


Irregular Ecologies: An Assessment of the Socio-Economic Implications of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Cameroon, since 2016, has been witnessing what is now commonly referred to as the Anglophone Crisis (or the Ambazonia War) that has kept economic and social activities in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon at bay with serious socio-economic implications on the local communities and the economic tissue of the regions. This paper explores the socio-economic challenges faced by the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon through the provision of a comprehensive analysis of the trends and economic implications of Anglophone Crisis. Moreover, the nature of conflicts has changed, with traditional civil wars giving way to non-state-based conflicts, including the targeting of civilians through terrorist attacks. The paper recommends that Cameroon, with the help of her partners, should focus on limiting the loss of human and physical capital by protecting social and development spending.

KEYWORDS

Ambazonia War, Anglophone Crisis, Cameroon, Conflict, Crisis, Economic Development, Economic Growth and Humanitarian Aid, Income, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and violence are major obstacles to peace and development. Despite the efforts of the international community to curb the upsurge of conflicts and violence at all levels, persistent and violent policies still exist in national territories, creating discontent and grievances that have consequently orchestrated to violence. Cameroon, since 2016 has been witnessing what is now commonly referred to as the Anglophone crisis that has kept economic and social activities in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon at bay with serious socio-economic implications on the local communities and the economic tissue of the regions.

Already confronted with low incomes, poverty, rapid urbanization, unemployment, income shocks and inequalities between groups, the Anglophone crisis has only come to exacerbate the dysfunction of Cameroon's socio-economic institutions that were already manifesting signs of weakness.

In November 2016, corporatist protests around sectoral demands by lawyers and teachers degenerated into a political crisis in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. This crisis led to the re-

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emergence of the “Anglophone Question” that has highlighted the limits of the Cameroonian Governance model that is based on centralization and the co-optation of the elites to the detriment of the masses (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The area known as Anglophone Cameroon consists of two of Cameroon’s ten regions—the North West and South West Regions, formerly administered as UN trusteeship controlled by Britain—that in 1961 voluntarily opted to gain independence by reunifying with *La Republique du Cameroun* that had acquired political autonomy in January 1960. These two regions cover 16,364 Km² of the country’s total area of 475,442km² and have about five million of Cameroon’s 24 million inhabitants. They play a fundamental role in the country’s economy, especially due to its dynamic agricultural and commercial sectors. It should also be noted that most of Cameroon’s crude oil, which accounts for 12% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) is located off the coast of the South West Region (Ebune, 1992).

According to International Crisis Group (2017), the politisation of the crisis and the radicalization of its protagonist was partially due to government’s response (denial, disregard, intimidation and largely repression), the diminishing trust between the Anglophone population and the government, and the exploitation of the identity question by political actors who have aggravated the population’s resentment to the point that probably most Anglophones see a return to federalism as a solution to the problem while a minority believe that secession is the only feasible way out of the crisis (ICG, 2017). The outbreak of this crisis orchestrated the emergence of some schools of thought that hold divergent opinions as to how a sustainable solution to the crisis can be achieved. We have those who strongly adhere to the federalist tendency. The proponents of this school argue that the most successful countries in the world are the ones that have embraced federalism as a system of governance. They cite the United States of America as a palpable example (ICG, 2017). They recall that Cameroon has once been a federal state (1961-1972) and this was the basis of the union in 1961. On the other hand, we have the republicans who believe that federalism was a stage towards national unity that was attained in 1972. Then we have the separatists who think the union between Southern Cameroons and *La Republique du Cameroun* has not yielded any palpable proceeds to the British Southern Cameroonians and as such separation is the only option. While the federalists adhere to republican measure in seeking a solution to the crisis, the separatists have constituted themselves in radical groups that have opted to use radical measure to drive their point through. The radicalization of the crisis has inflicted huge damages not just to the economy of the two regions but also the economy of Cameroon. The damages can be summarized in the loss of human lives, depreciation of economic activities, abuse to human rights, population drift from the conflict zones to other parts of Cameroon and even neighbouring countries (ICG, 2017).

It is all these implications put together that this paper refers to as “Irregular Ecologies of the Anglophone Crisis.” Conflict activities across the world have demonstrated their impact on the rights of peoples as they undermine the ability of the population to go about its day-to-day activities and enjoy the right to life, liberty and fundamental freedoms. In addition to the loss of lives, the Anglophone crisis has destabilized peace, security, economic activities, migration and environmental activities. This study therefore sets out to explore the socioeconomic and environmental implications of the Anglophone crisis. The study is a cross sectional design that collected data using oral interviews, media clips, newspapers, reports by local and international organisations and other alternative sources to explore the impact of the crisis on the immediate ecology. Given the seriousness and the security challenges posed by the conflicts, local populations have been forced to move out of their communities where agriculture, for example constituted their main economic activity. Many of the internally displaced persons have seen their property (farms, shops, houses) and other valuables destroyed, thus living them with no other option than displacement. There are reports of conflagration that had resulted to roasting of humans and property in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon. All these have resulted to serious socioeconomic and environmental ramifications that have even affected the Cameroonian economy in terms of GDP and revenue generation. Agricultural yield has dropped drastically, rural

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