

Understanding the Inability of Local and International NGOs in Addressing the Humanitarian and Peace building Needs of the Affected Population During the Cameroon Anglophone Conflict

Stephen Mokondo Moki¹, Johnson Efungani Malafa²

¹Senior Lecturer, Department of Management and Marketing, University of Bamenda, Cameroon
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Buea, Cameroon

²Department of International Relations and Conflict Resolution, University of Buea, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The Cameroon-Anglophone conflict has dominated political discussions and debates in Cameroon and abroad, especially after the situation went violent in 2017. Various stakeholders, including international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have taken an interest in bringing in their humanitarian and peacebuilding supports. Despite their efforts, it is reported in Malafa, Moki, Sunjo and Ewusi (2024) that members of the affected communities found them to be ineffective in their humanitarian and peacebuilding roles. The objective of this study is to examine the inability of these NGOs to address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population during the Cameroon Anglophone conflict. The researchers adopted the qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews. Considering the sensitivity of this research topic, the researchers employed the purposive and snowballing sampling techniques to select officials of some NGOs and key informants for the study by targeting individuals who were interested and versed in the issue. A total of 24 participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The findings revealed that insecurity and the threat to life, inaccessibility to the needy population, lack of collaboration and confidence from the affected population, poor communication network and language barrier, undue pressure from some traditional leaders, corrupt practices and dishonesty of hired community mobilisers, unstable population, lack of funding, donor fatigue, and lack of collaboration among NGOs were the factors that contributed to the inability of the NGOs to effectively address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population. Among the major recommendations are the following: NGOs should empower people in affected communities to become self-sustaining rather than constantly providing for their needs with funds that are often limited. Also, there should be periods of ceasefire between government forces and separatist fighters to enable the NGOs to carry on their humanitarian and peacebuilding activities without being faced with the risk of being hit by a targeted or stray bullet. This is in line with the collective model of the Seybolt's humanitarian systems theory that recommends NGOs should jointly carry out need assessments of the affected population and decide what each organisation will supply as per their specialisation to curb domain overlap, corruption and competition.

Keywords: Humanitarian support, Peacebuilding activities, NGOs, and Cameroon Anglophone Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The Cameroon government has been battling with civil unrest that erupted back in October 2016 in the English-speaking regions (North West and South West Regions) of the country (Moki, Ngange, Matute, and Eyong-Eta, 2022). From strike actions initiated by Common Law Lawyers against the Cameroonian government for constantly striving to suppress or eliminate the Anglo-Saxon judicial subsystem, the situation mutated into an armed conflict in 2017. This metamorphorization has led to a violent conflict that has dominated political discussions and debates in Cameroon.

Moki (2020) stated that this devastating conflict has been described by observers as one of the bloodiest internal conflicts Cameroon has ever witnessed since independence. The media and humanitarian organisations have reported on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the conflict affected regions. Six years into the Anglophone conflict, Pelican (2022) reported a death toll of over 6000 and the displacement of 765,000 persons as large-scale insecurity continued affecting the population in some parts of these two regions of Cameroon. These figures continue to rise as the conflict remains unresolved.

The Cameroon government has engaged in several peacebuilding efforts to restore peace, as well as humanitarian actions to address the needs of the affected population. Various stakeholders, including international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have taken an interest in also bringing in their humanitarian and peacebuilding support to the affected population. Despite their efforts, it was reported in Malafa, Moki, Sunjo, and Ewusi (2024) that members of the affected communities found the NGOs ineffective in their humanitarian and peacebuilding roles. The objective of this study is to examine the inability of these NGOs to address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population during the Cameroon Anglophone conflict.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Cameroon Anglophone conflict and its genesis

Moki, Ngange, Matute, and Eyong-Eta (2022) showed that the current conflict disrupting peace and tranquility in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon was born around October 2016 after government security forces crackdown Common Law lawyers for demonstrating to express their frustration to the government in what they termed as the marginalisation of Anglophones in the publication of the OHADA Laws only in French language. The common law lawyers claimed this act undermined the constitution that prescribes the bilingual and bijurial nature of Cameroon. Teachers from the English part of Cameroon later joined the striking lawyers on November 21, 2016 in a bid to express their own socio-professional claims. This paralysed the Anglophone sub-system of education in the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon from basic to higher education, leading to fierce confrontations between protesters and security officers, especially in the streets of the North West Regional capital, Bamenda.

Despite the Cameroon government's decision to dialogue and negotiate with the lawyers and teachers independently in Yaoundé and Bamenda, respectively, between November 25, 2016, and January 13, 2017, a lot of propaganda messages flooded various mass media spaces, especially social media (Moki, Ngange & Tala, 2024). This culminated with the escalation of the conflict in October 2017 into an armed struggle between the defence forces and separatists who henceforth called for the complete independence of the Anglophone Cameroon (the Ambazonia State).

However, the ongoing Cameroon Anglophone conflict has a history that is associated with the geopolitical history of the country, which has evolved. The country was initially annexed by the Germans in 1884 but later partitioned into two parts after this colonial master lost the First World War in 1916. This division led to 20% of the territory under the British control and 80% under the French as mandated territories under the League of Nations (Awassom, 2000; Faso, 1989; and Njeuma, 1995). As explained by Koreshi (2011), the collapse of the League of Nations led to the change of the two parts of Cameroon from mandated territories under the British and French to trusteeship territories under the United Nations at the end of the Second World War in 1946.

The approaches used by the British and French to administer the respective territories under their rules were different in terms of political administration. Though as mandated territories, Dupraz (2019) stated that France almost continued with the German political rigour, hegemony, and centralisation geared at assimilation as if Cameroon was its colony. The "indigenat" (system of government that virtually deprived the natives of most of their fundamental rights) was applied; they also established extrajudicial trials of natives for up to 10 years in jail. The French administration had the power to impose extrajudicial sanctions upon natives for a wide range of offences (Hodgkin, 1957:35).

The British administered its part of the territory by dividing it into two parts. That is: British Northern Cameroon and British Southern

Cameroons, and ruled it as an integral part of Nigeria (Tanjong, 2012). Lee & Schultz (2011) added that the British approach was an indirect rule allowing the natives to execute judicial and executive decisions. This meant that Cameroonians in this part were willingly rather than coercively made to comply (Jua, 1995). Jua (1995) further explained that this state of affair gave citizens of British Cameroon autonomy that helped to establish “a greater vitality of local political institutions in West Cameroon,” which was contrary to what was obtained in the French-administered part.

Taking a critical look at these separate approaches, Fanzo (1989) maintained that the 1916 Anglo-French partition of Cameroon created separate nationalist aspirations and movements in the two territories. This has implications for the cultural, social, and political differences that have existed between these two parts of Cameroon, especially after reunification. After gaining independence in 1960 (for French Cameroon) and 1961 (for English Cameroon by joining the French part), Fanzo (1989) reported that it soon became obvious that the cultural, social, and political divides between the two linguistic groups were more fundamental and difficult to bridge than the initial aspirations of the nationalists, whose aims were to establish a united and independent Cameroon. The Federal Constitution, arrived at in 1961 by the fathers of reunification, kept the two linguistic groups distinct, with the people of each community firmly attached to their colonial cultural heritage in terms of education, judiciary, politics, and other social aspects.

Fru and Wassermann (2017:1) explained that complaints of the systematic abrogation of the federal constitution (that stood as the basis for reunification), marginalisation, assimilation, and internal colonisation emerged among the minority Anglophone population of Cameroon after the 1961 reunification of Cameroon. The feeling of marginalisation leading to the Anglophone problem and eventually to the Anglophone conflict, has been addressed by different scholars. Echu (2004) stated that Cameroonians decry being subjected to communal disadvantage, which, according to them, constitutes an aftermath of reunification. Echu (2004) further noted that Anglophones complained of being treated by both Francophones and the State of Cameroon at large as second-class citizens in their own country.

As the “Anglophone Problem” continued to dominate the political agenda in Cameroon with some Anglophone Cameroonians requesting a quest for federalism, Ngange and Moki (2019) reported that there was also an emergence of a secessionist group known as the Southern Cameroon National Congress (SCNC) that started demanding the independence of the former British Southern Cameroons territory.

The legal framework governing the functioning of NGOs in Cameroon

Non-Governmental Organisations in Cameroon are governed by Law No. 99/14 of 22 December 1999 and No. 90/53 of 19 December 1990 relating to freedom of associations, amended and supplemented by Law No. 99/11 of 20 July 1999, and Decree No. 2001/150/PM of 13 May 2001 relating to the organisation and functioning of the Technical Commission in charge of NGO activities. Article 3 of Law No. 99/14 spells out the various domains in which the status of an NGO would be granted, notably the legal, economic, social, cultural, health, sports, education, and humanitarian sectors, or in matters of environmental and human rights protection. However, for such status to be granted in any of the sectors, the relevant organisation must be a duly declared association or duly authorised foreign association backed with at least three years of effective contribution in any of the above-mentioned sectors. It is only after the granting of the status of NGO to an organisation that it acquires its legal personality that is separate from that of the founder(s) and thus could act in its own name and capacity (Boma, 2021).

These laws constitute the legal framework for the promotion and protection of human rights in Cameroon by NGOs, which gave visibility to civil society organisations. The 1990 law therefore legitimised the existence and operation of civil societies and authorised the free creation of associations whose coordination should be government-led. This legal instrument was considered a significant improvement, as over the past, Law No. 67/LF.19 of 12 June 1967 on Freedom of Association made it mandatory that all associations be authorised by the minister in charge of the Territorial Administration (Rutinwa, 2001).

Though the state has the primary obligation to promote and protect human rights, there also exists a plethora of associations with the same interest (Boma, 2021). The institution of the Law on Freedom of Associations considerably promoted the increase in the number of NGOs involved in areas such as health, education, training, environmental protection, women's development, democracy and human rights, rural and urban development, capacity building and research, HIV/AIDS sensitisation, and community development (Boma, 2021).

Importance and advantages of NGOs

Rauh (2010) remarked that the sphere of influence of NGOs in the field of global politics is on the rise, as they represent political values, interests, and demands that cut across states' borders. As well, they participate in many transnational, world-level actions and programmes. They are recognised by policymakers as actors of the world political system, the reserved domain of states. He, therefore, claims that NGOs are fundamental to the transformation of the structure and processes of world politics and are considered a distinguished class of civil society organisations. Simultaneously, considering NGOs' high flexibility in mobilising funds, governments often perceive them as a potential threat to their sovereignty.

Thus, governments sometimes either ignore them or hinder the smooth running of their activities. However, Cakmak (2008) claimed that the recrudescence in NGOs is not equivalent to the state's decline or weakness. He adheres to the idea that rather, NGOs complement the state's actions, as they play significant roles unaccomplished by the state and international actors such as intergovernmental organisations. Moreover, he thinks that civil society has the potential to flourish in conditions of strong, stable, and effective governments. Beyond reasonable doubt, NGOs constitute a privileged partner to the state but have their flaws.

Galtung (1987) described the power of NGOs in both negative and positive terms. In the former, they lack economic, military, and coercive potentials. In the latter, NGOs are endowed with cultural powers, which bestow on them the ability to easily engage public opinions; political powers, which grant them autonomy in programme management and contacts with national and international centres of power; and moral power, characterised by adherence to values and the principles of international law. Barnes (2005) corroborated that development agencies enhance civil society because they are optimistic about their potential to enormously contribute to democratisation by providing an arena through which citizens can become politically engaged. However, within the plethora of civil society organisations, international donors have elected to fund NGOs as a channel for supporting democratisation in the global South (Fisher, 1997; Mercer, 2002). As well, Kaldor (2003:3) and Duffield (2001) acknowledged that civil society has been considered central to the peacebuilding process in war-affected areas.

In theory, the transformational nature of civil society supposes that it is ideally set up to initiate some of the deep structural change indispensable for peacebuilding, as advocated for by Galtung (1987) and Lederach (1995). However, questions still abound regarding how effectively local civil society organisations execute such roles within the framework of partnership with their international counterparts. Richmond (2003) stated that the gap is partly attributed to scholars' focus concerning the involvement of local civil societies in peacebuilding, which has been on the organisational weaknesses and its ability to contribute, rather than on the strategies Southern organisations use to navigate the uneven playing field within which they operate.

Abia et al. (ibid.) regretted that, though NGOs have taken the central stage in the fight against poverty, social injustice, and HR, most of them are considered weak due to their quasi-dependence upon funding from both governmental and international aid bodies. However, Duffield (2001) regretted that such international development aids are used as a means of containing and securing the global South rather than providing genuine empowerment. In this perspective, Yenshu (2008) in Abia et al. (2016:3) decried the growing expectation bestowed upon NGOs' intervention to mediate and balance the power of states and markets in providing a moral check, as well as maintaining the democratic integrity of states, has been short-lived. He regrets that some NGOs have rather derogated to private money-making machines.

There are many advantages offered by NGOs. However, after reading Cousins (1991), the authors have summarised the advantages as follows:

1. They have the propensity to take risks and to freely experiment with innovative approaches;
2. They easily adapt to local situations, respond to local needs, and therefore can develop integrated and sectoral projects;
3. They enjoy proximity and good working conditions with the populace. Thus, they can identify and render micro-assistance to the needy and tailor appropriate assistance to their requirements;
4. They have the flexibility to communicate at all levels, from the grassroots to the top levels of government;
5. They can easily recruit both experts and highly motivated staff with fewer restrictions than the government.

D. Humanitarian intervention and peacebuilding challenges NGOs face

CARE (2020: 7-9) contended that NGOs' paternalistic attitudes restrict the degree of participation in programme/project design. Moreover, the existing societal unequal gender balance is worsened by a deeply entrenched patriarchy (women are intimidated by men, and they are not authorised to contribute amidst them...), poverty, conflicts, and degrading cultural practices such as coercive and/or early marriages that relegate women to the rank of mere caregivers. CARE (2020) agreed that women's NGOs confront difficulties that are attributed to traditions that forbid the participation of the female gender in public spheres, particularly in rural areas.

Consequently, CARE (2020) regretted that, though there exist preponderant opportunities for women to engage in the peace process at both grassroots and national levels, such challenges undermine their potential to substantively contribute to the peace process. Consequently, such impediments have compelled women to adopt reactive rather than proactive approaches to peace initiatives. However, to reverse such a tendency, Butt (2013) noted that recently, NGOs have been focusing on moving from a "women-centred" to a more "gender" approach, particularly in the domain of health development. The NGO Symposium on Health for All Women and Men, a gender perspective that was held in Geneva in October 1997, recognises that "the concept of gender refers to women's and men's roles and relationships that are shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural factors rather than by biology."

Also, NGOs' peacebuilding activities are often restricted by scarce funding for peacebuilding activities. Nikolov (2009) stated that the peacebuilding efforts of INGOs are often constrained by short-term funding as well as want of evaluations, which most often hinder them from ensuring the completion of developmental and service delivery programmes. Shivji (2007:31) submitted that an overwhelming number of NGOs are donor-funded. They are void of any independent source of funding.

To survive, they seek funds through customary procedures set by the funding agencies. In that respect, the degree of independence NGOs can exercise in relation to donor agendas varies depending on the perspectives of their leadership. In a nutshell, the reduced replicability of an idea, due to the non-representativeness of projects or their selected areas, relatively small project coverage, and dependence on external financial resources, is subject to limitations of the scope of actions of NGOs involved in peacebuilding.

As a corollary to such predicaments, NGOs indulge in quick-fix solutions to addressing communal conflicts. Most often, donors consider peacebuilding a post-conflict matter and not a priority, considering the humanitarian crisis and the unpredictability of the security situation on the ground. Nikolov (2009: 2) stated that most international NGOs are competing over funds, and they are constrained by local and international political realities. Due to pressure and struggle geared towards obtaining and maintaining funding from donors,

NGOs often focus little attention on management, which irreversibly leads to a lack of transparency, accountability, and inefficiency in services delivered to the public.

There exists an inordinate lack of synergy and a common platform for NGOs that render coordination of their activities unrealistic, which hinder them from setting new objectives likely to enable them to withstand the ever-changing and challenging socio-political environment (Nikolov, 2009). The recently emerging triple nexus approach (relief-development-peacebuilding), which emphasises joint context analysis, joint programming, and longer-term funding for conflict affected states, potentially contributed to a shift in donors' priorities for South Sudan. Nkwi (2006) and Abia et al. (2016) decried that NGOs in Cameroon suffer from an acute lack of institutional structures and logistics that hinder their smooth running and hamper their blossoming. Hence, they function in suitcases, and their peacebuilding impact therefore fails to reach targeted communities.

Nikolov (2009) regretted that most international NGOs are constrained by local and international political realities and circumstances, which may impede their peacebuilding efforts. Most NGOs are monitored and, sometimes, censored by the government. Consequently, CARE (2020) regretted that such interference inhibits the grassroots from receiving adequate information about peace agreements. Also, some scholars argue that international interventions inhibit the ability of Southern civil society organisations to participate in responding to armed conflicts.

Pugh (2000:128) & Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) contended that some joint initiatives pursued by local and international organisations, such as project evaluation, may rather isolate communities' peacebuilding processes. Pearce (2005:42), Belloni (2008), Barakat & Strand (1995), Goodhand & Lewer (1999), as well as Belloni (2001), corroborated that the structures of international funding rather promote local NGOs' dependence vis-à-vis donors. Consequently, they may be unable to act as agents of change at the community level. Also, Nikolov (2009:2) regretted that NGOs' functions are overwhelmingly dictated by rules and regulations attached to donor funding. Furthermore, NGOs spend inordinate time competing over the acquisition of funding, and in return, they bestow little attention on the adequate needs of their targeted populations, therefore derogating from their cardinal principles.

The "territorial possessiveness" of an area or project reduces cooperation between agencies, seen as threatening or competitive. Scholars have demonstrated that a "donor-driven hierarchy" towards NGOs tends to adjust their programmes to align with their interests. Consequently, they encourage international aid agencies to focus their attention primarily on NGOs that are beholden to their policy and share their values, while marginalising those which portray radical views (Pugh 2000:119; Pearce 2005; Orjuela 2005).

Belloni (2008) lamented that such hierarchy may promote polarisation amongst both divergent categories of NGOs. As well, Werker & Ahmed (2008: 23) contended that NGOs are confronted with problems that stem from the existence of too many actors, leaders, and missions, without consequential coordination. In the same vein, Ingram, Diestelhorst and Tih (2007), and Nkwi (2006) opposed the idea that Cameroon's rich socio-cultural diversity, characterised by the presence of over 200 ethnic languages, constitutes a major constraint for NGOs.

Jarstad (2008: 19) qualified the peace agreement as a means but not an end. He states that the legacies of war do not vanish with a peace agreement and that transitions to peace are characterised by many difficulties, such as: lack of trust, demolished infrastructure, and a war-torn economy. As an example, he presents the case of Nepal, where a failed democratisation process regressed into a decade-long armed conflict. Though the armed conflict had ended, and Nepal had become a democratic federal republic, many challenges are still prevalent in the efforts to sustain peace, democratisation, and development in the quest for positive peace. In light of such noticeable recriminations, Belloni (2001) and Orjuela (2003:210) conclusively stated that NGOs' contributions to peacebuilding are necessary but not sufficient. Hence, they constitute a means to peacebuilding, but not an end.

E. Theoretical framework

Seybolt's theoretical approach to humanitarian systems forms the theoretical basis of this study. According to Kalita (2019), Taylor Seybolt conceived this theory in 2009. In this theory, Seybolt stated that the humanitarian aid system gradually evolves toward a network. However, he decried that this network faces significant constraints that prevent it from becoming a full-fledged network. Seybolt distinguishes two important models of partnership in this network, notably the reciprocal and the collective models. In the reciprocal model of partnership, the NGOs of the aid system work in isolation; they individually carry out need assessments, elaborate their plans of action, and individually execute them and follow up without sharing their experience in the field. Kalita (2019) maintained that such state of affair leads to a competitive tendency that becomes problematic when the NGOs fail to plan. This results in low connectivity among them, thereby creating an unstable system. This model leads to domain overlap and positive externalities that affect the efficiency of NGOs in the field.

In the collective model of partnership, NGOs in the aid system work in synergy. They generally hold concertation meetings where they collectively take decisions. They collaboratively carry out need assessments, jointly elaborate their plans of action, and execute them, then collectively follow up activities on the field. As well, they share their success stories and challenges faced on the field. This model significantly curbs domain overlap and positive externalities. Hence, unlike the reciprocal model of partnership, the collective model enhances the humanitarian output of NGOs in the field. Seybolt's theoretical approach to the humanitarian system is relevant to this study. It provides valuable insights in analysing, improving, and evaluating the coordination and effectiveness of international and local NGOs in humanitarian and peacebuilding contexts, as witnessed in the Cameroon-Anglophone conflict.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews. This qualitative research method (in-depth interview) has become a key research tool widely employed to collect data, especially in qualitative studies (Coleman, 2019). This technique, as described in Boyce and Neale (2006), involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a few participants in order to explore their standpoints on a particular idea, programme, or situation. Considering the sensitivity of this research topic, the researchers employed the purposive sampling technique to select some officials of NGOs and key informants for the study. The purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling method where the researcher knowingly targets a group of people or elements believed to be appropriate enough for the study (Ndue, 2017). Also, some of the respondents helped to link the researchers to other participants using the snowballing sampling technique. This was for convenience, considering the sensitive nature of the topic and the prevailing insecurity.

Against that backdrop, two categories of respondents were selected for this study. Firstly, officials of NGOs (two international NGOs, notably the Danish Refugee Council and Plan International Cameroon, as well as two local NGOs, Reach-Out Cameroon and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Foundation) were retained for the study. These NGOs were selected because respondents in the study, Malafa, Moki, Sunjo, and Ewusi (2024), identified them as those that have been significantly involved in providing humanitarian and peacebuilding support to the communities affected by the Cameroon Anglophone conflict. Secondly, key informants constituting some focal persons, traditional leaders, quarter heads, who have been working in synergy with the selected NGOs, and some focal persons from the administration who generally monitored the activities of NGOs on the field were also identified and interviewed for this study. These respondents were purposively selected and interviewed based on their knowledge in the humanitarian and peacebuilding activities of the NGOs.

Kibuacha (2021) stated that the larger the researcher's sample size, the more confident he is that respondents' answers may truly reflect the entire population's opinions. Against that backdrop, the researcher opted for a larger and more representative sample size to enhance the validity and credibility of the study. A total of 24 participants were interviewed for this study, which falls within the range of 20–30 recommended by Creswell (2003). A semi structured interview guide was administered to participants. The questions were coined to generate relevant data to significantly address the research questions and objectives.

Data collection for this study was done face-to face, and in some cases, through mobile phones (direct phone and WhatsApp calls). For the face-to face interactions, members of the research team booked an appointment with the identified participants to agree on the location and time that were convenient for them. This enabled comprehension between the interviewer and the interviewee, as both made their points clearer. In some situations, the researcher rephrased the question when he felt the participants did not sufficiently answer the main questions. The responses were recorded using a digital audio recorder and, at the end, transcribed. The consent (verbally before proceeding to conduct the interviews) of the respondents was obtained before recording the interviews.

The final population of this study was distributed as seen in table 1 below:

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to category and gender

SN	Categories	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	Danish Refugee Council	1	1	2
2.	Plan-Cameroon	1	0	1
3.	Reach-Out	3	3	6
4.	LUKEMEF	0	1	1
5.	Key Informants	11	3	14
6.	Total	16	8	24

Source: Field Work, 2025

According to the data, 2 persons (1 male and 1 female) were interviewed from the Danish Refugee Council, which is an international NGO, while 1 (a male) was interviewed from Plan Cameroon, 6 (3 male and 3 female) from Reach-Out, 1 (female) from LUKEMEF, and 14 (11 male and 3 female) key informants. However, in terms of gender, more males (16) were interviewed compared to females (8). During the interview, males showed more willingness to participate than females, given the sensitive nature of the topic.

Bryman (2012) outlined a six-step approach to thematic analysis, which we followed for data analysis. Based on the six-step approach, we began by reading carefully through the transcribed interviews to familiarise ourselves with the data (understanding). In this stage, we took note of initial impressions and patterns in the data. The next step was generating initial codes. This process is also known as indexing, where we identified and labelled key words, phrases, sentences, actions, and concepts that captured the essence of the data and assigned codes to them. In the third step, we searched for themes by deciding the most important codes and then grouped them into broader categories. In the fourth step, we reviewed the themes and revised them to ensure they accurately reflected the data and were connected to the research questions.

In the fifth step, we defined and named the themes, ensuring that they are concise and easy to understand. In the sixth step, we created a report of our findings by extracting excerpts from the interviews as supporting evidence for the identified themes and did the interpretation as seen in the findings below. Maguire & Delahunt (2017) and Dawadi (2020) have attributed the six-step approach to thematic analysis to Braun & Clarke (2006). For the purpose of confidentiality, we have assigned codes to the respondents. I-NGO-1 means International NGO number one, while L-NGO-1 means Local NGO 1, and KI-1 also means Key Informant 1, and so on.

FINDINGS

Explaining the inability of NGOs to effectively address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected

population After an analysis of respondents' assessments of the peacebuilding role and the quality of the humanitarian assistance to the affected communities, it is also important to find out from the NGOs what explains their inability to properly address the humanitarian needs of the affected population. There might be genuine reasons that hinder the ability of NGOs to support the affected population in this part of Cameroon, which has for over six years been affected by this internal conflict.

The responses to this research question have been captured from members of the NGOs and some key participants from the public by extracting excerpts from the interviews. The excerpts have been presented according to themes.

Insecurity and the threat to life

Insecurity is often one of the most serious problems NGOs encounter, as their personal security measures are hardly sufficient to secure their humanitarian operations in the field. Even in the current war in Ukraine, Jancke & Arthur (2022) disclosed that war situations do not only pose security threats to civil infrastructure, journalists, and hospitals, but also to those who provide humanitarian assistance to victims. The current situation in the two English regions of Cameroon has not been different, as captured in the following excerpts from interviews with personnel from NGOs:

Excerpt 1: Sometimes, humanitarian workers face situations of insecurity. The non-state armed actors sometimes meet us during the distribution of relief process in communities. Their presence puts fright in our hearts, so we generally stop our activities, either temporarily or permanently, as the case may be. That is because, during such instances, if the state security officials meet them within us, there may be a confrontational scenario of crossfire that may be precarious and may subsequently result to the death of innocent persons. (INGO-1)

Excerpt 2: "Up to 2022, the Anglophone Conflict is still in its emergency response phase that is marked by sporadic attacks..." (L-NGO-2)

Excerpt 3: The insecurity stakes are high. Humanitarian workers who may not risk their lives find it difficult to access most communities of concern. (L-NGO-5)

Excerpt 4: Insecurity, too, is a major impediment to peacebuilding. ...due to the prevailing insecurity, humanitarian workers concentrate in secured areas, notably in the Mezam Division, while most persons of concern in the hinterland live by the mercy of God. (INGO-2)

According to the response of the participant in excerpt 1, NGO humanitarian staff risk finding themselves in a crossfire between non-state armed men and the government security forces. As he explained, some non-state armed men come around when humanitarian workers are distributing aid to members of the affected communities. Their presence often attracts government security forces, and in such a situation, the staff, being afraid of any confrontation that may occur between the two parties, prefers to suspend distribution. This is because bullets do not segregate between civilians and armed men when they are fired. Hence, one would not expect NGOs to encourage their staff to take on such challenges.

A more critical look can be given to the presence of non-state armed groups during humanitarian distributions in the field. Their presence may also indirectly scare off humanitarian workers, who end up distributing supplies meant for the affected civilian population to people who are not actually needy. Imagine a case where relatives of the non-state armed men or of the state military are found among those identified to benefit from

the humanitarian supplies. They may intimidate the workers to hand such supplies solely to their relatives and friends rather than those who are actually targeted.

In the case of sporadic attacks, as mentioned in excerpt 2, the humanitarian workers may be taken by surprise, and the risk may be high as they may not have previewed any security measures. They may therefore restrict their activities to more secure areas, as stated in excerpt 4. Consequently, they are unable to address the humanitarian needs of the affected population, especially those who are most vulnerable in remote areas.

C. Inaccessibility to the needy population

The responses to humanitarian needs are often intended to cover all geographical areas and vulnerable populations, be they internally displaced or those returning after the regain of peace. Reaching such affected people, especially those in the hinterlands, is often compounded with both natural and man-made challenges. Though insecurity has been discussed independently as one of the factors that caused NGOs not to effectively address the humanitarian needs of the affected population, it can also be considered one of the human elements that made some of the affected population inaccessible to humanitarian staff working with these NGOs, as seen in excerpt 22 above. However, there are other factors that contributed to the inaccessibility of the affected population, as seen in excerpt 23 below:

Excerpt 5: Prior to activities on the field, we start with stakeholder mapping. Then after, we collaborate with local authorities who grant us access to communities of our interest, Local councils and religious groups, and then our safety and security department engage in access negotiation with the military, combatants, as well as the community authorities before we move on. Usually, we seek the consent of community members before providing relief services to vulnerable people. (LNGO-6).

The explanations provided by the respondent in excerpt 5 illustrate that it takes the NGOs a lot of negotiations before they move to the affected areas. To operate in a conflict environment, they must seek authorisation not only from traditional authorities (some of whom have deserted their palaces and communities because of insecurity) but also from local council officials and religious groups and even go as far as negotiating with the military or combatants from different separatists' groups. This reveals the ordeal faced by NGOs in the field to gain access to the needy population. In a conflict situation, respect for the rule of law and order is often far-fetched. Moki (2020) reported cases in the ongoing conflict in which separatists gave matching orders forbidding the population from respecting established authorities.

Negotiating with the military or separatists, two groups that are antagonistic to each other, implies that NGOs sometimes have to forgo their mission in the field if they fail to abide by the orders given by any of the above-mentioned parties.

Moreover, there is a problem of accessibility of the affected localities. Both staff of NGOs and even key informants pointed out that bad roads constituted one of those challenges that made the NGOs not effectively address the humanitarian needs of the affected population in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. The excerpts below give a picture of how bad road networks affect the work NGOs provide in the field:

Excerpt 6: Road network is also an issue because most rural roads are impracticable, so we cannot promptly reach people in need at the time of solicitation. Often, humanitarian officials are stranded at unsecured spots because our cars get stuck in mud or get bad because of the poor nature of the road. (I-NGO-1)

Excerpt 7: ...roads leading to communities of concern are often too bad, and NGOs generally do not have adapted vehicles to ply such roads. As well, most of their vehicles used gas, but there is a scarcity of gas stations, making it difficult to access distant communities. (KI-11)

Excerpt 8: ...as sometimes roads or bridges are either blocked or destroyed by non-state armed actors. (KI-13)
Due to the bad state of the roads, humanitarian workers could not react promptly to emergencies.

Worse still, as reported by the key informant in excerpt 7, it is observed that most of the vehicles that NGOs use are not suitable for the roads found in these two regions. Moreover, sometimes, roads are blocked, or bridges destroyed by separatists. Hence, NGOs can only go as far as their vehicles can go in the field.

D. Lack of collaboration and confidence from the affected population

This study found that the insecurity in the field sometimes makes the population reticent and avoids opening up to field workers from NGOs. This was captured in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 9: So, obtaining access to the communities is very difficult. Often, members of the community are so reticent that it is not easy to exchange with them or carry out advocacy exercises. (L-NGO-4)

As seen in excerpt 9 above, access to the affected population may not only be hampered by insecurity and bad roads, as it may be in some cases. The population's reaction towards the humanitarian workers can also make accessibility impossible. When the population becomes reticent by restraining themselves from the visitors, it makes it difficult for them to obtain data that can help NGOs make informed decisions relating to humanitarian supplies to such communities.

In addition to the lack of collaboration, there is also a lack of confidence from the population and other parties, like the military and even non-state armed groups. This can be seen in the following responses:

Excerpt 10: We face a lack of confidence from the government. In Kumba for instance, the forces thoroughly search our trucks. As well, the communities too suspect that NGOs may supply them poisonous goods. They take measures to ensure that the goods are fit for consumption.

Sometimes, our staff is forced to taste raw rice. Such treatments de-motivate us from going to such communities. In 2019 in a North West Region village, our truck was offloaded and then burned by non-state actors. We never returned there for fear of death. Sometimes, beneficiaries themselves resist assistance because of suspicions. (LNGO-1)

Excerpt 11: At the level of the community, we as well face threats from some individuals who fear that we may come and deliver them poisonous goods. Thus, they often urge us to consume even raw products to assure them that they are free from any toxic matter. (L-NGO-5)

Excerpt 12: Among the challenges, NGOs face a lack of trust between other organisations, the administration, armed groups as well as with beneficiaries that affects their impact on the field. (KI-7)

Lack of confidence is a serious problem when it comes to humanitarian services. Then, it will be needless to take such a risk to go and meet them without a guarantee of safety. Asking humanitarian workers to taste rice that is raw before the population can accept it may be unimaginable, but that is the reality they sometimes encounter in the field. And as explained by respondents in excerpts 10, 11, and 12, such acts are demotivating, meaning they will never want to visit such localities again, hence explaining why local and international NGOs were unable to properly address the humanitarian needs of the affected population. For whatever reason, the NGOs seem to face a problem of trust from both warring parties and the civilian population, despite the risks taken to access and provide humanitarian assistance in the field.

The issue of lack of trust as well as confidence was repeatedly mentioned by both NGO staff and key informants. However, from the explanation given by a key informant below, one can better understand the source or where this distrust stems from:

Excerpt 13: To them, as long as the conflict continues, it will continue to provide jobs. Hence, it provides them sustenance. As far as the region is concerned, most of the employees are imported from other regions to the South

West Region. That creates an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust in the community where they operate because they are seen as people who have come to reap economic benefits.

(KI-14)

According to the key informant in excerpt 13, NGO workers are often perceived to be only interested in the economic benefits they can obtain from this conflict. As he explained, the workers will continue to have jobs as long as the conflict continues. If seen in this light, it means that the workers are not seen as humanitarian workers but as people working towards self-aggrandisement. This perception is possibly worsened when the population observes that workers have not been selected from the communities but from outside their region.

One can therefore better understand where the feeling of distrust is arising from among the affected population, as they do not recognise those hired to provide humanitarian assistance to them. It makes it difficult for the population to openly and freely collaborate with humanitarian workers from these NGOs in terms of providing vital information when they do not trust the said workers.

E. Poor communication networks and language barriers

One of the points that was raised in the section of the questionnaire that required the population to assess the NGOs was that they did not properly communicate with the affected population. This also emerged as one of the themes that were identified in the interview with officials of the NGOs. The officials pointed out that some of the localities in the English-speaking regions where their NGOs offer humanitarian services were cut off from the communication network. Hence, this affected their work, as highlighted in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 14: Communication network is a problem. Most often, it is difficult to communicate with beneficiaries and even with our security officers. Sometimes we are blocked on the field but remain incommunicado, disconnected and vulnerable. As well, communication with beneficiaries is a problem due to language barriers; insecurity is also a major impediment to peacebuilding. (I-NGO-2)

Excerpt 15: In some of the communities, there is neither a network nor electricity, which renders the planning and implementation of our activities difficult. Consequently, sometimes mobilization is not carried on well and would definitely have an impact on relief distribution to the community. Due to communication issues, we are sometimes unable to inform the community of our arrival. Definitely, on our arrival we meet only few targeted persons who were shortlisted. (I-NGO1)

Excerpt 16: There is a communication problem because, due to poor networks, humanitarian workers find it difficult to communicate with beneficiaries or even with their security officers. (KI-11)

Based on the evidence revealed by the respondents in excerpts 14, 15, and 16, it was noted that poor communication problems and language barriers were major impediments both local and international NGOs faced while delivering humanitarian services to the affected population. As already disclosed in excerpt 13, the NGOs hired employees outside the affected regions. Besides having French and English as official languages, Cameroon is also a multicultural and multilingual country. Consequently, there are Cameroonians who do not understand either of these official languages. For effective communication, it will be more reasonable for NGOs to hire some people who speak the same language as indigenes in the affected communities.

Even an official from the North West governor's office confirmed that a poor communication network was a barrier to the effective implementation of humanitarian action plans in the affected communities, as seen in excerpt 16. According to this government official, humanitarian workers find it difficult to communicate with beneficiaries or even with their security officers. From all imaginations, it will be very traumatising to be stranded in the field and remain incommunicado by being disconnected from relatives and especially security officials when exposed to insecure situations like the ongoing conflict.

F. Undue pressure from some traditional leaders

There is often an erosion of the rule of law during conflict situations, as seen in Portela (2012).

The case in the ongoing conflict in the English speaking regions of Cameroon cannot be far from this. In the absence of the rule of law, humanitarian staff in the field cannot work freely. They sometimes break the rules on the ground because of pressure that may come from different quarters, as seen in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 17: ...some traditional leaders impose on us to satisfy all their wives and households in the palace before accessing the vulnerable persons. For instance, “I’m a chief, and I have nine wives drop their share in my palace. (LNGO-1)

From this excerpt, it can be seen how some traditional rulers put undue pressure on humanitarian field staff to satisfy their wives first, before even the vulnerable persons in the field. In times like this, where there is often an erosion in the rule of law, other people in the field can force the staff to supply them with relief material meant for vulnerable people. Imagine coming across non-state armed men with guns in an unsecured locality, and they command or order you to surrender humanitarian goods meant for the affected population. The staff may succumb to such demands for fear of the unknown and, by so doing, fail to deliver relief material to the needy. In such a case, one cannot blame the staff who needs to ensure his/her survival.

G. Corrupt practices and dishonesty

It is noted in Willitts-King and Harvey (2005) that there is a risk of corrupt practices, which can be at the level of the staff or the aid agency being a victim of corruption during humanitarian operations. The Transparency International Report (2006), cited by Fenner and Mahlstein (2009, 244), further pointed out that the corrupt practices include “fraud, embezzlement, misuse of assets, diversion of aid resources, and straightforward bribery”. In the case of the humanitarian and peacebuilding operations of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Anglophone Conflict, the following excerpts have been captured to present the situation:

Excerpt 18: Often, humanitarian workers realize that the community leaders carry out biased selections. They shortlist their relatives and friends who are not needy persons, at the expense of persons of concern for whom the reliefs were designed. NGOs are unable to adequately correct such a discrepancy because, with the insecurity on the ground, they cannot freely access and shortlist the targeted vulnerable persons within a community without the collaboration of community mobilizers. (L-NGO-4)

Excerpt 19: When we access a community, with the collaboration of the community leaders, we recruit and train community mobilizers who work in collaboration with our project in their community as brokers. However, they often exhibit practices of corruption and nepotism. That is because, they sometimes shortlist dead people or their relatives and friends at the expense of vulnerable people who live in abject poverty. (L-NGO-5)

Excerpt 20: NGOs recruit community mobilizers who are our facilitators or brokers in the field, they commit acts of corruption or nepotism. Whereas NGOs bestow their confidence upon them, however, they sometimes violate our cardinal principles. Hence, they shortlist the names of dead people or those of their relatives and friends, who are not eligible for assistance. Such detrimental and sarcastic attitudes of the agents significantly affect the outcome of NGOs because they lead to duplication of services to beneficiaries and inhibit relief services from significantly reaching persons of concern as targeted by the organisations. (L-NGO-7)

Excerpt 21: We train community mobilizers on project management and on humanitarian principles, and redeploy them back into the community to shortlist vulnerable persons therein. However, sometimes they are deceptive because they give the names of their own relatives and friends, whereas they are not eligible to receive assistance. (LNGO-1)

From excerpts 18 to 21, the participants, who were officials of some of the NGOs that performed humanitarian operations in these regions, highlighted that corruption negatively affected their operations in the field. As they explained, most of the corrupt practices came from community mobilisers they hired and trained to implement their operations in the field. Some of them ended up inflating the list of those who were actually in need of assistance with the names of their relatives, friends and even those of dead people. With this kind of dishonest attitude in the field, supplies end up with some non-vulnerable persons, hence undermining the NGOs' humanitarian and peacebuilding activities in the field.

Though the NGO officials point an accusing finger at the community mobilisers they hire to execute their activities in the field, some key participants on their part blamed the NGOs, as seen in excerpts 22 and 23:

Excerpt 22: The spirit of corruption has made NGOs look at profit-making at the expense of vulnerable persons. (KI-14)

Excerpt 23: ... Some of the NGOs engage in unlawful practices that may promote the resilience of the conflict. That is because they strive at rendering perennial and maintaining more humanitarian activities as well as donors' sponsorship on the field for the sustainability of their organisations. Some of them wish to make a return from the conflict; thus, they sometimes indulge in unlawful practices that may fuel the conflict and render it perennial. As well, the organisations strive for profit; hence, they violate the humanitarian cardinal principles, notably independence, neutrality and impartiality. (KI-7)

Excerpt 24: Most NGOs are not really there for the welfare of the community; rather, they are interested in satisfying their financial needs. However, even the genuine ones are not all faithful. They sometimes inflict the number of persons of concern at hundreds of thousands, in order to obtain huge funding from donors. (KI-2)

Excerpt 25: Generally, NGOs do not use the allocated funds for deserved purposes, notably the alleviation of the sufferings of needy persons. Some of them rather enrich themselves at the detriment of persons of concern. (KI-3)

Excerpt 26: From every indication, some organisations as well as actors wish that the conflict should persist over years so that it continues to create jobs for them and generate finances. The conflict has also created jobs for some unemployed or underemployed Cameroonians, who do not wish it should stop. On the one hand, the Anglophone Conflict has impoverished numerous people; on the other hand, it has enriched a minority. (KI-9)

As explained in the above excerpts (22, 23, 24, 25, and 26), some NGOs were seen to be interested in profit-making rather than in the people; they thus engaged in corrupt practices to achieve this goal. The participant in excerpt 22 is even of the opinion that some NGOs get involved in unlawful practices to prolong the conflict to stay relevant to keep gaining funds. In the same light, the participant in excerpt 26 outrightly stated that some of the NGOs do not want the conflict to end because it has created money-making jobs for them.

This kind of phenomenon whereby NGOs involved in humanitarian relief are accused of corrupt practices has been reported by Fenner and Mahlstein (2009). According to Fenner and Mahlstein (2009, 245), some agencies may defraud donors by forging receipts for relief supplies that were not received and using them to support expenditure claims. They also added that some of the agencies may inflate overhead costs or exigency funds (as seen in excerpts 24 and 25) in their budgets to divert project funds into private accounts.

Some members of the public have developed a poor perception towards NGOs due to the involvement of some in corrupt practices. In excerpt 27 below, the participant stated that some NGOs failed to disclose their missions in the Anglophone regions, and as a result, he perceived them as having a hidden agenda in the ongoing conflict.

Excerpt 27: NGOs do not disclose their mission in the Anglophone Regions. They fail to propose any solution linked to the conflict. They probably have a hidden agenda that may be related to the conflict. (KI-10)

H. Constantly displaced population

The populace is constantly moving as a result of conflict because they feel unsafe. Some even choose to flee the country, while others experience internal displacement. After identifying people in need of various forms of assistance, humanitarian workers return to certain communities only to discover that the people in need have moved elsewhere, seeking for safety. This is the kind of circumstance that is described in excerpts 28 and 29:

Excerpt 28: At the humanitarian level of the conflict, the population is not stable, so persons of concern are on the move and their needs keep on changing from time to time, thus rendering the peacebuilding role a complex one. (LNGO-1)

Excerpt 29: Most vulnerable persons moved to other secured regions of Cameroon, so we could not meet them in their locality. (L-NGO-3)

Despite efforts made by humanitarian assistance teams in the field to identify those who are needy, their efforts may be frustrated when they cannot locate the targeted persons because they have relocated elsewhere. Hence, such challenges may contribute to the inability of the NGOs to effectively address humanitarian concerns in the field. This situation is worsened by the fact that it is also difficult to obtain data about people's movement during a conflict situation, as observed in the ongoing Anglophone conflict for security reasons. People do not often disclose their movements to others for fear of the unknown.

I. Lack of funding and donor fatigue

One of the themes that also emerged from this study to explain the inability of the NGOs to effectively address the humanitarian concerns and needs of the affected population is the lack of funding and donor fatigue owing to the prolonged nature of the conflict. Officials from NGOs as well as key informants identify the lack of funding as one of the reasons why the NGOs could not satisfy the needs of the affected population. The excerpts below reveal this as a hindrance to the realisation of the humanitarian needs of the affected population:

Excerpt 30: "As well, we face a high demand from needy persons, but the Anglophone Conflict remains underfunded, thus we are unable to serve all persons of concern." (L-NGO-5)

Excerpt 31: Funding too is not common and remains unsustainable. (...).

Scarcity of funds, as well as inflation in the market, constitute, to my humble opinion, some of the impediments that undermine peacebuilding activities in the Anglophone Conflict. (L-NGO-7)

Excerpt 32: There is a high expectation from Danish Refugee Council to satisfy persons of concern's multiple needs, whereas the allocated funds are limited. Indeed, it is impossible for the Danish Refugee Council to satisfy all existing humanitarian cases in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon. (I-NGO-1)

Excerpt 33: With the outburst of COVID 19, since NGOs discovered that many donors were interested in the pandemic unlike the Anglophone conflict, which is less funded, they abandoned persons affected by the conflict and indulged in COVID assistance and only resumed after the curbing of the pandemic. (KI-11)

The responses in excerpts 30, 31, and 32 were captured from both officials of local and international NGOs. They explained that the conflict was underfunded, and funds allocated were limited to address the multiple needs of the affected population. On the other hand, the key informant in excerpt 33 blamed the underfunding of NGOs and the resulting slow response to attending to the needs of the affected population on the outbreak of COVID-19. He explained that NGOs that diverted their attention to the COVID-19 pandemic received funding during this period and abandoned the victims of the Anglophone conflict. This is because donors were more interested in donating to fight the spread of the deadly pandemic than to the Anglophone conflict.

It was observed that local NGOs received donations through international NGOs. As disclosed in excerpt 34, this procedure resulted in local NGOs being underfunded. Officials of the local NGOs say the international NGOs deduct part of these funds for use as operational costs to run their organisations, and as a result, just part of these funds are transferred to local NGOs to attend to the needs of vulnerable people.

Excerpt 34: As well, most funds pass via INGOs, which use part for their operational costs, before transferring the rest to LNGOs. At the end, very little amount is allocated for the vulnerable persons. (L-NGO-1)

J. Lack of collaboration among NGOs

Also emerging from this research in relation to reasons why NGOs failed to effectively address humanitarian concerns and needs of the affected population was the issue of lack of collaboration that manifested in different ways. Though some officials during the interviews claimed that they collaborated with different stakeholders to facilitate their work in the field, this collaboration was not always smooth and effective, as seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 35: NGOs faced the pressure of administrative bottlenecks that delay or block supplies; there are a lot of competitions over resources between the organisations, and lack of due collaboration that leads to duplication of services and waste of resources. (LNGO-7)

Excerpt 36: As well, collaboration with the stakeholders of the conflict is a difficult one. So, obtaining access to the communities is very difficult. Often, members of the community too are so reticent that it is not easy to exchange with them or to carry out advocacy exercise... (L-NGO-4)

The officials of Reach-Out-Cameroon reportedly seem to have had challenges collaborating with government officials and other stakeholders. As seen in excerpts 35 and 36, NGOs faced the pressure of administrative bottlenecks that delayed or blocked their humanitarian and peacebuilding responses. In addition, competition amongst NGOs is reported to have led to the duplication of services in the field, leading to the wastage of efforts and resources. The NGOs failed to collaborate in identifying the needs of the people and then share these responsibilities. Instead, they worked independently and sometimes provided the same humanitarian assistance to the population.

This lack of collaboration is seen as the reason why the population receives the same humanitarian packages from different NGOs, while a certain segment of the affected population is neglected, as observed in excerpt 37 below:

Excerpt 37: There is a lack of coordination as well as collaboration within the organisations who do not concert before going to the field. Hence, they duplicate services that constitute a waste of resources. Some needy persons keep on receiving the same goods while others are completely neglected. (KI-7)

Furthermore, key informants blamed NGOs for the lack of collaboration. The NGOs were accused of not collaborating with administrative authorities, as seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 38: NGOs cannot adequately curb the growing humanitarian concerns in the North West Region because they do not collaborate with the power that be. In addition, they fail to respect the key principle of neutrality in humanitarian activities. Such defaults made Doctors Without Borders suspend their activities in the North West Region. As well, the provision of humanitarian assistance cannot per se adjust the mindset of people that ought to be reoriented. (KI5)

Excerpt 39: Hence, few persons benefit from the assistance; under the pretext of the principle of independence, NGOs do not collaborate with members of the government who could enable them to reach many persons of concern; NGOs complain that they are unable to reach the hinterland because of insecurity, however, they refuse to be escorted by the military under the pretext that they are independent... (KI-6)

As disclosed in excerpts 38 and 39 above, though the interviewed officials of some NGOs complained of a lack of security during their fieldwork, the key informants disclosed that the NGOs often refused to be escorted to the field because they respected the principles of independence. This informant believed that most of the affected people were not reached by the NGOs because they refused to accept government security offers while going into the hinterlands. The NGOs are accused of failing to respect the key principle of neutrality in humanitarian activities, like in the case of Doctors Without Borders, who were blamed for collaborating with separatists, and hence, their humanitarian activities were suspended. Humanitarian actors like Doctors Without Borders have the right to assist the military or separatists on the field who have been wounded. In this case, they were accused of supplying arms and ammunitions to separatists.

K. Examining the research proposition

The NGOs face many challenges that limit their ability to properly address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population.

The data of this study reveals that field staff of both international and local NGOs faced numerous challenges in the field that impeded their ability to address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population. Despite facing the general challenge of inadequate funds, some challenges are out of their control. The NGOs may even have the funds and acquire the humanitarian and peacebuilding relief material, yet they have difficulties in effectively serving the affected population because of the following reasons: insecurity and the threat to life, inaccessibility to the needy population, poor communication networks and language barriers, undue pressure from some traditional leaders, lack of collaboration and confidence from the affected population, corrupt practices and dishonesty, a constantly displaced population, and lack of collaboration, as highlighted by participants interviewed in this study.

Insecurity and threats to life are issues that should not be taken lightly in conflict situations, especially like the ongoing Anglophone conflict, where there seems to be a breakdown in law and order in most parts of the North West and South West Regions. There are cases of death unaccounted for; therefore, the matter of security becomes that of personal decision. No NGO staff would like to take the risk of exposing themselves to bullets that do not discriminate. The breakdown in the communication network in the affected regions is not under the control of the NGOs.

K. Comparative perspectives between local and international NGOs

Comparatively, both local and international NGOs equally encountered challenges of insecurity and threat to life. Though they all face these challenges, that of the local NGOs may be unique due to their proximity to the conflict. Staff of local NGOs may become potential targets of armed groups who may consider them spies. The government or the non-state armed groups can offer to provide security to NGOs, but it can compromise their independence and neutrality. They may be perceived as being aligned with one side of the conflict and hence bridging trust. In the case of the ongoing conflict, it was even an international NGO called Doctors Without Borders that was forced to suspend its activities after being blamed by the Cameroonian government for aiding separatists in the ongoing conflict (see excerpt 38)

Though both NGOs complained that the conflict was underfunded, the international NGOs had more access to such funds compared to the local NGOs. Local NGOs complained that they receive funds through international NGOs who use part of the money for their operational costs before transferring the rest to them (see excerpt 34). Generally, international NGOs may have more diverse and stable sources of funding, as they have expertise in lobbying and can influence international organisations like agencies of the United Nations, the World Bank and international donors to get funds. On their part, local NGOs have limited access to such donors. By implication, the international NGOs can perform better in addressing humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected populations during conflict situations.

Comparatively, findings from this study also revealed that the local NGOs complained of corrupt practices and dishonesty. As seen in excerpts 18, 19, 20 and 21, it is only officials of local NGOs who complained that the community mobilisers they select to manage their projects in the field give the names of their own relatives and friends, whereas they are not eligible to benefit from humanitarian and peacebuilding packages. This problem may be as a result of their lack of expertise and experience in recruiting community mobilisers. Officials of international NGOs did not mention this as a challenge.

It is also observed that officials of local NGOs are more likely to face undue pressure from some traditional leaders than those of international NGOs. As previously mentioned, local NGOs frequently enlist community mobilisers from the affected population to oversee their projects on the ground. As stated in excerpt 35, some traditional leaders usually impose that their relatives are attended to before others. This can be because of community dynamics. Some of those selected from such communities may already have existing relationships

or conflicts with others. This can negatively influence the way they will manage humanitarian and peacebuilding projects under their supervision. International NGOs' approach to recruiting staff is more professional. They take measures to avoid situations like this when the community mobiliser is exposed to such pressure.

From the above comparative perspectives, it is clear that the structural and operational differences governing local and international NGOs place the latter in a vantage position compared to the former. International NGOs have more access to funding and recruit experts who make their operations more successful than local NGOs.

CONCLUSION

This sought to explain the inability of the NGOs to successfully address the humanitarian and peacebuilding needs of the affected population in the North West and South regions. Amongst the reasons that explained the inability of the NGOs were corrupt practices and dishonesty on the part of some NGO staff and hired community mobilisers who often inflated the lists of vulnerable persons with names of their relatives and friends who are nonvulnerable persons. Undue pressure from some traditional rulers imposing field workers to first attend to the needs of their numerous wives before having access to persons of concern also emerged as a reason to explain the inability of the NGOs to address the needs of the people effectively.

Other major challenges that impeded their work were insecurity and threat to life, as guns do not segregate between humanitarian workers and belligerents; inaccessibility to the needy population as a result of the enclave nature of the affected regions; lack of collaboration and confidence from the affected population; poor communication networks and language barriers; constantly displaced populations that are always running from place to place to seek safety; lack of funding and donor fatigue; and lack of collaboration between the NGOs and members of the administration. The lack of collaboration between the NGOs leading to domain overlap is a fundamental problem that affects the effectiveness of NGOs, hence preventing them from forming a full-fledged network. This ties in with the reciprocal model of partnership explained in Seybolt's humanitarian systems theory. When NGOs work in isolation and fail to collaborate, an unstable system is created with low connectivity among NGOs, leading to domain overlap and positive externalities that affect the efficiency, as stated in Kalita (2019).

As mentioned in excerpt 35 above, there existed an unhealthy competition between NGOs over resources. Such rivalry can have several negative consequences on the effectiveness of their activities. In addition to domain overlap highlighted in Kalita (2019), these kinds of competition can also lead to an uneven distribution of resources, with some communities or areas being overlooked. Competition among NGOs can also damage relationships between them, local communities and other stakeholders, thus eroding trust. The overall effect is that it will undermine collective impact on the field, and it will make it more difficult for them to achieve shared goals and objectives. As a result, the NGOs will find it difficult to implement collective partnership models that can effectively reduce domain overlap and enhance positive externalities, as recommended by Seybolt (2009).

Some of the challenges the NGOs faced, as gathered from the findings, are not restricted to the present Cameroon-Anglophone conflict alone. As reported in Stoddard (2003), insecurity is one of the challenges that interrupts humanitarian actions in the field. On her part, Crowther (2001) also noted the need for security enforcement to facilitate the role of NGOs, be it local or international, in post-war peacebuilding. Brooks (2016), Bakhit (2014), and Nikolov (2009) added that NGOs are often confronted with the task of ensuring the safety and security of their staff in complex situations like conflicts. According to the SAVE Programme's preliminary findings cited in the Norwegian Refugee Council (2016), insecurity is the primary cause and impediment to humanitarian presence.

Corruption, lack of funding and accountability, lack of collaboration with the government, etc., as found in this study, are also challenges the Norwegian Refugee Council and Handicap

International (2017) reported as factors that impede the humanitarian and peacebuilding actions of NGOs in the field. The Max impact Team cited in Holland (2017) extensively identified most challenges NGOs face in their humanitarian and peacebuilding actions in the field. Most of the challenges are the same as those that emerged from this study. These contributed to the inability of the international and local NGOs to effectively address the humanitarian needs and peacebuilding actions in the ongoing Anglophone conflict. Another objective of this study was to examine how NGOs enhance their humanitarian and peacebuilding roles in Cameroon.

The recommendation for NGOs to empower people of affected communities also emerged from the qualitative data, with some NGO officials maintaining that the vulnerable persons should be taught how to fish rather than keeping on giving fish to them all the time. This finding ties in with the Chinese saying cited in Kim and Yi's (2016) saying, "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

Notwithstanding, other recommendations regarding how NGOs can enhance the humanitarian and peacebuilding actions on the ground include capacity building of NGO personnel so that they can master the principles of humanitarian and peacebuilding actions, for NGOs to collaborate with all stakeholders, including other NGOs, create awareness to prevent conflicts, carry out need assessments before making supplies, and increase funding. These researchers add their voice to that of Seybolt (2009) to recommend that NGOs adopt the collective model of partnership so that collectively, they can carry out needs assessments of the affected population and decide what each organisation will supply as per their specialisation to curb domain overlap, competition and corruption.

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