

Socio-Political Conflict and Livelihood Vulnerability in Bafut: Implications for Community Resilience in Northwest Region Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The socio-political crisis that emerged in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions in 2016 has severely disrupted livelihoods in most conflict-affected communities. Substantial findings reveal that livelihoods in Bafut were severely affected, exposing the community to new difficulties of living and surviving dynamics. These conditions have heightened livelihood vulnerability while simultaneously compelling households to develop adaptive and resilience-oriented strategies to cope with prolonged uncertainty. Against this backdrop, the study examines livelihood vulnerability, adaptation, and community resilience in Bafut Sub-Division. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving 155 questionnaires administered across 10 quarters, complemented by documentary sources. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, tables, and charts, while qualitative data underwent content analysis. Findings indicate major disruptions through declining household incomes (64.8%), displacement (43.8%), restricted access to farmland (42.2%), and disrupted education and healthcare services (45.3%). It is observed that, vulnerability varied spatially according to insecurity, accessibility, displacement, and resource availability. Households adaptive and resilience-oriented strategies including livelihood diversification (25.0%), migration to safer areas (23.4%), petty trading, and informal economic activities were applied. However, these strategies remain constrained by insecurity, limited resources, and weak institutional support. The study therefore recommends integrated interventions combining peacebuilding, security, public-service restoration, agricultural support, livelihood recovery, and sustainable economic opportunities to strengthen long-term community resilience.

Keywords: Socio-political crisis; livelihood vulnerability; adaptation; community resilience; household livelihoods; Bafut Sub-Division; Northwest Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION

Crisis is generally understood as an unexpected event that can cause danger, instability, or significant disruption at individual, community, or societal levels (Boin, 2009). Evolution generally gave rise to the idea of a global crisis, where interconnected challenges such as political instability, economic downturns, climate change, and migration create socio-political disruptions that cut across national boundaries (Castells, 2017; EBSCO Research Starters, 2024). In response to these growing challenges, international frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Particularly Sustainable Development Goal 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions, the African Union's Peace and Security Council, and governance programs by the World Bank have been developed to guide countries in preventing, managing, and recovering from socio-political disruptions (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

In recent years, several countries globally have confronted major socio-political crises. In Myanmar, the military coup of February 2021 overthrew the civilian government, triggering large-scale protests, violence, and humanitarian distress; by mid-2024, more than 3.5 million persons were internally displaced (UNHCR, 2024).

In Bolivia, a failed military coup in June 2024 exposed deep political divisions and economic instability, threatening democratic governance and social cohesion (Al Jazeera, 2024). Simultaneously, global forced displacement surged to approximately 117.3 million people by the end of 2023, signalling the scale of global instability (UNHCR, 2023). These cases reveal that crises of governance and social justice are not localised but part of a systemic global pattern. In the United States, socio-political crises disproportionately affect marginalised communities, particularly youth, as political and social structures have often failed to address systemic inequalities.

In Asia, recent socio-political and financial crises have revealed the continued fragility of governance and economic systems. Countries with weak institutional oversight have experienced rapid economic disruption, currency depreciation, reduced investor confidence, and widespread corporate distress (World Bank, 2022; IOM, 2023). Political instability and poorly regulated markets have constrained productivity and slowed economic recovery across several Asian economies (ADB, 2021). In response, many affected countries have introduced reforms such as strengthened regulatory frameworks, enhanced state oversight, and improvements in legal and accountability systems (OECD, 2022).

In recent years, Africa has experienced repeated socio-political crises. A military coup in Niger in 2023 ousted President Mohamed Bazoum, sparking regional instability (BBC News, 2023). Sudan's civil conflict, which intensified in 2023, produced massive humanitarian consequences, including widespread displacement and infrastructure damage (UNHCR, 2023). Sub-Saharan Africa has been the subject of extensive research linking economic hardship, political instability, and recurring violence. Conditions such as widespread poverty, unemployment, and social inequality create fertile ground for political violence, reinforcing cycles of deprivation (Fagbemi & Fajingbesi, 2022; Luckham *et al.*, 2001). Empirical analyses indicate that weak economic development correlates with repeated socio-political crises, as fragile states often lack resilience capacity (Addy, 2021).

The Far North region of Cameroon has been significantly affected by cross-border insecurity linked to Boko Haram. The insurgency has displaced thousands, strained public services, disrupted local markets, and placed pressure on the capacities of humanitarian and state actors to respond (Familusi & Oshomoh, 2018; Babayo, 2021). In the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, the socio-political crisis is described as one of the most significant contemporary challenges. The situation is said to stem from a combination of long-standing administrative tensions, governance concerns, and unresolved institutional grievances, although the exact origins may vary depending on the source (World Bank, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Since 2016, the crisis appears to have intensified, leading to widespread displacement, disruption of basic services, and deterioration of local infrastructure. Recent humanitarian reports suggest that more than 700,000 individuals may be internally displaced, while school closures are reported to have affected hundreds of thousands of learners across the two regions (UN OCHA, 2023. Tayong *et al.*, 2026).

The Bafut Sub-Division in the Northwest Region provides an example of local communities may experience the wider socio-political tensions affecting the area. Interactions among traditional authorities, community groups, and state institutions have been noted in recent assessments as potentially influencing the stability of social and economic activities (UNDP, 2023). This crisis has forced individual within the community to sought livelihood adaption strategies to recover from their previous livelihood activities damaged by the crisis. Further studies have not presented how these livelihoods were affected, exposing the community to new livelihood adaptation strategies. Based on this, this study examines the study examines livelihood vulnerability, adaptation, and community resilience in Bafut Sub-Division.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was conducted in Bafut Sub-Division, located in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Bafut lies within the Western Grass fields and is situated approximately 20 km northwest of Bamenda, the regional capital. Geographically, the Sub-Division extends between latitudes 6°05'N and 6°11'N and longitudes 9°58'E and 10°11'E, covering an estimated surface area of about 340 km². The physical landscape of the area is characterised by undulating hills, valleys, and ridges, which form part of the Bamenda Highlands,

a mountainous region within the Cameroon Volcanic Line. The area is drained mainly by the Mezam River and its tributaries, which play an important role in the local drainage system and agricultural activities. The natural vegetation is predominantly grassland savannah, with scattered shrubs and trees, while valley bottoms are often characterized by wetter vegetation such as raffia palms. Administratively, Bafut Sub-Division is composed of several traditional Fondoms, including the first-class Bafut Fandom and other Fondoms such as Mundum I and Mundum II, which function under traditional leadership structures. The figure 1 shows a location map of Bafut Subdivision.

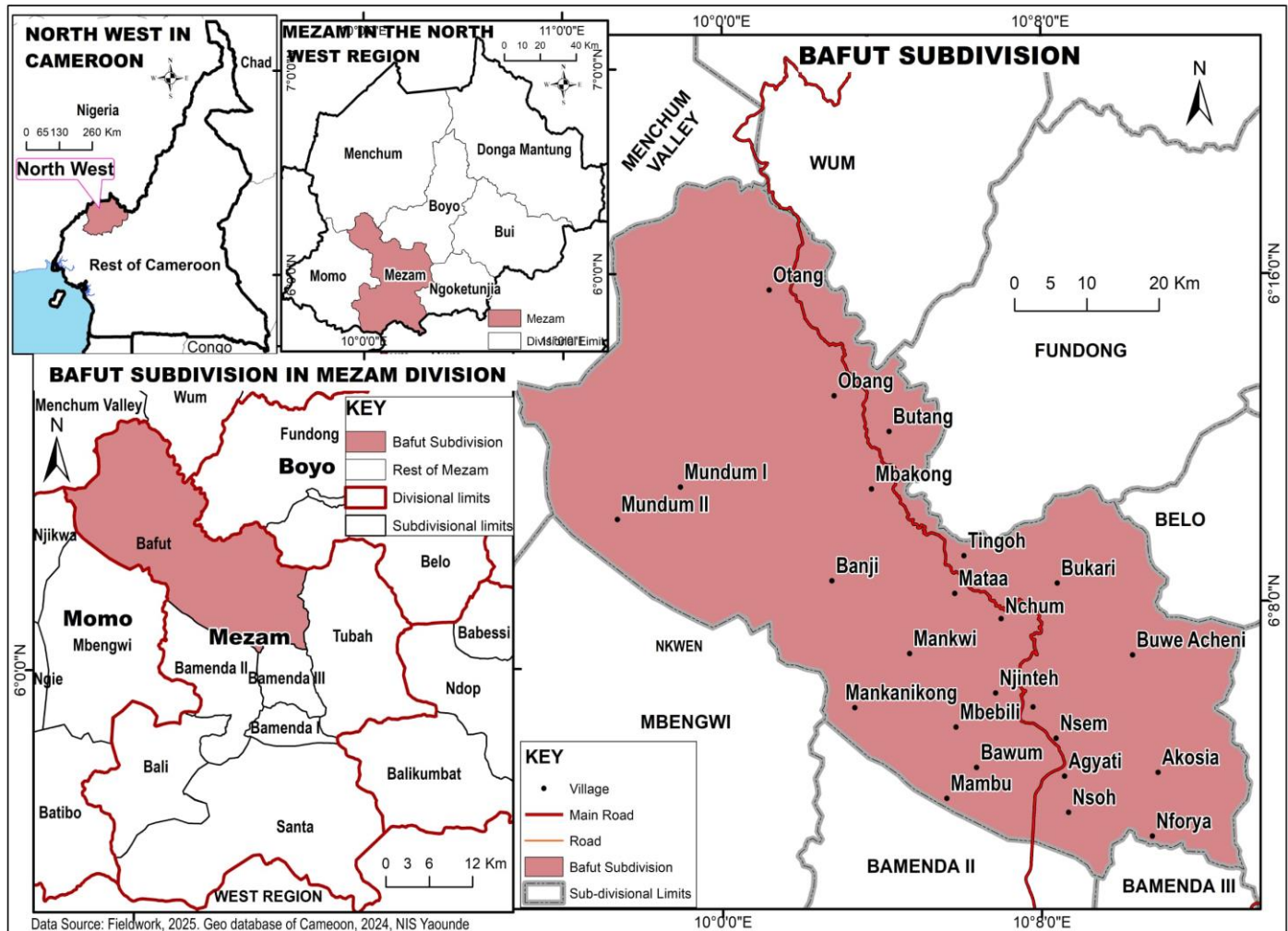


Figure 1. Location of the study area

Methods

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques was used to select respondents from the chosen communities in Central Bafut. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to deliberately select participants with relevant knowledge of the sociopolitical crisis, while snowball sampling helped identify additional respondents through referrals. Quantitative data were obtained numerically through the administration of questionnaire to permanent residents of the Bafut municipality. Qualitative data were obtained through interview and focus Group discussion expressing their life experiences regarding the impact of the socio-political crisis. One hundred and fifty-five (155) questionnaires were administered in 10 quarters, projected from population estimated at 29,216 inhabitants. This population was divided by the sample size (155), giving a ratio of approximately 1:188. indicating that each respondent represents about 188 individuals in the population in the Bafut municipality. Both primary and Secondary data were collected and used.

The data from the field were analysed using Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results from the analysis were presented clearly using tables, graphs, charts, and maps to illustrate patterns, trends, and relationships relevant to the socio-political crisis in Central Bafut.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Manifest Forms Of Socio-Political Crisis In Bafut Community

The socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division has manifested in several forms, producing profound consequences for community life, mobility, livelihoods, and access to essential services. The findings indicate that the most prominent manifestations include armed group confrontations, lingering fear and insecurity, road blockages, institutional closures, and population displacement. These manifestations vary spatially across the different quarters of Bafut, reflecting differences in exposure to conflict hotspots and the intensity of insecurity. Figure 2 presents the major day-to-day manifestations of the crisis experienced by the population in the study area.

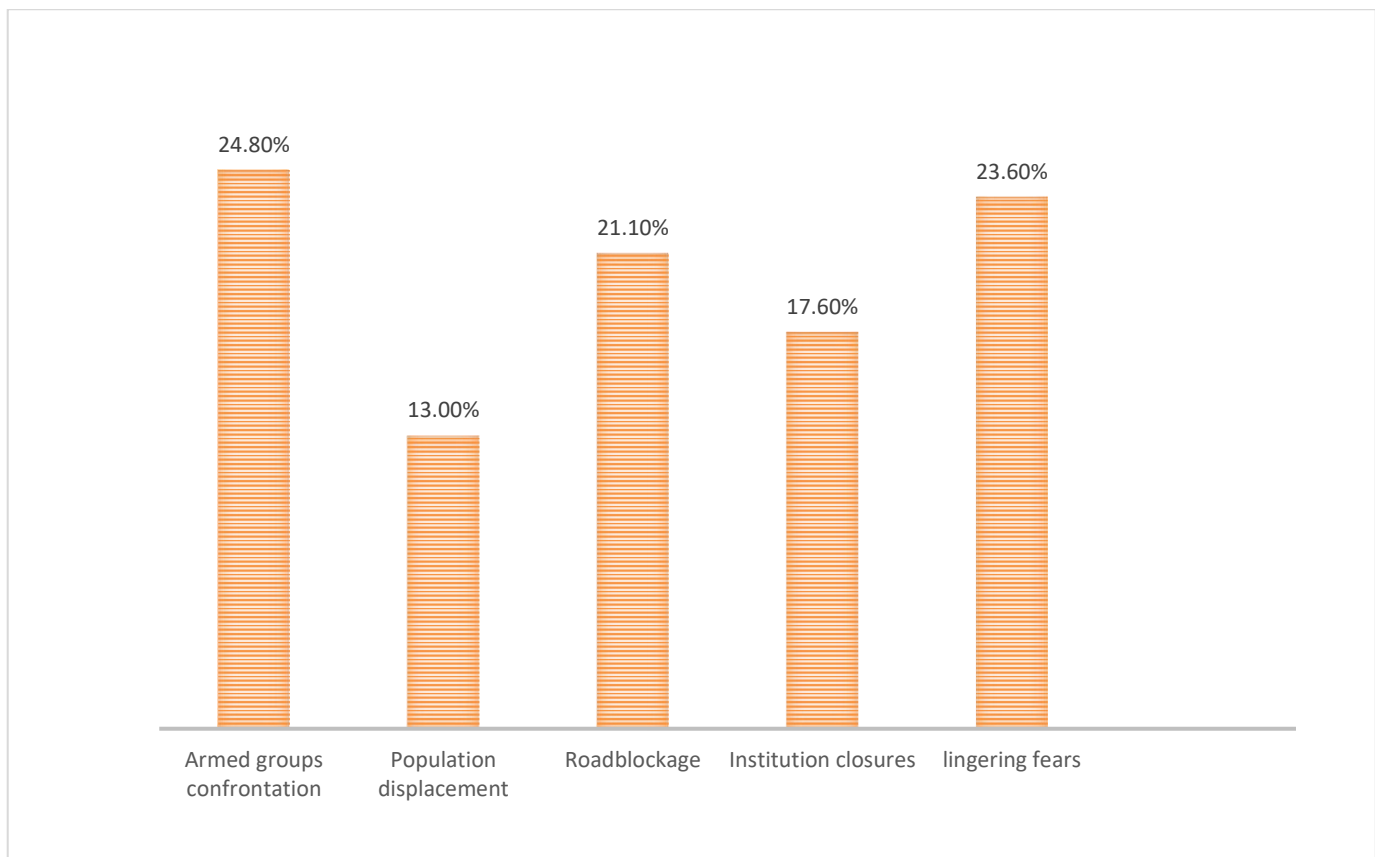


Figure 2: Evident Day-to-Day Forms of the Socio-Political Crisis Experienced by the Population in Bafut

Source: Fieldwork 2026

Armed group Confrontations

Armed group confrontations emerged as one of the most prevalent manifestations of the socio-political crisis, reported by 83.6% of respondents. These confrontations have created an increasingly hostile and insecure environment, particularly in quarters like Njinteh, Manji, Mankaha, and Nsani, where recurrent incidents have disrupted normal community activities and forced some residents to abandon their homes and livelihoods in search of safer locations. The intensity of armed confrontations, however, varies across the sub-division. Bujong and Mbeballi experienced confrontations at comparatively moderate levels, while Agyati and Nso recorded relatively fewer incidents. This spatial variation can be associated with differences in proximity to conflict hotspots and the intensity of armed activities across the sub-division. The concentration of confrontations in particular quarters demonstrates that the crisis is not spatially uniform but produces differentiated levels of vulnerability within the Bafut community.

Lingering Fears

Lingering fear and insecurity constituted the second most prevalent manifestation of the crisis, reported by 79.7% of respondents. The persistent occurrence or perceived threat of violence has generated a climate of fear, uncertainty, and psychological distress that extends beyond periods of actual confrontation. This condition has affected residents' freedom of movement, participation in economic activities, access to farms and markets, and general sense of security. The highest levels of insecurity were reported in Njinteh, Manji, and Mankaha, which are among the quarters most exposed to recurrent conflict-related incidents. Njibujang and Niko experienced moderate levels of insecurity, whereas Agyati and Nso recorded relatively lower levels. The spatial pattern suggests that perceived insecurity is strongly associated with the intensity and frequency of

conflict incidents within particular locations. Consequently, even in areas where direct confrontations are less frequent, the broader atmosphere of uncertainty continues to influence everyday decisions and community interactions.

Road blockages

Road blockages were reported by 71.1% of respondents, making them another major manifestation of the crisis in Bafut Sub-Division. The obstruction of roads has significantly disrupted the movement of people and goods, restricting access to markets, farms, health facilities, educational institutions, and other essential services. Such restrictions have also increased the difficulty and cost of transporting agricultural produce and accessing livelihood opportunities.

The problem was particularly pronounced in Njinteh, Manji, Nsani, and Mankaha, where major routes were frequently obstructed. Bujong and Mbeali experienced moderate levels of road obstruction, while Agyati and Nso recorded relatively fewer incidents, reflecting their comparatively lower levels of insecurity. The spatial distribution of road blockages demonstrates how conflict-related restrictions on mobility can amplify livelihood vulnerability by isolating communities from markets, services, and productive resources.

Institutional closures

Institutional closures were identified by 59.4% of respondents as another substantial manifestation of the crisis. The institutions affected included schools, council services, and public security facilities, whose operations were repeatedly disrupted by insecurity and armed confrontations. Schools were particularly vulnerable, with closures occurring at different frequencies depending on the intensity of insecurity within each quarter.

The closures can broadly be categorised as frequent, intermittent, and asymmetrical, reflecting differences in the duration and intensity of disruptions across locations and institutions. Government schools were perceived to be particularly affected, while the degree of disruption varied according to the security conditions of individual quarters. Institutions located in relatively safer or "green" areas experienced fewer disruptions than those situated in highly insecure or "red" zones.

The crisis also affected the provision of local administrative and security services. The relocation of the Council and Public security functions to Bamenda Town reduced the availability of essential services within Bafut community and increased the distance residents had to travel to access them. This institutional disruption represents an important dimension of the crisis because it weakens local governance capacity and further constrains residents' access to essential public services.

Population displacement

Population displacement was reported by 43.8% of respondents, making it another important manifestation of the socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division. The findings indicate that persistent armed attacks, insecurity, and the disruption of livelihoods have compelled many residents to abandon their homes and relocate to relatively safer areas. Bamenda emerged as an important destination, although some displaced residents also moved to other towns and regions across Cameroon.

Displacement was particularly pronounced in Njinteh, Manji, Mankaha, and Nsani, where recurrent armed confrontations and insecurity created strong pressures for residents to leave their communities. Bujong and Mbebali also experienced considerable population displacement, whereas Agyati and Nso recorded comparatively lower levels. The spatial pattern of displacement therefore corresponds broadly with variations in conflict intensity across Bafut.

Population displacement has consequences that extend beyond the physical movement of people. The departure of residents disrupts household livelihoods, weakens community networks, reduces agricultural production, and can lead to the abandonment of homes, farms, businesses, and other productive assets. Thus, displacement constitutes both a direct manifestation of the crisis and a mechanism through which livelihood vulnerability is reproduced within affected communities.

Impact of the Socio-Political Crisis in the Bafut Community

The socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division has had far-reaching consequences for the population, affecting economic activities, livelihoods, mobility, education, healthcare, security, and access to essential public services. The impacts are reflected in changes in the conditions reported by respondents before and during the crisis. Table 1 presents the major effects of the crisis experienced by the population in the study area.

Table 1. Effects of the socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division

Impact	Before the Crisis	During the Crisis
Loss of income	5.90%	64.80%
Population displacement	3.10%	43.80%
Restriction access to farms	1.60%	42.20%
Disruption to educational activities	2.80%	32.00%
Limited access to healthcare	10.50%	45.30%
Increased insecurity	2.10%	76.60%
Decline in business activities	3.90%	57.80%

Source: Fieldwork (2026)

Table 1 demonstrates a substantial deterioration in socio-economic and livelihood conditions in Bafut Sub-Division during the crisis. The most pronounced increase was in reported insecurity, rising from 2.1% before the crisis to 76.6% during the crisis, followed by income loss (5.9% to 64.8%) and declining business activities (3.9% to 57.8%). These changes reflect widespread disruption of economic activities, employment, household purchasing power, and income-generating opportunities, particularly among household's dependent on farming, petty trading, and small-scale enterprises. This further illustrates how displacement affected both household income and food security. Participants explained that before the crisis, farming provided food for household consumption as well as cash income from the sale of surplus produce. However, insecurity and fear of movement reduced their ability to cultivate their farms regularly. As one participant in a focus group discussion noted: As one participant in a focus group discussion noted:

“Even when you have a farm, you cannot just go there whenever you want. You have to think about your safety first. Sometimes the crops are ready, but you cannot harvest them.”

The disruption of farming was therefore experienced not simply as a reduction in agricultural production, but as a loss of an important household coping mechanism. Participants reported having to purchase food that they previously produced themselves, thereby increasing household expenditure at a time when income opportunities had also declined. A participant whose household depended on petty trading described the situation as follows:

“Before the crisis, I could sell in the market and make something every day. Now there are days when I cannot open my business at all. If there is no movement, there are no customers, and there is no money to take home.”

Access to productive resources was also severely constrained. Restricted access to farms increased from 1.6% to 42.2%, while population displacement rose from 3.1% to 43.8%. Insecurity and restricted mobility disrupted agricultural production, access to markets, and the movement of inputs and produce, thereby weakening household income and food security. Displacement further separated households from homes, farms, businesses, social networks, and productive assets.

Access to essential social services also deteriorated, with limited healthcare access increasing from 10.5% to 45.3% and educational disruption from 2.8% to 32.0%. Institutional functioning was similarly affected, as some public facilities were abandoned or relocated to relatively safer Bamenda Town, increasing the distance and difficulty of accessing administrative services.

In all, the findings reveal the interconnected and multidimensional effects of the crisis. Insecurity restricted mobility and access to farms, markets, education, healthcare, and administrative services, while displacement and declining economic activity further weakened household livelihoods. Collectively, these impacts increased livelihood vulnerability and reduced household and community resilience in Bafut Sub-Division.



Abandoned Bafut Council building

Abandoned Bafut Police Post



Abandoned Road

Abandoned Compound

Figure 3: Institutional and Physical Manifestations of the Socio-Political Crisis in Bafut

Source: Fieldwork 2026

Figure 3 illustrates the physical and institutional consequences of the ongoing socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division. The figure shows the abandoned Bafut Council building, whose operations were relocated to Bamenda Town because of persistent insecurity. The abandonment of the council premises demonstrates how the crisis has disrupted local administrative functions and compelled public institutions to operate from relatively safer locations. This relocation has implications for service delivery, as residents may have to travel beyond Bafut to access administrative services that were previously available within the sub-division.

Figure 3 also presents an abandoned Police post in Bafut Sub-Division, reflecting the disruption of local security provision. According to respondents, persistent armed confrontation and insecurity forced security personnel to withdraw from some posts, thereby reducing the institutional presence of security forces within affected communities. The resulting security vacuum increased residents' exposure to threats of violence and contributed to a heightened sense of fear and insecurity. In addition to institutional abandonment, the figure captures other physical manifestations of the crisis, including sections of roads reportedly associated with explosive incidents and abandoned residential properties. The abandonment of homes occurred as residents fled to relatively safer locations following repeated attacks and heightened insecurity. One displaced household member explained:

“When we left the village, we left everything behind. We could not take the farm with us, and we were afraid to go back. Before the crisis, we could produce food and sell some of it to pay school fees. Now we depend on what we can find here.”

The physical features illustrate that the effects of the crisis extend beyond human displacement to the deterioration and abandonment of public infrastructure, residential property, and transportation networks.

Generally, figure 3 provides visual evidence of the multidimensional impact of the socio-political crisis on both state institutions and private property in Bafut Sub-Division. The abandonment of administrative and security facilities, disruption of roads, and deserted residential areas demonstrate how prolonged insecurity has weakened institutional functioning, disrupted service provision, and altered the physical and social landscape of affected communities

Spatial Distribution of Crisis Severity Across Zones in Bafut Sub-Division

The spatial distribution of crisis severity across Bafut Sub-Division provides important insight into the uneven geographical expression of the socio-political crisis. The intensity of the crisis varies considerably from one settlement or zone to another, reflecting differences in exposure to armed confrontations, insecurity, population displacement, accessibility constraints, livelihood disruption, and reduced access to essential social services. Figure 4 presents the spatial distribution of crisis severity across the different zones of Bafut Sub-Division.

Areas with greater exposure to conflict-related activities tend to record more severe consequences, including loss of lives and property, population displacement, restricted access to farmland, disruption of education and healthcare, road blockages, and declining economic activities. Conversely, areas located relatively farther from major conflict hotspots generally experience lower levels of insecurity and fewer disruptions to everyday activities. This spatial differentiation demonstrates that the crisis is not experienced uniformly across Bafut; rather, its effects are shaped by the location and intensity of conflict-related incidents.

The spatial pattern is particularly important for understanding community vulnerability and livelihood resilience. Crisis hotspots or highly affected zones are likely to face greater losses of productive assets, reduced access to livelihood opportunities, and weaker access to essential services. In contrast, relatively less affected zones may provide temporary spaces of refuge and continued economic activity for displaced and vulnerable populations. The identification of these spatial differences is therefore essential for targeting humanitarian assistance, strengthening local security, prioritising infrastructure rehabilitation, and designing context-specific peacebuilding and livelihood recovery interventions.

Consequently, the spatial analysis presented in Figure 4 moves beyond simply showing where the crisis occurs; it demonstrates how the intensity of the crisis varies geographically and how this variation shapes the vulnerability and resilience of communities across Bafut Sub-Division. Mapping these differences provides an important basis for prioritising interventions in the most severely affected zones while supporting recovery and

resilience-building in relatively less. Figure 4 vividly shows a spatial map crisis severity across the Bafut Sub-Division.

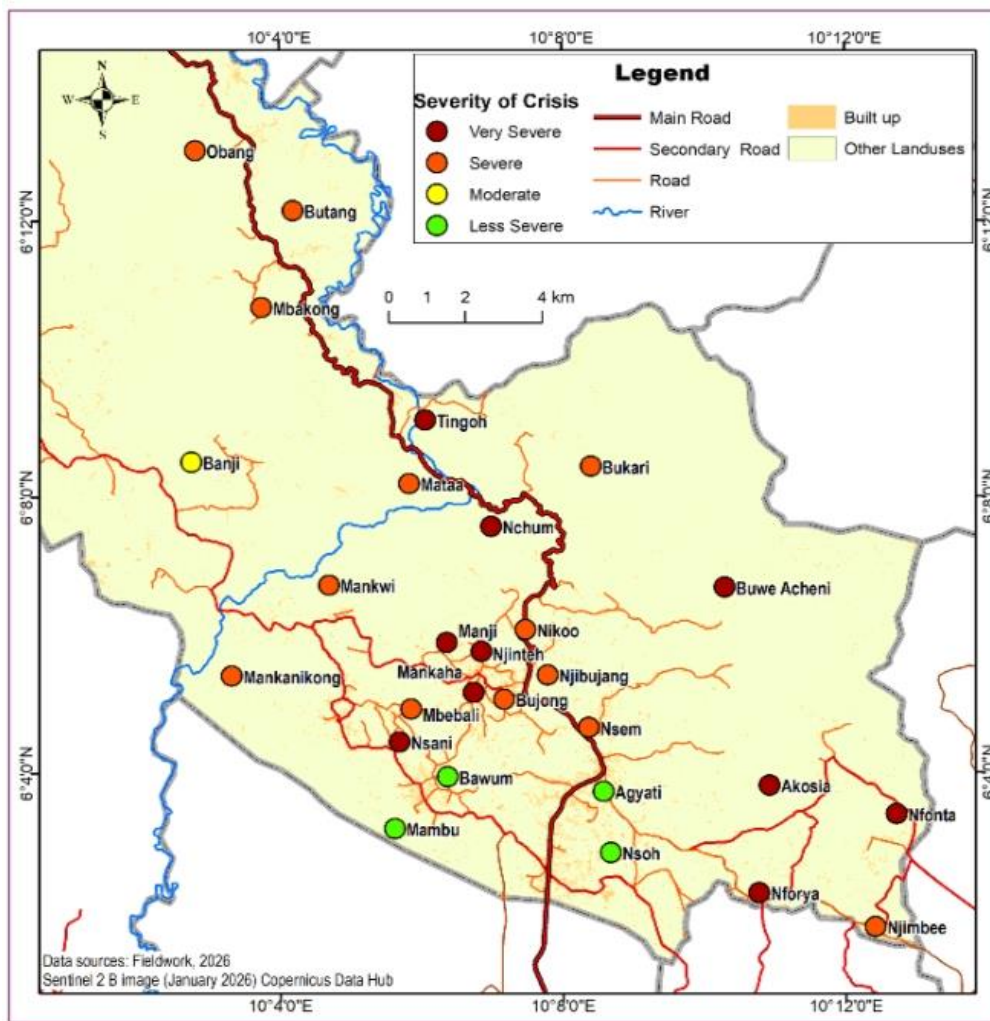


Figure 4: Map of spatial distribution of crisis severity across the Bafut Sub-Division

Figure 4 presents the spatial variation in the severity of the socio-political crisis across settlements in Bafut Sub-Division. The map categorises settlements into four levels of crisis severity: very severe, severe, moderate, and less severe, highlighting the uneven geographical distribution of conflict-related impacts across the study area. The four severity categories in Figure 4 were based on a **qualitative triangulation of evidence**, rather than a weighted composite index. The assessment considered reported security incidents, displacement/population movements, and key informant and community assessments of the impact of the crisis on livelihoods, mobility, and access to essential services.

The spatial pattern indicates that settlements located along and around the central main road corridor, including Njinteh, Bujong, Mankaha, Mbebal, and Nikoo, fall within the very severe category. These areas have experienced relatively high levels of exposure to armed confrontations, road blockages and explosive incidents, as well as the abandonment of homes and productive properties. Their location along important transportation corridors may further increase their exposure to conflict-related disruptions and restrict the movement of people and goods.

Surrounding settlements, including Tingoh, Mataa, Nchum, and Buwe Acheni, are classified as severe, indicating substantial exposure to insecurity and associated socio-economic disruptions, although the intensity appears comparatively lower than in the very severe zones. In contrast, peripheral settlements such as Mambu, Bawum, Nsoh, and Banji fall within the moderate to less severe categories. Their relatively lower levels of crisis severity may be associated with their greater distance from major conflict hotspots and the central areas of intense armed activity.

This paper holds that the impact of the crisis is spatially differentiated rather than uniform across Bafut Sub-Division. The concentration of very severe and severe areas around particular settlements suggests that proximity to conflict hotspots and major transport corridors is an important factor shaping community vulnerability. The spatial distribution also provides a basis for identifying priority areas for humanitarian assistance, security interventions, livelihood support, infrastructure rehabilitation, and peacebuilding initiatives.

Resilience-Oriented Strategies

Livelihood Adaptation Strategies of by the local community

The prolonged socio-political crisis in Bafut Sub-Division has severely disrupted traditional livelihood systems and compelled households to develop alternative strategies to cope with insecurity, displacement, restricted mobility, and declining economic opportunities. Some households reported reducing the quantity or quality of meals, while others relied on borrowing, support from relatives or occasional assistance. As one FG participant explained:

“There are times when we have to choose what is most important. If there is money for food, there may not be money for school. If there is a health problem, everything changes again.”

Rather than remaining passive victims of the crisis, community members have adopted a range of livelihood adaptation and resilience-oriented strategies aimed at maintaining household survival, generating income, securing food, and reducing exposure to conflict-related risks.

These strategies reflect the capacity of households and communities to adjust their livelihood practices in response to changing socio-economic and security conditions. They include modifications in agricultural practices, diversification of income-generating activities, engagement in petty trading and other informal activities, reliance on social networks, movement to relatively safer locations, and changes in the way productive resources are accessed and utilised. Figure 5 presents the livelihood adaptation strategies adopted by the local community in Bafut Sub-Division to cope with the socio-political crisis and sustain household **livelihood**.

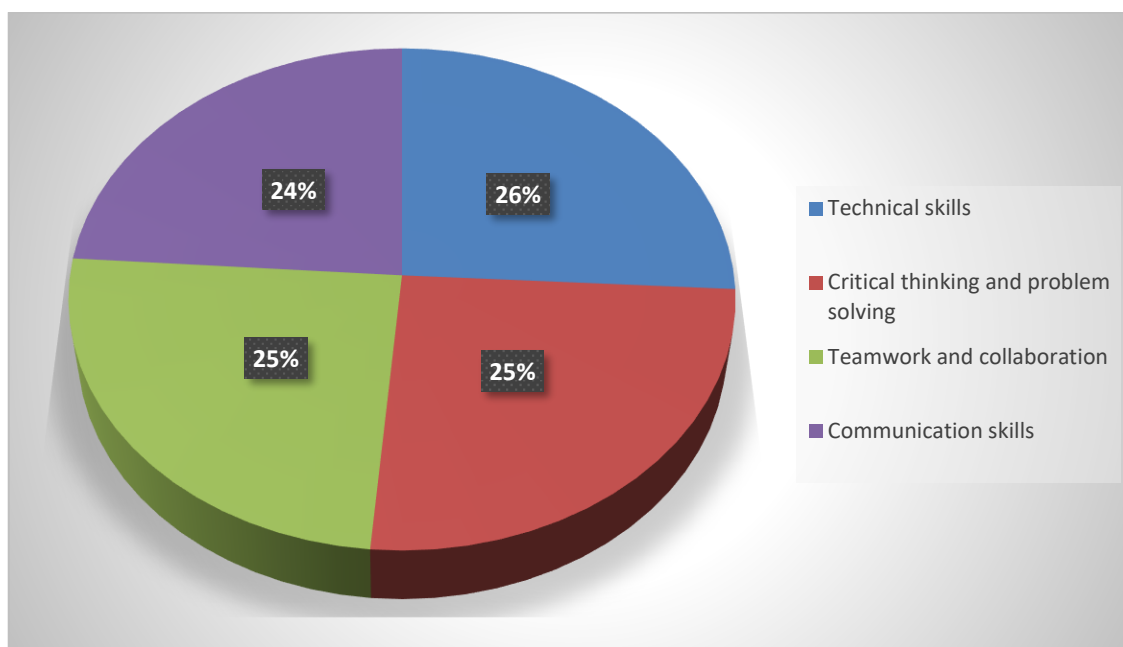


Figure 5: Adaptation strategies by community in Bafut Sub-Division

Source: Field work 2026

Diversifying Income Sources

Income diversification was adopted by 52.0% of respondents as an important livelihood adaptation strategy in response to the disruption of traditional economic activities by the crisis. The relatively high adoption of this

strategy reflects the resourcefulness and adaptive capacity of Bafut residents in responding to prolonged livelihood shocks. Many households that previously depended predominantly on subsistence and commercial farming have diversified into petty trading, small-scale businesses, and other income-generating activities, including commercial exchanges with Bamenda **town** and neighbouring towns.

This shift has been largely driven by declining agricultural productivity resulting from restricted access to farmland, insecurity, and disruptions along transportation and market routes. Farmers have increasingly faced difficulties accessing and cultivating their fields, while traders have encountered mobility constraints and disruptions to the movement of goods. In response, some households have established small-scale enterprises in relatively safer areas of the sub-division as alternative sources of income.

The Deputy Mayor corroborated these findings, noting that farm groups have been organised to support farmers in maintaining agricultural production despite the prevailing challenges. Such collective initiatives provide households with opportunities to share resources, labour, and agricultural knowledge while reducing some of the constraints associated with individual farming.

The adoption of income diversification demonstrates that the crisis has encouraged a shift among some households from predominantly agriculture-based livelihoods towards more diversified livelihood portfolios. Although largely crisis-induced, this diversification may enhance long-term livelihood resilience by reducing households' dependence on a single source of income and increasing their capacity to absorb future economic shocks.

Community and NGO Supports

Community and NGO support was reported by 25.2% of respondents, making it the least frequently adopted strategy among those examined. Despite its relatively low level of adoption, external and community-based assistance has played an important complementary role in supporting vulnerable households, particularly during periods of acute crisis and displacement.

Community groups and non-governmental organisations have provided humanitarian assistance, including food, mattresses, blankets, and other basic necessities, to displaced and crisis-affected households. Such assistance has helped to address immediate survival needs that many affected households were unable to meet independently because of disrupted livelihoods and declining household incomes.

The Mayor of Bafut Council further indicated that the council conducts regular engagement meetings and sensitisation programmes with quarter heads and sub-chiefs to strengthen community cohesion and provide practical guidance to residents in coping with the effects of the crisis. Community elders also reported an increased spirit of solidarity, with residents sharing resources and assisting neighbours experiencing difficulties.

These forms of assistance constitute an important source of social capital and community resilience. Informal networks of mutual support have helped vulnerable households cope with food shortages, displacement, loss of income, and other crisis-related challenges. The findings therefore demonstrate that resilience in Bafut is not derived solely from individual household strategies but also from collective action and external institutional support.

Circumvent of Insecure Areas

Circumventing insecure areas emerged as the most widely adopted livelihood adaptation strategy, reported by 82.1% of respondents. The exceptionally high adoption rate reflects the pervasive influence of insecurity on everyday mobility and spatial behaviour in Bafut Sub-Division. Recurrent armed confrontations, roadblocks, and the presence or perceived threat of explosives along some routes have compelled residents to modify their normal movement patterns to reduce exposure to danger.

Respondents reported avoiding routes, settlements, and other areas perceived to be unsafe, even when doing so required using longer and less convenient alternative routes. This strategy represents a rational short-term response to an immediate security threat, enabling residents to continue accessing essential destinations while

reducing their exposure to violence. However, the strategy also carries significant socio-economic costs. The avoidance of insecure areas can increase travel time and transportation costs while reducing access to farmlands, markets, schools, healthcare facilities, and employment opportunities. In this way, insecurity does not only directly threaten physical safety but also indirectly constrains livelihood activities and access to essential services.

The widespread adoption of this strategy illustrates how the crisis has restructured the functional geography of everyday life in Bafut Sub-Division. Areas that were previously easily accessible have become difficult or effectively inaccessible because of actual or perceived security risks. Consequently, **circumventing insecure areas is better understood as a protective coping mechanism rather than a sustainable livelihood adaptation strategy.** In the short term, it enables residents to reduce exposure to violence while maintaining access to essential destinations. However, prolonged reliance on this strategy may generate longer-term livelihood costs by increasing travel time and transportation expenses and restricting access to farmland, markets, schools, healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, and social networks. Thus, while circumvention may enhance immediate physical safety, its continued use can reinforce livelihood vulnerability by limiting households' access to productive and social resources.

Temporarily or Permanently Relocation

Temporary or permanent relocation was adopted by 48.8% of respondents as a coping strategy in response to persistent armed attacks and deteriorating security conditions. The relatively high proportion of households adopting this strategy further demonstrates the severity of the crisis and its effects on residential stability within Bafut Sub-Division. Respondents indicated that relocation was, in many cases, not a voluntary choice but a response to repeated attacks, threats to personal safety, and the deterioration of living conditions. Affected residents reported moving to relatively safer locations, particularly Bamenda and other parts of Cameroon. Displacement altered household living arrangements. People who moved from rural communities or crisis-affected areas described staying temporarily with relatives, friends or other host households in the safer areas. Although such arrangements provided immediate protection, they sometimes resulted in overcrowding and additional pressure on host families.

One displaced person stated: *"We came with the children and stayed with my sister. At first, she was happy to receive us, but now the house is too small for everybody. We are grateful, but you can see that she is also struggling."*

This indicates that the crisis generated a shared livelihood burden between displaced households and the communities receiving them. For many households, relocation provided an immediate means of protecting lives and reducing exposure to conflict-related violence. However, relocation also generated substantial social and economic costs. Displaced households often lost access to homes, farmland, businesses, employment opportunities, and established social networks, thereby weakening their livelihood security. At the community level, the departure of a significant proportion of the population reduced the local labour force, disrupted economic activities, and weakened established social and cultural networks.

Community elders reported that efforts are being made to encourage displaced residents to return when security conditions permit. Their return is considered important for restoring community cohesion, rebuilding livelihoods, and revitalising local economic activities. Nevertheless, the sustainability of return depends heavily on improvements in security, restoration of essential services, rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure, and the availability of viable livelihood opportunities. Thus, while relocation constitutes an effective short-term protective strategy, prolonged displacement may deepen livelihood vulnerability and undermine community resilience. The findings suggest that sustainable resilience requires not only the ability of households to relocate when necessary but also the creation of conditions that enable safe return, livelihood recovery, and the restoration of normal community life.

Overall, the findings indicate that not all coping strategies contribute equally to resilience. Strategies that **diversify livelihoods, strengthen social networks, maintain productive capacity, and improve access to collective resources** are more likely to support long-term resilience. In contrast, strategies that involve **prolonged displacement, restricted access to productive areas, depletion of productive assets, or increasing**

dependence on external assistance may reduce vulnerability in the short term while potentially deepening it over the longer term. Strengthening resilience in Bafut Community thus requires interventions that move households beyond emergency coping towards sustainable livelihood recovery, safe access to productive resources, and strengthened community institutions.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the socio-political crisis in Bafut Community has generated widespread insecurity, displacement, disruption of social relations, and weakening of community systems. This is consistent with studies of the Anglophone crisis, which document extensive disruption of social and economic life in Cameroon's North-West and South-West Regions (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2018; Nkongho, 2018; Tayong *et al.*, 2026). Similarly, the International Crisis Group (2019) highlights the effects of insecurity and displacement on affected communities. However, Kah (2017) provides a contrasting perspective, noting that some communities maintained traditional institutions, kinship networks, and collective support systems despite prolonged conflict. This suggests that although the crisis weakened social functioning in Bafut, community networks continued to support collective coping and adaptation.

The substantial loss of income, declining business activities, and restricted access to essential services reported in Bafut community are consistent with Fonchingong and Ngwa (2021), who found that insecurity constrains household income and economic opportunities. This also supports Chambers and Conway (1992), who emphasise that livelihood security depends on households' access to assets and their capacity to cope with shocks. However, Ellis (2000), argue that conflict-affected populations can develop alternative livelihoods and informal economic activities, emphasising livelihood diversification as an important mechanism for reducing vulnerability. Thus, while many Bafut households experienced serious economic losses, others adapted through petty trading, alternative occupations, and informal activities.

The findings further indicate that community support and NGO assistance were important coping strategies. This agrees with Nkongho (2020), who highlights the importance of community solidarity and informal support networks during prolonged insecurity. Aldrich (2012) similarly demonstrates that social capital strengthens community resilience by facilitating access to resources and collective support. However, Omata (2012) cautions that prolonged dependence on humanitarian assistance may create dependency and does not necessarily guarantee sustainable livelihood recovery. Therefore, although community and NGO assistance provided important short-term relief in Bafut, sustainable recovery requires improved security, restoration of productive assets, access to markets and services, and expanded economic opportunities.

Inclusively, the findings demonstrate largely that the crisis has increased livelihood vulnerability while simultaneously stimulating household and community resilience. In line with Norris *et al.*, (2008), resilience in Bafut community is reflected in the mobilisation of social networks, livelihood diversification, and external assistance. However, coping should not be equated with sustainable recovery. Strengthening long-term resilience requires an integrated approach combining security improvement, livelihood restoration, infrastructure rehabilitation, social protection, and community participation.

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study is anchored on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers & Conway, 1992) and Community Resilience Theory (Norris *et al.*, 2008). The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework explains how conflict disrupts household livelihood assets human, social, natural, physical, and financial thereby increasing vulnerability through displacement, restricted farmland access, income loss, and declining economic activities. Community Resilience Theory explains how affected communities mobilise social networks, livelihood diversification, local resources, and external assistance to cope and adapt. Chambers (1989) and Adger (2000) further emphasise differential vulnerability and the role of social relationships in resilience. Thus, the study conceptualises conflict as a shock that disrupts livelihoods, increases vulnerability, and stimulates coping and adaptation towards resilience, specifically within the Bafut context.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Conducting research in an active conflict zone such as Bafut Sub-Division presented several challenges. **Security risks and access limitations** restricted field visits to some communities and may have resulted in the underrepresentation of households in highly insecure areas. **Respondent fear and sensitivity surrounding the crisis** may also have influenced participants' willingness to provide complete information, creating potential response bias. To minimize this, confidentiality was assured and information was triangulated across household surveys, key informants, focus group discussions, and secondary sources. Finally, because the study focused on **Bafut Sub-Division**, its findings are context-specific and should not be statistically generalized to all conflict-affected areas of Cameroon.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the socio-political crisis has profoundly transformed the social, economic, and spatial landscape of Bafut Municipality, increasing livelihood vulnerability through insecurity, displacement, income loss, restricted farmland access, declining businesses, and disrupted education and healthcare. However, livelihood diversification, community support, and external assistance demonstrate the capacity of Bafut communities to cope and maintain elements of resilience. These findings are specific to the Bafut context and should not be generalised to other conflict-affected communities without considering differences in geography, livelihoods, insecurity, and institutional support. The observed spatial variations therefore call for context-specific and geographically targeted interventions, including improved security, safe resettlement, restoration of schools and health facilities, rehabilitation of roads and farmland access, agricultural and business support, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. Strengthened collaboration among government, traditional authorities, communities, NGOs, and development partners is essential for moving Bafut from crisis survival towards recovery, resilience, and sustainable development.

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