

Protection of Women in a Conflict Situation: Lessons from the Conflict in the English Speaking Regions of Cameroon

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Abstract: The protection of women in a conflict situation is topical in the conflict in the English Speaking regions of Cameroon where the challenges women have been facing is a cause for concern. Why are women suffering the brunt of the conflict? What is the position of the law/government in protecting the citizens in times of conflict and how effective is the protection? The study employs the qualitative research methodology where both the primary and secondary sources of information are used in addressing the above worries together with interview and focus group discussions of some relevant stakeholders on their impression about the conflict. Findings reveal that women have suffered negative effects since the conflict began as wives, mothers, peace crusaders or as silent civilians when compared to the effects on their male counterpart even though women did not take part in the cause of the conflict. The respect and protection of the rights of citizens especially women who are the vulnerable group during the conflict are not effectively guaranteed. The government should institute adequate measures to ensure the effective implementation of the laws guaranteeing the rights of the citizens and to take holistic approach to peacefully end the conflict that has negatively affected the population as a whole.

Keywords: Women, Protection, Rights, Conflict, Cameroon.

1. INTRODUCTION

Though conflicts and intrastate conflict in particular is inevitable in any given human society, the prevailing effects it has on women are tremendous. Women are not often at the forefront of most intrastate conflicts either as those who initiated or triggered the conflict but the effects are often severe on them directly or indirectly. The causes and effects of intrastate conflict in countries such as Rwanda in 1994, Sudan in 2012, Burundi from 1993-2005, Democratic Republic of Congo in 2007 are glaring examples to attest to the above view.¹In Cameroon, the outcome of the Fouban Conference of 1961 which is considered as one of the root causes of the Anglophone conflict, women did not take part in the deliberations or decision making. During the teachers' and lawyers' strikes in 2016, women were not front liners. During the Bamenda conciliation meeting which took place in the later part of 2016 and the early part of 2017, women were neither invited nor seen as active participants in the meeting. Also, when the national dialogue was convened in 2019, though women were invited, the men dominated them in term of population and decision making. Their views were not taken into consideration and may be, that is why the war is ongoing and the effects are rife.²

When Cameroonians started experiencing a full blown civil war in the English speaking parts of Cameroon, women were not seen as active participants carrying guns or exchanging bullets on people. However, they have and are still facing the gruesome effects of the conflict due to the numerous killings, destruction of properties, sexual violence, maiming, unemployment, and shutdown of schools, poverty and homelessness.³These caused the alienation of their rights in all ramifications and they are living an undignified life. When they discovered that the effects of the conflict were

unbearable, women worked in diverse groups to plead for peace. They took this initiative as women in church groups, lamentation groups, and civil society groups to express their plights and that of the general community to the government and the separatists appealing to their consciences to stop the killings as well as resolve the problem.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to find out in detail, what the conflict is all about; the role women have played in the conflict as combatants and non-combatants; the legal and institutional measures set up to protect women during conflict, the effects of the conflict on women which have hampered the enjoyment of their rights; the parts women have played in resolving the conflict; as well as investigating the challenges women have faced as compared to their male counterparts in braving and resolving the conflict. The paper uses qualitative research methodology in carrying out the research since most of the materials concerning the conflict are already documented. Content analysis of both the primary and secondary sources of information is employed in order to interpret correctly the documented facts and raw data collected. Also, unstructured interviews and focus group discussion of women especially the grassroots women are used in order to get reliable information about the experiences they have lived since the conflict erupted and their effective roles in resolving the conflict. Furthermore, relevant theories such as the triple pronged theory is used to determine if the human rights implications on women during the conflict are just or not and then, what needs to be done to ameliorate the situation.

Evolution of the Conflict in the English Speaking Regions of Cameroon

The immediate cause of the conflict began with a series of strike actions called by lawyers of the English speaking (Anglophone) regions of Cameroon in October 2016. Though starting in October 2016, the Anglophone conflict is a product of many years of underlying grievances held by the Anglophone minority population found in Cameroon. Such grievances are due to the perceived marginalization of the Anglophones in favour of the majority French speaking (Francophone) population by the Cameroonian government; which is predominantly made up of francophone. Hence, the Anglophone problem is perennial.

Despite the existence of sentiments of discontentment caused by the perception of marginalization, abandonment, neglect and unequal distribution of both economic benefits and political power, Cameroon has relatively been peaceful. This changed in October 2016 when Anglophone lawyers and teachers of the South West and North West regions of Cameroon called a strike action for the translation of the governing texts of the Organisation for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa from the French to English language. Additionally, the lawyers criticized the flooding in the courts of the South west and North West Regions with Magistrates who are predominantly francophone, who could not understand the English language or the rules and procedures which are very much the tradition of the Common Law system which is applied in the courts of the English-speaking regions of the country. The state reacted to such strikes which included peaceful matches by flooding lawyers with anti-riot water cannons, while some were severely beaten.

The outing of the lawyers, spurred the teachers in these two regions to ask for the transfer of Francophone teachers teaching in the Anglophone section of government public schools in the regions. It was alleged that a majority of such Francophone teachers who were teaching in the government technical school sections, did not have a mastery of the English language and therefore could not disseminate the necessary information required in Anglo-Saxon technical studies.

The population of these regions was not oblivious to the events occurring in the South West and North West Regions. This is because many joined in protesting against economic hardship, as well as the lack of social amenities like road, adequate healthcare, constant electricity and pipe borne water. This saw many people throng the streets of major towns like Bamenda; Kumbo, Limbe, Kumba and Buea; championed by university students in the South West Region. The state responded with a heavy hand which saw many arrested, some female humiliated by being forced to roll in mud and one allegedly raped in Buea.

In order to have a common platform to champion the demands of the Anglophones, the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (CACSC) whose members constituted representatives from teachers, lawyers and the civil society were formed. The CACSC among other things asked for the end of Anglophone marginalization; a return to an effective two-state federation; the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon educational and Common Law legal systems of the English Regions of Cameroon; and the unconditional release of everyone arrested in relation to the strike action. In order to pressurize the government to positively act on their demand, the CACSC called on inhabitants in these two regions to

engage in civil disobedience. This civil disobedience was a series of ghost town operations where inhabitants were expected to stay at home on any day it was announced. In order to arrest the situation, the CACSC was banned, its leaders arrested and spent months in detention, and internet services in the two regions were cut off. These approaches by the government further dug the pit of Anglophone resentment in these two regions.

Some Anglophone Cameroonians abroad belonging to pro-secessionist groups like the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), took advantage of the prevailing situation to advocate not for an amelioration of the conditions of Anglophones in Cameroon, but an outright independence of the two regions to form the Republic of Ambazonia. They continued the calls for the boycott of education and constant ghost towns every Monday or any other day announced. The situation deteriorated with mass protests, numerous schools burnt down, kidnappings, and attacks against civilians and military being recorded.⁴As years go by, the conflict is more violent as human rights violations are worsening. Women and children are subjected to gross human rights violation including misery and desperation.

The worsening of the security situation has seen an intensified military operation and presence in the regions. This has seen violence between the pro-secession/independence fighters under the umbrella of the Ambazonia Defence Force (ADF) commonly known as *Amba Boys* and the regular armed force of the State of Cameroon. This has resulted in serious human rights violation committed by both fighting factions. Such acts violate natural law principles which entails that human beings have natural rights which are supposed to be respected at all time by everyone. The inability to shield the civilian population; especially women, from ills such as summary execution, forced displacement and sexual violence, is indicative of the government's failure of its tripartite obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of her citizens. This failure of its tripartite obligation has seen the natural rights of women being violated both by the state or non-state armed group.

Role of Women in the Anglophone Conflict

The consequences of an armed conflict generally have a different toll on men and women. Due to their vulnerability, women most often bear the brunt of the armed conflict. They however play a very crucial role in events before and during the conflict, champion causes for the resolution of the armed conflict as well as participate in post conflict peace and reconstruction. In the Anglophone conflict, women are involved as combatants, victims and peace makers.

As combatants, women have participated in the armed conflict in the Anglophone conflict especially as they are found within the rank and file of the *Amba Boys*. As concerns this non-state armed groups, though it could not be confirmed that women took part in direct confrontations, they however participate indirectly in hostilities.

Women are also involved in the conflict in an indirect way, by supporting men in carrying out armed operations, and by providing them with the moral and physical support. As care givers, women cook in the camps and hideouts, provide food and shelter to the non-state armed group combatants in the villages and equally act as spies or messengers. The Anglophone conflict has seen many women indirectly participate as spies on behalf of both the regular armed force and non-state armed groups to disastrous consequences. In Bachuo Akagbe; a village in the Manyu Division in the South West Region, a lady was arrested by elements of the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR) and transferred for detention in Buea on allegations of being a double spy agent for the regular armed force and *Amba Boys*.⁵

Their motives for participating in hostilities can be due to duty or ideology. Participation because duty calls is typical with the case of female members of the regular armed force. On the other hand, ideological reason is seen with the case of female members and sympathizers of non-state armed groups who are advocating for secession or independence of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

The conflict has a negative and diverse effect on women as it has caused many women to function as female household heads who are forced to singlehandedly care for the family. This was made possible by their husbands being killed in relation to the conflict or are members of the non-state armed group; hiding in the bush. Such women many of whom are in the rural communities, take up activities like farming to cater for the livelihood of the family. Taking over such responsibility is not always smooth especially for women in the rural areas where access to farm land heavily relies on traditional systems which prohibits women from owning land. Because they have to carry all the household responsibilities alone, such female-headed households tend to be poorer and face hardship.

Legal and Institutional Measures protecting women's rights during conflict

There exists a plethora of legal and institutional measures available to protect women during conflict since they are the most vulnerable group during conflict as civilians and combatants. The legal measures are the international humanitarian laws and the international human rights law. The international humanitarian law (IHL)⁶ is applicable in international and non-international armed conflicts and is binding on the states and armed groups participating in multilateral peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations if they take part in the hostilities. The principal instrument protecting civilians women inclusive during war are the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977 which are all ratified by Cameroon. The fourth Geneva Convention in its article 27 states that, protected persons are entitled to the respect for their persons, their honour, family rights, religious convictions and practices, and their manners and customs. They shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats thereof and against insults and public curiosity. It further stated that, women shall specifically be protected against any attack on their honour, particularly against rape, forced prostitution or any form of indecent assault by one group or another.⁷ Nursing mothers specifically protected in times of war, given special treatment and are entitled with relief necessities like foods stuff and clothing.⁸

Besides the IHL, We have international human rights law protecting the rights of women from violation during the conflict. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in its Article I guarantees the equal rights and dignity of all human beings at all times from killing, torture, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment. This is affirmed by Article 3 of the ICCPR, article 3 of the ICESCR and the Convention against torture and degrading treatment.⁹ There are some specific human rights instruments protecting women during armed conflicts which Cameroon has ratified. For instance the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its article 2, states that state parties are obliged to follow the Convention during armed conflict, state of emergency, within its jurisdiction and beyond as well as obliging states to combat discrimination against women and reaffirms the protection of the equal political, economic, social, cultural and civil rights of women and men.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights is a regional treaty which guarantees the rights of African women inclusive. Its article 18(3) enjoins states to eliminate every discrimination against women and to ensure the protection of the rights of women and the child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions. The Charter through the African Commission offers protection to women during armed conflict. It condemned the use of sexual violence by the armed forces as a military tactic against civilian populations. Women are part of the civilian population and so deserve protection as demonstrated in the case of DR Congo, armed forces of Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda where women were raped and killed amongst other human rights violations.¹⁰ The African Commission considered these acts as violations of the rules of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Furthermore, the Maputo Protocol specifically focuses on women's rights and the protection of women during armed conflicts. It calls on state parties to eliminate violence against women as well as gender discrimination.¹¹

Theoretical Framework Relating to the Protection of Women in a Conflict Situation

The use of the triple pronged theory postulated by Henry Shue¹² is relevant in this study to determine or appreciate the application and effective implementation of laws protecting citizens, women inclusive during a conflict situation. According to Shue, the triple pronged theory which dwells on the obligations to respect, protect and fulfill human rights principles are fundamental in the effective application and implementation of international human rights laws by state parties. The duty to respect, protect and fulfill human rights obliges states to take positive steps demonstrating that they are actively living up to their obligations under the ratified international human rights instruments by guaranteeing the rights of the citizens at all times.

The theory greatly emphasized that a breach by a state of any element of the tripartite duties will be a violation of that state's obligation under the International Human Rights law. This entails that states are duty bound to live up to their human rights obligations according to international standards. This is because obligations under international human rights law have traditionally been reserved for state parties. Hence the rights of citizens, women inclusive are under the protection of the state during conflict situations. Any infringement of their rights directly or indirectly by a state agent or a third party such as the gruesome killing, sexual violence, torture and homelessness women have suffered during the crisis, both the military forces and the separatist fighters, are blatant violation of their rights which are not in compliance with

states' obligations under the ratified international human rights laws. The government is duty bound to put in place all necessary measures to secure the rights of the citizens during the crisis. More efforts are needed from the government agents together with collaboration from the citizens to adequately protect the rights of women from further violation.

Effects of the Anglophone Conflict on Women

The conflict affecting the two regions has seen increased insecurity resulting from the constant fighting between state and non-state armed groups. The outcome is serious violations of the human rights of women and children of the female gender as many have lost their lives. Women have reported of having been killed as a result of them participating directly or indirectly in hostilities or caught in the cross fires of armed confrontation between the regular armed force and non-state armed group.¹³ Reports of extra-judicial or summary execution of women have implicated both factions in the armed conflict affecting these two regions. It was a sign of relief that military personnel who participated in the massacre of civilians; including two pregnant women in the locality of Ngarbuh; in the North West Region, were charged with murder after a state authorized commission submitted a report stating those responsible.¹⁴ Being caught in the web between the regular military and separatist fighters, women have been killed for allegedly betraying the cause of the independence struggle. The story of the summary execution of Treasure Keno¹⁵ or Comfort Tumassang who was interrogated and the throat cut off allegedly by separatist fighters on the grounds of being spies or blacklegs (traitors) on behalf of the regular state armed force,¹⁶ are chilling reminders of the consequences of the Anglophone conflict on violating the right to life of women.

During conflicts, systematic rape and other forms of sexual abuse or violence against women are used as means of carrying out warfare.¹⁷ This has made women and girls the main victims of war in many countries having armed conflicts.¹⁸ The situation in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon has not been different as women have been subjected to varied form of gender-based violence like sexual assault or rape. Interestingly such violations of the person of women have become weapons of war used both by separatist fighters and members of the regular armed forces of the state.¹⁹ Women revealed how they were raped and gang raped in front of their husbands and children. They also reported that some of their daughters had been raped and impregnated by unidentified gun men. Such have caused psychological trauma on the victims and equally a cause for increased unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and abortions.²⁰ The abhorred nature of using sex as a weapon of war has crystallized into being an element of a war crime falling under the competence of national courts as well as international tribunals like the International Criminal Court.²¹ Though the trial of a government soldier for allegedly raping a 17-year-old lactating mother in Bamenda²² is commendable, most of the instances of sexual violence and rape still remains unreported and therefore unpunished due to the stigma²³ associated with it or due to the prevailing situation of violence and insecurity in the regions which make reporting difficult.

The health care situation of the women in these two regions has taken a nosedive since the start of this conflict. The current situation further compounds an already existing situation wherein the healthcare system was not the best even before the conflict. This is the condition where the hospitals especially in the rural communities are ill equipped and under staffed. Due to the conflict, it is not uncommon to hear or meet women who have delivered children in the bushes under very difficult and unhygienic conditions which is detrimental to the health of the mothers.²⁴ The inability to access adequate health care has equally led to an increase in maternal and child mortality at birth in these two regions since most women especially in the rural communities cannot do proper follow up while pregnant. Reasons being that some hospitals have been destroyed or the unavailability of doctors who have been forced to flee violence or constant harassment especially from separatist fighters.

The fallout of the conflict rocking the Anglophone regions of Cameroon has not only affected the women, it has equally affected the girl child. This is very evident in the domain of the right to education. The smooth functioning of formal education in these two regions of Cameroon has been seriously hampered due to the crisis. The educational sector; public or private, has been specifically targeted through the no school campaign together with the ghost town operations by the separatist fighters. Schools that have been affected are the Presbyterian Secondary School (Bafut) wherein in November 2017, the girls' dormitories were set on fire allegedly by separatist fighters. Similar incidents registered in the North West regions were the kidnapping of teachers and students of Presbyterian Secondary School (Nkwen) in 2018 and Saint Augustine's College (Kumbo) in 2019. In October 2020, students were killed while in class in Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy in Kumba by unidentified armed individuals. Such attacks against educational

institutions, has prompted schools especially in the rural areas to shut down and parents are afraid to send their children to school due to insecurity. This situation of no school has exposed many young girls to early pregnancy and motherhood, whose significant rise in the last years are direct consequences of the conflict.²⁵

The South West and North West Regions play a very crucial role in the economic life of Cameroon. These regions play host to, agricultural giants; the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), Pamol Plantations Plc in the South West and Cameroon Tea Estates which has plantations across the two regions. Besides these corporations that employ some of the Anglophone population, others especially in the rural area engage in activities such as farming. The situation of carrying peaceful economic activities in these two regions has greatly been affected due to the crisis leading to hindered economic activities and unemployment. Women who predominantly work in these agricultural parastatals like CDC have been laid off or forced to abandon work due to the crisis thus affecting their only source of income for livelihood. The intention of crippling the CDC at the detriment of women's livelihood by the separatist fighters is to pressurize the government to heed to their demands. Women who have failed to respect the calls to quit or abandon their CDC jobs have experienced grievous bodily harm like cutting off of fingers by alleged separatists who regard the women as traitors to the Anglophone cause.²⁶ Besides such attacks, women in other parts of the regions have been placed in dire circumstances due to inaction of their economic activities like trade or farming. This is made possible by the incessant harassment of traders who are forced to pay taxes to separatists or farmers who cannot go to their farms due to fright of violence.

In addition, the Anglophone conflict has seen many people flee their homes from the South west and North West Region, to seek refuge in other parts of the country. This movement for safety is spurred by the destruction of houses and means of livelihood such as farms and businesses. Those fleeing violence moved to the French speaking regions, or remain within the affected regions especially in urban areas that are relatively peaceful like Buea or Limbe. A good number of women who have no means to finance their flight to their relatives in such safe town, have fled to the bush where they now reside. Though the intention is to flee to safety, the living conditions of such internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not the best and women constitute about 60% of IDPs²⁷ as at October 2020. The situation of those displaced in the bushes is very dire, this is due to the absence of amenities like electricity, water as well as healthcare; which has seen many women deliver children in the bushes. It is not uncommon to find IDPs living in cramped apartment in cities like Douala, Yaoundé, Limbe or Buea with relatives or friends. Such conditions have made it difficult as they are exposed to or vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence and illnesses. Common problems faced by IDP parents; especially female led households, is the unavailability of a steady source of revenue to provide for the needs of their family such as food, shelter and education. This has led to coping strategies such as withdrawing children from schools to retain available resources,²⁸ or worst still sex for survival to raise money for livelihood.²⁹

Women constitute a category of persons; refugees, who are associated with any type of armed conflict scenario. In our present case, women fleeing the violence have sought protection in neighboring Nigeria as refugees. Following UNHCR's report, women constitute 53% of registered refugees in Nigeria.³⁰ This percentage can even be higher owing to the possibility of non-registered refugees. Though refugees and IDPs are usually mistaken to mean the same thing, there are not. An IDP flees violence but remain in their country while a refugee is out of his or her country due to fleeing violence. The crisis in these two regions of Cameroon has churned out persons who now seek refugee status protection in other countries such as in Nigeria. The inadequate survival necessities like food, water and hygiene, makes life difficult especially for the female refugees in the camps in Nigeria. Due to them being vulnerable, women easily fall prey to various forms of sexual violence and other types of exploitation. Such a risk is even heightened due to the lack of physical security which is common with women who have children but no male counterpart to rely on for protection in refugee camps.

Irrespective of the fact that the crisis has caused a huge number of persons to be internally displaced or seek refugee status abroad, there exists a common impact on the lives of women which is the existence of fractured families. In fleeing or escaping from situations of confrontations between state and non-state armed groups, many families have been separated.³¹ The family unit is the unknown casualty of this crisis as it has seen parents separated from children and vice versa. There exists an unending dilemma for separated family members do not know if other members of the family are alive or dead especially if there is no means of communication. Others who have means to communicate with separated members, worry about their wellbeing and safety.³² Countless children; most of whom are girls, have been considered Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) who had been identified and/or placed in alternative care

arrangements.³³Such a situation makes it difficult to identify the children many of whom do not have important documents like their birth certificates which have either been forgotten in the flight to safety or destroyed by fire alongside houses and villages.

Women as Peace builders

Conflict situations however create an avenue for women to champion conflict resolution and peace building processes. The atrocities witnessed in the past years in these two regions has seen many women rise up to denounce them and assist the victims. Women in these regions have rallied themselves to form pressure groups like the South West North West Women's Task Force (SNWOT) and Cameroon Women's Peace Movement (CAWOPEM) for the purpose of peace returning to these regions.

Women under the banners of SNWOT and CAWOPEM, have used many tactics to generally decry the prevailing situation generally and the deliberate gruesome killings of women and children particularly. In 2018, women in the South West and North West Region organized public lamentations. During such lamentation scenes, women sat on the floor carrying placards which read "we want our husbands and children back home"; denoting the release of those arrested or relaxing the tension for those who have fled to return home, and "Women need peace"; calling for the government and separatist fighters to ceasefire.³⁴The killing of school children in Kumba saw wide condemnation and scenes of public mourning by women in these restive regions calling for an end to hostilities.

The church has been another medium which women have used to call for peace in these restive regions of Cameroon. In responding to the worsening of the security situation in these regions, CAWOPEM has organized candle light vigil services. In responding to atrocities allegedly committed by military and separatists alike such as killings, amputations of fingers and kidnapping for ransom, a candle light vigil service was held at the Presbyterian Church Buea Town in the South West Region. In aiming for peace, they prayed for the repose of those who have died as a result of the crisis; especially Florence Ayafor a wardress who was killed and beheaded by separatist fighters. They criticized the prevailing situation and called on women to participate in ending the crisis by calling on their children in the bushes to lay down their arms.³⁵

Public manifestations for the interest of peace in these two regions have seen participation of women be it in the government or civil society. Though the Cameroon government took time in accepting that the Anglophone minority population had any grievance worth raising, the current crisis has changed. This is evident in the outings of the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family as well as the president of the women's wing of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in Yaoundé, criticizing the gruesome execution of women in the North West and South West Regions³⁶and calling on all gunmen to lay down their arms and give peace a chance. In responding to the extra-judicial killings which targeted women; such as Comfort Tumassang in Muyuka, CAWOPEM members staged a manifestation in Buea wherein they marched to the office of the Governor of the region, denouncing the general violence and calling for peace in these two regions.³⁷

In a bid to address the on-going crisis, the President of the Republic of Cameroon Mr. Paul Biya, called for a national dialogue. This dialogue which ran from September 30 – October 4, 2019, saw participants representing the government, opposition parties as well as members of Civil Society Organisation. It should be noted that this dialogue did not see any member of the separatist faction being represented. Though women were among the delegates at this dialogue, their role or participation was not very visible. This is especially true with the absence of women who have borne the brunt of the crisis, and a seeming sidelining of women from active positions and participation in the working sessions of the national dialogue process which aimed at peace.³⁸

Through Civil Society Organisations (CSO); some of whom are controlled by women, financial and material aids or assistance are given to the victims of this conflict. They have assisted internally displaced women by providing Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) items like buckets, soaps, sanitary napkins and toothbrushes. Additionally, dignity kits, MAMA kits especially for those who have suffered some form of gender violence have been distributed by CSO. These CSOs have facilitated the distribution of shelter kits; containing canopy, rope and machete, as well as dignity and other survival kits especially for pregnant women in the bush, and food items to internally displaced persons. A majority of these items distributed are usually donation from humanitarian organization that see such CSOs as an important route of reaching the victimized population quickly.

Successes Registered

The activities of women peace crusaders fanned the flames of awareness to what is obtaining in the North West and South West Regions. The outing of older naked women under the banner of *Takumbeng*; a social group of old women who performed shunning rituals common in the North West region, protested against the violence in the North West region is commendable. This activity sent shocking waves across the territory. Such outings of older women protesting with little or no clothing, the lamentation scenes organized by women of all works of life in almost all the regions in the country and the candle light vigils contributed in the government calling for a national dialogue to address the situation.

The constant calls made by women to both the government and the separatist fighters for their children to return to school have registered some successes. Though not comprehensive, some level of formal education is ongoing in rural areas which have a huge presence of separatist fighters. Interestingly, some separatist fighters sought out their consciences and also called on children to go back to school. Such calls would not have been successful without the assistance of women in the formal and informal sectors of brokering a return to peace and stability in the regions.

The ultimate cry of everyone in these two regions especially women is for peace and calm to return by the belligerents laying down their guns. Such calls on women wanting their husband and children back from the bushes, has seen many separatist fighters laying down their arms and come back to their families. The government has created a National Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration Committee (NDDRC) as well as centers to facilitate the reintegration of former separatist fighters including the women involved. Furthermore, women in all works of life, especially in civil society organisations together with women in the government and from the diaspora organized a grand conference from the 27th to 31st July 2021 under the sponsorship of Fredrich Engelbert Foundation in Yaounde. This conference was to assess the devastating effects of the crisis on Cameroon and the people in the English speaking regions in particular.¹ Based on this, they found it very necessary to chat a way forward with some government officials present by making some recommendations to the government for peace to return to the nation. This move made the government and the entire nation to feel the effect of the crisis and to appreciate the persuasive efforts women have been putting in to end the crisis. Hence, the role of women's groups, government actions and the separatists with consciences have collectively and collaboratively helped in diminishing the intensity of the crisis and insecurity in both regions

Challenges Faced

Women engaged in the campaign for peace in these regions have received threats and intimidations. This has caused some women to abandon their role as peace crusaders. Such threats or intimidation are generally from separatist fighters who see such peace crusaders or any woman associating with the military as traitors or spies for the government. Such allegations have had negative repercussions such as the killing of such suspected women.³⁹ On the other hand, the military also imposes threat on women who are identified as mothers of the separatist. This is to enable the women advice their children sons to drop down arms and to stop causing havoc in the society. The threat on the women were recurrent until of recent on the 16th of June 2022, the women in Menchum Division in the North West Region had to march on street in a bid to denounce the threat and intimidation they are suffering from the military. The women considered themselves as people who are suffering from double jeopardy from the hands of the separatist fighters and the military. This causes them to live a very confused life in the villages filled with uncertainty since they lack who to lean on for protection.

Most of the women engaged in ensuring the resolution of this conflict, rely heavily on foreign donation. Such donations especially financial do not easily come by since the conflict has ran for more than four years now. The issue of financial difficulties has hindered the peace campaign that started with great steam.

There is still some form of armed violence between separatist and government fighters especially in the rural areas. This has prevented the smooth distribution of necessary items like food or other survivor kits to internally displaced persons in these rural areas and those in the bushes. Such armed violence still creates a situation of insecurity which is now more cumbersome with the advent of the kidnapping for ransom.

2. CONCLUSION

The Anglophone conflict has had a serious toll on the rights of women both in the South West and North West regions. Due to the violent nature of the conflict, some have become internally displaced or refugees for fear of persecution and insecurity resulting in women being subjected to various forms of gender-based violence. The population has seen

lamentation scenes and public demonstrations led by women denouncing the prevailing situation and calling on the return for peace in the country. Though threatened and intimidated, their denunciations have created awareness which has resulted in some form of calm resulting in these two regions.

The paper therefore concludes by stating that, despite the numerous and lucid laws safeguarding the rights of women in all circumstances and especially during conflict, it is questionable if the rights of women are respected and protected during the conflict. The myriad and recorded human rights violations that women have suffered during the Anglophone conflict is a call for concern to the perpetrators of the acts, human rights defenders, government, international bodies, the local communities, women themselves, just to mention a few. The government need to be held accountable for directly violating women's rights due to the gruesome killing and destruction of property they suffered and for the lack of adequate protection provided to secure women's rights as a vulnerable group in the society who should be accorded special attention in guaranteeing the safety of their rights.⁴⁰The plights of women is a clarion call to everyone to rethink why are women suffering the gruesome blunt of the conflict and what can be done in terms of the laws and the implementation, our perception about women and why are women treated as people who do not deserve to live a dignify life in the society.

END NOTES

¹ See the East Central African Report (ECA, 2001).

² This information is gathered from the interview conducted with women of SNWOT on the 20/01/2021.

³ This revelation was done by women in the focus group discussion forum organized in Limbe and Douala on the 19th and 20th of December 2020 respectively.

⁴ C. N. Okeneke, "Analysing Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis" (2018) Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses Vol. 10, No.3, pp 8-12: 10.

⁵ Interview with a State Armed Group (October 28, 2020)

⁶ IHL is a body of international law that protects persons not or no longer taking part in hostilities, that is civilians, wounded, sick, shipwrecked and captured combatants, and which regulates the means and methods of warfare.

⁷ Article 12 of Geneva Convention I, Geneva Convention II, and article 14 of Geneva Convention III as well as Protocol II article 2(I), accord women equal protection to men and a privilege treatment should be accorded to them by reason of their age in all internal armed conflicts.

⁸ See article 23 of GC IV and article 70 of Additional Protocol I

⁹ Article 2 of CAT holds that 'each state party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction' and by so doing, protection is guaranteed to the civilian population.

¹⁰ See The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, DR Congo v Burundi; Rwanda and Uganda Communication No. 313/05, 33rd Ordinary Session, May 2003.

¹¹ Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa, adopted on 11 July 2003.

¹² Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of women in Africa, adopted on 11 July 2003.

¹³ Henry Shue, Basic Rights: Subsistence Affluence and US Foreign Policy (Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹⁴ This pathetic revelations were made by female internally displaced persons in a focus ground discussion organized in Douala on 21/12/2020. This is one of the causes that led to their escape to Douala from areas such as Ekona, Muyuka, Kwakwa, Bafut, Bali, etc.

¹⁵ RFI, "3 Cameroon soldiers charged with murder in Anglophone village massacre" available at <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200611-3-cameroon-soldiers-charged-with-murder-in-anglophone-village-massacre-ngarbu-ambazonia> (last accessed October 12, 2020).

¹⁶ BBC News Pidgin, "Anglophone crisis: Who bi de dancing lady weh separatists 'kill' for Cameroon?" available at <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/media-53685910> (last accessed October 7, 2020).

¹⁷ L. Mudge, "Horrible Video Shows Cameroon Killing: Separatists' Abuse Continues in South-West" available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/14/horrific-video-shows-cameroon-killing> (last accessed October 8, 2020).

¹⁸ T. Bouta *et al*, *Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature Review and Institutional Analysis*, (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2002), p 31

- ¹⁸ P. E. Estebanez, “Women in Armed Conflict and Wars” in Spanish Ministry of Defence (ed), *The Role of Women and Gender in Conflict*, (Grenada: Spanish Institute for Security Studies Strategic Dossier 157, 2013), p 247.
- ¹⁹ F. Jackson *et al* “The 51% -Rape as a weapon of War: Sexual Violence on the rise in Cameroon’s Anglophone Region” available at <https://www.france24.com/en/20190419-51-percent-sexual-violence-cameroon-anglophone-region-iran-boxer-brexit-women-impact> (last accessed October 16, 2020)
- ²⁰ M.E. Kindzeka, “Study: Abortions From Rapes on Rise in Cameroon's Conflict Zones” available at <https://www.voanews.com/africa/study-abortions-rapes-rise-camerouns-conflict-zones> (last accessed October 5, 2020)
- ²¹ Article 8 of the Rome Statute 2002
- ²² B. E. Nwenfor, “Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: Killing of Women and Girls going Unabated” available at <https://panafricanvisions.com/2020/08/camerouns-anglophone-crisis-killing-of-women-and-girls-going-unabated/> (last accessed October 5, 2020).
- ²³ C. Lindsey-Curtet *et al*, *Addressing the needs of Women Affected by Armed Conflict: An ICRC Guidance Document*, (Geneva: ICRC, 2004), p 29
- ²⁴ L. A. Bagnetto, “Women bear the brunt of violence in Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis” available at: <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20200303-women-bearing-brunt-ongoing-violence-cameroon-s-anglophone-crisis>(last accessed October 5, 2020)
- ²⁵ Child Protection Area of Responsibility, *Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon –North West and South West Crisis Secondary Data Review–April 2019* p 12-13 available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/swnw_cameroon_sdr_2019_final_.pdf (last accessed October 13, 2020), R. Willis *et al*, *Human Rights Abuses in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis: A Submission of Evidence to UK Parliament*(University of Oxford, 2019), p 27
- ²⁶ M. E. Kindzeka, “Armed Groups Attack Cameroon Plantation Workers” available at <https://www.voanews.com/africa/armed-groups-attack-cameroon-plantation-workers> (last accessed October 5, 2020).
- ²⁷ T. Kaushal, *Contextually Engendering Conflict Analysis: The Case of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon*, (Geneva: The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2020), p 9. Also see www.data2.unhcr.org accessed on 25/10/2020.
- ²⁸ Child Protection Area of Responsibility, *Risks and Needs for Child Protection in Cameroon –North West and South West Crisis Secondary Data Review–April 2019* p 8 available at https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/swnw_cameroon_sdr_2019_final_.pdf (last accessed October 13, 2020).
- ²⁹ Interview with a member of a Civil Society Organisation (October 13, 2020)
- ³⁰ UNHCR, “NIGERIA: Registration of Cameroonian Refugees, March 2020” available at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Nigeria%20%20Cameroon%20Refugees%20Dashboard%20-%2031MAR20.pdf> (last accessed November 1, 2020).
- ³¹ Interview with an internally displaced woman who fled from violence in Ekona, town in the South West Region (November 20, 2020).
- ³² L. A. Bagnetto, “Women bear the brunt of violence in Cameroon’s Anglophone crisis” available at <https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20200303-women-bearing-brunt-ongoing-violence-cameroon-s-anglophone-crisis> (last accessed October 5, 2020).
- ³³ OCHA, Cameroon North-West and South-West Situation Report no. 3 as of 31 January 2019.
- ³⁴ A. B. Atabong, “Women and children bear the brunt of Cameroon’s conflict” available at https://www.equaltimes.org/women-and-children-bear-the-brunt?lang=en#.X4jLs5ko_Dc (last accessed October 8, 2020).
- ³⁵ Cameroon Tribune, “Ending Conflict in NW/SW: Women’s Group Decries Atrocities, Pray for Peace” available at <https://www.camerdoon-tribune.cm/article.html/28570/en.html/ending-conflict-in-nw-sw-womens-group-decries-atrocities-pray-for-peace> (last accessed October 8, 2020).
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- ³⁸ Newsday Cameroon, “Female delegates at Grand National Dialogue decry discrimination and under-representation” available at <https://newsdaycameroon.wordpress.com/2019/10/02/feamale-delegates-at-grand-national-dialogue-decry-discrimination-and-under-representation/> (last accessed October 14, 2020).
- ³⁹ The Killing of Comfort Tamassang in Muyuka due to her associating with the military is a glaring example.
- ⁴⁰ The above actions denote that the government has failed in the tripartite obligations of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of the citizens at all times as safeguarded under the ratified International Human Rights Laws such as

the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966; International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights 1966; Convention Against Torture 1958; Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women 1981; African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 1981; Women's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 2005; just to mention a few.

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