

Implications of Armed Conflict on Community Solidarity and Social Cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba, South West Region Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Social cohesion and community solidarity are underlying factors defining the growth of a community. The objective of this study was to investigate the effects of armed conflict on community solidarity and social cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba. Based on a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from a sample of 77 respondents from Bangem, 99 from Nguti, and 212 from Tombel, for a total of 388 respondents. With the aid of descriptive statistics and frequency distribution, the study provides important insights into the effects of armed conflict on community solidarity and social cohesion in the Kupe Muanenguba, and findings revealed that armed conflict negatively affected the three main measures of social cohesion: societal trust, level of cooperation, and identity. Community solidarity and social cohesion as a result of the conflict in Kupe Muanenguba increased fear, mistrust, and isolation among community members. Therefore, the study suggests giving priority to repairing and re-establishing existing community structures and relationships that have been damaged by violence. This could involve working with local traditional leaders, community-based organizations, and religious institutions to promote reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives at the local level.

Keywords: Social Cohesion, Community Solidarity, Armed Conflict, Kupe Muanenguba.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social cohesion has recently gained popularity in social science studies due to the intervention of several institutions, both national and international (OECD, EU, World Bank, governments of some countries, such as England, France, and Canada), that have reconsidered the concept of social cohesion, adapting it to their governance needs (Addeo, 2017). Social cohesion and living together increasingly appear to be a response by the public authorities to the emergence of identity claims in Cameroon, in a context marked by the Anglophone crisis. Indeed, socio-historical evolution reveals that living together in Cameroonian society changes considerably according to the social crises that animate it (Esse, 2021).

Social cohesion refers to bypassing disparities, sharing common values, reducing the income and wealth gap, living in harmony, and facing challenges as one community (Rudina, 2012). Therefore, in a cohesive community, there is a common vision, mission and a sense of togetherness and belongingness; the socio-cultural differences matter less so far as they move forward as a community to ensure peace and development. Social cohesion is a scenario where those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools, and within neighbourhoods.

The Development Centre (2011), concerning the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), looked at a socially cohesive society as one that works towards the well-being of all its individuals, limiting inequality, and evading marginalization. Economic inequality, social segregation, discernment, marginalization of minorities, social contract disengagement, situations where the welfare of the poor is being protected, as well as general unease among communal groups in mixed societies, pose the greatest threats to

society's social cohesion (API, 2021). These faults are made worse by internal conflicts like armed conflict and political disagreements.

According to Alison, S. (2020), conflict is still Africa's biggest challenge, and Cameroon is not excluded. The armed conflict in the South West Region could make it harder for people to get along with each other. Fighting, displacement, interaction, and the mixing of people from different parts of the warring zones might bring about a clash of social differences. The cause of the armed conflict came from differences in opinions and desires, objectives, and methods of achieving them. These differences, coupled with the multicultural diversity of the people, may cause fragmentation in the community, and promote social injustice. These fragmentations may come as a result of breaches of trust, discrimination, and inequalities, which might affect the fight for a stable and peaceful society. The focus of this study, however, is on the effect of armed conflict on community solidarity and social cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba.

The Kupe Muanenguba is one of the six divisions in the southwest of Cameroon and is home to several ethnic groups. The region has been plagued by armed conflict between separatist groups and the government since 2016. The conflict has led to the displacement of thousands of people, the loss of lives, and the destruction of property (OCHA, 2019). Armed conflict has a significant impact on community solidarity and social cohesion, which are critical components of any stable and healthy community. The impact of armed conflict on communities can be devastating, with profound effects on social cohesion and community solidarity. This is particularly evident in Kupe Muanenguba in Cameroon, which has been heavily affected by the on-going conflict, according to Amnesty International, (2020). The violence has caused the loss of lives, displacement of people, and the destruction of property, but the impact goes far beyond these immediate effects. Armed conflict can have a profound impact on the social fabric of a community, eroding trust and the sense of shared purpose that are critical for a healthy and stable community.

In Kupe Muanenguba, the violence has created an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, leading to the fragmentation and polarization of the community. Individuals have become increasingly isolated, and the bonds that once held them together have weakened (field reports). The conflict has also led to the displacement of people, making it difficult for individuals to maintain their social connections and support networks. Despite these challenges, community-based organizations have played a critical role in promoting solidarity and cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba. Through their activities, these organizations have helped to build trust and foster a sense of shared purpose among community members. However, to create a more stable and cohesive community, it is essential to address the root causes of conflict and build trust and shared purpose among community members.

This article provides an assessment of the impact of armed conflict on community solidarity and social cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba. The article examines the ways in which armed conflict has eroded these critical components of a healthy community and the role of community-based organizations in promoting solidarity and cohesion.

One of the most significant effects of armed conflicts on social cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba has been the displacement of people. According to a report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), as of 2021, there were over 679,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon, many of whom were forced to flee their homes due to armed conflicts in the country (IDMC, 2021). The displacement of people can lead to the fragmentation of social networks and the breakdown of trust among members of a community, as people are forced to leave behind their homes and social ties (Azam & Thelen, 2010). According to a study by Ngoh and Halle (2019), armed conflict in the Southwest region of Cameroon, which includes Kupe Muanenguba, has led to the displacement of over 437,000 people, severely impacting community solidarity and social cohesion.

LITERATURE

The concept of social cohesion is critical to development studies as weak social cohesion is often related to slow economic growth. Very few studies have attempted to carry out systematic research on the concepts of social cohesion and community solidarity. Fiedler and Rohles (2021) carried out a study on how armed

conflict affects social cohesion by taking a holistic perspective and analyzing each of the three constituent elements of social cohesion, that is, trust, cooperation, and identity, from 39 published peer-reviewed empirical studies, of which the majority of them analyze armed conflict based on comprehensive survey data or behavioural experiments. The main findings of this study concluded that armed conflict harms social cohesion. Quite a number of points pointed to social trust being negatively affected by experiencing conflicts; however, elements of cooperation and inclusive identity were not so conclusive.

Addeo et al. (2017) carried out a study on social cohesion in times of crisis with the objective of proposing an effective and reliable theoretical and operational definition of the concept of social cohesion, which was not going to take into consideration only economic indicators as measures of welfare but also fundamental dimensions such as active citizenship, trust, shared values, and integration. Their study began with the contribution of Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi (2009), who postulated that measuring the welfare of a country only by using economic indicators was inadequate. Data was obtained from Eurostat as well as academic datasets, from which different socio-economic indicators for the 27 EU Member States were considered. The data was analyzed through an explorative factor analysis approach, whose main result was the creation of a social cohesion composite index for the 27 EU member states.

Langer et al. (2017) introduce an innovative method to measure national-level social cohesion based on a survey of 19 African countries for the period 2005–2012 on the basis of Afrobarometer survey rounds 3, 4, and 5, investigating quantitatively by specifically looking at the level of societal trust, the extent of perceived inequality, and the strength of people's adherence to national identity. Their findings revealed that countries with low levels of social cohesion in a particular year, according to social cohesion indices, are more likely to experience a range of different violent conflict events in the subsequent year. Furthermore, social cohesion is a product of community engagement, which is embedded in the principles of community organization, fairness, justice, participation, and self-determination (McCloskey et al., 2011). Community organization bring people together to work for the common good. Conflicts of ideas and identities are to be treated with fairness and justice, while working together as a community in participation will enhance tolerance and promote growth. Self-determination enhances collective action for the common good and strengthens social cohesion in society.

Conflict and economic crisis have exacerbated social cohesion and community fragmentation (Fletcher, 2017). According to Aiun et al. (2017), social cohesion is strong within confessional communities but weak across them. In this light, however, social cohesion has been regarded as a tool to construct peace in every society. In its theoretical interpretation, the concept of social cohesion aims to fight inequality as well as build social capital. In its practical application, social cohesion is argued to be an important goal for achieving long-term peace in places such as the Central African Republic (CAR) (Brown et al., 2015).

Multi-cultural diversity and conflict have strained the peaceful cohesion of society in some African countries, such as Nigeria. Carrying out a national survey on social cohesion in Nigeria, the Africa Polling Institute (API, 2019) discovered that the numerous socio-political conflicts and ethnic differences in Nigeria had strained the coexistence of the people of Nigeria. According to their research, resource control and natural resource governance led to numerous agitations and conflicts that threatened the peaceful coexistence of all nations. It goes on to saying that rising poverty and inequality show how impunity and corruption have harmed the country's ability to prosper regardless of its natural and human resources.

Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) defines social cohesion by taking into consideration the ability to belong, level of trust, and share of common values, which make up the glue that bonds society together (NURC, 2008). In the same vein, the National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG) defined social cohesion in terms of restoring what was lost after the genocide and the capacity of Rwandans to redevelop unity in an interview. As a result, sanctioned dialogue appeals to social psychological descriptions (IRDP 2010, 2012; NURC, 2013).

Social cohesion in Cameroon has long been affected by conflicts in neighbouring countries (Nigeria, CAR, and Chad) before the armed conflict in the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon. The crisis in neighbouring countries (Nigeria, Central African Republic, and Chad) has increased uncertainty in many

aspects common to the poor, children, and women, particularly in border areas (CSR, 2016). In an environment with such challenges, there is high insecurity in terms of health, food, physical hygiene, sexuality, and GBV, which threatens social cohesion among diverse groups.

In contrast to other nations in Africa that are experiencing crises, Cameroon has a lack of research that explains community cohesiveness and solidarity. However, one pronounced study in Cameroon, CSR (2016), identified some key conflict dynamics in Cameroon that threaten social cohesion, such as (1) local level conflict over resources, (2) agro-pastoral conflicts, (3) insecurity and crime, and (4) ethnic and religious conflict. At the national level, other key issues identified include: (1) uncertainty over national leadership; (2) terrorism; and (3) youth unemployment.

In Cameroon, Esse (2021) carried out a study on Construction of Social Cohesion and Living Together in the Cameroonian Public Space: Differences of Opinion versus the Emergence of a Common Sense in Discourse with the aim of exploring the possibilities of constructing a problematic in the public space, namely living together, based on what is said by the actors in televised debates. The observation of the public space, in particular that circumscribed by televised debates, reveals the frequency of their discursive use. The study observed and analysed particular statements made by four different television channels, and their findings revealed that social cohesion was present as a manifestation of living together, for which they concluded that "living together" was a result of good governance.

The Anglophone issue has had a significant impact on the rich Anglophone culture in the North West and South West areas of Cameroon (Bang & Balgah, 2022). In the course of the conflict, rulers and custodians of cultures, coupled with traditional rulers of the region, have been publicly attacked, beaten, kidnapped, and, worst of all, killed (Journal du Cameroun 2018b). Separatist fighters assassinated the supreme chief of the Balondo people in Ekondo Titi in the SW region, and eight Fako chiefs were abducted eight months later. As a result of such insecurity, dozens went into hiding and were forcibly displaced in the SW region (Kindzeka, 2018). Furthermore, what was seen before the crisis as an off-limits practice became normal in the NW region of Cameroon, where women were seen performing burial rites in some crisis hotspot areas like the Belo village in the Boyo Division and the Bafut village in the Mezam Division (Journal du Cameroon, 2019). These conflicts and violations have clearly threatened community cohesiveness and solidarity in the region; however, the purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze the extent to which the conflict has affected community cohesiveness and solidarity in the crisis-affected areas of the south-west region of Cameroon.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The scope of this study is within the framework of humanitarian emergencies, with a special focus on armed conflict and its effect on community solidarity and social life in Kupe Muanenguba. The focus of the research is Kupe Muanenguba Division (KMD), one of the six divisions that comprise the South West region and consists of the Bangem, Nguti, and Tombel subdivisions, with its headquarters located in Bangem. The research design used in the study is a cross-sectional survey. The use of the survey method facilitated our describing the characteristics of the target population and adopting a descriptive approach to analyzing their perceptions concerning the implications of both armed conflict and social cohesion.

The target population is the whole of KMD, both males and females, aged 15 years and older. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique, beginning with the selection of communities and ending with the selection of individuals. The first stage concerned the sampling of villages and communities in which the study was to be conducted. Here, all the villages in each of the three subdivisions of Kupe Muanenguba were eligible for selection, but only a few were randomly selected through a raffle draw. Out of the 54 villages that make up Nguti, 11 were selected; 18 out of the 72 villages in Tombel were sampled; and of the sixty-three (63) villages in Bangem Subdivision, 14 were sampled.

The second stage involved randomly selecting inhabitants from the communities selected in the first stage. Using the online Survey Monkey sample size calculator (see: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>), the total target population of the study (52927 inhabitants), at a 95% confidence level and an

assumed margin of error of 5%, we obtained a sample size of 382. This was also robustly checked using the Cochran formula for sample size calculation under the same assumptions of error margin and confidence interval.

The questionnaire used was compared to that used in similar studies, and adjustments on variables were made where necessary. Examples of variables included in the study were conflicts and their implications on community trust levels, favouritism, peace restoration challenges, disruption of community events and community ties. The technique of data analysis used is mostly descriptive because the study was largely quantitative. These involved the use of frequency tables, pie charts, bar charts, line graphs, cross tabulations, and descriptive measures of central tendency such as means, minimum and maximum values, and measures of dispersion such as standard deviation. To guarantee instrument validity, prior to data collection proper, the questionnaire was validated using the content validation approach with assured internal validity, and the results were inferred from the target population for external validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of results

Investigating the effect of the humanitarian crisis on community solidarity and social cohesion, there were differences in the socio-demographic composition of the respondents (**Table 1**). Tombel (54.6%) was highly represented, followed by Nguti (25.5%) and Bangem (19.8%). Also, most respondents came from the suburbs or villages (76.3%), while the central town constituted 23.7%. Regarding the age distribution of the respondents, there was not much disparity between those between 26 and 35 and those 36 to 50 years old (28.9% and 29.1%, respectively). The young (15–25) made up 18%, and the old (51+) made up 24%. Most of the respondents were married (58%), followed by singles (25%). Divorced people made up 8% of the population, while widowed people made up 9%. Households with 1-2 children and those with 5+ children made up 25.5% and 25.3%, respectively. Households with 3–4 children made up the majority (34%), while households with no children made up 15% of the population. Most of the respondents had attended secondary school (54.9%). Primary school leavers were 18%, while tertiary education leaders were 16%.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic composition of the Population

No	Variables	Values	Frequency	Percentage%
1	Sub-Division	Bangem	77	19.8
		Nguti	99	25.5
		Tombel	212	54.6
		Total	388	100.0
2	Locality	Central Town	92	23.7
		Suburb/Village	296	76.3
		Total	388	100
3	Age-group	15-25	70	18
		26-35	112	28.9
		36-50	113	29.1
		51+	93	24
		Total	388	100
4	Marital Status	Single	77	25
		Married	225	58
		Divorced	31	8
		Widowed	35	9
		Total	388	100
		None	59	15.2
		1-2	99	25.5

5	Number of Children	3-4	132	34
		5+	98	25.3
		Total	388	100.0
6	Level of education	Primary	109	28.1
		Secondary	217	55.9
		Tertiary	62	16
		Total	388	100

Source: Field Work, 2026

Role of Community Leader in Peace Restoration

Our findings show that the people of Kupe Muanenguba have respect for local and traditional values. The culture of the people gives high credence to their local or traditional authorities. The communities in Kupe Muanenguba are under the control of various local leaders, depending on the size of the jurisdiction. They are the chiefs, the regent chiefs, the quarter heads, and the elders. The chief rules over the villages, while the regent chiefs answer to the chiefs. Since the chief need's eyes in every corner, quarter heads take charge of the local affairs of the various quarters. In the community, elders assist the traditional rulers in the affairs of the community, especially when it comes to asking for or getting opinions from a few people to make certain decisions.

During the peak periods of the crisis (2017–2022), there were many breaks and lapses in the presence and functioning of government institutions. Due to this deficiency, local rulers were forced to make decisions for the community (**Figure 1**) to ensure peace and community restoration. The respect and confidence the public has in its old institutions has played a significant role in encouraging this. Even though interviews with some denizens indicated that some traditional rulers fled because of insecurity, some of them stayed behind to watch over their communities. The most common role played by the local authorities was to settle disputes between their subjects (47.9%). Settling disputes was common, especially because government institutions such as police stations and administrative offices such as the service of the divisional officer were absent. This was because they were targets in the conflicts, and so their lives and those of their family and property were not safe. Community protection (32.2%) was another important role played by the traditional authorities. They solicited on behalf of their people. The local community leaders also sheltered many denizens who ran to them to seek refuge (11.7%). Their residences were seen as the safest places amidst the armed conflict. This was due to the limited number of attacks witnessed at their residences. Other roles played by community leaders (8.3%) were feeding the hungry and providing material and financial assistance, just to name a few.

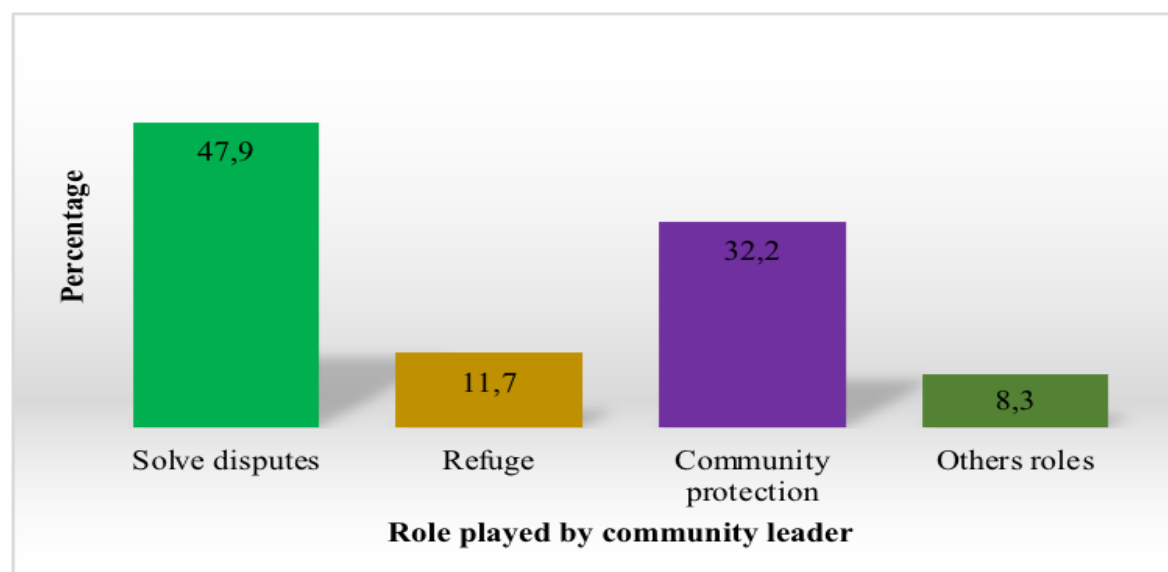


Figure 1: Role of Community Leader in Peace Restoration

Source: Field work, 2026

The armed conflict affected community trust in many ways (**Table 2**). Insecurity (34% of the population) was the order of the day. Many lives were lost, and properties were destroyed. The words below are from a respondent's account.

"We lived every single day thinking it would be our last. People were disappearing and never coming back. No one slept in peace in their houses, and at night, your one eye stayed open for any eventualities. The level of insecurity made everyone, even the domestic animals, unsafe."

There was an increased level of theft (29%). Because of the insufficient presence of law enforcement institutions, theft has become increasingly common. According to some respondents, not only were houses looted, but farms were also subject to food crop theft. This was made worse by the increased hunger in the community. Also, betrayal (27.25%) and revenge (9.5%) were common impacts of the armed conflict on the community. Some people took advantage of the state of peril and disorder to enforce their grievances with others. Interviews with a community lessee revealed that *"some people went and reported others to the military and the NSAGs."* They were arrested or abducted and taken to their camps. There, they were severely harassed and beaten. Some of the victims remain permanently incapacitated today, while others even lost their lives. These were all acts of revenge and betrayal. *"Now, no one trusts anyone in this village anymore."* This response was similar all around the Kupe Muanenguba Division.

Table 2: Effect of the Armed Conflict on Community Trust

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased level of theft	206	29.2
Insecurity	240	34
Betrayal	192	27.2
Revenge	67	9.5
Total	705	100

Source: Field work, 2026

Because of the above impact of the armed conflict on trust, community cooperation was affected (Figure 2). Most of the community (70.8%) acknowledged that cooperation between community members had decreased. 18.0% thought cooperation had remained constant, while 10.8% believed community cooperation had instead increased due to the armed conflict. This opinion of increased cooperation was supported by the fact that some people worked together to provide food and shelter to the needy, among other forms of assistance.

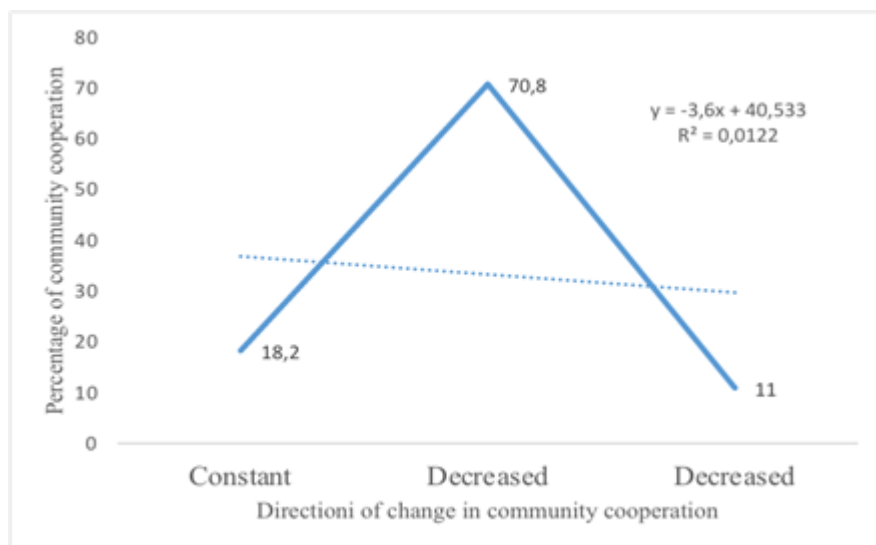


Figure 2: Effect of armed Conflict on Community Cooperation

Source: Field work, 2026

The lack of cooperation caused by the armed conflict also had severe effects on communal ties (**Table 3**). This was reflected in the fact that 42% of the population knew there was a lack of trust, and 23% reiterated restrictions on movement. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated that there were low turnouts during cultural activities, while thirteen percent acknowledged that some traditional values had been lost.

Table 3: Effect of Armed Conflict on Communal Ties

Effect	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Restriction of movement	140	23.8
Low turnout in cultural activities	120	20.4
Lack of trust	248	42.2
Loss of traditional values	80	13.6
Total	588	100

Source: Field work, 2026

The cultural setting of the locals of Kupe Muanenguba was characterized by a huge turnout for community cultural activities. The armed conflict, however, resulted in deteriorating social ties within the community (Figure 3). Community events were a great hit. It was mostly felt at community meetings (33.9%), where many denizens no longer attended them. Burials used to be arenas where the community came together to mourn; however, the respondents (28.7%) acknowledged a negative impact on turnouts at these occasions. Village festivals (19.8%), such as cultural weeks, agricultural shows, and food expos, were victims. Community services (17.9%), such as clean-up campaigns and road rehabilitation works, among others, were also hard hit because of the armed conflict. Some of the reasons advanced by the population for this reduction in community solidarity were that people were afraid to gather in one place for fear of attacks from NSAGs or government forces. This was because most gatherings were treated as arenas to plot against the government or NSAGs. It should be noted that these events often brought the community together. Either to rejoice as a people or to mourn as a family the impact the armed conflict had on these events immensely affected community cohesion and solidarity.

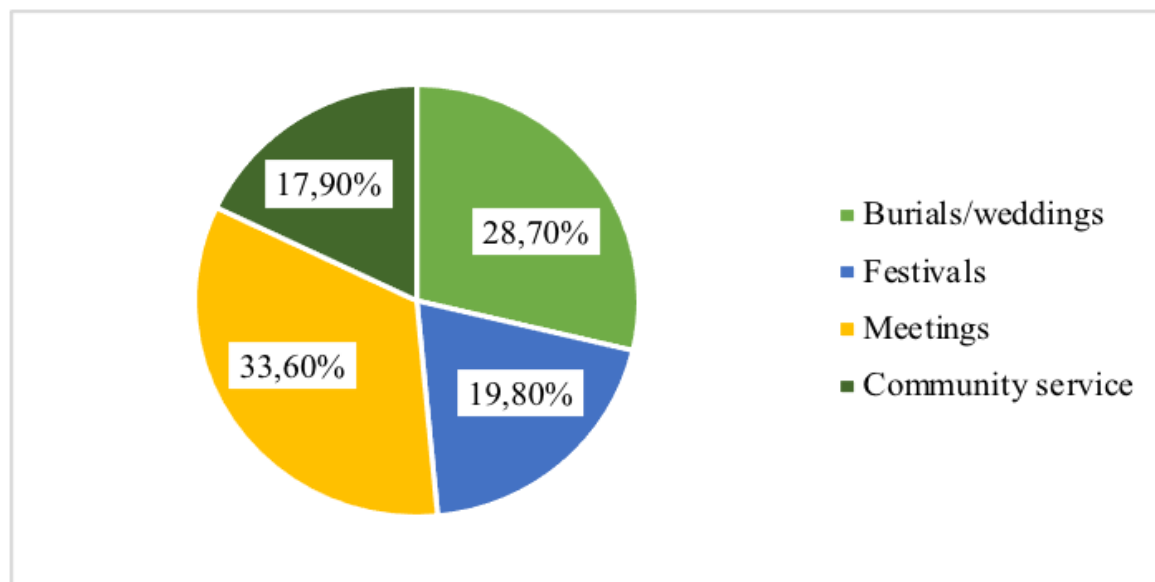


Figure 3: Most Community Events Affected by the Armed Conflict

Source: Field work, 2026

Furthermore, community solidarity and social cohesion were not only affected in the areas of the crisis but also in areas where some people fled. 87.9% of the population were internally displaced persons (IDP) at some point in the crisis (Table 4). This caused family separations as some people fled to different locations. 11.7%

stayed put. They went to neighboring towns in the French-speaking parts of the country. The nearest towns were Dschang and Baffousam in the West Region of Cameroon, Loum, Nkongsamba, and Douala in the Littoral Region, just to name a few. Displacement was necessary in the search for peace and security; however, this was not the case for every IDP. The IDPs gave their opinion on the treatment they received in the host communities, as described in **Figure 4**.

Table 4: The Percentage of Once Internally Displaced Community Members during the Crisis.

IDP status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Displaced	341	87.9
Not Displaced	47	12.1
TOTAL	388	100

Source: Field work, 2026

Figure 4 shows that a majority of the IDPs (41.7%) received good treatment from the host community, while 27.8% acknowledged that they received very good treatment. Some of the acts these IDPs received were food, shelter, water, and clothing, just to name a few. They also acknowledged that the host communities were hospitable and caring. However, some IDPs got poor treatment from their host communities (22%), while others (8.4%) received hostile treatment. Some of the poor and hostile treatment was reflected in the rent increments, poor housing conditions, poor hygienic conditions, and increased prices of basic amenities such as food and water. Some respondents recounted verbal and physical abuse from people who labeled them as foreigners. In some cases, as narrated by a respondent, the poor and hostile treatment drove them back to their hometowns.

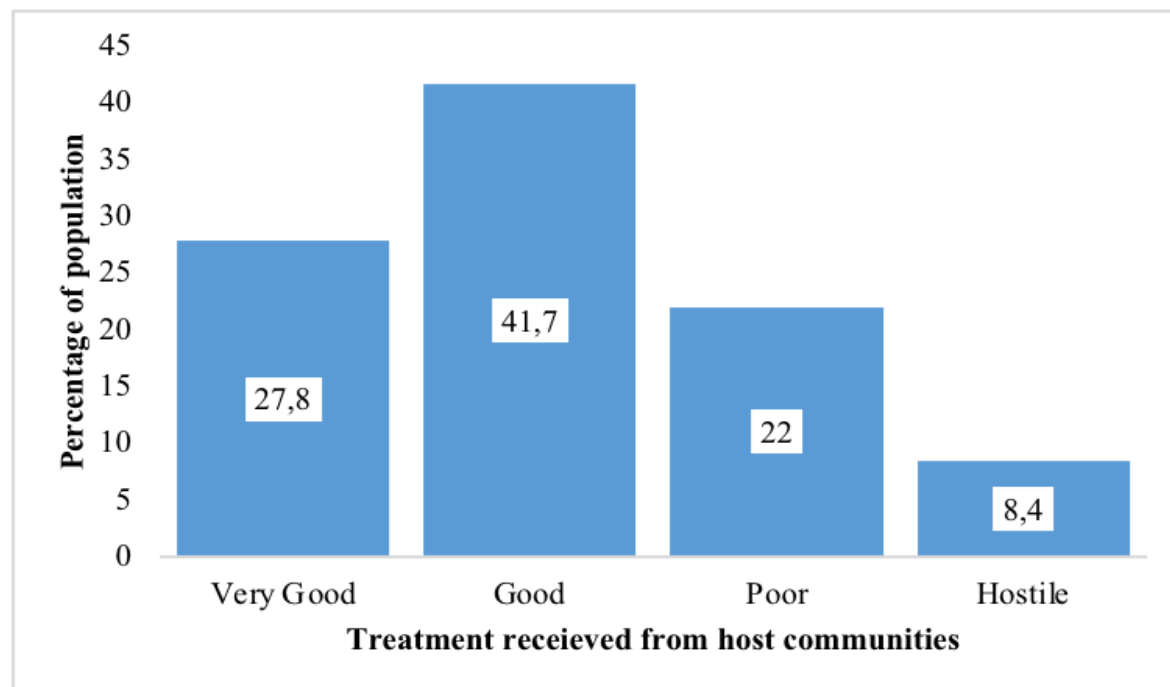


Figure 4: Treatment Accorded to IDPs in the Hosts Communities.

Source: Field work, 2026.

Interestingly, community solidarity and social cohesiveness were also affected by humanitarian aid. According to some community dwellers, humanitarian aid (food, money, medical supplies, and so on) was distributed, favouring some groups of people (Figure 5). This favour, which some in the affected community saw as corruption, did not end well for community cohesion. The most favourably positioned group of people were the IDPs (39.8%), followed by women and girls (24.7%). In addition, children, youth (20.8%), and people with

disabilities (14.7%) benefited. This hierarchy in receiving humanitarian aid caused bitterness between those who received aid and those who did not. This disagreement with the hierarchy of aid distribution caused anger or hatred (27.6%) among some community dwellers (Figure 6). It also caused envy (26.1%), quarrelling in areas of distribution and among the population (25.1%), and enmity to the point of violence (21.2%). It strained social relations among the denizens, enhanced community segregation, and diminished trust and solidarity in the crisis-affected communities.

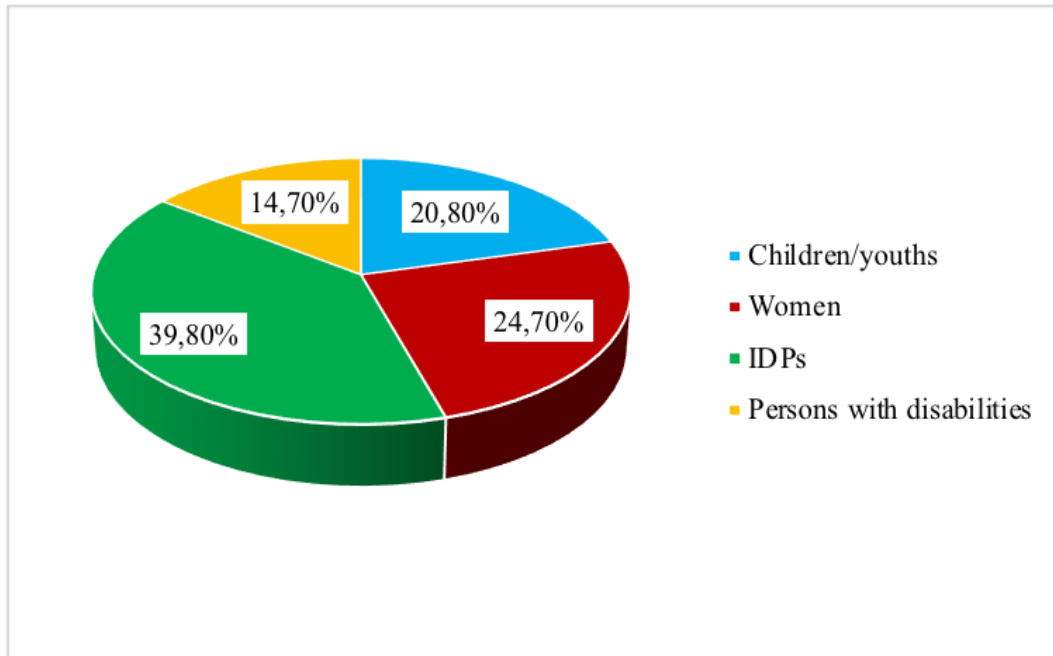


Figure 5: Percentage of Groups, Favoured during the Distribution of Humanitarian Aid.

Source: Field work, 2026

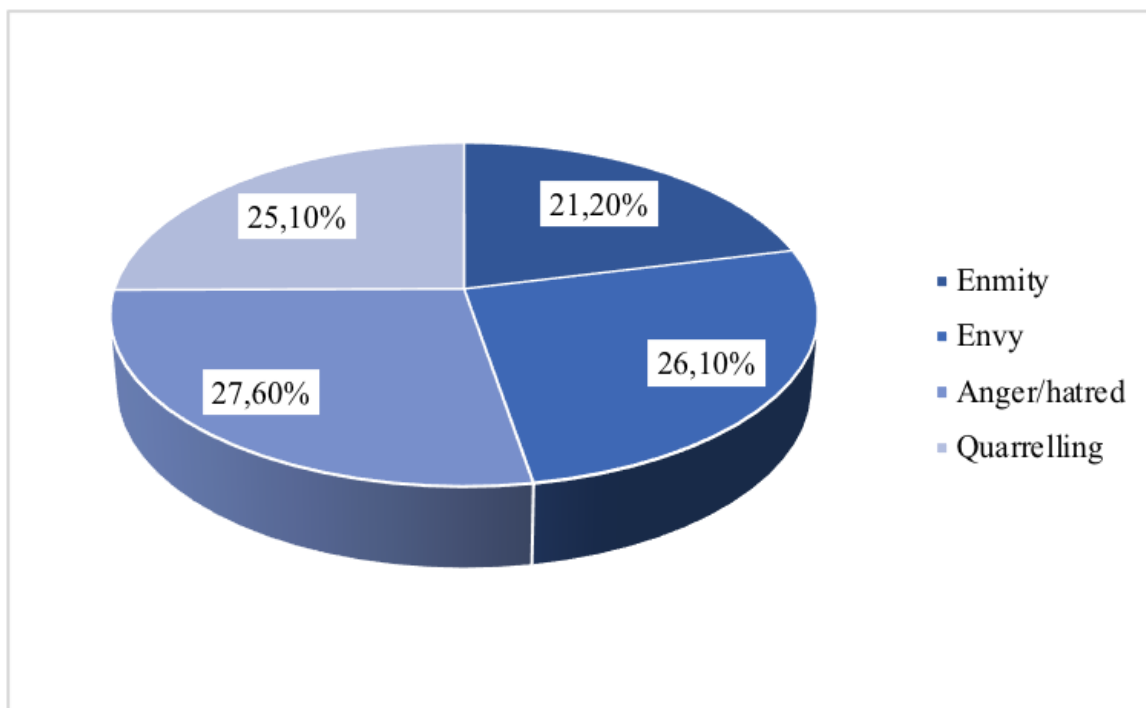


Figure 6: Effect of Favouritism in Aid Distribution on Community Solidarity and Cohesion

Source: Field work, 2026

A number of organizations provided humanitarian aid to the communities impacted by the crisis. These institutions and their workers were the architects of favouritism, according to some respondents. Seeking a ranking, the inhabitants of Kupe Muanenguba gave their opinion on the major perpetrators of favouritism during aid distribution (**Figure 7**).

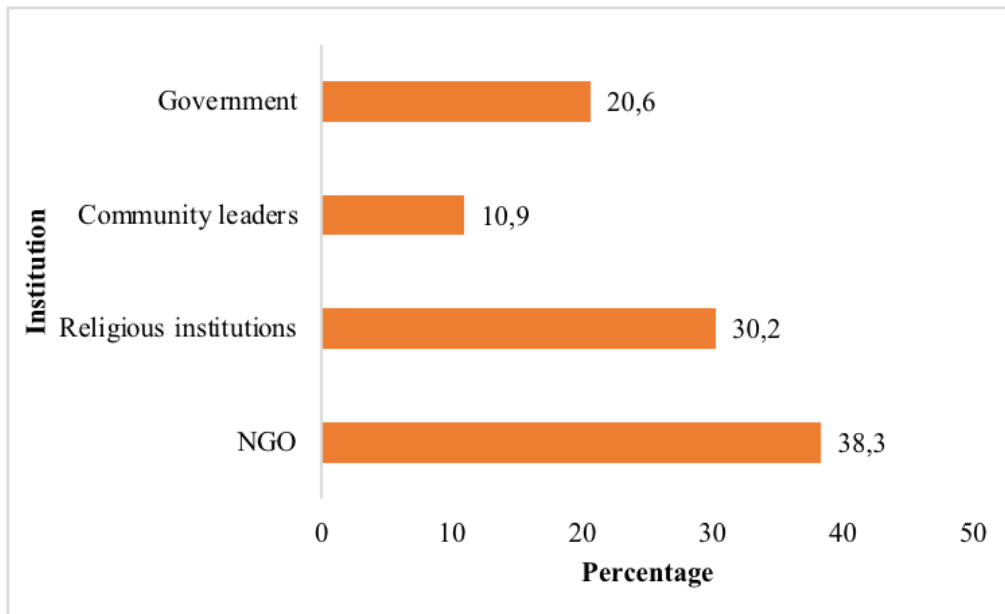


Figure 7: Percentage of Favoritism by Insitution

Source: Field work, 2026

Results (**Figure 7**) indicated that NGOs (38.3%) were the institutions practicing the highest rate of favouritism during the distribution of humanitarian aid. This was followed by religious institutions (30.2%). The reasons advanced to this effect were that the employees were purposefully chosen. Also, respondents acknowledge that the communities were not contacted during the selection of aid workers. Therefore, those who were chosen were working with bias. Government institutions accounted for 20.6% and community leaders for 10.9%. The limited rate of favouritism in these institutions was attributed to their accountability to their leaders, sponsors, and the community. Also, during distribution sessions, these institutions (the government and community leaders) informed and consulted the public through the right channels. Information dissemination was better than that of NGOs and religious institutions.

In the Kupe Muanenguba Division, there is a mixture of other ethnic groups. They include the Tikar, the Bamoum, the Bamileke, and the Bororos, mixed with Bakossi and Bassosi people. The humanitarian crisis affected their interaction. Community solidarity among these ethnic groups was strained (Table 5). Disunity (31.9%) was the most common effect of the humanitarian crisis on community solidarity. This was followed by a loss of confidence amongst ethnic groups (24.4%), a low rate of participation (22%), and the inability to meet financial obligations (21.6%).

Table 5: Effect of the Humanitarian Crisis on Community Solidarity with other Ethnic Groups

Effect on other ethnic groups	Frequency	Percentage
Inability to meet financial obligations	109	21.6%
Low rate of participation	111	22
Disunity	161	31.9
Loss of confidence	123	24.4
TOTAL	504	100

Source: Field work, 2026

Security challenges in Kupe Manenuguba caused by the armed conflict

The humanitarian crisis brought several security challenges (**Figure 8**). The most renowned was theft (40%), followed by kidnapping or harassment (24.1%) and extortion (17.4%). The absence of law enforcement institutions during some periods of the conflict left the communities vulnerable to thieves. The search for money and revenge by the warring sides and even strangers led to kidnapping and harassment for ransom.

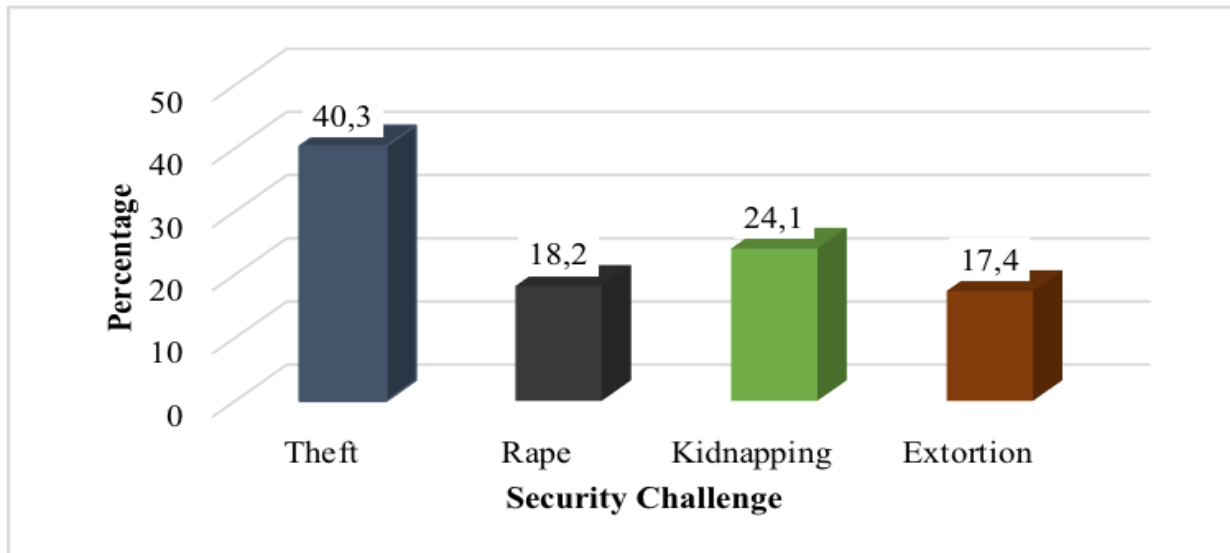


Figure 8: Security Challenge Casued by the Humanitarian Crisis

Source: Field work, 2026

Security challenges brought on by the humanitarian crisis created an atmosphere of fear. To this effect, the communities sought to ensure the protection of their residents. This led to them taking certain measures to enforce community safety (Figure 9). One of the measures was the formation of vigilante groups (54.3%), and spies were dispersed across the country (25%). Also, there were recognized alerts (17.1%) and other measures (3.5%), such as not keeping late nights and being critical of strangers. These measures were put in place to ensure early warning in times of danger, limit attacks from the NSAGs, and ensure the safety of people and their properties.

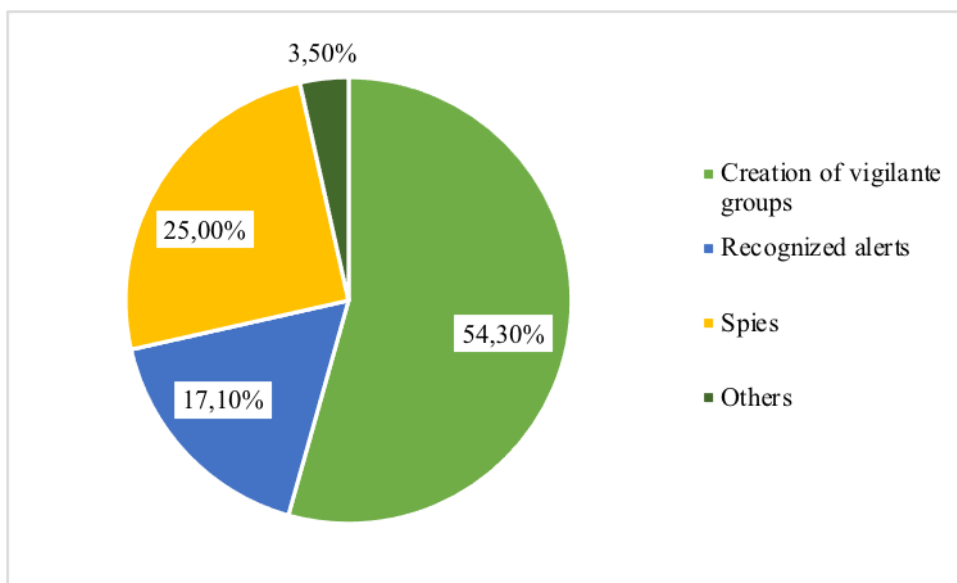


Figure 9: Community Efforts to Maintain Protection, Peace and Security

Source: Filed work, 2026

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Judging from the facts presented above and the dimensions of horizontal social cohesion, it was discovered that social cohesion was significantly strained. The lack of trust between community members reflected this addition. Insecurity made it impossible for government and private institutions to function properly. This led to an absence of accountability and transparency. Many denizens complained of discrimination and corruption, especially during the distribution of humanitarian aid. The continued violence hindered the transformation of the conflict. This was also another hindrance to horizontal community cohesion.

With regards to vertical cohesion, there were strained relationships between the population and its leaders. This is because many leaders did very little or nothing to promote peace. Some leaders were even branded as supporting the conflict for personal gain. The absence of accountability and transparency was evident. The absence of inclusive dialogue to solve disputes was another sign of the lack of vertical social cohesion.

The armed conflict in Kupe Muanenguba had effects on every person in the community. This was reflected in the diversity of the respondents in this study. The three sub-divisions (Tombel, Nguti, and Bangem) displayed uniqueness in the composition of their populations. This was also the case between the central towns and the suburbs. People of different age groups, marital status, household sizes, and educational leaders—this socio-cultural mix is reflected in every social entity in the country. The onset of the armed conflict strained their bond even more. This was because it brought security challenges, with the most renowned being theft but also rape, torture, and kidnapping. These security challenges strained the cohesiveness of the community. This fall in community solidarity and social cohesion caused by differences in socio-political status and insecurity is like that recorded in the national survey on social cohesion in Nigeria. The Africa Polling Institute (API) (2021) discovered in the survey that Nigeria's numerous socio-political conflicts and ethnic differences had strained people's coexistence.

As an important aspect of the culture of the people of Kupe Muanenguba, the role of community leaders is indispensable in promoting peace and development. Kupe Muanenguba had a mix of local leaders who played various critical roles during the crisis. They included solving disputes and offering refuge. This was important, especially given the fact that most institutions charged with solving disputes (such as law enforcement agencies) were not functional.

An important aspect of community solidarity and social cohesion is trust. This was greatly felt in the crisis community. It strained the relationship between community members and even strangers. This was reflected in acts such as increased levels of betrayal, revenge, theft, and insecurity. In interviews with the denizens, 70% of them acknowledged that, due to the crisis, the level of trust amongst community dwellers has depleted. This is mostly driven by fear of the unknown, as many instances were recorded where people betrayed others. In the meantime, having others seek revenge The lack of trust also reduced the level of community cooperation, which was affirmed by most of the population (70.8%). Studies by Andreas et al. (2020) in Colombia also arrived at similar results. They discovered that armed conflict strains community trust, which hinders peacebuilding.

A reduction in community engagement was an important aspect that showed dwindling community solidarity and cohesion. Like other parts of African society, the communities in Kupe Muanenguba lived together. This was reflected in the social activities they used to organize and attend in droves. The advent of armed conflict changed everything. Events such as weddings, burials, community works or services, festivals, and meetings that used to have huge turnouts saw a huge decline in participation from the locals. This was exacerbated by the restriction of movements, insecurity, and loss of traditional values. This lack of community cooperation and engagement strains community solidarity and social cohesion, as affirmed by McCloskey *et al.* (2011), who states that social cohesion is a product of community engagement, which is embedded in the principles of community organization, fairness, justice, participation, and self-determination.

Furthermore, community solidarity and social cohesion were not only affected in the crisis-affected communities but also in the host communities. The host communities were neighbouring towns and villages in

the country. With 87% of the population displaced at one point in time, the treatment they got from the host communities was not all the same. Some were treated well, while other host communities treated IDPs with much hostility. As reiterated by some respondents, this was because of the scramble for basic necessities such as jobs, housing, and food. Furthermore, favouritism, as witnessed during the distribution of aid, further strained community solidarity and cohesion. This is because IDPs were prioritized during aid distribution, and this angered the home and host communities. NGOs and other institutions were accused of favouritism. This further strained social cohesion as it bred anger, hatred, envy, and enmity. Similarly, social cohesion and solidarity were strained with the influx of nearly one million Rohingya into Bangladesh in 2017. According to Siddiqi (2022), social cohesion between the Rohingya and their host communities became extremely complicated.

In trying to promote community togetherness in Kupe Muanenguba, efforts toward building peace were important. This was done through the creation of vigilante groups, spies, and recognized alerts, just to name a few. These efforts were in line with trying to bring the community together. This is in line with Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), which defines social cohesion by taking into consideration the ability to belong, level of trust, and share of common values that make up the "glue that bonds society together" (NURC 2008).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The objective of this study was to investigate the effects of armed conflict on community solidarity and social cohesion in Kupe Muanenguba. Based on a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from a sample of 77 respondents from Bangem, 99 from Nguti, and 212 from Tombel, for a total of 388 respondents. The study sheds light on the impact of armed conflict on social cohesion and community solidarity in Kupe Muanenguba using descriptive statistics and frequency distribution. The results showed that armed conflict had a negative impact on the three key indicators of social cohesion, societal trust, degree of cooperation, and identity, as identified by Fiedler and Rohles (2021). As a result, the Following suggestions are made :

- First and foremost, it is important to give priority to repairing and reestablishing the relationships and traditional community institutions that have been damaged by violence. This could involve working with local traditional leaders, community-based organizations, and religious institutions to promote reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives at the local level.
- More so, education and awareness-raising programs should be implemented to promote dialogue and understanding among community members. This could involve the inclusion of conflict resolution and peacebuilding topics in the formal education curriculum, as well as media outreach and public awareness campaigns.
- Finally, international organizations, including donor agencies and non-governmental organizations, have an important role to play in promoting community solidarity and social cohesion in post-conflict contexts. This involves providing financial and technical support for peacebuilding and development initiatives, as well as promoting inclusive and participatory approaches that prioritize the needs and voices of affected communities.

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