what the problem was, but, instead, assumed it knew the problem and could provide a solution to it.[16]

Some research participants gave other reasons for the Anglophone crisis. One contended that Anglophones were marginalised historically. It was asserted that Anglophones are culturally different from their Francophone counterparts, again as a product of history where Anglophones were governed through the policy of Indirect Rule and Francophones through assimilation prior to reunification.[17] The different governance systems made them appreciate things differently. Another participant faulted the government for asking only '*OUI*' and 'YES' during the referendum of 1972, and not including '*NON*' and 'NO' as possible responses. This was interpreted as a subtle way of forcing the Anglophone population to vote for a unitary state, which then turned out to destroy Anglophone identity in Cameroon.[18]

The views of the research participants pointed to what they knew about the history of Cameroon. Their views are important, considering that they are speaking from their experiences in the conflict-stricken areas. The basis of the crisis today is in reunification which was however a shaky one. The referendum of May 20 1972 on its part was considered a *coup d'état* because it legitimised domination and assimilation of Anglophones. The non-respect of English as being equal to French was a source of marginalisation from reunification. Due to the unending crisis, it is important that Anglophones are consulted in an inclusive manner as to what solutions could bring about lasting peace.

2.4. Political liberalisation and the rise of Anglophone opposition (1990s)

The 1990s marked an important period in the rise of Anglophone opposition to the government of Cameroon. The re-introduction of multiparty politics and the broadening of political space in the 1990s led to the mushrooming of Anglophone pressure groups and CSOs to press for better treatment of Anglophones. These groups included the CAM, SCNC, SCAPO and SCYL. Political parties like the Liberal Democratic Alliance (LDA) also articulated the socio-economic and political problems of Anglophones. While some groups called for separation, others wanted recognition and better treatment of Anglophones. The rebirth of multiparty politics thus opened up the floodgate of dissension and nostalgia, especially among Anglophone Cameroonians, but their hopes soon vanished.

The Tripartite Conference of 1991, convened to lessen political tension in Cameroon, did not satisfy agitated Anglophones. The government talked about a decentralised unitary state which was one and indivisible. However, the decentralisation process was delayed by government unwillingness to fast-track the process (Cheka, 2007; Mbuagbo, 2012). On the heels of the Tripartite Conference of 1991 was the All-Anglophone Conference (AAC I and II) in Buea in 1993 and Bamenda in 1994. The Buea Declaration that sanctioned the Buea meeting called for constitutional revision that would restore the 1961 federation agreed upon in writing

14. Interview MM005, Buea 16 December 2020
15. Interview ME004, Buea 22 December 2020
16. Interview JM030, Jakiri, Bui 19 November 2020
17. Interview, DR032, Kumba 19 November 2020
18. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

between the Southern Cameroons and the Cameroun Republic. The government did not heed this demand and, in the Bamenda Proclamation the following year, representatives of the people of Southern Cameroons stated that if the federal state was not restored within a reasonable time, the territory would assert its independence and take all necessary measures to protect its territorial integrity and safeguard its people.[19] This was a serious threat that should have been taken seriously, but, as was its custom, the government disregarded it.

Since the liberalisation of political space in Cameroon in the 1990s and formation of the SCNC, the annual celebration of 1 October as an important historic date by leaders of this organisation and some Anglophone activists has been ruthlessly suppressed. The government has since refused to recognise its historic significance in favour of 20 May 1972, a date contested for being at the centre of the Anglophone problem turned conflict today. On 1 October 1961, Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroon came into a union which dissolved their previous identities. Southern Cameroons became the West Cameroon state, and the Republic of Cameroon was renamed East Cameroon. It has been argued by concerned Anglophones that this date is important and should be celebrated, but government has taken offence at this. Every year, government mobilises troops in Anglophone Cameroon to pre-empt any gathering for commemoration of this date (Shaban, 2018). On several occasion,s the leadership of the SCNC were arrested, tortured and thrown behind bars for daring to speak up and commemorate this date.

Furthermore, the 22–29 February 2008 strike in Cameroon over increasing fuel and food prices, which quickly turned into an anti-Biya campaign, had negative consequences on Anglophone towns like Kumba, Bamenda, Buea and Limbe, and aroused in the people a feeling of regret for the union contracted in 1961. The government had begun campaigns for the scrapping of term limits to the presidency of the Republic and this was criticised by many including prominent Anglophone leaders like Ayah Paul. Troop crackdown on Bamenda and other Anglophone towns such as Kumba, Ekona, Muyuka, Kumbo and Tombel was heavy with dozens of deaths and destruction of property. The Chairman of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) party was accused by the government of fomenting problems for the government and the crackdown on protesters in Anglophone towns was particularly brutal. The crisis was a stark reminder of the fact that Anglophones did not have a voice in Cameroon. The details of this crisis have been succinctly captured by Julius Amin (Amin, 2013).

In spite of efforts to unify Cameroon, the Francophone and Anglophone parts of the country remained under the legal and educational systems of their previous colonisers, with very strong attachment to their language and culture (Lekane and Asuelime, 2016: 142). Again, Government's silence on the grievances of Anglophone lawyers and teachers led to the outbreak of conflict. The lawyers wrote several memos and made demands to the government concerning the common law jurisdiction, but these were ignored. Among these were complaints about the progressive erosion of common law, with the use of French – which was neither spoken nor understood by the those seeing justice – increasingly being imposed in local courts (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019: 7). Members of the legal profession decided to exercise their constitutional right of freedom of expression through a press conference to inform public opinion on these issues, but French-speaking administrative officials in Anglophone Cameroon imposed a ban on the press conference with threats of imprisonment. Lawyers were also harassed and humiliated by the police during peaceful demonstrations. Their robes and wigs were seized, which was an assault on their dignity.[20]

Teachers also presented a list of their own grievances. They wanted better conditions of service and the promotion of a purely Anglo-Saxon system of education. The military, especially the *gendarmerie* and the Brigade d'Intervention Rapide (BIR) descended on them with brutality.[21] Those who thought that the government would act fast to arrest the situation before it got out of hand were disappointed. This was a long-standing problem that led to Anglophone student protests in the 1980s at the University of Yaoundé. They had drafted a petition against the new General Certificate of Education (GCE) when the Minister of National Education made French mandatory (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019: 19). They also wanted the creation of an English-speaking university, promotion of bilingualism and a return to the federal state in Cameroon (Central Intelligence Agency, 1986: 3). Bilingualism remains a liability when it has to do with relations between Anglophones and Francophones (Echitchi, 2014: 54).

Several voices from the masses who have suffered the brunt of the conflict traced the roots of the conflict from the liberalisation of political space in the 1990s. This followed the FGDs, interviews and collage sessions

19. Communication 650/17 of the African Union. Kum Bezeng and 75 Others (Represented by Professor Carlson Anyangwe) vs The Republic of Cameroon.
20. Communication 650/17 of the African Union. Kum Bezeng and 75 Others (Represented by Professor Carlson Anyangwe) vs The Republic of Cameroon, 5.
21. Ibid.6.

organised in Limbe, Douala, Dschang and Yaoundé in the context of this project. One person argued that government had centralised everything in Yaoundé and the people had no control of their activities at the local level.[22] Others thought that the conflict was a result of an archaic mentality of the Cameroonian government.[23] Another argued that the basis of the conflict was that the Francophone leadership wanted Anglophones to see themselves differently from the way they had been brought up, mainly for political reasons.[24] From the very beginning of the crisis in the 1990s onwards, there was a rejection of the fact that there was an Anglophone Problem in Cameroon, and a refusal to dialogue. The state created its own problem and pretended to provide solutions to it. One interviewee felt that the only way out was for disenchanted Anglophone youths to take up arms to express dissent.[25] The argument was also that Anglophones in Cameroon were marginalised, and there was no justice in job opportunities.[26] Besides, despite the fact that English and French are equal in status in the Constitution, English has been relegated to the background.[27]

While some of the problems expressed by the respondents might not be very sound, others clearly pinpoint the start of the descent into chaos. Too much centralised power in Yaoundé frustrated Anglophones and other Cameroonians in many different ways and there are arguments that the problems of the country are a result of a gerontocracy and an imposition on the way Anglophones should view themselves. In several ways, Anglophones have cried out against marginalisation, but attempts at addressing this problem have not been profound. This still explains why there is increasing disenchantment among a cross section of the population. These and other issues built up to the conflict that Cameroonians have lived with since reunification in 1961.

22. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
23. Collage Session, Dschang 28 November 2020
24. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
25. Interview, KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020
26. Collage Session, Dschang 28 November 2020
27. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

3. Contemporary Crisis: From 'Anglophone Problem' To 'Anglophone Conflict'

3.1. Anglophone identity: marginalisation and rising grievances

The word 'Anglophone' in the context of Cameroon has a connotation that an outsider may not easily grasp. Naturally, the word 'Anglophone' means 'speaking of the English language' or 'belonging to a country where English is spoken'.[28] In the context of the conflict in Cameroon, the word 'Anglophone' becomes an identity tag for a group of people with a colonial history linked to Britain. This is how an Anglophone defines himself or herself in Cameroon: *'An Anglophone is an identity; it is a culture that has a history […] the fact that you speak English does not make you an Anglophone in the Cameroonian context. We know who an Anglophone is'*.[29]

The Anglophone identity coexists with another linguistic and cultural group called the Francophone in the same political territory. These two cultures are different, as citizens from both sides affirm their linguistic and cultural identities (Chiatoh, 2012). Therefore, merely being able to speak English is not enough to cause one to be identified as Anglophone in Cameroon.

Concerning their identity, it is strongly felt by Anglophones that government has attempted to assimilate the Anglophone population into the majority Francophone population. Research participants affirmed this: *'You see that they wanted to assimilate us*'.[30] Another insisted:

> *[…] the Francophone regions wanted to assimilate the Anglophone regions. In their attempt of assimilation, they cut off everything. There was a power plant producing energy at Yorke which was closed and carried to Edea. There was the best technical school at Ombe, it was weakened down and carried somewhere else.*[31]

Using education, the judicial system and government administration, Anglophones believe that their identity is gradually being eroded. In education, for example, an interviewee noted that: *'In the Northwest and Southwest regions […] some teachers were using a language [in teaching] that students could not understand. They were using French*'.[32] The general feeling is that, since reunification in 1961, the aim of successive Francophone leadership in the country has been to gradually assimilate the Anglophone and absorb the language community into the majority Francophone. Therefore, the Anglophone educational system is being gradually eroded by teachers who use only French and sub-standard English in their teaching.

Further, the Anglophone in Cameroon are living what could be described as 'identity usurpation' (Kiwoh, forthcoming). This happens through education, where learners with Francophone backgrounds go through English medium schools and pass for Anglophones. This means that the people with historical and cultural backgrounds as Anglophones see their identity being taken away and exploited to their detriment. This instrumentalisation of identity has been a source of conflict because the Francophone elite use this to dilute the fact that the Anglophone exists in Cameroon as an identity. This is corroborated by a participant in the study:

> *[…] very fast they realised that English language, which is the official language of Anglophones since they had British rule, is like the language of the world. So most of them send their children to Anglophone schools and because their children go to Anglophone schools, they claim they are Anglophones. This not true. An Anglophone is an identity, it is a culture that has a history.*[33]

This is evidence that the identity called Anglophone is under systematic threat from the majority French-speaking elite and population. The identity called Anglophone has undergone significant marginalisation in Cameroon over the past few decades. Research participants identified some major areas where marginalisation was and is still

28. www.merriam-webster.com
29. Interview NM011, Buea, 15 December 2020
30. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
31. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020
32. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
33. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020

felt. These domains are sociocultural, political, socio-economic and linguistic.

3.1.1. Sociocultural marginalisation

Identity has social and cultural ramifications. Gloria Anzaldúa (cited in Gonzales 2006: xix) affirms, 'I am my language,' and '[T]o speak of language is to speak of our "Selves"'. The language spoken by an individual identifies him or her and gives that individual a sociocultural belonging. This is because there are some mannerisms that only people who use a language habitually can understand. The Anglophone identity in Cameroon has such mannerisms that can identify them socially and culturally. This sociocultural affiliation gives them an identity that is different from someone who has learnt the English language and uses it as a tool for communication. One participant affirms the nexus between language and culture: *'[…] and that is why language can also be one of the key things in most of our tribal wars though land has been the core, but it has to do with culture*'.[34] Research participants were very much aware that English and French are two distinct cultures. This was emphatically stated as follows:

> *'French and English are cultures. A Frenchman speaking English does not mean that English is his culture. English is a culture; French is a culture. So, these are two different cultures'.*[35]

Socially and culturally, the feeling of the Anglophone in Cameroon is captured in the following interview excerpt:

> *With regards to the cultural dimension, we look at it simply as the issue of cultural diversity, cultural acceptance and cultural tolerance in which the Anglophones have consistently sailed. They have the sentiment of alienation, they have this feeling of marginalisation in which they believe that their historical significance and their cultural specificity have not been respected, and they have consistently come up with measures to voice this grievance that they felt, and that we say is the core [of the crisis].*[36]

The 'Anglophone Problem', as it was generally referred to before the crisis, manifested itself in different ways. Socially, the Anglophone is called a variety of negative names. This is evident in the following as provided by study participants:

> *First, there was abuse of rights […] The Francophones do not respect the Anglophones […] They look at Anglophones as second class; especially, when you are from the Northwest, they call you 'Bamenda' ('les Bamenda la'); yes, and they say you are a fool.*[37]

Another focus group participant stated:

> *Anglophone, Francophone, the relationship is not really cordial. Because like in hospitals for example, if you go to hospital and you are an Anglophone, there is a Francophone consulting (and) there is difficulty in communication especially for some of the Anglophone who cannot express themselves in French and the next thing you get maybe from the doctor is that 'les anglofous la, tu ne peux meme pas'*[38] *[…] You see, when they insult you like that, you feel weak.*[39]

A third view from an interviewee was:

> *Consider us the Anglophones as a people with a different culture, everything different. So, they don't regard us the same as them. We speak English and they speak French. So, if you speak English anywhere it's a problem. They don't treat us the same. They call us 'anglofools'. They consider us and treat us as fools […]*[40]

The sociocultural situations that have led to this conflict were summarised by study participants as follows: *'Yes, identity and language contributed to this conflict. This is because of the disdain with which Anglophones are treated in public space*'.[41] Socially, the Anglophone are *'[…] second to them (Francophones)'*[42] and *'[…] Anglophones are treated as foreigners' in their country'*.[43] These participants are simply reiterating what researchers, scholars and CSOs have regularly drawn the attention of political authorities to. As early as 1979, Fonlon (1979) signalled this, while others like Jikong (2003), Anchimbe (2005), Ubanako (2012) and Kiwoh (forthcoming) have regularly called for state intervention to address the discriminatory treatment of Anglophones in the public linguistic space.

34. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
35. Interview BJ 038, Limbe 27 November 2020
36. Interview, DR032, Kumba 19 November 2020
37. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
38. Translated as: Those anglo-fools, they can't even (measure)
39. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
40. Interview ET006, Buea, 16 December 2020
41. Interview AL023, Buea, 27 November 2020
42. Interview BL020, Buea, 28 November 2020
43. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020

3.1.2. Political marginalisation

Politics entails good quality leadership and governance, equal representation of the people, and the respect of basic democratic rights and principles. Before the 1972 referendum which abolished the federal structures, Anglophone Cameroon had a political system where the people could hold their leaders accountable. With the centralisation of powers, the political rights and freedoms enjoyed by citizens of former West Cameroon were lost. Complaints of political marginalisation started surfacing. Research participants noted the following example cases of political marginalisation: *'The crisis came up because some people who are in power thought they could use some people and they could marginalise some people with their arrogance'*.[44] Another participant focused on the blatant disregard for the Constitution of the Republic *'[…] respect has been lost as the terms of the Constitution are not implemented'*.[45] Another point to corroborate the political marginalisation of Anglophones hinged on the absence of an inclusive system of governance:

> *Governance has not adopted the model of inclusiveness, there has been no accountable governance […] Now take, for instance, ministerial appointments. If you draw inspiration from the 1961 Constitution which talked of equal partition of the ministerial portfolio, we realise that Anglophones have consistently been relegated to the background in terms of ministerial appointments. Even in cases where Anglophones are recognised and included in the system, they have been given those 'white elephant' ministries. And in terms of personalities of the country, you also realise that an Anglophone does not feature among the first three personalities of the country: you have the president, and you have the speaker of the National Assembly and the speaker of the House (of Senate). Look at the constitutional marginalisation which has taken place, consistently sending Anglophones to the back corner.*[46]

From the above, it can be seen that political marginalisation has played a significant role in the current Anglophone conflict. Grievances have been nursed for a long time. These grievances range from the non-respect of constitutional clauses such as the limitation of presidential mandates, which are modified to enable a stay in power, to the failure to respect constitutional clauses regarding accountability (for example, Article 66, related to the declaration of property before and after leaving office); and the *laissez-faire* attitude on abuses related to human and democratic rights. These issues of governance added to the marginalisation of Anglophones where, in matters of effective political leadership in the country, no Anglophone holds and wields real political power. As seen in the above testimony, in the current political dispensation of the nation, an Anglophone does not feature amongst the first three top political personalities in the country. This situation has been imposed on a group of people who, before the 1972 referendum, had a system of some public accountability and political power (Enonchong, 2021).

Political decisions on the form of the state have been significant in the marginalisation of the Anglophone in Cameroon. Many Anglophones have always advocated for a return to the pre-1972 federal status or for outright separation from the Cameroon state. The continuous mention of separation and federation as forms of the state indicates that many Anglophones in Cameroon are not comfortable with the centralised nature of decision-making, with everything practically done in Yaoundé. This implies that every decision on where to build a school or how to furnish an office must come from Yaoundé. This over-centralisation makes the Anglophone Cameroonian feel marginalised in decision-making. Despite constitutional options indicating that Cameroon is a unitary decentralised state with 10 regions, there is a lot of reticence by central government to allow regions to manage their affairs. Anglophones, as a people who had once enjoyed political autonomy, constantly make demands to return to it. Such demands have been advocated for, over the last decades, by political pressure groups like the SCNC (now outlawed), the All-Anglophone Conference I and II and the banned Consortium of Anglophone Civil Society Organisations. Recently, in Parliament, as noted by one focus group participant:

> *An MP*[47] *made an important plea, we felt that the Parliament would even check the problem. The (idea) was that Parliament is where people are voted to solve problems but after (the MP) had spoken so openly the matter still was not entered in the agenda, meaning that the idea that the country belongs to (a particular set of people) became dominant leading to anger with the French system.*[48]

Despite the calls for political reforms from various quarters, the government of Cameroon remained adamant against reforms that could create a more inclusive atmosphere which would accommodate the marginalised Anglophone population.

44. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020
45. Interview YR018, Buea, 20 December 2020
46. Interview, DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
47. On 13 December 2016, Hon. Joseph Wirba, MP and representative of the people of Jakiri, warned the Cameroon National Assembly of impending conflict if the marginalisation of the Anglophone population in Cameroon continued. His plea was ignored, and his life came under threat despite his immunity as a people's representative. He escaped arrest by fleeing to Nigeria and eventually went into exile.
48. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

3.1.3. Socio-economic marginalisation

The livelihood of Southern Cameroonians depends on their output in education and business. Through education, the Anglophone Cameroonian aspires to get a job that will enable them to take care of themselves and their extended family. Gaining employment after education or professional training is essential. The Cameroon government has not encouraged the private sector to provide stable and reasonable salaries for citizens. Consequently, Cameroonians look to the state to provide the necessary jobs. However, Anglophone Cameroonians often do not find it easy to access these jobs on a competitive basis with French-speaking citizens. Even when such jobs are found in the heartland of Anglophone Cameroon, Francophone Cameroonians are favoured over Anglophone Cameroonians. One male focus group participant gave the following testimony:

> *[…] for example, SONARA.*[49] *They are being headed by Francophones and it is an English zone. If you go there, three-quarters of the workers that are there are from the French regions. […] whereas Anglophones are there they have the same qualifications, the same experience […] they have more talent than them, but they will not give them the same opportunity.*[50]

A participant in a different men's focus group corroborated this view of the employment situation at SONARA, the national oil refinery, and of economic marginalisation generally:

> *When it comes to the job market in Cameroon, the Anglophones have been marginalised. From my experience, when I went to deposit my file at SONARA, I noticed that more than 90 per cent of the workers were Francophone. There at SONARA the posts reserved for Anglophones are security men and a few drivers.*[51]

It was felt that despite being equally qualified, the Anglophone and Francophone are not treated the same. As noted at a women's focus group discussion:

> *What amuses me in this country is that when Anglophones go to work at the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC),*[52] *you must start as a labourer be you a degree holder, but Francophones come straight from the ministry and start work at the head office immediately.*[53]

The participant is asserting here that Francophone workers are recruited in the ministry in charge of the CDC and immediately placed on higher pay scales and better positions, whereas Anglophone workers must begin from the lowest rank no matter their qualification.

Another experience recounted at the same discussion went thus:

> *We graduated at the same time from the university, but I'll be jobless or a cleaner in their office, he is in the office, and I am cleaning his floor in the office […] That is what angers some mothers and even some fathers too. So, this very Anglophone crisis, I am sure it is from there that it sprung […] Secondly, talking about this side [the Anglophone side], the place where resources come [from] most people who work here are Francophones. And he will come and manipulate me in my zone and do whatever he wants to do. You see, we became fools in our own zone, that thing angered people. Yes! Discrimination is the cause of this crisis in this country. That is where it started before people arose to say NO, we will take our own resources.*[54]

Further testimony on socio-economic marginalisation of the Anglophone population made the link to the separatist struggle:

> *We are suffering because we have many learned children among us who can be in high positions in offices, who can even control Cameroon, but Francophones look down on us and smash us low. They degrade us and do not recognise us as anything at all. If there is something like a job to do in the office, they won't put us Anglophones in charge, but they will put the Francophone there. So, this the reason the Boys who call themselves Amba are fighting for a separation because, if the country separates, the Anglophone will be better off. So, that is why they are fighting for us to separate because they themselves [the Boys] have suffered a lot.*[55]

Even those who have decided to focus on agricultural production are not spared from marginalisation by the government. A participant in a further men's focus group stated:

> *[…] yes, a lot of reasons, largely socio-economic […] A lot of people dwell in abject poverty. They*

49. SONARA is the National Oil Refinery of Cameroon with headquarters in Limbe, Southwest Region
50. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
51. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
52. The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), before the conflict, was a buoyant agro-industrial company in the heartland of Anglophone Cameroon that was the second-largest employer after the state of Cameroon.
53. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
54. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
55. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020

are cocoa farmers, but they do not determine the price. They have the feeling that they work hard, and others reap from their hard work. The appointed government workers in their area are not representing their needs.[56]

3.1.4. Linguistic marginalisation

Historically, the Republic of Cameroon was established as a bilingual state. From reunification in 1961, the country opted to use the two official languages under what is today known as official language bilingualism. This political and sociolinguistic policy aimed to maintain the cultural diversity of the nation and preserve national unity (Kiwoh, 2021). This official bilingualism was confirmed in the 1996 Constitution (Article 3):

> *The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.*

However, the practice of language equality and bilingualism, as stipulated by the Constitution, has been difficult to achieve. The French language has had dominance over the English language from the very beginning. This was justified by the population factor, and by a clause in the 1961 Federal Constitution which gave French a lot of prominence.[57] DeLancey (1986) remarked that one cannot travel around Cameroon without observing the pervasive dominance of one of the official languages, French, within the Cameroonian linguistic landscape. This observation was made more than 35 years ago and, despite the adoption of the current Constitution in 1996, remains valid. French dominates English in public offices, in education and even in day-to-day interactions among citizens in a country where official language bilingualism and language equality should be practised in accordance with the 1996 Constitution (Jikong, 2003). Participants in this study consistently noted that the dominance of the French language in bilingual Cameroon remains a reality and gave examples of real-life situations in which they experienced marginalisation and discrimination based on language. One female focus group participant stated that: *'Cameroon is a bilingual country only in papers [on paper]. For example, when you go to Yaoundé and you start speaking English, they will start saying,* "c'est les Bamenda la"*'.*[58]

Another female participant in a different focus group recalled a personal experience.

> *My sister's child went to establish an ID card. When she arrived there, the policewoman who was in charge, since she doesn't speak English, speaks only in French and she too doesn't understand French. The (police) woman sent her away, tossing her documents on the desk, saying if she does not have anyone who can come and translate for her, she should take her documents away* […] *The child started crying there.*[59]

One interviewee recalled a recent event in which such discrimination was contested:

> *On my way to Kumba*[60] *one day, our bus stopped at Ekona road junction, and the identification paper of an old woman was demanded in the French language by the officer in charge. Immediately, the people on the bus got offended and the former responded that Cameroon is bilingual. I rebuked the officer and told him that as citizens in a bilingual country, when encountered with English-speaking Cameroonians, they should be addressed in the language they better understand.*[61]

French remains the dominant language in competitive entrance examinations into professional schools that provide direct employment. The notion of *concours*[62] hinders many Anglophone Cameroonians from accessing strategic jobs in the country. One focus group participant noted that:

> *[…] most of the* concours[63] *that are being advertised, you hardly hear them in English, you only hear them in French, you see them only in French, and if you want to google it to do translation […] which is not supposed to be like that. You have to advertise in English and French equally.*[64]

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56. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
57. Article 59 of the 1961 Federal Constitution stated clearly that only official documents in the French language were considered authentic.
58. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020. '*C'est les Bamenda*' simply means they are Bamenda people. Here, the word Bamenda is used in a pejorative manner. Bamenda is the chief town of the Northwest region, and the term is commonly used by Francophone Cameroonians to refer pejoratively to Anglophones from the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon.
59. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
60. Kumba is one of the major cities in Anglophone Cameroon. The inhabitants mostly speak pidgin English and English.
61. Interview YR018, Buea, 20 December 2020
62. Competitive entrance examinations to highly qualified training schools and jobs.
63. *Concours* is the French word for competitive entrance examinations. It is a system that government uses to control access to public service jobs.
64. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

Similarly, a participant in another focus group recounted her own experience of linguistic marginalisation in the education sector:

> *I have had to even write a public exam all in French. It was during the class [exam] that it was now translated in English, and which was even a wrong translation. So, those of us who understood a bit of French understood that that was not what was requested from the question, but there are others who never understood. So, they had to just go along with what had been given as a translation.*[65]

The above testimonies show that official language equality and effective official bilingualism are far from being achieved in Cameroon since 1961, the year of reunification. But mention must be made of the creation of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism. The Commission was established by presidential decree (No. 2017/013) on 23 January 2017, simultaneous to the repressive crackdown by the government on peaceful Anglophone CSOs. It has a consultative status and an advisory role to the president, but with no powers to enforce laws. While its role may have future potential, explored further in section 5.2.4 below, one interviewee wryly commented, *'Many [government] texts, including that creating the Commission of Multiculturalism and Bilingualism largely come out in French language before a funny [sub-standard] translation [into English] is done*'.[66]

Language is intrinsically linked to identity. It goes along with culture to give a complete view of the phenomenon of identity. Through language, one is easily identified and classified. In multilingual societies, language can be instrumentalised and either used for inclusion or exclusion (Bamgbose, 2002. In the build-up to the Anglophone conflict, many former Southern Cameroonians complained, and are still complaining, that their language was used to marginalise them, and that linguistic discrimination is the most visible form of marginalisation suffered by Anglophone Cameroonians.

From all the above it is evident that, prior to the outburst of conflict and warfare in 2017, marginalisation was experienced in terms of identity, socio-economic issues, the political life of the nation and linguistic discrimination. These have all affected the Anglophone Cameroonian negatively. Despite alerts and indicators towards a degenerating situation, the Francophone leadership of the country, as well as its complaisant Anglophone political elite, kept denying the existence of these various forms of marginalisation. This led to the strike by lawyers and teachers calling for better treatment of the Anglophone by the government. The management of this strike became the immediate cause of the current civil strife in Anglophone Cameroon.

3.2. Peaceful protests and government repression

The year 2016 marked the beginning of a turbulent political landscape in Cameroon, characterised by multiple peaceful protests by Anglophone citizens denouncing the decades of marginalisation and imposed assimilation from the dominant Francophone government. This was evidenced during the field study in Cameroon as one focus group participant expressed: *'I was in Bamenda where the teachers and the lawyers went for a peaceful march in 2016 because of the anger people already had and their frustration due to what the Francophones are doing to them'*.[67]

The 'Francophonisation' of the Cameroonian society, culture and identity was for many Anglophones an infringement of their fundamental rights, an injustice which concomitantly made them feel like second-class citizens*: 'We are not treated the same [equal] as Francophones',* another research participant noted.[68] Thus, with such sentiments on the rise, protests became the medium through which Anglophones felt *'our voices could be heard'*.[69] Though civil protests are not novel phenomena in Cameroon, as seen especially in the 1990s (Aziz, 2019), they regained more popularity among Anglophones in 2016, as they felt the need to have their voices heard and express their grievances at what has been perceived as discriminatory coexistence with their Francophone kinsmen.

Consequently, in October and November 2016, the Anglophone Common Law Lawyers Association and the Cameroon Teachers' Trade Union (CATTU) organised strikes and protests across the two English-speaking regions demanding reforms in the country's judicial and educational systems. One interviewee explained:

> *In 2016, teachers and lawyers took to the streets demanding their rights. The lawyers wanted common law lawyers to be respected in the courtrooms within the jurisdiction of the English-speaking regions, and the teachers also asked for the reform of their educational structure to reflect the Anglo-Saxon community.*[70]

At their first civil protest, which was in the form of a sit-in strike on 11 October 2016, the lawyers criticised the government for the lack of representation of Anglophone

65. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
66. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020
67. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
68. Interview NM011, Buea,15 December 2020
69. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
70. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 December 2020

lawyers and the deployment of Francophone legal practitioners who neither understood nor applied the common law practices as was customary in the Anglophone regions. The lawyers *'did not see normal how Francophone magistrates were transferred to Anglophone regions while they did not master Common Law',* as noted by one interviewee.[71] Statistically, of the 1,542 operating magistrates in the country, 1,265 were Francophone while only 227 were Anglophone; while out of the 514 judicial officers, 499 were French-speaking with only 15 English speakers (Caxton 2017). In the Northwest specifically, of the 128 magistrates working in that region, 67 (52.3 per cent) are Francophone (Caxton, 2017). The lawyers thus perceived such disparities as an affront to Anglophone jurisprudence, demonstrating systemic marginalisation by the French-led government. Ultimately, this has implications on the fair adjudication of justice for many Anglophones. For example, one possible scenario noted in a focus group discussion is:

> *If there is a dispute between two villagers who are not educated and only understand pidgin [English], but are forced to appear in a court where the judge is a Francophone, who does not understand what common law is and is using a dictionary to pass judgment on people who do not even understand the language.*[72]

During the sit-in protest, the lawyers, among other things, called on the government to preserve Cameroon's bi-jural system and respect the Anglophone common law practice. With no response from the government, the lawyers followed their strike action with another peaceful demonstration on 8 November 2016 where over 500 lawyers came together, re-emphasising their demands for the government to reinstate the Anglophone common law practice (Bone, 2021). It is important to note that previous petitions had been made by the lawyers to the government to address these institutional biases. In May 2015 and February 2016, the lawyers submitted petitions to President Biya to mitigate the eradication of the country's bilingual institutional and cultural makeup; these were all ignored (Awasom, 2020).

Similarly, the teachers' protest, which occurred on 21 November 2016, bemoaned the lack of Anglophone teachers, the influx of Francophone teachers in Anglophone schools and universities, and rising problems in the educational systems in Anglophone regions (Okereke, 2018). During the field study, the majority of the research participants expressed concerns about the educational debacle citing grammatical errors in student textbooks (because they are written by non-English speakers), weak curriculum/syllabus and low quality of teaching: *'I don't understand how a Francophone woman will be standing and giving lectures in English*'.[73] Participants further explained that, in many of their communities, *'teachers taught in French which the children do not understand, so there was a problem and the government did not rectify the problem, instead, they were forcing the teachers on Anglophones who do not understand the French*'.[74] As a consequence, the majority of Anglophone students tend to fail, or perform poorly, in state exams, which subsequently affects their employability and livelihood. Hence, for these teachers and by extension the Anglophone citizens, as one interviewee put it, *'standing up to fight for these [rights] to be restored is worth it, it is just a normal way for them to get what they want'.*[75]

Nonetheless, these protests, though peaceful, were met with aggressive retaliations from the Biya government. The government took a repressive, military approach by deploying the army, *gendarme* and police to disperse these groups, leading to violent clashes, casualties and arrests. One research participant highlighted:

> *You see for yourself. We have people who are being sprayed by tear gas and things like that, all by men in uniform. When they are protesting and trying to express their voices, they spray tear gas on them, they shoot them, and they even kill some of them.*[76]

The protesters at the lawyers' strike, for instance, were attacked and brutally dispersed with tear gas by the Cameroon paramilitary agents and *gendarmes* (Awasom, 2020). Equally, at the teachers' protest, two people were killed, others severely beaten and about 100 arrested by the army (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019). The government's repressive responses to these protests, coupled with the growing sense of the Anglophone consciousness, sparked several other protests across the two Anglophone regions, organised by individual activists, pro-federalists and university students. As illustrated in the extract below:

> *In October 2016, when the lawyers came out, and in November the teachers also joined the lot, later on civilians joined and everybody was joining in at their*

71. Interview TP010, Buea, 14 December 2020
72. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
73. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
74. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
75. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
76. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020

own level. Mancho Bibixy came up with the coffin revolution[…][77]

Mancho Bibixy's coffin revolution occurred on 21 November 2016, where the radio broadcaster was pictured standing inside a coffin at one of Bamenda's busy roundabouts, decrying the injustices and marginalisation of the Anglophone population by the Biya government (Agwanda et al., 2020; ARREYB Media, 2019). Following Mancho's coffin revolution, students from University of Buea organised a protest on 28 November 2016 demanding the release of educational bursaries for students among other demands (Agwanda et al., 2020). In response, the government again utilised repressive tactics, with the army, *gendarmes* and police undertaking beatings, arbitrary arrests against protesters and their organisers, with some reporting incidences of rape in the aftermath of their protest (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019). Research participants corroborated this repressive state response from their own experiences. A focus group discussion recalled that:

*They [military/*gendarmes*] were arresting lawyers and other people. So they started arresting males, females, and if you say anything about the crisis you were arrested […] Boys were running around, and military too was following them, those who were protesting.*[78]

In a collage session, the brutalities against protesters, including the university students, were highlighted:

There is too much brutality caused by the men in uniform. For instance, we have the case of the brutalisation of the students in the University for Buea, as you see in the picture […] You also have the case of a principal who was killed because he protested with a small banner.[79]

As one interviewee simply put it: *'When people marched, the military arrested people'.*[80]

An important development was the formation of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC or simply the Consortium) on 5 December 2016 as the mouthpiece for Anglophone civil society organisations. Significantly, the Consortium advocated a return to the 1961 federal system as a means of securing greater autonomy for Anglophone legal and education institutions. The Consortium also initiated 'Operation Ghost Towns Resistance', also referred to as 'Country Sundays' or 'lockdowns', with the closure of schools and businesses in the Northwest and Southwest regions on selected days as a tactic of non-violent resistance (ICG 2017; Okereke 2018). Such 'ghost town' days were widely and voluntarily respected, indicating the level of support amongst the general population at the time. In retaliation against the CACSC, especially for their 'Ghost Town' tactics, the government, through the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation, issued a banning order against the group on 17 January 2017, and subsequently arrested some of its leaders including the President, Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla, and the Secretary-General, Fontem Neba (Awasom, 2020), while others fled into exile. Those arrested, alongside other activists, were later brought before a military court on 13 February 2017 and charged with domestic terrorism and treason (Blackstock, 2017).

State repression extended to the media, both traditional media and social media. For instance, research participants noted that *'we also have cases of journalists who are being maltreated or mistreated'.*[81] Mancho Bibixy, for example, was arrested on 19 January 2017, accused of jeopardising national unity through his coffin revolution activism and support for secession (ARREYB Media, 2019). He was later sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in conditions described as poor and unlawful (Takambou, 2020). The government also shut down the internet in the two regions from January to April 2017, which came at a social and economic cost to Anglophone populations (Ritzen, 2018). This was followed by a second shutdown on 30 September 2017 (Cassim, 2017). Other reports indicate that the internet shutdown continued into February 2018 (Atabong, 2018).

These repressive acts, to many Anglophone citizens, contributed to fuelling the tensions rather than helping to resolve the long-standing problems. As expressed by one interviewee:

The measures adopted by the government were not appealing because instead of using calm and peaceful measures, force was rather used. It should be noted that it is not every case that needs to be addressed with force, because force aggravates issues rather than solving them.[82]

The government crackdown entailed a major escalation of the crisis, leading in less than a year to demands shifting from federalism to secession and the emergence of armed conflict (Bone 2021: 46).

77. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
78. Interview SM014, Buea, 1 December 2020
79. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
80. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
81. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
82. Interview LF016, Buea, 16 December 2020

3.3. Rise of separatism and armed struggle

State repression of, first, legitimate expression of grievances and, second, peaceful advocacy of a return to federalism, led to increasing calls both within Cameroon and in the diaspora for secession of the English-speaking regions. Following the banning of CACSC and other organisations, separatist organisations took centre stage. In January 2017, existing separatist organisations, largely active in the diaspora, came together to form the Southern Cameroons Ambazonia Consortium United Front (SCACUF). The group was led by a leadership council composed of the heads of all its member organisations (Bone, 2021: 47). Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, previously involved in CACSC, was appointed as chairperson, and it is noteworthy that his strategy remained non-violent, widely attributed with the statement that SCACUF should use the 'force of argument rather than the argument of force' (Bone, 2021: 48), thereby reiterating the non-violent position of SCNC in the 1990s. There were divisions within SCACUF, however, with others such as Ayaba Cho Lucas, leader of the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC), one of the constituent organisations, advocating armed struggle. Yet, what was most significant was the fundamental shift in the key demand from federalism to secession.

The claim for secession was vehemently opposed by the Cameroonian government who deemed this a rebellious act against the country's sovereignty. Although local resistance was non-violent, the Northwest and Southwest remained militarised, with state security forces arbitrarily arresting and detaining young men in particular on the pretext that they were supporting secessionism (Tabi 2017). In response to this oppressive military presence, and signalling the move towards armed conflict, the Ambazonia Governing Council announced on 9 September 2017 the formal deployment of the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF) in the NW and SW regions, with the first attack on Cameroon's government forces in which 3 soldiers were killed (Kindzeka, 2017; ICG, 2017). On 1 October 2017, SCACUF marked the anniversary of Southern Cameroons' independence from British rule in 1961 by symbolically declaring the independence of the Republic of Ambazonia (ICG 2017). The independence declaration was marked by a demonstration of over 1 million people throughout the NW and SW, but resulted in the killing of 17 demonstrators and over 500 arrests by government forces (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights 2019). On 31 October, SCACUF officially transformed itself into the Interim Government of Ambazonia (IG), with Ayuk Tabe assuming the role of President. Although the IG remained opposed to armed struggle at this point, and condemned an ADF attack that killed three gendarmes in early November 2017 (ICG 2017), the armed conflict had commenced. The state intensified its military occupation of the Anglophone regions, and on 30 November 2017 President Biya issued a statement that referred to 'repeated terrorist attacks from a secessionist group' and measures 'to eliminate these criminals' (Awasom 2020: 284). Biya's pronouncement was regarded as a declaration of war and as a very significant moment, as noted by a collage session participant:

> *… [the situation] changed with the declaration of war. The teachers and the lawyers started the strike and then the security forces reacted violently, and some persons of the Anglophone community took it upon themselves to defend their community through arms, and the President declared war.*[83]

Biya's declaration and the military's occupation of the Anglophone regions led to intensified clashes between the two warring sides, resulting in the ongoing civil war (Alexander, 2021). Notable examples of clashes include 1 February 2018 where two *gendarmes* were killed by armed separatists in Mbingo; and subsequently, on 21 June 2018, suspected ADF armed men attacked the police checkpoint in Mutengene, killing one *gendarme* officer and injuring another (CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019). In November 2019, violence resurged in Bamenda after President Biya announced a date for the 2019 parliamentary and municipal elections (Craig, 2020). Declaring the elections, a 'sham', the separatists, on 1 December 2019, further attempted firing down a commercial plane suspected to be transporting soldiers and weapons (Craig, 2020). On 13 January 2021, clashes between the military army and the armed groups in Northwest resulted in the killing of five soldiers and a civilian (Forku and Kum, 2021). According to the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) and the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (2019) as of 2019, 1,000 non-state armed combatants have been killed. Moreover, Happi (2021) and Ahmed (2021) note that since 2017, about 1,200 soldiers and police personnel have equally been killed.

Politically, the Ambazonian movement has been characterised by fragmented and conflicting authorities, mainly based in the diaspora, as well as a proliferation of armed groups with stronger or looser ties to the political groupings. Initially, the main political split was between the Interim Government (IG) led by Ayuk Tabe and the Ambazonia Governing Council (AGC) led by Cho Lucas. The situation altered in January 2018 when Ayuk Tabe and nine other IG leaders were arrested in Nigeria and extradited to Cameroon. They were held in detention without trial for a long period, then all sentenced to life

83. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020

imprisonment by a military tribunal on 20 August 2019 (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Militarily, the armed groups responded to the arrest and detention of Ayuk Tabe and the other leaders by escalating attacks against the security forces (Bone, 2021: 57), with little division now over the necessity of armed struggle. Politically, following Ayuk Tabe's arrest and detention, Samuel Ikome Sako – a US-based former pastor - was elected as acting interim president of the IG (Bone, 2020). However, infighting ensued with a power struggle between the two leaders and allegations of corruption and incompetence. This reached a climax in early 2019, resulting in a split and the creation of two groups : 'IG Sisiku' and 'IG Sako'. Both factions are themselves umbrella groups composed of different Southern Cameroonian separatist organisations, often with diaspora-based leaderships. IG Sako is believed to be aligned with two armed groups: the 'Red Dragons' militia and the 'Southern Cameroons Defense Forces' (SOCADEF) (Bone, 2020).

As a rival to the Interim Government, the Ambazonian Governing Council, led by Ayaba Cho Lucas, initially took a tougher stance with its guerrilla strategy aiming 'to make the Anglophone regions ungovernable' (ICG, 2019). However, despite this rivalry, the AGC supported the IG Sisiku faction in the IG split, and formalised cooperation ties in August 2019 (Bone, 2020). The AGC's armed wing, the ADF, is generally seen as the largest armed group and is active across both the Northwest and Southwest, and the collaboration between Sisiku Ayak Tabe and Cho Lucas is a powerful coalition within the Ambazonian movement.

Aligned to these political groups are an estimated thirty armed groups (Craig, 2021a), known locally as the 'Amba Boys' or simply the 'Boys', although female fighters are also present. As well as the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), prominent groups are the Southern Cameroons Defense Forces (SOCADEF), Ambazonia Restoration Forces, Red Dragons, Tigers of Ambazonia and Vipers (Ngala, 2020; Bone, 2020), among others. The number of fighters involved in the NSAGs is uncertain, but estimated at around 4000 across the two regions, composed mainly of civilian recruits, as well as former members of Cameroon defence forces and suspected mercenaries from Nigeria (ICG, 2020). The combat strength of the NSAGs has increased during the conflict, including acquisition of more sophisticated weaponry.

The Anglophone conflict has also contributed to the resurgence of inter-tribal conflicts, which have further escalated the violence. In the Northwest region, for example, the long-standing farmer-herder conflict has resurged due to the ongoing conflict. In Wum for instance, *'as a result of the conflict, the hidden grudges between the Mbororos and the Aghem community were exposed and became more challenging for both parties to manage, and it led to loss of lives'.*[84] The Mbororos are part of the pastoral Fulani tribes, who have been in Cameroon since the 1900s. Their main occupation is herding cattle, whereas the indigenes are mainly agriculturists. The nomadic nature of the Mbororos and other Fulanis has seen this group spread across Cameroon, particularly the Northwest region. However, over time, their presence, given their use of farmlands for grazing their animals and the accompanying environmental challenges, has been a major source of conflict in the region (Mbih, 2020). Over the years, efforts made towards resolving this farmer-herder conflict have been largely unsuccessful. Nonetheless, the tensions between the Mbororos and the native farmers have mostly remained at a low intensity level characterised by sporadic violence, but have resurged in the wake of the Anglophone conflict, sometimes manipulated by the warring factions. In the case of the Mbororos and the Aghem community in Wum:

> *… through this crisis, some groups of people connived with the Mbororos and misled them into a conflict with the Aghem people. So, the Mbororos went into destroying buildings, burning houses, and their cows were eating the women's crops and all that, and then the Aghem people stood up to defend themselves and so they went into a fight and so many people lost their lives.*[85]

Ultimately, with the ongoing confrontations between these two warring factions and the accompanying violence, it is civilians, mostly Anglophones, who have borne the brunt. Burnt homes and villages, loss of lives, injuries, internal displacements and school closures, coupled with incidents of sexual violence and loss of livelihoods, are among the many impacts of and experiences from the conflict, as discussed in the next chapter.

84. Interview FN028 Yaoundé, 18 November 2020

85. Interview FN028 Yaoundé, 18 November 2020

4. Grassroots Voices: Perspectives of Conflict-Affected Communities and Citizens

In this chapter, we turn to a discussion of how the conflict has affected Anglophone Cameroonian citizens, including those that remain in the conflict zones and IDPs forced to flee their homes. Their experiences and perspectives are especially important as their voices have seldom been heard, despite their lives being so significantly affected by the conflict. Indeed, it is a key objective of this research to give voice to those most-affected citizens and to enable their hitherto excluded voices to contribute to local and national dialogue on conflict resolution. The chapter is in two main parts. First, the various experiences of civilians are outlined, with material organised along six thematic lines that highlight the various adverse effects. Second, the impact on particular social groups is examined. The discussion is supported throughout by direct quotes from interviewees and participants in focus groups and collage-making sessions.

4.1. Experiences of conflict

Following the escalation of the conflict in 2017, civilians in the two Anglophone regions have suffered extensively, experiencing human rights violations, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), mental trauma, loss of livelihoods, the breakdown of social cohesion and an increase in insecurity and crime. These experiences of Anglophone civilians are captured in this section through their own words.

4.1.1. Human rights violations

One of the most dramatic consequences of the Anglophone conflict is the scale and nature of human rights violations. Human rights violations can be a source of conflict but can also emerge as a consequence of conflict (ACHPR, 2019; Sriram et al., 2010). In many conflicts such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo between government and militias in the Kivu Region, violations are committed both by government security forces (ACHPR, 2019; Sriram et al., 2010) and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) (ACHPR, 2019). Violations during armed conflict may include 'torture and disappearances, but also frequently include war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide' (Sriram et al., 2010). The rights violations identified by participants in this study included arbitrary arrest and detention, summary execution, torture, arson and kidnapping. SGBV is another human rights violation that has increased markedly in this conflict. Its prominence, and the terrible consequences for women and girls, merits its discussion in a separate section that follows this one.

Figure 3: Collage No. 13, Yaoundé, 1 December 2020

Arbitrary arrest

Since conflict escalated in 2017, arbitrary arrests have become commonplace. The United Nations Seminar on the Protection of Human Rights in Criminal Law and Procedure held in Baguio City (Philippines) from the 17–28 February 1958, defined arbitrary arrest as an arrest which may or may not be authorized by a law, but which fails to protect human rights either because the legal right to arrest is too broadly defined or 'the means, circumstances or physical force attendant on the arrest exceed the reasonable requirements of effecting arrest' (UN, 1958). The Universal Declaration on Human Rights and Freedoms (UDHR) states in Article 9 that 'no one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest' (UDHR, 1948). The cases of arbitrary arrest described by participants in this study were either illegal or conducted in ways that significantly undermined the dignity of the human person. One collage participant, for example, described his experience in the following words:

> *I was on a mission coming from Foumban […] military people just came out and interrogated me that who am I. I said that I am an Anglophone. They said where am I coming from? I said from the Northwest region of Cameroon. So, they said I am a terrorist, that everybody is suffering in Cameroon and not only the Anglophones. So, from there I was taken to the police station, stayed in the police station for nine days, then I was taken down to prison.*[86]

Another FGD participant similarly said:

> *They themselves, the soldiers, they do not respect the laws, for instance, the way they treat people […] They arrest people without any proof, they arrest people without any evidence, they just see somebody, they just say. ' this man is this', they just go, 'you arrest that man.' You start brutalising the person and people accept things that were not even done [before].*[87]

One woman described how her son was arbitrarily arrested, detained and tortured, and how her family has been impoverished after spending a lot of money to have him released:

> *Some were caught and locked up in prison, yes! Then you start spending money. For example, my son was caught. He used to manage doing something at Buea. He was taken by the army and maltreated. He was maltreated that he could die and only prayer healed him. He had four children at home, he left two here and took the others to Buea. As he went to work, he was taken. As he was taken, he even tried to say, 'I have a wife and children at home and some at Limbe,' but the army did not listen. He showed his ID card and driver's license, since he was driving one car, but he was still taken. It was not easy, I walked in Buea up and down, the wife and children were under trauma. I could not sleep; I was in pain. I went there for more than two weeks and by the time I finally took him, his body was like a dead body. It was swollen, it was peeling off. I brought him to Mile 1 and spent more than a million francs on him before he recovered. These my sisters know, even this my daughter knows. It was not easy. So, from then we went bankrupt. The children here and in Buea have been in the house and they still feel that fear. So, all these ones make me feel bad as a mother.*[88]

The story of one participant revealed that many arrests were based on false accusations. Such accusations were made to the military out of jealousy, hatred or other subjective reasons. One participant, for example, said:

> *I want to say it has affected me in such a way because I have incurred some loss – human loss […] I have three of my cousins so they [somebody around the quarter] went and told the military that these guys are fighting with the Boys. […] They took them away and […] we didn't see them again till now. We don't know, but for me I just know they are dead because getting to nine months we have not seen anybody. By now you just know that the person is already dead. So, it has not been easy. […] That one really affected my grandmother till a point when she just sits and starts calling the names of the guys. […] It affected her until two months ago she died because she has been traumatised, she just sits and starts calling them and crying.*[89]

Similar stories were narrated by other participants who had similar experiences with arbitrary arrest themselves, or had seen members of their family arrested arbitrarily, or knew someone or persons that had been victims of such arrests. The frequency of these arrests was a major source of fear and, as seen from the stories of participants, also had a traumatic and devastating impact on the livelihoods of families of those affected.

Summary execution

Participants also shared their experiences of killings, including extrajudicial executions, which border on war crimes, and contravene international norms of responsibility to protect (R2P) and international human

86. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
87. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
88. FGD Women, Limbe 21 November 2020
89. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

rights laws. Article 138 of the UN General Assembly's 2005 World Summit Outcomes which emphasis R2P indicates that every 'state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; (UN World Summit Outcomes, 2005: 30).[90] As the conflict unfolds in Cameroon, killing and slaughtering of Anglophone civilians have equally increased, accompanied with violence, leaving many local populations feeling like their lives are no longer valued. Participants lamented about this during a focus group discussion:

> *One thing I've discovered is that there is no respect for human life anymore. If you see the way people are killed […] even animals and fowls have more value than human beings at this time because you can kill your fowl and have a meal but men [people] are just being slaughtered and they have the heart to put this over the media to show it. So, life no longer has a meaning because of this crisis. They would kill a person and behead. Some are even masked [before the act is carried out]. So many have died in that way.*[91]

As a result, *'death is a normal thing now.'*[92] Indeed, in one of the collage sessions, participants expanded on this new reality, noting how seeing bodies of people who have been killed has become common in their town:

> *In the morning, you cross on corpses to get somewhere. Even yesterday, on leaving the house, I crossed over a corpse […] before going up to the park to take a car to come here. In short, life is somehow.*[93]

The above sentiments were shared across the research population. Many participants lamented how *'a lot of innocent lives have been taken'* and *'people are being killed for no just cause...'*[94] since the beginning of the conflict. Some even described it as *'genocide'* and *'blood bath'*.[95] Women, men and children have fallen victims of these crimes.

Both the government (often through its military and other security agencies) and the NSAGs were accused of these crimes. *'It is from either the military or the "Boys" [Amba Boys]'*,[96] stated one participant. The military (sometimes referred to as 'the Uniform' or 'men in uniform' by research participants) was accused by a participant of murdering the very people they are to protect. As expressed in a collage discussion:

> *From here we see that the military, instead of defending the civilians, they were murdering, killing civilians in the name of the 'Ambazonian Boys' or the 'Amba Boys' as they call them […]. We do not know whether they were fighting against civilians or whether they were fighting against an enemy.*[97]

Throughout the study, the majority of the participants narrated their experiences of the military killing civilians during the conflict. The narrative of one participant provided a grim picture of how flagrant killings have been taking place in some neighbourhoods and the high likelihood of being killed when arbitrarily arrested by the military. She said:

> *Take my elder brother, for example. When this thing started, they would come to the house early in the morning and make arrests. There is a school there called xxx. They would arrest over 60 young people, take them there, and 'wipe' all of them. You just have to come and pick the remains of your own [relative] from there. That is if you have the heart to step out to go and collect the remains [of your relative]. Bodies will stay there until they rot. So, my brother had to escape to a small village called xxx where he decided to remain. But the military still pursued them there, arrested them and beat them up. I think it was two months ago when he called me to tell me that the military had taken them out of the house. I told him to leave from there […] but he would not agree. He was beaten on that day, almost to death. I was only informed that he had been taken to the hospital.*[98]

In a focus group discussion in Dschang, another participant also shared his experience:

> *For us in Wum, my very first time I saw how the military arrested a person, I was peeping through my window, they caught a person and beat him up, asking him to call his father to come out and finally they shot the boy and in the morning what we found was the [Boy's] corpse.*[99]

In Limbe, participants equally narrated their experiences of summary killings by the military:

90. UN General Assembly (2005) 'World Summit Outcome: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly', 24 October 2005, A/RES/60/1
91. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
92. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
93. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
94. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
95. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
96. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
97. Collage Session, Douala, 25 November 2020
98. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
99. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

Talking about our experience in Kumba, as a matter of fact, we do not have peace. This is because, first, they shoot children and sometimes you stand and see it happen. You are there; they catch your child and shoot him in front of you […] They, the Uniform [military]. They shoot your child in front of you […] They catch your child, be he an Amba or the one who is not Amba […] they catch them all, if they are not killed, they carry them in their car and get them locked up in their camp.[100]

Further, in Dschang, a participant narrated how a teenage boy from a community called Bafut was killed by the military, noting *'when the military came one day, and they simply just killed the child accusing him of being "Amba" because he was tall'*.[101]

Moreover, participants further explained that the unannounced invasion of the military into communities resulted in the killing of a large number of civilians because *'when the army even comes, they do not know who the Amba is and who is the civilian, since the Ambas have no uniform. So, they kill even those who are not Ambas'*.[102] This contrasted with the NSAGs, as participants explained:

When they [Amba Boys] want to launch their attack, they always inform the population to be aware but rather this is not the case with the military who just shoot anytime they feel like, and this is the main reason we always hear of stray bullets.[103]

These testimonies, to a larger extent, demonstrate that the government of Cameroon, though bounded by national and international laws, has reneged on those norms, as its military commits these crimes in wartime with impunity. Such acts affirm participants' perception of the government's declaration of war on Anglophones as underscored in section 3.3 of this report.

While the majority of the participants accused the military of being the main perpetrators of these crimes (as demonstrated in the foregoing evidence), the NSAGs were equally accused of killing innocent civilians. One participant indicated in a FGD:

And in other cases, they even behead. There was a young boy who came from Bamenda. He knew nothing but they [the 'Amba'] said he was a spy and wanted to collect information. That boy said, no, that he hadn't reported anything. [But] they cut his neck… Yes, it is 'Amba' that cut off his head.[104]

Another participant shared about the loss of her nephew at the hands of the Amba Boys:

I was living with my two kids and my elder brother's son. So, one day when there was shooting at the road, my elder brother's son went out and was shot while he was crossing the road by the 'Boys' [Amba Boys].[105]

Though several factors account for the widespread killing of civilians, such as stray bullets from crossfires between the military and NSAGs, suspicion, as demonstrated in the above quotations, was noted as a major reason for civilians being targeted. In other words, the wrongful accusations of civilians based on suspicion of supporting either side of the warring faction was one of the main drivers of summary killing of civilians. The extract below further explains:

They are victims of killings either in crossfires or they are just suspected to be working either with the secessionists or the military which they are sometimes termed blacklegs and as a result of this they are arrested and sometimes killed, some kidnapped.[106]

Consequently, Anglophone civilians feel unsafe and unprotected in Cameroon as their lives are under constant threat of violence and violated by the two warring factions. As one participant noted, 'there is no peace. Every day there is shooting, every second.'[107]

Torture

Violations of the right to freedom from torture have also become common, with men being particularly targeted. Participants shared their experiences, which suggest there has been widespread use of torture since the conflict escalated. One female participant, when describing violence against civilians by both the military and the NSAGs, stated that:

You are not safe from the military; you are not safe from the 'Boys'. So, the violence is really high. […] If you see the way they torture people. You look and say this is how they treat a human being. Because I've seen a situation where they beat somebody

100. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
101. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
102. Interview NS 035, Limbe, 26 November 2020
103. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
104. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
105. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
106. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
107. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

with a cutlass, they whip you as if you are an animal, which is not right. We are all humans. You cannot treat another person like that. So, the violence has really increased.[108]

Another participant in the same focus group also described similar experiences of violence and intimidation perpetrated not only by the military, but also by the separatist fighters, whom she referred to as *'our own children'. 'Even when you go on the side of our own children, who are the "Boys", […] they maltreat your own husband, beat up your neighbour with a cutlass'.*[109]

A male focus group participant noted that girls have also been victims of torture by the NSAGs in circumstances where they are accused of assisting the military, despite having no choice:

They come and take those girls and beat them until some were taken to the hospital. 'You people were with the military. Paa you were housing the military.' And when the military comes like in my quarter, they just occupy a place, they don't ask. [110]

Many participants recounted similar experiences with torture. Victims were either tortured by security forces or by separatist fighters. The victims of torture have been young, old, men and women.

Arson

The right to property has also been violated by repeated acts of arson by the parties in the conflict. One participant described how their house was destroyed by the military:

They burnt my uncle's house and our own house, reason being that there was a tenant who was living with us, when the military came when searching the house. When they enter and see that there is a bike inside, they just assume that it is an Amba person that is living there. So, they burnt the house down and since [then] it has been very difficult living in the village.[111]

A health centre owned by the father of one participant was burnt by the military, who accused them of treating separatist fighters. She narrated that:

One evening we were at home. We never knew what an armoured car is, but to our surprise it parked in front of our house. It had 'four heads'. That was my first time that I ever saw anything like that. So, they told our father that they had to burn our house, that hospital, that clinic […] they said that they wanted to burn it because when the 'Boys' have accidents we treat them at our clinic. We said we knew nothing of the sort, but they said we should leave. They poured petrol and said everyone should go out and they burnt down everything, including our certificates […] I currently have no certificate.[112]

Another participant recounted how their house was burnt by the separatists and why she believed they did it. She said, *'Our house was burnt to ashes. The reason is that […] my father is an Assistant Mayor in […] Council. So, you know when the crisis began, they were targeting all of them that are working with the government."*[113]

Kidnapping

Kidnapping was equally highlighted as one of the human rights violations perpetrated by warring factions in the Anglophone conflict. Participants underscored during the field study that *'four years down the road, people have been kidnapped, people have died'*,[114] and that *'at times it is military, at times it is Amba'.*[115]

Findings from the study show that civilians are often kidnapped for ransom or for information. The military, in particular, was noted to kidnap civilians to extract information about the NSAGs. As explained by one participant during a focus group discussion, *'When the military discovers that you have the information that they want, they will kidnap you'.*[116] On the other hand, the NSAGs were accused of kidnapping civilians for both ransom and information. Several participants shared their experiences on this. For instance, in a focus group discussion, one participant shared a personal experience of being kidnapped by the Amba Boys for ransom:

I, for one, I have experienced that. My family had to pay huge sums […] before they released me. They had to pay 2.5 million [FCFA] before they could release me […] I can only predict they were Amba

108. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
109. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
110. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
111. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
112. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
113. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
114. Interview KN 015, Buea, 03 December 2020
115. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
116. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

(because it was a group), yes, it was a group of persons […] they didn't take me to a police station; they took me to the forest. I stayed with them for almost two months before they could release me.[117]

Another participant added:

They took my woman; I spent about 2.5 million Francs. They wanted ransom. I took the ransom to the place where they said I should bring it. They removed it and counted it then one of them told me that I killed my sister to have power and her blood is telling me to kill this man for revenge. He hit me, I fell down and he climbed on my hand and stood there. I only realised that I was alive when one of them, probably a student I had taught, and I want to think so, said, 'let's leave this man, he has given the money so why molest him?' So, the long and short is that we have lost everything that we had yesterday.[118]

With regards to kidnapping for information, one participant narrated the experience of her brother:

Two months ago, he [brother] went to the beach to see how his family was doing. Immediately he got home, 'Amba' guys came and took him again […] So, he insisted that he was aware that he was already a dead body and would therefore like to know what crime he had committed. Because of his insistence, Amba started beating him up in the presence of my mother and father. He was beaten and then taken to a camp. The next day he was told that all they wanted was to extract some information from him […] So, they said since my uncle is a CPDM member [Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, the ruling political party], he works in Shisong Hospital as a doctor, they said my uncle communicates with the government, so they knew that by holding him they were now in touch with my uncle. From every indication that is now jealousy in the whole thing. They no longer want to see a family that seems to be progressing. If you are a little bit well-to-do or if you are a family that has escaped to, say, Yaoundé, they would then say that you have escaped and abandoned the struggle without supporting them. So, he was kept for over one week. He was beaten up and not fed and was given the promise that when they extracted the information they wanted from him, they would shoot him. Someone we know told us that he could put us in contact with one of the leaders so that we can call and see if we can negotiate with someone. When my uncle called, they asked for 'one stick.' By 'one stick' they meant an AK-47, which is about 1.5 million francs [FCFA]. We struggled to source some money and, with the little we had, we called and pleaded with them and finally they released my brother. So, we thank God that he is back here again.[119]

Interestingly, there were views from participants implying that sometimes kidnapping is used as a recruitment strategy of the Amba Boys. The extract below expounds:

I had faced an instance with the 'Amba Boys' in which a woman's child was held and the woman's plea for them to let go the child was not heeded. But in the end, they did not return the child to the mother, they took the child to the camp because they wanted the child to join [them]. After all, they saw that he was physically mature. It was after, when the mother had begged with money in hand, that they released the child […][120]

Sadly, some civilians do not make it back alive; they are killed in the process, as explained by one participant in the narrative below:

Most of these 'Boys' [Amba Boys], they have kept around 13 of my family members in the bush and we tried to pay money for them to leave but they refused, and they were killed.[121]

Consequently, the rampant kidnapping by the warring factions has affected, among other things, the provision of and access to social services. For example, healthcare has been adversely affected in the Anglophone region as some doctors are being subjected to kidnapping. One participant explained:

At that time, we had two doctors at the sub-divisional hospital in Jakiri. They kidnapped one doctor and took him to the camp and asked him for five million FCFA. They struggled, and when he was taken, the other doctor escaped. They struggled, the money in the hospital was not enough so the family sent it. After about one and a half weeks, he was released from the camp. At this time, there is no doctor in that particular hospital. Maybe because they have heard about the story.[122]

Additionally, children have been afraid of going to school due to the prevalence of kidnapping in the region. As noted by a participant during an interview:

117. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
118. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
119. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
120. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
121. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
122. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

Some of them [children] went [to school] and were kidnapped and one finger of their hands was plugged off giving the children psychological trauma that school is a no-go zone.[123]

Ultimately, the rise in kidnapping is not only a gross human rights violation against the civilian population, but it has also affected the social and economic wellbeing of the people. Moreover, for much of the Anglophone population, this situation is getting worse and becoming normalised, as one interviewee lamented: *'Things are not moving. Let me say it … things are not improving. It's a lie. It is a lie, in very capital letters. It is a lie. The situation is getting worse and worse and worse'.*[124]

In addition to the experiences with the violation of rights presented above, there have been similar experiences with other human rights such as the right to work, freedom of movement and the right to property. Thus, the human rights violations in the conflict can be described as widespread and flagrant.

4.1.2. Sexual and Gender-based Violence

As indicated in the Introduction, the substantial increase in various forms of SGBV is a highly disturbing consequence of the war. In particular, the incidence of rape, including mass rape, against women and girls is horrific. The prevalence of sexual violence was noted from relatively early in the conflict onwards by human rights organisations (see CHRDA and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, 2019) and more recently described as 'pervasive' and 'rampant' in a UN report (Craig 2021b). Other forms of gender-based violence include sexual exploitation and abuse, forced prostitution and survival sex, early and forced marriages, teenage pregnancy, and denial of resources to women. While these various forms of gender-based violence existed prior to the conflict, they have been exacerbated by the crisis, with higher incidences reported (AMEF 2021). This epidemic of SGBV is both directly and indirectly related to the conflict. Directly, acts of sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, are perpetuated with impunity by the military and the NSAGs. Indirectly, various forms of gender-based violence have surged due to conflict-induced contexts of forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the breakdown of the education system and of community protective mechanisms. Based on the testimonies from research participants, the prevalence of various forms of conflict-related SGBV is outlined below. The responses by women's organisations to such violent abuse of women and girls is highlighted in section 5.3.0 on 'Women and youth as peacebuilders.'

Participants were almost unanimous that SGBV had increased significantly during the conflict, highlighting incidences of rape in particular. When asked about increases in gender-based violence, one female interviewee replied, *'A lot! A lot! A lot! A lot! Because people are taking advantage of this conflict and just maltreating women, using women, raping little girls, raping even big women'.*[125]

Other interviewees all confirmed the increase in violence against women and girls:

There has been an increase in violence against women and this is human rights abuse. Some have been raped and yet some have been molested and beaten.[126]

Yes, there has been a lot of violence on women and girls. They brutalise women, they naked them, they rape children, in fact they torture them, which is not good.[127]

The violence has increased a lot especially on women and girls. So many pregnancies, so many abortions, so many frustrations.[128]

Rape

Allegations of rape and sexual assault against both the Cameroonian security forces and the separatist fighters have been common: *'Women have been raped by the separatists, raped by the military and raped from both sides'.*[129] Human Rights Watch (2021) provides an account of a particularly dreadful instance when, on 1 March 2020, about 50 Cameroonian soldiers attacked Ebam village in the Southwest, invading 75 homes, arresting men and raping at least 20 women, including four with disabilities. Many participants in this research had had similar experiences, recounting instances where women and girls known to them had been raped, especially by soldiers. One focus group participant gave a particularly harrowing account:

123. Interview GR 017, Buea, 16 December 2020
124. Interview WU 026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
125. Interview MC 036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
126. Interview JA 024, Buea, 26 November 2020
127. Interview CB 012, Buea, 21 November 2020
128. Interview MM 005, Buea, 16 December 2020
129. Interview WU 026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020

When these military break into your house the kind of things they do, they can even rape your child in front of you, like one of our neighbours. It's not in my house but one of our neighbours, one little child, the father explained that some two military people raped one daughter right in front of him […] just imagine, his small daughter of 13 years old raped by military people right in front of him! There is nothing he could do because anything you do, they will shoot you.[130]

At a collage session, one participant described an instance of rape by soldiers on the streets:

Yes, there was one time that a friend, the mother sent the girl to go and buy in the market and the girl was a breastfeeding mother. So, military stopped her by the road, took her now behind the petrol station and raped her there and kept her there helpless.[131]

A focus group participant gave another example, this time during an incident of gunfire, with further mistreatment by the police when seeking medical treatment:

Take, for example, my neighbour's child. A young boy came over and called her. They raped her at the roadside. She was so helpless because no one was able to step outside because of the gunshots. Even when the gunshots subsided and her mother went out to get her, she too was held and constrained, tied on the same spot […] Even when they hired the neighbour to transport them to Xxx General Hospital […] when they arrived at a control post, the police officer slapped the poor woman and showed no sign of concern for their plight, no consideration for what had happened to the young girl who was raped. They even shot the girl on her foot for no good reason.[132]

One interviewee noted how the increase in SGBV was 'a general phenomenon,' with large numbers of reported rape cases at the Bamenda regional hospital, while noting that this figure did not include the many additional unreported cases:

So, the rate of SGBV has greatly increased. I can call that a general phenomenon because there was a time we even checked the regional hospital in Bamenda; within six months, the regional hospital of Bamenda had around 300 cases of reported rape cases, those records can be found there. Just imagine those are the cases that were reported, imagine those that have not been reported, though we still have a problem with reporting […] so a lot of those cases remain unreported.[133]

One interviewee also spoke of the real dangers of reporting the perpetrators, as well as the difficulties and stigma attached to speaking about being raped:

You have cases of married women who have overtly been raped but they cannot speak, or their husbands cannot even say anything, because the next thing is that you are gunned down. So, the rate of sexual violence and human rights abuse and violation of women is high.[134]

There were also allegations of sexual misconduct and rape by members of the separatist groups. One interviewee stated that, *'sometimes too, the Amba commanders send their boys to take some girls from the village and when they are brought, they will rape them'*.[135] One male teacher stated in a focus group that:

We are in school teaching, never have I seen such sacrilege in my life […] They [Amba fighters] were en route *[…] My brother and I said, 'Let's sit and try to distract them so that the women can run ahead.' They caught the women, the 'Boys', they raped these women.*[136]

As in other conflicts, rape has been used as a weapon of war, terrorising local communities into submission while grossly violating and abusing women and girls in the process.

Sexual exploitation and abuse

Other forms of sexual exploitation and abuse are also reported. For instance, women and girls have been held in sexual captivity or bondage, with research participants recounting how they are used by both warring parties as bait to entrap the other side, with release to their families often conditional on the successful execution of a 'mission':

130. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
131. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
132. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
133. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
134. Interview AH 033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
135. Interview SE 025, Mbiame, Bui, 20 November 2020
136. FGD Men, Dschang, 28 November 2020

Many women and girls are being exploited and harassed, used as slaves, sex agents, and some are even used like bait either to get the military into trouble areas or also get the separatists to the military traps. With, generally, a condition to have a family member released if the mission is well executed. The women or girls are used here as sacrificial lambs.[137]

A local NGO reported that the NSAGs abduct young girls for sexual purposes using the slogan 'for the struggle':

It is common for a member of the NSAGs to impregnate girls in the village and forcefully take them as wives. These girls are forced to serve as their sexual partners and do other domestic chores (cooking, washing their clothes) for them (AMEF 2021).

Forced prostitution and survival sex

Sexual exploitation and abuse also occur outside of the conflict situation yet are indirectly caused by it. The most common example is young girls and women being forced into prostitution or, more aptly, 'survival sex'. In particular, displacement from rural to urban areas and a loss of income have pushed women and girls into survival sex, with men taking advantage of their vulnerability. As one interviewee noted, *'A lot of young girls are into prostitution for survival'*,[138] especially in the context of being out of education. As explained by one collage session participant:

They [rural dwellers] still don't have access to their farms and other things that they used to do for income generation. So, it has led to displacement, and it has also led to prostitution because people are found in different cities, and they are just struggling to live.[139]

One participant in the women's focus group in Dschang spoke passionately about the problem of child prostitution among IDP girls, with her final comment reserved for the men exploiting them:

When we come to this side, we see that most of these our girls, they are prostitutes everywhere. You see some of them just standing by the roadside. The other day when I came to Bafoussam, I passed there and one was just standing there saying 'weh, why can someone not just see me like this and gift me 5,000 francs [FCFA]. They have nowhere to stay. They are just moving about, no school, no place. If you go to big hotels, bars you will see them there, prostitutes, they sleep them there. They have nothing. Then when you look at it, the men too, the Francophones insult them. Go to Yaoundé, Douala, they are there. They don't go to school; they are doing prostitution. Children of about 12 years, you see them, they are just like that. Men are using them.[140]

At times, it appears that the relatives of displaced girls at times push them into prostitution in order to bring in money. As a local NGO reported: 'In Meme, there are several cases of internally displaced girls who are forced to do prostitution by their guardians as a means of survival' (AMEF 2021). Further, one interviewee noted that prostitution occurs in difficult contexts where hunger is rife: *'People are just confused, prostitution is very high, people are moving up and down just to look for something to eat. It's not easy'*.[141]

Early and forced marriage

The incidence of early and forced marriages, as well as teenage pregnancy, has also increased as a result of the conflict. One local NGO noted that, while early/forced marriage has been a common cultural practice in parts of Manyu Division in the Southwest region, its practice has increased as a result of the crisis (AMEF 2021). Research participants explained this as being a result of school closure and loss of incomes:

Some have also been sent into early marriages whereas, if schools had been going on, none of these could have happened.[142]

So many girls have gotten into forced marriages, [though] it was not their will. They are not in school, and they are getting older.[143]

Because business is not booming as it used to be, suffering, a lot of misery, early marriages have been reinforced. It is no longer your choice of man whatsoever. If somebody comes and tells your father 'I want your daughter', then he does not even think, he accepts. He accepts no matter your age because to him he believes that under him you will be protected rather than [having you] killed with

137. Interview AA 001, Buea, 23 November 2020
138. Interview FN 028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
139. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
140. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
141. Interview MM 005, Buea, 16 December 2020
142. Interview YR 018, Buea, 20 December 2020
143. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020

assumptions you are dating a military man, or you are dating an Amba Boy.[144]

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood

The rampant nature of rape and forced sex, coupled with schools' closure, has meant a large increase in the number of pregnancies amongst young girls. A number of interviewees discussed this issue based on their experiences in conflict zones. One stated, *'There is high rape and violence, and you can see it with the high rate of unwanted pregnancy with young girls, some of them don't even know who impregnated them'.*[145]

Another interviewee reported similarly and remarked on the associated fear concerning naming of fathers, if known:

> *You could see the rate of pregnancy of young girls, you even try to talk to one or two. They don't know who has impregnated them because there is also this fear that has gripped them, pronouncing names is like you are dead; it could be one from the non-state arm, it could still be one from the regular army and it could be one vagabond around the neighbourhood. So, the rate of sexual violence and especially human rights abuse of women within this crisis has drastically increased.*

This same interviewee continued by noting that the high rate of pregnancy extended to very young girls, some not even teenagers, and this situation was exacerbated by schools' closure, the lack of mobility and the presence of armed young men from both sides who prey on the vulnerable young girls in the village:

> *You go to some of these communities where we go for humanitarian reach out; you find a young girl of 12, 13 already pregnant […] and why? Because they are not going to school, they are not even allowed to go out of the villages. […] And most of the young people who are holding guns, the military people […], they [young girls] are vulnerable in those areas because they have to satisfy their sexual desires at times.* [146]

A third interviewee confirmed the problem and again attributed it to rape and sexual violence by those with guns, and schools' closure:

> *Then we have the problem of early pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies. I had already mentioned school dropouts – those children who could no longer go to school – some were raped, especially the girls, raped by these NSAGs and whoever contenders to the conflict. Girls were raped, unwanted pregnancies, not to talk of infections, because all those things go together.*[147]

A fourth interviewee corroborated the extremely young age of some pregnant girls, with their physical development at times insufficient to enable normal birth, and the need for delivery by Caesarean section:

> *Presently, what I see with young girls is pregnancy. They are not marrying but are getting pregnant. Many are pregnant at a very young age. The situation is bad because some of them cannot deliver normally and so they are operated upon to have the baby.*[148]

The issue of young motherhood is also noted in the *'Young people'* section (4.2.3), with instances of teenage girls becoming lone mothers after impregnation by teenage boys, a situation that is exacerbated by education breakdown.

Sexual violence in communities and families

While perpetration of sexual violence is attributed mainly to the men with guns on both sides of the conflict, the war situation has also served as a cover for the increase of rape and sexual violence in communities and in families. In a survey of 320 women, the Community Agricultural and Environmental Protection Association (CAEPA), a women's organisation based in Bamenda, stated that 100 per cent of women reported having experienced various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including beatings, intimate partner violence, early and forced marriage, prostitution, rape, sexual harassment and trafficking.[149] They attributed the dramatic increase in violence against women in the community and at home to the fact that violence has become normalised in the war setting. Similarly, as noted by one of our research participants:

> *You know, they are taking advantage of the fact that the country is unstable to do that [violate women] because they know people will be scared to follow*

144. Interview FN 028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
145. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
146. Interview YR018, Buea, 20 December 2020
147. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
148. Interview JM 030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
149. https://www.caepacameroon.org/hope-women-center

up the cases. You won't know who in the community is…, and to be on the safe side you rather stay quiet than talk.[150]

Increased sexual exploitation and abuse of internally displaced women and girls is of particular note, both within the Southwest and Northwest regions and outside of the conflict zones in the Littoral and West regions. This is most notable in contexts of overcrowding in homes and absence of privacy, with increased cases of sexual assault and rape reported by health personnel (UN OCHA, 2021b: 36). Our research data also provided instances of such abuse of IDP girls within homes. A local NGO reported that internally displaced young girls are being forced to have sex with siblings in homes where they sought refuge, giving an example in one village where two 13-year-old girls were made pregnant by members of the family, indicating an increase in incest (AMEF 2021). This was verified by a female IDP who gave a distressing account of the rape of her niece in overcrowded housing conditions:

I have lived with my children living in different houses. There comes a situation where in one house there are 27 children. There are boys between the ages of 20 to 23 years. Then there are little girls of 13 and 15 years. So, what is happening is that those boys tend to rape the girls right inside the same house. I had a situation where, my niece, because we could not all live in one place, so I had to go leave her in another house. She was raped. Boys who also came because of this situation raped her until it is another little one who informed me. But before we realised it the damage was horrible. We took the child to the hospital. She had been infected. So, the situation is really horrible. At times I do not even want to discuss it.[151]

The local NGO also identified the denial of resources to women as another form of GBV. It was reported that their field experience in the Southwest region had revealed that some widows, who had lost their husbands as a result of the conflict, had been subsequently driven from their homes or denied their right to access their husband's property either by the husband's family or by the NSAGs (AMEF 2021). This issue of denial of resources can be extended to those many young women and girls who are impregnated and then abandoned, both by combatants and by community and family members.

In sum, women have been subjected to various forms of SGBV in the conflict, and their social position adversely affected in different ways. A final quote from a participant indicates the extent to which women are routinely humiliated and mistreated:

If you see how those little boys are talking to women. A child that you cannot even call your first or second child would stand and talk to you and say, "kneel down", and you would say "yes papa", and you go down on your knees because you want to free your head. You are not safe from the military; you are not safe from the 'Boys'. So, the violence is really high.[152]

We outline some of the responses by women's organisations to this rampant and pervasive abuse of women and girls in section 5.3.0 on *'Women and youth as peacebuilders'*.

4.1.3. Psychological/mental health issues

Literature on the mental health consequences of conflict abounds (Betancourt et al., 2014; Jordans et al., 2016; Murthy and Lakshminarayana, 2006). The mental/psychological impact of violent conflict is often neglected but stands as one of its most significant. The literature shows that there is a high occurrence of psychopathology among persons exposed to the violence of war, with women, children and other socially or economically vulnerable persons representing a higher proportion of those seriously affected (Murthy and Lakshminarayana, 2006). The consequence of the Anglophone conflict on the psychological health of the population is similar to that described in other studies on the consequences of war, such as those by Jordans et al. (2016) and Betancourt et al. (2014). Women, children and the elderly, who are socially and economically more vulnerable, have been seriously hit. As Galea and Wortman (2006) argue, the idea that military violence can be used in a professional way, 'focusing hostilities on armed combatants or political leaders without injuring the population' is a myth. Evidence from this study shows that the ongoing conflict has had a devastating impact on the physical and mental health of the population in Northwest and Southwest regions. Additionally, it is also important to note that arguments that favour the idea that war can be just for some reasons also fail to consider the effects of war on the psychological health of the security forces and combatants in general (Galea and Wortman, 2006). The psychological impact of war on all these groups outlasts the war itself and therefore needs to be discussed in a study of armed conflict such as this. The ongoing conflict in the Southwest and Northwest has caused trauma in the population. The main symptoms of such trauma identified by this research are fear, bitterness/anger and hatred, as discussed below. The particular mental health issues experienced by young people living in the midst of conflict are discussed separately in section 4.2.1.

150. Interview MC 036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
151. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
152. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

The conflict has caused fear in the population. All participants in collage and focus groups discussions shared their experiences on how fear caused by the conflict is affecting their lives and how difficult it is to live with the kind of fear it has brought. Fear is one of the reasons why many have fled their homes to other towns. One participant described this in the following way: *'We continued living in the area until it became unbearable, and a woman [was] shot, leaving a child of about four months, so we became scared and had to find ourselves in Douala'.*[153]

The collages of some participants also captured how fear forced them to abandon their homes.

Figure 4: Collage No. 6, Yaoundé, 1 December 2020

In the collage on Figure 4 above, for example, the participant shows how people are displaced because of fear. As with the other participants, the author of this collage explained that the fear was unbearable and that she had no other option than to leave her home.[154] Those who have not moved described how difficult it was to live in the fear that has resulted from the conflict. One participant for example said, *'We are living in fear, perpetual fear'.*[155] Another described how fear was affecting their way of life in the following words:

> *You are afraid to live in your house, talk less of being in the neighbour's house. Formerly we used to rest on the veranda up till about midnight with light. But now you cannot step out when it is 6 p.m.*[156]

It was gleaned from the FGDs and collage sessions that fear has been a major problem for parents with children attending school. One participant, for example, said:

> *When the child goes to school we are not at ease until she comes back. We even go and take big children from school. When it is past [school closing] time and they are not back we are afraid, and the fear continues.*[157]

Another participant described the how fear prevented parents from sending children to school and students themselves from attending school:

> *Parents, children are all traumatised. As a parent, considering the recent incident at Kumba and Limbe where students were being killed and stripped naked respectively, you will be afraid to send your children to school in these war zones. As a student going to school in these areas you will always be afraid of the unknown. While in class you can't fully concentrate on lectures.*[158]

Similarly, fear was seen to affect the way students go to school and most especially how they dress for school. It also caused anxiety in parents whose children were still attending school:

> *Here, children go to school in fear, some don't even wear uniforms, parents are always alert; in case of anything, you just rush and get your child from school. Some schools don't even go any more. Everything is so discouraging here right now. We are all living in fear.*[159]

Teachers have also been gripped by fear, making it difficult for them to teach effectively or to teach at all. One teacher described his experience in the following way:

153. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
154. Collage session, Yaoundé, 1 December 2020
155. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
156. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
157. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
158. FGD Men, Limbe 21 November 2020
159. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020

> *As a teacher, you carry [teaching materials]. I have to hold a 'sacks and motto' to put my things inside. I had to change the number plate of my car because it had Littoral [Francophone region]. Those are the realities we are going through, my brother. I am a teacher [but] I am afraid to identify myself as a teacher.*[160]

A 'sacks and motto' as mentioned by this teacher is a bag commonly used for shopping. Here the teacher says he carries his books and other teaching materials in such a bag for fear of otherwise being identified as going to school to teach. He also mentions having to remove the number plate of his car due to it being registered in the French-speaking Littoral region. People have been afraid of driving with registration plates from the Francophone regions because many have been targeted and their cars burnt.

The main source of this fear, according to most participants, was the separatists and the military. Some participants also identified frequent kidnappings and gunshots as what scared them. One participant, for example, said, *'The military and the "Boys" are the same. You see any of them you are afraid'*,[161] while another said, *'There is none of them that is a good friend. So, when you hear they [are coming], you are just going into the bush'*.[162] Similarly another participant said:

> *It was really traumatising for me while in my new neighbourhood either with the police or the Boys. The police always came to ask the whereabouts of the Boys because the Boys were living around the area, while the Boys on the other hand always came to ask what the military came to do in my house.*[163]

In one collage (see Figure 5), the participant captured her reasons for being afraid of the military and showed how fear of the military caused her to leave her home.

Figure 5: Collage No. 12, Yaoundé, 1 December 2020

She narrated how the military entered her town and how they forced the door of her house early in the morning. They took her daughter out and began to gang rape her in front of the house. She ran with her husband and the younger children into the nearby bush. Her husband stopped and said he must go back to save their daughter and was shot and killed by the soldiers as he approached the scene. She continued walking in the bush with her children until she reached the neighbouring region. Someone helped her to pay for transport to reach Yaoundé in the Centre region.[164]

Another participant explained why she was afraid of separatist fighters. *'Those "Boys," there was a situation in which we went to the village, my brother is a government worker, they took his ID card and started beating him up that he is the one who is Biya's people'*.[165]

160. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
161. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
162. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
163. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
164. Collage Interview, Yaoundé, 1 December 2020
165. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020

The traumatic events experienced have also made people bitter or angry. One participant, for example, shared her view on what had caused the bitterness or anger and was of the opinion that the bitterness needs to be addressed for genuine dialogue to take place. According to this participant:

> *Why would you kill people that you should be protecting? So there was that bitterness, and instead of encouraging peace efforts, they were angry, and it is difficult to bring things together when the person is angry.*[166]

Similarly, one participant was angry because of what she had experienced. She narrated that:

> *They burnt everything. They said we should leave, or they burn everyone. My elder sister was pregnant at that time. They burnt everything. I currently have no certificate. We left into the bush. A snake bit my father but there was no way to return to our health centre because it had been burnt down. So, he died [from the snake bite]. And then my sister gave birth in the bush, no 'wrapper' [loincloth], nothing. Imagine that they used a cutlass to cut the baby's navel [umbilical cord]. This is the type of thing that makes one very angry.*[167]

Another participant recounted similar feelings:

> *I am so angry. Imagine they will give birth to a baby, no blade, no clothes, and having to cut the navel with a cutlass. For a good two weeks, we were in the bush, we tied the baby with 'wrapper,', can you imagine? There were no clothes. They burnt everything. We did not even have clothes. If you beg clothes, you are refused because the person from whom you are begging doesn't even have enough to wear. There was no food. We only struggled, roasted plantain to eat. I am so angry.*

Like other participants, they attributed the anger to the trauma and the traumatic events they have experienced or witnessed. Studies by Huddy, Feldman & Cassese (2007) and Cheung-Blunden & Blunden (2008) among others have shown that anger elevates public support for violent actions. In line with the views of some participants in this study, anger felt by the population has been a significant consequence of the conflict that warrants attention because it has the potential to fuel more violence and, most especially, to undermine peace efforts.

Another manifestation of trauma is hatred in the communities. One participant, for example, said, *'There is a lot of hatred…'* and *'This makes people now to really be insecure'*.[168] Resolving a conflict is difficult when hatred is not addressed.

4.1.4. Breakdown of social cohesion

Defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper (Stanley, 2003: 5), social cohesion has been hugely affected as a result of the ongoing conflict in the two Anglophone regions. According to the testaments of research participants, the breakdown of social cohesion is largely characterised by increased fear, mistrust, suspicion and division, the weakening of cultural values, the settling of scores, and the abandonment of rural communities in the conflict zones. These issues are clear indications that the cooperation that is the basis of social cohesion has significantly declined or is no longer possible.

As highlighted in the previous section on psychological trauma, fear has significantly contributed to the decline in trust within communities and in turn to the breakdown of social cohesion. The fear of being set upon, arrested, kidnaped, tortured or killed has gradually eroded social cohesion in communities affected by the conflict: *'In fact, if you ask how we can compare life within our communities now and some years back, I would say that the difference is like night and day because we are living in fear, perpetual fear'*.[169]

The high level of insecurity has caused fear among civilians. Insecurity and fear are generated by both the armed forces and the separatists, as expressed by participants in different focus groups:

> *The military and the 'Boys' are the same. You see any of them, you are afraid.*[170]

> *There is insecurity here at Mile 1. There are many times I slept under the bed or[in the] bushes because of gunshot and fear of the unknown.*[171]

Fear has sadly caused a lot of people to stop enjoying the benefits of collaboration with others and living peacefully

166. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020,
167. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
168. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
169. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
170. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
171. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020

in their homes. From the onset of the conflict, many have sought refuge in the bush as they feared for their lives:

> *In 2016, people woke up one morning to see the soldiers and their military cars everywhere. This brought fear and people ran helter-skelter into the bushes. Houses were burnt and some valuable things in the community were carried away by the soldiers. This brought in more fear into the hearts of the people of this community as most people decided to stay in the bushes rather than returning to their comfortable homes.*[172]

Fear is apparent, especially in relation to education, with the school boycott enforced by the separatist groups and the destruction of schools by the military. Consequently, communities have lost their ability to collaborate to ensure the effective education of their children. The example of the killing and torture of school children in Kumba and Limbe explains this:

> *Parents, children are all traumatised. As a parent, considering the recent incidents at Kumba and Limbe where students were being killed and stripped naked respectively, you will be afraid to send your children to school in these war zones. As a student going to school in these areas you will always be afraid of the unknown. While in class you can't fully concentrate on lectures.*[173]

Increased fear is closely associated with a decline in trust, which has also led to diminished social cohesion. People in communities affected by the conflict have ceased to trust one another as they did before the crisis. One key issue is the pressure on community members from both the military and separatist fighters to identify those collaborating with the other side, often leading to false accusations against neighbours, 'friends' or enemies. One participant, for example, said:

> *Community life has broken down. There is no trust, even in neighbours because of the things that are going on. They can come and take 'papa' or 'mama' or the child. On listening around, you would hear that it was the neighbour settling scores. So, there is a breakdown of community life, there is no trust.*[174]

One consequence is that suspicion amongst inhabitants in communities has risen tremendously. *'Normally, when you are in the community, you watch your words because you cannot determine who is who, who is with who'.*[175] The feedback of one participant grasps how mistrust has contributed to the breakdown of social cohesion:

> *Before the crisis, life was so smooth and lively. You had the confidence to tell your person [acquaintance] something. But this time everybody around is a suspect. Everyone suspects the other of plotting to harm them. So that freedom of exchange, freedom of assistance; sometimes you may want to assist a person, but the person has mixed feeling, worrying that you want to kill them. So sometimes you may find something that is good, and you want to share [with] another person, the way the person receives it, it is the same as a bullet.*[176]

The lack of trust has not only affected social cohesion by limiting collaboration among civilians in given communities, but has equally affected relations between civilians, the separatist fighters and state security forces. Civilians do not trust the two warring parties, in spite of claims by both sides that their war efforts are meant to protect them. In addition, community members cannot always ascertain if they are engaging with the warring parties or their sympathisers due to concealed identities:

> *In terms of the conflicting parties, it is difficult to know if [you are dealing with] a military agent who is in civilian wear listening to what you are saying. You may not also be able to know if it is an 'Amba' who may be interested in listening to what you are saying and later come to you.*[177]

Cohesion is very much undermined by the atmosphere of suspicion that reigns as both warring parties look upon many civilians as spies in favour of the other party. *'You may hear that your neighbour has been kidnapped on grounds of spying, on grounds of being a "blackleg." And when they are taken away, they are shot, they do not return'.*[178] Often, this decline in social cohesion was characterised by research participants as the settling of old scores among civilians. Some participants narrated how some would wrongly accuse their neighbours, knowing it could cost them their life:

> *Even when you sit quiet, someone who hates you will go and tell the Amba Boys that you are a 'blackleg', [he/she says] you are giving information to the military whereas you do not even have the number of the military.*[179]

172. Interview LF016, Buea, 16 December 2020
173. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
174. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
175. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
176. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
177. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
178. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
179. Interview SE025, Bui, 20 November 2020

Another cause and consequence of the breakdown in social cohesion is division. Division is now more common in the conflict-affected communities. Even families have become divided and the spirit of togetherness and solidarity that was celebrated in communities has often been lost, creating room for division, hatred and vengeance. As was stated in one focus group:

> *When the crisis began, it brought division. My father is a chief and he was the one heading the family meetings and all that. Now he has escaped somewhere in Mile 16 in the forest and what is happening now is that the tribe has been divided into camps. My father was there as the leader, he always knew how to handle issues, but now that he is no longer there is a lot of hatred amongst them. There are people that are collaborating with the military and others that are collaborating with the 'Boys'. So, for example, if you and I have a misunderstanding, you may go and call the military, telling them I am one of those people who is collaborating with these 'Boys'; same as if I have a problem with him, I can tell the 'Boys' that he is taking information to the military. So, it makes people now to really be insecure, insecurity.*[180]

The notion of the 'settling of scores' in an environment of distrust and division was expressed on a number of occasions. Victims of this settlement of scores are either reported to the armed forces for conspiring with separatists or reported to the separatists for spying for the government. Many have been abducted and some killed due to mere accusations. As noted by participants in one collage session:

> *Backbiting, that is making [up] stories behind your back. For example, some people take this conflict now to settle scores.*[181]

> *If they have some personal disagreements with a friend or member of the family […] they go around making [up] fake stories and tell the Boys to come and kidnap you.*[182]

A downward spiral of mistrust and division seems to pertain in that the lack of togetherness in communities has itself obliged many civilians to engage strategically with either the military or the separatists as a means of self-protection. The aim is to be safe in a society where cohesion has become almost non-existent. As one participant expressed:

> *Like others, when you arrive in xxx [town in Northwest region], in fact, the environment speaks for itself. There is a situation in which none of the parties shows that if you stand by them, you are safe. If you stand with the military and the government you are safe, you stand with the 'Boys' and their government you are safe. So, at one moment when you are living in xxx, you are on your own and [have to] know how you play your card for your safety, on both sides.*[183]

Cultural values have been grossly affected as the norms and moral values that bind communities have been severely disrupted. Respect for elderly persons – a fundamental value in communities – is less observed. Irrespective of their ages, those in possession of weapons make the law and thus undermine cultural values. One participant stated:

> *Before, children could not point fingers at parents. But today we have lost all of those values until children do not have respect for elderly persons; they arrest them, kill them, lock them up.*[184]

Tradition which is sacred has equally lost its place in communities amidst the crisis. Both religion and traditional authority in the conflict situation struggle to maintain the social cohesion. As one participant noted:
[There is] no respect even towards our traditional authorities and religious authorities; they arrest and molest them. Those are the things that when I look yesterday and I check today, I weep.[185]

The example of the paramount chief of the Nso people epitomises decline in the influence of traditional authorities: *'Our cultural values have collapsed. Because of late, we know the story of the Fon of Nso who stayed in captivity for about a week. Meanwhile before the crisis nobody could dare touch the Fon'.*[186]

Anger and bitterness are widespread as a result of so much hardship and suffering in the conflict-affected communities. A female participant in the FGDs expressed her anger about the loss of good behaviour by children due to the crisis: *'I am angry for us suffering now. We were brought up to know that when the mother is not there, the children can help us in carrying water, but now even you give food the children cannot help'.*[187]

180. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
181. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
182. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
183. FGD Men,, Dschang, 27 November 2020
184. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
185. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
186. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
187. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020

The abandonment and desertion of many towns and villages in the conflict-affected regions also amply depicts the breakdown of social cohesion. Many villages have been abandoned by their inhabitants because of the violence which has become the order of the day. Bafut is one example of a town that was previously vibrant but is now largely deserted, as noted by one focus group participant:

> *If you enter Bafut now that we are speaking, you would think it is a graveyard. Grass has grown on the paved roads. There is no police station there. If you want to see a Police or Army, it would be the one who is ready to shoot. So there is no police station, no DO's [Divisional Officer] Office, no council. Bafut is empty.*[188]

A female participant in the Douala focus group noted with great sadness the decline of her hometown:

> *Muea is a shadow of itself. About 95 per cent of the people [that] I knew in Muea in 2016 are dead, be it children or the elderly. It is like a ghost community. Muea to me is like going to a place you don't know whereas you have lived there for long. Living there just bring back sad memories.*[189]

Some parts of Bamenda (capital city of the Northwest region) are equally depopulated because of the violence:

> *It has really affected the community because so many people have escaped. This is because they cannot bear the tension from the guns around. Even when you enter Bamenda and someone says they are going to Nacho, even the bike riders would refuse to transport you because they know that the area is tense.*[190]

4.1.5. Impact on income and livelihoods

The conflict in the Northwest and Southwest has adversely affected the Anglophone economy in diverse ways. Various experiences were captured during the interviews, FGDs and collage sessions on how the conflict has caused the Anglophone economy to plummet. In an interview, one participant expounded:

> *Economy wise, we realise that it follows that which we have explained, because the calendar of the region has been designated. We have every Monday now, more or less a free day, a day of 'ghost town', and we understand the implications of such a day in terms of the productive capacity of the community. And that aside, we also bring into consideration the various lockdowns which usually come up, which some of them usually stretch to weeks and nothing takes place, the economy is at a total stand still and nothing goes operational. And apart from that, the small businesses which have been burnt down by the separatists forces as well as the military forces who suspect them of either aiding and abetting the Amba forces who suspect the black legs and the only way they can have some form of reprisals is burn buildings and business premises, not forgetting also the boycott on certain products such as the Brasseries product which was the line for many business owners, bar owners, small operators. It has seriously crumbled the economy of the region, to be very very candid and to be very factual.*[191]

The 2021 report from the World Bank on 'The Socio-Political Crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon: Assessing the Economic and Social Impacts' affirms the above stated economic decline in the Northwest and Southwest regions, indicating a decline in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 35.2 per cent and 27 per cent in 2019 respectively, as compared to pre-conflict statistics (World Bank, 2021: 46).

The current economic downturn was described by participants as a sharp contrast to what existed before the conflict. Participants in a focus group discussion shared their pre-conflict experiences. One underscored that before the conflict began:

> *Muea was a very lively place though not that big and business was booming in the area. Anything you do it came out as a success. Life then was peaceful, less expensive, accommodation affordable, abundant food. Things were really moving.*[192]

Another described her experience in Nkembong, Mamfe:

> *Nkembong (Mamfe) we are close to the border. Business was really moving [booming] and we also had different kinds of raw material such as cocoa, coffee. Talking about my father's farm which was very big with different kinds of produce such as cocoa, bush mango which is where the real money is during their season.*[193]

188. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
189. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
190. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
191. Interview DR 032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
192. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
193. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020

Similarly, in Dschang, the men's focus group discussion also highlighted, *'Before this thing [the conflict] started, in our place in Bafut, we were living happily. Movement was free. People could go about their businesses, farm work, markets, freely'*.[194]

As the foregoing extracts demonstrate, the economic vibrancy that characterised the pre-conflict Anglophone economy meant that local citizens were able to earn income and livelihood to support and improve their quality of life. However, with the decline of the Anglophone economy during the conflict, avenues for income generation and livelihood of many Anglophone citizens have been adversely affected. Insecurity caused by constant attacks from both military and the separatists, fear, arson, rampant killings, kidnappings, displacement and ghost towns/lockdown that have accompanied the conflict were noted to be some contributory factors. For instance, one participant underscored how ghost towns and insecurity have impacted the income of Anglophone citizens: *'Income levels have dropped because farming and trading activities have been seriously affected by regular ghost towns and insecurity of working in the farms'*.[195]

The imposition of ghost towns by the separatists, in particular, was highlighted as a major contributory factor to the decline in people's income and livelihood. As another participant added, *'"Ghost town" has come in and destroyed, paralysed everything, schools – nothing, economically the town is almost dead, socially the town is almost dead'*.[196] In a focus group discussion, other participants further explained:

> *Kumbo is one of the towns in the Northwest that has registered the highest number of 'ghost towns'. Like yesterday they declared 'ghost town'. They have three 'ghost towns'. Every week it is maybe two times, two days you have to travel in Kumbo – you follow their calendar. For example, we already have information that from Monday and until the election comes and passes you cannot get into or out of Kumbo.*[197]

To ensure that these 'ghost towns' days are strictly followed, participants noted that some locals, especially youths, have been collaborating with the separatists on that front. The narrative below explains:

> *Local collaborators were identified, and they went around stopping people from going out during 'ghost town' days. Young boys were seen with long machetes as they moved around in rain and sun to enforce operation 'ghost towns'*.[198]

Ultimately, the income and livelihood of the population have been affected in three main areas: farming and food security, businesses and markets, and employment and job security. These are discussed below.

Farming and food security

Agriculture and farming, more specifically, are the main sources of income and livelihood for much of the Anglophone population. The Anglophone economy is noted as a major producer of agricultural products such as banana, coffee, and cocoa, both for local consumption and export (World Bank, 2021). Farming is a critical source of income for 74 per cent of households in the Northwest and 53 per cent of those in the Southwest. However, due to the ongoing conflict, farming has drastically reduced due to the insecurity, ghost towns, fear and displacements of local population. One female focus group participant noted how insecurity had made farming very difficult, including getting produce to market:

> *Our mothers used to do farming at Mutakwen, where they were blessed with a fertile soil and always have a good harvest. But now they can't even farm because of the insecurity. Even the ones they managed to cultivate will get bad in the bush due to the numerous 'ghost town.*[199]

Another in the same focus group stated that their cocoa farming had ceased: *'Even the cocoa that was our source of livelihood, we can no longer farm it because of shortage of fertilizer and fear to go to the farm'*.[200]

Most farms have been difficult to access because of frequent lockdowns, crossfires and the attacks on farms and farm workers. The lockdowns and 'ghost town' days enforced by NSAGs have prevented farmers from working in their fields during critical farming periods when they need to plant, weed, treat or harvest their crops (World Bank, 2021). These 'ghost towns' have rendered many farmers afraid to go about their farming activities for few of being killed or attacked by the separatists. As noted by one participant, *'If you dare enter your farm, you are looking for death. So, livelihood activities came to an end'*.[201] Moreover the 'ghost towns' and the fears that accompany such precarious environments affect not only

194. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
195. Interview BL 020, Buea, 28 November 2020
196. Interview FN 028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
197. FGD Men, Dschang, 28 November 2020
198. Interview AL 023, Buea, 27 November 2020
199. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
200. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
201. Interview EE 013, Buea, 21 November 2020

subsistence farmers, but also those working in commercial industries with large plantations, such as the CDC. This was expressed during an interview: *'Farmers are afraid to go to their farms. Even the Tole workers here, the CDC workers, they can no longer go to the plantation'.*[202]

Industrial farming, as implied in the above quote, has been hit hard by the conflict, resulting in the low production of crops for export and local use. Large-scale plantation agriculture in palm oil, rubber and bananas declined to a fraction of pre-crisis levels (UNDP, 2021: 2). In 2018, for example, the CDC was forced to shut down its banana production and plantation in the Southwest due to the conflict. As a result, the production of bananas in the Southwest declined by 86.5 per cent from 2017 to 2019 (UNDP/GoC 2021: 29). Additionally, palm and rubber productions plummeted by 90 per cent and eight times less respectively in 2019 (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). Similarly, between 2017 and 2020, the production of food crops such as maize and plantain declined by 21.3 per cent and 19.6 per cent respectively (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). There was also a recorded decline in rice production by an annual average of 14.5 per cent from 2017 to 2019 (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). Consequently, food crop farming in the two Anglophone regions decreased by almost 20 per cent annually between 2017 and 2020 (UNDP/GoC, 2021: 2). Manufacturing industries such as tea production and wood processing have also declined significantly (UNDP, 2021: 3).

Furthermore, in an interview, a participant indicated that the presence of the separatists in the bush (they mostly hide in and operate from the bush) also prevent farmers from freely accessing their farms. He indicated, *'Most of the people there will agree with me that armed [separatists] have occupied the bush, therefore depriving many farmers [of access to] their day-to-day activities'.*[203]

For those who risk their lives to go to the farm, they are constantly having to be extra cautious not to be seen or hit by a stray bullet from the crossfires or shooting. The extract below explains:

> *Even in the farm, because you do not know when they will start shooting, when you are in the farm and it starts you have to look for a place, lie low there [and] when the shooting finishes before you get up and continue farming because you cannot be idle. If you are idle who will give you food. So, it is difficult.*[204]

The crisis in the Anglophone regions has not only limited farmers' access to their farmlands but has also increased the cost of agricultural inputs and other related services. Institutions supplying agricultural inputs such as seedlings and fertilizers have fled the conflict zones. Hence, the supply chain for such inputs have been disrupted:

> *But the most important thing that has really affected us is economic hardship. I have realised that this economic hardship is because almost 65 to 70 per cent of the country relies on agriculture and our own area has about 50 to 60 per cent supplying both cash crops and even food crops that are consumed in the whole country. But since the guns started, mothers farm around the house to have a little bit of vegetables [for subsistence]. So, all the agricultural activities in the rural and urban areas, both the cash crops, economic crops and food crops, it is impossible for the mothers to produce the same quantities today. So, when you go to the market the plantain you used to purchase at 200 francs [FCFA] now stands at 700 francs. This is the economic aspect. They have prevented the majority of the people who rely on agriculture and who work to feed their families or work to educate their children [from accessing] those farms.*[205]

Relatedly, farmers who have been displaced by the conflict, were forced to abandon their farms, and ultimately lost their source of income. The experience of one farmer was shared by a participant:

> *He is a farmer from Munyenge and left the place because of the present conflict. The family is without a house, which has resulted in family separation. The conflict has [prevented] him from raising an income to support his family. This is because he no longer goes to the farm.*[206]

What is more, harvested products of farmers are forcefully taken by the separatists, denying them their source of income and livelihood. In a focus group discussion, participants expressed:

> *The livelihood of the people is not the best, they are really going through hell. During cocoa season, they [separatists] moved to people's houses and farms collecting bags of cocoa from them depending on their harvest, took to the buyers and sell to them. They even took more than six bags in some houses.*[207]

202. Interview ET 006, Buea, 16 December 2020
203. Interview MC 007, Buea, 16 December 2020
204. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
205. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
206. Interview JA 024, Buea, 26 November 2020
207. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020

This was further affirmed by another participant:

> *Few who could manage and go to the farm when they were permitted to go, some will even go, come back and produce garri which is like our cash crop; cassava is the cash crop from Chomba, so when they come and produce garri those who call themselves Amba generals, seize. So, in term of returning to life, I think the poverty gap is widened.*[208]

Consequently, the loss of farming and the related decline in food production has not only entrenched poverty as indicated in the above quote, but it has also heightened food insecurity, as many people are unable to feed their families due to the increasing prices of food, and the finances of several others have plummeted, limiting their purchasing power. One focus group participant said, '*Financially, it has really affected my family as my parents can't do much on their own. Where my parents are now, we are really struggling with feeding'.*[209]

In the women's FGD in Limbe, they also lamented about the increasing food prices and its impact on their ability to eat:

> *It has really affected me as I was telling you, because even to feed is not easy. You see some of us whose relatives have come from afar, you have about 20, I have about 25 in the house and so the feeding alone is an issue, it is not easy to feed them. Then you go to buy in the market, and you are unable, food too is now expensive.*[210]

An interviewee in Limbe also remarked that, *'Food is now really expensive and even social life is expensive. The economy is really bad; there is poor circulation of money.*'[211] Another interviewee further lamented that:

> *The [food] prices were high. Though they have reduced, it has not gone back to the price we bought them before. For example, we bought a bag of salt at 2,500 francs [FCFA]then went to 3,500 and now it is 3,200.*[212]

Businesses and markets

Another area through which the income and livelihood of the local population have been affected is the area of businesses and markets. The majority of the research participants highlighted how many people had lost their businesses, and the lack of markets or a marketplace for the selling of goods and commodities, which has ultimately affected their income and livelihood.

In an interview, one participant complained about the way the conflict has affected the business sector in the Anglophone regions:

> *Economically, our community is down. I just imagine the Easter period where sons and daughters of this village used to come from all over the world and commune, different families had different occasions, then it culminated in the general assembly of the village. That has not happened. You can imagine the economy of the place, people who are into the entertainment business, even if you go to the main brewery of Cameroon – Brasseries, they used to spend a whole week in our cultural activities; that has not happened.*[213]

In other words, business avenues for earning income such as community activities and trading has slowed dramatically. Thus, for much of the Anglophone population, *'businesses are no longer the way they were'*.[214]

The lack of mobility resulting from the constant 'ghost towns' or lockdowns was noted as the main contributory factor. One research participant explained:

> *'Definitely the most because mobility is one, economic is two, social life is three. They can't move freely. You can't go to the market; you can't do your own business, so it has affected us'.*[215]

Another participant explained how the 'ghost towns' affect their businesses:

> *Talking about the economic situation, the whole Monday has been cut off here and that is a day businessmen open their businesses and make sales but now, once Monday is gone, we have just four days to do […] They say it's a 'country Sunday' (holiday) for the Ambas (chorus joins). (She continues) when you decide to open you are at loggerheads with them and when you don't open you are at loggerheads with the military.*[216]

Inter-communal trading and markets have also been affected due to the 'ghost towns'/lock downs. This was expounded in a focus group discussion:

208. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
209. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
210. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
211. Interview MC036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
212. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
213. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
214. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
215. Interview TG037, Limbe 27 November 2020
216. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020

My community is a very poor community now. This is because there was a time when these 'Amba Boys' locked us up for almost three months. You could not move. You could not go from Jakiri, you could not go to Kumbo, you could not go to Ber which is just about 10 km from the centre of Jakiri. They cut the roads, blocked the roads for almost three months, nobody was moving. After that they cleared the road. Then sometime after that they locked, they closed the main market in Jakiri, for almost one and a half years, no one was selling, no one was going to the market. But they were taking people to the bush and asking for money. So, from that, closing the town for almost three months and closing the town for almost one and a half years – a person like me, I used to rear goats and sell to Bamileke people who come from the west. No one was coming to buy. Most of us in the Jakiri area are farmers. We only have cash from produce or from livestock, so everything was blocked. It was terrible. Poverty became the talk of the day. So, we were really affected by the locking of our market, the locking of movement and all those things. Up till now we are still feeling the effects.[217]

Other participants in the focus groups also shared their experiences of market lockdowns:

Excuse me, then economically wise, no market. We have one small market there and the main people there are farmers. There is one main market and it's not holding [unable to operate]. Those small, small markets there in the village, then quarters they are no more there. We have just one market which is just a small market which is just like a market for the hospital. People are using it now; even people who leave Bamenda when they go there, they buy food, but it operates only once a week such that there is another week it would not hold [operate] and another week, it can even be two weeks. So, you can imagine the state of people in Belo Sub-Division.[218]

As a result, businesses and markets are being crippled due to these constant 'ghost towns'. As noted by one participant, *'When you talk about the economic sector, just the fact that every Monday and when the Amba Boys deem fit to impose 'ghost towns', it cripples every business, any business one has engaged in'.*[219] Another expressed, *'And then apart from this issue [of the people who die], business is dead. There are times when we did not have market days for six weeks. There was no way to sell. So, it is hard now'.*[220]

Small-scale business owners such as carpenters, restauranteurs and traders are losing their businesses not only due to the 'ghost towns', but also police harassments, arson and lack of markets (demand). Some participants shared their experiences:

And even me in my business, it has really affected me so much because with all that you cannot do anything. Today you are in business, the next day you are not in business. At times they would say one month of lockdown, and it remains like that, and you find yourself staying for one month without anything. If you do not have an income, how are you going to live? So it has really affected the community and my family.[221]

Another participant further expressed during a focus group discussion:

Economically, I continued in my petty trading, buying and selling in 'bush markets' across those villages in the Northwest, until one day we were attacked by the 'Boys', who asked us to stop coming to trade in those villages. This made life difficult for me as this was my sole source of livelihood at that time.[222]

A small business owner added:

People cannot carry out their businesses. The small off-license that I had I cannot do it again because every time police are harassing people and people are just running up and down. So, things are not moving. People are just confused and frustrated […] It's not easy on us, no business can go on, nothing.[223]

A carpenter noted that, *'The economy has dropped and, as a carpenter, the contracts I used to have, I have them no more. Things are difficult now… Yes, business is very slow'*.[224]

Moreover, one restauranteur implied that her business was destroyed through arson: *'I was having [sic.] a small restaurant at Ntarikom market where my business area was but it was destroyed. I don't know if it is the Boys or the force of law and order because they wore masks*'.[225]

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217. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
218. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
219. Interview GR 017, Buea, 16 December 2020
220. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
221. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
222. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
223. Interview MM 005, Buea, 16 December 2020
224. Interview YR 018, Buea, 20 December 2020
225. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020

Farmers can be double victimised. Not only are they denied access to their farms to cultivate and harvest their food crops, but they are also denied access to markets to sell their products due to heightened insecurity, unsafe highways and limited mobility, as the narrative below explains:

> *Also access to the community is very complicated, which means that movement of people and goods into the community and as well as farm products out of the community is very limited because you notice that the highways […] the access points are very unsafe from both the Amba soldiers and the military who patrol those highways […] you know these communities, my community Mbessa are local farmers and they depend extensively on that activity for their livelihoods so they have been in a precarious situation because they can no longer market their products.*[226]

The internal displacement of persons was also highlighted as one of the factors by which people are losing their businesses and hence their income and livelihood. The insecurities, coupled with the rampant 'ghost town' operations within the region, have forced people to relocate, with some abandoning their businesses. In an interview, one participant noted that:

> *Business activities have gone down. Take the case of the internally displaced people, take even those in exile. I have seen people who used to run stores but who are now unable to open their stores. On the other side, you will hear the separatists talk of 'ghost town' or shut down for three weeks, which means the people will not be able to do any business for three weeks. People are living in abject poverty and pain.*[227]

This was affirmed by another participant who noted that:

> *Also, businesses have been forced to shut down because the owners have relocated to calm areas so as to find peace. In the domain of business, stores and shops have been destroyed in such a way that the owners are not able to plough back money into the same business; as such, the store owners are forced to relocate.*[228]

The influx of IDPs has also had an impact on host communities because *'the arrival of some IDPs has equally affected incomes of members of the host community'*,[229] as one participant underscored. In addition, *'families hosting displaced family members find it extremely difficult to make [ends] meet'.*[230] In other words, host families and communities have equally had to bear the burden of supporting and sharing their already shrinking income and market spaces with the IDPs, which eventually puts a strain on their income and livelihood. This has also had an impact on prices in many host communities. For instance, rents have increased due to the influx of IDPs. Participants lamented in a focus group discussion:

> *In relation to how I have been affected, even at the level of house rents […] due to overpopulation – as we had some calm here, many persons migrated, ran and came to take refuge here. So, a room of a wooden house which used to be rented out at 5,000 FCFA has now become 15,000 FCFA and the payment is one year at a blow. (Payment for the house rent? Yes, if you do not want it so, then leave go). Sometimes too landlords just increase rents, and you have no choice since he doesn't care about the effect of the economic situation.*[231]

The impact of the conflict on the income and livelihood of IDPs is further discussed in section 4.2.1. Furthermore, the relocation or displacement of people from the region has also affected demand for commodities; thus, traders and businesses are unable to make the much-needed sales to sustain their income. For instance, *'a trader who used to sell about 150,000 francs [FCFA] a day couldn't sell even 50,000 now'.*[232]

Ultimately, the business and market sector in the Anglophone regions have been destabilised by the conflict, which in part resulted in the monopolisation of the space and prices by a few people. One participant explained:

> *Destabilised market prices. You know, because there are few people in the market for production, they [have] the monopoly of making prices. They determine prices. The prices which the government had set for prices, since there are not so many people in the market to see those goods they find themselves, they stand the chance of re-arranging the prices for themselves, increasing the prices with people not having money. So prices are not stable, they are not balanced.*[233]

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226. Interview DR 032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
227. Interview KN 015, Buea, 03 December 2020
228. Interview LF 016, Buea, 16 December 2020
229. Interview MC 007, Buea, 16 December 2020
230. Interview AA 001, Buea, 23 November 2020
231. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
232. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
233. Collage Session, Dschang, 28 November 2020

Employment and job security

Employment was equally highlighted by participants as another source of income and livelihood that has been adversely affected by the conflict. Participants expressed that since the start of the conflict, the *'unemployment rate has increased'*,[234] as most people lost their jobs due to the increasing insecurity and 'ghost town' operations. One woman shared the experience of her family:

> *My parents are based here in Douala, I was born and bred in Douala, but I got married and had to move to my husband's place. He was out of the country, so he came last year for the wedding and after the wedding, unfortunately for him seven days 'ghost town' has been declared when he was to return. He had to call the company he was working [for] to tell them about the situation back home, but they instead told him that while leaving for his vacation he did not tell them about his program so if he did not return on the set date he will be relieved from duty. It was really difficult because by then I was three months pregnant and was a student with no means of survival, and his parents were at Buto and the area was even worse than our area. Things were really tough and unfortunately, he did not make it, so he lost his job, visa, in fact everything just went bad for us. We went into total misery and was just living from hand to mouth […] There was even a time he attempted to kill himself.*[235]

Another participant also shared her experience:

> *First, I lost my job, because I was working with a publishing house. So, since schools were not going on, the company could not continue, they had to close their branch. So, I started the bar business, bar and restaurant. But even with that I could not continue because on Mondays they would impose a lockdown. Next thing, they would attempt to find out what type of drinks you are selling.*[236]

Others were made redundant due to the impact of the conflict:

> *My experience here in Limbe since the crisis started when I was working in home base Company. When it started, they made we the non-permanent workers redundant, so we became jobless.*[237]

As can be gleaned from the above discussions, the conflict has had a devastating impact on income and livelihoods. It is important to add that before the escalation of the conflict, some people were already living under the poverty line and the conflict has made them even more vulnerable. Thus, *"there is total poverty everywhere [and] some people have become beggars, while they were not [previously]. So, it has really affected lives and societies".*[238]

4.1.6. Insecurity and crime

The situation of insecurity for civilians is also characterised by rising crimes associated with the conflict. In the course of the war, members of the armed forces and the separatist groups have committed numerous crimes, with virtual impunity. The war has equally created an environment within which other criminal groups can operate.

Feedback from the victims or eyewitnesses on the ground have revealed multiple instances of unprofessionalism by members of the armed forces. A participant in the Dschang FGD described how some soldiers set a house ablaze in a conflict-affected community:*'I witnessed how these people smashed the door of a house until it opened […] they picked dry grass put it in that house […] on our return, that house was down to ashes'.*[239] A collage session participant in Dschang visually described the crimes committed by some soldiers: *'As you see on the picture. We also have cases wherein they burn houses; they burn schools, they burn vehicles and they set properties ablaze'.*[240]

Instances of harassment and stealing of goods and property have been attributed to members of the armed forces. As one interviewee noted:

> *They only come in, scatter the house, they say they are looking for guns, they are looking for those 'Boys' or they are looking for your brother, they are looking for your father, you should tell them where you have hidden them. They will climb up the roof, scatter your house, dirty the place, ask you what you do for a living, start asking you for receipts of things that were bought in 1992 or in the 1980s for you to show them and when you don't show them, they carry them away.*[241]

234. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
235. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
236. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
237. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
238. Interview WU 026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
239. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
240. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
241. Interview SM014, Buea, 1 December 2020

Similarly, other participants noted how soldiers took advantage of the war situation to benefit themselves through theft. For instance, one focus group participant observed:

> *When they [soldiers] realise that you have a shop, they will park their vehicle, then they start to shoot, shoot everywhere and people escape and lose concentration and then they now concentrate on loading their cars.*[242]

Engaging in crimes against civilians is not restricted to military personnel, and separatist groups have also exploited their possession of firearms to commit crimes. As one participant stated, *'There is a lot of looting and armed robbery from both sides'*.[243] Another noted that: *'Young boys and girls with smartphones lost them to both the military and Amba Boys'*.[244] A participant in the FGDs in Limbe made allegations about criminal activities committed by some separatists in his community:

> *I am from the xxx subdivision. There, it is the Amba Boys who terrorise the community not as the case with others where it is the military. The Amba Boys have taken control over xxx area which is made up of about 13 villages, and the people are really going through a lot [at] their hands. They even kill businesspeople or buyers and collect all their money, and nobody has the power to complain. It is more of stealing than fighting and they do it frequently. They entered into people's houses, collected the largest pigs and took them to their camps.*[245]

Kidnappings for ransom have become the trademark of different separatist groups in the two conflict-affected regions. The victims of these rampant abductions have mainly been teachers, political leaders, religious leaders, administrative authorities, businesspersons and other individuals deemed unsupportive to the secession agenda. The abduction of six civil servants on 15 June 2021 in Ndian Division, Southwest region, and the execution of one of the hostages by abductors three days later (GARDAWORLD, 2021), epitomises the crimes committed by separatist fighters against civilians amidst the ongoing conflict. They have also been extorting money from families – especially those having members with lucrative jobs. Another participant in the men's focus group in Limbe recounted how he was a victim of such crime:

> *When I last saw my mother, we had to negotiate with them before they allowed me to enter the village. My elder brother gave them pigs, drinks but still they were not satisfied saying 'I' am a Customs officer so I must add something to it.*[246]

For such victims, the NSAGs' line between raising money for the 'struggle' and money-making for themselves becomes blurred. Some armed groups are considered as having distanced themselves from the initial cause, i.e. fighting against the marginalisation of Anglophones and for secession. One interviewee spoke to this state of affairs, suggesting that, as the war has persisted, the initial ideological motivation has diminished and, at times, been replaced with an economic one:

> *We know in cases when you open the fore gate, even armed robbers, bandits will come in and take over the genuine concern. When it started, all of us knew it was genuine, people were only asking for better living conditions. But because of the poor management, look at, it has transformed into victimisation, ambushing and kidnapping for ransom. And some communities where you still have those NSAGs, people there tend to pay taxes but to them […] It has become an economic war rather than a war of ideologies like it is supposed to be.*[247]

Lines can get further blurred with the phenomenon of 'fake Ambas'. Rising crimes amidst the ongoing Anglophone crisis are not only committed by the warring parties, but also by other criminals who have taken advantage of the insecurity in the two regions. Popularly known as 'fake Ambas', this category of criminals claim to be separatist fighters but, in reality, they are not, and have been implicated in robbery, scamming and abductions. A participant in the men's focus group on Douala echoed that *'Many people are using that name Amba to operate'*.[248] Robbery has become particularly common in the conflict-affected localities, as one interviewee highlighted:

> *Whether they come in the day or in the night or attack us in our farms, they say they are Ambas. We believe they are the ones, irrespective of the fact that some are fake Ambas. We trust no one and we no longer feel safe. Even in our farms, some come and hijack us and demand for money (100,000 FCFA, 200,000 FCFA) and get you well beaten before collecting the money and so I feel that an end to this crisis will also bring an end to these.*[249]

242. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
243. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
244. Interview AL023, Buea, 27 November 2020
245. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
246. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
247. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
248. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
249. Interview NS035, Limbe, 26 November 2020

The 'fake Ambas' are known for extorting money from civilians in the name of supporting the 'struggle', and it becomes difficult for civilians to distinguish between those fighting for independence and those not. *'Sometimes we are embarrassed with notes written to threaten us to give money meant for their "groundnuts" [bullets] and their feeding. And in this all, we do not know if they are genuine or fake Ambas'.*[250]

The diverse sources and types of crimes have, sadly, come to characterise the environment in the conflict-affected zones in the Northwest and Southwest regions, and have further adversely affected the quality of life for civilians.

4.2 Impact on social groups

4.2.1. IDPs

The conflict has caused the displacement of over a million people in the Northwest and Southwest regions out of a pre-war population of less than four million. While there are approximately 67,500 registered Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria (UN OCHA 2021f: 1), the large majority of displaced people are internally displaced. Many rural dwellers in particular have fled from the conflict zones and moved either to urban areas within the Northwest and Southwest, or to neighbouring Francophone regions, notably the West, Littoral (including Douala) and Centre (including Yaoundé) regions. Urban dwellers in the towns and cities of the Northwest and Southwest have, similarly, moved out of the regions, often to Douala and Yaoundé, where they feel safer. Although entirely accurate figures for IDPs are difficult to assess due to problems of access, UN OCHA states that the conflict has displaced over 1.1 million people as of August 2020, an increase of almost 200,000 in comparison with December 2019 (UN OCHA, 2021b: 18). The majority of IDPs are women and children, including unaccompanied and separated children (UN OCHA, 2021b: 19). While recent OCHA figures indicate a decrease in overall numbers to 712,800 IDPs, with increasing numbers of returnees (333,900), new displacements of people continue as they flee from ongoing violence (UN OCHA 2021f). Returnees include those who flee into the bush when localised conflict occurs and return when hostilities cease, constituting a 'regular pendular migration pattern' (UN OCHA 2021b: 19), with OCHA reporting that almost 50 per cent of those returning do so for livelihood reasons.

According to Kellenberger, formerly President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 'internal displacement poses one of the most daunting humanitarian challenges of today. The impact not only on many millions of IDPs but also on countless host families and resident communities is hard, if not impossible, to measure' (ICRC, 2009: 4). Similarly, Yigzaw and Abitew (2019: 33) state that 'internal displacement has emerged as one of the greatest human tragedies in the world today.' They argue that 'internal displacement denies innocent persons access to food, shelter and medicine and exposes them to all manner of violence' (Yigzaw and Abitew, 2019: 33). Internal displacement does not only affect the lives of those forced to move, but also affects those they leave behind and their host communities (IDMC 2018: 5). The gloomy situation of IDPs captured in the literature reflects the fate of those from the Anglophone conflict. Their experiences were captured in FGDs composed primarily of IDPs. This section covers the following issues. Initially, it examines their reasons for fleeing from their homes, and the subsequent problems caused by loss of documents. It also examines the challenges experienced in terms of access to shelter; basic needs such as water and sanitation; employment and livelihood issues; family separation; IDP - host community issues; support to IDPs and its mismanagement. Finally, the current trends pertaining to returnees and to further displacement are discussed.

Fleeing violence

Those displaced by the conflict have left their homes and land mainly due to direct and indirect experiences of violence, including arbitrary arrests and detention, the destruction of their homes and sources of livelihood, and to preserve their lives and wellbeing in the face of constant gunfire. As one interviewee, an IDP in Buea, explained with regard to his home village:

> *There are more people leaving the community because it is no longer safe to stay here. One cannot sleep well at night because of gunshots between the soldiers and the Amba Boys. As such, people live in panic and more people are forced to leave the area each day.*[251]

Young men, in particular, were targeted by the military as potential separatist fighters. In a focus group in Douala, one young man described how arrests, extrajudicial killings and the burning of homes forced him to flee from his village:

> *When the crisis started there, it wasn't an easy issue because the military were arresting everybody they see in the name of youth. As far as you were a young man, if they meet you, they will arrest you. So, the massive killing was so rampant and to an extent they had to put some of us, our parents' houses to dust, on fire. They burnt houses, so we were obliged to escape.*[252]

250. Interview NS035, Limbe, 26 November 2020
251. Interview LF 016, Buea, 16 December 2020
252. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

Such arbitrary arrests and disappearances also affected those in urban areas, as noted by another young man who fled to Yaoundé:

> *So what made me to come here to Yaoundé is because one day my brothers, so we were just at the Carrefour, just sitting like that, so I just saw a military car like that just came, and they just came there, and then they just take one of my elder brothers and another person, another one guy, we were three of us, they took my elder brother and the other one, they go, they go with them. After, they go and release the other one, they go release the other person, then my brother, they go with him, up till today I don't know where he is. So that's what made me [come here], since that day I left Bamenda and came to Yaoundé.*[253]

Another focus group participant, a teacher by profession, similarly indicated that young men were being subjected to arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killing, despite not having links to the NSAGs:

> *There was constant shooting and there was even sometime that they came and caught some guys in our place, went with them to Bamenda and those guys were butchered. There was one that was from our church, a young guy, […] the family members, they went up to Bamenda [to collect the corpse] and when they saw in the mortuary, then nobody saw again.*[254]

The same participant attested that the military often had little knowledge about who was an 'Amba Boy' and who was not:

> *So, most of the people that are killed are not even those 'Boys', and I do not even know whether they [the military] know or they do not know, but they need to know because if you are fighting somebody you need to know the person. I have a worry that most of the people who are suffering here are not even those 'Boys'. They are just people like you and I.* [255]

The fear and insecurity of living in a situation where you could be subjected to such arbitrary violence and potential death had forced him to leave the Northwest with his family and flee to Yaoundé: *'Sometimes the military would just come in the night, so you were not feeling at home living in such a place […] So, I finally left there with my family and came here [Yaoundé], having no place'.*[256]

Another young man testified to his experiences in escaping to Douala due to fears of the military, only to then face accusations from the Amba fighters of being an informant and losing his farm. There were also consequences for his family members who remained in the village:

> *I was having a cocoa farm, I and my friends we will sit on 'Country Sundays' [initial 'ghost town' day] and say this is how we will do this, we relax, and we enjoy everything. […] [But] when everything happened like now when I want to go back the 'Boys' have invaded everything. You no longer have access; they have taken control over my own property and even my parents do not even have access. […] They [Amba fighters] say because I'm in Douala, I am an informant, […] I have run, I cannot join them to fight, that I am a 'black leg'. It means those military that came to our village that I am the one that is giving them the information to go this way. So now as I am talking, my family is in a deep shit because they can no longer walk freely, they are already suspecting them. So, it has really bring me down because my younger ones [brothers and sisters] were relying on me, they are [still there] in the village.*[257]

This common experience of violence and killings in the Anglophone regions, including in towns and cities, forced many people to flee. Some went to the Northwest and Southwest regional capitals of Bamenda and Buea respectively, seen as relatively safe compared to the main conflict zones, while others fled to the Francophone regions. IDP participants recounted their stories. One interviewee, an IDP herself, spoke of the exodus from Kumba to Buea:

> *I am here as an IDP. I told you that I was in Kumba. Because of the crisis, I had to run away to come to Buea. So, I am here as an IDP. The IDP situation is increasing every day so many people from Kumba have run to Buea because of the insecurity that is in Kumba, everyday gunshots. So many people have run to Buea. Kumba is not a place where people can sit, no electricity, no water. So instead, we have run and come to Buea. I have joined my family in Buea. I see so many people [in] Buea because of the insecurity situation in Kumba.*[258]

A participant in a men's focus group had also fled from Kumba, first to Buea then to Yaoundé:

253. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
254. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
255. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
256. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
257. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
258. Interview MM 005, Buea, 16 December 2020

So, I left Kumba because […] the friction in the town was too much for me. People were being killed. Even in the quarter [neighbourhood] […] Sometimes when I'm travelling [to Buea] we meet dead bodies on the road. So that alone gave me a lot of psychological trauma […] I thought of moving out of Kumba to a safer place. That is how I left Kumba.[259]

What made me leave [Buea], there were gunshots everywhere […] everywhere were militaries, they were shooting. So all I could do was to carry my child and leave […] The only thing I could do was to leave and come to Yaoundé.[260]

Another IDP in Douala similarly explained that he fled because of the arbitrary burning of villages and homes:

The reason that they [the military] burnt some of those houses is because, like for example, they believe that you who were involved in the fighting lived in those areas, in those houses so when they came, they could not try to find out maybe who lives here, who lives here, so they just put everything to ablaze. So, we were forced to escape.[261]

Some villages were almost entirely destroyed, as testified by one interviewee:

So many people have left my village. In this village there were thousands, but see this area, it's all empty. All these houses burnt down; we do not even know who burnt them. Everybody has run away. So, the whole place is empty because every day there is shooting. Everyone has left.[262]

Another focus group participant, a bar owner, suffered at the hands of the NSAGs, forced to pay out money as ransom before fleeing from Bamenda to Yaoundé. This experience is cited here in full, and its authenticity is clear from the detail. The participant also questions the extent to which the initial political struggle has been tainted and degraded and become more of a money-making exercise:

I moved from Bamenda. I was a businessman in Bamenda. Because I have a bar, those 'Boys' they came to my bar. They told me, 'You sell Brasserie products' [French beer]. It's from there I discovered that these 'Boys' they are no longer doing what we originally thought they were doing; instead, they are out to exploit people and siphon money […] So, when those 'Boys' kidnapped me when I was on my way to the hospital […], they whisked me away on the road saying that the 'Bigman' sent them on grounds that I am selling Brasseries. I said, 'That's my bar, let's go and search for it because even a bottle you won't see there.' They said I must go explain myself at the camp to the 'Bigman' […] They took me in an unknown direction. They then dropped me and 'untied my eyes', put me down, and told me that 'everyone has been warned to stop selling Brasseries.' I responded that I do not sell Brasseries […] They kept me there for four days. I was asked to pay 1.5 million FCFA [a ransom]. I told them that my business capital is not even that much and so where do they expect me to get that type of sum. I was there with them for quite some time. I kept begging and finally paid 542,000 FCFA […] but I told them I can't raise the rest. I do have a place where I can get money but if I am not present there the money won't be available. So, I asked for five or six days during which I would be able to call them and give them the money. It's then when those boys released me. When I left, they said I had only four days. That was on a Wednesday and so they said latest Saturday [the same week] I should have sent the money. That same Saturday, I looked into my things, packed up my family and that's how I found myself in Yaoundé. I have since been struggling [to feed] my family. What bothers me is if these 'Boys' are into this struggle to use as a means to make money or if they are out to fight for the 'struggle'. That is why I am confused about the struggle. That's why I am here.[263]

Another participant described how he lost his shop, his source of income and all his belongings as a result of the conflict. The heavy loss left him with no choice other than to leave:

They burnt my shop where I was having my properties […] inside that place; everything, all everything. I don't know why they went there to my shop. So, I reached here. Life is strong […] I am not fine in Yaoundé […] They were disturbing me too much. They never wanted to see you doing something to bring income. One morning on reaching my shop, everything was burnt. That is how I find myself in Yaoundé with my two younger brothers.[264]

While most IDPs have moved from rural to urban locations and from within the Northwest and Southwest to adjoining regions, some villagers have fled into the nearby bush to escape the conflict, living in extremely basic conditions, as witnessed by one interviewee:

259. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
260. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
261. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
262. Interview ET 006, Buea, 16 December 2020
263. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
264. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

I had a very terrible experience when I went to xxx to visit the IDPs who fled their homes to the bushes, and I found girls in their early 20s using grass in the name of hygienic pads. That was horrible and it is something I can never forget. I found children in the bushes who have been for two months without eating anything that has to do with oil. They roasted plantain, cocoyams and ate.[265]

From the above, it is evident that IDPs have directly or indirectly experienced extreme violence, including the killing and disappearances of many civilians, and seen their livelihoods destroyed, forcing them to leave their homes and seek safety elsewhere.

Loss of documents

One consequence of fleeing at short notice and having houses being burnt down is a loss of documents, including identity documents. This has become a key issue for many IDPs in their new locations, especially as lack of legal documentation limits both movement and access to basic services. It also adversely affects employment prospects in new living situations. One focus group participant explained to the facilitator how everything was destroyed as he fled from Bamenda, and how the lack of documents has prevented him from getting a job:

One man helped me to escape from Bamenda to Douala without anything, because they had destroyed almost everything, my documents, everything. I just arrived (Facilitator: So how have you gotten your documents?) No, I don't even have documents. (Facilitator: So, you cannot get a job anywhere?) I cannot, that is the problem I am having.[266]

One female IDP described the trauma of losing everything and the restrictions of not having documentation on everyday life:

I became so traumatised when our house was burnt with everything including our documents like birth certificates, school certificates and many other things. I did not even know how to live again as in Cameroon you cannot do anything serious without official documents.[267]

Another similarly discussed the constraints, especially the fear of being stopped by the police and the repercussions of lacking ID:

I am always indoors and afraid of being stopped by police if I go to the road or market. One of our neighbours was arrested the other day because he did not have his identity card. You cannot even explain to the police that your documents were burnt because they just insult and ask you to pay some money, if not they would lock you up.[268]

One interviewee indicated that the lack of ID can have even more serious consequences for IDPs:

Even in the city they are hunted because they fled their homes when their certificates and national identity cards were burnt. They become prey to the military and police as they fail to identify themselves. Some are even killed as a result of failing to identify themselves.[269]

IDPs also testified to police harassment and exploitation of their lack of documentation in order to extract money:

I used to suffer as I could not travel or go to any public place without my identity card. Sometimes, police and gendarmes *will come to our quarter very early in the morning and start searching people and houses, asking for identity cards and receipts of things like television, fridge and phones. My brother was taken to the police, and we spent money before he was released.*[270]

The lack of documents has a particularly adverse impact on the ability of IDPs to get jobs or undertake self-employed work, exacerbating the income and livelihoods situation described below:

Since I managed to come to Douala even without my birth certificate and national identity card, I have been searching and applying for jobs, but no one has called me for interviews. I also wanted to start a small business, but I am afraid as they told me it is not safe to move around and sell without my identity card.[271]

When I did not have an identity card, I could not do my business, especially going to buy food stuffs from bush markets to come and sell. Sometimes, I will call, and they send me money to settle police officers at control check points before they let me continue my journey.[272]

265. Interview GR 017, Buea, 16 December 2020
266. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
267. IDP Douala, January 2022, personal communication
268. IDP Douala, December 2021, personal communication
269. Interview AA 001, Buea, 23 November 2020
270. IDP Yaoundé, February 2022, personal communication
271. IDP Douala, January 2022, personal communication
272. IDP Douala, February 2022, personal communication

Another IDP in Douala explained how the loss of his technical education qualification had prevented him from gaining employment in his trade:

> *I did technical education so that CAP document I had was helping me […] and there were guys who were learning trade from me. So since then, I have been so in need to even have something in Douala.*[273]

Birth certificates in particular are required for school admission, and their loss is another factor that impinges on IDP children attending school:

> *Imagine I have three of my daughters here in Yaoundé and they did not have birth certificates. Two of them did not succeed to go to school last year until when I succeeded to establish their birth certificates. Even to raise money for my children's school fees is very difficult when you cannot work or do business here.*[274]

Many IDPs are in an impasse, where they cannot get identity cards without birth certificates, which they can only get from their hometown or village, as noted by one participant:

> *I don't even know what to do since I cannot go back to my village and see how to do my birth certificate. I wanted to do a new identity card, but it is not possible since I do not have a birth certificate.*[275]

Life without documentation, as experienced by so many IDPs, is so difficult that it was described by one as a 'living hell', especially given the insults and corruption that it gives rise to:

> *As an Anglophone and a man, living in this Yaoundé is like being in hell. Can you imagine the council people or police sometimes ask me to bribe them with at least 5,000 FCFA for riding my bike in the city? When they even discover that you do not have an identity card, they just want to take you to the police station and even call you an 'ambazozo'. This is why I only try riding my bike to directions where police or the council will not disturb me.*[276]

Shelter

Having fled from violence and conflict, many IDPs face many difficulties in their new locations, for instance, finding adequate shelter, gaining employment and incomes and in accessing basic services, such as education and healthcare. In terms of housing, IDPs live in informal urban settlements in cities like Douala and Yaoundé, characterised by overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of access to potable water, which increase the prevalence of communicable diseases and exposure to COVID 19.[277] Most live in rented accommodation and when asked what support they required, a number of participants in the men's focus group in Yaoundé replied that assistance with rents was needed: *'What is really very, very pertinent for us is rents'; 'Sir, it's also rents'; 'Also rent problem'*.[278]

Living conditions were frequently experienced as worse than before fleeing the conflict. When asked to describe their living conditions, various participants in the men's focus group in Yaoundé spoke of extreme overcrowding, at times moving in with relatives:

> *I am living with my siblings, and we are about six of us living in the same room.*
>
> *I am living with my family, about six of us in one room in Melen.*
>
> *I am living in just a one-room house with five children.*
>
> *I am living in a 'Kalabot'.*[279] *My friend called me here and showed me his plot that if I am able, that I can even make something like 'Kalabot' that I can take my family in. I should try. So, he just offered me the land but not for sale. It is temporal. So, I am in a two-room 'Kalabot' with my six children, my mother-in-law and my mother.*[280]

Some IDPs live on the streets or move from house to house in search of a place to sleep. As one IDP participant stated, '*We have issues […] a lot of IDPs have lost all their sources of living. They are squatting in unfinished buildings or are crowding in homes that*

273. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
274. IDP Yaoundé, January 2022, personal communication
275. IDP Douala, December 2021, personal communication
276. IDP Yaoundé, January 2022, personal communication
277. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
278. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
279. House made of poor quality or old wood.
280. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

are overwhelmed by their presence'.[281] One interviewee confirmed that *'Some have picked up abandoned buildings and have made tents as their dwelling place'*.[282] Another noted that *'We need financial help, we need material; we need food, housing for those people who are sleeping outside in the markets and bus stations'*.[283]

One interviewee noted the problem of homelessness (and joblessness) amongst IDPs:

> *Even in Yaoundé where we are talking, go to the hotspots of this town, you find many of them who are sleeping on benches of bars or chairs of bars and pubs, in the day they hawk around.*[284]

Another focus group participant described the difficult situation under which he and his family live with relatives: *'I came here and lived with my in-laws, and it was not easy. And living with somebody in the house with your wife and the children, I mean'*.[285]

A particular issue arising from contexts of overcrowding and an absence of privacy is sexual exploitation and violations of IDP women and girls in extended family and host community settings, with increased cases of sexual assault and rape reported by health personnel (UN OCHA, 2021b: 36).

Water and sanitation

Having to relocate into poor quality and overcrowded accommodation also entails problems of accessing essential items like water and sanitation for many IDPs. For those in cities like Yaoundé, water was mainly available, but the cost was high, and at times the quality poor. Participants in the women's focus group in Yaoundé spoke as follows, with some relying on the church to access drinking water:

> *I am in one compound at Lycée Bilingue. Water is available, but we have to pay for it and it's costly. Even when you pay for water, there is dirt in it but you must pay for it.*
>
> *We now have water, but it used to be a big problem in the past. Children had to move from place to place [to get water]. At times I wouldn't want to look at the water because it would discourage me from cooking just by looking at the water. At times they [the children] would go long distances to wash clothes and to take a bath, then they come home with 5 litres each. So, it was really bad during the first two years. We thank God that a few months ago our landlord connected water.*
>
> *Water is a major problem. When I go to church on Sunday I go along with gallons. That is where we have good potable water. Then with the bore hole the landlord dug, it had odour and we used to pay high bills. So, I told him I would discontinue using the bore hole, paying 5,000 FCFA I was unable. So, the children can go to the well, then we manage to wash clothes. Then for drinking water we carry every Sunday, and we manage it during the week.* [286]

Sanitation was even more problematic. Some city-dwelling focus group participants had no access to a toilet, while others only had access to very unhygienic conditions.

> *You go out in the bushes and maybe just around in the night. and just free yourself and move on, or you put it in a nylon and fling it somewhere.*[287]
>
> *Let's not even talk about the toilet because it's [done] in the bush.*[288]
>
> *Poor sanitary condition […] because of the dirt and flies and the toilet was a total mess.*[289]
>
> *Concerning toilets, we are many in the compound, but there are just two toilets so many of us use the toilet.*[290]

Jobs and livelihoods

IDP participants also described the impact of the conflict on their livelihoods, including the loss of assets left behind or destroyed in their home communities. The loss of livelihoods has resulted in hunger, malnutrition and limited access to food, education and health.[291] As a result of the displacement, many are not able to continue with their former jobs, most notably farming, and remain unemployed or underemployed.

281. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020.
282. Interview ET 006, Buea, 16 December 2020
283. Interview MC036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
284. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
285. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
286. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
287. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
288. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
289. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
290. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
291. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

IDPs living outside of the Northwest and Southwest regions noted the difficulties in getting employment in French-speaking locations, also suggesting some discrimination. In the words of participants at the collage session in Douala:

> *Yes, we are here; we do not have jobs.*
>
> *Jobless in Francophone lands.*
>
> *Yes, with the education we have, we don't have good jobs and even in the Francophone land we are being rejected. They do not open doors for us.*
>
> *They close doors for us. Even at the companies, when you do not speak French.*[292]

Some IDPs work informally, often below their educational qualifications, and are exploited:

> *We do odd jobs to live, to survive. We do things even to clean somebody's house, they give you 15,000 [FCFA], you do it just to have something on the table at the end of the month. So those are not jobs that we desire of our own selves.*[293]

One student who had fled first to Bamenda and then to Douala bemoaned his current situation of homelessness and that the employment he could get did not even enable him to pay school fees:

> *We used to have homes in Bamenda and Buea. But we are not comfortable [in Douala]. I beg homes here to live. We cannot go to school. I came here because I even wanted to further my education, [but] the job cannot even permit me to go to school.*[294]

One IDP in Yaoundé spoke of the daily challenge to get some money for food:

> *I am here checking on a daily basis how I would feed myself. Whatever I can do to get my hands on food for the family. We live in a single room, all tight up. We have to wake up every morning at 6 am. We have to go to Mokolo [the main market] and earn small amounts of money on which we feed. My wife gave birth to twins. You have to make sure that the children are fed.*[295]

One interviewee noted that: *'There are a lot of jobless people, especially the IDPs, around, who can indulge [engage] in small businesses to eat, a lot of beggars on the streets, a lot of little girls doing prostitution just to feed'*.[296] The prevalence of women and girls being forced into 'sex for survival' in contexts of poverty is of particular concern, as discussed above in the section (4.1.2) on *'Sexual and gender-based violence'*.

Family separation

The family and social life of IDPs has also been shattered. They are cut off from their social networks and many have lost communication with family members as well.[297] Male IDPs in particular were found to be living alone, separated from their families. As stated in one men's focus group: *'All of us we scattered, some went to Nigeria, and some are in Yaoundé. [As we speak] my own family are in the forest*'.[298]

IDPs are unable to attend the social functions that are central to family life in their communities of origin, such as burial ceremonies, marriages and births.[299] One group of particular concern is the significant number of unaccompanied and separated children amongst displaced children, stated to have 'dramatically increased in both [Northwest and Southwest] regions' in 2020 (UNOCHA, 2021b: 51).[300] Family separation occurs when fleeing from attacks on villages, including deaths of adult family members, but also with children sent out of the conflict zones to urban centres. Such children are at risk of exploitation, including the worst forms of child labour and child prostitution (UN OCHA, 2021b: 54).

IDP - Host community relations

Tensions between IDPs and host communities have also increased, especially in the majority Francophone areas. Host communities complain that the presence of IDPs has raised prices and the cost of living.[301] They also perceive there are more security threats because of the presence of IDPs,[302] and increased crime can certainly be a problem in contexts of enforced poverty, as indicated by one interviewee: *'A lot of illegal things going around. Boys who don't go to school, they smoke [marijuana]*

292. Collage Session, Douala, 25 November 2020
293. Collage Session, Douala, 25 November 2020
294. Collage Session, Douala, 25 November 2020
295. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
296. Interview MC036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
297. Collage session, Yaoundé, 01, December 2020
298. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
299. Workshop, Policy makers, Yaoundé, 27 August 2021
300. Numbers given are '5,816 unaccompanied children and 16,240 separated children recorded [in 2020] against 2,500 UASC identified in 2019' (UN OCHA, 2021b: 54).
301. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
302. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

and they take into armed robbery because they feel it's another way of making a life'.[303]

Another source of tension is that members of host communities think they should be supported.[304] These differences and the marginalisation of Anglophone IDPs means that relations with host communities may deteriorate if their stay becomes protracted.[305] However, one interviewee reported a more positive attitude towards the integration of IDPs into the local quarter:

> *New Town is a portal that has socially accepted the IDPs. Some, like the paramount chief, for example, have habited so many of the IDPs in our quarter. Even in the abandoned school, some IDPs are there and even tenants too are cooperating because formerly people could not live 4-5 in a room, but now the landlords welcome that because of the socio-political crisis.*[306]

Related to tensions, IDPs in Francophone areas also reported instances of discrimination, for example in housing or employment. One focus group participant outlined a common situation encountered when seeking accommodation to rent:

> *Most people who have houses don't like to accept Anglophones to stay in their houses. They say, 'You people have caused the country to be destabilised, you want to run and come here; go back to your place.' So, Anglophones find it very difficult to even have houses and they increase the rents and make life very difficult.*[307]

A female IDP described her experience when looking for work, with her precarious situation as an Anglophone woman exploited in a sexually abusive way:

> *When I came to Douala, I had to meet with one man from a major company who has about 80 per cent chance of employing me. But he has to give me two conditions just because I told him am an Anglophone. The conditions were either I slept with him or gave him my two months' salary. I was surprised and asked him if I was a Francophone will I still fulfil these conditions? […] And I had to back out of the job.* [308]

Support to IDPs

In spite of local and international efforts to support IDPs, the proportion of those that have received some sort of assistance remains very low.[309] When asked about support received from government or other sources, many indicated that they had received nothing, including these participants in focus groups in Douala: *'We have not had any support from the government'*[310]*; 'no NGOs… nobody; you are on your own'.*[311] Another participant stated similarly: *'As for me, there is no support from anywhere. I'm struggling myself to see how my family will eat and how the young ones will go to school. I've not received any support from the Government'.*[312]

Where assistance was provided by government, it was criticised by some participants as mismanaged and subject to misappropriation:

> *There was a time I had to go to Up Station and see what the territorial administration ministry was distributing. But I saw healthy and well-looking people collecting the mattresses, the buckets and the few things that were there. So it even pushes the real needy not to go, they resort to churches.*[313]

> *The government should provide food for us but there is a problem because some of the people in charge of sharing food […] would either store the foodstuffs at home or share them to their kinsmen and neglect the others who are not privileged to have food.*[314]

IDPs in Douala were aggrieved that Francophone citizens were able to benefit from government-advertised humanitarian distribution, while they were often left without goods, such as mosquito nets, fuelling feelings of discrimination:

> *Sometimes they will say they are bringing help for the IDPs. Before the IDPs get to the place the things will be taken all by the Francophones.*[315]

303. Interview SM 014, Buea, 01 December 2020
304. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
305. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
306. Interview BJ 038, Limbe, 27 November 2020
307. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
308. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
309. Workshop, CSOs, Douala, 7 July 2021
310. FGD Men, Douala, 28 January 2020
311. FGD Women, Douala, 28 January 2020
312. FGD Men, Douala, 28 January 2020
313. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
314. Interview YR018, Buea, 20 December 2020
315. FGD Female IDP, Douala, 28 January 2020

I only heard that they [government] were sharing things, but before we knew it, they had shared it already. Yes. They only came and gave us papers to sign for mosquito nets. But yet before you know it the Francophones are selling the mosquito nets you have signed to come and take. So yeah, at the end we don't have money to buy them, and we will sleep with mosquitos. Don't you see how my hand is? Yes, we sleep with mosquitos, it's quite terrible.[316]

One interviewee, a women's leader, blamed the limited support on corruption: *'You see that the corruption in the whole system has gone even into the IDP, to what is meant for the IDPs*'.[317] This individual explained how what was presented as support to displaced children did not reflect the reality, and was in effect a public relations exercise:

I have a child in the government secondary school in Yaoundé who was given piles of books to carry when the cameras were around. They were filmed, but that child came home with two exercise books – one 60 leaves and one 40 leaves, three ballpoints and two pencils. Is that a minimum package to give to an IDP?[318]

Her disdain for government schemes and their misuse meant that she did not even consider registering: *'I have these two IDPs at home, but I have never thought of registering them under a scheme because I saw it as a scam'*.[319] Her viewpoint was that assistance to IDPs would be better managed if distributed through local associations on the ground. It was suggested that such organisations would be more able to identify those in need, and would do so with less corruption:

I have always advocated that if there was anything humanitarian to them, it should go through their village organisations or religious organisations […] If it went, even in the major cities in Cameroon, where these communities are assembled, they have their village halls, and they have their associations/ organisations where they meet. Just imagine educational assistance through those communities, they will identify the needs of those children better and will be able to solve them.[320]

Returnees

Research participants confirmed the trend noted by UN OCHA (2021f) of a slow return of IDPs to their original homes. Yet this was not because the conflict had subsided or that personal security was greater. Rather, it was because experiences of being displaced were overwhelmingly negative and people were tired of living in such unfavourable circumstances. The yearning for home was stated by two participants:

I just want to go back home when this war ends soon. I don't like staying here.[321]

I only wish this war can end so that we return home and not continue to suffer like this.[322]

Interestingly, older women from rural locations were one category that wanted to return to their faming occupations. One interviewee discussed this trend with personal examples:

Yes, some people are going; those who have come here, and you know, home will remain home. I remember my mother wants to farm. […] So, I am being tormented heavily for keeping her here and she is not doing what she is good in. So, to her, to solve her problem, send her home. She prefers to go and die there, but as long as she is closer to her farm, she is ok. So, we have that challenge, and a lot of mothers are being sent home, some of them are going back. I have a friend that could not handle it, so finally he has carried the mother and sent back home and so he is doing everything to make sure that things are getting better back there for her, but it is not easy. People were well established at the regions so coming here is strange for them. No matter what they do here, their mind is not there, and they are not fulfilled, they are not satisfied. Some give up and say, 'No, let me go and die there.' So, a lot of people have gone back.[323]

When asked if this indicated that the situation had improved, her response was:

316. FGD Male IDP, Douala, 28 January 2020
317. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
318. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
319. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
320. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
321. IDP, Yaoundé, February 2022, personal communication.
322. IDP, Yaoundé, January 2022, personal communication.
323. Interview PG 031, Kumba, 19 November 2020

No, they are not going back because things have improved, they are going back because they prefer to just go and die there. It is like, 'I damn whatever wants to happen, I can't punish myself here, I'm not happy.[324]

Another interviewee confirmed that the trend to return was more to do with the unsatisfactory situations experienced by IDPs, rather than any significant change in the conflict zones:

The IDPs who are coming back home are coming either because they no longer have the means to live where they were living, [or] they are coming because to them the worse has come to the worst so let them come and stay back at home.[325]

One interviewee also endorsed the view of UN OCHA that forced displacement was still ongoing, albeit in lesser numbers than before, with the same patterns of movement from villages to cities like Bamenda, and then from Bamenda to Yaoundé:

There is still that outward push, people are still leaving communities that are […] very insecure, even though the volume of movement or the proportion of people who are leaving, as we can say with some reservations, has reduced. […] People are still leaving from Bamenda to Yaoundé as well as people are migrating from other subdivisions, villages and communities, probably the further areas of the Northwest, to move to Bamenda.[326]

In sum, displacement has had many adverse effects on the lives of IDPs. The impacts have especially been felt in the dimensions of shelter, livelihoods, education, employment and social life. These effects have striking links and are mutually reinforcing, making it difficult for IDPs to improve on their livelihoods by themselves. Yet, there is also concern for those people left behind when community and family members flee from violence. These are often the most vulnerable and immobile, such as the elderly, the chronically sick, people with disabilities and pregnant women. As OCHA notes, not only are such people deprived of the family structures and community support mechanisms on which their wellbeing and survival depended, but they often 'remain in areas with no access to basic social services and unsafe for humanitarian workers to reach' (UN OCHA, 2021b: 19).

4.2.2. Women

Although the literature on the impact of war and armed conflict on women has burgeoned since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2001, more needs to be done to shed light on the unique and widespread consequences on women. According to Estébanez:

In addition to suffering inequality and gender discrimination, in armed conflicts or war women also suffer an added burden of violence arising from the conflict situation and reduced access to health and healthcare facilities, to food and to the resources needed to ensure their survival and that of their children (2012, 244).

Although the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women warrants more attention, it is also necessary because, as McKay (1998, 381) argues, when women are affected, children are too. The Anglophone conflict has had terrible and widespread consequences for women, which remain relatively little understood or studied. These impacts are outlined below. The pervasiveness of SGBV is a highly significant impact on women and girls, and already discussed in 4.1.2.

Women in the Anglophone conflict, like men and boys, have suffered from trauma, have been forcibly displaced, injured, tortured, killed and cut off from their sources of livelihood. If these experiences were to be compared, it would not be exaggerating to say that they have been particularly hard hit, as the literature on other conflicts has revealed. Of particular concern are, however, the differences in the ways they have been affected. Women and girls have been the prime target of the belligerents in the conflict, especially as sexual violence has been widely used as a weapon of war. As discussed in 4.1.2., women have been exposed to rape, mass rape, sexual bondage and unwanted pregnancies. Pregnant women have suffered from reduced or no access to pre-natal care. Women have also taken on new roles, such as leading households and digging graves, which are traditional male roles in the Anglophone communities.[327] Although some of such new roles can potentially break gender stereotypes, they have been an added burden on women, who continue to fulfil other roles under the difficult conditions brought on by violence and displacement.

The conflict has displaced more women than men. According to the UNHCR (2019: 3), 60% of the IDPs in Cameroon are women, who face a grave humanitarian situation. Discussing the challenges of being a displaced woman, participants in one women's focus group highlighted the issue of family break-up:

324. Interview PG 031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
325. Interview WU 026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
326. Interview DR 032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
327. Workshop, Policymakers, Yaoundé, 27 September 2021

With my children, I cannot even leave all because when I came to Yaoundé, I had to stay with a cousin of mine. Unfortunately, he passed away. So now I was forced to divide my children. My four children are in four different houses, which is a very big problem to manage them. I myself, I struggle, moving from one friend's house to the other, just like that. So, it's really very difficult.[328]

My family has become scattered around. I am here, my husband is elsewhere, my other children are elsewhere too. No one knows where the other is found. so that is what our lives have become.[329]

Separation from their families has been very traumatising for women, especially those who have seen their children or husbands killed. In addition to the trauma of losing a spouse, women have carried the extra burden of taking care of their children without a decent source of livelihood:

So many women are widows. Because of this aspect, in which they have lost their husbands, so many of these women have become vulnerable. I used to spend time in Dschang before returning to where I came from [residence]. You see those that are displaced, those that have children in hand. They are vulnerable in the sense that they can do the nastiest thing, to prostitute, do dirty jobs, just because they want to survive. So, the class of women that are widows due to this crisis and their children that their dead husbands have left behind, that class of people have suffered.[330]

Similarly, another participant described how the already precarious situation of women has continued to worsen due to the heavy burden they now have as caregivers and the sole providers of services in some communities:

You will realise that the crisis has also increased the burden of women who, for the most part, stay back home and are the ones left with the extra burden of fending for families, taking care of children and other family members, equally in cases where the male members of the family have either joined the forces or have been kidnapped, or have been arrested because they are suspects or accused/condemned […] This crisis, from a gender perspective, has only gone to exacerbate the precarious situation of women, particularly rural women. If we look at it critically, because we realise, for example, we take rural women who are principal beneficiaries to take care of their families and who also provide community services and who also give birth to children, we notice that they are in a very difficult situation and their problems keep increasing.[331]

Leadership of households, which was a gender role attributed to men in the community, is now primarily fulfilled by women:

Many women have also become leaders during this time. Many have lost their husbands due to the crisis. This has also exposed women. Women who had the assistance of their husbands are now left on their own. And the plea for help by women is often not heeded. So, women have become exposed and have to do odd things in order to feed the children and to feed herself.[332]

Another major change has been the digging of graves by women. In many communities, the men who traditionally used to dig graves have either been forced to seek refuge in the bush or other towns or have been killed, leaving women to bury the dead. As noted by one interviewee:

You see cases where mothers are the ones digging graves, burying their loved ones who have been killed by unknown gunmen. You begin to ask yourself, 'When did that start?' Our mothers, with all the respect we give them following from our culture, all the love, but today they have to work, they have to sacrifice, they have to do things that they have never dreamt of.[333]

This was confirmed by male focus group participant who stated, *'I can say that in xxx when the army enters into town and kills people, it is the women who ensure that they bury'*.[334]

Women have not only been beaten, displaced or suffered from other shocks, but have also been killed. Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers who are particularly vulnerable and require care have also been deliberately killed. One interviewee, for example, said:

It has affected women a lot because even pregnant women have been killed. The murder of pregnant women is the killing of a generation as no one knows the future of the unborn babies. This is a very cruel and callous act.[335]

328. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
329. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
330. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
331. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
332. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
333. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
334. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
335. Interview LF 016, Buea, 16 December 2020

Another interviewee similarly stated, *'I have seen the military shoot a woman who was breastfeeding her child, I have seen people kill women who were pregnant'*.[336]

Also of note is the unique challenge that women face due to the lack of access to health facilities, some of which have been destroyed by the warring parties, while others have seen health personnel flee because of the violence. Those that are still operational are usually very remote and difficult to access due to insecurity on the roads and frequent lockdowns by separatists and curfews enforced by government forces:

> *Women face a lot of difficulties when it concerns healthcare because sometimes cars are not moving. So, in this case when a woman is in labour, it is very difficult. There was a situation where one woman gave birth on the way to the hospital because there was no car to transport her. And there are many cases like that.*[337]

Difficulties in accessing health facilities have also caused the death of pregnant women as well as babies during delivery, as tragically recalled by one interviewee:

> *I lost my junior sister who gave birth during the curfew and could not access medical facilities; she needed blood transfusion, she could not access the medical facility and she bled to her last drop and died. And so many other cases like that in the community, young girls whom we have lost during childbirth and inaccessibility to health care facilities.*[338]

In some cases, women have not been able to access health facilities because of the near absence of a means of transport or financial resources. One participant, for example, stated that: *'There are women who have died in villages because they don't have the means to go to the hospital. Some pregnant women died because they are not able to reach Kumbo, where they could receive better care*'.[339]

It has also been very difficult at times for women to access basic items such as sanitary pads and underwear essential for hygiene, with implications for their health, as noted by one interviewee: *'The inconvenience of not accessing sanitary pads and underwear during menstruation because the women are stuck in the bushes makes life unbearable for them. So yes, the women have suffered a great deal from this war'*.[340]

The health situation is made worse by the lack of food, as many have lost their sources of livelihood. Many displaced women have faced hunger and starvation, especially those in the bush, which also affects their health, as stated by an interviewee: *'It has affected women. They are unable to feed their children nor feed well themselves, they are unhealthy in the bushes.'*[341]

4.2.3. Young people

This conflict has also had devastating consequences for young people in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. The UN considers a youth as an individual between 15 and 25 years old. Youths have seen their education either disrupted or halted, many have been forcibly displaced, while others have been tortured, arbitrarily detained or summarily executed. Research shows that most of those killed in what Kaldor (1999) called 'new wars' are young people (Singer, 2006). According to Punamäki (2002), armed conflict and war undermine the physical and mental development of youth. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2008) similarly holds that young people can suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and suicide as a result of displacement and armed conflict. The impact of the Anglophone conflict on young people replicates many of the ills depicted in the literature.

Young people have been some of the main victims of the violence. According to UN OCHA (2021: 3), young people have lost their parents due to displacement or death in the conflict, suffered harassment and arbitrary arrests, had to take leadership of households following separation from parents or caregivers, and girls have been forced into early marriage. The report also noted child labour and recruitment into armed groups, and unwanted and early pregnancy. Participants in this study have confirmed these adverse effects, among others, on young people. We outline here the impacts on education, mental health and youth radicalisation, as well as the general social impact.

Education

Children and young people's education have been hugely disrupted by the conflict. The school boycott, the context of armed violence, and the widespread destruction of schools has made attending school impossible for children in many communities, thereby impacting on the right to education. It is worth recalling that, before October 2016 when the crisis started, more than 6,000 schools were operational within the Northwest and Southwest regions. However, since September 2017, the NSAGs have implemented and enforced a school boycott

336. Interview KN 015, Buea, 3 December 2020
337. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
338. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
339. Interview SE025, Mbiame, Bui, 20 November 2020
340. Interview LF016, Buea, 16 December 2020
341. Interview NJ034, Limbe, 26 November 2020

to protest against the appointment of French-speaking teachers, with many children now in their fifth year without formal education. As of December 2018, it was reported that less than 100 schools were operational; meaning nearly 5,900 schools were closed down, with over 40 schools burnt down (CHRDA, 2019). In late 2020, it was stated that approximately 700,000 children remained out of school (UN OCHA, 2021b: 24), with the same estimate in late 2021 (UN OCHA, 2021a: 2). Although some reopening of schools occurred from 5 October 2020, after national closure due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was reported that only 23 per cent of primary schools and 25 per cent of secondary schools were operational in the Northwest region in November 2020 (UN OCHA, 2021b: 24). Attending school can be a risky business for both teachers and students, at times targeted in violent attacks by separatist groups and abducted for ransom, and consequently many teachers do not report for work.[342] Probably the worst atrocity occurred in Kumba in the Southwest region on 24 October 2020 when eight schoolchildren were killed and others injured in an attack on the Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy by unidentified gunmen, one of a number of attacks on schools at that time following reopening (Mules and Song, 2020). While some schools again reopened for the new educational year in September 2021, with the agreement of separatist groups, UN OCHA (2021g: 1) indicated that two-thirds of schools remained closed. Additionally, the killing of two young schoolgirls, aged three and seven, by security personnel in Buea and Bamenda on 14 October and 12 November 2021 respectively, has led to a renewed schools closure by separatist groups.

Therefore, it remains the situation that the majority of children in the conflict zones either do not go to school or are attending community schools run by separatist groups in rural areas under their control. IDP children in adjacent regions also struggle to access education due to poverty and high school fees – displaced parents have often lost their sources of income, making it difficult for them to pay school fees, especially when some schools reportedly charge higher enrolment fees for IDP children (UN OCHA 2021b: 25).

The breakdown of the education system and its impact on children and young people was reflected in the discussions with research participants. According to one parent, 'There were many secondary schools in Jakiri which were functioning well before the crisis, especially those in the private sector. As at now, no school is functioning.'[343]

Referring to her own children, one focus group participant noted the fear associated with school attendance, and how she had sent her children to reside with her own parent in order to take their exams, although not with a successful outcome:

> *There are days that they will refuse going to school, saying that 'the Boys' at times come and interrupt classes so needless going to school when they wouldn't even have classes. So, I had to call my parent, who asked me to send them back home when my son was in class 6 and was about writing First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) and Common Entrance examination who finally did not make it because he did not prepare for it.*[344]

An interviewee in Limbe confirmed this fear amongst both parents and students:

> *Schools around here were shut down because parents were scared of the too many gunshots … That is the situation with the majority of them not even going to school. We have children not going to school in most of the suburbs [of Limbe].*[345]

The very real nature of this fear was highlighted by one focus group participant who gave a graphic and highly disturbing example of being caught in the cross-fire, with one parent's child being killed as she accompanied the child to school:

> *When you wake up in the morning, you would find fire. And then the intensity of gunshots, that is to say, were you to look out of the window you would find out that cartridges hot as fire [were] flying through the air, and you can't even step outside. You can't stand outside. So, in 2018, they announced that schools would resume. So, one of my neighbours took her small daughter to a government school. On her way the child was killed. She had to run back home.*[346]

Another parent noted the compounding of difficulties, with declining incomes impacting the ability to pay school fees, as well as the long-term impact of children being out of school:

> *Many children have not been able to go to school, the economy is seriously affected as businesses are not moving. We don't even have money to send our children to school. Some of them are no longer*

342. It was reported that "Only 39 per cent of the primary school teachers and 21 per cent of the secondary school teachers are reporting to work" (UN OCHA March 2021: 24).
343. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
344. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
345. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
346. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

interested to go to school since they have been out of school for long now.[347]

The fulfilment of the right to education is essential for young people to develop the skills that enable them to enjoy other economic and social benefits. Its breakdown will have long-lasting impacts on young people's lives.

Mental health

Staying out of school and work, in addition to the loss of loved ones and generalised violence, has traumatised many young people, with an impact on their mental health. Young people who are victims of this violent conflict, including as fighters, may experience a range of psychological effects, including depression, anxiety disorder, panic disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is the most common clinical diagnosis following exposure to armed conflicts. Participants recounted their stories of disturbing experiences which left many young people with multifaceted psychological issues:

I was in Upper Sixth when the crisis began in November 2016. It really affected me because I couldn't go to school again after three years until after coming to Douala and now I completed my A Level. It was really traumatising.[348]

Two weeks into this academic year, they called me in the afternoon, saying that they [NSAGs] picked up my son. He is 13. They [the children] were coming back from school. Immediately they dropped, they [NSAGs] just picked them up with my neighbour's child around 3 p.m. I succeeded to bring him back to the house around 10 pm after of course paying the usual ransom. Now this child, he is intelligent, but his performance for the first sequence, he performed poorly, and he is traumatised […] I have been so disturbed because it is my last child. He said he wants to go and school out of Bamenda. A neighbour in 'Ghomgham', another quarter, on coming back saw around 30 children that had been held by these 'Boys', tormenting the children, asking them if they were still going to school […] He asked them why and what is the crime of the children.[349]

A female interviewee revealed that some children who went to school were kidnapped that school had become a 'no-go zone'.[350] It is due to such psychologically disturbing experiences that trauma centres have been set up in the Northwest and Southwest regions by some local and international NGOs, as well as in medical facilities, to provide psychosocial support to victims of the conflict. However, the demand for such support is far less than the provision.

Youth radicalisation

Young people, especially boys and young men, have been especially targeted by the security forces, who regard them as being potentially sympathetic to the separatist groups. This has led to the harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and, at times, summary execution of young people, as discussed above in the section on *'Human rights violations'*. One participant noted a particular situation where children in technical schools had been targeted:

You realise that children, pupils and students of school-going age are at risk. The various parties have so much to gain if they disturb them. Particularly their lives are in danger from both sides. Children in technical school, the Anglophone technical education has suffered a lot because most of those children have been eliminated. They are accused of being the ones making arms, preparing and giving to the 'Boys' because of their technical knowledge. Our technical children, I have statistics, have suffered and many of them are being chased and killed […] So, both ways they have been both in front of a guillotine and they are killing them. That is our most vulnerable group in society.[351]

In turn, this has led to a loss of trust in the government and fuelled the radicalisation of many young people. In addition, the NSAGs have targeted young people, especially young men, who end up being recruited voluntarily or forcefully. As one participant confided:

You look at the boys, just like the sister said. Most of them are just exposed to this issue of becoming 'Amba' with or without their permission or without their acceptance. They are forced because I have a situation in which they took a colleague's child. That child disappeared for about two months. When we saw the child, they said he had been kept in the training camp. They had kept him in the training camp, so he had become hardened before they released him and once he has become that thing ['Amba'] there is no turning back. So, to me, this thing has mostly affected our future generation, and something needs to be done.[352]

347. Interview NM011, Buea, 15 November 2020
348. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
349. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
350. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 December 2020
351. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
352. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020

Additionally, there are young people who voluntarily join the NSAG in search of revenge. For instance, in a collage discussion, a participant expressed, *'This child soldier is as a result of parents being burnt alive. Some of the children have decided to join them [Amba Boys] to fight because they [military] have killed their parents*'.[353] Similarly, a focus group participant provided a more specific story:

> *There was one [young woman] in my village who joined those 'Boys' because they [the military] killed all of her parents, so out of frustration she joined those 'Boys'. She said she was joining to revenge the military because of what happened. So now they call her 'Queen Mama'. Orders are taken from 'Queen Mama'. She says she wants to revenge what was done to her father's [parents], that her parents were [innocent] so why did they have to kill them and therefore she is going to revenge, not that she likes it but that she wants to revenge.*[354]

Interestingly, there are other young women who were noted to have voluntarily joined the NSAGs due to idleness caused by lack of employment. The extract below expounds:

> *Several [young] women have joined because they say that they do not know where to go, they are not going to school, some are doing business, but no one is buying so what can they do? They [then] go and join those 'Boys' to cook for them. Because they say when the 'Boys' go out and harass people and seize money, they benefit from [it].*[355]

There are children as young as 14 years old reported to be members of these NSAGs (World Bank, 2021). One study participant also suggested that the military was also recruiting underage soldiers:

> *I call them children because you find some of them, they say they are military people, but the guns are even bigger than them. So, what I do not know is if they now recruit children in the army and send them.*[356]

Social impact

The conflict has led to various social impacts on young people. Their social lives have been disrupted, as one young participant noted:

> *Our life was enjoyable; you could go out before and after 6 pm. When this crisis started you will not find people out of the house after 6 pm. Amidst the crisis, you will not open the door to whosoever is knocking after 6 pm.*[357]

Their lives have been adversely affected in many ways through displacement, unemployment, being out of education and being exposed to violence. Yet young people have also responded to the challenges faced in ways that can have socially adverse consequences for others. As one young person put it:

> *Young people are both the victims and the perpetrators. In terms of being victims, school is shut down, we cannot go to school. Secondly, crime wave has increased, young girls are becoming pregnant and not knowing who the fathers are, and the fathers are disappearing. There is a kind of social crisis where we have children of the revolution as could be considered. Also increases in rape, crimes and so on.*[358]

To corroborate the preceding situation, another young female participant portrayed a precarious scenario where:

> *The youth have been in total disarray. They have for all these three years without going [to school] and have completely forgotten about school. Most of them have become recalcitrant. The girls with unwanted pregnancies. The boys have become fathers. I am talking of a particular situation where a boy of 17 years impregnated three girls in a row and all of them delivered babies practically in the same period. Basically, three years have been taken off their lives and about 15 years [added] to their lives since they have become fathers at adolescent ages and have to take responsibility as fathers. The youth have lost their youthfulness.*[359]

The rise in unwanted pregnancies also interacts with a decline in health services, with medical facilities destroyed or closed down as a result of the conflict. One consequence is childbirth in dangerous circumstances without medical assistance, as noted by one participant:

> *Getting unwanted pregnancies, the parents are not able even to go to hospital for the treatment. Why? No money, insecurity, they give birth in the bushes and all the like. And there are lives that have been*

353. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
354. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
355. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
356. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
357. Interview NM011, Buea, 15 December 2020
358. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020

lost in the forest because of that, because there were no medical doctors to attend to them.[360]

For girls and young women, there has been an increase in early and forced marriage, as recounted by one young interviewee:

So, because business is not booming as it used to be, suffering, a lot of misery, early marriages have been reinforced. It is no longer your choice of man whatsoever. If somebody comes and tells your father, 'I want your daughter,' he does not even think, he accepts, he accepts no matter your age because to him he believes that under him [husband] you will be protected rather than you are being killed with assumptions you are dating a military man or you are dating an Amba boy.[361]

For other young women, displacement, loss of livelihood, and poverty have created a situation of having to engage in survival sex. Many of these girls and young women could not complete education and faced many challenges in getting jobs in new towns and were forced into prostitution for economic reasons.

4.2.4. Elderly

The Second World War marked a turning point in the history of warfare and led to the adoption of the Geneva Conventions by the international community on 12 August 1949. One of these Conventions (the Fourth Geneva Convention) focused principally on the protection of civilians and contains two clear provisions on the situation of the elderly in war (Articles 14 and 17). It protects the elderly as persons not taking part in hostilities. In this regard, the elderly are afforded protection from abusive behaviour by any of the parties in a conflict. International humanitarian law has not defined the elderly clearly, but people of or above retirement age are widely considered as falling within this group. Most countries have a retirement age of about 64 years (see for example OECD, 2017; Munnel, 2011). According to Article 17 of the Fourth Geneva Convention:

The parties to the conflict shall endeavour to conclude local agreements for the removal from besieged or encircled areas of wounded, sick, infirm, and aged persons, children and maternity cases, and for the passage of ministers of all religions, medical personnel and medical equipment on their way to such areas.

In spite of the efforts made to ensure the protection of the elderly in situations of armed conflict, civilian casualties, including the elderly, have continued to rise in armed conflicts. The proportion of civilian casualties has been significantly higher in conflicts that have taken place since the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, accounting for up to 90 per cent in some conflicts (Krill, 2001). As a response to this new situation, additional protocols were adopted in 1977 to supplement the Geneva Conventions of 1949. In spite of these, the situation appears not to have changed significantly as the protection afforded by these instruments for civilians remains more legal than practical (see, for example, Waznick, 2011: 1). This has been the case with the Anglophone conflict, which has exacted a particularly heavy toll on civilians, with the elderly highly affected in a unique way.

The elderly require support to meet basic physiological needs including eating and drinking water, depending on their age and health. Elderly people have not only been cut off from such vital support, but have also been maimed, tortured and killed. One focus group participant explained how the separation of the elderly from young members of their family has affected them:

Old people are suffering because [their] caretakers are the youth. So as the youth have run away, whether school-going age or what type of age, they [the elderly] have automatically become handicapped because there is no one to look after them or carry water for them. When there is a battle, they have no means to run away and that is how stray bullets have taken them away […] Old-aged people are at high risk […] the youth and everybody escaped but the old and disabled were unable to run away. In my village, two died inside the house because there was no one [who] could give them water to drink.[362]

Elderly persons have frequently been kidnapped and held hostage in order to induce younger family members to pay ransoms or support armed groups in different ways. Some old people have been kidnapped. One focus group participant noted that *'some [elderly people] are "caught" [kidnapped] so that their children provide a ransom*'.[363] This participant also narrated the ordeal of their maternal grandmother. She said, *'These "Boys" kidnapped her and took her away'* and threatened to kill her if money was not sent to them.[364] She was only released when the money was sent. Another participant described the violence her mother endured in the following words:

359. Interview ME004, Buea, 22 December 2020
360. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
361. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
362. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
363. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
364. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020.

Imagine a person like my mother at her age and she's the patient. These 'Boys' came to my sister's house in Bamenda. They spoke to my sister and her husband, they came when there were some neighbours there, they forced all of them to lie on the floor. They went into the room and found my mother lying on the bed. They forced her to get up from the bed. My mum said she is unable to move. They see such an old woman, yet they force her to get up from bed. My mother said as she is lying [in bed] that she is not able to come down [to the floor]. One of these 'Boys' came and carried her to put her down. Can you imagine, such an elderly woman? I am even unable to explain it, it's too much.[365]

Similarly, one interviewee narrated the circumstances under which some elderly people have lost their lives and the challenges they are going through. This participant said:

The issue with elderly people, I will just focus on those I have witnessed. Many elderly people have lost their lives, many. We've met elderly people who cannot run or flee for their lives, they are being burnt to ashes by the military in their own houses. Some are shot at blank point; they trigger live bullets at them, and they are killed immediately. Some of them die because of stress where everybody fled and left just them in their houses, what happens is, they die just of stress.[366]

The physical condition of elderly people makes them particularly vulnerable in this conflict, as staying at home has been unsafe as homes are burnt. One participant described this in the following words: '*Even the elderly who do not have the strength to run to the bushes like the young are killed in their homes, since they are helpless'*.[367] Another interviewee similarly explained that:

I think for elderly people it has been very difficult because some of the elderly people have been roasted in their homes. Those who were bedridden, there was nobody to take care of them, when some of the villages were set ablaze, some of them were actually burnt alive. So elderly people cannot escape from the crisis, they cannot escape from the violence.[368]

Access to healthcare was identified as another important challenge faced by the elderly as a result of the conflict. Old people are increasingly unable to pay for their health bills due to the loss of their sources of income or decline in business activities in some areas and the absence of younger family members to help transport them to a health centre when the need arises. In some communities, hospitals have also been destroyed, making access difficult even for those that have support and are able to pay. The near absence of health facilities as a result of the destruction, and the challenges in accessing hospitals due to physical weaknesses, are also reasons why some elderly persons have lost their lives. One participant, for example, said: *'Old people are there, some of them are dying because they cannot go to the hospital, some of them are sick but no means of going to the hospital because of insecurity. The suffering is too much*'.[369]

It also worth mentioning that psychological trauma has been a major problem, affecting the elderly, like other members of the affected communities. Many older people have been traumatised by the loss of their loved ones or their separation from younger members of their families who have sought refuge in the bush, neighbouring regions, Nigeria or other countries.[370]

The elderly in the Anglophone regions have, therefore, been seriously affected and faced some particular challenges. Mortality resulting from very poor access to healthcare, assault and trauma were seen to be a major impact on the elderly. In spite of the legal requirement that the elderly and other civilians be protected in humanitarian situations, they have often been deliberately targeted by the parties in the conflict ,with the pain inflicted on them difficult to qualify accurately.

4.2.5. Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

People with disabilities are among the most-affected and at-risk population in many conflict-affected countries. In Cameroon, disabled persons amongst civilian victims have been badly affected by the violent conflict in the two Anglophone regions (CAWI, 2020). Some have been killed, wounded, or abandoned, while others have been forced out of their homes (Alphonse, 2020). Because of physical disabilities, it can be more difficult to swiftly vacate areas under attack, and easier to get caught in cross-fire. One interviewee noted, *'During the shooting, those who are able can run. Think about those with disabilities, they are left to themselves*'.[371] Another stated

365. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
366. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 December 2020
367. Interview LF016, Buea, 16 December 2020
368. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
369. Interview MM005, Buea, 16 December 2020
370. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
371. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020

that *'people have left the places and the disabled people cannot leave because of limited movements, so I think it is really far [more] challenging for the disabled people*'.[372]

The support provided to disabled persons by able-bodied family members, friends and neighbours – who have themselves become more vulnerable in the midst of conflict – has been curtailed on occasion. One interviewee in Buea reported, *'the case of a handicapped woman who was abandoned by the children and she later on died in her room somewhere around Dongo quarter'.*[373] Similarly, another indicated that: *'Many with disabilities and the elders have been abandoned as it is difficult to reach them in the troubled zones where they unfortunately find themselves'.*[374] It appears that the crisis has indeed watered down the spontaneous support previously given to disabled persons. As noted in one focus group:

> *There is no time to look after the blind or the crippled […] They also die like us who are capable, most of them do not have any person who can help them. It was us who used to help them but now we are also in difficulty.*[375]

Persons with disabilities have increasingly witnessed the disappearance of social support systems which were more or less helpful to them before the commencement of the conflict:

> *Social support systems have disappeared in addition to the initial very poor social security for disabled people. Their situation in the middle of the crisis has even become worse than it was before because in spite of the fact that they initially lacked a social security, they could even rely on their social support systems.*[376]

The lack of access to health or medical facilities is another major challenge faced by persons with disabilities. The destruction and burning of health centres and the desertion of medical personnel from unsecured areas have made it very difficult for disabled persons to be medically attended to or access basic resources. As noted by one interviewee:

> *The disabled persons are barely coping because it is very difficult. There is no hospital around, only the health post there to help people. When they shared [out] the mosquito nets, many [disabled] people did not have [get them].*[377]

Nevertheless, a disabled respondent highlighted an attempt to ameliorate the difficult situation. *'We have the advantage that the medical workers from Shisong and BBH used to supply us with drugs that will sustain us for three to four months. That one has been helping us a lot'.*[378]

Disabled persons in the conflict-affected regions have also been deprived of their political rights. Many of them could not vote in some areas for fear of becoming victims of reprisals, especially from separatist groups who had threatened any person who would take part in elections. As noted by one interviewee:

> *The elections that took place during the crisis, I don't know how many disabled people voted. I mean the presidential election of 2018 in the middle of the crisis, municipal and legislative elections in the middle of the crisis and regional election this 2020 during the crisis, I mean where are the disabled people? How are their voices heard?*[379]

In a shocking twist, it appears that some disabled persons can be suspected by members of the security forces simply because of their disabilities. The suspicion is that their disability is a result of their involvement in the conflict in separatist ranks. As one disabled participant stated:

> *I am disabled and it is really difficult. There came a time when even a handicapped person was shot by the military, suspecting that he was first a separatist fighter who had been shot in the bush before moving with crutches.*[380]

372. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
373. Interview BM003, Buea, 25 November 2020
374. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020.
375. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020.
376. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
377. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
378. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
379. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
380. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020

5. Conflict Resolution Strategies

This section continues with the focus on grassroots voices, but here we explore the perspectives of affected civilians on the prospects for resolution of the conflict. In four parts, we commence by examining their views on the government's earlier attempt at dialogue as well as the current impasse on ending the conflict, inclusive of the state's ongoing military strategy. Second, we examine the strategies for peace that are identified by local actors. Thirdly, we highlight particular local voices for peace, notably those from women's and youth organisations. Finally, we examine the views of participants on the potential role of international organisations.

5.1. Non-inclusive dialogue and the government's military approach

There is clearly an urgent need to end this terrible conflict that has brutalised the civilian population and had such adverse effects on so many people's lives and livelihoods. Yet there is a current impasse in any such efforts, and it would appear that the government is intent on maintaining a military approach to the conflict, and thus pursuing a military solution. As discussed in the Introduction, the main official attempt at conflict resolution, the Major National Dialogue held in Yaoundé from 30 September to 4 October 2019, was criticised for being elite-oriented and excluding key actors (Hendricks and Ngah, 2019; Köpp, 2019). The elite and non-inclusive nature of the Major National Dialogue was also noted by research participants: *'What we organised last year was not a dialogue; it was a monologue'.*[381] The exclusion of the separatist armed groups as a key party to any serious peace negotiation was criticised:

> *You cannot organise a dialogue to end an armed conflict while those who are holding the arms are not even there.*[382]

> *You can't be dialoguing and wanting to solve an issue and the person who is involved in the issue is not being represented in the dialogue.*[383]

One interviewee similarly noted the continued imprisonment of separatist leaders during the Major National Dialogue and questioned the nature of the dialogue, suggesting that it was largely an internal ruling elite affair:

> *Who was dialoguing with who in the Grand National Dialogue? You call your party members who think like you and reason like you to come for a dialogue, and the people who are telling you that they want separation, you leave them in prison. So, who was dialoguing with who?* [384]

Another participant expressed similar sentiments in a more imaginative way, suggesting that the government organised the national dialogue in a manner that suited its own interests: *'That national dialogue was like a […] it's like, you took material to the tailor, you cut it to the size that fitted you and wore. It was not inclusive'.*[385]

Research participants also criticised the non-inclusion of local people from the conflict zones:

> *I heard people went to Yaoundé for dialogue, so who went there? Nobody in my community went there to represent us or to say something. Because if they were taking people from all communities, the government should have understood the effect of this crisis on people […] You cannot sit in Yaoundé and be imposing on people.*[386]

This situation was reinforced by the terms of the Major National Dialogue which excluded discussion of the form of the state:

> *When we begin to talk about dialogue […] we discover that it has nowhere to go because the last dialogue that came in Cameroon, the form of state which has been the foundation of this country became a taboo.*[387]

The outcome of the national dialogue was various recommendations to the government, notably proposals for a special status for the Anglophone regions and more local autonomy under powers in the 1996 Constitution (Cameroon Tribune 7 October 2019).[388]

381. Interview EE013, Buea, 21 November 20202
382. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
383. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020
384. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020
385. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
386. Interview ET006, Buea, 16 December 2020
387. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 November 2020
388. Special status – section 62 sub 2 of Constitution; decentralisation – section 32 sub 2 of decentralisation law. https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/28306/fr.html/major-national-dialogue-recommendations-restore-peace-stability

However, such recommendations have largely not been implemented. One interviewee, while noting the lack of a constitutional amendment to implement the special status recommendation, asked rhetorically:

> *It is in fact one year now, and into the second year after the national dialogue, and how many resolutions were taken? There were resolutions about nationality; there were resolutions or proposals on the special status. […] [For sincere adoption of the resolution], there would have been a very clearly embedded article there in the Constitution that clearly states that the Anglophone regions have a special status.*[389]

Analysts have doubted the sincerity of the government, suggesting that the national dialogue was essentially a ploy to deflect international criticism (International Crisis Group, 2020: 8; Willis et al., 2020: 85). Some research participants likewise questioned the seriousness of government in resolving the conflict through dialogue, especially given its non-inclusiveness:

> *The first thing they organised was not […] that dialogue did not, it was not specifically meant to solve the Anglophone crisis, it was not in my humble opinion.*[390]

> *They say dialogue. The government is not interested in resolving the problem. If the government was interested, we should have resolved it.*[391]

It is pertinent that the military crackdown in the Anglophone regions intensified immediately afterwards (Dupuis, 2019).

5.2. Strategies for peace

Given the current official impasse in progress towards conflict resolution, what possible strategies for peace were identified by local actors? One interviewee summed up the pathway to peace: *'I want to say that ceasefire is the first button that should be clicked […] all the political detainees should be released, after their release, dialogue and a referendum and the people will decide. I conclude'.*[392]

We look at these possible steps in turn.

5.2.1. Ceasefire and military withdrawal

The urgent need for a ceasefire was repeated by many participants as a first step towards conflict resolution and peace-building. *'If we can silence the guns, we can talk peace, we can talk some sense […] and change mindsets gradually into peace-building'.*[393] While agreement by both sides to ceasefire is necessary, some felt that the initiative should be taken by the government as a prelude to peace talks between the two warring parties. *'If the government declares a ceasefire, then they call on this other party [to cease fire]. Then both parties sit somewhere, maybe out of the country, discuss in a neutral place, discuss and come out with the solution'.*[394] There was a specific call for the President to declare a ceasefire, given his declaration of war on 30 November 2017. *'The Anglophones are very angry for that war which he [head of state] declared. And for him like a father, it will be preferable for him to call for a ceasefire same as he declared the war'.*[395] The call to both sides to 'drop arms' was frequently voiced:

> *We are begging the military and the Boys in the bushes to drop their arms and come together as one.*[396]

> *If the military drop their guns and the 'Boys' also drop their guns, maybe peace will reign.*[397]

Such pleas were made in particular by women in FGDs, indicating war-weariness and appealing to the separatist fighters to cease fire:

> *I plead with my brothers in the bush, please they should put down their guns and let our children to go to school.*[398]

> *The Boys should drop their guns and call for dialogue.*[399]

> *So, we really beg our brothers who are fighting this war to please put down their guns.*[400]

But such pleas were made with the understanding that a ceasefire agreement with the military was required. *'This doesn't mean they [the Boys] should be told to abandon their guns and come by themselves. No, if they drop their guns the military will shoot'.*[401] As well as a ceasefire

389. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
390. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
391. Interview ET006, Buea, 16 December 2020
392. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
393. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
394. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
395. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
396. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
397. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
398. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
399. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
400. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
401. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020

agreement, the withdrawal of the military from the war zones was perceived as a pre-requisite for dialogue and peace talks. *'They should demilitarise the region first before you could dialogue, because the dialogue cannot be going on while fighting is still going on'.*[402]

Indeed, many voices called for military withdrawal:

> *The government should remove their military in the war areas.*[403]

> *I will beg the government to remove their military from Northwest and Southwest.*[404]

> *All those soldiers who are in the Anglophone zone should pack and leave.*[405]

> *The soldiers deployed to saturate everywhere be sent back to their main bases.*[406]

One woman felt that it was beholden on the government to do so unilaterally. She said, *'The state is responsible for that because they were the ones who brought in the military, so let them take them out and then we can start discussing other ways forward'.*[407]

Another endorsed this procedure, though for the reason that the government is *'more organised and structured; I think the government should be the first to begin'.*[408]

Much fear of the military was expressed due to experiences of killings, kidnappings, and burning of properties:

> *This crisis has brought a lot of fear in the people's minds towards the police, towards the military.*[409]

> *The people are afraid and if they see the military people, they are afraid […] and they are running to the bushes because it got to a point where everybody that lives there is a suspect, you are considered either an Amba Boy or a collaborator to the Amba Boys, so everybody became a suspect at that time, by who? The military.*[410]

> *When an Anglophone sees a policeman, he's running, he's running because he does not know whether this one will consider that I'm an Amba Boy; we have seen our brothers being beaten and dragged.*[411]

This fear of the military was seen by some as greater than of the armed separatist groups. *'The people are afraid of them [the military] more than [they are of] the Amba Boys'.*[412] There was little sense that the military was providing security to the local population. One woman stated categorically that this was not the case: *'But they are not here to protect. They are not actually protecting. From the pictures that we are seeing, it shows that they are not protecting us, they are rather harming us'.*[413]

Significantly, there was a view that the military had lost the respect of the population and that this would take a long time to restore:

> *There are a lot of these things that have brought a lot of pain in people and have dealt with the people's mentality towards the military so it will take time for the Anglophone population to respect and value and honour the military because of what they have seen.*[414]

This also required change by the military in its relations with the civilian population: *'The military should be reoriented on the way they approach the people'.*[415] The release of political prisoners was seen as a further precondition for dialogue: *'The innocent people who have been arrested should be released and [there should be] a peaceful dialogue between the government and the separatist leaders, lawyers, teachers and even the parents'.*[416]

This corresponded with the critique of the 2019 Major National Dialogue that had taken place while many separatist leaders remained in prison.

402. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
403. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
404. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020
405. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
406. Interview LF016, Buea, 16 December 2020
407. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
408. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
409. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
410. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
411. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
412. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
413. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020
414. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
415. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
416. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020

5.2.2. Inclusive dialogue

Inclusive dialogue was highlighted by research participants as the pivotal strategy to resolving the conflict in Cameroon. This was mentioned by numerous participants in interviews, in FGDs and on their collages. The call was for *'a real, genuine, inclusive national dialogue which brings all the stakeholders to the table with an international neutral arbitrator'.*[417]

Figure 6: Collage No. 1, Limbe, 22 November 2020

In Figure 6 above, two main types of content, which appeared in most of the collages, were used by the participant. These are written text and collaged-together pictures. Here, the participant used written text to indicate that dialogue or negotiation and truth and reconciliation were needed for peace to be achieved. During the collage discussion, this participant said the dialogue had to be genuine. To him, genuine dialogue meant one that is inclusive and brings together all parties to the conflict without preconditions to discuss and agree on a solution that they can all accept and commit to.[418]

Inclusivity extended to a range of actors. First, the leaders of the armed separatist groups needed to be involved, as noted in participants' critique (above) of the Major National Dialogue of 2019:

> *We have been talking about dialogue over and over, but we have not yet had any concrete dialogue between the two stakeholders in the crisis.*[419]

> *If the government had a sincere dialogue with the main actors in the crisis and made sure all prisoners in line with the Anglophone crisis were set free, it [dialogue] would have been taken to another level.*[420]

Second, it was crucial to include those in the diaspora that are supporting the separatist cause, with guarantees of their security from the government:

> *You bring the actors who are also based in the diaspora to take part of the discussions.*[421]

> *They should invite these people, calling them in, giving them their assurance that they will not be harmed.*[422]

The significance of the diaspora elements was highlighted by a number of research participants. One recurring perception was that such diaspora elements were driving the conflict, materially and ideologically. Thus, not only was it crucial to invite them to participate in peace negotiations, but it was also important that they should simultaneously be exposed to the conditions endured by many Anglophone civilians in order to persuade them of the need for negotiation:

> *The guys abroad in the diaspora, they continue to fuel this thing. Let them know that people are really suffering down in the field.*[423]

> *What is discussed is then witnessed by [these people abroad] and equally they are coming in as well to witness what is happening in the region rather than get them from the news. So, they should come themselves now, sit in the midst of the struggle, see how things are being done here, by themselves in this dialogue.*[424]

417. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
418. Collage session, Limbe 22 November 2020
419. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
420. Interview TP010, Buea, 14 December 2020
421. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
422. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
423. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
424. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020

Additionally, a role for the African Union (AU) was perceived in identifying the leaders in the diaspora and bringing them into the dialogue:

> *Let the AU try to find out the icons that are behind these acts […] those who are sponsoring the struggle. If they are not satisfied with whatsoever the AU can dialogue with the [government] leaders; then the struggle will not still end […] Discover the icons, and then try to meet those people, ask them what they want in order for this struggle to stop.*[425]

Third, and significantly, many participants noted that dialogue needed to include ordinary community members affected by the conflict:

> *Sincere dialogue should be brought in whereby those who are the victims, those that have been victimised by the Anglophone crisis right down there, who know the cost of losing somebody, yes, they should be brought to the tables and let there be a sincere dialogue, let them express themselves in relation to their challenges and if there is good faith, I think a solution will come out of it.*[426]

> *We have heard of the national dialogue. I believed those who convened to talk about the crisis would have come from the root, picked from the masses. With such, a better approach would have [been] put in place. Policy makers have to go back to the grassroots. Do not sit in the major cities […] and don't discuss people without them, don't discuss problems faced by people without them.*[427]

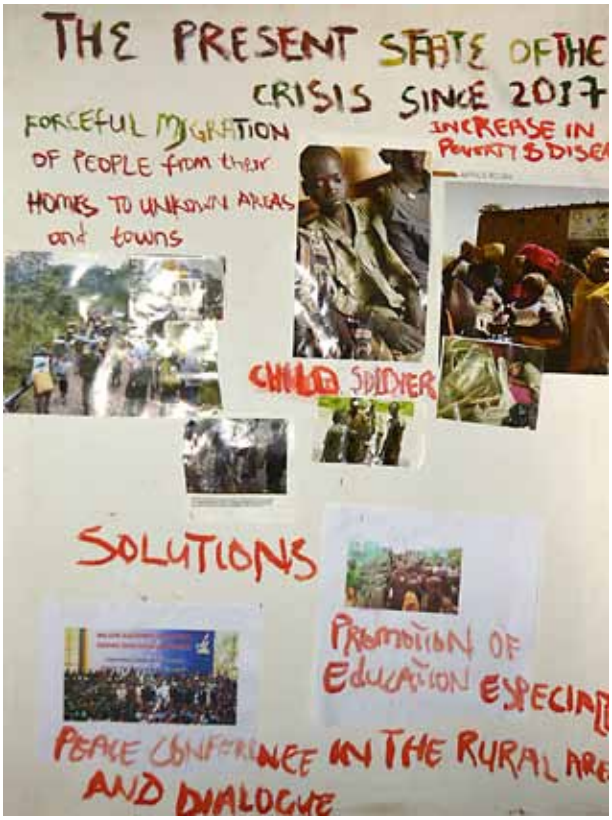

Figure 7: Collage No. 6, Limbe, 22 November 2020

As can be seen in Figure 7 above, one participant was of the view that such involvement of the people affected by the conflict could be done by organising peace conferences in the rural areas. This participant used both written text and collaged pictures to show the importance of a peace conference with significant grassroots involvement from the communities affected in the search for lasting peace.[428]

The crucial involvement of women was also emphasised, and in a genuine, not tokenistic fashion:
What we wish to see is that there are women on the table making proposals. Whenever there is a particular issue, they have their voices heard and make concrete proposals that would be considered and not just placed there for manipulative purposes.[429]

425. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
426. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
427. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
428. Collage session, Limbe, 22 November 2020.
429. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020

Figure 8: Collage No. 6, Limbe, 22 November 2020

Another participant used written text and collaged pictures showing women in conferences in their collage to emphasise the need for women to be effectively represented in a genuine dialogue. According to this participant, women need to be included for dialogue to be considered genuine because they have been particularly hard hit by the conflict. To explain why they are the most affected, this participant said those being killed, whether among the civilian population, the military or the separatist fighters, are their children, sisters, brothers or husbands without whom they cannot live normal lives. Women are also tortured, killed, raped, kidnapped, arbitrarily arrested and detained, but remain the first responders to calls for help by their family members.[430]

The involvement of local people affected by the conflict was also reflected in advocacy for a bottom-up process of consultation and dialogue:

> *Consultations need to be held at all levels and even in holding a national dialogue, it should have come from bottom to top, grassroots identifying their representatives. Why not begin at the villages that will go to subdivisions, subdivisions to divisions and divisions to regions, and from regions you hold a national dialogue. Everybody's voice or opinion would have been sought and […] the impact would have been felt more.*[431]

Somewhat in line with this process, one view on 'where' the dialogue should take place was 'anywhere but Yaoundé,'[432] with a preference for holding talks in the Anglophone region itself:

> *We can organise such a dialogue in Buea or in Bamenda. It should not take place where Anglophones will perceive it again to be a centralisation of negotiation or a centralisation of dialogue.*[433]

> *Come to these Anglophone regions […] we have places in Bamenda that are safe, as well as we have places in the Southwest that are safe.*[434]

However, other voices called for the dialogue to be held outside of Cameroon, proposing Switzerland for example, given the previous offer of the Swiss government to mediate peace talks.[435] The broader question of mediation of dialogue was also considered by participants. Some focused on international mediation, either by the AU or the UN, although the UN was emphasised, given the role of UN Trusteeships in Cameroon's history:

> *I think United Nations should come and chair. The separatists, they should sit on this side and the government of Cameroon sit on this side […] One should speak and the other too should speak and let the neutral body bring a solution.*[436]

In terms of suitable local mediation, the church was solicited to take the role as it was perceived to represent moral values: *'The church comes in to mediate, to kill hatred, to kill distrust and to see how to encourage us to build back trust. That is the role of the church'.*[437]

A few participants commented on reports that some dialogue and discussion had taken place remotely between government representatives and some separatists who had dropped their arms to join the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion (DDR)

430. Collage session, Limbe, 22 November 2020
431. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
432. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
433. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
434. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
435. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
436. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
437. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020.

programme. Yet it was felt that more trust was needed for comprehensive negotiations to take place between the warring parties. If present, such trust would enable civilians to become more involved in the negotiation process:

> *The government should give assurances in good faith that anyone who can help to reach out to the separatists in the bush would be secured. There are people who can go to the bush and call those people and they would listen. But the fear is that a person who could discuss with them, would be afraid to be taken away by the government forces.*[438]

Optimism for successful dialogue and conflict resolution was expressed by some participants:

> *The only thing that needs to be done is for dialogue to take place and for the resolutions of the dialogue to be respected and implemented. This is because the Anglophones who are angry have experienced a high death rate. For those leaders in prison who started the struggle, the government should enquire to know the rationale behind the struggle. […] Once these issues are addressed in the dialogue, there will be a better and positive way in resolving the crisis.*[439]

However, other participants felt that the dialogue had not only to be inclusive of all people, but also inclusive of all possible political solutions, including federalism or an independent state in the Anglophone regions. The holding of a referendum as an outcome of dialogue was commonly mentioned, as for instance by this focus group participant:

> *Then [post-dialogue] they also have to ask the people of the Anglophone regions what they want in this union. [If] they decide that it is total separation, let it be like that; if they say it is a federation let it be so; if they say it is a unitary decentralised state, let it be so. But anything they want to do let it be people's will.*[440]

5.2.3. Bottom-up approach

In terms of facilitating dialogue and peace negotiations, participants were critical of the hitherto top-down approach adopted by government, and instead called for a bottom-up approach that facilitated local people's participation in decision-making: *'We should be bottom-up. Let the people suggest, decide what they want. Let the people be involved in making decisions that concern them'.*[441]

This translated into processes of consultation and dialogue from the grassroots upwards to the national level, as outlined by one interviewee:

> *Consultations need to be held at all levels and even in holding a national dialogue, it should have come from bottom to top, grassroots identifying their representatives. Why not begin at the villages that will go to subdivisions, subdivisions to divisions and divisions to regions, and from regions you hold a national dialogue. Everybody's voice or opinion would have been sought and […] the impact would have been felt more.*[442]

Such an approach was perceived as entailing government coming down to the local level and talking directly to those affected.

> *I will beg the government that we cannot solve a problem from the top, I think if we start from the bottom, because it all started at the bottom […] I will ask them to come down and tell us to talk with them […] For me the government should start from the bottom then we climb step by step to the top.*[443]

> *They [government] should try and come down to ground zero because they do not want to hear our cry. If they humble themselves and come down a bit to our level, because they are still very high and we are not fit to meet them. When they come to our side then they can try to ask what the problem is.*[444]

> *Policy makers should understand that a lasting solution cannot come from one end. Decisions or views to be considered should come from the people who are suffering. There should be a genuine dialogue. We still have miles to go despite the dialogue held in 2019.*[445]

This view that the government had remained aloof and neglected the perspectives of those directly affected was expressed at times in passionate pleas:

> *I want to use this medium to plead with the government that this crisis contains human life and there is nothing that brings back human life when it is taken. And the government should calm down its pride, let the government really come to the floor level. They should know that the government they are in charge of is made by people and these people facing these problems are breathing like them and they have a*

438. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
439. Interview YR018, Buea, 20 December 2020
440. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020 (Translation from Pidgin English)
441. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
442. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
443. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
444. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
445. Interview BM003, Buea, 25 November 2020

choice and an opinion and they [the government] need to listen to them. They should put everything down on the table, allow everyone to talk and allow everybody to take the choice and they should be able to accept.[446]

The pathway for peace as I said is, the rich people should bring themselves down and meet the poor because the poor are the ones suffering more than the rich. So the rich people should bring themselves right down and meet the poor so that we can sit down and talk as the poor people have so much to say as they are the ones facing it.[447]

5.2.4. Political solutions?

Discontent with the current state system has been at the forefront of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. It is perceived as unjust and discriminatory towards the minority Anglophone population within Cameroon, with many Anglophones feeling marginalised in a context where the Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage is assimilated, and human rights prescriptions are not given due attention. Although most Anglophones agree that the crisis largely results from an unsuitable state/political system, they differ in their opinions on a system to be adopted as a political solution that addresses root causes. Some support secession, while others advocate a federal system. Feedback gathered through interviews, FGDs and collage sessions mainly spoke to secession and federation.

Some Anglophone Cameroonians perceive secession as the ultimate objective to attain, even if they may not support violent means. A participant in the collage session in Dschang said, *'The only solution that we can see out of this is that it is only for us to have our own freedom and go back to our own land'.*[448] The degree of alienation and marginalisation is expressed in another quote, likening the Anglophone condition to one of slavery, and thus seeing going separate ways as the only option: *'We will never be slaves. If they don't want it, let them share [divide] the country and let us go our paths'.*[449] Such alienation is also expressed as rejection and a failure to treat the Anglophone population as equal, including within the Francophone regions, paving the way towards a secessionist solution. *'We can never be one […] because they have already rejected us. Even in our presence here they don't open us doors for jobs'.*[450]

A recurrent motive for secession is that Francophone Cameroon has failed to observe the conditions of the reunification of both Cameroons as adopted following the 1961 plebiscite. A participant at the FGD in Douala compared the reunification with that of a malfunctioning marriage: *'We are into the marriage that we agreed was monogamy. You the man, for some reasons you have broken it, you have gone into polygamy. So, the only solution is divorce'.*[451] The lack of trust has equally been a contributing factor to secessionist tendencies: *'Long and short, I am tired, I have seen the bad faith. If you ask me honestly, I will tell you that we go back to the start, they are two separate entities, let them remain separate'.*[452]

Some of those who favoured secession described the current crisis situation as a point of no return. Separation to them appeared as the only sustainable solution:

I think that the solution is separation. Because even if the situation is resolved now, in years to come, the anger, our children will read this history that you are trying to write, and the anger will reignite, and they will rise again to fight.[453]

Some research participants felt a referendum would be fundamental in deciding whether separation takes place or the reunification stands (the status quo). Those who push for secession argue that such referendum should only concern Anglophones: *'A third party should conduct it, and only the Northwest and Southwest regions should vote on certain conditions. It should not be the entire Republic to vote'.*[454]

The quest for greater autonomy in the two Anglophone regions has also led to demands for federation. When the late 2016 peaceful protests by lawyers and teachers' trade unions took a political dimension, federation appeared as the means to resolve the crisis. *'From the start of this thing, when I remember when the lawyers […] were marching, they did not stop asking for federation'.*[455] It was also noted that teachers had also requested a system of education that fits into a federal system.[456]

Some Anglophones see federation as an alternative in case secession is not obtained. Others prefer federation to other options. 'The second option is that they should return to a federal system in which each state has social,

446. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
447. Interview TG037, Limbe, 27 November 2020
448. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020
449. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020
450. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020
451. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
452. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
453. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
454. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
455. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
456. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

economic and political autonomy.'[457] Therefore, the demand here is for a return to a two-state federal system whereby the English-speaking regions would exercise autonomy in the manner that was originally agreed in the 1961 reunification. Since the dissolution of federation is identified as a major root cause of the Anglophone crisis, supporters of federation think the re-adoption of a federal system would be a solution: *'People only started complaining when federation was changed […] People could now see that things were fine under federal system; people were really animated by the whole political thing'.*[458]

However, supporters of federation can differ on the type of federal system to be adopted. While many think that the pre-1972 two-state federal system (West and East Cameroon) should be re-adopted, others opt for the current 10 regions in Cameroon to come under a federal system with equal autonomy in managing their internal affairs within the ambit of constitutional prescriptions:

> *All regions should be independent under a federal system.*[459]
>
> *The government should accept the creation of a 10-state federation.*[460]
>
> *A 10-state federation will be the solution with each state autonomously manag[ing] its own affairs.*[461]

The centralised system is identified as a major cause of the crisis. Therefore, a considerable number of Anglophones see federalism as most appropriate to promote socio-political and economic dynamism: *'I don't really care how it is called; you might call it a federation, you might call it confederation, but I think anything that is centralised may not be really the ideal solution'.*[462] As living together is difficult in the current centralised system, federation emerges as a solution to maintain territorial integrity in Cameroon.[463]

5.2.5. Language equality/bilingualism

Language marginalisation, as elaborated in section 3.1.4, was noted by participants as one of the underlying causes of the conflict. For many Anglophone Cameroonians, simply being identified as English-speaking means that they are inevitably marginalised politically, socially and economically by the dominant Francophone government and society. Thus, in resolving the conflict, language equality or bilingualism was similarly highlighted by the research participants as a key issue. As noted by one interviewee, *'If they say Cameroon is a bilingual country, then everything should be done in both English and French'.*[464]

Ultimately, and in line with the above policy, ensuring language equality or bilingualism is, for many Anglophones, an important approach to resolving the conflict. To do this, participants emphasised the need for changes and reforms at the institutional level. Participants noted that not only should policy documents be written in both languages, but equally, policymakers and civil servants must be able to function in and speak both languages. The extract below expounds this:

> *And I think personally if English and French are the official languages, then those people who are working in the government ministries should be bilingual, should be the first people to portray bilingualism. Take, for example, those who are heading offices and those who are at work to serve both people, when installing anyone they must put in place people who understand English and French; a person who will be able to satisfy everybody.*[465]

As highlighted in the above quotation, by ensuring that state officials speak and function in both languages, both Francophones and Anglophones will be served and treated equally resulting in equal satisfaction. This will potentially reduce English speakers being ignored, disregarded or discriminated against with statements such as '"*Je ne comprends pas,' or 'Qu-est ce que tu dis?*"[466] whenever they travel long distances to Yaoundé to seek assistance at the government ministries. Additionally, such an approach will contribute to addressing the Anglophone marginalisation in accessing official documents, as well as ensuring equal adjudication and general support from the government.

Here, participants acknowledged that the establishment in January 2017 of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism by the government is a commendable starting point towards enabling language equality, with the potential to reduce language marginalisation. As expressed optimistically by

457. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
458. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
459. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020
460. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020
461. Interview VK002, Buea, 20 November 2020
462. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
463. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
464. Interview ET 006, Buea, 16 December 2020
465. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
466. Interview TG 037, Limbe, 27 November 2020

one interviewee, *'I think the government has formed the Commission for Bilingualism, which is trying its best. Hopefully, in the near future, everything will be ok'.*[467] However, others were less sanguine, with an awareness that the Commission only has a consultative role in which the President of the Republic could seek its opinion on matters of bilingualism and multiculturalism. The Commission seems to be copied from the Canadian Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, established in 1963. Yet, since the Cameroon Commission's establishment, it has not yet had any significant impact apart from paying visits to some public institutions and advising Cameroonians to use both languages. The Commission lacks the power to make decisions and enforce them or to motivate Cameroonians to adopt positive attitudes towards official language policy. Notwithstanding these limitations, some Anglophone Cameroonians believe that this instrument could still play a role in the search for peace and harmonious coexistence of the two official language cultures in Cameroon. For example, it was recommended by a focus group participant that public authorities *'from the civilian world [civil servants] should watch their speech'.*[468] This recommendation was a response to the view that some public authorities tend to minimise the problems faced by Anglophone citizens, especially in public spaces. Positively, this had led the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism to launch a campaign against the hate speech that has characterised the public linguistic space since the beginning of the Anglophone conflict.

Participants indicated that such institutional reforms should not only be demonstrated at the national level, but must cascade to Anglophone communities, changing attitudes of state officials (Francophones especially) towards the people. One interviewee expressed it thus:

> *I think that the solution should be, for the documents, the sign boards and all those types of things that are easy to be done [to be in French and English]. But they are in government offices. In the villages, that is where the impact is, and those who are making controls [government officials], they should make sure that if you are treating [a document], if you are looking at somebody's identity, once you see Northwest you already change your mind [negatively] to begin to look for other things. They should look for a way to sanction those types of people so that when you see somebody who is an English-speaking person you know that it is your brother. Because in most cases these guys do not believe that we are same level in terms of Cameroonians. So, they should make sure that those who are in control should change that mentality of treating an Anglophone different from Francophones [and all such behaviour] should stop.*[469]

Moreover, such attitudinal change is essential in creating a society where both languages are equally recognised and respected. As emphasised by one interviewee:

> *It [language] has contributed because as inhabitants from each tribe, we cannot expect others who are not in the same tribe or area to speak in the same mother tongue. So, the least to do is to speak in the two colonial languages of English and French. As such the two languages should be respected and given equal positions.*[470]

Respecting and giving equal positions to both languages, according to another interviewee, should be premised on the knowledge that language is both a *'vehicle'* and *'communication thing [tool]'* through which *'[…] you see the world, it's a communication of how you see yourself; so, if you say you have to separate that language from how this person sees himself or ought to see himself, then it becomes a problem'.*[471]

Hence, instead of imposing one language over the other, there should be an understanding that:

> *There are two different philosophies and so these philosophies they should not be allowed to disintegrate [destroy] the whole idea of what Cameroon should be. Everybody should be able to come to this 'Cameroonian-ness' with themselves and that one should be celebrated, not feared.*[472]

In other words, 'Cameroonian-ness' should not be defined by one dominant language, but a celebration of the uniqueness of both languages, heritage and identity. Essentially, maximising the commonalities rather than the differences shared through the different languages is an important foundation for finding unity and resolving the conflict. As noted by a further interviewee, *'It really cannot be possible that Francophones are only in their territory and Anglophones only in their territory. This is because they have to be together'.*[473]

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467. Interview TG037, Limbe, 27 November 2020
468. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020.
469. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
470. Interview YR 018, Buea, 20 December 2020
471. Interview AS 027, Yaoundé, 08 December 2020
472. Interview AS 027, Yaoundé, 08 December 2020
473. Interview NJ 034, Limbe, 26 November 2020

Three proposals emerged from the discussions with research participants for the effective management of official bilingualism and language equality policy. First, some participants felt that decisions must be made about the form of the State in order to better protect the two official languages and ensure equality. This is noted by one interviewee as follows:

> *And how do you make a constitution in a deeply divided society? I mean there are different models [of the state] one of which is a centralised model which will not work here because a centralised model can only work in a place where the languages have been unified, honestly. If you look at France today, it looks like a country where language has been unified, so it can practise centralisation. I know that Belgium can't be an example of centralisation. Belgium has three languages spoken in different areas of the country. Canada has two languages spoken in two parts of the country. Cameroon should review the kind of state they have so as to give room to the two languages and say exactly where the people can use them freely.*[474]

The above interviewee opines that language equality cannot be achieved without a review of the nature of the state. His case is further illustrated with examples of countries like France, Belgium and Canada, where language equality was arrived at through consensus. After the reunification of Cameroon in 1961, there was a consensus on bilingualism and language issues. There was a two-state federal structure in which each state conserved its official language. This meant that the official language of West Cameroon was English and that of East Cameroon was French. Only federal government offices were obliged to function in the two official languages. The ordinary citizens had very little to do with the federal government, since matters affecting them were treated at state level, where the official language understood by the people was used. However, to return to such a situation will necessitate a review of the political form of the state so as to revert to federalism as practised in 1961, something that the current government has rejected; indeed, it has imprisoned some English-speaking Cameroonians for advocating such a return to a two-state federation.[475]

A second proposal from participants indicates the need to enforce the equal use of both English and French on a par. One focus group participant noted that, *'The two languages are known as the official languages, but French language is being enforced more than English language, but they can enforce both languages in the same way'.*[476] Another participant added that, *'Things have to be done in the two languages, not only one language'.*[477] For this to happen, the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism could be given the powers to watch over official language policy, official language equality and effective official language bilingualism in the public domain. It should have powers like those conferred on the Canadian Official Languages Commissioner through the Official Languages Act proposed by the Canadian Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1969.[478] Such powers enable the Commissioner to act as an ombudsman on issues of official languages and bilingualism, listen to official language complaints, mete out sanctions, and oversee the enforcement of language-related decisions.

The third significant proposal, as made by research participants, to achieve official language equality and effective official language bilingualism is through education and sensitisation. However, two conflicting approaches to achieving official language bilingualism through education and sensitisation emerged from the discourses with study participants. The first was to encourage English speakers to be more receptive to the learning of French and vice versa. This is captured in the following excerpt:

> *What can be done is for the English speakers to become open to other cultures and learn French. We realise many Francophones enrol in the English system of education to learn English. Anglophones should not restrict themselves [in] studying French since we are bilingual country.*[479]

The second approach insisted on maintaining separate educational systems to preserve each language culture. The view was projected as follows:

> *To me, they should fix the educational system of the Anglophones, fix that of Francophones so that the Anglophones should be doing their own system of things, Francophones doing their own system of things, so that we should not mix as confusion is always coming out. We must develop in uniformity; we can also achieve unity in diversity.*[480]

At this level, conflicting views emerged. Some participants in the study thought that there is the need for Anglophones to embrace the Francophone culture and language and

474. Interview JM030, Jakiri, 19 November 2020
475. Political activists like Mancho Bibixy Che, Tsi Conrad and Penn Terence are serving prison sentences for advocating for a return to a two-state federation. Dr Fontem Neba Aforteka and Barrister Balla Nkongho served short detention periods before being pardoned because they advocated for a return to a pre-1972 system of government (Federation).
476. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
477. Interview NA 008, Buea, 10 December 2020
478. For more information see https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca
479. Interview MM005, Buea, 16 December 2020
480. Interview SE025, Mbiame, Bui, 20 November 2020

vice versa, while the other view was a matter of separate development of each of the language cultures. These conflicting views show the divided nature of participants on how to handle sensitisation through education. However, the government of Cameroon tries to make its citizens embrace the other linguistic culture and bilingualism through what is popularly known in the country as bilingual schools. Here, two types of bilingual school programmes exist; one in which mainstream English and French school programmes run on one campus under a school principal and a second type where a few students are selected and given a special programme wherein lessons are taught, interchangeably, in both English and French. This second option was practised between 1962 and 1975 and abandoned without any explanation, then reintroduced in 2012. This experience is producing bilingual Cameroonians with an almost equal level of performance in both official languages. However, these schools remain elitist and very few Cameroonians are trained in them.[481] In addition to these efforts, the government has started a public bilingual programme to train civil servants to improve on their official language skills.[482] But, these efforts from the State have not yielded the expected fruits. Therefore, participants also suggested other reforms, as stated above.

5.3. Local voices for peace

Here, particular local voices for peace are highlighted, notably those from women's and youth organisations, as well as the efforts of CSOs more generally.

5.3.1. Women and youth as peacebuilders

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 underscores the need to include women in peace efforts, while UN Security Council Resolution 2250 emphasises the importance of youth participation in these efforts. In Cameroon, especially in the English-speaking regions, women and youth have taken many initiatives in attempts to end the violence and establish a pathway to peace. They have engaged in advocacy, contributed to humanitarian relief efforts, and protested against human rights atrocities being committed in the Anglophone regions. Women, in particular, have organised lamentation campaigns and other public events, including conferences, to draw attention to the adverse effects of the war. Through the perspectives of our research participants, we look at these efforts of women and youth as peacebuilders in turn, inclusive of the challenges faced.

Women have organised protests to call for an end to the fighting between the government and separatists and to encourage negotiations between them. One collage participant, for example, noted, *'You find women marching in the streets with messages, asking the government to stop this crisis, asking for the secessionists to stop the crisis, to look for a lasting solution to stop the crisis'*.[483]

Another focus group participant similarly stated:

> *There was a time in the Northwest when women went out to the street for a peaceful march saying they are tired of this fight because their husbands, children, brothers are being killed on a daily basis. They also did same in Southwest.*[484]

Women have also organised lamentation campaigns to draw attention to the horrors of the war. These are passionate expressions of grief or sorrow over the ills of lived violence by women who sit, carry messages of peace and peace plants, roll on the ground and mourn as an appeal to the key actors of violence to cease fighting and engage in peaceful negotiation. Describing the campaigns in the Anglophone regions, Wakuna and Kitio (2020, 40) state that 'during these lamentations, women wore black clothes, carried plants that are symbols of peace and messages of peace and dialogue while wailing on the streets.' According to Budji (2019, 455), 'the women's agentive performativity of nonviolent protest/resistance mostly through the use of sound was one way of intervening in the current Anglophone crisis to open up an avenue for more peaceful dialogue.' Similarly, Wakuna and Kitio (2020, 40) argue that women 'have organised two sit-down lamentation campaigns' for women in the Southwest region calling for a meaningful and inclusive dialogue. Participants corroborated these views of the objective of the lamentation campaigns. Given that this conflict has been nationally and internationally neglected (Krippahl, 2020; NRC 2019), women have, according to participants, been courageous in helping to break the silence. As stated in one women's focus group:

> *At least, the women have helped. We have seen on social media women carrying out demonstrations and brandishing messages of peace on placards and marching with these messages. Regardless of*

481. These special bilingual schools were an initiative of President Amadou Ahidjo, Cameroon's first president in 1962. The first of such schools was opened in Man O War Bay and another in Yaoundé. However, the initiative failed at the time and was only re-introduced in 2012 by the Cameroon Ministry of Secondary Education as an experiment.
482. The popular bilingual training programme is coordinated by the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon with a pilot training centre in Yaoundé and linguistic centres in the headquarters of the different regions. It no longer trains only civil servants but any interested Cameroonian.
483. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
484. FGD Women, Douala, 24 November 2020

the situation, they have broken the silence and have come out to the streets to march and call for peace. In some places, there have been lamentations by women where the women sit on the ground and cry out for an end to the conflict. In a recent event, they the women were singing, saying they have cried out for long. They were calling for a return to peace. If you look at these campaigns, they are mainly carried out by women.[485]

Figure 9: Women from Southwest and Northwest during a lamentation campaign (Source: Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force)

Yet, despite these efforts, a participant in a separate women's focus group expressed the frustration of women whose call is yet to be heeded by the belligerents. According to her – who also gave reasons for expecting that the campaigns could influence the warring parties – it is surprising for the voices of women to be ignored in this way:

Women have cried, women have marched there in Yaoundé, women have done the very [same] thing here, women have cried, they have cried. We say NO! NO! NO! to this. And what is their response? Because if a mother cries to you, whether you are what, just start that love, that pity to your mother, that small voice (the voice can be big but spiritually it is a small, tiny voice speaking to you), my son knows what you are doing. But the government is not ready to hear from women, and I believe that only the women, if they listen to our cry like the mothers of the nation, but they don't want to.[486]

Women have also organised major national events bringing together both national and international stakeholders to promote interest in a peaceful resolution of the conflict. A good example has been the Women's National Peace Convention, which took place in Yaoundé from 29 to 31 July 2021 (ICAN, 2021). Women have also been at the forefront of peace advocacy on this conflict. They have used different media to advocate for peace, including television, print media and social media. They have taken action to influence opinion at different levels. As one interviewee noted:

So, the women have in their advocacy action, in their campaigns over radio, rallies and the rest, have helped both at the international level, national level and the community level. You see women doing sensitisation in churches, pasting posters and so on, it has helped. It is gradually changing people's ideologies – both the state and the NSAGs.[487]

Women have strategised and organised themselves and created networks and groups to further the aims of their advocacy. One interviewee, for example, said, 'Most women have formed groups trying to persuade the government to bring peace.'[488] An activist from the Cameroon Women Peace Movement (CAWOPEM) similarly explained how women have mobilised to advocate for peace. She specifically focused on the establishment, in May 2018, of the Southwest / Northwest Women's Task Force (SNWOT) by 150 leaders of women's organisations and individual female activists:

It all began when the insurgency began. We were trying to mobilise women to tell the world or to tell Cameroonians that war is not a good thing, terrorism is not a good thing. After that the Anglophone crisis emerged in the Northwest and Southwest regions and from there we started by coming together as women from the two regions under SNWOT (the Southwest/Northwest Women's Task Force), where we thought we could maximise the voice of the woman, we could increase the voice of the woman to say no to armed conflict – doing all of this under the canopy of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. From there, we saw that restricting women's voices only to the Northwest and Southwest was not carrying, so we decided to come up with the Cameroon Women's Peace Movement, which is a constellation of CSOs from the ten regions of Cameroon. We thought that if women could come together as one person and talk with one voice, […] our voices will be magnified and be heard better.[489]

SNWOT is particularly associated with the lamentation campaigns that it organised in Buea and Bamenda, entreating warring parties to cease fire and undertake dialogue (Kiven et al., 2021). On 24 October 2020, the group re-emphasised their call for ceasefire in a communique to the warring factions after the killing of seven school children in Kumba (Journal du Cameroon,

485. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
486. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
487. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
488. Interview MM005, Buea, 16 December 2020
489. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020

2020). More recently, 38 women-led CSOs in Cameroon mobilised over 1,000 women for an historic three-day peace conference/convention from 29 to 31 July 2021 in Yaoundé. The aim was to consolidate the solidarity among women in Cameroon towards finding a solution to the conflict, to empower women's voices, and to call for the inclusion of women in the peace processes and an end to the prevailing violence in the Anglophone regions (Ikome, 2021).

It is also important to highlight the difficulties faced by women in raising their voices for peace. Participants said women who protested or organised with the aim of promoting peace faced many challenges, at times risking their lives. As noted by one male focus group participant:

> *I think that women have tried their best. For example, they gather to march, considering that this is banned by government, but women have come up with this idea, we are afraid to be killed if we march and most of them have been shot.*[490]

While the above statement may be exaggerated, the very real fear of female activists in engaging at the local level was captured by one interviewee, a nurse by profession and a leader of women's community groups:

> *Women have been going out there on peace walks and other things, caregivers in the community, trying to help each other, sensitise, etc. But there is limitation in that, especially in some of my groups, we are limited because we are scared to go out into the community, we do not know who we are going to meet there. We are just women, you know, the strength of men will always overpower. It is not really moving as it used to because we are scared of the unknown, we are scared to penetrate our communities these days.*[491]

In situations where women were consulted or listened to, some participants felt that this was rather nominal and tokenistic, with the intention by state authorities to demonstrate that women's views were being considered or that they were effectively participating in official peace strategy, while disregarding such views. One civil society representative, a youth and church leader, described how, in spite of being consulted for the Major National Dialogue, the views of women were still ignored, and that women had to engage more in political matters in what is a political crisis:

> *You can see that they [women] really have some active role, but then […] my own curiosity is where these things end up. It's one thing to protest and organise vocal events and another thing to have this transition from that animated movement to a politically impacting one. That is where the crux of the matter is. We wanted to see, for example, that as this movement is building up, protests, yeah, frontline women who are battling, we want to see how these women channel this energy from that protest movement into politics. Because, first of all, the crisis in the Northwest and Southwest is a political matter, unlike what is going on in the extreme north, [there] it's a security crisis, but this one is a political crisis. So, women have to be really strategic, you have to orientate your actions towards a more political aspect of the crisis because that is where the solution lies […] And that is where I think we are not really seeing a lot of presence of women. What we wish to see is that there are women on the table making proposals whenever there is a particular issue. They have their voices heard and make concrete proposals that would be considered and not just placed there for manipulative purposes.*[492]

It is reported that women have been peacemakers in several ways. One of these has been through street marches with the peace plant. Others have been discreet as they have spoken to people that matter, hoping that this will yield fruits. Still others, through ecumenism, have continued to pray for an end to this conflict.[493]

Another revelation is that some women have been peacemakers talking peace and cease-fire to both government and Amba forces.[494] One interviewee stated that many women are involved in church groups: *'We have been praying all along in the church groups for the crisis to come to an end'*.[495] Many women have formed groups, organised lamentation campaigns, and tried to persuade the government to bring peace. For example, in Bamenda, after the killings in Kumba, *'women went out in their numbers. They cried with peace plants, marched up to Up Station to meet the governor. They pleaded with the governor that anything should be done for peace to be return'*.[496]

Although the efforts made by women, like those of other stakeholders, have not produced an end to violence, they have been particularly relevant in raising national and international attention to the devastation caused by the conflict, especially given the unusually low interest shown by mainstream media and the international community.

Like women, young people are highly unlikely to be the initiators of war. It is in this light that the American Republican statesman, Herbert Hoover, in a speech at the Republican National Convention, Chicago, 27 June 1944 stated that 'older men declare war. But it is youth who must fight and die' (Ratcliffe, 2016). In spite of the recognition of the importance of ensuring the active participation of youths

490. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
491. Interview MC036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
492. Interview AS027, Yaoundé, 8 December 2020
493. Interview BL 020, Buea, 28 November 2020
494. Interview PK 021, Buea, 28 November 2020
495. Interview NM 011, Buea, 15 December 2020
496. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020

in peace processes, they are often marginalised in peace efforts. In Cameroon, young people have made efforts to encourage a peaceful settlement of the conflict, although perhaps less publicly so than women. Young people have actually constituted the majority of the personnel on the frontline, implementing humanitarian and peace-seeking activities of both national and international organisations in the Anglophone regions.[497] As one interviewee noted:

> *The youths that are into humanitarian activities are doing their best to make sure that peace should return or to make sure that the affected families are reached out to and supported […] They have carried out campaigns also to see how they can get their peers who are in armed groups to come out. They have registered some successes, but then you cannot pin it only on the youths because it is a joint action, a whole system put in place.*[498]

However, similar to the experiences of women's organisations, the intent of politicians to intimidate, stop or manipulate young people's activities to serve their own positions on the conflict was identified as a major challenge to youth-led efforts. The support of some youth for violence by either party has also undermined the peace efforts of others. One interviewee captured the efforts and difficulties faced by youth as follows:

> *You have youths who are advocating for peace, you have youths who are there clamouring that the fight should continue, youths who are there saying that 'we must crack down the armed groups'.*[499]

Youth and women, in particular, have made considerable efforts toward conflict resolution. The contribution of youth is not so visible because they often act from within organisations that are not necessarily youth led. For example, many young women have participated actively in the initiatives sometimes associated solely with women. The efforts of young people and women have thus far not put an end to the conflict but are far from being negligible and their effective participation in any future peace is essential.

5.3.2. CSOs and NGOs

Civil society plays a critical role in conflict-affected societies, especially in Africa. Civil society in the form of CSOs, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith- and community-based groups have been instrumental in enabling development and sustainable peace at national and grassroots levels. These groups help in meeting the needs of people and communities that are often unreached and ignored by the state and international organisations. In Cameroon, as the Anglophone conflict unravelled, the vital roles and contributions of these groups became even more critical. In many of the affected communities and the local population who participated in this study, their only recourse to any form of support during the conflict has been through CSOs and NGOs. During an interview in Buea, one research participant noted:

> *I face a number of challenges, and these include hunger and material support. There are also water and financial crises because life is very difficult. Only NGOs have given us some form of support or the other.'* [500]

The above extract demonstrates the important contributions of CSOs and NGOs to the local population in Cameroon. During the study, the contributions of CSOs and NGOs were found to include humanitarian assistance/relief, trauma healing, peace education, peace campaigns and advocacy, networks and platforms, and community mobilisation. It is imperative to note that there are some intersection and interlinkages between the contributions of CSOs and grassroots women and youth groups, which have been outlined in the previous section. Perhaps this is due to their collaboration and their common target beneficiaries. Moreover, CSO/NGO contributions are equally interconnected and complementary to each other. The diagram below highlights the interconnected contributions of CSOs and NGOs in Cameroon.

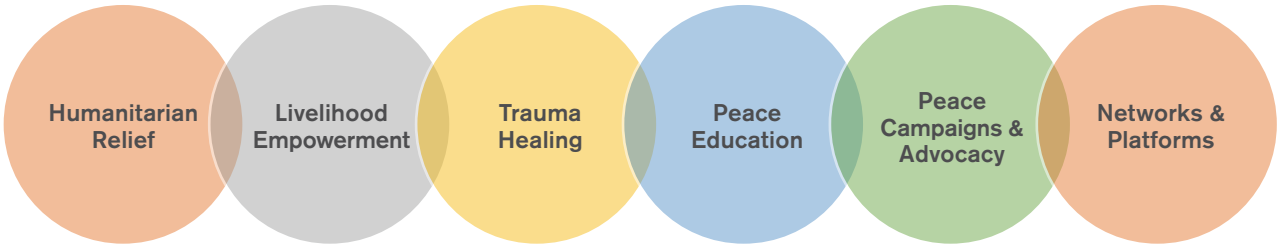

Figure 10: CSO/NGO contributions in Cameroon

497. Workshop, Civil Society Organisations, Douala, 7 July 2021
498. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
499. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
500. Interview ZS019, Buea, 28 November 2020

Given the violence accompanying the conflict and the untold suffering of the civilian population, one of the major contributions of CSOs and NGOs to addressing the Anglophone conflict has been towards humanitarian relief or assistance. Research participants attested that NGOs have been instrumental in supporting IDPs and other vulnerable groups to access food, shelter, medical and sanitary supplies, soap, mattresses, and registration of IDPs with lost identity cards and documentation, among others. As noted by one CSO representative during an interview in Limbe:

> *We are rendering services to humanity and our organisation looks at the wellbeing of people. Peace has a big role to play when it comes to wellbeing. When there is no peace, you cannot live a good life, but within the crisis we still make sure to see that people can still survive. People should at least have access to their livelihoods, subsidies and resources and that is why we have gone in to reaching out to the IDPs, and also some of the host community and affected community personnel because not everybody is displaced. We have people who are not displaced but are in worse situations than those who have been displaced, so we make sure we reach out to them with non-food items, food items and also sensitisation, especially with the compounding of the recent global crisis (COVID-19).*[501]

CSOs and NGOs such as Authentique Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF), Hope and Rehabilitation Organisation (HARO), the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Foundation - Cameroon (LUKMEF), CHRDA, and Caritas, among others, have been instrumental on this front. AMEF, for instance, is involved in 'providing services to vulnerable communities that need shelter, food items and other items they need to protect their dignity.'[502] Similarly, Caritas has been very active in the promotion of human dignity through support in terms of food and shelter during emergencies.[503] HARO has assisted at least 3,885 IDPs with education, registration and reintegration of returnees.

The humanitarian assistance of CSOs in Cameroon is not only limited to immediate material support, but extends further to empower affected populations financially through livelihood empowerment initiatives such as income-generating activities. As the HARO representative highlighted:

> *HARO equally has a project for IDP returnees and because of this HARO Bamenda has been established to take care of these IDPs that are coming back home, to put them into this our principal activity which is income-generating activity.*[504]

In addition to Bamenda, HARO has also been assisting IDPs and other local populations in Wum community in the Menchum district of the Northwest region/province, '*with income-generating activities, to train some of them for free and to also empower them financially'.*[505] In other words, livelihood empowerment has become an important part of CSO humanitarian interventions in Cameroon. Ultimately, for the majority of the local population, the humanitarian assistance provided by the CSOs and NGOs play *'a great role to put smiles on the faces of IDPs in my community'.*[506]

Linked to their humanitarian relief initiatives, CSOs also provide trauma healing for affected members of the population. HARO, for instance, highlighted that they help civilians with *'trauma healing by acting as a link to restore family ties with IDPs who have lost their loved ones. HARO has successfully restored almost 200 families who did not know the whereabouts of their loved ones'.*[507]

In other words, by reconnecting IDPs with their missing families, CSOs help ease the emotional and psychological burden of the people. Additionally, as part of their trauma healing efforts, CSOs have also been providing counselling for IDPs and other affected civilians.[508]

Furthermore, CSOs were also found to contribute towards addressing the Anglophone conflict through peace education. Peace education was found to be critical because research participants believed that attitudinal transformation is essential to ensuring peace in Cameroon. Thus, positive mindsets and behaviour are enabled through inner self-reflection, which are engineered through peace education. One CSO representative expounded:

> *We can continuously carry out education on peacebuilding because peace starts from the mindsets, so we are looking at people chang[ing] their mindsets. If you are not first of all having peace within you, you cannot express peace out there. We have to start with self, changing your mindsets so that peace should return.*[509]

Another area of CSO contributions in Cameroon is

501. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
502. CSO workshop, Douala, 7 July 2021
503. CSO workshop, Douala, 7 July 2021
504. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
505. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
506. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 December 2020
507. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
508. CSO workshop, Douala, 7 July 2021
509. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020

peace campaigns and advocacy. With the event of the socio-political crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions, CSOs, especially women-led organisations, have acknowledged and identified a wide range of peace messages and advocacy priorities to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of the crisis-stricken Anglophone regions. They are clear about the peace messaging sent out to policy makers and parties to the crisis to enable those concerned to address the issues as well as hold both parties accountable. Here, the Northwest/ Southwest Women's Taskforce (SNWOT) has been at the forefront, as discussed above. One interviewee, unconnected with SNWOT, highlighted their contribution:

> *I think we have the Northwest/ Southwest Taskforce that was created by some familiar women who have used it on many occasions to stage demonstrations calling for peace to reign, and also coming out with reports to also confront public officials to solve this crisis, to look for a sustainable solution/resolution of this crisis.*[510]

CSOs and NGOs further contribute towards finding solutions to the Anglophone conflict through the creation of networks and platforms. These networks bring together organisations at different levels, both horizontally and vertically. One CSO leader outlined such local, national and international links:

> *You cannot work in isolation. We work with community groups. Presently, my organisation is working with over 350 community health workers recruited for our health programmes and these community health workers are also reaching out to social groups. We work with these community-based organisations. We also partner with CSOs within the region and within the country in the implementation of some of our outreach activities. We are members of the Southwest CSO network, we are members of* Dynamique Citoyen*. We are members of UN platforms like the WATCH platform, the shelter platform, the health platform. And all of this is to reach out to the IDPs and affected communities of the Northwest and the Southwest.*[511]

Other networks and platforms include the SNWOT and the Cameroon Women's Peace Movement which is made up of CSOs from the 10 regions.[512] Through networks and platforms. CSOs are able to easily mobilise and empower each other and strengthen their solidarity and collectivism towards finding peaceful solutions to the conflict ,which consequently enable their voices to be magnified and better heard.[513]

It is also important to note that, alongside the formation of networks and platforms, CSOs collaborate or partner with international organisations on diverse initiatives. One interviewee, not a CSO representative, was aware that LUKMEF:

> *… have partnered with World Food Program and they are the implementing organisation on the ground. In Mile 4, they distribute a lot of food and there are also those who have testified that they received some monetary compensation from international organisations.*[514]

Another NGO noted that they partner with local and international organisations to help identify and register IDPs in the Northwest and Southwest regions. The Cameroonian NGOs serve as a link between affected communities and international organisations especially, giving them *'a platform to meet these IDPs and communicate to them easily'*.[515]

In addition to the afore-discussed, SGBV support and sensitisation was found to be a cross-cutting focus of the majority of CSOs and NGOs in Cameroon. Their efforts include the promotion of reproductive health and rights, human rights monitoring, as well as sensitisation on GBV, mentorship for girls, and referral pathways for affected civilians and communities.[516] One research participant noted:

> *These victims of gender-based violence are not necessarily IDPs, because we have cases in court which have been managed by HARO, who are not IDPs. We have a young girl who wants a divorce because of abuses and all that, our counsellors worked with her, and we saw the need, so it is in court. We have a young girl who was raped, we have two rape cases which are in court which has nothing to do with IDPs. It is fully that aspect of gender-based violence.* [517]

In sum, it is evident that local NGOs play a key role in straddling the community level and the international level, with one leg at each level. This can be termed a 'triple-

510. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
511. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
512. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
513. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
514. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
515. Interview DR032, Kumba, 19 November 2020
516. CSO Workshop, Douala, 7 July 2021
517. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020

level approach,' albeit with the emphasis on a bottom-up direction.[518] In order to make entry into communities, NGOs pass through key focal persons who assist them in having forums of discussions at community level. This eases community acceptance and enables NGOs to gain trust and thereby to ascertain the range of community views. Such understanding can then be transmitted to national and international actors, especially non-governmental ones, with the aim of bringing greater attention to the experiences of those citizens most affected by the conflict, as well as to their observations on its resolution.

5.4. Role of international organisations

The armed conflict in Cameroon is often regarded as being relatively overlooked by the international community, and one consequence is that international pressure on both warring parties to undertake peace negotiations has been limited. Yet, many research participants recognised a role for international actors, notably multilateral actors such as the UN and AU. This section first examines the responses of international organisations to the conflict, inclusive of foreign governments, and then highlights the views and perspectives of participants on their potential role in conflict resolution.

5.4.1. International responses

We focus here on the only significant effort at international mediation, the so-called 'Swiss initiative', and then explore the reasons for the lack of pressure on the Cameroonian government from other international actors.

Offers to mediate peace talks came in early 2019 from the Vatican in February 2019 and from the President of Switzerland, who travelled to Cameroon to meet President Biya in March 2019. These offers were not taken up by the Cameroonian government (ICG, 2019). Subsequently, it seems that the Vatican has not continued with attempts to mediate peace talks with the Cameroon government. The Swiss initiative remains on the table, however, though with little progress. The Swiss Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), an NGO with experience in mediating between governments and NSAGs globally, has been given responsibility by the Swiss government for taking forward the initiative.[519] Yet, despite attempts by HD to relaunch the stalled peace talks in November 2021 (African Intelligence 2021), it seems that neither warring party has responded positively. The Biya regime appears reluctant to begin negotiations or have private meetings with the separatist groups and, significantly, feels no international pressure to do so, with only low-level government officials in contact with the Swiss. While a number of Western governments have rhetorically expressed their support for the Swiss initiative, it seems that they have done nothing practically to assist the process or to put pressure on the Cameroon government.[520]

The African Union (AU) has shown limited interest in the conflict, seemingly reluctant to criticise one of its heads of state, especially such a long-standing one, due to its non-interference clause. In November 2019, the AU took part in a three-way mission to Cameroon, along with the Commonwealth and the International Organisation of La Francophonie, and simultaneously the AU Commission urged Biya to implement the recommendations from the Major National Dialogue (ICG, 2020). However, the AU's Peace and Security Council (PSC), tasked with maintaining peace and security on the continent, has declined to place the Anglophone conflict on its agenda. In the view of the International Crisis Group (2020), this is largely due to lobbying from Yaoundé. Further, since 2020, Cameroon's membership as one of the 15 PSC members has ensured that its internal conflict has not been discussed (ISS Africa, 2020).

UN interest has also been muted. The Anglophone conflict has received almost no attention from the UN Security Council, with permanent members such as France, China, and Russia seemingly keeping it off the agenda after lobbying by Cameroon's diplomats (ICG, 2019). The only discussion was during a Security Council Briefing in December 2018 on the UN Regional Office for Central Africa's (UNOCA) call for the release of detainees and immediate peace talks (Entsuah, 2019). UN humanitarian agencies have asked both sides to end the violence and guarantee humanitarian access, with UNHCR opening an appeal in March 2019 for $184 million for IDPs in Cameroon and Nigeria (UNHCR, 2019). In May 2019, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, visited Cameroon and called for dialogue as well as for more international support in resolving the conflict (Entsuah, 2019). However, such initiatives and calls have not led to any perceptible change in policy by the Cameroon government.

The European Union (EU), despite being Cameroon's biggest trading partner and contributor of development aid, has also declined to intervene. The European Parliament (EP) did pass a resolution in April 2019 calling on the Cameroon government to 'engage in dialogue to find peaceful and sustainable solutions to the Anglophone crisis'[521] (cited in International Crisis Group, 2019). Further, in November 2021, the EP passed a resolution on the human rights situation in Cameroon which urged both the Cameroon government and leaders of separatist

518. On the concept of straddling, we can say CSOs straddle the local and international communities, because they need the local communities for their mission/mandate to be accomplished and at the same time they need the international community.

519. For further information about the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, please see www.hdcentre.org

520. Private correspondence

521. European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2019 on Cameroon (2019/2691)

groups to cease fire and engage in peace talks, while urging the international community to facilitate dialogue through a mediation role.[522] But, to date, such resolutions have had little political weight.

The French government under President Macron has remained almost silent on the conflict, while most likely influencing EU foreign policy behind the scenes in the direction of non-intervention in what France regards as its sphere of influence. It is well known that France has maintained close ties with its former colonies in Africa, and indeed has significant economic and military interests in Cameroon, all mitigating against any critique of the President Biya's government. In late February 2020, a media report stated that President Macron described the killings of 22 civilians in the Ngurbuh massacre as 'intolerable', and that he would put pressure on President Biya to resolve the conflict (Kindzeka, 2020). However, no action of any consequence followed. To date, the UK government, as the former colonial power in the Southern Cameroons, has shown limited interest in the conflict. In February and October 2018, the UK Minister for Africa, Harriet Baldwin, released a statement calling for the de-escalation of violence and for dialogue, and in 2019 the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) announced £2.5 million for UN humanitarian appeals pertaining to the Anglophone conflict (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019). Overall, however, the UK government seems to prioritise its trading relations with Cameroon's government, notably off-shore oil and gas deals for UK-based companies such as New Age (Development Discourse, 2018; OE Digital 2020, 2021).

Of the major Western governments, the US government has been the most vocal in its criticism from an early date. On 28 November 2016, US Department of State issued a communique calling for dialogue and respect for human rights (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019). In May 2018, the US ambassador to Cameroon condemned killings by state forces in the Anglophone regions, and in December 2018, 10 US Senators called for sanctions against individuals accused of human rights violations in Cameroon (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019). Subsequently, in February 2019, the US withdrew its $17 million military aid to Cameroon (Lunn and Brooke-Holland, 2019). The most comprehensive and strongest statement about the conflict came from the US Senate in the form of Senate Resolution 684. This was passed on 1 January 2021 and called for:

> *…the Government of Cameroon and separatist armed groups from the English-speaking Northwest and Southwest regions to end all violence, respect the human rights of all Cameroonians, and pursue a genuinely inclusive dialogue toward resolving the ongoing civil conflict in Anglophone Cameroon.*[523]

The resolution also calls on the US government to consider targeted sanctions on Cameroonian government and separatist leaders responsible for gross violations of human rights, and to continue to limit security assistance and military training. Further, it urges the international community to press for inclusive and meaningful dialogue, using an independent mediator, and for the mobilisation of humanitarian and development assistance to affected communities. It calls on regional and international forums such as the AU, the Economic Community of Central African States and the UN Security Council to push for a cessation of violence and a programme of conflict resolution that addresses the root causes of current grievances. Despite the strong wording, to date there is little evidence that this US Senate Resolution has led to significant moves towards peace.

Overall, the international community can be criticised for its lack of concerted efforts in addressing the Anglophone conflict, with little multilateral or bilateral pressure on the Cameroon government to undertake a ceasefire and promote negotiations with the separatists. The only ongoing initiative is from the Swiss, but with no current perceptible progress. While Western governments declare their support for the Swiss initiative, it appears that they use it as a smokescreen for their indifference and inaction. One unfortunate outcome is that the peace advocacy from both national and international CSOs and human rights groups can be easily dismissed or simply ignored by the Biya government.

5.4.2. What role for international actors?

Despite these failings, many research participants called for international actors, notably the UN and AU, to play a more pro-active role in ending the violence and resolving the conflict. Foreign mediation appears to be the most preferred as per participants' feedback:

> *If there is no foreign intervention it will be difficult.*[524]

> *A third party can be the AU, the United Nations, any powerful country like America, Britain, France.*[525]

> *It is the UN that is the neutral referee and should say bring your own 'book' [case, argument, law] too, let's look at it.*[526]

522. European Parliament, Joint Motion for a Resolution on the human rights situation in Cameroon, 24 November 2021
523. For more information see (https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/sres684/text
524. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
525. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
526. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

Thus, the AU and UN are proposed as potential key actors to play the mediation role. They are recommended to visit the conflict zones and meet various authorities, including the NSAG leaders:

> *The AU can come down to the Northwest and Southwest and meet the authorities of the region because that is where we need them. If the AU can make it in such a way that they can come down to Bamenda and Buea, and find a way to meet the top [separatist] generals who dominate all the Amba Boys, they will come out with one thing […] Having done that, they will say this is what we came for, this is what the people want, the government will now say 'ok' […] I think a peaceful solution will be arrived at in such a way that the AU will be supervising transparently.*[527]

In this way, a bottom-up approach is also proposed:

> *The best way that they [the AU and the UN] can actually handle this situation is as we have said, they should go down to the people and bring them together. The AU and the UN which will be in charge should go down to the people as […] none of them showed up at the 2019 National Dialogue. If it were the UN that entered Bamenda or Buea and said, 'You people should come, let us see what we can do,' I believe that they would have brought an end to the crisis.*[528]

As with mediation, some participants called for the UN to make peace talks happen among the different stakeholders: *'The person that is competent to call this talk is the United Nations'*.[529] Others felt that individuals with a reputation for good leadership, such as former presidents, could facilitate negotiation between the parties:

> *Negotiation should be the way forward because dialogue has failed. For instance, one party can say they are for secession while the other might say they want centralisation. So, with negotiation, they might come with another thing, not necessarily what they wanted. They can invite a neutral person rather than UN. They can invite former presidents they knew were good leaders.*[530]

A particular role for the AU was perceived in identifying the separatist leaders in the diaspora and bringing them into the dialogue. Their participation was perceived as crucial because their sponsorship was so instrumental to the continuation of the conflict; also, the leaders on the ground were more reluctant to enter dialogue due to fears for their own personal security:

> *Let the AU try to find out the icons that are behind these acts because even the leaders at the level of the Northwest and the Southwest regions are afraid to come out to any dialogue because their own lives too are at stake […] Discover the icons, those who are behind the sponsorship of this struggle and then try to meet those people, ask them what they want in order for this struggle to stop.*[531]

It is clear that many directly-affected participants were despondent about the intransigence of the warring parties and their failure to enter into peace talks. Unsurprisingly, they were turning to the AU and the UN as significant international actors, despite the poor record of both organisations thus far in addressing and attempting to resolve the Anglophone conflict.

527. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
528. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
529. Collage session, Dschang, 28 November 2020
530. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020
531. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020

6. Challenges to Conflict Resolution

The study identified a range of challenges to successful conflict resolution. These can be categorised into different types of challenges: the ongoing cycle of violence against CSOs in general and women in particular; local-level organisational issues; elite-level challenges; and the obstacles posed by intransigent actors and actions. We look at these in turn.

6.1. Cycle of violence

Unremitting violence in the conflict zones is a significant obstacle to conflict resolution. Since October 2017, the violence experienced in the Anglophone regions has not diminished and it appears that a vicious cycle of violence has become self-perpetuating. It is also noteworthy that violence has taken different forms as the conflict situation has evolved, making the cycle of violence more difficult to break. Discussions above highlighted increased crime and insecurity (4.1.6), as the war situation has become a means of making money for both warring sides through crime and extortion against civilians, while armed criminals ('fake Ambas') pretend to adopt the separatist cause to disguise their activities of robbery, scamming and abductions. The horrific prevalence of rape and other forms of GBV as weapons of war has been documented above (4.1.2; 4.2.2), as well as the intensification of abuse and humiliation of women and girls in society as a whole in the context of war. CSOs have found themselves in an environment where their personal security is threatened, being regarded by the separatists as government spies while the government considers them as supporters of the Amba fighters, thereby making their activities difficult to undertake. In these ways, the various forms of violence experienced every day in the conflict zones have intensified and become self-sustaining, making it more difficult to bring an end to violence and realise conflict resolution. Research participants' views on the challenges posed by this cycle of relentless violence are outlined below, focusing on its impact on women and CSOs.

Women and women's organisations have been very prominent in campaigns for peace, while also suffering greatly as civilian victims in the conflict. At times, the two aspects are linked. For instance, it was noted that individual women were victimised precisely because they had spoken out: *'Some women have been victims of rape in the course of reaching out, some women have been victims of physical violence, and some women have been victims of threats from both the state and NSAGs'.*[532]

Women leaders, in particular, have been subjected to such intimidation and threats. One participant noted how calling out for peace at church had led to reprisals:

> *Women leaders in the communities, like some church group members, at times they are speaking and are scolded at, are shunned altogether, are tormented. Without calling names, I know of women who left church and next day they were in a camp being flogged for talking peace in some of these villages. […] A woman left the pulpit, preached that peace should return […] and before she got to her home, she was picked up and taken to a camp and was given 74 strokes on her buttocks. So those are the challenges, that woman's crime was that she was advocating for peace. Those are the challenges, without looking at women who have been kidnapped and killed for advocating for peace.*[533]

Meting out such physical violence is intended to deter individuals and organisations from peace campaigning. And of course, it is successful – people are intimidated and scared and therefore often desist from advocacy activities or simply speaking their minds. One female community leader noted how community groups were limited in what they could do or say:

> *We are limited because we are scared to go out into the community, we do not know who we are going to meet there. We are just women, you know, the strength of men will always overpower. It is not really moving as it used to because we are scared of the unknown, we are scared to penetrate our communities these days.*[534]

One interviewee noted that traditional 'Takumbeng' protests by older women in the Northwest region had not occurred, as could have been expected, presumably due to fear of violent consequences:

> *We used to have these land disputes […] when the female group called Takumbeng came out and confronted the men and our men had to go out to defend the village. But the Takumbeng, they have not been able to mobilise our old mothers. You know Takumbeng is from 65, 70 years upwards that you really qualify to be a Takumbeng, and we have not been able.*[535]

532. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
533. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
534. Interview MC036, Limbe, 27 November 2020
535. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020

Takumbeng mobilisations have a long history in the Northwest grass fields region of Cameroon, originally involving traditional practices where older women in rural communities exercised moral guardianship through shaming individuals who violated key community moral standards. These mobilisations took on an overtly political dimension in the pre- and post-independence period in the 1950s and 1960s, mostly oriented against agricultural policy, and then in the 1990s when the Takumbeng marched with the opposition SDF against the ruling party, and used nudity and the social status of older women to prevent troops and security forces from harassing protesters.[536] It is indicative of unprecedented levels of intimidation and violence that such a formidable female movement, one that has 'engendered the discourse of public protest and a revival of indigenous democratic values' (Fonchingong and Tanga, 2007), has not been able to mobilise.

The degree of violence inflicted upon rural civilians has also intensified as the conflict has progressed. While Anglophone communities felt relatively protected by separatist groups at the outset, the war setting has led to divisions and mistrust within communities and allegations of atrocities against the armed separatists, especially concerning punishments of those accused of spying or being 'blacklegs'. Experiences of severe abuses by both warring sides against ordinary civilians are common, serving to deter local populations from involvement in overt peace advocacy. In one focus group, the fate of a young market woman was discussed:

> *There was one girl who sell dresses in the village. So, one market day she went to sell as usual when the Amba Boys saw her with the military. They confronted and warned her not to be seen with the military anymore. We don't know what happened later that day, but we could not see the girl anymore till [to] date.*[537]

In another focus group, the fate of another young woman was told, allegedly captured by the military and not seen again, with no knowledge if she is alive or not. She was (arbitrarily and wrongly) accused of selling food to separatists in her village:

> *They [the military] caught one woman in my village and we do not know her whereabouts. She used to buy drinks and sell, and many had run out. Some of the Ambas used to come to that particular corner and [other] women cooked food. So, this woman went to the market and on coming back, just a stone throw from her house, she met with the military. One of the boys moving with them just pointed at her saying she is the one cooking food and from that day till today we have never known where she is.*[538]

Violence begets violence, and many young people have been drawn to the separatist groups after experiencing military abuses and violence. This was especially highlighted in discussions of women as combatants, including those who had suffered the violation of being raped by soldiers:

> *I may not give exactly the names but when the crisis, started some of the leaders were the women, yeah, especially those who were raped in Buea. Most of those girls really got angry and they joined the Amba Boys, and they spearheaded most of the stuff […] She has no choice but to revenge and for them revenge means joining the other party to fight back. So that was a challenge that pushed some of these girls into that group and a good number of them are there still as a result of this.*[539]

Another interviewee stated succinctly, *'As combatants, some of the young women have joined with the intention to avenge the killings of their loved ones'.*[540]

This spiral of violence commenced in 2016 with the violent repression by the state of the peaceful protests organised by the Anglophone Civil Society Consortium. CSOs have continued to be at the forefront of conflict resolution efforts, yet their activities are also directly affected and constrained by the violence. Some CSOs have continued to suffer directly from violent acts committed by both warring sides, while all organisations are aware of the constraints that they operate under and the threat to their very existence if they go beyond those limits. Human rights organisations in particular have been targeted by the state, given their role in documenting the violence. For instance, the offices of the Network of Human Rights Defenders in Central Africa (REDHAC),[541] based in Douala, have been broken into by unidentified armed men on several occasions, with documents and equipment confiscated on other occasions, and leaders and other staff subjected to intimidation (CIVICUS et al., 2017). Similar harassment has occurred to other CSOs in Cameroon (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In addition, NGO staff have been kidnapped by armed separatist groups, including when distributing humanitarian

536. For more information see Chantal Edie, 'Takembeng or female activism': https://chantaledie.medium.com/takembeng-or-female-activism-9eaa200aa474. Edie does indicate that Takembeng protests did take place in the Northwest region at an early stage of the conflict, stating that: "In 2017 the Takembeng women of the northwest province had to head a peaceful protest against military violence on its youth".

537. FGD Men, Limbe, 21 November 2020

538. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020

539. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020

540. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020

541. Reseau des Defenseurs des Droits Humains en Afrique Centrale

assistance, and held to ransom. While a number of organisations, for instance SNWOT, have been able to engage in peace advocacy, inclusive of street protests, it is notable that CSOs have generally steered clear of addressing the root causes of the conflict or discussing possible political solutions, such as a return to a federal system of government, conscious of the state repression that would likely befall them. Unsurprisingly, CSOs undertake a degree of self-censorship in their activities in order to ensure that violent reprisals are not provoked from the state or from armed separatists.

The cycle of violence is itself one that limits efforts to resolve the conflict, and breaking that cycle is a significant challenge.

6.2. Local-level organisational challenges

Since the conflict began, CSOs and grassroots groups have made diverse efforts towards the mitigation and resolution of the conflict. As indicated elsewhere in this report, they have provided humanitarian assistance, trauma healing, advocacy, peace campaigns and sensitisation/outreach programmes, and have initiated dialogue within communities. Despite their efforts, these groups equally experience numerous constraints which impede their contributions and level of impact. Major among these challenges is financial constraints. While such financial constraints are commonly faced by CSOs and grassroots organisations throughout Africa, in Anglophone Cameroon the constraint has been particularly felt as a result of the war. The lack of global attention to the conflict and its concomitant funding gaps has meant that external funding opportunities are limited, while needs have increased. As one focus group participant underscored:

> *Due to the crisis, and we do not have any funding […] we have to source money to feed the disabled we used to take care of, but now with the heavy population that has come in, it is not easy for us.*[542]

Implied from the above quotation, both the ability of local actors to mobilise internal funds and international funding has been difficult. The series of UN OCHA Situation Reports on Cameroon, for example, highlight that global funding, especially for humanitarian assistance, has been inadequate, in part due to the ongoing conflict (UN OCHA, 2021a-g). Linked to this are the prevailing strict donor funding requirements and the short delivery timelines, which make it more challenging for many CSOs to access such funding (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2016). This has implications for the operation and impact of these groups, as most CSOs and grassroots groups are limited in their ability to provide assistance to populations who are most affected by the conflict, and to have local and national influence on the resolution of the conflict. As stated by one interviewee, *'They [CSOs and other local groups] have financial constraints to reach out to some communities'.*[543] For instance, as noted by another interviewee, in Mbiame there are 64 functioning women groups, but they do not receive any support.[544]

With regards to humanitarian assistance in particular, the persisting financial constraints have made it challenging for CSOs and groups at the grassroots level to sustain their activities and intervention:

> *There is a lot of support in terms of foodstuff, mattresses, social wellbeing of the IDPs from both the government and NGOs, but I think they should do more because these people are desperate people, it should be a sustainable issue. This is because they do it, then say about six months before they come again. But people need to eat every day; the stomach needs food. If you give me a cup of rice, it may just take me for two days, but this needs to be a continual issue; the people need continual support. Before the conflict is resolved their wellbeing should be taken care of.*[545]

As a result, for a large number of the local population interacted with for this study, the presence and support of NGOs and grassroot organisations has been close to non-existent, despite the best efforts of those organisations. For instance, when asked if they have received support from any local organisations, one interviewee was quick to exclaim, *'There is none. There is none'.*[546]

Furthermore, findings from the study also highlighted that government interference in the activities of local NGOs and CSOs affect their operations and function. As noted in one focus group, *'There are some local NGOs that are struggling to do something, like the xxx Foundation, but [who] also complain that the government does not allow them to do what they have to do'.*[547]

Such interference can take different forms, such as by refusing to give them access to communities in need, spying on their activities or suspecting the local groups to be accomplices to the armed separatists.[548] Ultimately, this

542. FGD Women, Dschang, 27 November 2020
543. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
544. Interview SE025, Mbiame, Bui, 20 November 2020
545. Interview BJ038, Limbe, 27 November 2020
546. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
547. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
548. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020

leads to the 'double vulnerability' of CSOs, who not only have to deal with the mistrust, suspicion and intimidation from the state, but also with similar mistrust and intimidation from the NSAGs of their activities in grassroots communities, suspecting them of being used by the military. As a member of a women's peace movement expounded, *'Once you start coming together collectively, the military think you are an accomplice, the NSAGs think you are an accomplice to the military - black legs as they call people. It has not been easy mobilising women'.*[549] Another interviewee noted similarly the difficulties in organising for women due to the intimidation experienced from both warring parties: *'It's difficult for them [women] to exercise their rights. They are [too] afraid of the military and the separatists to exercise their rights'.*[550]

Another extenuating factor that has direct and indirect implications on the operations of grassroots groups is patriarchy. Like most African contexts, Cameroon is a patriarchal society, where men dominate in leadership and decision-making. One research participant, for example, expressed the view that:

> *This particular war is not a child's play and women are [the] weaker sex when it concerns this particular conflict because we are talking about armed conflict […] the women have played just little role in this issue because the war is intense.*[551]

As a result of such patriarchal notions of women as the weaker sex who cannot be engaged in the resolution of such intense conflict, women and youth groups at the grassroots level have often struggled to have a platform to share their views or have their voices heard. This was confirmed in an obverse way during a men's focus group in Dschang, with one man stating that, *'The women don't have a particular role to play, no one listens to them'.*[552] In a more critical manner, the women's focus group in Limbe highlighted the lack of attention to women's voices from those in authority:

> *We always say there is no smoke without fire. I will say, this thing is happening, those people up there, have they given us the go-ahead? Have they even looked at women to be anything? If they look at women as God who created us seated here, they could have listened to the voices of women.*[553]

From the foregoing discussions, it is evident that, while CSOs and grassroots groups are willing to engage and contribute to resolution of the conflict, prevailing factors within Cameroon, often exacerbated by the conflict itself, limits their ability to do so.

6.3. Elite-level challenges

Perhaps the most formidable challenge to conflict resolution perceived by participants was the lack of political will at the top level of the state for a negotiated peace agreement, and the government's determination to pursue a military solution and repress Anglophone protest. One focus group participant noted the historical precedent for such an approach, going back to the time of the first President Ahidjo (1960–82):

> *Because if we are looking from the stream of memory when Ahidjo invaded the Western region he used the armed force, and the people were all subdued before disarmament was implemented. So, until the Anglophones are fully subdued, before these people will withdraw the troops. So, if the people are not subdued, they will never [withdraw the troops]. So they are using that same strategy and it is still the same idea. So, if they change the authority, I think different ideas will come.*[554]

The implication of this speaker's final sentence is that it would take a change of government for greater willingness to emerge to seriously pursue peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Disinterest by government in resolving the problem was also perceived in the elite nature of the Major National Dialogue in 2019, characterised as a *'major national eating dialogue'* [555]; in other words an opportunity for elites to partake in the benefits and perks of their position. Simultaneously, it was regarded by the same interviewee as merely performance, an occasion for the national government to be seen to be doing something, but with no real intended outcomes:

> *It was a fanfare. It was not a genuine a dialogue. To me it was a monologue, it wasn't a dialogue. If there was a dialogue, we would have seen the fruits of dialogue rather than easily formulated slogans. The actions don't match all these slogans.*[556]

The disinterest of the government in pursuing a negotiated solution to the conflict was also reflected in a sense of government denial of a problem in the first place. While dialogue and a negotiated settlement would require recognition of Anglophone grievances, it was felt that the

549. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
550. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
551. Interview GR017, Buea, 16 December 2020
552. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
553. FGD Women, Limbe, 21 November 2020
554. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
555. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020
556. Interview AA001, Buea, 23 November 2020

government was keener to portray the armed insurgency as simply the activities of 'bandits', thus redefining the nature of the problem and justifying a military response as a solution. As one interviewee noted:

> *First of all, they have refused the problem. Somebody stood up and said, 'I am saying it now and I will say it tomorrow that there is no Anglophone problem.' So they have refused the problem so how are they handling it? It is now that some say it is a group of bandits that are making problems in the Anglophone region. First of all, there is a refusal to accept it, there is a refusal to dialogue. This is how the State and the government of Cameroon functions: when you pose a problem to them, they first of all refuse it's a problem, then they create their own kind of problem pertaining to what you have said, and then they see if they can solve it.*[557]

6.4. Intransigence of warring factions

The prospect of peace in the ongoing Anglophone conflict is further impeded by the intransigence of the warring parties. Over the course of the conflict, the two main warring factions – the Francophone-dominated government and the armed separatists – have remained resolute and uncompromising in their respective pursuits and demands. What is more, the study highlighted how both sets of actors exploit and use diverse intransigent acts to pursue their cause.

The government is adamant in its rejection of the separatists' demand for independence, and hence has taken a militarised approach. One research participant highlighted, *'The Anglophones, due to marginalisation, they wanted to separate and live independently. And the government said "NO!" that it will never be, that Cameroon is one and indivisible*'.[558] Another interviewee noted intransigence on both sides: *'They [separatists] are fighting to have their independence; they want to be on their own. But they are denied that because they [government] want us to be one'.*[559] The military tactics by the Biya administration was to many a sign of the incumbent's reluctance to find an amicable solution to the conflict. As noted by one interviewee, *'You see, whenever there is a report that the Ambas have operated somewhere, the government send more army, and this is increasing the war'.*[560]

Another reason for Biya's uncompromising stance to the secessionist demands is the natural resource benefits from the two Anglophone regions, as noted in the Introduction. The Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon are notable for their vast agricultural plantations of timber, coffee, cocoa, bananas and rubber, commodities which have made a massive contribution to the country's exports and GDP (ICG, 2017).

Like the government, the armed separatists have equally not showed any sign of relinquishing their claims for Anglophone independence. The financial and moral support from Cameroonian activists in the diaspora to the armed separatists contributes, to some extent, to limiting their interest in ending the conflict and by extension to the prospects for peace (Browne, 2019). The umbrella body for the separatists – the Interim Government (IG) – is said to receive between US$ 10,000 and US$ 100,000 monthly in donations from the diaspora to support its activities (ICG, 2019).

Further elements of intransigence highlighted by research participants pertained to the manipulation of young people, the 'blackleg' situation, and the intensification of farmer-herder conflicts, all perceived as stoking the conflict and impeding the prospects of peace. Regarding young people, one interviewee noted, *'Even the politicians are using the youths to pass on their agenda, the different ideologies of those fighting for independence are also using the youths'.* [561]

The 'blackleg' situation was similarly noted to be politicised, with both warring parties using civilians as informants and paying them for information, resulting in more violence, especially against those alleged blacklegs. As expounded in one focus group:

> *Politics still has a role to play in this conflict. When you speak of 'blacklegs', it is politicised […] When you belong to party A, which is the government, you always have to show that that man's child is in [Amba Boys] so the government would want to come and arrest him. And when the 'Boys' [Amba Boys] know that it is you who pointed out that man or boy, you are labelled a 'blackleg'. So, when we want to speak 'blackleg', we must put it in context because there is a lot of politics going on. Local politics and national politics are playing a big role in the blacklegs. Because we are selling ourselves because of one thousand francs [FCFA].*[562]

Another participant in the same focus group noted similarly how the military exploits civilians through fear and the promise of small money, with terrible murderous

557. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020
558. Interview WU026, Jakiri, 20 November 2020
559. Interview NJ034, Limbe, 26 November 2020
560. Interview NS035, Limbe, 26 November 2020
561. Interview AH033, 26 November 2020
562. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

consequences that escalate conflict and intensify violence: *'You are told that if you can report the 'Boys' you will be given one thousand francs [FCFA]. So, I take the one thousand francs, point you out, and you are killed'*.[563]

The government and armed separatists were also noted to be behind the rise of inter-tribal /farmer-herder conflicts that have intensified in the midst of the Anglophone conflict. A case in point is the tension between the Mbororos and Aghem people that re-emerged prominently in Wum in 2018. Both the military and the separatists were alleged to be manipulating the tensions to escalate the conflict and to push for their demands. During one focus group discussion, research participants noted:

> *It used to happen before the crisis, it's just that it has never been to this level because the videos came circulating where the Mbororos were talking with the military, videos came circulating where some of them were talking with the Ambas, so we don't know who is who, you don't know who is at the forefront but we have never experienced this rate of conflict.*[564]

According to research participants, the farmer-herder tensions have been politicised by the government, with the latter siding with the Mbororos because they pay Jangali taxes, which is a major source of income for the government in the region. What is more, there is a growing perception that the military is using the Mbororos to further attack Anglophone communities, as explained below:

> *So, this conflict that broke out in Wum between the Mbororos and Aghem people has caused a lot of havoc […] The Mbororo started attacking, burning houses. They burnt some people in their houses. So, people started suspecting that the military is using the Mbororo to attack them. So, the people retaliated and decided that they will no longer eat livestock such as cow meat sold by the Mbororo […]* [565]

Thus, the resurging farmer-herder conflict has added new dynamics and actors which further compounds the already complex and violent situation in the country.

Another factor that partly explains the lack of interest by the two warring factions in resolving the conflict is the economic benefits that can be gained by both sides. This is not unique to the Cameroonian case. Several studies expound what is popularly termed as the 'war economy', where conflict settings can be marketised and/or taken advantage of by warring factions to gain economic benefits (Aning and Atuobi, 2011; Goodhand, 2003), as seen, for instance, in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In Liberia, armed groups looted, exploited and 'managed to export an estimated 300–500 million USD worth of diamonds and gold, 53 million USD worth of timber, and 27 million USD worth of rubber' (Aning and Atuobi, 2011: 30). Such opportunities for economic benefits undermine the possibilities for peaceful resolution. Similarly, in Cameroon, research participants noted that the Anglophone conflict *'has become a business for both military and the "Boys"'*.[566] The same perception was expressed in another focus group discussion, that the conflict has become an *'economic war'* benefiting both the government and the armed separatists, with allegations of wider collaboration made:

> *Yes, for me, from the way I perceive the situation, it does seem like it will take a long time for it to be resolved. This is because this has become a business. The government and those 'Boys' are involved. What I am trying to explain is this: I am the type of person who has taken several risks and, therefore, I am not afraid to propose an explanation. While selling in the bar I did see military officers communicating with 'Amba'. Can you imagine that? Personally, what do you think about that? There are situations where police contingents have been sent to [location xx stated] and a police officer call saying that they are on their way to [location xx repeated]. From every indication he is calling those 'Boys', alerting them on the army's entry. So, I wonder […]* [567]

Similarly, in a collage-making session, one research participant noted how government forces used the conflict to extract money from civilians, and that this business aspect was perpetuating the conflict:

> *Like the police, they [the military] should stop seeing the conflict as a business, it is not a business […] They will continue to collect money from the Ambazonian people so that the crisis will not stop, they will continue to collect money, and make* calé calé *and pick people, everywhere and pick people to go and give money and go.*[568]

The armed separatists were also noted to be now using the conflict as a business or economic avenue to further their cause. One interviewee expounded how economic interests had come to the fore and taken over from the initial cause:

563. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020
564. Interview FN028, Yaoundé, 18 November 2020
565. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
566. FGD Women, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
567. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
568. Collage session, Douala, 25 November 2020

When it started, all of us, we knew it was genuine, people were only asking for better living conditions but because of the poor management, look at, it has transformed into victimisation, ambushing, kidnapping for ransom. And some communities now, where you still have those NSAGs, people tend now and pay taxes but to them, which is economic, it has become an economic war rather than a war of ideologies like it was supposed to be.[569]

In a focus group discussion, other research participants added:

These 'Boys' [Amba Boys] have transformed the situation into a business. They kidnap people and ask ransom of up to 2 million francs [FCFA]. The people they are supposed to arrest, they fail to arrest. They instead are arresting people who are struggling. They do not arrest Ministers from whom they can ask five to ten million. They arrest the common man and ask sums of 500,000 francs, one million francs. They've arrested so many people in the neighbourhood and asked money from them, which is not fair.[570]

However, some research participants were quick to highlight the emergence of what they call 'fake Ambas', who are the main offenders of such atrocities, and the use of the conflict for business gain. These 'fake Ambas' were noted to be the ones committing crimes and kidnapping people for ransom in the name of the 'real Ambas'.[571] One interviewee explained:

Forget about what we hear out there, there are a lot of fake Amba Boys that have come in, we have small groups, more than 10 of them or whatever. But real Amba Boys were showing to them, they were there to protect them, thieves could not just come around. In fact I remember before it even got to my village, my village was like Europe, you could not steal, you can put your things out there and go and they will be safe because if you dare and a neighbour cries, I don't know the mystical way in which those guys take to locate those people and they will get the thief and the thief will confess. The community was great before all this influx of the terrible kinds of Amba Boys that we have now.[572]

Another perceived related factor impeding peace was 'greed', particularly on the part of the warring factions. It was highlighted that, *'There is a lot of greed in the whole thing, and we need to come out from that aspect of greed […] without which, we will not give peace a chance'.*[573]

Ultimately, the foregoing intransigent acts and actors have, to a larger extent, contributed to derailing the prospect of peace in the Anglophone conflict. Thus, it is both disconcerting and worrying for Anglophone populations that *'four years today, getting to five, we are beating the records of the country with the longest internal struggle in Africa. It is difficult, painful, sorrowful and mean to see what is happening'.*[574]

569. Interview MY029, Chumba, 19 November 2020
570. FGD Men, Yaoundé, 30 November 2020
571. FGD Men, Douala, 24 November 2020
572. Interview PG031, Kumba, 19 November 2020
573. Interview AH033, Limbe, 26 November 2020
574. Interview KN015, Buea, 3 December 2020

7. Conclusion

The armed conflict in the Anglophone regions is now in its fifth year with no serious attempt at its resolution (at the time of writing). The Cameroon government appears intent on a military solution, while the armed separatists are acquiring increasingly sophisticated weaponry (Cameroon Magazine, 2021). Internationally, the Anglophone conflict is highly neglected, while the Cameroon government is content for it to remain hidden from view both within and outside the country. In this research, we have focused on giving a voice to those Anglophone Cameroonian civilians who have been most affected by the conflict. In addition, we have examined the historical background to the crisis (section 2), inclusive of the colonial legacies and post-independence developments, as well as the issues that sparked the current armed conflict (section 3). We posed the question: 'In what ways have "Anglophone" Cameroonians experienced the conflict, what are their perspectives on conflict resolution, and how can these influence dialogue and peace negotiation processes?' Our main findings are as follows.

7.1. Impact of conflict

The impact of the conflict on the civilian population in the Northwest and Southwest regions has been devastating. All research participants have been adversely affected, with experience of deaths, injuries, loss of livelihood, mass displacement and subjection to various forms of violence, including sexual violence. In short, the Anglophone civilian population has been brutalised by the war.

Participants provided personal accounts of extreme violence suffered by themselves or by close family, neighbours and friends. Such occurrences were common and included instances of arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, summary executions and rape. Disappearances of family members and local community members had occurred, abducted by both warring sides, with individuals presumed dead. Horrific violent crimes were recounted – for instance, the rape of a 13-year-old girl by soldiers in front of her father. While civilians are subjected to violence from both warring sides, reports from participants indicate that the military were the perpetrators of abuses in the majority of cases. Killings and death have become normalised, and the sight of corpses is not unusual in some areas. Property is also targeted, with many participants reporting the burning down of houses, health centres and schools by the military and separatists alike. Human rights violations are pervasive and flagrant, and committed with impunity.

While all people have been affected by violence, women and girls have been subjected to the particular violations of sexual violence and other forms of GBV. Incidents of rape, including mass rape, have become rampant, with perpetrators coming from both warring sides. As in other conflicts, rape has been used as a weapon of war, aimed at terrorising local communities into submission. Women and girls have been held in sexual captivity, with participants recounting how they are used by both warring parties as bait to entrap the other side, with release to their families often conditional on the successful execution of a 'mission'. We are reminded of the 2008 statement by a former UN force commander that 'it has become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in an armed conflict' (cited in Hodge, 2018). Many girls and young women have been forced into prostitution, or more aptly 'survival sex', in contexts of poverty caused by displacement and disruption of educational and livelihood opportunities, with increased incidence of teenage pregnancy and forced and early marriage. Women have also experienced problems in accessing medical facilities in pregnancy and childbirth, with deaths of women reported. Women have reported the difficulties in providing for their families in contexts of damaged livelihood situations. Women's burdens have also increased, where male members of the family have been killed or arrested and imprisoned, or have joined the separatist forces. In all, the conflict has affected women in a variety of devastating ways.

In addition to physical brutalisation, the civilian population has been mentally traumatised. Such trauma stems partly from physical violence that has been experienced or witnessed, and partly from the constant fear of violence that affects civilians in the conflict zones. Indeed, large swathes of the population live in continual fear of possible violence from either of the warring sides. Young men are fearful of being targeted by the military; women and girls of subjection to sexual violence; teachers, parents and children of the consequences of attending school; even drivers with a vehicle number plate from a Francophone region are fearful of extortion of money and kidnap. Such fear has been the primary cause of civilians fleeing from their homes, and those that remain in the conflict zones live in 'perpetual fear'.[575] Fear is also seen to lead to anger, bitterness and hatred, with long-lasting repercussions for mental wellbeing.

Mass displacement and all its attendant problems has been documented as a major consequence of the Anglophone conflict. The figures are stark. As of August

575. FGD Men, Dschang, 27 November 2020

2020, the conflict has displaced over 1.1 million people (OCHA, 2021b: 18) out of a total pre-war population of under 4 million people in the Northwest and Southwest regions. Despite some returnees, this overall figure continued to rise in 2020, almost 200,000 more compared to December 2019 (OCHA, 2021b: 18). While recent figures (OCHA, 2021g) do show a decline in total number of IDPs, displacement of new people continues as they flee from ongoing violence. Most IDPs are from the conflict zones in the rural areas and have fled to the major towns and cities in the two regions, or to neighbouring regions, with an additional 60,000 refugees in Nigeria. Other IDPs escape from military violence by fleeing from villages into the nearby bush, at times returning after localised conflict has subsided, but where they may also face harassment from the NSAGs that inhabit such areas. Our focus groups and collage sessions predominantly involved IDPs as participants, and they recounted various problems. IDPs are dispersed in private accommodation in various locations rather than gathered together in camps. Life was universally experienced as hard, with problems of access to shelter, food, employment and land. They generally felt abandoned. Despite the efforts of national and international humanitarian organisations, many IDPs stated that they had received no support or assistance whatsoever. Government assistance was criticised in two respects: its absence and, where present, its mismanagement. While most reported no government support, others complained of corruption and abuse in the distribution of assistance. A common complaint was of the misappropriation of goods, distributed to Francophone citizens who were at times re-selling them to Anglophone IDPs. Discrimination was experienced more generally amongst those IDPs in Francophone areas, involving high rent demands and refusal of job opportunities, as well as verbal abuse. Loss of documents was a key issue for many, limiting their mobility and access to services. Evidence indicated that many IDP children were not going to school, and often the higher school fees in the cities proved prohibitive. One consequence of displacement and dispersal was the break-up of family structures and community support mechanisms, including separation from children, which caused considerable emotional upset. Finally, while IDPs had managed to flee from the violence, concern was also raised for those left behind. These are often the most vulnerable – older people, those with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and pregnant women. Mass displacement has disrupted the social safety nets on which the most vulnerable depend, especially those who live in hard-to-reach areas deep in the conflict zones that are difficult to access by humanitarian workers.

The conflict has had a massive impact on the income and livelihoods of a large part of the population, including both IDPs and those civilians who remain in their homes. Economic production has declined dramatically, as have incomes. The majority of the population in both the Northwest and Southwest depend on agriculture, both on small-scale farming for food crops and on employment in commercial agriculture for export crop production. Participants informed us that many small-scale farmers in the conflict zones have been unable to access their farmland, and food crop production has slumped. In addition, while large-scale plantation agriculture and processing industries have all declined significantly, along with publicly-funded infrastructure projects (UNDP, 2021). Local markets have been unable to function due to lockdowns and 'ghost town' days, and supply chains to petty traders have been disrupted. The price of many basic items has also increased substantially as a result. The outcome is economic hardship, as many relatively poor people have seen their incomes slump and prices rise, with many participants stating that they are now unable to feed their families adequately. This was especially true for IDPs. These experiences confirmed UN estimates that food insecurity in the Northwest (40 per cent) and Southwest (30.7 per cent) regions is higher than any other region in Cameroon (UN OCHA, 2021b: 40), despite their previously being a large producer of both food crops and cash crops. The more protracted the conflict, the greater the impact on poverty rates as more households are pushed into chronic poverty (World Bank, 2021: 59).

The breakdown of social cohesion within communities is another significant consequence of the conflict. The levels of cooperation and solidarity among members of a community have been adversely affected by the environment of mistrust, suspicion and division that has arisen. Neighbours no longer trust each other, and the environment of insecurity has led to accusations that some are acting as 'informants' or 'blacklegs', in other words, giving information to one or other of the warring parties about the allegiances of others in the community, often inaccurately. Where this does happen, it may be driven by fear or a desire for self-protection, or for the settling of old scores. Nonetheless, it can have devastating consequences, including being killed, both for those who are informed upon and for alleged informants. Another characteristic of social breakdown is the decline in traditional cultural values. In particular, respect for the elderly is reported as less observed, with social power increasingly exerted by those with weapons, mainly young men. Similarly, a decline in the influence of traditional and religious authorities was highlighted, as indicated by such leaders being subjected to abductions for ransom.

Greater insecurity through rising crime is a related finding. While opportunistic crimes against civilians were committed by both soldiers and separatist fighters, for example the theft of smart phones or extortion of money, the situation of insecurity has been taken advantage of by other criminals. In particular, the phenomenon of 'fake Ambas' has arisen – a category of criminals who engage in armed robbery and extortion in the name of separatism, but in fact do it purely for their own benefit, with no ideological motive.

7.2. Conflict resolution strategies

Research participants also gave their views on the prospects for conflict resolution and the possible means to achieve this, summarised as follows.

There was consensus that government efforts with the Major National Dialogue (MND) of September/October 2019 had been insufficient and led to little or no change to the conflict situation. There was criticism of the non-inclusive nature of the dialogue, notably the failure to effectively engage the separatist groups, including those in the diaspora, and of the lack of effective implementation of the set of proposals that emerged from the MND, especially the 'special status' for the Northwest and Southwest.

There was almost universal agreement on the urgent need for conflict resolution, although less so on how that could be achieved and how a future peace agreement would address the root causes of the conflict. An immediate ceasefire and military withdrawal were regarded as an essential first step by many participants. An 'inclusive dialogue' was the most common call by participants as the initial means to bring together all stakeholders around the negotiation table. Such dialogue should include the warring parties, the diaspora elements that support the Ambazonian cause, and, importantly, representatives and members of affected communities. The crucial involvement of women was emphasised, given the key role that women and women's organisations have played in calling for an end to violence, and the unique contribution that women can make to peace-building processes.

Following on from the notion of inclusive dialogue, participants raised interesting perspectives on the inclusion of actors both below and above national-level actors. Importantly, they called for a bottom-up approach that entailed prioritising the grassroots voices of those 'people who are suffering'. Specifically, this translated into processes of consultation and dialogue from the bottom to the top, with representatives being selected from the village level upwards to the national level through the various governance structures at sub-divisional, divisional and regional levels. Participants felt that this would enable a genuine dialogue that included those most affected by the conflict, yet whose views have hitherto been ignored. Interestingly, local actors also saw a key role for international actors, perhaps due to the national government's reticence to engage in serious conflict resolution efforts. Appeals were made to the AU and/or the UN in particular to intervene and play a mediation role and facilitate negotiations between the warring sides. Additionally, bottom-up and top-down approaches were reconciled by emphasising the importance of the AU and UN visiting the conflict zones and ascertaining the situation on the ground for themselves through talking to both the armed groups and affected civilians.

As well as processes towards ending violence, participants also discussed the substance of possible conflict resolution. They focused on the real grievances and feelings of marginalisation that underpinned the conflict, and the need to address these for sustainable peace to be achieved. Although government is highly reluctant to discuss the form of the state, most Anglophone research participants were of the view that the crisis largely results from an unsuitable state/political system, one that has been changed over the years to consolidate Francophone dominance, and that reform is necessary. Among participants, there was support and advocacy by some for a federal system and by others for secession. Those in favour of secession expressed their feelings of alienation and marginalisation by likening the Anglophone condition to one of slavery, and thus saw going separate ways as the only option. They felt subordinate within a political entity that had failed to treat the Anglophone population as equal, and indeed had tried to nullify their identity through assimilation into the dominant Francophone culture. A recurrent stated reason for secession is that the Francophone-dominated government had unilaterally abolished the federal system agreed at reunification and independence in 1961. Other participants advocated a return to such a federal system as a means of addressing Anglophone marginalisation and resolving the current conflict. They felt that this could be sufficient to provide the social, economic and political autonomy that would protect Anglophone identity within Cameroon. Nonetheless, there was relative agreement between participants that a referendum within the Anglophone regions was a necessary first step in determining whether secession or federation was the preferred option of the Anglophone population, and potentially a peaceful means of resolving the current violence.

7.3. Voices for peace

Voices for peace were heard everywhere in our FGDs, interviews and collage-making sessions. These were the voices of individuals whose own lives and those of family members and neighbours have all been adversely affected by the conflict, and whose experiences and perspectives were being privately and anonymously shared with us as researchers. In terms of public and organised voices for peace, those of CSOs in general, and women's groups in particular, have stood out. Many NGOs active in the Anglophone regions have responded to the urgent needs of most-affected people and communities through the provision of humanitarian assistance, often reorienting their work to do so. NGOs have also prioritised work with victims and survivors of SGBV. CSOs have also been active in public advocacy for peace, despite the crackdown by the state on civil society activity at the start of the crisis in late 2016 and early 2017. Women's organisations have taken the lead, most notably in the formation of networks and coalitions

such as the SNWOT who have taken to the streets to publicly demonstrate and advocate for peace. The three-day women's peace conference/convention from 29 to 31 July 2021 in Yaoundé, organised by 38 women-led CSOs and attended by over 1,000 women, was another example of such advocacy. CSOs have performed what one interviewee referred to as the 'triple-level approach', whereby CSOs perform a straddling or bridging role between local communities and international actors, with one leg at the community level and the other at the international level. Discussions in local forums have enabled community views to be gathered by CSOs and then channelled to international organisations, mainly international NGOs. This role has enabled local voices to be heard nationally and internationally, inclusive of appeals for ending the violence and achieving peace with justice by addressing the root causes of the conflict.

7.4. Challenges

However, the prospects for dialogue aimed at resolving the Anglophone conflict were not encouraging at the time of writing. Current challenges and obstacles require significant shifts in approach and mindset if peace negotiations are to happen.

Breaking the cycle of violence is a major challenge. The various forms of violence have intensified as the conflict has persisted. These forms go beyond violence between the two warring sides and extend to an environment where violence is widespread and commonly experienced by the civilian population. This includes the horrific prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against women and girls. It also entails the development of a war economy in which war has become a profitable business for the warring parties through extortion and theft, as well as for armed criminals (so-called 'fake Ambas') who use the war situation to disguise their criminal activities. In such ways, a cycle of violence becomes self-propelling, increasingly normalised, and difficult to break. This is especially so in the context where the government appears determined to pursue a military strategy to quash Anglophone dissent.

This lack of political will at the highest level of the state to negotiate a peace settlement is a huge obstacle to any prospects for peace. While various research participants noted that the state's refusal to even acknowledge the so-called 'Anglophone problem' had persisted for many years, one participant traced this stance right back to the time of President Ahidjo (1960–82) when he used armed force to subdue (what was then) West Cameroon. The denial of Anglophone grievances and the pursuit of a military approach to what is termed a 'security crisis' all indicate the disinterest of the government in engaging in dialogue towards a negotiated solution to the conflict.

While the Swiss initiative remains on the table, it appears that the Biya regime is reluctant to begin negotiations with the separatist organisations, and no progress is reported.

This intransigence of the state and government also appears to extend to the armed separatist groups, including their diaspora supporters, who have equally not shown any public sign of compromise or willingness to negotiate a political settlement. While it may be incumbent on the government of Cameroon, as the internationally-recognised state entity, to initiate peace negotiations, there also needs to be some hint by the non-state armed actors of preparedness to enter into such discussions. A number of factors may account for the intransigence displayed by both warring sides, but there is increasing evidence of the creation of a 'war economy' that provides economic benefits to armed actors, state and non-state alike, including by corrupt and criminal means, and which poses a major obstacle to conflict resolution efforts.

The lack of pressure on the Biya government from the international community is a further limiting factor. The former colonial powers, Britain and France, show little appetite for applying pressure on Biya to enter talks for differing reasons, while other key nations such as the US and Germany appear reluctant to take the lead. Disappointingly, these major powers all seem content to rhetorically express support for the Swiss peace initiative, while practically doing little or nothing to put their weight behind the process. Governmental influences within the AU PSC, of which Cameroon is currently a member, and the UN Security Council, of which France is a permanent member, also seem to keep the Anglophone conflict off their agendas.

In contrast, local CSOs' multiple efforts towards resolution of the conflict have been highlighted here. Yet they have faced significant challenges and their influence remains limited. The lack of adequate financial resources is a common constraint on NGOs' ambition. However, challenges go much further. In particular, they have encountered considerable government interference, inclusive of restrictions on access to conflict-affected communities or insistence on military accompaniment in the field, thereby enabling state surveillance of CSO activity. Indeed, CSOs suffer from the 'double vulnerability' of mistrust, suspicion and intimidation from both the state and the non-state armed actors, impeding their efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and to advocate for peace.

7.5. Recommendations

The ongoing civil war in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon has had severe consequences for the civilian population. There is currently an impasse in the prospects for its resolution, despite the clear desire for an end to violence as expressed by research participants. The following recommendations are made in the spirit of contributing to peace through a just resolution of the conflict.

- It is vital to listen to the voices of affected civilians. Almost unanimously, they have called for a ceasefire by the warring sides and inclusive peace negotiations.
- Such negotiations should be mediated by an international third party, preferably the AU or UN.
- Negotiation and dialogue should include a bottom-up dimension through which representatives of affected communities can express their views and perspectives.
- Within a peace agreement, the Anglophone population should have the opportunity to vote for different political options by means of a referendum in the English-speaking regions.
- A Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be established in order to deal with war crimes and other human rights violations, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, committed during the conflict.
- Official bilingualism should be included within the Constitution, with the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism given powers to implement bilingualism in the public domain.
- Reconstruction efforts should prioritise infrastructural development and financial support for local people, including women, in order to re-establish livelihoods and economic independence.
- Trauma healing services should be made widely available, including for survivors of sexual violence; and institutions should be established for children who have lost their parents during the war.

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List of Interviewees

SNL	Codes/pseudonyms	Gender	Date	Position
1	AA 001	M	23 November 2020	Catholic Men's Association (CMA)
2	VK 002	F	20 November 2020	Virtuous Sisters Jangi Group
3	BM 003	F	25 November 2020	Youth Christian Group Presbyterian Church
4	ME 004	M	22 December 2020	Member of a Cocoa Farmer Group
5	MM 005	F	16 December 2020	Church Leader
6	ET 006	F	16 December 2020	Christian Women's Fellowship
7	MC 007	M	16 December 2020	Quarter Head
8	NA 008	F	10 December 2020	Farmer
9	NR 009	M	23 December 2020	Farmer
10	TP 010	M	14 December 2020	Businessman
11	NM 011	M	15 December 2020	Retired Nurse and Church Leader
12	CB 012	F	21 November 2020	Hairdresser
13	EE 013	F	21 November 2020	Farmer
14	SE 025	M	20 November 2020	Member of Parliament
15	WU 026	F	20 November 2020	Traditional ruler
16	AS 027	M	08 December 2020	Youth and Church Leader
17	FN 028	M	18 November 2020	NGO Director working with IDPs
18	MY 029	F	19 November 2020	Member of Cameroon Women Peace Movement
19	JM 030	F	19 November 2020	Member of Muslim Women Association

SNL	Codes/pseudonyms	Gender	Date	Position
20	AH 033	F	26 November 2020	CSO Leader
21	NJ 034	M	26 November 2020	Women community unity leader
22	NS 035	F	26 November 2020	Religious women's leader
23	MC 036	F	27 November 2020	Nurse
24	TG 037	F	27 November 2020	Community Leader
25	BJ 038	M	27 November 2020	Quarter head
26	SM 014	M	01 December 2020	Youth group representative
27	KN 015	F	03 December 2020	Academic
28	LF 016	M	16 December 2020	Beautician
29	GR 017	F	16 December 2020	Catholic Religious leader
30	YR 018	M	20 December 2020	Woodworkers' association representative
31	ZS 019	M	28 November 2020	Teacher
32	BL 020	F	28 November 2020	Buyam Sellam (Petty Trader)
33	PK 021	F	28 November 2020	Farmer
34	AB 022	F	27 November 2020	Student Leader
35	AL 023	M	27 November 2020	Community Leader
36	JA 024	M	26 November 2020	Farmer
37	PG 031	M	19 November 2020	Pastor
38	DR 032	M	19 November 2020	Doctor

List of Focus Group Discussions

SNL	FGD group/gender	Location	Date
1	Women	Limbe	21 November 2020
2	Men	Limbe	21 November 2020
3	Women	Douala	24 November 2020
4	Men	Douala	24 November 2020
5	Women	Dschang	27 November 2020
6	Men	Dschang	27 November 2020
7	Women	Yaoundé	30 November 2020
8	Men	Yaoundé	30 November 2020

List of Collage Sessions

SNL	Collage group/gender	Location	Date
1	Mixed	Limbe	22 November 2020
2	Mixed	Douala	25 November 2020
3	Mixed	Dschang	28 November 2020
4	Mixed	Yaoundé	01 December 2020

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