

Assessing the Challenges of Internally Displaced Persons in Times of Armed Conflict: The Case of Cameroon

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Annotation: From time immemorial, humanity has been characterised by displacement which could be wilful or forceful. Forced displacement is caused by varied factors amongst which we have armed conflict and persons displaced from this are oftentimes plagued by challenges. Using observation and interviews with the help of the constructivist theory, its evident Cameroon struggling with a number of armed conflicts, has IDPs from these faced with challenges ranging from poverty, lodging, health, education, hate speech and so on which are consequences of their being displaced by armed conflict. These defies from findings are inherent to the conflict and at times related to the IDPs' cohabitation with the host. Difficulties which explains the efforts made by the state and other actors to provide these IDPs with live saving skills for their survival, material assistance, lodging and many more; to remedy these challenges though more could be done in terms of ensuring proper cohabitation between the IDPs and their host, ensuring the resolution of the conflict responsible for the force displacement and safeguarding the protection of these IDPs from unscrupulous persons in the case of the IDPs of the Boko Haram Insurgency and the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon.

Keywords: Armed conflict, Forced displacement, Challenges, Internally Displaced Persons.

Introduction

Humanity in reality is a reflection of a peaceful or conflict related context, caused by a wide range of dynamics that could be natural or manmade. This state of human existence remains accountable for the displacement of persons from one part of the globe to another with Cameroon being indifferent to this existential reality. The world it is worth noting in its present configuration is complementary a direct reflection of the population movements of the antiquities strongly linked to wilful or forceful displacement as well. With the specific case of forced displacement, it goes without doubt, it involves a wide variety of political and legal dimensions and depicts the reality of people who have been forced to flee their homes or residence to seek refuge elsewhere; be it within or across the borders of the country and are most often faced with a wide range of challenges (Castles, 2003:14). Also, there are many reasons that explain forced displacement or what Stephen Castle calls forced migration amongst which we have; fear of persecution, the search for protection, armed conflict or violence, compelled to move as a result of large scale development projects, environmental disasters and so on. These reasons, leads to the different types of forced migrants or displaced persons like Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Development displacees, Environmental and disaster Displacees (Castles, 2003:15). With the specific case of armed conflict and most especially conflict of diversity linked to internal displacement, it goes without debate, it has been responsible for the forced displacement of persons in Cameroon and the challenges faced by these displacees, is a common reality that only varies on the degree of difficulty from one context to another worth analysing. These difficulties strongly hamper in most cases social cohesion between the host population, the IDPs and the administration

or better still institutions of power and decision making, thus worth addressing to promote peace and ensure sustainable development:

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

Faced with a context marked by state supremacy being contested by violence and acts of terrorism, the social construct of displacement becomes evident. Andrew Bradly Phillips in citing Fishel argues; “Great Power war appears to be in abeyance, the international community now confronts in transnational jihadist terrorism a threat that differs fundamentally from the powerful revisionist states that threatened international peace and security in the twentieth century” (Bradly, 2013:60). Going by this thought, it’s evident it only depicts the conflict prone nature of the contemporary world confronted with the difficulties encountered by those displaced as a result of this context. To Andrew Bradly, “the Constructivists are defined by their emphasis on the socially constructed character of actors’ interests and identities, and by their concomitant faith in the susceptibility to change even the most seemingly immutable practices and institutions in world politics” (Bradly, 2013.60). This strongly defines human action responsible for the challenges faced by Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in times of conflict, a fact worth assessing for proper redressed and to do this, the trajectory of observation and interviews, complemented by some secondary data remains pertinent as employed in the confines and context of this study.

Challenges inherent to forced displacement

Forced displacement in essence is accompanied by a range of scourges inherent to its existence. This human construct logically leads to challenges ranging from lodging, poverty, lack of nutrition, poor health conditions and so on. These obstacles jeopardize the wellbeing of IDPs especially when they settled in their new residence. Christelle Cazabat (2020) in this light paints the deteriorating conditions of IDPs who due to poverty do experience deteriorating livelihood, poor housing conditions and poor health conditions with security becoming the only area in which they are better off compared to their previous residents transformed into a theatre (Cazabat, 2020). In the case of Cameroon faced with the Boko Haram Insurgency in the Far North region and the Anglophone conflict in the two English speaking regions of the country, the IDPs of these conflicts are faced with these challenges which are in themselves a time bomb if not properly managed. These defies are worth examining:

Poverty

This has remained one of the main difficulties faced by the IDPs of armed conflicts in Cameroon. It is a common ramification, evident in different parts of the world experiencing violent armed conflict. Usually, persons running away from insecurity caused by conflict, find themselves abandoning their place of habitual residence, a place which represents not just their zone of environmental stability, but equally their economic, political and socio-cultural wellbeing. Being displaced logically leads to loss of your source of living which in itself leads to a state of economic hardship that ideally culminates to poverty due to the inability of the displacee, to move with his properties especially in times of armed conflict. Moving to a new environment most often entails a period of hardship within which the displacee tries to adapt to his or her new environment and this usually contributes significantly to the poverty that mostly characterised the condition of IDPs as is the case with the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict and those of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Cameroon.

From our observation and interview granted to an IDP of the Anglophone conflict, she narrated her ordeal; as to how she fled from Muyuka, where she use to do farming to take care of herself and

family to Douala, where she knows no one but was hoping to start a new and better life. Though things turn out not to be as planned; as they barely struggle to secure a meal per day at times due to poverty (Interview, October 2, 2021, 5: 20pm). With the case of the IDPs of the Boko Haram Insurgency, many of them complaint of their inability to meet up with their basic needs and can hardly boost of 500 Franc CFA a day to purchase even food. Poverty many said is linked to the nutrition and food problem they are faced with as they; suffer from lack of food and malnutrition. In an interview granted to one of the IDPs, he narrated with plenty of sorrow his current state which has reduced him to a beggar due to the abject state of poverty in which he finds himself. This state of affairs is complemented by lodging difficulty.

Lodging

Lodging having a link with residence, depicts a major challenge to IDPs who in times of conflict are forced to abandon their residence in search of safe havens in different parts of the country or globe judged secured to them and the case of Cameroon is indifferent to this normal. This is seen with housing challenge that usually occurs when there is a mass movement of persons from one part of the country to another. Emilio Depetris-Chauvin and Rafael J. Santos on this aspect, argued that the inflow of IDPs leads to increase demand for low cost houses which effectively culminates to an increase in the price for houses thus creating a serious lodging problem for these IDPs, who are in most cases usually poor (Emilio D & Rafael S, 2018:7). This is a mirror representation of the situation of the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict and those of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Cameroon.

Looking at the protection monitoring carried out, 5,187 protection incidents were recorded between January and September 2019 and quite a number of violent attacks on villages, burning of houses and killings have been recorded. House destruction alone, going by statistics gotten from the monitoring, accounted for 41% of the incidents recorded and homicides accounted for 7.5% (Cameroon Displacement Report, 2021). In this context of crisis-induced socio-economic fragility, women who have lost their partners face more responsibilities as heads of households and are charged with the daunting task of not only providing for the entire family, but also to provide shelter in the form of lodging for their different family members, thus making them even more vulnerable.

Many of them from our observation don't have where to stay and so are forced to sleep on the streets, public structures and bars in major zones reputable for night activities. This has contributed to their being exposed to societal ills like banditry, rape, and aggression. Going by reports from International bodies like the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), housing is a serious problem to the IDPs of the Boko Haram Insurgency especially in the case of children and women whom according to these reports are vulnerable; as there is a growing need for safe spaces to shelter not only women and girls at risk but also those who have been subjected to gender based violence (GBV) (cmr_hno, 2020 revised: 42). This is added to their inability to have access to quality education.

Education

The quest for knowledge in times of conflict becomes a relegated need to many who focus their survival on safety from the belligerents. Schools though a protected milieu in times of conflict, according to international humanitarian law, remains unfortunately one of the areas constantly attacked by belligerents especially in cases of intra state conflicts like is the case with the Anglophone conflict and the Boko Insurgency. According to the 2020 report of the Regional Delegation of Basic Education of the Far North region as noted by the Cameroon humanitarian

needs overview reports, the student per teacher ratio in the three crisis-affected divisions in the Far North region is 211 students per teacher in Mayo-Tsanaga, 191 in Logone et Chari and 121 in Mayo-Sava. 43.6% of school-age with many children lacking birth certificates and are therefore not allowed seating for the primary school exams to access secondary school (Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2020:25). This somehow added to other reasons explains why the rate of illiteracy is high compared to other parts of the country and as well the vulnerability of the population that can easily be initiated into the terrorists activities of the Boko Haram insurgency (Ntuda & al, 2017: 11).

The inability to afford quality education has contributed to these IDPs not being able to engage in any form of formal education, talk less of them being able to seat for popular exams organised by the government through the different institutions in charge of education in Cameroon. In the Far North, because of protracted displacement, education services are suffering from the additional burden students from displaced families represents for the host communities. In the Logone et Chari, Mayo-Sava and Mayo-Tsanaga divisions, 62 schools according to reports from educational institutions and international organisations are still closed, and 50 others have been destroyed for years and have never been rebuilt, affecting about 35,000 students (Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2020:25). School infrastructure and personnel already struggling to respond to the increasing demands in locations with a large displaced population, are now also requested to respect COVID-19 related social distancing measures.

In addition, in 18 schools, armed men in uniform provide education services to protect the schools and students but making the school susceptible to attack by NSAGs and endangering the girls and boys who attend these schools. (Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2020:25). Also, with the case of the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict based in neighbouring towns like those in the littoral region and most precisely Douala IV, Nkonssamba, Souza, Pouma, Mbanga, Penja and so on, many IDPs face access to education challenges ranging from lack of knowledge about the existence of schools suitable for them, lack of means to pay the price for schooling, distance, pregnancy in the case of girls and distance in some cases from our observation while living with many of the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict plaguing the two English speaking regions of Cameroon with spill-over effects on the other regions of the country.

Difficulties Related to IDP Cohabitation with the Host

Upon displacement, these IDPs are most often confronted with the need to start a new life in their new residence and this is usually determined by the nature of the relationship that will exist between these IDPs and their host communities. This cohabitation mostly is strongly framed by a number of factors in the case of armed conflict; factors which has to do with the conflict perception by the host, their cultural ties with the IDPs, and the political will of the state, the influence of the international community and so on. In cases wherein these factors depicts a negative relationship between the IDPs and the host, the IDPs are most likely to suffer challenges like hate speech, health defies and trauma perpetrated on them by the host:

Hate Speech

IDPs of armed conflict are also faced with challenges that stems from the nature of the relationship they share with their host population. This oftentimes has to do with amongst many others in the case of conflict of diversity, the conflict perception of the host, which strongly influences the nature of cohabitation between the IDPs and their host population. From our observation of Cameroon's case, it could be deduced IDPs from the different armed conflict are faced with the scourge of hate speech perpetrated on them by their host communities. Here, we come across a context in which the

appellation IDP is in itself pejorative and a form of hate speech that depicts someone who is a nuisance to the society, a source of insecurity and an obstacle to the wellbeing of others. This is the case most especially with the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict living in major cities like Yaoundé, Bafoussam and Douala.

These IDPs constantly suffer hate speech and stigmatization coming from some members of their host community, who oftentimes see them as an obstacle to their happiness and consider them as prime suspects to the ills of the community (Interview, October 2, 2021). Some of these IDPs are even confronted with life threatening stigmatisation with them been considered at times as accomplices to the Non-State Armed Groups in the two English speaking regions and not victims of the armed conflict responsible for their displacement. These IDPs find themselves in a state of constant violation of their human rights and dignity; as they are at times taken advantage of by unscrupulous persons, who exploit their vulnerability to inflict not just physical but also psychological pains on them. Thus relegating many to environmentally unfriendly zones and exposing them to challenges related to their physical health and trauma.

Health

Looking at health as another challenge of IDPs, the domain remains a strategic aspect that relates to the difficulties of IDPs as a whole and especially IDPs from forced displacement linked to a violent armed conflict. Alexandra Fielden while referring to these challenges in the case of the forcefully displaced in cities, talks of food, health and nutrition to be one of the main challenge of Urban IDPs (Fielden, 2008:10). With the case of the conflict in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, reports from the humanitarian needs overview portrays a shortage of safe drinking water in rural areas leading people to rely on water from streams, rivers, and unprotected wells for drinking and domestic use (Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2020.p.25-26). It goes on to argue that 54% of the population collect water from an unimproved water source especially when it comes to those living in the bushes (Cameroon Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2020.p.26). This state of affairs is even worst in major cities like Yaoundé and Douala wherein water sources are often limited and unprotected as well.

With the case of the Boko Haram Insurgency in the Far North region of the country, statistics gotten from UN agencies in the Far North says, in Mayo Tsanaga, there is a very high rate of open defecation (at least 26%) among refugees outside the camps and this is having a significant adverse effect on the health condition of the inhabitants that includes the host and the IDPs (cmr_hno_2020 revised. p.61). They also noted the fact that the highest proportion of those who share latrines are the inhabitants of Diamaré with 47.8% of households (63% of women and 37% of men) while in Mayo Sava this proportion is 35% including 41% among women and 31% among men (OCHA, 2018). This it is worth noting increases the risk of gender-based violence and undermines the privacy of women and men who use it and exposes them to other societal ills and health hazards.

Trauma

Trauma being part of the major psychological consequences of armed conflict, equally represents one of the major challenges IDPs of armed conflict are confronted with on daily basis in their cohabitation with the host population. These IDPs are unfortunately at times defied with a host population that is very much negligent and impatient to tolerate the psychological pain IDPs of armed conflict go through. They are oftentimes badly treated by some hosts and this further deteriorates their psychological state. This is very much common with women and children who mostly end up with mental health challenges; as they are at times victims of gender based violence and rape from some unfriendly persons in their host communities. This we must note is in violation

of article 9(1) (d) and 2(d) of the Kampala Convention which call on state parties to protect the IDPs from gender based violence and to provide them with psycho-social support (Kampala Convention, 2009:11-12). This has been the case for example with the IDPs of the Boko Haram Insurgency observed to be suffering from sexual harassment and Gender Based Violence (GBV) especially young girls and women in the hands of some unscrupulous persons (cmr_hno_2020 revised: 42). Findings on this scourge, reveals this is in some cases promoted by well-connected persons and networks having the necessary resources to escape from the forces of law and order putting a lot of the needed effort to protect these vulnerable persons.

Administrative Obstacles

In times of conflict, the quest for safety evidently remains the main priority of escapees who forcefully displaced themselves with their first option being that of relocating to safe havens that can permit them to avoid being collateral damage to the warring parties. In such a context, the time to carry along necessary documentations and identification papers is usually illusory as some even displaced themselves after witnessing the total destruction or burning of their houses and properties by one of the belligerents. This usually leaves the IDPs with no documentation in general and identification papers in particular. Thus a major challenge which renders them vulnerable when confronted with an oppressor. They become victims of insecurity coupled with their inability to access the administration.

Access to the Administration and Insecurity

Displacement oftentimes results in lost documentation for many people and has an adverse impact on their freedom of movement, exposing them to the risk of arbitrary arrest in the existing tensed environment. On this aspect of the treatment reserved to IDPs, Abbey Steel explains why these IDPs are usually victims and targeted in times of conflict for personal gains or suspicion of collaboration with rebel groups especially taking into account the administrative irregularity and vulnerability that characterises these IDPs (Abbey, 2018:812). Within the context of Cameroon, many have decried the degrading and inhuman conditions these persons lacking official documents go through. This from our observation is at times with the complicity of some state officials taking advantage of the situation of these persons for their private gains. Corruption in this aspect stands out to be a major difficulty faced by these IDPs in the hands of some persons who take advantage of their vulnerability to extort money from them before they are rendered services. This is usually due to the fact that most of these IDPs are ignorant of their rights and at times helpless like Carolien Jacobs & Kyamusugulwa (2018:182) puts it while looking at the justice situation of the IDPs in DRC Congo. We can also note the aspect of language barrier which exposes these IDPs to extortion and exploitation by those responsible to render services to them. Most of them like in the case of the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict don't understand French thus faced with this language lacuna that terminates with them being exploited by ill intention persons who present themselves as middlemen in a mafia setup witnessed in some administrative structures.

Added to the administrative huddles suffered by these IDPs in the hands of some unscrupulous administrative personnel, they are also victims of insecurity through aggression, corruption and at times torture. Though from our observation, it could be argued some of these IDPs at times are equally perpetrators of aggression through banditry and unfounded claims of hardship to extort sympathisers. The laziness of some leads them to opt for public begging and illegal extortion instead of taking steps to secure a job that can permit them satisfy their basic needs. Nevertheless, within the context of Cameroon, they are mostly victims as their vulnerability is oftentimes abused

by war lords, gangs and aggressors who go right to the extent of using them for child labour, child trafficking and modern day slavery in some homes in major cities like Yaoundé and Douala.

Efforts to Mitigate these Obstacles

The government of Cameroon in a joint effort with other national and international actors have been putting in place some significant measures to mitigate the challenges faced by these IDPs; which ranges from security assistance, to material, health and even financial assistance to help remedy the condition of these persons:

Efforts from International Actors

With regards to assistance from International actors, they have in line with Principle 18 on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights been engaging at different levels to provide assistance to the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict and those of the Boko Haram insurgency as well. This goes in line with the recommendation of Primus Fonkeng who argues; the effort of the Cameroonian government and its partners should not be limited in winning the battles of the different conflicts, but should also be tilted towards finding solutions to the challenges the victims of these conflicts are faced with (Fonkeng, 2019:17). This has been the case with many UN agencies and institutions like the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), United Nation Children and Education Fund (UNICEF), the Norwegian Refugee Council and a host of others as we observed.

The European Union for instance has since 2013, allocated €157.5 million in humanitarian assistance to Cameroon, including €17.5 million in 2021. Added to this financial assistance, other humanitarian organisations and UN agencies according to humanitarian response reports are also benefiting from agricultural support in terms of seeds, agricultural equipment and tools as well as capacity building support to enhance agricultural and livestock production in the different parts of the country where these internally displaced persons are located (cmr_hrp Final Measures, 2020). In October 2020, 14 food security cluster partners going by statistics from the humanitarian response report of 2020, collectively assisted 291,813 people, out of which 72% received food assistance either in-kind or the cash/voucher modality (Humanitarian Response Report, 2020). All these have been contributing enormously to alleviate the sufferings of the IDPs. But these efforts are not limited to these international actors as we equally have the state alongside national or say local actors ranging from Civil Society Organisations, NGO's and individuals of good will putting efforts to remedy the challenging context in which these IDPs find themselves.

Efforts from the State and other Local Actors

In an attempt to meet up with the needs of the IDPs of the Anglophone conflict and the Boko Haram Insurgency, a normal expectation incumbent in principle principally on the government; going by international norms (Eweka & Olusegun, 2016: 195), the Cameroonian government through the Ministry of Territorial Administration (MINAT) has reached out to close to 500 Internally Displaced Persons who were forcefully displaced by the on-going violent armed conflict in the two English speaking regions. According to the government, IDPs have received humanitarian assistance in the form of aid from the Head of State Paul Biya worth 600.000.000CFA (Interview, April 17, 2022 at 2:15pm). The items, consisted of foodstuffs, medication and bedding equipment like matras. The items were distributed to some IDPs in

Yaoundé on December 21, 2020 at the esplanade of the Yaoundé City Council. Territorial Administration Minister Atanga Nji Paul with officials of the Department of Civil Protection, Governor of Center Region Naseri Paul Bea and Administrative Officials of Mfoundi supervised the distribution exercise. MINAT at the end of the distribution exercise said the gesture from the president is a clear prove the Head of State has thought of them during this end of year festivities and is always attached to those in difficulties (MINAT report, 2021). We also have assistance that comes from Decentralised Territorial Collectivities to IDPs like the case of the Kumba III Council in Meme Division of the South West region of Cameroon in April 2021 (The Guardian Post, April 30, 2021: 8)

Persons of good will and other civil society organisations in Cameroon like #defyhatenow, Active Spaces, Advocates for Humanity First, Advocates for Equity and Development, Peace Watch and a host of others have been very much engaged in building the capacity of these IDPs to render them less vulnerable to violent extremism by providing them with basic lifesaving skills that can render them independent and self-sufficient. Examples of these are projects like the *'Peacebuilders Makerspaces'* project of #defyhatenow and its grassroots partners aimed at building the capacity of IDPs to render them self-reliant and less vulnerable to violent extremism. We can also note efforts from others like 'Safe an IDP' providing the IDPs with some basic needs like food, clothes and shoes. This is not leaving out assistance coming from individuals of good will like Honourable Cabral Libii, Regina Etaka, Mbuh Stella (Interview, May 16, 2021:5pm) and a host of others who from time to time do assist these IDPs and most especially those of the Anglophone conflict with basic needs to help alleviate their suffering. But these assistances have with the passage of time proven to be vital but in reality insufficient thus the need for additional measures.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In assessing the challenges related to forced displacement, the findings concludes on the fact that, several factors explains the displacement of persons, amongst which we have conflict; a major factor. As to the challenges faced by these IDPs, it is evident they are confronted with similar challenges like poverty, lodging, health, access to education, hate speech and aggression though with different degree of severity due to key factors like the conflict perception, cultural ties and so on. These challenges are to a greater extent responsible for the tensions existing between the IDPs and their host thus rendering their condition more complex to handle with poverty, demarcating itself as the most common challenge faced by the IDPs in the different regions they find themselves. Mitigating these complex and multifaceted challenges, demands a triangular effort from the state, the host and the IDPs. Before all, measures are to be taken to ensure an effective resolution of the conflicts responsible for the forced displacement of these IDPs. This is in line with what Josep Zapater calls prevention of forced displacement (Zapater, 2010: 3). There's as well the need to ensure effective implementation of existing laws and conventions protecting IDPs, taking proper measures to ensure constructive communication on the situation of IDPs and drawing the administration closer to them. This is added to the necessity for the host to have a change of mentality towards the situation of these IDPs; to avoid the stigmatisation, suspicion and bullying suffered by many, in the hands of some hosts. Also, creating an atmosphere of peace and working with institutions and persons of good will to promote social cohesion, between the hosts and the IDPs is necessary. To the IDPs, they are advised to invest in economic activities that can render them self-reliant to the government, their hosts or other actors involved, make efforts to understand the daily realities of their host communities and take measures to get closer to the administration to gain knowledge of their rights and how they can best protect themselves.

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