

Historical Realities and Specificities of the December 2019 Special status for North West and South West Regions of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The aspect of living together of the people of Cameroon from the time of unification in 1961 has since then evolved politically and socio-economically to have a culture so unique only to her. The former British southern Cameroons and the majority French Cameroun who willingly and constitutionally came together adapted a system of government that gave room for the two culture to coexist side by side. Over fifty years down the lane this one time united, loving and friendly people have in the past eight years been experiencing violent socio-political crises in what was earlier known as the Anglophone problem. A crisis began with the Anglophone teachers crying against marginalization of the Anglo Saxon educational system by their francophone system and the lawyers requesting for a place of the common law at the supreme bench was soon high jacked by some citizens with separatist's ideas. These sequences lead to violent extremism. Several calls from both national and international institutions for the Cameroon government to quickly resolve the problem lead to the convening of the major national dialogue from 30th September-4th October 2019. The December 2019 law of decentralisation which gave the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon a special status is its fruits. Moved by the persistence of violent extremism in these regions even after the national dialogue, this article seeks to answer the question; what are the motivational trend for conflict in Anglophone Cameroon and what could be done to improve on the situation? This article argues that, the problems of Anglophones have socio-political origin, are largely addressed in the realities of this law and that much attention given to its specificities by the beneficiaries it will be realistic. Examining the concepts and articles of the 2019 law in qualitative research method, we discovered that, accumulated socio-political marginalization laid the foundation for the outbreak of violent crises from 2016 and that a majority of the concerned masses are ignorant of the content thus, benefits of the law. This research proposes that, with proper exploitation and application of the 2019 law of decentralization, given its specificities for Anglophones, there will be a facilitation of national integration, social cohesion amongst Cameroonians and sustainable national development.

Keywords: Violence, Marginalisation, Decentralisation, Special Status



Figure 1. Map of Cameroon showing Anglophone Cameroon, the empirical referent

Source: Determinants of Ecofeminism in Anglophone Cameroon: A PESTECH Analysis, available online in https://www.researchgate.net/figure/map-of-Cameroon-showing-Anglophone-Cameroon-the-empirical-referent-source-adapted-from-fig1_346993910 accessed 9 September 2024

INTRODUCTION

Anglophones in the Republic of Cameroon who have tabled their dissatisfaction against the government for marginalization and an attempt to wipe out their inherited most cherished English culture especially the Anglo Saxon sub system of education. An expression which began as a peaceful protest by teachers and lawyers in 2016 sooner than not turned into violent conflicts the following year and has since then become so complex. La Verne Thomas (2007:71) identifies four sources of conflict in communities namely, wars, disagreements within groups, legal disputes and clashes over ideology such as religion or politics, which matches this research. To further reflect on the issue of communities, functionalist theory holds that, Society is held together by consensus, as such, most people agree on what is best for society and work together to ensure that the social system runs smoothly (La Verne 2004:16). This is the basis of indigenous values for conflict prevention and resolution. They invent and accept values that they agree to use for social stability. The Cameroon government has over the years taken steps geared towards resolving the Anglophone problems so as to foster the spirit of social cohesion and national development. This was expressed in the 2019 grand national dialogue which introduce the law of decentralization granting the two Anglophone Regions of North West and South West a special status. What then are the specificities of the 2019 law of decentralization for Anglophones?

Evolutionary Years of Socio-Political Grievances of Anglophone Cameroonians

A historical identified years of socio-political frustrations of the Anglophone North West and South West regions of Cameroon due to Marginalization, leading to the recent crisis between 1945-2019 and a diagrammatic presentation of the levels and the volume of violent crisis that escalation from 2017. It should be recalled that, from 1945-1960, Southern Cameroon was a trust territory of the UN, administered as part of Eastern Nigeria by Britain. Enjoyed indirect rule, local government and common law practice in the justice system. In 1958 Southern Cameroons had a quasi-government and had a House of Assembly with

headquarter in Buea. It also had a House of Chiefs and a Premier-Dr. E.M.L Endeley

In 1959 Dr. John Ngu Foncha won Endeley in an election and became the Premeir of Southern Cameroon. Negotiations between La Republique du Cameroun's President Ahmadou Ahidjo and Premier John Ngu Foncha and other Southern Cameroon politicians to gain independence by Uniting with the state of Nigeria or reunite with La Republique du Cameroon. At this time Nigeria was to gain her independence on 1st October 1960 and so Southern Cameroon will not be part of it. Foncha demanded the 3rd option for total Independence and was refused. At Fouban conference Ahidjou and Foncha agreed on a two equal status federated states. This marked a period of calm for Anglophone N.W and S.W regions of Cameroon.

Between 1961 and 1975: In 1961 a Plebiscite was organized for the Southern Cameroon by the UN for reunification with La Republique du Cameroun or unite with Nigeria in 1961 to gain independence. The result favored reunification with La Republique du Cameroon that was already independent since 1st January 1960. Cameroon became a federal country with two States-East and West Cameroon. Ahidjo was the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon while Foncha became Prime Minister for West Cameroon. The Fouban Reunification and equal status agreement was not completed with a treaty between Ahidjo and Foncha, with the UN as supervisor and signatory to be co-signed by Britain, giving room for eventual violation of the gentleman agreement decreeing a Federation. The Beginning of sowing seeds of discord to Anglophones and frustration by the UN resulted to conflict between Ahidjo's government and Southern Cameroon politicians thus, SCNC movement for a return to Federal system.

In 1966, Ahidjo started amalgamation of political parties to form the CNU single party for East and West Cameroon. His Union Camerounaise (UC) Party and that of J.N. Foncha, KNDP party, including others in both East and West Cameroon were dissolved.

In 1972, Ahidjo violated article 47 sub 2 of the Fouban Federal Constitution by organizing 1972 May 20 Referendum requesting both the East and West Cameroons to vote for a United Republic of Cameroon by answering the question that needed "Yes" answer. This led to the disappearance of the House of Assembly and that of Chiefs in Buea. Until today the two Houses of an independent country, Southern Cameroon have not been official and legally dissolved. Introduction of the post of the Vice President that took J.N Foncha to Yaounde, while Augustine Ngum Jua and Solomon Tandeng Muna became PMs in a United Republic government of Cameroon respectively until dissolution of West Cameroon.

1984: The new head of state Paul Biya changed the name of the country from the United Republic of Cameroon by decree to la Republique du Cameroun same name as at independence of French Cameroon from France on the 1st January 1960. It is worth noting that British southern Cameroon was not part of them at independence. This certainly annoyed the Southern Cameroonians that had a government and has just lost that status of an independent state. The decree used to annihilate this structure has become a source of conflict and frustration to southern Cameroonians also known as Anglophones.

Conflict Level Rising due to Frustration for the loss of Power and Economic Slum

1990: The formation of political parties the raising of political awareness brought about conflicts within politicians resulting in massive arrests and detention of people. Southern Cameroonian National Congress (S.C.N.C) movement versus La Republique du Cameroun government. Anglophone elites and politicians organized themselves to seek redress of the resolution of West Cameroon State. This lead to re-introduction of many political parties with John Fru Ndi's formation of the Social Democratic Front (SDF) Party amidst tension leading to the death of six supporters in Bamenda against government's desire.

1991: Tripartite conference (Grand Debat) of President Paul Biya organised to quell down agitations in Cameroon by Union of Change group of some political parties in Cameroon, led by John Fru Ndi. The

failure of the conference to yield to the demands of the Cameroonians and even to implement the proposals from that conference by the President has resulted in the continues sowing seeds of discord for future conflicts in the country, coupled with bad governance, bad electoral law and frustration, it prepared an increase in conflict level.

However, the 1991 tripartite conference gave birth to the 1996 constitution which has up to this period of conflict not fully been implemented, and it's a source of socio-political concern of the Cameroonians. Presidential Elections organized under the 1996 constitution during which John Fru Ndi of the SDF party claimed he won Paul Biya's Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (C.P.D.M) party and which resulted into burning of public and private property. This resulted to a state of emergency declared on North West. Anglophones felt that Fru Ndi was deprived of the Presidency because he is an Anglophone. Committing of arson was never a way of nation building but creating scars in people who became hardened.

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1993-1999: There was relative calm during this period politically except in the areas of education and justice that do not reflect the bicultural nature of Cameroon and equally depicting that the French culture of the Francophone in Cameroon was gradually assimilating the English culture that was already part of the Southern Cameroonians.

2016-2018; The teachers and lawyers in their trade unions requested the government to address the Anglophone problem of marginalization on their sub system of education and common law.

Annoyed by the refusal of the government to yield to the resolutions of the All Anglophone Conference (AAC), 1, 2 and 3, political demands for a return to Federation to solve Anglophone problem after several appeals, the teachers and lawyers decided to go on the offensive by going on an indefinite strike. The government staying for long to solve the problem saw the situation worsening. Then they decided to meet the teachers and lawyers to dialogue with them in Bamenda but using piece meal method of solving to end the problem which failed. This later degenerated into new demands which were purely political. It's worth mentioning that Cameroon is not a stateless society where people should just behave as if there is no law. Goldthorpe J.E (1974:163) states that in stateless societies, customs take the place of law, and sanctions that include those of reciprocity, publicity and magic were dished out. The Anglophones in the Diaspora-USA, Belgium, Germany, Britain, and elsewhere joined in the fight to request for independence of the state of Southern Cameroons as way to solving the problem. On the 1st of October 2017 Anglophones went out to celebrate their independence day, met with the police who cracked down on Southern Cameroonian citizens. On the 30th November 2017, the head of state Paul Biya declared war against the secessionist (separatist) of Southern Cameroon that resulted into a total armed conflict between the state of Cameroon and the *Ambazonian* state of Southern Cameroon as is referred to by the separatists. This has escalated with Southern Cameroonian activists arrested and imprisoned, people against secession kidnapped tortured, or and killed, destruction of public and private properties, closing down of schools and colleges in the North West and South West of Southern Cameroons to cite a few.

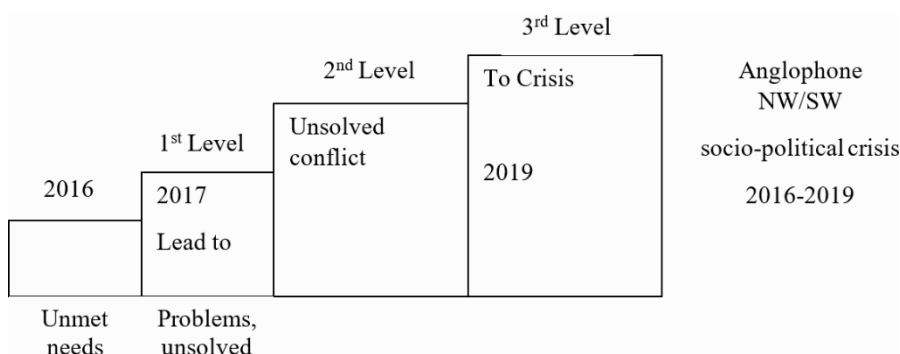
In 2018, during the presidential elections, a good number of denizens from the North West and South West living under violent impact of the Anglophone crises were restricted from partaking in the elections and other national events.

Demands of teachers and lawyers poorly managed however later lead to more agitations in the NW/SW regions of Cameroon. 30th September – 4th October 2019; Pressure by national and international communities forced President Paul Biya to organize an inclusive dialogue to resolve the Anglophone crisis that has met with some resistance with his supporters in government not accepting that Anglophones have a problem. However, in the long run President Paul Biya recognized that there is a problem and accepted to organize it. But he gave an agenda that suits his interest without considering the source of Anglophone quarrels which is the form of government that should be discussed since many are of the opinion that the return to the federation which produced the socioeconomic and political problems will be resolved. Meanwhile, there are some who need separation. But Paul Biya regime refused to discuss on the form of government. He also did not bring in the authors of the conflict to the table – Ayuk Tabe Sesseko and others he had imprisoned in Kondengui. This has made a majority of the people to believe that the dialogue and the purported proposals meant for Biya to solve the problems did not mean anything to the protagonists. First of all, the contenders still kept in prison without releasing them to discuss the matter with the government but instead entertained people who were not the cause of the ongoing crisis. The killings and kidnappings witnessed during and after the dialogue still shows the dialogue as a farce. International communities, such as the United states of America and European Union are still calling on Cameroon Head of State to repeat his so call Major National Dialogue, making it inclusive to solve the conflict which has become bloody several years on the lane.

With conflict escalating, fear rose very high with serious crackdown on the secessionists. The major national dialogue hurriedly organized by President Biya was far from being inclusive. That is, it did not involve the main actors, the separatists who are the authors of the socio-political crisis. These group of disgruntled people made up of the home branch or ‘ground zero’ (‘separatist fighters’) and the diaspora (also known as the ‘interim government’), still remains source of conflict which is still escalating to 2024 seven years running. All the socio-political events named above during the historical period interspersed by relative calm have produced the sentiments and consequent conflict and war in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. From all the historical happenings it was now left for the government to do what is right for North West and South West regions of Cameroon as proposed by national and international communities-the discussion on the form of the government of Cameroon. Though criticized, the outcome 2019 grand national dialogue with the adaption of the Special Status for the Anglophone regions cannot be undermined.

In the diagram below a demonstration the stages of conflicts in communities explains the stiff increase of conflicts passing through peaceful quest for equality to violent resistance due to unmet needs. This model according to Julio Quay highlights the main changes that no solutions are found at different levels to prevent a conflict from broadening, widening and intensifying.

From Unmet needs to Crisis-Three Levels of Escalation



The diagram starts with frustration of needs leading to a problem and continues at each level. If no solution

is found and if no fruitful intervention, the issue of unmet needs will finally end in the 3rd and last level-crisis. This simplified model highlights clearly that interventions are possible on each of the three levels of escalation. There are always possibilities to stop the escalating dynamics of a conflict.

MODEL OF CONFLICT ESCALATION

There is also another model that describes four stages of how conflict can escalate from discussion as friends/family to fighting as enemies.

Level 1: Discussion Stage: Parties to the conflict disagree over issues; discuss them directly with each other. The parties involved are close enough and ready to dialogue and work together. Unmet needs lead to a problem unresolved.

Level 2: Polarization Stage: Parties start to put distance between each other. Communication becomes indirect. A third party is used to transmit information or writing to each other. Communication is interpreted than facts given out. A gradual loss of distinction between issues and people develop. People discuss people, that is, altitude of opponents more than the issues at hand

Level 3: Segregation: Parties move away from each other completely. No more direct communication between parties. Only voicing threats, anger and aggression exist against the opponents. At this stage it is found that its thoughts and plans of actions proposals coming from the opponent directly no longer exists.

Level 4: Destruction: Opposing party is dehumanized to justify thoughts and action of aggression and violence against others. Communication is direct violence or complete silence. The goal of all thoughts and activities is to damage or ruin the opponent(s).

The Birth of the special status to solve Anglophone crisis

To understand important place of the 2019 law of decentralization, What the “special status” for the people of Northwest and South West Regions of the republic of Cameroon is All About, According to the Amended Cameroon constitution of 14 April 2008. In order not to violate the Constitution of the republic of Cameroon, the recommendations` to solve the problems of marginalization and the look down on the English inherited common law practices and the Anglophone subsystem of education, came from the Grand national dialogue. Called by president Paul Biya on the 10th September 2019 to find a solution to the problems he acknowledged that he recognized are existing, he requested the prime minister to invite 600 participants to look for ways and means to get them resolved. It was from the 30th September to the 4th October, 2019 that the Grand National Dialogue was organized at the Palais de Congress Yaounde where the Constitution of 2008 of Cameroon (Amended) provided an opening for the solution to the problems raised by the teachers and lawyers of Anglophone Expression, was to be provided and which is the Article 62 granting the special status treatment for the Anglophone problems raised by the teachers and lawyers since 2016 and before then by SCNC I II III. The Regional Assembly and House of Chiefs including, the public independent conciliation relating to the special status for the Northwest and South West regions only, are the ways by which those problems would be solved with time, given the means and the will to do so.

If there are any other political problem having a link with those issue raised by the teachers and the lawyers of English Speaking Expressing that is another problem that could be examined in relation to constitutional Amendment. However, for now, the law No 2019/024 of December 2019 is focused on solving the problems raised by the teachers and Lawyers that were found genuine by the head of state and the protector of the Constitution. An effective implementation of the law would produce positive results. It is obvious to say that social interactions in everyday life of society amounts to the shared reality that people construct as they interacted with one another as Macionis J.J.; (1999:19) puts it. That is, human beings are creatures who live

in a world of symbols, attaching meanings to virtually everything. This is left for the Regional Assembly with its Executive the House of Chiefs and the public independent conciliation of the Northwest and Southwest regions to apply the requirements of the Decentralization law of 1996 to prove it Worth. The state will have to make it work provided the special status privilege is made available with fanams and qualified persons. Resources, so as to support the Regional structures produce the desired results. Equally, the people of Northwest and Southwest regions have to support this Socio-political idea by accepting and appropriating it to enable it work, looking at the counting as on and indivisible. The results will make people believe and stable. Anybody can be what he/she wants to be in Cameroon provided one is qualified and there is no discrimination, hate language, prejudice and sentiment that brought back conflicts and violence.

The pointer to the special status

Article 1.2a of the Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon states thus” The Republic of Cameroon shall be a decentralized unitary State, it shall be one and indivisible seculars, democratic and dedicated to social services.

1.3. The official language of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country.

In a glance on article 1.2a, the law No 2019/024 of 24 of Dec 2019, it is geared towards implementing decentralization law by creating the regions and local council and designing their organizational and operational characters. However, giving the Northwest and Southwest regions special attention focused on their specifications, history, language culture and the common law practice and of the English education subsystem. These are in connection with the English established culture since 1945 in the Northwest and Southwest regions and which has impacted the lives of the people. None the less, bearing in mind that the activities to be Carried out respect the unity of the State and the solidarity of the people of Cameroon. Therefore, section 2.2 of law No 2019/024 of December 2019 relating to decentralization states that the regions and councils shall carryout their activities within due respect for national unity and solidarity, territorial integrity and the primary of the state.

So, what is called “special status” for the Northwest and Southwest Regions came out from the Grand National dialogue to redress cultural discrepancy of Southwest and Northwest regions.

The “special status” law for Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon

Law No 2019/024 of December 2019 bearing on the special status for the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon hanging on the specificities referred to section 327 of Articles 62 of the Constitution sub 2 that stresses on the specific organizational and operational regime, based on the historical, social and cultural values of these two regions with due respect for the primary State, National Unity and Solidarity.

As regards political powers, section 328 of the law on Regional and authorities in addition there are some power devolved on the two regions that includes the Northwest and Southwest in the following: Economic development, environmental and national resource management, health and social development canning, Regional development public works, Town planning and housing educational, sports cultural development.

1. – participate in the formulation of national public policies relating to the Anglophone education subsystem.
 - Setting up and managing regional development authorities.
 - Participating in defining the status of traditional chiefdoms.

1. The Northwest and Southwest regions maybe consulted on issues relating to the formulation of Justice public policies in the common law system.
2. They maybe involved in the management of public services established in their respective territories
3. From the above, the special status hangs around Anglophone sub-system of education, culture, development autonomy, the common law system and public service management. The matter of power and position has been well outlined and elaborated in the Constitution as to who handles what and how they come to occupy such power positions- Elections, appointments, by decree for example.

As with the cultural aspect, chief shall give their opinion on the status of chiefdoms and cultural and traditional events. The Regional houses have secretaries and questions like that of the National Assembly and the Senate. There exist standing orders that lay down the duties of these given some functions to perform. There is also the Regional organ, the public independent conciliator (PIC). This is not found in other regions and makes the two regions Northwest and Southwest Special. Section 371 Of the Law keeps the PIC duties under the control of the president of Cameroon on one State. All that has been mentioned here shows the specificities of the Northwest and Southwest Regions deserving special attention but still keeping on one – Reference section 327 Sub 2 of the law No. 2019/024 of December 2019.

The Special Status Concept

The special status of the Northwest and Southwest Regions concept cited in Law No 2019/024 of 24th December 2019 section 28 has as its concept Notes related to the specific organization and operational regime based on the historical, social and cultural values of these regions. They are mentioned in section 328 sub 1 as follows

- Participating in the formulation of national public policies relating to the Anglophone education subsystem.
- Setting up and managing regional development authorities.
- Participating in defining the status of traditional authorities.
- Devolving Powers on the regions.
- Consulting on issues related to the formulation of justice public policies in the common law subsequent, (Ref. section 328 sub.2)
- Involvement in the management of public services established in their respective territories. concept (sec.328 sub 3).
- The creation of organs of the regions that includes Regional Assembly and the Regional Executive and the public independent conciliator (PIC).

All these notes show how the special status concepts will apply in the northwest and Southwest regions Cameroon only among the ten regions but making sure the primary wellbeing of the State, national unity and solidarity referred to in section 327 sub 2 of law No 2019/024 of Dec 2019 is Maintained. Another example related to the concept Notes when writing a project is on the Decentralized cooperation potential of the Bamenda Highlands.

With this in mind, the general duties of the regions is to promote economic development and social progress, contributing to harmonious balanced supportive and sustainable territorial development (Ref. P43 of “The North Westerner” maiden Edition No 001, September 2022, on “Special status”, Relationship between Regional and Local Authorities without the framework of” Decentralized cooperation”.

By Decentralized Cooperation it means any partnership between two or more local authorities, or their groupings, established for the purpose of achieving common objectives. Such partnership could be carried out between Cameroonian Local Authorities but under the terms and conditions laid down by the laws and

regulations unforce and in accordance with the international commitment of the state. However, the local authorities may join Cities or Regions, turning international organization of the cities or Regions.

Concepts Notes

Concepts Notes on the Decentralized Cooperation potential of the Bamenda Highlands (pp.43-45 of the “North Westerner”) like those on the special status for the Northwest and Southwest Regions cited in the “North Westerner” page 44 include:

- Improving sustainable livelihood and food security through integrated Agro-Pastoral Farming and Ecosystem be protection.
- Enhancing environmental management of conservation water, hygiene and sanitation.
- Improving fresh Water Ecosystem service and management.
- Enhancing vocational training as a vital tool and strategy in fighting Urban and Rural Youth Unemployment and poverty.
- Mitigating against and adapting to climate change through Green investment.

The problem is that the whole area of the Bamenda Highlands is predominantly rural and again; it is only 1/5 urban. This Agro pastoral farming (pen-urban agriculture) is the main stay of the local economy, especially for the Female Gender. At the same time the Ecosystem (Fresh water, forestry, soils Bio-diversity, and others) are systematically destroyed and degraded in the course of farming.

Sustainable livelihood dependent on renewable natural resources. The continuous and systematic destruction degradation and decline of thin resources base, therefore, is the highest environment priority issue of the Northwest Regional Assembly. This is a situation made even more precarious by the pollution of surface water and group water, the depletion of Fuel-wood, flooding situations of streams and dams during the raining season and loss of indigenous natural products such as medicinal plants.

The task of the Northwest Regional Assembly faced with these issues is to ensure that sustainable exploitation of already scarce land as well as on the management of the ecosystems.

About Six out of ten people in the region do not have toilet facilities and this becomes a source of diseases and illness/death. This situation calls for urgent attention and the Regional Assembly needs to attend to by re-enforcing the work of sanitary officers.

The majority of people within the Highland region face a problem of inadequate water supply for home consumption, for agriculture, livestock and industry. This reduces annual Agro-pastoral production as well as other Socio-economic development endeavors in the Region.

Under and unemployment of youths abound in the Bamenda Highlands, as a result of educational system that forms mainly literate Youths with rudimentary imbued work skills and appropriate precious little vocational training from primary through secondary to tertiary education. Though imbued with a plethora of natural resources, the areas harbor many youths who languish in object penury, generalized poverty and misery. By this point, the paper stands to say that the primary needs of the youths remain a big concern for the Northwest as well as Southwest Regional Assemblies. Areas that can satisfy the needs of the youths are provision of opportunities for adequate professional training in various vocational disciplines such as Information and Technology, Catering, missionary, bamboo, pottery, woodwork, electricity and others.

- offering opportunities to the vocationally trained to be profitably self-employed and to be employers to their peers.
- The identification of job opportunities as well as job creation and placement avenues.

- The incubation in the youth's spirit and sentiment of self-esteem, solidarity and collegiality at work.
- Cataloguing young talents in an employment nursery

The green environmental education remains an indispensable condition in mitigating against and adapting to climate change so as to be able to reduce vulnerability to climate extremes. This was in essence to prevent natural disasters, to improve on environmental values with equitable distribution of costs and benefits. Therefore, green investment in the Bamenda highlands will involve reforestation, improve forest, food crops and land management, agro-forestry all deserving as a wide range of opportunities to increase carbon-intake and slow deforestation to reduce emission. Green investment is also a component of disaster management environmental management, poverty reduction, and reduces the burden to adapt to climate change crisis. ha

Expected Results from The Northwest and Southwest Regional Assemblies

The Regions which have suffered from degrading natural eco-system, local inter community boundary conflicts, (Deyeb, 2013:55), of recent violent socio-political crises, would certainly desire a reverse with the creation of the regional assemblies. The ultimate aim of the assemblies is improving on environmental management on the conservation of Regional Eco-system, water, sanitation, hygienic conditions of inhabitants, to alleviate poverty, ensure food security, improve on sustainable livelihoods and income levels through increased pastoral productivity. Further, to add consistency to lives and values that shall help them to formulate better live concepts. These could be done through the Traditional councils of each village, with committee set up to manage the day to day execution of the activities and programs of these projects. For effective evaluation and monitoring, these committees shall be technically supervised by experts, consultants and other partners to the projects. These shall provide regular relevant training and follow up of the respective committees Participatory Partnership for Development Initiative (PPDI) as spelt out in the 8th millennium Development Goal.

WHAT CAN ANGLOPHONES DO TO IMPROVE ON THIS STATUS? (RECOMMENDATIONS)

Given that peace talks between the two sides appear to be stalled, it is not clear how or when the issue of a reformed Special Status might arise. Although a Canada-backed initiative appeared briefly to gain traction in early 2023, Yaoundé denied that it had asked a “foreign party” to broker peace. Since then, none of the relevant parties have made public any information about the status of discussions or any related details. The following discussion presumes that talks in this or some other forum will pick up pace at some stage and offers recommendations for how the elements of a reform might take shape in a way that would work for both sides. As noted above, reaching agreement on Special Status would by no means be the same thing as reaching a comprehensive political settlement between the parties. That said, forging consensus in this area would have benefits in its own right and could help create momentum for a broader deal.

An inclusive and consensual process

As earlier discussed, a major flaw in the way the Special Status law developed in 2019 is that it did not involve sufficient input from prominent Anglophone voices spearheading the conflict. This deficiency created an overwhelming aversion to the policy among separatists. To stand a chance of gaining legitimacy in the Anglophone regions, a reformed Special Status will need to be the product of meaningful consultations and reflect major substantive changes. for instance;

Consultation could take place either as part of peace negotiations or in an adjunct dialogue. The key is that it must involve the government and a representative group of Anglophone separatist leaders, including religious, youths and women leaders. Given the tarnished status of the Special Status framework in its

current form, authorities could consider renaming it. That would be an important gesture to Anglophones, in effect acknowledging that the half-measures adopted since 2019 have done little to address their core demands for greater autonomy.

Not less important is that, securing the buy-in of Anglophone elites will be securing popular support. There are two seemingly feasible ways to obtain the public's buy-in for a reformed Special Status. First, the government and separatist leaders could organise a gathering similar to the Anglophone general conference proposed in 2019 by the archbishop of the Douala archdioceses Christian Cardinal Tumi. This gathering would allow the parties to explain the reformed Special Status to Anglophone civil society, which, for its part, could endorse the proposed new provisions or provide feedback for renewed negotiations. Secondly, the government and separatists could lay out the benefits of the changes in law and policy separately to their respective constituencies, by organising targeted meetings with core groups of supporters and hardliners. Either way, the consultations should include focused efforts to elicit women's views, including one substantive political arrangements and on protection issues, as Crisis Group has recommended previously.

Mechanisms for making Anglophone voices Heard

For a reformed Special Status to present a step forward for Anglophones, it will likely need to create stronger mechanisms for ensuring that Anglophone institutions are effective platforms for voicing Anglophone concerns and are representative of their constituents. One structural change that could help relates to the regional assemblies. Having two separate assemblies has the effect of weakening the voice of the Anglophone regions absent a formal mechanism for them to coordinate. The two regions have common educational, legal and other sub-systems that need to be assessed and treated as a whole. Any reformed Special Status should provide for joint sessions where the two regional assemblies come together to deliberate and vote on laws concerning the whole Anglophone region, with the technical details for this format to be mutually determined.

Reform would be best done by enhancing the law Section 3 of the General Code of Regional and Local Authorities signed in December 2019 recognising the common linguistic and historical heritage of the North West and South West regions. This will also relate to noting their need for special organisation and administration, as well as the importance of respecting the Anglophone educational and common law judicial systems. Section 100 of the law allows regional bodies to form partnerships for common matters, meaning in principle that the North West and South West assemblies could jointly discuss matters of common interest. The challenge is that under the present law, the assemblies needs to first seek permission from the government in Yaoundé, something they are unlikely to request given centre-periphery power dynamics. Reforming the Special Status would be an opportunity to amend the law so that it provides for holding joint sessions, at least twice a year, that would focus on judicial, educational and linguistic issues.

Special Status reforms should also include, or be accompanied by, changes that would expand the participation of local actors in the Anglophone regional assemblies. Instituting direct universal suffrage in Anglophone regional assembly elections to replace the current system of indirect voting would give the assemblies greater legitimacy and voters a sense of ownership and autonomy. Another possible step relates to Anglophones who supported secession and are therefore exposed to prosecution for crimes against the state, which would bar them from taking part in elections. By extending the right to vote and to run for elections to all the people enlisted in the voter registry, so long as they have not committed gross human rights abuses or war crimes, the government could demonstrate openness to diverse viewpoints and reduce the appeal of violence as a means of political expression. Ultimately, as part of a broader deal, by making changes to the law on political association, the constitution could allow separatists who renounce violence to run for regional office either as a political party or as independent candidates.

The reformed Special Status should promote the political participation of women's groups, including those

that have been involved in conflict mediation and resolution.

On the same theme of boosting participation, the reformed Special Status should promote the political participation of women's groups, including those that have been involved in conflict mediation and resolution. Youths and women leaders should have a role in shaping post-conflict governance in the Anglophone regions. To this end, it could create an office for gender and equality headed by commissioner in the regional executive. The commissioner would be responsible for ensuring that gender-differentiated concerns are taken into account in government actions and women are equally represented in regional institutions, among other things. The commissioner would engage with women leaders in civil society and represent their perspectives in both the executive and legislative branches. The existence of this role should complement, not supplant, the engagement of other commissioners with civil society. It should not replace efforts to increase women's direct and equal participation in political spaces.

Furthermore, to provide Anglophones greater voices with respect to the way they are governed would be to widen the remit of the Public Independent Conciliator to include disputes with national civilian authorities.

The government should also consider appointing a deputy public independent conciliator ideally, a senior military officer—in charge of relations with the national security forces. This person could help reduce tensions between Anglophones and the army and respond to the growing demand for attention to claims against security services in the North West and South West Regions. The deputy's experiences in this realm could be instrumental in designing a security sector reform program as part of a wider peace process when the parties reach that stage.

Promoting Broader Responsibility and better Relations

Special Status reforms should also expand regional authorities' responsibilities in the key areas related to Cameroonian Anglophone identity, notably education, language and judicial affairs. The government and Anglophone stakeholders will have to negotiate the extent of powers of the regional assemblies in these three areas, but the assemblies should have, at a minimum, the ability to propose new laws on those topics without waiting for the Yaoundé administration to initiate the process. This change would allow the assemblies to debate Anglophones' longstanding grievances and participate in deciding issues of fundamental importance to their community. These laws would still need to be signed by the president of the republic, but the power to initiate legislation at the regional assembly level would help focus regional decision-making in the national legislative process—creating a stronger sense of Anglophone agency and potentially improving the relationship with the Yaoundé government.

To improve lines of communication and help ensure that laws and policies linked to the new Special Status are consistently implemented across the national territory, the Yaoundé government should also consider appointing a senior official responsible for coordinating all its actions in the Anglophone regions. This official, who should have the rank of state minister, would answer directly to the president and coordinate among ministries and agencies to align positions in the capital on matters relating to the conflict in the North West and South West Regions. Such a measure could reduce the number of contradictory policies emanating from the national government and help build trust between the two parties.

Yaoundé can also help to prove its seriousness about a reformed Special Status by making sure the regional assemblies have the funding to do their jobs. The government should transfer 15 per cent of the national budget to the decentralised bodies as stipulated in the 2019 law, while considering an increase to cover the expense of fulfilling the additional responsibilities created by the reforms as discussed. Fear of the unknown makes one fear danger and takes precaution thus, we must be able to learn in the face of fear, (Lugo and Hershey, 1981:263). It is crucial that the new, elected regional assemblies have enough resources to cover operational expenses and deliver on their mandate in areas such as education, health and infrastructure. The

regional executive should at the same time create measures to guarantee transparency in using funds.

CONCLUSION

Cameroon's Special Status policy for the North West and South West regions, adopted in 2019, was a step toward acknowledging the distinct Anglophone identity in a majority-Francophone country. It has flaws which exposes it to critics who opined that it was hastily organised that the national government imposed the Special Status without sufficiently consulting key Anglophone figures. It then created regional assemblies with hamstrung legislative powers and without a formal mechanism for working together on issues of mutual interest. Indirectly elected, they are not seen to be representatives of the regional population, and they appear to lack an appetite for raising the educational, judicial and linguistic issues of greatest interest to their Anglophone constituents. Against this backdrop, the parties should give Special Status a second look—considering how it could become a mechanism for better empowering regional assemblies and helping address Anglophones' political grievances, and perhaps even become a rare area of agreement between the government and the Anglophone separatists. As the conflict drags on with no end in sight, it is critical that the government and separatists find common ground on which to rebuild trust and start forging a new path to a political solution. Whether or not reforming the Special Status could serve this end is not clear, but after six years of fighting, it is worth a try. Let experts get on board, work with the government in various domains and solve identified problems for harmony, co-existence and sustainable peace and national development.

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