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HUMAN SECURITY IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED REGIONS: COPING CAPACITY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGIONS OF CAMEROON

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Human security in conflict-affected regions:
coping capacity of women and children in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon

By Ngenge Ransom Tanyu

Abstract

This paper examines human security, and women and children's coping capacities in armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon. Using a qualitative research approach, the paper reveals that women and children caught in the conflict face security challenges regarding food, health, finances, personal and community safety, education, political rights and freedoms. To cope with these challenges, they rely on humanitarian organisations, well-wishers and neighbours for help. In addition, some affected women have resorted to prostitution while children go to school without uniforms, especially in remote areas. In extreme situations, others have sought refuge in the bushes, neighbouring Francophone regions, Nigeria and beyond. By zooming in on Anglophone Cameroon, whose ongoing separatist conflict and its impact on human security continues to receive scant attention in scholarship, this paper adds to existing research on human security in contexts of fragility and conflict.

Keywords: human security, armed conflict, coping capacity, fragility, Anglophone Cameroon, Ambazonia.

1   Introduction

Africa is arguably the world's most conflict-prone continent today (Aoláin et al. 2018). The continent, which is endowed with mineral resources, is riven by inter- and intra-state conflict, which includes boundary and territorial disputes, civil wars, succession disputes, and conflicts motivated by politics and ideology (Bujra, 2002, p. 3). These conflicts stem from the continent's history of European colonisation and Balkanisation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ethnic diversity and complexity, inept leadership, corruption, and poverty (Aremu 2010, p. 549ff.). According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, Africa has seen 50-55 state-based conflicts since 2019, with 60,000 to 70,000 recorded casualties (2021, UCDP). Similarly, statistics from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLEDP) indicate that the situation will deteriorate, with 21,600 reported incidents of armed conflict in Africa in 2019, up from 15,874 in 2018, a 36 percent increase (Alison, 2020, p. 1).

According to Wagner et al. (2018, p. 8), women and children are disproportionately affected by armed conflict in Africa. Women and children on the continent face daily security challenges, particularly during armed conflicts, and often devise strategies to overcome them. Cameroon is one of several African countries currently afflicted by various forms of armed conflict, including state and non-state conflicts. Since 2010, Cameroon has been fighting the Boko Haram insurgency in the northern part of its territory alongside Benin, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria as members of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF). To the west, northwest, and southwest regions of Cameroon, a state-based conflict between government forces and separatist fighters has been raging since 2016, with separatist fighters desiring to carve out an independent state known as Southern Cameroon/Ambazonia. To the east, the border with the Central African Republic (CAR) has been gripped by non-state violence for years, with non-state armed groups from the CAR invading Cameroonian territory. As a result, Cameroon, previously regarded as one of the most peaceful countries in the Sub-Central African Region, has descended into violence, with 5,394 people killed between 1989 and 2019. (Table 1).

Table 1: Total number of deaths between 1989-2019

Conflict type	Total number of deaths
Total number of deaths	5,394
State-based violence	3,776
Non-state violence	281
One-sided violence	1,337

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (2021, p. 1)

This paper examines the armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, which has claimed over 1,344 lives between 2017 and 2019, according to 2021 UCDP statistics. Pettersson & Öberg (2020, p. 1) define a state-based conflict as follows:

> A contested incompatibility that concerns government and territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year".

The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2019, p. 1) estimates that over 1,850 people have been killed in the conflict, with over 170 villages destroyed: 530,000 people internally displaced, with an additional 35,000 seeking refuge in neighbouring Nigeria and beyond. Corresponding figures from the United Nations (UN) indicate that "three of the Anglophone regions' four million people are affected by the humanitarian crisis while about 800,000 children are out of school" (ICG, 2021, p. 1).

1.1 Contextual background and challenges

Armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions is rooted in the country's historical past. Previously a German protectorate from 1884 to 1916, the end of World War I and the defeat of the Germans ushered in a new era of British and French colonial administration following the territory's partition in 1919 and resumption of the League of Nations Mandate in 1922. Willis et al. (2019, p. 7) note that "the land boundary and colonial policy implemented by British and French colonial forces […] acted as a physical divide between border communities" resulting in complex cultural differences manifested in community practices and embedded in the country's socio-political structure. French Cameroun gained independence on 1 January 1960 as a result of the decolonisation process. It was renamed The Republic of Cameroon. In comparison, former British Southern Cameroon gained independence on 1 October 1961 when it reunified with the Republic of Cameroon following a UN-sponsored plebiscite to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon (IPSS, 2020, p. 2).

Since independence and reunification, economic deprivation, marginalisation, and restrictions on access to political decision-making processes have stifled Anglophone Cameroonian citizens' civil, cultural and social rights. These long-standing historical grievances contributed to the rise of Anglophone separatism (Pedneault & Sheppard, 2018, p. 14). According to the New York City Bar (NYCB), the immediate cause of the armed conflict in 2016 was the violent repression of teacher, student and lawyer demands to end Anglophone marginalisation and suppression. It reached a zenith in 2017 as a result of the Cameroonian government's crackdown on peaceful demonstrations, as the African Affairs Committee reported (AAC, 2020, p. 1). According to UN statistics, Anglophone Cameroonians are comprised of an

estimated 4 to 5 million people who live in the country's Southwest and Northwest Regions (UNFPA, 2021). The United Kingdom's (UK) Home Office's Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) defines an Anglophone as "primarily distinguished from other Cameroonians by the fact that they speak English, or a dialect of English" (IAGCI, 2020, p. 6). Additionally, the definition states:

> The distinction is not simply linguistic – around 20% of the population speak English, but perhaps 50% speak 'pidgin' English, not all of whom are considered Anglophone. Instead, being 'Anglophone' may also encompass other aspects of a person's background, including belonging to or having a shared culture, history and being from an ethnic group with its origin in the North-West and South-West regions (which were formerly UN-mandated territories administered by the UK and have a legal system derived from UK-common law)".

Women and children in Anglophone Cameroon are constantly threatened with kidnapping, rape, food scarcity and insufficient medical assistance, to name a few. As a result, they have developed strategies for overcoming these daily security threats. Additionally, the destruction of infrastructure, including electricity and water facilities, communication lines, bridges, and connecting roads, fracturing family structures, affecting food production, livelihood, resulting to unemployment and prostitution of young girls for survival, (Mohammed 2020:198), are some of the numerous causes and effects of the armed conflict. The ratio (in percentages) of women and children affected by the war is shown in TABLE 2.

Table 2: Percentage of women and children affected by armed conflict

	Women	Children
Internally displaced persons in Cameroon	60%	43%
Refugees in Nigeria	53%	51%

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017:1)

The 1994 Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined human security as people's "safety from chronic threats and protection from sudden hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life" (UNDP, 1994, p. 23). Human security is fundamentally comprised of seven components: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. The damage to various aspects of human security has been enormous in the context of the armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon. However, little effort has been made in academia to comprehend the major threats to human security, the human security challenges confronting women and children, and the measures they have taken to cope with impending challenges. As a result, this paper draws on the UNDP's (1994) definition of human security and its essential

components to comprehend the threats, elaborate on the challenges, and assess the coping capacity of women and children living in conflict-affected regions.

1.2   Justification and significance

Armed conflict is a threat to global peace and security, as scientific evidence from Somalia, Northern Nigeria, Rwanda, and Northern Uganda demonstrates (Annan et al., 2011; Emmanuelar, 2015; Gumbi, 2015; Kraehnert et al., 2019). Additionally, non-combatants (most notably women and children) are particularly vulnerable in times of armed conflict. For example, women and children are frequently exposed to violence and trauma, suffer physical injuries, malnutrition, and psychological damage, impairing their physical and mental health, as well as their educational opportunities, thereby limiting their ability to progress (Akresh, 2016). Thus, this paper is critical for understanding human security challenges in conflict-affected regions in general, and specifically the security threats and coping capacities of women and children caught up in armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, the armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions is one of the continent's most neglected and underreported conflicts (NRC, 2021). As such, this paper sheds light on the plight of women and children in the conflict. Additionally, the paper demonstrates how it could facilitate the work of international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) in promoting policies that protect women and children during armed conflict. Protection could take the form of equipping women and children with the skills necessary to defend themselves and remain resilient in the face of adversity. On another level, this paper demonstrates the widespread disregard for the humanitarian needs of women and children. In this regard, the paper is especially beneficial to humanitarian organisations because it identifies critical gaps in the delivery of humanitarian aid to internally and externally displaced women and children in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

1.3   Definition of key terms

Human security, armed conflict and coping capacity are all key concepts in this paper. Whereas later sections of the paper contextualise these concepts in terms of theory and literature review, this section focuses on defining them, particularly given that the use of terms varies frequently between academic works. Additionally, the name Cameroon is clarified to avoid any confusion that may arise as a result of making the paper difficult to understand.

1.4   Human security

Human security is a contentious concept that is frequently approached from a variety of perspectives. However, this paper relies on the 1994 UNDP HDR, which defines human security as 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want', as stated in the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights' (UDHR) preamble (Gómez & Des Gaspar, 2016, p. 2). Freedom from fear and want is synonymous with women and children's ability to cope with violence and crime, secure access food and medication in the context of the armed conflict Anglophone Cameroon. This paper focuses on economic, health, food, political, personal safety and community dimensions of human security in the context of armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon.

1.5 Armed conflict

Armed conflict, as defined by Vité (2009), is a multifaceted concept. To qualify as an armed conflict, a conflict must exhibit at least two characteristics: the existence of organised armed groups and the engagement of those armed groups in combat of some intensity (Blair & Brick 2010, p. 3740). This paper makes use of the definition derived from the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts (Protocol II), which entered into force on 8 June 1977. Article 1 of the Conventions defines armed conflict as "which takes place in the territory of a High Contracting Party between its armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organised armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations" (ICRC, 1977, p. 314). Therefore, the armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions between government forces and armed separatists who have significant territorial leverage while operating as a guerrilla army meets the definitive definition of an armed conflict.

1.5.1 Coping capacity

Burkett (2013) defines coping capacity as the capacity of humans to respond to and recover from the effects of stress or perturbations that have the potential to alter the structure or function of a system. The term is frequently used interchangeably with vulnerability, which refers to "a set of conditions and processes resulting from physical, social, cultural political, economic, and environmental factors, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards" (Billing & Madengruber 2005, p. 3). Coping capacity is used in this paper because it demonstrates how women and children can manage political, economic, personal, health, food, and community resources. In other words, coping capacity demonstrates how they utilise these resources to adapt to or overcome adverse consequences of the armed conflict.

1.5.2 Cameroon

Cameroon is not a technical term perse. However, due to the fact that Cameroon has been known by various names throughout history, it is necessary to mention it here. From 1884 to 1916, the territory was under German control; the British and French took over in 1916, divided and administered it separately until independence. On 1 January 1960, French Cameroon gained

independence. It officially adopted the name The Republic of Cameroon, with the French acronym La Republique du Cameroun, on 1 October 1961, when British Southern Cameroon achieved independence by reunifying with The Republic of Cameroon following a UN-sponsored plebiscite. The so-called reunification of the two Cameroons resulted in the establishment of the Federal Republic of Cameroon from 1961 to 1972, followed by the United Republic of Cameroon from 1972 to 1983, and finally the Republic of Cameroon in 1984.

It is worth noting that the above-mentioned historical transformations are a contributing factor to today's armed conflict. Previously known as British Southern Cameroon, the North and South-West Regions of Cameroon are located to the West of the country. Separatists have renamed it the Federal Republic of Ambazonia since the conflict began, though the new name is not recognised officially or internationally. For reasons of legality, this paper refers to the country as the Republic of Cameroon or Cameroon and to the conflict-affected regions as the North and South-West Regions of Cameroon or Anglophone Cameroon.

1.6   Objectives of the paper

The paper has the following objectives:

- Examination of the threats to human security in the conflict-affected region
- Identification of the human security issues faced by women are children
- Analysis of the coping measures adopted by women and children.

The conflict's contemporary nature and the exposure of women and children in the war compelled the researcher to address these issues. The paper attempts the following research questions:

- What are the threats to human security in conflict-affected regions?
- What are human security challenges faced by women and children because of the armed conflict between Cameroon and separatists?
- What are the measures adopted by women and children to cope with the threats?

The paper's aim is to confirm or refute the following assertions: armed conflict is detrimental to human security; women and children in Cameroon's Anglophone regions face daily security challenges as a result of the ongoing armed conflict; and women and children rely on humanitarian organisations as part of their coping mechanisms during the war.

2   State of current research

This section of the paper examines human security as a paradigm through which armed conflict may be understood in order to ascertain its consequences for women and children and their coping capacity. It reviews previous contributions on the subject.

2.1 Human security paradigm

Since the Cold War's conclusion, the forms and nature of armed conflict have changed substantially (ICRC, 2008). In other words, the end of the Cold War demonstrated that conventional approaches to security, such as statism, were increasingly incapable of identifying and addressing the many types of insecurity that the majority of the world's population encounters on a daily basis. Huntington (1993, p. 22ff.) contends that the majority of armed conflict, one of the vulnerabilities, is now motivated by cultural and civilisational considerations. This is shown in the expansion of so-called ethnic conflict, intra-state violence, and flagrant human rights abuses, indicating the pervasiveness of human security as a new paradigm/approach to understanding security (Shepherd, 2013, p. 24). Increased violent conflict in any of the aspects stated above, as seen across the world today, particularly in Africa, demonstrates the critical nature of a human-centric approach to security. Thus, the concept of human security is gaining momentum and being one of the very few that has "done most to organise thinking and international action around the management of poverty and armed conflict […] usually defined as the protection and empowerment of people caught up in extreme violence and underdevelopment" (Owens, 2012, p. 547). Perhaps, this explains why the concept of human security has become part of the mainstream discourse in international politics (Owens, 2012, p. 547).

Human security, in a nutshell, is the opposite of the conventional, state-centric approach to security (Hama, 2017, p. 2). Individuals, rather than the state, are the referent object of security in the human security paradigm. Paris (2001, p. 87) argues that regardless of the diverse implications attached to human security by various academics, a focus on the welfare of ordinary people, such as women and children caught up in conflict situations, is what unifies them. Apart from the 1994 UNDP HDR, several researchers have established definitions of human security that are somewhat different but basically similar. A few examples include:

1. Alkire (2003, p. 8) states that "the objective of human security is to safeguard the vital core of all human lives from pervasive critical threats, in a way that is consistent with long-term human fulfilment". This reflects the plight of women and children in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. It also demonstrates why human security is synonymous with security on both an individual and communal level.

2. Newman (2010, p. 78) deduces a notion of human security from its normative principles, implying the existence of an "ethical responsibility to re-orient security around the individual in line with internationally recognised standards of human rights and governance". This description goes into further detail about internal conflicts as the

biggest danger to 'security', which corresponds to the situation in Cameroon's Anglophone regions.

Despite the two definitions above, this paper uses the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) concept of human security as a working definition. Three factors account for this: (1) it was the first important declaration on human security; (2) the breadth with which the idea was covered, allowing for application to a variety of case studies; and (3) the fact that it remains the most generally quoted and authoritative version of the phrase. Additionally, several members of the coalition for human security have tailored the term to their particular requirements and research interests (UNDP, 1994; Paris, 2001, p. 90). The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report intended to analyse certain facets of society. TABLE 3 below summarises the many facets of human security and their associated instances.

Table 3: Aspects of human security and examples

No	Security type	Examples
1	Economic security	Persistent poverty, unemployment
2	Food security	Hunger, famine,
3	Health security	Unsafe food, lack of access to primary health care, malnutrition, deadly infectious diseases
4	Personal security	Physical violence, crime, terrorism, child abuse
5	Political security	Political repression, human rights abuses, lack of the rule of law and justice
6	Community security	Inter-ethnic, religious, and other identity-based tensions
7	Environmental security	Environmental degradation, resource depletion, natural disasters, pollution

Source: Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, 2021, p. 1

The economic, food, health, personal and communal security of women and children, as well as their coping abilities, are prioritised in the context of this paper. As demonstrated in TABLE 3, economic security encompasses independence from poverty, food security refers to access to food, and health security is concerned with access to health care and disease protection. By contrast, personal security emphasises physical protection against torture and domestic abuse, while political security emphasises the exercise of civil and political rights and independence from political tyranny.

Alkire (2003) remarks that the human security paradigm's axiomatic notion that the referent object of security should be individuals rather than the state reinforces rather than replaces current methods to security studies. The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS, 2016, p. 6) and the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (IIHR, 2021) grasp the fundamental concepts and major arguments of human security articulated by the 1994 UNDP HDR.

- Human security is a people-centred concept, putting the person at the centre of study and considering factors that jeopardise their existence, livelihood, and dignity.

- Human security is predicated on a multi-sectoral view of vulnerabilities. Thus, in addition to national security, it encompasses a broader understanding of risks and their causes affecting economic, food, health, environmental, personal, communal, and political security.

- Human security's components are interrelated. When a person's security is threatened anywhere in the world, all governments are likely to intervene.

- Security of humans is a global concern. It is pertinent to individuals worldwide, including in developed and developing nations. While the severity of the risks varies by location, they are genuine.
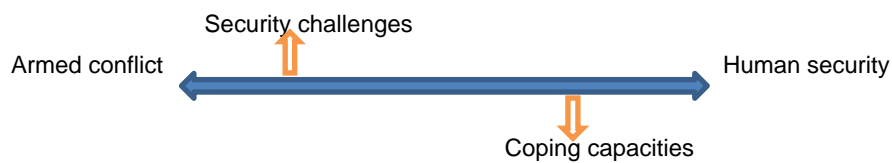
Human security is more attainable via early action than it is through late intervention (Bosold & Werthes, 2005). Human security ensures that individuals have the right to live in liberty and dignity, free of poverty and despair. Individuals, especially the most vulnerable, are entitled to be free from fear and hunger, with an equal chance to exercise all their rights and fully develop their human potential. Human security acknowledges the interdependence of peace, development, and human rights, taking into account civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights equally. Human security is not synonymous with the threat of force or coercive means, nor does it supplant governmental security. Because the political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances for human security vary greatly across and within nations and through time, human security bolsters national solutions that are consistent with local reality.

As Newman (2007, p. 6) argues, "armed conflict constitutes the most direct and brutal affront to human security for its victims". Armed conflict's consequences, including as death from violence or severe deprivation, forced human relocation, infrastructure and government capacity damage, and livelihood collapse, all have a harmful effect on human existence. Armed conflict is already regarded a danger to human security; the concern is now how this impacts women and children living in war zones. Does it aid in our understanding of armed conflict? And does it include strategies for women and children to deal with conflict? Does the notion of human security contribute value to the study of armed conflict and aid in the development of new policy-relevant ideas for addressing violence more effectively? If not all, this paper tackles each of these issues in some form.

Armed conflict and human security may be found at opposite ends of the same security continuun. Between these two extremes are security issues and coping capacities, with security difficulties approaching armed conflict and coping capacities approaching human security. FIGURE 1 depicts the human security approach to armed conflict accurately. It also accepts that the person is a critical security referent, but opposes to undercutting the state's significance

as a security referent. The paper's theoretical contribution is the thesis that what matters about insecurity is not only the reference point, but also which reference point is relevant in which security scenario and how governments and people survive in such security conditions. Nonetheless, an end to the war would be highly dependent on the steps taken by the Cameroonian state and its foreign allies. In other words, what good are methods if they are incapable of resolving diverse types of conflict? Allow women to obtain adequate medical treatment, for example, or allow a kid to attend school when school infrastructure has been set on fire or converted into a military barracks, as has occurred in Cameroon's Anglphne Regions.

Figure 1: Coexistence of armed conflict and human security

Source: own figure

2.2 Previous related research

This section examines scientific contributions to human security and armed conflict in order to identify knowledge gaps. Simultaneously, this paper intends to add to knowledge about the armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions and to serve as a springboard for further research. According to Aning (2007, p. 1f.), "armed conflict in Africa has been the continent's single most devastating challenge" as a result of (1) increasing fragmentation of political authority across societies (2) growing political influence of armed sub-state actors (3) fragmented loyalties of official military groups (4) food security and public health crises and (5) increasing vigilantism as a societal response to the insecurity. Women and children face unimaginable crimes in violent wars, as seen in Somalia and Mozambique. For example, children sustain catastrophic injuries, some of which are permanent, others are maimed by landmines, millions are mentally scarred by violence, and others are forced to watch or even participate in heinous acts of violence (Olivier, 2019, p. 115). Women and children are also subjected to significant emotional and psychological stress as a result of assaults, the death of loved ones, separation from parents, and the devastation of home and community. Numerous youngsters have difficulties, including flashbacks, nightmares, social isolation, increased aggressiveness, melancholy and a reduced sense of future direction (Rizkalla, 2020). Armed conflict, according to Orrnert (2019), is a substantial public health threat that cannot be ignored. Each year, thousands of children die as a result of combat – from knife wounds, gunshots, bombs and landmines – but many more die from starvation and illness caused or exacerbated by armed conflicts. Between 1981 and 1988, violent conflict killed 454,000 children in Mozambique alone. Additionally, millions of children suffer from hunger and sickness as a result of conflict. The high rate of starvation, disease and mortality among young children is a result of combat tactics that disrupt food supply and delivery. Many of today's violent conflicts occur in some of the world's poorest countries, which already have a disproportionate number of vulnerable children. Children are particularly vulnerable to collective attacks on their health and well-being. At the height of the fighting in Somalia, measles was responsible for more than half of child mortality in certain areas (Kadir, 2019). Ahanger et al. (p. 191) document how three decades of armed war in Kashmir subjected women to the constraints of a patriarchal culture in 2019 research. Due to the community's patriarchal character, the death of a husband results in the absence of the family's head and the primary source of economic and emotional support for the wife and children. As a result, women confront many demands related to home maintenance, child rearing, and preserving their honour and modesty. They often suffer victimisation at the hands of in-laws or sometimes romantic males attempting to exploit them.

In instances of armed conflict, when violence threatens human survival, individuals often develop strategies for overcoming recurring security issues. For women and children, survival is often a fight for life or death. Women often use a variety of techniques, including submitting and seeking sanctuary, sending male children away, coexisting with and collaborating with armed groups and expressing opposition to rape and abduction (Zubillaga, 2019). Veronese et al. (2019, p. 6) suggest that "to adequately uncover the complex dynamics of women's psychological well-being in conflict settings, we must take women's lived realities seriously as expressed through their narratives". As such, this paper seeks to fill the gap in the literature by offering insight into the many resources mobilised by women and children in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions to cope with daily security challenges.

2.3   The study area and knowledge gap

In comparison to Somalia, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan, the armed conflict Anglophone Cameroon is recent (Cilliers, 2018, p. 2). Nonetheless, Cameroon's historical evolution has invariably contributed to present conflict. While congratulating the peoples of Southern Cameroon (Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon or Anglophone Cameroon) on their accession to self-government at the 896th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting on 6 August 1959, the former Chairman of the House of Foreign Affairs stated that it was the people's will to conduct themselves democratically (Ebong, 2007, p. 1). However, he advised [on the question of reunification with former French Cameroun] against imposing a hasty decision on the Trust Territory's inhabitants, warning that it would be disastrous for their political future. As a result, it can be argued that what we are seeing today reflects the UN's failure in 1961 to make informed political choices in the interest of the people of former British Southern Cameroon's 'auto-determination'.

Numerous scholarly publications cover the separatist war in Anglophone Cameroon; focusing on the conflict's political, economic and sociocultural origins, the international actors involved, the nature of the conflict, the type of military hardware used, the factions involved, the legal aspects of the conflict, the war's overall consequences and recommended solutions. For example, Agwanda et al. (2020, p. 2ff.) emphasise the conflict's colonial origins, claiming that it "emerged from an intricate and highly contested process of decolonisation in Cameroon beginning from the 1950s to 1960s when the country gained independence". This process involved a UN-sponsored referendum on 11 February 1961, in which the inhabitants of former British Southern Cameroon were given two alternatives for achieving independence: joining the independent federation of Nigeria or reunifying with the independent Republic of Cameroon (Ngam & Budi, 2021; Ngamfon & Ngamfon, 2020). Today, proponents of an independent Southern Cameroon argue that they are rectifying the UN's 1961 errors.

Chung (2020) expounds on the economic ramifications of the war using the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) as a case study, demonstrating how it has crippled the agro-industrial firm that serves as the second largest employer in the Southwest Region of Cameroon after the state. Chung (2020, p. 280) asserts, using public policy theories, that the CDC has been limited to the point that it can hardly function as a result of severe fighting between government troops and separatist insurgents. This occurs inside and around the corporation's debilitating rubber, palm, and banana plantations in Boa, Illoani Mill, Illoani Estate, Mbonge, Mukonje, Malende, Mungo, Manja, and Tomball.

Ngange & Mokondo (2019), Langmia (2019), Nounkeu (2020), and Nganji & Cockburn (2020) analyse the role social media platforms like as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp have had in igniting the war. These platforms assist in the dissemination of false news, raising worldwide awareness, radicalising youths, exposing atrocities committed on both sides, and raising donations to assist internally displaced people (IDPs), the majority of whom are women and children.

Ashu (2020) and Ayuk-Etang (2020) discuss the war's effects on women and children (hunger, poverty, displacement, and prostitution), their efforts to bring about peace, and the government's lack of political will to settle the conflict. Mbondgulo-Wondieh (2020) demonstrates, on the other hand, how women's engagement in demonstrations throughout the conflict shaped public opinion about their experiences with inequality and injustices. Musah (2021) and Budji (2020) emphasise the value of music, grieving, poetry, and street demonstrations in promoting an end to the violence, while Moinina and Ngoh (2020) highlight the role of civil society organisations like as churches, teachers', and attorneys' groups. On the other hand, although Muki (2021, p. 147) makes reference to developing 'resilient communities' in order to prevent increasing intergenerational inequities and to include young people in social resilience building, he neglected to consider coping capabilities. Rather than that, their study focuses on how young people are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic's conflicting realities, particularly in terms of health and education.

Among the scholarly studies referenced above, none has clearly portrayed the armed conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions from the viewpoint of human security and women and children's coping capacity. While this paper tries to show human security in a conflict-affected area of Cameroon, to comprehend the issues confronting women and children, and to explore their coping capacities, many others have yet to take a comprehensive approach to the subject. However, this paper used human security, which is more of an approach/paradigm and associated schools of thought, to describe the complexity and problems faced by women, children, and their replicative capabilities in the conflict-affected area. By coping capabilities, the paper refers to the ways in which women and children have adapted to the injustices of the raging war, as previously conceptualised. This relates to their access to food, medical assistance, and personal safety, as well as their ability to exercise their political and civic rights.

2.4   Research Methodology

This paper uses a qualitative research approach since it enables a better understanding of human security in armed conflict with a particular emphasis on conflict-affected regions, such as Cameroon. More so, the qualitative research method with a case-study approach proves to be

appropriate in comparison to other research methods because it enables the acquisition of new insights into the current security situation in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, and an understanding of the challenges confronting women and children.

2.5 Methods of data collection

According to Namey et al. (2020, p. 59), "qualitative data collection is no longer synonymous with face-to-face research, as researchers now use a variety of online platforms to conduct focus groups (FGs) and individual interviews (IDIs)". On the basis of this rationale, this paper uses online interviews as the major data collecting technique owing to its relative adaptability and ability to contact research participants. The decision to conduct online interviews was motivated by the obstacles posed by the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic and the topic's security dynamics. The online interviews were conducted using Facebook Messenger, Zoom conference, and WhatsApp.

The study participants were able to use Facebook, Zoom, and WhatsApp due to their appropriateness for internet connection and availability in Cameroon. The researcher used audio calls for Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp since the study participants, particularly those who were impacted, such as women and children, want to maintain their anonymity. Zoom video conferencing was used mostly to communicate with humanitarian workers from different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who work 'on the ground' delivering medical help and food to the affected. The researcher arranged one-hour video conversations with humanitarian workers. They did, however, consent to the researcher recording the discussions for subsequent transcription. Online interviews, including both voice calls and video conferencing, arguably gave an asynchronous technique in real time.

Secondary data came from NGO, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) and governments reports, as well as from books, journal articles and book chapters. In detail, the majority of secondary data for this paper came from UN specialised agencies reports and other international organisations such as the United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR), the International Crisis Group (ICG), Amnesty International (AI), Doctors Without Borders (MFS) and the National Research Council (NRC). Apart from library visits, official NGO, and government websites, two more platforms, ResearchGate and Google Scholar, were crucial for collecting secondary data. The trouble with this stems from the testimonies of NGOs and IGOs about the difficulties experienced by women and children. Their coping mechanisms often contradicted government, respondent, and community-based organisation accounts. According to this paper, such adversity provides an opportunity. It enabled the comparison of data from a

variety of sources in order to create a balanced narrative about a subject that is very contentious due to its security dynamics.

2.6 Sampling: method, population, and size

The sampling strategy used in this paper is purposeful, since interviewees either possess unique and expert information or have been impacted by the conflict in some manner, particularly women and children. Around 4-5 million Anglophone Cameroonians live in the conflict-affected area. Some are internally displaced and are constantly relocating inside the area, while others have relocated to the French-speaking portion of Cameroon. Others, on the other hand, have sought safety in neighbouring Nigeria and elsewhere. However, since the research does not seek to legitimize or delegitimise more than half a century of alleged marginalisation, the study population is limited to Cameroonians of English-speaking extraction. The majority of them have been directly impacted by the ground situation. In other words, the paper's emphasis is not on the origins of the conflict but on its unfolding and impact on local populations. Initially, the researcher desired a sample size of fifteen study subjects. The researcher worked with a sample of 10 interviewees. Six humanitarian workers, two internally displaced persons (one in the conflict-affected zone and the other in the French-speaking portion of Cameroon), and two women whose families have been displaced from Cameroon were among those present. The study participants were chosen using the sampling techniques described in 3.4.1. This paper uses thematic analysis to get a better understanding of the subject. Themes developed around the four pillars of human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security in relation to both the problems faced by women and children and their coping capacity.

3 Findings

This section discusses the paper's results. Integrating security problems and coping capacities elucidates how the war has affected women and children's lives and what they have done to survive.

3.1 Food security

Since 2017 when the crisis in Cameroon's Anglophone regions devolved into a separatist war, agricultural activity has been disrupted in the majority of villages, some town and cities. With agriculture serving as the backbone of the Cameroonian economy and the main source of income for the majority of people in the Anglophone regions, the food situation has deteriorated for impacted families. It is worth noting that women in this region of Cameroon mostly cultivate food for livelihood. As a result of the interruption of agricultural activity, the following effects have occurred:

Scarcity of foodstuffs, closure of farm gates markets, high cost of farm inputs, high cost of transportation of farm produce to the limited available markets, reduced farm sizes, limited farm sizes due to insecurity to plough further in the bush because of armed camps.

Interviewee No. 1.

The scenario described by interview No. 1 above has a detrimental effect on food security, since the majority of women who depend on farming to support their children in the conflict-affected regions have fled to safer regions due to violence between government forces and separatist rebels. Additionally, there are cases when Cameroonian government forces have been accused of destroying food crops such as maize in order to compel the populace into submission, resulting in a fundamentally insecure environment and food shortages, as recounted by respondent No. 3:

With the shortage of food supply in villages, towns, and cities, the villagers have deserted most of the villages where these crops are grown, the prominent small-scale farmers, due to the conflict. Food insecurity has led to a hike in the prices of basic foodstuffs. It is high-risk farming in these areas these days, and as such, there is not enough to eat.

Due to the continual shootouts between Cameroon government forces and separatist rebels, it has also become difficult for those small-scale farmers to get food from fields in remote villages to marketplaces in towns and cities with the following consequences:

Inability to transport food from rural to urban areas results in extremely high prices, which makes a living cost for the average family very high. This affects the quality of food and diet intake by these families as things like meat, chicken, tomatoes become too expensive, reducing protein intake by average families.

Interviewee No. 2.

Women and children increasingly depend on a variety of sources for survival, including humanitarian organisations, well-wishers, and neighbours, in response to the problems created by the food crisis. Interviewee No. 4, describes the assistance provided by humanitarian workers:

We are involved in providing relief to these vulnerable members of the population. They have been effective, but security challenges affect the success as they are sometimes targets of the armed groups as they equally require food to support their camps. We work in collaboration with the government and other humanitarian organisations like World Food Programme (WFP), NRC, Humanitarian Aid Organisation (INTERSOS),

> *UNHR, Ontario Advisory Committee on HIV/AIDS (OACHA), and PLAN INTERNATIONAL to distribute food, non-food items, and WASH.*

Interviewee No. 7 adds that:

> *Since we cannot work our farms again, we rely on well-wishers occasionally and our neighbours who can still afford also assist us, which is of course but voluntary.*

Additionally, NGO studies show that women and children who live in the bushes depend on natural fruits and plants to survive. Due to the guerrilla nature of the war, the afflicted people may continue living their normal lives, which enables women to produce in some relatively tranquil areas. Women and children in Nigerian refugee camps have also benefitted from humanitarian organisations and their diaspora brothers and sisters. One of the interviewers (No.10) explains:

> *First, most women and children who are refugees and IDPs have benefited from food aid from international humanitarian organisations and NGOs. Moreover, the separatist Ambazonian government in exile has a humanitarian department called the Department of Human and Social Security (HSS) responsible for mobilising donors to distribute basic foodstuffs to the refugees in neighbouring countries.*

On the other hand, the Cameroonian government has made significant efforts to ensure that impacted communities have access to essential foodstuffs. It is surprising, however, that many of the afflicted women and children are unwilling to receive food deliveries from the Cameroon government, maybe due to the conflict's historical background and disruptions by separatist rebels.

3.2 Health security

A second issue that emerged from data collecting is health security, which correlates to the 1994 UNDP HDR report's main components. Numerous women and children's health conditions have worsened, particularly those living as internally displaced persons. Prostitution has developed as a coping method for people who have fled to cities like Douala and Yaoundé. Sexual abuse by military personnel, separatist combatants, and armed gangs has also increased significantly. As a consequence, as explained by one of the humanitarian workers, the chance of obtaining Sexually Transmissible Diseases (STDs) has increased.

> *Women risk contracting sexually transmissible diseases in cases of rape from armed groups, suffering and dying of cholera, typhoid, malaria due to improper hygiene and sanitation. No water abandoned and burnt homes make women and children more exposed to diseases—poor menstrual hygiene among young girls and women when displaced.*

One of the IDPs adds:

> *We live in fear of sexual and gender-based violence, stress, and our children are suffering from water-borne diseases such as typhoid, cholera -malnutrition -malaria- most. Sometimes we run to the rush and stay there for days, weeks or months, and in the process, the exposure to malaria from mosquito bites is too much.*

The findings also show that the plight of internally displaced people (IDPs), particularly those who live in the bushes, is deteriorating. For instance, "children have developed health complications such as typhoid, anemia, kwashiorkor, arterial hypertension, and marasmus due to malnutrition" due to shortage of food" (interviewee No. 5). In addition, there have been reports of women and children suffering from mental pain and trauma as a result of the deaths of their loved ones, which have occurred in some instances in front of their very own eyes coupled with hunger and famine producing stress, as stated in more detail below:

> *We have left our comfort zone to unknown areas, where you can barely eat twice a day or be guaranteed a place where you can lay your head and get some sound sleep, which is enough reason for me to be traumatised.*

Interviewee No. 7.

On the issue of malnutrition, "affected persons eat what is available and not what their bodies need to be healthy. They eat to fill their stomachs and not to meet up with its nutritional values." Aside from that, the majority of women and children affected are hiding in bushes and not properly feeding themselves because they are afraid of returning to their homes and villages, which have previously been raided by Cameroon government forces, because they are

descended from families with separatist sympathies and vice verssa. Interviewee No. 9 verifies the following:

> *Yes, few cases are reported and although millions of women and children are affected by malnutrition. This is because access to information is difficult due to cross-firing between the warring parties (military and the separatist). Poor feeding and an unbalanced diet due to lack of food are the major causes of malnutrition. The North and South-West Regions are experiencing a severe food crisis.*

Health services have been more difficult to get since the crisis degenerated into an armed conflict. As indicated by respondent N0. 7, a large number of women and children who have been hit by stray bullets or who have had medical difficulties as a result of food shortages and mosquito bites have been forced to depend on humanitarian organisations such as MFS and other sources for their survival.

> *We get help from humanitarian organisations and community health services. Guess aid also comes from well-wishers, doctors without borders and some, government too for IDPs. In some cases, we use herbs in treating health issues because there is no fixed time as to when we will get medical supplies.*

Interviewee No. 4 states that "life in the bushes is like in the days of the early man. We are relying on the grace of God to save us from this crisis." Additionally, community-based organisations have been assisting malnourished children. For instance, Rural Sustainable Integrated Development (RUSIDEV) are actively collecting baseline data to address malnutrition in parts of the North-West Region's rural districts. Their work is often prioritised for women and children, who are also the most impacted by the violence. Similarly, well-wishers provide sanitary pads to women and young girls living as IDPs in Buea, Bamenda, Limbe, Douala, and Yaoundé.

3.3   Personal and community safety

In terms of economic security, financial exploitation occurs as a result of increased unemployment, resource constraints, insufficient food, and sexual exploitation of women who are refugees and internally displaced persons in towns and cities as a result of poverty. As stated by interviewees No. 2, No. 6, and No. 9:

> *Human rights violations through the exploitation of human resources as cheap labour. Congestion due to limited spaces for shelter. Increased crime waves, like theft, prostitution, drugs etc. There is pressure and high demand for housing which causes landlords to raise the prices of their houses. There is pressure on schools as too many people are trying to enrol and hence causes proprietors to increase fees. General*

population pressure -rising living standards such as house rents, foodstuffs -pressure on basic social amenities such as schools and hospitals thus spike in prices -increasing crime waves (banditry and prostitution).

Some of the coping strategies with regards to the above include:

- Some of them in camps and bushes receive temporary supplies from various NGOs and philanthropists, as well as friends and family members who take on the risk and responsibility of visiting them in their hideouts. • They sustain life through humanitarian assistance, family assistance, and local associations.
- Many make a livelihood by doing household tasks in other people's homes.
- Women and children rely on men of good will to get food for their households.
- A sizable proportion of these children have been forced to acquire a trade—for example, beading and other craft skills—in order to survive. Additionally, it has promoted child entrepreneurship by enabling some children to acquire income-generating talents.
- Generous support from family and friends, as well as humanitarian help.
- Others get financial help from the Cameroonian and Ambazonian governments, depending on which side they support.
- Scarce resources for feeding their families, as well as a poor family income. Children are unable to excel academically owing to their parents' inadequate financial resources.

3.4 Security situation in schools

Education is one of the worst-affected industries for a conflict began with a walkout by attorneys and teachers in response to government meddling in the Anglophone legal and educational systems. Separatists rebels have been setting fire to school infrastructure such as Sacred Heart College and Government High School (GHS) Kongie in order to thwart government action. Additionally, they have been pushing for school boycotts and kidnapping students in places like as Bamenda. Students at Presbyterian Comprehensive High School (PCHS) Mankon and Government Bilingual High School (GHBS) Bamenda are unable to study freely. Additionally, interviewee N010 states:

Many schools suffer regular arson attacks, both staff and children kidnapped and killed in some cases by unidentified armed men in most cases, e.g., the Kumba massacre in October 2020 that led to the death of seven kids and many others injured.

Interviewee No. 5 confirms this by stating that:

The Kidnapping of some school children in Presbyterian High School (PHS) Bafut, saint Augustine Kumbo, GBHS downtown Bamenda, kidnapping of Rev. Fathers in Buea and Kumbo, Kidnapping of uncountable men and women, businessmen, teachers

for ransom. The case in Kumba, whose images of innocent children swimming in the pool of their blood is still so fresh in my mind.

Other examples of schools attacked include:

Sacred Heart College, a primary school in Kumba (Mother Franciska), and many children were all shot to death. The school is located on the campus of Mother Theresa College in Kumba. Following the abduction and subsequent release of school pupils from Presbyterian Secondary School (PSS) Nkwen, adolescents at GBHS Mendakwen are now pregnant for military protection at their school. When the conflict began, government forces stormed into student hostels in Buea, and Bamenda, arrested and detained some students (girls), who were subsequently sexually abused.

While the majority of acts of violence against schools and kidnapping of school children are attributed to Separatist fighters, other research participants argued that the military used similar tactics to paint a negative image of the separatists in order to turn the populace against them, as research participant No6 explains: "young girls and women being gang-raped by Cameroon soldiers in war-torn zones."

As a consequence of insecurity, this has led in an irregularity in school attendance. Women also rely on both the Cameroon government forces and separatist fighters to ensure the security of their children in areas controlled by either of both parties as explained by Interviewee No. 3 explains:

> *Security in the North and South-West Regions is fragile. However, vigilante groups have been created in some communities to aid state militia in ensuring safety, especially in schools. Cameroon government forces provide some schools with military guards 24/7. In some areas, school going kids and their teachers get an escort to and from school. Some military men do teach in some schools. in some communities fully controlled by the separatist, government schools have been closed, and community schools opened and managed by the local population and guarded by the separatist forces.*

Other coping measures include:

- They advise their children to avoid wearing school uniforms in order to prevent excessive exposure to armed personnel.
- Some offer a token to the alleged military in exchange for their children being allowed to attend school in peace, but their safety is not guaranteed.
- Enrollment of pupils and students in schools located in Francophone regions.
- Transport them to and from school, with the gate being closed until closing time and the instructor being the last to depart.

- Be respectful to ghost towns established by the separatist Ambazonian government and Amba warriors. For instance, all Mondays are ghost towns, which might last for days or even weeks depending on the security situation.
- Children who continue to attend schools nowadays are just cautious and avoid going to school if their areas show symptoms of assaults or weapons transactions.
- Those who can afford to take their children to the neighboring Republic of Cameroon's towns and cities. Others take their children to more secure residential institutions.

3.5 Rights and freedoms

Political and civil rights violations seem to be the norm even before the conflict started. It has now reached a point where families of separatist combatants and military personnel are being kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured by opposing groups. There is no rule of law or due process in place. Again, interviewee No. 10 accounts.

> *If you are a relative of separatist or government forces, you are arrested by either party and tortured mercilessly. A good case is my sister's husband, whose separatist fighters assumed he was a military or had a military friend; he was arrested and tortured for no crime committed if not for having an army friend. Then, when the separatist fighters released him, he was again detained by military forces who assumed he had a separatist fighter as a friend.*

An example is the mother of Mark Bareta and sister of Chris Anu who double as key Ambazonian activists, were arrested and detained on suspicion of having ties to the restoration struggle. Accounts of innocent persons arrested just because they are related to combatants are also common. A recent example is a rebel warrior who was slain in Nwa and afterwards his father caught and imprisoned in Nkambe, a border town in the Northwest Region. Some separatist rebels chose to fight in order to defend their political and civic rights, which may be seen as a coping mechanism.

4. Discussion

Three research questions guide this paper: What are the primary challenges to human security in areas afflicted by conflict? Second, what human security issues do women and children confront as a result of the armed struggle between the government and separatists? Finally, how do women and children respond to threats?

According to the study results, risks to human security include ongoing confrontations between Cameroonian government troops and separatist combatants, sexual harassment, kidnappings, food shortages, hunger, famine, and malnutrition. Women and children have struggled to get food, a place to sleep, to attend school, to live in the bushes, and to live in refugee camps as a result of the separatist activities of their brothers, husbands and in some cases children. Despite this, women and children have demonstrated strength and resolve by relying on wild fruits and herbs to survive in the bushes, attending school without uniforms, relocating to safer regions in Cameroon's Francophone regions, hocking, and obtaining food from relatives, well-wishers, neighbors, and local and international humanitarian organisations.

The growing themes of food and health insecurity, personal and community safety, economic security, school security, and political deposit reinforce the connection between human security, armed conflict, and coping capabilities. Armed conflict, according to all study participants, has a detrimental impact on human security, albeit certain women and children are more affected than others. This is particularly true for women and children who have familial ties to rebel militants or government troops in Cameroon. As the findings indicate, the primary threat to human security and the difficulties associated with the armed conflict in Cameroon's North and South-West regions forced women to flee to the bushes and, in neighbouring Francophone regions and Nigeria, where they are living as internally displaced persons and refugees, rely on humanitarian organisations, well-wishers, and unaffected families for food and medical supplies.

Food and physical health are necessary components of existence. However, as seen by Cameroon's North and South-West Regions, it is difficult to adhere to standards during times of armed conflict. Even though the war jeopardised the study participants' food and health security, the majority of them regarded the conflict as a method to end more than 50 years of marginalisation. The threats and challenges to human security posed by armed conflict, such as economic, food, health, and political, as identified by the 1994 UNDP HDR, were identified by research participants as the primary factors driving people to seek refuge in the bushes and neighboring countries during the conflict in the North and South-West Regions of Cameroon. As Moinina & Ngoh (2020) revealed in their research of armed conflict, the hazards and obstacles pushed women and children to depend on humanitarian and civil society organizations for protection, monitoring, and telling them of early warnings of gunfire and public communication. As shown by the study results and literature evaluation, armed conflict may have a substantial influence on the human security of women and children. Analyses of the obtained data and a study of the literature indicate that coping abilities seem to be more successful for people who had other companies in addition to farming as a means of survival. Those with relatives in towns and cities like as Bamenda and Buea, Francophone areas, or family members in the diaspora are better off. This is because financial assistance is provided to women and children from Cameroon's North and South-West Regions who have family relations outside the nation.

According to one of the study participants, the separatist Ambazonian government in exile's HSS is responsible for mobilising donations to support the provision of essential supplies to refugees in neighboring countries and internally displaced persons. Others have received assistance from the government of Cameroon in the form of food, mattresses, bedsheets, homemade tents, and actual currency. However, the nature of the battle forces women and children to depend on the two opposing sides for survival. Some have refused assistance from one of the warring sides out of fear of reprisals from the other, while the majority, such as the Nigerian refugees, have flatly refused assistance from the Cameroon government. They survive primarily on the generosity of humanitarian and civil society organisations such as The Ayah Foundation. The study has a variety of practical ramifications, including its relevance to research in security studies and social sciences, as well as issues of health, politics, and economics. The rationale seems to provide insight on what occurs in other parts of Cameroon and Africa during times of strife. It provided light on the obstacles women encounter and their coping mechanisms, allowing humanitarian organisations to distribute relief more effectively.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this paper corroborate prior research on the relationship between human security and armed conflict, with a particular emphasis on the dangers and difficulties faced by women and children, as well as their coping skills. Limitations derive from the researcher's origins in one of the conflict-affected countries, which may have impacted the study and its interpretation. The researcher, however, mitigated the danger of bias by enabling study participants to describe the conflict scenario. Additionally, the formulation of interview questions to elicit objective facts regarding the atrocities perpetrated by opposing sides in the war, the impact on women and children, and their resilience. The research confirms that there are now existential threats and challenges to human security. It demonstrates that humanitarian organisations play a critical role in safeguarding and providing for civilians during war, which enables many people, particularly women and children, to cope. During data collecting, the researcher became aware of other significant concerns, such as some humanitarian personnel diverting humanitarian supplies. The repercussions for impacted women and children are that they lose their ability to cope, which is a subject worthy of further investigation. The role of humanitarian organisations in protecting and assisting civilians during the conflict in Anglophone Cameroon, the evaluation of community-based organisations' work delivering aid to displaced populations, the humanitarian situation of women and children in Nigerian refugee camps, and the empowerment of affected women are all areas that remain unexplored.

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