

The Situation of Anglophone Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the Far North and West regions of Cameroon

Researchers

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Research

Mission: The goal of our study was to assess the far-reaching effects of the Anglophone Conflict on the youth in the country's deprived Anglophone and Francophone regions. In particular, the project centred on the situation of Anglophones who have been internally displaced to the Far North, a region that since 2013 has been gravely affected by Boko Haram insurgencies and has become both a source and destination of internal and transborder displacement. For comparison, the project also considered internal displacement from the Anglophone North West to the neighbouring West region, focussing specifically on the situation of Mbororo IDPs.

Methods: The project draws on earlier research carried out between 2020 and 2022 as well as a recent 3-week joint research stay in Maroua in the Far North, Fombot in the West region, and the capital Yaoundé. Data was collected through workshops, focus group discussions and individual interviews with IDPs, community organizations, humanitarian organizations, UN institutions and diplomatic representations in Cameroon.

Key findings

1. Education is among the determining factors in making a future after displacement.

Receiving education in the place of refuge as well as having received education before displacement help IDPs establish themselves and adapt to their new environment. This finding was evident in the Far North Region for both IDP students and IDPs seeking jobs but proved true for all the regions included in the research.

2. Family relations and social networks play a crucial role in IDPs' trajectories.

IDPs reported that their choice of destination was generally informed by the presence of family members or social networks they could draw on for assistance, e.g., with accommodation, food or counsel. In the Far North, the presence of Anglophone teachers in bilingual schools and Maroua University as well as the support provided by Anglophone community organizations have been key factors in facilitating the establishment of Anglophone IDPs in Maroua. For Mbororo IDPs in the West region, life in Bafoussam proved challenging, as they were not used to making a living in the city. Forming social and virtual networks to provide care, cultural guidance and practical information has helped reassure IDPs. However, reliance on family relations can be challenging. Several IDPs in Maroua and Bafoussam recounted protracted mobility and the urge to find their own accommodation as a result of competition over limited resources or social tension within their host families.

3. IDP children and host families would benefit from psycho-social support structures.

All Anglophone IDPs reported having had traumatic experiences before or during their flight. Conversations with educators and Anglophone community organizations suggest that many school children may have been hampered in their academic performance. Most schools lack trained staff to identify traumatized children and provide psycho-social support. Similarly, host families who have taken in unaccompanied minors may face challenges in catering to the children's emotional needs. Both schools and host families would benefit from professional support structures.

4. The reception of IDPs by host societies differs by region.

The research revealed differences in the ways IDPs from the Anglophone regions have been received by host societies in the Far North and the West regions. Although humanitarian aid was provided in both locations, competition is much more intense in an environment that is a crisis region itself. When resources are already scarce, moral economies of aid can develop and prioritize certain groups over others. In the West region, competition over limited resources is less poignant, and local authorities have offered land to Anglophone IDPs in some locations, thus encouraging the formation of new villages, including Mbororo villages. Yet, excluding locals from humanitarian aid and other benefits can fan negative feelings towards IDPs.

5. The management of humanitarian aid differs by region.

Anglophone community organizations and IDPs in Maroua reported that they were struggling to access humanitarian aid, even though institutions running humanitarian programmes already existed due to the Boko Haram crisis. Our research indicates that in the crisis-ridden Far North region, humanitarian work has largely been outsourced to external (international) actors. Conversely, in the West region, the distribution of humanitarian aid is mostly organized on the local level and managed by decentralized administrative structures. Anglophone IDPs have self-organized, forming associations, social and virtual networks, to liaise with local government institutions and jointly develop suggestions on how to address their needs.

Recommendations

1. Facilitate exchange and collaboration between institutions providing humanitarian aid

We noticed that while there are various local, national and international institutions providing humanitarian aid, there is limited exchange between them. Given the scarcity of resources and the chronic underfunding of humanitarian interventions, we advocate for more networking and collaboration to consolidate and extend the existing resources (e.g., competencies, training, and services).

2. Strengthen educational opportunities for IDP children.

We recommend that government institutions and schools should effectively facilitate the education of IDP children, e.g., by subsidizing school fees or providing specialized training for teaching staff and host families to attend to the children's psycho-social needs.

3. Integrate IDPs and host communities in humanitarian programmes.

To avoid friction between IDPs and host communities, we advise integrating both parties in humanitarian programmes, and actively involving institutions of IDP self-organization in finding solutions to their needs.