

ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE CRISIS IN THE NORTH WEST AND SOUTH WEST REGIONS OF CAMEROON ON THE ECONOMY OF THE TWO REGIONS (2016-2018)

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Abstract

The concept of political crisis is not new in this generation as more than 50 countries around the world are currently experiencing political turmoil. In late 2016, the two English speaking regions of Cameroon were forced into an unexpected crisis that is bringing the nation to its knees. Within the context of repeated calls for ghost town characterized by business shutdown, killings and movement restrictions, this paper investigates into the socio-economic consequences of the crisis on the economy of the regions. The study combines the literature review and survey approaches, and uses direct observation, group discussions, press releases and other documented sources from civil society organizations to collect the necessary information. Data was analysed using content analysis and the results suggest that the crisis has serious negative consequences on the wellbeing of the population. Combined with armed confrontation, the regions have witnessed unprecedented wave of out migration with consequences on

production, income and security. The death toll resulting from the crisis has increased significantly with many trapped in psychological trauma following destruction of villages and means of livelihoods. Over 30.000 individuals have become jobless and/or homeless. The effects of the crisis are not severely felt by the government as existing enterprises continue to pay taxes for its functioning. Ghost town calls have yielded no political solution as the government remains resolute. However, frank dialogue is necessary to break the political dilemma and to prevent a full blown civil war as tension continues to escalate.

Keywords: Political crisis, ghost town, socio-economic consequences, food insecurity, local population, inclusive dialogue

INTRODUCTION

The African crisis of the late 1970s has been transformed into what has aptly been called the African Tragedy (Arrighi, 2002). After the economic crisis of the late 1980s that was largely due to falling oil prices in the international markets, Africa is back on the fore front with political instability. The last one decade has been characterized by rising political tensions and dissenting voices across the continent. While Africa as a whole continue to witness rising terrorism largely due to governance issues, the world continue watching them helplessly, with international organizations having been reduced to paper giant with no ability, willingness or simply too slow to take decisive actions to break deadlocks.

Sub-Saharan Africa is extremely weak and volatile in the globalizing world in which pervasive and persistent violence has confounded efforts to improve its economic capacity and performance (Marshall, 2006). The numbers of armed conflicts and refugees reduced in Africa after the early 1990s but today, the situation has taken on a sharp rise. While the Middle East and North Africa has led the global landscape of violence, terrorism and crisis in the last two decades, the tide is today changing towards the Central and West African states with the unexpected rise in terrorist activism, starting with the Boko Haram sect in the early 2010 which has inflicted severe damage on the economy of the region. According to Mantzikos (2013), the activities of this deadly group was more or less peaceful until in 2009 when the Nigerian government led an offensive against them, killing over 800 people. Itumo and Nwobashi (2017) argued that the rise of Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east of Nigeria is a logical consequence of governance failure in the region. The Seleka Rebels of Central African Republic and the extension of Boko Haram activities in Northern Cameroon are recent instances that need comprehensive measures to rapidly address.

Since independence, few African countries have been spared of violence and armed conflict (Touré, 2017). Conflict is a major obstacle to the development of education in Africa. This is of concern because the dissenting voices of the present crisis in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon have directly targeted education as a political bargaining chip. The more radical Boko Haram sect started by claiming that western education is sin (Agbiboa, n.d). Armed conflicts, ethno-linguistic disputes, religious radicalism and many other forms of conflicts have made the Horn of Africa one of the greatest conflict zones in the world (Mengistu, 2015). While economic and social injustice has been identified by many as the causes of most of the global crisis, failure of the political class to deal with the basic issues of life should carry the greatest share of the blame.

After South Sudan, Mali, Niger, Gabon, Nigeria, just to name these few, Cameroon is now at the centre of a rising political tension between one of the two main entities that form the very foundation of the Republic and the state to which they all belong. According to the International Crisis Group (2017), the recent spark of violence in Cameroon's Anglophone regions points to an emerging insurgency, requiring urgent attention. Edstrom (1999) reported that while economic crisis are the result of sudden, unanticipated shocks, political crisis are usually expected given the behavior of political agents. In Africa, believe in the forces of repression has contributed to aggravating conflicts. In many instances, repression has turned social conflict into political upheavals as we are currently observing in Sudan.

The crisis which started with well-founded socio-professional grievances by the Lawyers and the Teachers trade unions took a new turn when political interest groups later took interest in the social unrest. While many interest groups such as the United Nations, the African Union, and the civil society tried mounting high level pressure on government to yield to certain political demands, such pressure have yielded little fruits as the government has remained resolute in its stand. It followed that the political component of the crisis was of little interest to the government as repeatedly, they showed shadow interest in addressing it. According to Christian and Lynette (2012), there is rising trend in global unrest characterized by public demonstrations and riots or disruptive actions with far reaching consequences on the society.

The history of the conflict currently rocking the two English speaking regions of Cameroon which has moved from repeated ghost town calls to armed confrontation can be traced as far back as the early 1960s when the two territories decided to come together for a stronger state on equal terms. According to Nyamjoh (1997), the lack of political will by the ruling elites to preserve the two cultural/colonial legacies led to the feeling of marginalization by the minority Anglophones who started agitating for a return to a federal system of government in

the 1990s. The complete refusal of the regime to discuss the subject led to growing separatist popularity in the region.

Many are also of the opinion that the “the Anglophone Crisis” dates back to the post-colonial era and specifically after the reunification of the two Cameroons formerly under the British and the French colonial administration. While cultural disparity in itself is not a problem, there are reasons to believe that the mismanagement of cultural diversity is the true cause of the present Anglophone crisis. Although Huntington (1993) observed that cultural differences bring conflict, it is the poor management of the diversity that really aggravates conflict. Contrary to popular opinions, Elbadawi and Sambanis (2000) noted that the relatively higher prevalence of war in Africa is not due to the ethno-linguistic fragmentation of its countries, but rather to due to high levels of poverty, failed political institutions, and economic dependence on natural resources.

Many analysts have been quick to attribute the crisis in Cameroon to a falling attention given to the people of the former British Colonial entity by the central government. Conflict builds up when the sense of belonging is threatened and when people feel that what they deserve is not being given to them. Besley and Reynal-Querol (2012) provide evidence that historical conflict is directly correlated with lower levels of trust, a stronger sense of ethnic identity and a weaker sense of national identity. Thus, nation states are expected to deal with the problems of ethnic identity, while building a stronger sense of nationalism amongst its population. Brutality and military crackdown on dissenting voices has only helped to aggravate tension in many African states (Omeje, 2005).

The crisis that initially had some ‘force of argument’ became very unpopular when activists started targeting school children, teachers, lawyers while calling for intensive school and court boycott. It has taken a little over two years of near complete school shutdown for many to understand the true nature of the crisis. Government took on the offensive when the political unrest degenerated into an armed conflict, with severe consequences on the separatists, military, paramilitary and the civilian population. Conflict as an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principle (Mengistu, 2015), with one feeling that her interest is at stake has for long been an issue of global concern because of its far reaching economic, social and political implications. Babbitt and Hampson (2011) argued that while conflict transformation and conflict settlement may have different political implications, they are both important in deriving relevant policies for a better world.

The history of conflict in the world is that of social and economic pains, characterized by forceful displacement, loss of lives and property, sexual abuses, economic stagnation, hatred and many more (Zeleza, n.d.). As Njimanted (2007) noted, the dire need for economic growth

and development in Cameroon cannot be achieved under instability such as political protest and strike activities. Before the present crisis, the greatest political activism and civil unrest in Cameroon dates back to the early 1990s, when the operation ghost town was instituted by the leading opposition party in the country-the Social Democratic Front (SDF), seeking political reforms. On the economic front, this operation that paralyzed the economy for over 7 months resulted to over 70billion FCFA of unearned revenue for the state (Njimanted, 2007).

Despite the devastating consequences of the earlier protest characterized by ghost town calls, activists who witnessed it continued to call for more ghost towns as the political class remains resolute on its stand. It is often said that “a stitch in time serves nine”. Despite the efforts of the government in handling the crisis, separatists succeeded to take control of well-founded socio-professional grievances by trade unions in the English Speaking regions to manipulate public opinions. The government was quick to criminalize and delegitimize issues relating to the political demands of the separatists. After many years of fighting, Syria, Yemen, Central African Republic, South Sudan and many war-torn and other war-torn countries are beginning to realize that political problems cannot be solved on the battle field. Why can the separatists and the government not follow the much acclaimed dialogue route in addressing simple societal problems like this one? On the basis of the above, this paper attempts an inquiry into the social and economic consequences of the crisis in the English speaking regions of Cameroon on the population.

The rest of the paper is structured into four distinct sections. Section two presents the empirical and theoretical background to conflict and political instability and the various models adopted to deal with activism. Section three is the methodology, while in sections four and five, we respectively present the findings and its discussions, and policy outcomes and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fight for power and political dominance with the vision of controlling economic resources is a more or less universal problem affecting every single country of the world. Agbiboa (n.d.) drew on the social identity theory (SIT) to show how its politics, practice and perception are implicated in the escalating terrorism of Boko Haram. He further argued that the social dynamics of poverty and relative economic deprivation in northern and especially northeastern Nigeria, is contributing significantly to the spiraling violence of Boko Haram. Cooling down political tension will require a mix of methods due to the spiral effect.

Febeh and Harrieta (2016) observed that the emergence of Boko Haram insurgence in Nigeria opened a new chapter in the history of militancy in with suicide bombing and senseless killings as the main strategy. According to them, Nigeria’s effort to check the menace has been

compounded by international condemnations in the name of human rights violations. While everyone agrees with the necessity and urgency to combat violent extremism, the method needed to do so is yet to attain a common ground.

Based on the work of Eme (2012), the Boko Haram sect has emerged as the most palpable threat to the polity's continued peace and development. According to him, the persistent attacks of the sect has created not only widespread insecurity and fear, but has stifled normal processes of trade and investments as well as the performance of routine security functions. Elkaim (2012) reported that the terrorist group exploited a long standing ethnic and religious division in Nigeria to gain popularity. However, Pichette (2015) noted that socio-economic and political realities are far more relevant to explaining the activities of Boko Haram than Islam as a religion.

Konings (2004) observed that marginalization and poor governance system has been at the centre of ethnic division in Cameroon but as Kriesberg (2009) reported, engaging in a mutual solution finding process is necessary to satisfy the grid of the conflicting parties. Kinnander (2011) recommended for the development of methods that can prevent conflicts and develop the behaviours of team members. It is therefore very urgent to avoid violent conflicts as it has exerted a heavy toll on the Africa's societies, polities and economies, robbing them of their developmental potential and democratic possibilities (Zezeza, n.d.).

Moe (2009) noted that pervasive conflict throughout much of Sub-Saharan Africa defies easy resolution due to a unique web of factors such as poor governance, ethnic rivalry, mismanagement of land and natural resources, declining economic conditions, widespread poverty and famine which make it extremely difficult to have stability in the region. According to him, the spread of constitutional democracy and economic globalization have saved the west from the rising instability witnessed across Africa. Though women have been silent in resolving political conflict in Africa, Tsewah (2014) observed that they are a major force to reckon with when it comes to dealing with issues of conflict of interest. Babbitt and Hamtson (2011) argued that the failure of conflict resolution has aggravated political violence.

While Amnesty International (2017) condemns the killing of over 1500 civilians by the Boko Haram sect in the Far North Region of Cameroon, it criticizes the Cameroon government response in protecting the population, labeling it as disrespecting the rights of the population as contained in ratified international instruments. The current crisis in Cameroon has made many to see with Molem (n.d.) who observed that the absence of war in the country does not imply that it is peaceful. According to his finding, the linguistic and cultural diversity of the country with its more than 289 ethnic groups and a colonial legacy of French and English cultures and languages, plus remnants of a German sub-stratum, are potential ingredients for conflicts.

Chereji and Lohkoko (2012) provided insights on how such a conflict management scheme can help incorporate the Anglophone elites to assume a more credible, proactive, and sustainable role in diffusing peacefully the tension, discord, conveying the problem of the SCNC and the government of Cameroon. From this finding, the failure of the political elite of the community through outright rejection of the problem provided a fertile ground for the recent upsurge in the crisis. Anyanwu (2004) observed that in trying to avoid war in Africa, states must ensure economic diversification, poverty and population reduction, and political reforms.

Many conflicts around the world are found in communities with extremely poor conditions of life, thereby aggravating sufferings. Anjoh (2017) reported that while conflict has forced many to move out of Sudan, the recurrent wave of displacement has serious negative consequences on the socio-economic, cultural and political life of the Sudanese people. According to the United Nations, there are over four million internally displaced people in Sudan. However, options remain for a meaningful dialogue for an effective peace building in the war-torn country. According to Bercovitch (n.d), conflict is endemic to all social life, stressing that it is an inevitable part of living given that it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation.

It is generally not acceptable that by the year 2000, half of the African countries were affected by conflict caused by inequality, economic decline, state collapse and historical relations with the west (DFID, 2001). Militia fighting in Africa has resulted in a marked reduction in food production and serious losses of infrastructure and hence must be tackled because of the human suffering and also because of the impact on global security and the environment. Fonchingong (2011) noted that the absence of a visionary leadership for the people of the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon make their case more complicated to handle. While the law continues to be put forth as solution to the crisis in Cameroon, Edralin (1998) had noted that 'good labour relation cannot be obtained by legislation.

Adewo and Aluko (2007) observed that as against what obtains in monolithic society; diversity necessitates adopting appropriate strategies for its management. It is necessary for policy makers to fully understand the diversity of a political system or organization for effective management given that diversity is an asset. Seemndze (2016) argued that when cultural diversity is politically manipulated in Cameroon, it fails to serve as a unifying factor and becomes ethnocentrism, an ideology that animates superiority over others and breeds exclusion, rivalries, lust of revenge and violence. However, Hamad (2005) noted that it is the narrow definition attached to conflict management that hinders the resolution of global conflict.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The crisis currently crippling the North West and the South West Regions of Cameroon can be better understood if we consider some sociological theories. Starting with Karl Marx (1818-1883) who laid some ground work on the theory of social conflict, attention is paid to the “conflict theory and social change”. Conflict theory was first introduced by Karl Marx in the book “Communist Manifesto”, 1848. Conflict theory argues that society is not best understood as a complex system striving for equilibrium but rather as a competition (Lyudmila, n.d.). Society is made up of individuals competing for limited resources.

According to Marx, conflict arises from social class differences and inequality defined by means of production and social relation of production. Conflict breeds in a society with two or more conflicting social classes with different powers. Thus, social conflict leads to class struggle, with inequality including the exploitation of the powerless. Based on the concept of dialectic materialism, Marx noted that “it is not the consciousness of man that determine their being, but, on the contrary, it is their social being that determines the consciousness. In this respect, the political class is accused of failing to ensure the social wellbeing of man for him to be morally conscious and be a responsible citizen. Marx challenged the philosophers not to focus on interpreting the world in various ways but to attempt to change the social setting for a better world. Marx considered social revolution as the main if not the only way of changing the social order of society. Though Marx was criticized on the grounds that social conflict does not always lead to structural social change, his theory has been so instrumental in the development of modern sociological models.

Contrary to Karl Marx, the theory of relative deprivation (RD), first articulated by Stouffer and his colleagues, stresses on the fact that conflict arises when a person (or group) feels more or less deprived on basis of comparisons between one’s own situation and that of comparable others (Stouffer et al., 1949) as cited in Walker and Smith (2002). According to Pettigrew (2015), relative deprivation predicts a wide range of important outcomes as it measures resentment. Based on the work of Walker and Smith (2002), peoples reaction to objective circumstances depend on their subjective comparison. The concept of relative deprivation obliged Saleh (2013) to observe that the gravity of the people’s identity problem and state security concerns correlates closely with the extent to which societal identity is politicized. The more politicized these identities become, the more they display a ferocity which makes them a force to be reckoned with.

According to Smith and Pettigrew (2015), relative deprivation is the judgment that one is worse off compared to some standard accompanied by feelings of anger and resentment. Throughout history, social scientists have used this concept to predict a wide range of

significant outcome such as willingness to join protests, deviance, intergroup attitudes, amongst others, though the results are often weak and inconsistent.

As Sorel pointed decades ago, 'we are today faced with a new and unforeseen fact-a middle class which seeks to weaken its own strength' through social revolution (Cosser, 1957). Many struggles around the world end as he foresaw. Through intense fighting and struggle, the middle class is brought to a more disadvantaged position in global politics. Conflict within and between groups in a society can prevent accommodations and habitual relations from progressively impoverishing creativity (Cosser, 1957).

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts the survey research design to investigate into the socio-economic consequences of the two year old political conflict in the North West and South West Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. According to Glasow (2005), this research design is necessary to analyse trends across time in order to describe what exists, in what amount, and to what context. Polland (2005) also noted that survey research is useful for determining the degree to which a desired objective is attained as a result of a planned programme. In this context, we are able to analyze clearly the effect of the conflict/war on the economy of the regions.

Data for the study was gathered from reports of civil right organizations working in the region, government periodic briefings, report from separatist leaders and eye witnesses as the researcher(s) were present on the ground during the conflict. Much of the data was also collected from the Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) during a special interview with members of parliaments, political stakeholders and the General Managers of major enterprises operating in the conflict affected regions. Information was also gathered from BBC and Aljazeera news agencies on the conflict and its consequences on the population and the economy of the region.

The data collected was analysed using context analysis. In this way, we ensured the systematic reading of body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective. Content analysis is distinguished from other kinds of social science research in that it does not require the collection of data from people. Like documentary research, content analysis is the study of recorded information, or information which has been recorded in texts, media, or physical items (Krippendorff, 2004). Essentially, an in-depth analysis of the data obtained was ensured through comparative analytics, trend development and insightful analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the most prominent social consequences of the political strife in the North West and the South West Regions of Cameroon is a near break down in the social structure that has been the basis of the society for over 50 years. Characterized by daily tension and the fear of the unknown, the two regions that once were preferred destinations for many personalities from within and out of the national borders is now almost completely deserted. Higher level radicalism is being observed as the youth and other segment of the population engage in more or less guerrilla warfare as the crisis continue. No form of economic venture can survive in the face of such conditions. In particular, the army that used to be a symbol of national pride and highly respected is now being confronted on regular basis. Other security services have to work 24/24 to keep the momentum and gain the necessary authority it once had.

Given the disconnection in the social fabric of the system, businesses have been paralyzed in the two regions. Apart from the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), UNVDA Ndop and a few other agro industrial plantations such as Cameroon Tea Estate, Delmonte Banana Plantation in the Regions, no major manufacturing company exists. Repeated call for ghost town has compounded the effort to make ends meet. According to the general manager of CDC over the famous CRTV radio programme-Cameroon Calling on Sunday August 5th, 2018, out of 11 estates in operation prior to the crisis, none is working normally. The report further suggests that all the rubber estates have been shut down, leading to the loss of 7000 direct jobs in rubber, over 5000 job loss in Banana and 4500 lost jobs in the Palm sector.

The few individuals who attempt to bridge the odds of the ghost town calls are met with the “weapon of fire” that has ravaged hundreds of business units in the two regions. At least 500 business entities have been damaged in separate locations in connection to the uprising, including but not limited to the burning of markets, shops, individual stores, taxi cars and other transport buses, just to name a few. Over 2000 residential houses have also been burnt down in more than 50 communities across the region according to the separatist spokesman.

The loss of lives that according to media report were in their thousands since the start of the crisis has serious social consequences on living in these two regions. The BBC Focus on Africa (2018) reports that in an interview with General Agha Robinson of the Cameroon army, over 1200 lives have been lost so far made up of separatist fighters and the security and defence forces. According to field observations, the more the separatists call for ghost town, the more potential lives are to be lost because the government is determined to combat them with the full force of the law. Lives lost can never be regained and the warring parties are advised to understand the value of human lives within the context of the bible principle of “thou shall not kill”. In this respect, it is only God that has the power to give and therefore to take life.

Table 1: Variation in the agricultural/industrial
Characteristics before and during the crisis

Product/institution, variable	Year 2016	Year 2018	% change
UNVDA (tons of output)	2000	<5 tons	-99.75%
Budget of UNVDA	-	-	-40%
Effective labour force (CDC)	21,000	2,500	-88.1%
Cocoa production	-	-	-75%
GAICAM job situation	-	-	-6000

Source: Computed by authors from field data, 2018

In specific terms, production of goods and services in the two English speaking regions have dropped by more than 75% as the main agro industries are almost completely paralyzed. At the CDC, bananas, palms, rubber and other cash crops have been abandoned to themselves with no possibility of short term revival. According to the General Manager of the Upper Noun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA) Ndop, output dropped from about 2000 tones to less than 5 tones in the harvest period principally because farms cannot be accessed due to road blocks and general insecurity. Individual productions have also fallen significantly as farmers have abandoned their farms, reduced farming hours due to ghost towns, closure of rural financial institutions that has compromised producers' ability to seek for funding. As a consequence, the budget of UNVDA dropped by about 40% for the 2019 financial year. According to GAICAM, at least 6000 jobs have been lost as a result of the crisis. To summarize, Table 1 shows that all economic and social indicators for the two regions are negative. The Mutation Newspaper reports that at least 29 billion FCFA is required to revamp the Cameroon Development Corporation.

The income of farmers, business persons and other economic interest groups has fallen sharply if not lost completely. The CDC alone reports that over 2.2 billion FCFA of salary is lost monthly with many labourers going hungry. Persistent road blockade and ghost town calls have devastating consequences on the flow of goods and services and on income of businessmen. This is compounded by the burning of shops and associated killing of corporate personnels. Many teachers in private, lay private, confessional and religious schools have now gone for at least 24months without salary with threat to complete job loss as the sector finds it increasingly difficult to bounce back into business.

The security system and general governance of the two regions are on the verge of collapse. Administrative orders are openly violated by separatists who are trying to map out a

state within the present day Republic of Cameroon. It is no longer easy to travel between major towns of the regions such as Kumba-Buea, Kumba-Mamfe, Mamfe-Bamenda etc for business. Traders have reportedly abandoned business trips to Nigeria resulting in empty shops. The level of risk that currently exists along these major cities is so high that no amount of profit can motivate people to undertake business trips. At least 50 cars have been burnt down and passengers kidnapped between Buea and Bamenda passing through Mamfe.

Table 2: Consequences of crisis on the educational sector (sampled areas/institutions)

Variable	Year 2016	Year 2018	% change
Number of students in the North West Region (Secondary education)	213,277	2,908	-198.65%
Registered students in The University of Bamenda	15,898	14,164	-10.91%
Students registered for GCE Examination (O/L & A/L)	138.000	130.000	-5.79%
% of students who passed the GCE examination (O/L & A/L)	74.84	54.60	-27.04%

Source: Computed by authors from field statistics, 2018

Education is the sector that has suffered the most from the conflict as the separatists from the onset used education as a political tool to mount pressure on the state for political reform. Unfortunately, as the conflict was developing and changing forms, the ideology was hard to wipe from the minds of the fighters on the ground as kidnapping, killing and ransom request characterized the later stage of the conflict. Table 2 shows that enrolment in the basic and secondary education sector in the North West region alone dropped by 198.65% between 2016 and 2018. The performance of students at the GCE Examinations also dropped in terms of quality and quantity. Success rates at both the ordinary and the advanced level examination dropped by over 27% for the period under review. While the level of illiteracy, teenage pregnancy, household burden, and poverty have risen significantly because of no school, the future consequences on the economy as a whole cannot be underestimated. Armed robbery, stealing, settling of scores have also intensified within this crisis period.

While the short term infrastructural damage in schools, roads and markets can be evaluated at over trillions of FCFA, the long term effect of such consequences is even far reaching. The persistent call for ghost towns and school boycott have increased the school dropout rate in the two regions by over 80%, increased crime rates by over 45%, alcohol consumption and drug abuse by over 35% though with diminishing income and income sources. It should be noted that the consequences of school boycott can hardly be evaluated in the short term. The long term effect of no school in an economy is much more severe to include but not limited to fall in the supply of labour and consequences on output and economic stability, high

crime wave, juvenile delinquencies, drug abuse, fall in taxable income, just to mention these few.

Social services have also broken down completely in some areas with the population being the victims. Water systems have broken down, electricity supply in many areas are no longer functional, health centers burnt to ashes and those in remote areas abandoned because of the fear of being caught in cross-fire or abducted for ransom. Many social services in rural areas are managed by institutions in other to meet up with the corporate social responsibility articles of their contracts. It becomes increasingly difficult to send staff for their upkeeps and proper maintenance. While the communities have sufficiently recovered from the three months internet shut down by the government, its effects on income and general welfare could not be underestimated as many start-ups depends on internet to do business and earn a living.

The effect of the crisis on the culture of the people cannot be left out. In some communities like Belo, for example, women had the opportunity to bury corpses for the first time, in defiance of cultural and traditional norms. Traditional rulers considered as custodians of the tradition has been publicly attacked, kidnapped and taken ransom from. Some of them have been killed in the crisis, things that should not happen. There are over four hundred thousand internally and externally displaced internally displaced persons as a result of the crisis. Traditional rulers too have abandoned their chiefdoms/palaces for safety in other regions and towns of the country. This crisis has triggered a wave of forceful migration that the UN says is the fastest growing conflict in Africa.

Huge sums of FCFA have been lost in the two regions of the country. The North West custom department reported loss revenue of over 200million FCFA for the 2018 financial year alone. At least 90% of all the public contracts awarded in the two regions for the 2017 and 2018 financial years have not been executed or poorly executed. Contractors have abandoned machinery and equipments because of threat or actual attacks from separatist forces. In this perspective, many farm-to-market roads that had to be rehabilitated were not. The crisis, it must be mentioned, has hit the rural areas much harder than the major cities of Bamenda and Buea where some degree of relative calm is reported. This has contributed to the falling total output of the two regions. Cocoa production from the South West region has particular suffered because of this as the farms are largely in remote and inaccessible areas.

The overall effect of falling output, dwindling income, deteriorating security conditions, distant governance, poor or no social services and no education on the general welfare of the population is huge. Meeting basic needs is now more of a luxury than necessity in the two affected regions of the country. Priority for many now is to be alive and not to be caught in fighting. Many households can no longer afford two square meals per day as a result of souring

inflation driven by two key factors: fall in output as a result of fighting and inability to receive supplies especially of manufactured goods from other parts of the country due to regular road blockade. People now live to eat and not eat to live as it was in the past. The negative effect on poverty and hunger are immeasurable.

The crisis has presented the ugly side of social media as the separatists used it as their stronghold to pass information and to influence the population. Through the spread of false news, rumours and propaganda, the separatist based abroad succeed to influence the minds and actions of many of the youths based in the two regions. Photo shopping in part has been responsible for the deteriorating security conditions in the two regions as graphic images quickly moved the masses. This led to the band of social media through internet shut down in the two regions for at least 91 days. Liberty and freedom of the people was also severely restricted as persistent curfews continue to be instituted by the government, blocking of borders and the band on motorcycle as a means of transportation in some major cities. All these made life unbearable for a majority of the citizens especially as unemployment had forced a good number of university graduates to depend on motorcycle transport for livelihood.

Contrary to the negative consequences presented above, the so called Anglophone crisis presents opportunities to other interest groups such as those who deal with arms and ammunitions. While the government has spend billions of FCFA to buy arms, equipments, logistics and to maintain the army and security services on the ground, the separatists have also invested though not to the same extent on war facilities. Contractors supplying the government and separatists' movement, lawyers, and others have had direct share of benefit in the crisis. In fact, it created political jobs for others as the crisis saw the creation of the Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, The National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee as well as the appointment of two Anglophones for the first time to head the Ministries of Secondary education and Territorial Administration. It also paved the way for the opening of new schools especially of the common law system such as the Common Law Department at ENAM, and other state universities and the creation of the Common Law Bench at the Supreme Court of Cameroon.

Many have also used the crisis as a means to enrich themselves illegally through stealing, kidnapping, ransom taking, settlement of political interest, just to mention a few. Unofficial report suggest that many of the combatants on the ground have taken over abandoned properties including houses, farmlands and plots from those who could not withstand the tension and had to escaped to other cities (especially non indigenes). Some political elites of the two affected regions have also reported of the undue benefits that public

administrative and military authorities are deriving from the crisis which is making it difficult to end.

The popularity of the social media as tested by this crisis prompted public authorities for the first time in Cameroon to adopt it as an official means of communication. The President of the Republic and head of State for the first time used social media to announce his candidature for the October 7th presidential election as well as to thank the voters for voting him. The Ministry of Communication has also opened an official social media platform for the national news broadcaster-the CRTV.

CONCLUSION

We have lived the devastating consequences of the crisis in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon from 2016 to 2018, and counting. Based on the evidences gathered on the ground, it is clear that ghost town operations are not an effective means of political pressure mounting in the context of Africa with heavy reliance on the army for defence rather than dialogue for peaceful conflict resolution. While operation ghost town has the potential to raise public awareness, the greater consequences falls back on the protesters and the marginalized that are agitating for emancipation and political freedom. This is largely due to the fact that the central government made up of few individuals continues to legitimately exist within the context of democracy while the majority of the people suffer.

Closing down shops during ghost town operations is painful to the population because of lost income but for the government, taxes are often paid in advance and will definitely be paid as arrears where applicable. Interestingly, consumptions are never made in areas, implying that the suffering of the population will never be regained. A missed lunch because of ghost town will never be taken as lunch again and hence business people loss most. Also, all government borrowing in times of crisis shall be repaid by the striking tax payers when normalcy is regained, while the landlords will continue to live in luxury. In this context, new strategies for political pressure mounting must be introduced to replace ghost town.

Education as a universal right should be treated as such. There is an urgent need for restraint on both sides of the political divide and to seek a peaceful means of resolving the differences. As the two giants continue to fight, the sufferings of the population is aggravating on daily basis. The time to show love for motherland has come and every political stakeholder must work toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Revolt is necessary to uproot a bad system and to usher in a new political dispensation which has shown to be successful in many parts of the world such as Zimbabwe (2017), South Africa (2018), Iran (1979) just to mention a few, but

country specific characteristics is what makes the difference and therefore one country should never be compared with another.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the above, this paper recommends that:

- Urgent measures should be put in place to break the deadlock and open up frank and inclusive dialogue between the government and the separatists for the sake of the innocent population. There should be an immediate stop to violence as the consequences on the population are enormous. Violence is not a solution to the problem. A political problem can only be resolved on the table through dialogue.
- Violence between the armed groups and the local population should also stop as they continue to struggle for survival. The crisis has transformed into guerilla warfare and ghost town calls are no longer necessary. Two years of repeated ghost town calls has crippled the economy and should stop. The population should be allowed to go about their business without political interference.
- Measures should be put in place to ensure that the education industry which is the driver of the economy of the two regions should regain its position in national life. A proper mechanism that will instill confidence between the population and the administration is necessary as they continue to call for school resumption under deteriorating security conditions.
- There is also need to indemnify all those who are homeless because of the crisis. Over 2000 houses have been burnt down in more than 50 communities across the region. This has to stop immediately and the humanitarian assistance plan proposed by the government should be enlarged to accommodate more citizens. There is no need to assist when burning is still going on.
- As the North West and the South West are the leading agricultural food production basin of the country, there is every reason to stop the escalating confrontation to ensure that hunger crisis does not add to already deteriorating political crisis. General food security is necessary to keep the population under control in trying moments like this.
- The competent and legitimate intelligence services should work on any documentation about this crisis and not neglect any information that may be vital. The international crisis group foresaw the crisis turning into an armed conflict but the warning was neglected. Cameroon Intelligence Report (2018) also noted that while the risk of partition of the country is low, the risk of a resurgence of the problem in the form of armed violence is high, as some groups are now advocating that approach and was also neglected.

WAY FORWARD

This paper focuses on the social and economic consequences of the political crisis on the population of the two English speaking regions of Cameroon. In order to better understand the devastation that it has brought especially to the education sector, a separate analysis should be conducted as separatists continue to target schools, beating up and harassing children of school going ages in schools. Also, it is important to conduct a macro-level study to ascertain the full effect on the treasury of the nation. This will give the government full knowledge of the extent of the crisis and may pave the way for faster political reform.

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