



# The Repercussions of Armed Conflict on Food Security in the Republic of Cameroon

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## Abstract

Peace and stability are among the most significant conditions capable of guaranteeing food security in all communities in the world. In fact, the constant availability and access to food is largely dependant on the state of peace. Armed conflicts in the world today have seriously affected food security with direct consequence on the economy, health, and standard of living of the affected population. This paper seeks to show how the ongoing armed conflicts in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon between separatist armed groups and Cameroon defence forces have affected food security. It is also argued that sustainable food security is strongly dependent on the degree of peace and security existing in a particular region. As such, effective conflict prevention and resolution can significantly contribute to guaranteeing food security to all communities in the world.

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## Introduction

For the past four years, the two English-speaking regions of the North West and South West Cameroon have been confronted with an on-going, increasingly violent armed conflict between government forces and separatist armed groups. The present conflict has its roots in the political, economic, and socio-cultural differences between Anglophone Cameroonians. Their claims focus mainly on the marginalisation of the English language, the lack of access to English education, the common law system, and jobs for native Anglophone Cameroonians.

It is important to note that Kamerun, as a German protectorate, was partitioned between Britain and France following the defeat and ousting of the Germans from Cameroon after the First World War. From 1916 to 1961, the divided spheres of Cameroon evolved under the French and British mandate and eventually Trusteeship. At the time of independence, each side (French and British Cameroons) inherited the legacy of its colonial master. In an effort to reunify the two Cameroon sides, the political elites of British and French Cameroon decided to put in place a federal system to preserve the legacy of both Cameroons. Unfortunately, with the evolution of time, citizens of former British Cameroon started witnessing marginalisation in various aspects of life by French Cameroon. The outcome was the beginning of Anglophone contestations which eventually culminated into a violent armed conflict in October 2016 between government defence forces and separatist forces in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. Caught in the middle of the fires of the belligerents, many civilians fled to seek refuge either in other regions of the country, including the West and littoral regions because they share boundaries with the North West and South West regions. Meanwhile, those in remote area sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Nigeria.

In Cameroon, and specifically in the North West and South West regions, agriculture is the main-stay of the economy, employing about 85% of the rural population (Voufo and Hermann 2016). Most of the displaced civilians were farmers in their various communities which are today occupied by separatist forces. Before the outbreak of the armed conflicts, the North West and South West regions of Cameroon featured among the most important regions which supplied food crops such as vegetables, cocoa yams, cassava, Irish potatoes, plantains, fruits, and smoked fish to major Cameroonian cities including Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam. Most of the food supplied from these two regions are characterised by original, traditional means of cultivation, which ensure human health.

However, since the outbreak of the Anglophone war, most remote local farmers have been obliged to abandon their homes and agriculture activities in search of security. As a result,

the abandonment of food production by the fleeing local farmers has seriously impacted their lives and the food chain supply. This study seeks to explore the consequences of the on-going armed conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon on food security.

## **Analysing the impact of the Anglophone war on food security**

Food security requires that all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to adequate amounts of nutritious, safe, and culturally appropriate foods, which are produced in an environmentally sustainable and socially just manner, and that people are able to make informed decisions about their food choices (Peng and Berry 2019). The Anglophone war in Cameroon has significantly impacted food security in Cameroon. These consequences can be explored in terms of livelihood, food systems, and food security.

### **Impact on livelihood**

Before the outbreak of the Anglophone war in October 2016, the rural population, whose livelihood was essentially based on agriculture, witnessed a drastic change in their production, consumption, and sales of crops. Profits from the constant supply of food to cities in the past years had contributed to improving the livelihood of rural population in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. For example, a study carried out by Mbangari et al. (2019) on the Mezang division in 2019 in the North West region reveals that local farmers, under the banner of local farmer's organisations, had brought changes within the community in areas such as local governance (43.8%) and improved market outlet (10.9%) for the sale of food items (Mbangari et al. 2019). In the same vein, Djoumessi et al. (2018), opine that the South West region, with its tropical rainforest and temperate climate, is one of the areas best suited for vegetable farming in Cameroon and provides food and incomes to remote vulnerable smallholder farms (Djoumessi, Afari-Sefa, Kamdem and Bidogeza 2018). Focusing on vegetable production in Ndian Division, vegetable cultivation contributes to the income and food of more than 77% of remote local farmers in the Ndian division (Djoumessi et al. 2018).

The outbreak of the Anglophone war has significantly affected agriculture activities such as production, as the total cultivated land has decreased by 40 per cent in the past four years as compared to years without conflicts (USAID Early Warning System 2019). Farmers had been victims of kidnapping and violence, and some forced to pay ransoms before their liberation (according to the government). In rural areas where most farmlands are situated, there have been theatres of open confrontation between government forces and

armed separatists' groups. This situation obliges farmers to abandon their activities in such areas and run for safety.

It can therefore be argued that farmers in the North West and South West regions have lost their source of income and feeding. In the past, Cash from the sale of farm products had permitted parents to send children to school and provide for their basic needs. Also, farming activities in these two regions guaranteed constant food supply to major towns like Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam. Again, some of these farm products from the North West and South West regions were generally exported to neighbouring countries like Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. In sum, the Anglophone war has considerably affected the capabilities, the assets – including both material and social resources – and activities required for a means of living of famers in the North West and South West regions (Persha and Farrell 2017). Foods are consequently very expensive in both regions as a result of a drop in production. Farmers who sustained their families through education are unable to send their children to school and provide basic need because of the lack of financial means.

### **Impact on food systems**

According to the Scientific Group for the United Nations Food Systems Summit 2021, a food system comprises the related resources, the inputs, production, transport, processing and manufacturing industries, retailing, and consumption of food, as well as its impacts on environment, health, and society (UNFSS 2021). Linking this to our study, it can be observed that the Anglophone war has contributed to disrupting the food system in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. This is because the human resources have been affected by the forced migration of farmers to safer areas in cities like Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam. Furthermore, the quantity of food production and means of transportation has witnessed a serious drop. The sabotage of farm-to-market roads by separatist groups to limit access into their hiding camps has also impacted farmers, who, despite having the courage to cultivate, are unable to transport their crops to the market. As such, transportation agencies, who, before the outbreak of the conflict, were involve in the transportation of food crops from the North West and South West Regions to major cities like Douala, Yaounde, and Bafoussam and to neighboring countries like Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, have stopped going to these areas (discussion with travelling agency workers in Yaounde, July 2021). Restaurant businesses and retailing traders in towns have seriously been affected by the drop in the supply of food from the two regions.

### **Impact on food safety**

Food production in the rural area of the North West and South West regions is renowned for its natural means of cultivation and taste. This is because most farmers in these regions

use natural fertilizers like animal dung, dead leaves, and household waste in their farms. As a result of the Anglophone war, and in an effort to meet the growing demands caused by the lack of supply from the North West and South West regions, some farmers from other regions like the West, littoral and central regions of Cameroon have resorted to the use of chemical fertilizers to produce the needed food crops, thus exposing consumers to eventual health problems. It is worth noting that most patients suffering from cancer in the Cameroonian society today can partly be explained by food safety, which is threatened by numerous pathogens that cause a variety of foodborne diseases, as well as algal toxins caused by the use of chemical fertilizers to increase food production (Borchers et al. 2010). Further, the use of chemical fertilizer also constitutes a serious hazard to environmental security.

From a general point of view, the ongoing armed conflict in the two English speaking regions of Cameroon have adversely impacted the livelihood, the lives of the local population, trade, and the consumer population. Before the outbreak of the conflict, the majority of the displaced population depended on food production to pay their children school fees, pay hospital bills, and carry out their projects.

## **Conclusion**

Food security and armed conflicts are intrinsically linked because wars have the potential of impacting food security and generating further complications capable of affecting human survival. Food systems and security are some of the threats caused by war not only in the Cameroonian case, but in other ongoing conflicts around the globe. Effective solutions to wars are therefore also an opportunity for the development of sustainable food security.

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