

CREATING SAFER SPACE

STRENGTHENING CIVILIAN PROTECTION
AMIDST VIOLENT CONFLICT

Creating Safer Space Working Paper Series • 04/2024 • Vol.2(1) • ISSN: 2754-947X

Exploring Unarmed Civilian Self-Protection in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict



Gordon Crawford, Nancy Annan, James Kiven Kewir,
Atim Evenye Niger-Thomas, Bernard Nsaidzedze Sakah,
Zonziwoh Mbongdulo-Wondieh



Creating Safer Space

Creating Safer Space is an international research and impact collaboration, which aims to understand and support unarmed civilian protection (UCP) and self-protection in the midst of violent conflict. It supports research that explores how violence against civilians can be deterred or prevented by civilians without the use or threat of force.

The Network brings together conflict-affected communities, protection practitioners, academics, policymakers, and artists to jointly work on the vision of enhancing unarmed protection practices, which create safer space for communities and individuals amidst violent conflict, raise their levels of resilience and help prevent displacement.

Creating Safer Space is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

For further information on the work of the Network, please visit our website:

<https://creating-safer-space.com>

All rights reserved. Copyright lies with authors of work published in this series.

The sole responsibility of content published lies with the author(s). Short sections of text, not exceeding two paragraphs, may be quoted with full attribution to the source.

Department of International Politics
Aberystwyth University
Penglais
Aberystwyth
SY23 3FE
creating-safer-space@aber.ac.uk



About the authors

- **Prof. Gordon Crawford**, Professor of Global Development, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University, UK, and Honorary Professor, University of Freiburg, Germany.
- **Prof. James Kiven Kewir**, Professor of Conflict Prevention and Regional Integration and Research Hub Leader for Central Africa, African Leadership Centre (ALC), Nairobi, Kenya.
- **Dr. Nancy Annan**, is an Assistant Professor, at the Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR), Coventry University, UK. She holds a PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies.
- **Dr. Sakah Bernard Nsaidzedze**, is an International Peacebuilding Consultant, Lecturer of Conflict and Peace Studies. He holds a PhD in Governance & Regional Integration from the Pan African University-Yaounde, Cameroon.
- **Ms. Atim Evenye Niger-Thomas**, is the Executive Director, Authentic Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF - <https://ameffoundation.org/>), Cameroon. She is a PhD candidate in Conflict Management and Peacebuilding at International University of Applied Sciences for Development (IUASD) Sao Tome in partnership with IPD Yaoundé.
- **Dr. Zoneziwoh Mbongulo-Wondieh**, is the Executive Director, Women for a Change (Wfac – <https://wfaccameroon.org/>), Cameroon. She holds a PhD from the University of Buea, Cameroon.



Table of Contents

Table of Figures	iii
Table of Poems	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Executive Summary	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Research Methodology and Methods	3
1.2. Structure of the Report	6
2. The Anglophone Conflict in Historical Context	7
3. Conceptualising Unarmed Civilian Protection	10
3.1. Components of UCP	11
3.2. UCP in the Cameroon Anglophone conflict	14
3.3. Using Arts-based Methods to explore UCP	15
4. Forms of Violence and Civilian Vulnerability	17
4.1. Physical Violence	18
4.2. Mental and Psychological Violence	27
4.3. Violence Against Property	29
5. Unarmed Self-Protection Strategies	31
5.1. Spontaneous Protective Measures	33
5.2. Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Measures	42
5.3. Preventive Measures	57
6. Collective Protection and Local Agency	77
6.1. Collective Protection	77
6.2. Role of Community Groups	80
6.3. Role of Local CSOs/NGOs	91

7.	<u>Successful Strategies and Challenges</u>	100
7.1.	<u>Successful Strategies</u>	100
7.2.	<u>Challenges</u>	109
8.	<u>Conclusion</u>	118
8.1.	<u>Approaches and Types of Unarmed Civilian Self-Protection</u>	119
8.2.	<u>Strengthening Successful Measures of Civilian Self-Protection</u>	120
8.3.	<u>Scaling-Up and Broadening-Out of Community Self-Protection Measures</u>	123
8.4.	<u>Contributions to the UCP Literature: A Bottom-Up Perspective</u>	124
8.5.	<u>Use of Arts-Based Methods in Conflict Contexts</u>	127
8.6.	<u>Final Reflections</u>	129
	<u>References</u>	130
	<u>Annex: List of Interviewees and Workshop Participants</u>	141



Table of Figures

Figure 0: Map of Cameroon, with Anglophone regions highlighted.....	viii
Figure 1: Kernel Density Map.....	4
Figure 2: Living and Giving Birth in the Bush	36
Figure 3: Running to Neighbouring Villages	39
Figure 4: Providing Shelter and Crossing the River to the Francophone Region.....	40
Figure 5: Use of mobile phone communication for protection.....	45
Figure 6: Use of Interpositioning	85
Figure 7: Empowerment to Protect Women from SGBV.....	94
Figure 8: Unarmed Vigilante Groups.....	106
Figure 9: Non-Engagement Strategy	107

Table of Poems

Poem 1: Hopes	17
Poem 2: Security Challenges.....	32
Poem 3: Just To Be Safe	33
Poem 4: Unpleasant Surprise	50
Poem 5: Say No to Armed Conflict	60
Poem 6: A Humanitarian Worker	91
Poem 7: The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection.....	101
Poem 8: Our Mothers, Our Strength.....	103
Poem 9: We Are Tired	111

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the contributions of all research participants, inclusive of the workshop participants and those who willingly allowed us to interview them. Anonymity is unfortunately required to ensure their safety and security, as they continue to live amidst the conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. We appreciate their willingness to share their stories and experiences with us, ones which often entailed loss and trauma, and we value the courage, resilience and agency that they have shown in protecting themselves and others from violence. Their voices are at the heart of this report and provide its vibrancy and lived experiences. We are most grateful.

Special thanks to Billie Burton from the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database

of Atrocities (University of Toronto) who undertook the initial mapping exercise that identified areas of intense conflict ('hot spots') in the North West and South West regions, enabling us to select the communities from which to draw research participants. Big thanks to Ms. Mutia Brendaline for her excellent facilitation of the poetry workshops.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to the funders – the Creating Safer Space network based at Aberystwyth University – for the financial support that enabled this project. Creating Safer Space is a Network Plus funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) through the Global Challenges Research Fund. For more information:

<https://creating-safer-space.com/about/>



Executive Summary

This study explores the unarmed civilian self-protection measures taken by individuals and communities who live in the midst of ongoing armed conflict in Cameroon's two English-speaking regions, the North West and South West. Known as the 'Anglophone conflict' and now in its 7th year, this civil war pits Cameroon's state security forces against armed separatist groups fighting for secession of the territory that was formerly British Southern Cameroons from the Francophone-dominated Republic of Cameroon. The armed conflict was triggered by state repression of peaceful protests led by Anglophone lawyers and teachers in late 2016 denouncing the marginalisation and assimilation of its distinctive Anglophone judicial and educational systems. In the subsequent armed conflict since late 2017, it is civilians, especially women and girls, that have been the most affected. Figures, though underestimates, show that over 6,000 civilians have been killed (HRW, 2023; ICG, 2023a), with an estimated 628,000 internally displaced persons, and 87,000 Cameroonian refugees in neighbouring Nigeria (UN OCHA, 2023). Additionally, hundreds of villages have been burnt down in the military's counter-insurgency campaign (CHRNA, 2019; *The Economist*, 2019), while sexual violence is being used as weapon of war and committed with impunity by both state forces and armed separatists.

Despite the devastating impact on civilians, the conflict remains hidden and neglected with limited attention and support from regional and international

actors. As a result, in terms of civilian protection, civilians have largely been left to their own devices, employing and maximizing local unarmed protection strategies amidst the raging violence; hence demonstrating their resilience, resourcefulness, and pro-activeness. Thus, this report contributes to the emerging discourse on unarmed civilian protection by highlighting the informal and innovative grassroots measures of community self-protection and their accompanying challenges. It is based on findings from an empirical study conducted by Coventry University's Centre for Peace and Security, the African Leadership Centre, Nairobi, and three Cameroonian NGO partners: Big Steps Outreach Network (BONET); Authentic Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF); and Women for a Change (Wfac). In addition, the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities, University of Toronto, contributed substantially to the project's mapping exercise.

Data collection was conducted in February 2023 using a blend of qualitative methods, namely semi-structured interviews and participatory arts-based methods - poetry, drawing and storytelling workshops. In general, the study confirms the critical role and the innovative nonviolent strategies of civilians in protecting fellow civilians in the Anglophone conflict. However, challenges were equally identified.

The report is comprised of eight sections. The Introduction provides the rationale

for the study, highlighting the research background and the methodological approach and methods. The second section provides the historical context to the current conflict. The third examines the literature on unarmed civilian protection, and the relative dearth of research on bottom-up civilian self-protection. Subsequent sections are based on our empirical data and research findings. The fourth discusses the forms of violence to which civilians are subjected in the Anglophone conflict, while the fifth explores the range of unarmed self-protection strategies employed by civilians. Section six underscores local agency and highlights the different social groups involved in community self-protection. Section seven then assesses the relative success of various protective strategies as well as the challenges encountered. Finally, section eight concludes with a summary of findings and overall reflections, highlighting the following:

- Unarmed civilian protection in the context of the Anglophone conflict is predominantly led and implemented by local citizens affected by the conflict. This is relatively distinctive from other settings where UCP is led by international organisations, yet such organisations are not permitted to operate in the conflict zones by the Cameroon government. Civilians thus employ a plethora of homegrown and digital unarmed self-protection strategies, which we categorise under three domains: spontaneous measures; early warning and response measures; and preventive measures. These strategies are adopted by individuals to protect themselves, their families and community members as part of their everyday mechanisms to navigate the violence perpetrated by warring factions.
- Local agency is critical in the implementation of unarmed civilian protection. Social groups such as women's groups, youth groups as well as community, religious and traditional leaders, were all found to play key roles in enabling the collective protection of affected civilians and communities. The role of the family was equally crucial. While these examples of community self-mobilisation have largely occurred without outside support, local NGOs, usually urban-based, have been able at times to engage in UCP-related activities through humanitarian assistance and lacking the formal approval of government.
- Particular unarmed protection strategies were found to be more successful, notably collective protection, early warning strategies, non-engagement strategies and interpositioning. Nonetheless, various challenges were also identified, including weakened social cohesion; issues around vigilantism; intimidation by warring parties; risks associated with running away; and financial constraints. For instance, the breakdown of social cohesion within communities, given the levels of violence and fear, simultaneously undermines community collective protection efforts. Further, the spontaneous and *ad hoc* nature of some of the protective strategies can mean that vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and persons with disability, are sometimes left behind and unassisted. The challenges have not made the use of the strategies irrelevant. Rather, understanding how to address such challenges can

increase their effectiveness, given their indispensability in conflict situations where international intervention to protect civilians is limited or impossible.

- Community self-protection can potentially be strengthened through enhanced linkages from the grassroots to local and international NGOs. Community self-organisation can be usefully supported by local NGOs, for instance by facilitating the formation of community-based organisations out of the loose networks of individuals and community leaders that have emerged from the conflict situation. It was found that local NGOs have provided much-needed support and training, for instance, gender-based mapping to protect girls and young women from SGBV, and training to women leaders on hostage negotiations and security awareness. In turn, international NGOs can provide financial support to enable local NGOs to expand those activities. The nature of these CBO-NGO partnerships is crucial, however, requiring NGOs to carefully reflect on how they can best support community self-protection strategies without the imposition of NGOs' preconceived agendas. This study has demonstrated how people in conflict-affected communities are active agents in their own protection, and this local agency should be enhanced not undermined.
- Positive examples of community self-protection strategies can also be scaled up and broadened out through local and international NGOs. Dissemination of best practices within the English-speaking territories can be undertaken by Anglophone civil society organisations, and through the humanitarian coordination structures established by international organisations such as UN OCHA. International NGOs can promote positive examples of locally-devised civilian self-protection strategies from the Anglophone conflict to wider audiences in Africa and globally, with the potential for such strategies to be adopted and adapted in other conflict contexts.
- This study has taken a bottom-up approach and demonstrated how people in conflict-affected communities are active agents in their own protection, countering the relative neglect of local self-protection measures and highlighting the significance of grassroots actors in the provision of UCP. We advocate that external bodies, both national and international, should learn from the protective measures adopted by local actors. This orientation reverses the dominant conceptualisation of UCP to date where international organisations were seen as the most significant actor, undertaking measures to protect relatively passive civilian populations. The conceptualisation of UCP that emerges from this

research is of active agency and self-protection at the local level, with support where possible from national and international organisations. It is perhaps a conceptualisation that is broadly in line with the 'local turn' in peacebuilding, where local populations play a key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

- The bottom-up approach to UCP equally informed the participatory methodology and arts-based methods used here. These methods were relevant and beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, the workshops provided safe spaces for participants to share their experiences freely and creatively without fear of possible

reprisals from warring parties. Of particular importance were the poetry and drawing workshops that provided participants with a non-verbal safe space in which to express their conflict-related experiences, emotions and perceptions. Secondly, it enabled participants to be authors of their own stories and experiences through the creative processes of storytelling, drawing, and poetry, ones that they were not familiar with and at times overawed by. Yet, participants showed a sense of pride in demonstrating their 'hidden' skills in expressing themselves, especially after seeing their final creative product.

Figure 0: Map of Cameroon, with Anglophone regions highlighted



1. Introduction

Now in its seventh year, the current armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon is between state security forces and armed separatist groups fighting for secession and the establishment of an independent Republic of Ambazonia.¹ While officially bilingual, Cameroon's English-speakers make up approximately 20 percent of the total population and are concentrated in the North West and South West regions, what was formerly British Southern Cameroons. The Anglophone population has long felt discriminated against and marginalised by the francophone-dominated state (Konings and Nyamnjoh 1997: 207; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2018), and a substantial proportion support demands for greater autonomy for the minority English-speaking regions in one form or another (Kaushal, 2020, 11; Husted, 2021, 8). However, the armed conflict has undoubtedly had a devastating impact on the civilian population. In the absence of official figures, estimates indicate that over 6,000 civilians have been killed (HRW, 2023; ICG, 2023a). It is highly likely that this figure is an underestimate. Hundreds of villages have been razed in the military's counterinsurgency campaign (CHRNA, 2019; *The Economist*, 2019). Hundreds of thousands have

fled the violence, with recent figures indicating a total of 628,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) and 87,000 Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria (UN OCHA, 2023), out of a total population of some five million (ICG, 2017: 1). Rape and other forms of gender-based violence are endemic, described as 'pervasive' and 'rampant' in a UN report (Craig 2021a), and perpetuated with impunity by both the military and non-state armed groups (Crawford, et al 2022: 34-37; Amnesty International, 2023: 38-40). Many children have missed years of education through a separatist-imposed school boycott, with recent figures indicating that about 54 percent of government schools remain closed in the North West and South West regions (UN OCHA, 2023).

This is a guerrilla war fought mainly in the rural areas in the two English-speaking regions. The Ambazonian forces are composed of a number of geographically-based armed groups led by self-styled 'generals', mainly based in the bush. They are generally well-armed and have acquired more knowledge, skills and experience in guerrilla warfare coupled with increasingly sophisticated weaponry with which to attack the Cameroon defence and security forces (Amnesty International, 2023: 14). The military, led

¹ Key terms can vary. Anglophone crisis or conflict or civil war are all used. We prefer Anglophone conflict to describe the ongoing situation. The geographical area can be described as the Anglophone region(s), the North West and South West regions, the English-speaking regions, the former British Southern Cameroons, or Ambazonia. We prefer to speak of the North West and South West regions or the English-speaking regions, which we use interchangeably. The armed separatist groups are also referred to as non-state armed groups (NSAGs) or separatist fighters or Amba Boys, as colloquially known. We stick with armed separatist groups, though our research participants mainly spoke of the Amba Boys or simply the Boys. While we try to be consistent with our own use of terminology, we stay true to whatever terms are used by participants in quotations.

by the elite Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), fights a counter-insurgency campaign in the rural areas. Civilians are caught in the middle, targeted directly by both warring parties, and accused of either colluding with the separatist fighters (by the military) or collaborating with the military (by the separatists) and subjected to violence by both. The military, with predominantly Francophone deployment in the Anglophone regions, subjects civilians to arbitrary arrest, extortion, detention, torture, extrajudicial killing, rape and extortion, as well as wholesale destruction of homes and businesses, especially in rural settlements. Civilians are often accused by the military, mainly falsely and with little or no evidence, of assisting the separatist fighters (HRW 2023; Amnesty International, 2023), with intimidation and violence then rationalised on this basis. Civilians are also subject to kidnapping for ransom, assault, and extortion by armed separatists for non-compliance with their orders (such as weekly ghost towns, ad hoc lockdowns or school boycotts), with the killing of individuals suspected (again often falsely with little evidence) of being traitors ('blacklegs') and collaborating with the military (HRW, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023). The armed separatist groups are also responsible for abductions and killings of non-military representatives of the Cameroonian state such as government officials, local politicians, and traditional leaders (known as Fons and Chiefs)² (Amnesty International, 2023: 24). Indirectly, civilian casualties also occur

when they are caught in the crossfire of gun battles between the two sides, as well as widespread suffering through restrictions to delivery of humanitarian assistance (UN OCHA, April 2023). Civilians have also suffered through disruption of economic livelihoods, as well as the traumatic effects of experiences of extreme violence and living in a constant state of fear, and grief from the loss of family and friends.

The scale of atrocities committed against civilians constitute a violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, adopted on 12 August 1949 (ICRC, 1949). French Cameroon acceded to the convention by succession on 1 January 1960 and following reunification with Southern Cameroons on 1 October 1962, the then Federal Republic of Cameroon deposited its declaration of succession on 16 September 1963. Cameroon is therefore bound by this convention. The Convention states in Article 3 (1) that:

"Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria".

² Traditional leaders in Cameroon are known as Fons in the North West region and as Chiefs in the South West. Unlike other African countries, in Cameroon the Fons and Chiefs can be closer to the government. While Fons remain hereditary, as do some Chiefs, increasingly the Chiefs are government-appointed. Additionally, the Fons, although not formally appointed, must be endorsed by the administration. Therefore both are frequently regarded as auxiliaries of the state by the armed separatist groups.

The acts specifically prohibited include murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, taking of hostages, violations of personal dignity, humiliating and degrading treatment, handing out sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court in a fair trial. In spite of the clear prohibition of all forms of violence against civilians and persons not taking active part in hostilities by this provision, violence against civilians including killings, arbitrary detentions, burnings, hostage taking, rape and torture have been a major feature of the Anglophone conflict.

Civilian protection by government or intergovernmental and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) is virtually absent, and local people in the conflict zones have been largely left to their own devices. Therefore, this research has aimed to explore the examples of unarmed civilian *self-protection* taken by individuals and communities who live in the midst of this ongoing civil war, mainly in the rural conflict zones. To this end, we asked the following primary research questions:

What approaches to and types of unarmed self-protection have been taken by local civilians in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon? How successful have they been and how can civilian self-protection be strengthened? In what ways can positive examples of self-protection strategies be scaled up and broadened out to community-based organisations within Cameroon and across countries?

In order to answer these main questions, a series of secondary questions were also posed:

- *What differing forms of violence and civilian vulnerabilities are identifiable in conflict-affected communities, and what are the interactions between them?*
- *What are the range of unarmed self-protection strategies adopted by conflict-affected communities?*
- *Which social groups, including vulnerable ones, have been at the forefront of such agency?*
- *Which initiatives have been relatively successful? What challenges and shortcomings have been experienced?*
- *How can the capabilities and preparedness of local communities in undertaking unarmed civilian protection (UCP) measures be enhanced, and what role can local, national, and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play?*
- *In what ways can positive examples of self-protection strategies be scaled up and broadened out to community-based organisations within Cameroon and across countries?*

1.1. Research Methodology and Methods

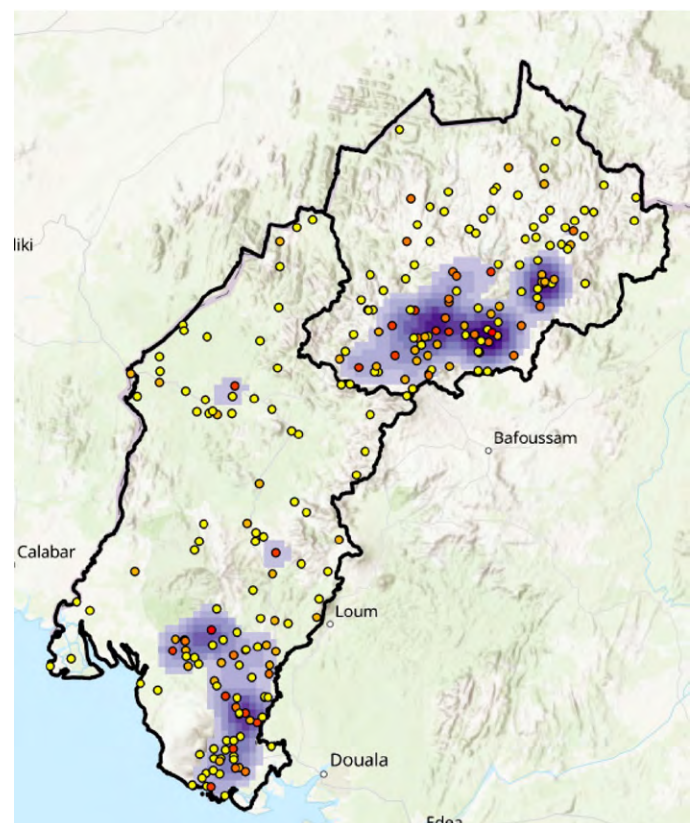
The research explored the protective and coping strategies of individuals and communities living amidst armed violence. It accessed civilians living in some of the conflict 'hot spots' and engaged with those groups involved in taking self-protective measures, including women-led groups who are often at the forefront of local mobilisation. While

such individuals and groups often do not use the terminology of UCP, they are effectively undertaking various self-protection measures. A participatory methodology was adopted. This was appropriate given the emphasis on enabling local people to share their experiences and perspectives. It sought ways to enable such civilians to articulate their strategies and approaches to self-protection through a mixture of qualitative methods. These included arts-based methods (Van der Vaart et al. 2018; Wang et al. 2017), namely poetry, drawing and storytelling workshops. Poetry and drawing workshops provided community members, including young people, with opportunities to express their experiences, emotions, and perspectives on UCP in the conflict through spoken word poems and artistic representation respectively. This was especially important for those who have endured the traumas of conflict, providing non-verbal means of expression. Storytelling sessions brought together community members who collectively shared their experiences of self-protection measures and discussed the dynamics of the situation, emerging strategies, and their respective strengths. In addition, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with community organisers, notably leaders of grassroots women's and youth groups, 'community watch' groups, traditional and religious leaders, and with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in humanitarian work with conflict-affected communities.

The research was undertaken in two main stages: a preliminary mapping exercise and a main data collection phase. The mapping exercise identified areas of intense conflict ('hot spots') to enable the

selection of appropriate communities in the North West and South West regions from which to draw research participants. Through the use of satellite imagery and open-source intelligence, information was collected about incidences and locations of conflict in both the North West and South West regions from October 2017 to December 2022, inclusive of reports of atrocities and human rights violations committed by both warring parties, including those against civilians. The Kernel Density Map in Figure 1 above shows the concentration of incidents in the area of study.

Figure 1: Kernel Density Map .25 Search Radius (All Incidents from Best ACLED Data Available – Buea, Bamenda Removed). Constructed by Billie Burton with data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) database and from the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities.



Data was obtained in particular from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) database and from the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities, the latter being a project partner. Density maps such as that in Figure 1 above were created that showed those most conflict-affected rural areas in both regions and identified a range of communities of priority interest to the research. This geospatial analysis was then triangulated with the collective knowledge of the project's Cameroonian team members, gained from their humanitarian work within the conflict zones in the Anglophone regions since 2017. Based on this information, the research team was able to select four specific conflict-affected communities (two in each region) from which to invite research participants for data collection purposes.

The mapping exercise that was carried was useful to identify the communities where civilians have been adversely affected by the conflict, including hard-to-reach areas such as Baffia and Ekona in the South West Region and Tubah and Kumbo in the North West Region. Participants were then purposively selected from these locations where they were likely to have employed and experienced unarmed civilian protection. These were therefore persons who may have taken measures to protect themselves and/or other civilians or who had witnessed civilians protecting others without the use of any weapons/arms. The selection was done by contacting community leaders and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) leaders that work in these communities to identify potential participants and prepare a list with their contacts. The lists of potential participants

and their contacts prepared by the community leaders and CSO leaders were used to select, contact and invite participants to the study. Among other key criteria, gender, age, occupation, availability and willingness to participate in the study were equally considered. All those contacted were provided with participants information sheets (PIS) highlighting more information on the objectives, and logistic modalities of participation in the study. Following the written consent, they were then invited and provided with transport to access the interview and workshop locations at the agreed dates and time. The venues for all interviews and workshops were selected based on their convenience and security rating as safe by the mapping study and information obtained from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UK website at the time of the study. During all interviews and workshops, participants were required to read the participants information sheet and confirm their participation by signing a consent form.

The data collection phase was undertaken in February 2023 in two safe locations, one for participants from the South West region held in Limbe, and the other for those from the North West region, held in Dschang in the adjacent francophone region. It was important to create a safe space for research participants to freely and creatively express their experiences of the conflict and the self-protection measures taken, without fear of possible reprisals from warring parties. In total, forty local civilians from conflict 'hot spots' attended the workshops, twenty-two from the South West and eighteen from the North West. Fifteen individuals participated in

the drawing workshops, twelve in the poetry workshops, and thirteen in the storytelling workshops. A total of fifteen interviews were held with selected individuals who came to the two locations for interview purposes from the selected communities, along with interviews held with NGO practitioners in the two regions.

1.2. Structure of the Report

This report is organised into eight main sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides background information on the conflict, while the third examines the literature on unarmed civilian protection, and the relative dearth of research on bottom-up civilian self-protection. The following sections then turn to the findings of this research. The fourth examines the various forms of violence faced by civilians, along with the forms of civilian vulnerability. The fifth section identifies the range of unarmed self-protection strategies taken by local civilians and how these were implemented over the duration of the conflict. The sixth examines local agency and which social groups have been at the forefront of protecting fellow civilians. The seventh then assesses these strategies, inclusive of their successes and shortcomings. Finally, the conclusion returns to the main research questions and provides a summary answer, along with some reflections on the contributions of our findings to the UCP literature and on the use of arts-based methods.



2. The Anglophone Conflict in Historical Context

The immediate cause of the current armed conflict was the violent repression of the teachers' and lawyers' peaceful protests in the Anglophone regions by the Cameroon government's security forces in late 2016 and early 2017, leading to the rise of the separatist movement and the commencement of armed struggle in late 2017. Yet the roots of the conflict are in colonial legacies and longstanding grievances of the minority Anglophone population within independent Cameroon. In this section, we look first at the contemporary trigger and then the historical roots of the current conflict.

In late 2016, Anglophone lawyers and teachers' unions undertook strike actions and demonstrated against the ever-increasing appointment of French-speaking judges and teachers that was undermining the distinctive Anglophone legal and education systems. Protests then widened, led by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium (also known as the Consortium), with demands for increased autonomy for the Anglophone regions. The predominant demand at this point was for a return to the two-state federal system that was agreed at independence in 1961 and existed until its unconstitutional abolition in 1972. The Consortium initiated 'Operation Ghost Towns Resistance' involving the closure of schools and businesses in the North West and South West regions on selected days as a tactic of non-violent resistance (ICG, 2017). But

in January 2017 the government issued banning orders on the Consortium and other CSOs (Amnesty International, 2017b). Key leaders were arrested and detained, while others fled the country (Bama, 2017). Simultaneously, a three-month internet shutdown was imposed on the Anglophone regions from January to April 2017. This government crackdown majorly escalated the crisis, leading to increased demands for secession and the emergence of armed groups within the year (Bone, 2021: 46). On 1 October 2017, the anniversary of independence from British rule in 1961, the independent "*Republic of Ambazonia*" was symbolically declared in the territory of the former British Southern Cameroons. This declaration was accompanied by largescale demonstrations of support amongst the English-speaking populace, with at least 17 demonstrators killed by state security forces (Minority Rights Group 2017). The Cameroon army proceeded to further occupy the Anglophone regions, with the newly-formed armed separatist groups now initiating attacks on the military. On 30 November 2017, President Paul Biya declared war on the separatist groups who he described as 'terrorists' (Sonkey 2017). Armed conflict has been ongoing to date, with little sign of resolution.

Although triggered by the events of 2016 and 2017, the current conflict has colonial and post-independence roots. Originally a German colony (1884-1916) called Kamerun, it was divided between France

(80 percent) and Britain (20 percent) after World War I, first under League of Nations (1922-46) and then United Nations mandates (1946-61). Britain subdivided its territory into Northern and Southern Cameroons and governed them as part of Nigeria. Differing institutions were developed under separate French and British colonial rule, including legal, educational, political, linguistic and cultural differences. For instance, a civil law system in French Cameroun contrasted with the common law system in British Cameroons, as well as the uses of French and English as official languages in the respective French and British territories, including in education. A botched reunification process occurred at independence in 1960 and 1961. French Cameroun and Nigeria gained their independence in January and October 1960 respectively. In February 1961, an UN-organised plebiscite was held to decide the future of Northern and Southern Cameroons, with the choice of joining either the Republic of Cameroun or Nigeria, but not independence as a separate state. It was also questionable why Britain held two separate plebiscites, one for Southern Cameroons and one for Northern Cameroons, in the single territory handed to it at the end of World War I. Consequently, Northern Cameroons voted to join Nigeria, while Southern Cameroons voted to join Cameroon. The terms of reunification between Southern Cameroons and the Republic of Cameroun were then agreed upon at the Foumban constitutional conference in July 1961, resulting in the declaration of the Federal Republic of Cameroon on 1 October 1961. The Federal Republic consisted of two federated states: West Cameroon (former Southern Cameroons) and East Cameroon (former

French Cameroun). The federal system was understood to uphold the bi-cultural and bi-lingual nature of Cameroon within which the state of West Cameroon retained some autonomy, inclusive of separate governance structures and distinctive legal and educational institutions. However, federalism was short-lived, despite article 47 of the 1961 Constitution stating it to be “*indissoluble*”. In May 1972, President Ahmadou Ahidjo held a controversial national referendum that led to the abolition of the federal constitution and the creation of a unitary state called the United Republic of Cameroon. The 1972 referendum also removed West Cameroon’s autonomous and democratic governance structures, most notably the West Cameroon House of Assembly. In 1984, President Biya re-named the country as *La Republique du Cameroun*, returning to the name given to former French Cameroun at independence in 1960 and before reunification with Southern Cameroons in 1961. Writing in 1985, the barrister Fon Gorji Dinka described the 1972 referendum as a “*constitutional coup*” and the 1984 decree as an “*act of secession*” of *La Republique du Cameroun* from the 1961 union with Southern Cameroons (United Nations Human Rights Committee 2005).

Therefore, today’s conflict is a consequence of longstanding Anglophone grievances and perceived marginalisation as a minority population. Being Anglophone in Cameroon goes beyond language to encompass a cultural identity that has a history linked to Britain and a set of distinctive institutions. For decades, many Anglophones have felt that the Francophone-dominated state’s policy of assimilation of the English-speaking

territory has attempted to erode that identity. Anglophones feel treated as second-class citizens within Cameroon, with marginalisation experienced in the socio-cultural, political, economic, and linguistic fields. Thus, Anglophone opposition has risen at different times. For instance, in the early 1990s, political liberalisation enabled Anglophone-specific trade unions, interest groups and political groups to emerge. Such mobilisation led to the All-Anglophone Conferences (AACI and AACII) held in 1993 and 1994 and attended by more than 5,000 delegates from numerous Anglophone organizations and associations. AACI's Buea Declaration called for a return to two-state federalism, but total disregard of such demands by Biya's regime led to the option of secession being noted in the declaration from AACII. The aim was stated as *"the restoration of the autonomy of the former Southern Cameroons which has been annexed by La République du Cameroun"* (cited in Jua and Konings 2004). One organisation in particular, the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), advocated for secession, but notably by non-violent means through the "force of argument rather than the argument of force" (Bone, 2021: 48). These Anglophone associations were active, with frequent meetings, rallies and demonstrations, but only for a limited period. Konings and Nyamnjoh (2019) reported that by 1996 momentum was lost. One organisation, the Southern Cameroons Youth League did opt for armed struggle at that time, but attacks in March 1997 on military establishments led to a ruthless and lethal response by government, effectively ending this strategy (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2019: 77). However, the same authors wrote prophetically in 1997 that:

"The Government's continued denial of any 'Anglophone problem' in Cameroon, and its determination to defend the unitary state by all available means, including repression, could lead to an escalation of Anglophone demands past a point of no return". (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 1997: 229).

This turning point did not arrive for almost 20 years until 2016 when frustrations intensified with the systematic francophonisation of the distinctive legal and education systems in the English-speaking regions, leading to the initial protests by lawyers and teachers. The grievances about marginalisation and ever-increasing French influence were widely shared within the English-speaking population. This was reflected in broad participation in non-violent demonstrations in late 2016 and early 2017 (Bone, 2021: 37), and in the widespread observance of the weekly general strikes or 'ghost town' days at a time when participation was entirely voluntary with no fear of retribution from armed groups which did not yet exist (Bone, 2021: 45). However, the ensuing armed conflict has had an unimaginable impact on the civilian population.



3. Conceptualising Unarmed Civilian Protection

Unarmed civilian protection (UCP) is a relatively recent concept that aims to enhance the protection of civilians before, during and after conflict through non-violent means. As such, it represents a paradigmatic shift to prevailing international responses to conflict operationalised through military peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations by the UN, EU, AU, and NATO, and challenges the notion of using violence to deter violence. Moreover, UCP contests the conception of state and military peacekeeping as ‘active’ and civilians as ‘passive’ actors, lacking agency and voice (Bliesemann de Guevara et al. 2023). Initially scholarly debates on UCP emerged in the 1980s and gained impetus through the work of authors such as Lisa Schirch in the mid-1990s on ‘civilian peacekeeping’, which focused on non-violent intervention strategies such as interpositioning, accompaniment and monitoring employed by unarmed civilian groups and organisations (Schirch, 1995). While the work of Schirch laid the foundation to the terminology, the core ideas of UCP or nonviolent civilian agency was developed through practical and creative work of communities affected by conflict and national and international peace organisations/activists including Witness for Peace, and Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) (Bliesemann de Guevara et al. 2023). In 2014, UCP gained more prominence at the international level through the recommendation of a UN High-Level Independent Panel on Peace

Operations which advocated for the inclusion of unarmed civilian protection in UN peace operations (Oldenhuis et al., 2015; Julian and Schweitzer, 2015). Despite such recognition, UCP is still relatively new, less well-known, and under-explored among practitioners, academics, and policymakers (Hewitt, 2018). Its definition is evolving and somewhat ambiguous, often used differently by different actors, institutions, and contexts. While there is some consensus that UCP is distinctive from other interventions by its focus on violence prevention and physical protection and not humanitarian relief or conflict resolution, there are differences on who is involved in civilian protective measures, with a key line of differentiation between external and local actors. At times, UCP is perceived as implemented by groups that “*frequently come from outside the communities affected by the conflict or even from overseas, providing them with a special protective status as internationals*” (Molz 2018: 14). However, other definitions are more inclusive of local agency, for instance that of Oldenhuis et al. (2015: 16):

“UCP is the practice of civilians protecting other civilians in situations of imminent, ongoing, or recent violent conflict. It involves international civilians protecting local civilians, local civilians protecting each other, and even local civilians protecting international or non-local civilians”.

It is the aim of this research to explore the agency of such ‘local civilians protecting each other’. Yet in discussing such local agency in the literature, it can still remain limited to *“the experience of external, international organizations that apply UCP in a context that is not their own”* (Oldenhuis et al. 2021: preface). Such efforts remain top-down and external to the communities affected by conflict and violence, with little exploration of bottom-up, local and grassroots initiatives in conflict settings. This neglect of local self-protection measures is also observed within the international humanitarian system, as noted by Niland et al. (2015) in a major review of how protection issues are addressed in the context of humanitarian action. Indeed, they state that *“the system appears to largely ignore individual and community self-protection coping strategies”* (Niland et al., 2015: 59).

One example of the neglect of local self-protection is in Wallis’s (2010) typology of actors who engage in UCP. First is ‘unarmed military’ such as UN military observers who are often without arms. The second include ‘police’ involved in civilian operations in peacekeeping missions. The third are ‘unarmed civilians with official mandate’ such as those (non-uniformed) working with the UN, EU, OSCE or other international organisations. The fourth include ‘unarmed civilians from civil society’ such as those without official mandate including NGOs, journalists, solidarity movements. The fifth are ‘unarmed civilians with special skills and training’ to engage in civilian protection (Wallis, 2010: 26-28). Wallis’s typology however, fails to include unarmed grassroots groups who often do not have official mandates, are often unstructured and

unorganised, but employ spontaneous and homegrown non-violent approaches and skills to protect themselves and their communities. These can include women’s groups and youth groups among others who increasingly provide protection for themselves and their communities in times of conflict.

It is important to acknowledge that Jose and Medie (2016: 6) introduce civilian self-protection (CSP) as an element of civilian protection and define the term as *“activities undertaken during armed conflict (international or non-international) to preserve physical integrity in which the primary decision maker is a civilian or group of civilians”*. According to the authors, CSP has three core elements: *“(a) actions taken to protect against immediate, direct threats to physical integrity imposed by belligerents or traditional protection actors; (b) primarily selected and employed by civilians; and (c) employed during an armed conflict”* (Jose and Medie 2016: 1). The point of divergence between Jose and Medie’s CSP and the general understanding of UCP is that while the latter takes place before, during and after conflict, the former seems to focus only on actions taken ‘during conflict’. Also, while UCP limits itself to non-violent responses, CSP covers both violent and non-violent approaches.

3.1. Components of UCP

UCP involves a wide range of strategies, methods, activities, and practices. This is in part related to the differing understandings of the concept and its practical dynamics on the ground. For example, Schirch’s (2005) initial concept of ‘civilian peacekeeping’ focused on

interpositioning (human shield or moral deterrent) and accompaniment, for example of human rights workers and internally displaced persons, with activities largely undertaken by international actors. For Julian and Schweitzer (2015:1), UCP practices include but are not limited to “*accompaniment, presence, rumour control, community security meetings, securing safe passage and monitoring*”.

In general, however, the literature highlights four main methods of UCP, as follows: proactive engagement; monitoring; relationship building; and capacity development (Birkeland, 2016; Oldenhuis et al., 2015). In their 2021 revised manual on ‘Unarmed Civilian Protection’, Oldenhuis et al (2021:32) expanded these methods to include advocacy as well as revised ‘capacity development’ to ‘capacity enhancement’. The activities under each method are outlined below and may vary in practice depending on the needs and realities of the local population, the contextual dynamics, the type of conflict, and the goals and skills of the implementing organisation or group (Duncan, 2016).

With regards to proactive engagement, activities include interpositioning, protective accompaniment, and protective presence. Interpositioning for instance is when citizens or UCP practitioners place themselves between warring factions to prevent violent clashes. An example is the case of Filipino citizens who formed a barrier between the armies of the autocrat President Marcos and General Ramos during the Filipino revolution in 1986 to prevent violent clashes (Lakey 1995). Examples of protective accompaniment and

protective presence include providing safety and security for vulnerable citizens and communities to escape violence and protecting human rights or community activists by creating safe spaces for them to operate (Schweitzer 2010). For example, in Guatemala in the 1980s, UCP practitioners deployed by Peace Brigades International began providing 24 hours protective accompaniment to stop the disappearance and killing of leaders of human rights and peacebuilding groups (Wallis 2010). Likewise in South Sudan, Nonviolent Peaceforce trained about 1000 female UCP practitioners who helped prevent the kidnapping of children, resolved conflicts, and accompanied rape survivors to receive medical care (Duncan and Ai-Lin-Loh 2017).

Monitoring on the other hand involves activities such as ceasefire monitoring, rumour control, and early warning, early response (Oldenhuis et al., 2015). For instance, UCP practitioners encourage warring parties to adhere to peace agreements or terms of negotiations. The trust they have built with the warring factions, their access to various groups enables UCP actors to monitor and provide oversights over the implementations of peace agreements on the ground (Wallis, 2010). Relationship building includes confidence building and multi-track dialogues such as mediation, negotiation, and other conflict resolution mechanisms. According to Wallis (2010), confidence building by UCP practitioners enables communities, citizens, and other actors to become more resilient in addressing their own needs. Capacity development or enhancement includes “*strengthening self-protection capacity and enhancing local protection infrastructures*” (Oldenhuis et al., 2021:

32). This can take the form of training and workshops. Finally, advocacy involves education and mobilisation inclusive of outreach work, sensitisation, and awareness raising campaigns to disseminate peace messages, inform and educate communities on escape routes in times of violence, and mobilise communities to mitigate violence.

Further, in their discussion on civilian self-protection (CSP), Jose and Medie (2016) outline the three main strategies of CSP as non-engagement, non-violent engagement and violent engagement. The authors elucidate that non-engagement strategies involve situations where civilians avoid interacting with warring factions or those who might be of threat to their safety. Non-violent engagement includes negotiation, peace committees, homegrown conflict transformation approaches as well as paying taxes to the warring factions to avoid violence. The authors also include a controversial element such as the use of sexual relationships as protective strategy by civilians citing an example from Liberia where women and girls formed sexual relationships with warring factions in exchange for protection from violence (Jose and Medie, 2016). This strategy is difficult to claim as a credible civilian self-protection strategy. On violent engagement, Jose and Medie (2016) highlight both spontaneous and organised acts of violence by civilians to protect themselves from imminent threat such as vigilantism and militias, with an example being the creation of militia groups by Sudanese men to protect themselves during the Darfur conflict (Jose and Medie, 2016). The authors admit that such violent self-protection mechanisms could expose

civilians to more harm and can be less successful, but ultimately for Jose and Medie, CSP does not only involve non-violent approaches but violent strategies and activities. Such strategies are evidently controversial and differ from the general understanding and remit of UCP. However, it is possible that in times of war, these contested strategies could be employed by civilians as they are forced to find different means of protecting themselves. Caution however is required when exploring such strategies as part of UCP.

It is notable that the main methods of UCP outlined above predominantly involve activities being initiated and implemented by outside actors, so-called 'UCP practitioners' seeking to protect those individuals and communities affected by conflict and violence. Although UCP in theory places the "*primacy of local actors*" at the centre of its practice (Oldenhuis et al., 2021: 27), it is equally evident that discourses thus far are predominantly focused on international actors and responses, exposing the international-local dichotomy in UCP. Schirch (2006), Oldenhuis et al (2015) and Wallace (2017) all admit to the limited focus on bottom-up actors and approaches as compared to those of the international, with most of the literature focusing on the work of international NGOs such as Peace Brigades International, Nonviolent Peaceforce and other western-led organisations, with little exploration of local and grassroots initiatives in conflict settings (Birkeland., 2015; Furnari et al., 2015; Duncan, 2016). Hence, though the 'local' is promoted in UCP, it is not comprehensively explored and nuanced. Rarely are the actual conflict-

affected communities perceived as active agents in their own protection. Despite the controversial nature of some aspects of Jose and Medie's discussion of CSP, it is noted that their strategies do place more emphasis on active agency by most-affected communities themselves. Therefore, more studies and documentation of bottom-up UCP practices drawn from the perspectives and initiatives of local and grassroots groups are essential to expanding the knowledge and practice of this field. This research aims to contribute to that knowledge through examining the measures taken at the grassroots levels by individuals and communities to protect themselves amid conflict and violence, particularly where no external 'UCP practitioners' exist. The Cameroon case-study is a very suitable example.

3.2. UCP in the Cameroon Anglophone conflict

The UCP methods and practices outlined above, initiated primarily by international organisations and other external actors, are almost entirely absent in the current civil war. The government of Cameroon does not facilitate the activities of UCP practitioners, neither international nor local/national organisations, rather it hampers any such practices. It was noted above that what distinguishes UCP from other interventions is its emphasis on protection of civilians from violence and *not* humanitarian relief (Julian and Schweitzer 2015: 3). Yet the obstacles that would be faced by UCP practitioners can be demonstrated by the restrictions, formal and informal, placed on providers of humanitarian assistance. While

humanitarian relief is the main activity that NGOs are permitted to engage in by the state in the conflict areas, it is subject to many limitations. Kewir et al (2021: 26) noted that administrative restrictions were "*a major means of limiting CSOs' access to conflict-affected communities*", with prior permission required from Divisional Officers. Even when access is granted, military accompaniment is at times imposed, not only endangering the lives of NGO staff through crossfire exchange with the non-state armed groups (NSAGs), but also perceived as a means of surveillance of NGOs and their interaction with local communities (2021: 26). Humanitarian assistance providers also face threats from the NSAGs, encountering their checkpoints and subject to kidnapping for ransom (UN OCHA 2021: 63). NGOs generally face security threats to their lives and properties from both warring parties, with staff facing harassment and intimidation and properties broken into and equipment destroyed (Kewir et al 2021: 27). Those NGOs based in or close to the rural conflict zones have been forced to relocate to safer locations in urban areas. One organisation interviewed for this research had shifted from environmental work to humanitarian assistance in the context of the conflict, but the kidnapping of staff by a separatist group and the vandalism of their premises had forced them to relocate to a more secure city location.³ The experience of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF)/Doctors Without Borders is perhaps the most instructive in terms of the difficulties faced by humanitarian organisations from a hostile state. Despite its global legitimacy in conflict contexts, MSF has been forced to withdraw from the

³ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

North West region after its suspension by the government in December 2020, with MSF accused of supporting local armed groups, an allegation that MSF categorically denied (MSF, 2021). Further, in April 2022, MSF suspended its medical activities in the South West region following the arrest and detention of four staff, charged with complicity with secessionists (MSF, 2022). All were eventually acquitted and released by military tribunals, but only after enduring months of incarceration, with two staff imprisoned for 5 months, another for 10 months, while a fourth spent almost one year in prison (MSF, 2023). MSF stated that the accusations were groundless from the first instance, especially as *“the authorities knew exactly how we were providing medical support”* (MSF, 2023). Given such challenging circumstances experienced by a globally respected medical humanitarian organisation, well-known for being guided by medical ethics and abiding by humanitarian principles such as independence, impartiality, and neutrality, it is extremely difficult for international NGOs, to provide civilian protection in conflict-affected zones. They would certainly not be given formal approval by the Government of Cameroon, and the same is true for local and national NGOs who are restricted to humanitarian assistance. Nonetheless, despite such very real constraints, our research does explore the extent to which local NGOs in particular have been able to engage in UCP-related activities without formal approval of the government. However, it is evident at the outset that civilians and their communities remain overwhelmingly reliant on their own strategies and methods of *self-protection*, and it is these that we focus on.

3.3. Using Arts-based Methods to explore UCP

In this study, arts-based methods were used to explore UCP in the context of the Anglophone conflict. This is to a large extent informed by our focus on the bottom-up approach. Over the past three decades, the interest in and use of arts-based methods for research has grown exponentially within academia. Humanities, social sciences, and the natural sciences have all explored the use of arts-based methods in their respective disciplines (Brazg et al., 2010; Barone and Eisner, 2012). Some of these methods include- visual arts (e.g drawing, painting, photography, collage making, video-making); performance arts (e.g. dance, drama, role-plays, music); and writing (e.g. story, prose or poetry). The interest in creative arts for research has been precipitated by a shift in how research is understood, informed, and conducted. That is, the quest for research to be more engaging and participatory where the research constituents are seen as active participants in the co-creation of knowledge and research (Coemans and Hannes, 2017). This makes art-based methods a relevant tool for community-based inquiry including in conflict affected contexts such as Cameroon. According to Coemans and Hannes (2017) arts-based methods are beneficial for grassroots or community-based research because they are participant-driven, illicit a multiplicity of experiences and perspectives, facilitates non-verbal communication, enables personal (empowers research participants), institutional (leads to policy reforms) and audience transformation (change perspectives), and are relatable,

comfortable, and accessible to diverse research population. Van der Vaart et al. (2018), Kanchana (2017) and Wang et al. (2017) equally concur, asserting that poetry and drawing for example enable participants to use creative and non-verbal ways to express their emotions and experiences. In other words, they provide safer spaces for participants to delve beyond verbal narratives to capture their unsaid, silent, and invisible experiences. Using such methods is especially useful in the case of Cameroon where marginalised Anglophone citizens can be afraid to openly verbalise their views due to possible reprisal from warring factions.

Despite its benefits, arts-based research is not without challenges. This includes ethical dilemmas around anonymity, sensitivity, and ownership. How to ensure that arts produced by research participants maintain anonymity and that if ownership is publicised, it does not pose threat or risk to the lives of the authors especially in conflict situations (Rydzik et al., 2013; Moletsane et al., 2009). This is an ethical concern that requires thoughtful navigation to avoid and reduce potential harm to participants. Relatedly, Water et al. (2020) also highlight concerns around ensuring a safe and secured environment to conduct arts-based research especially when dealing with youth and children. Additionally, even though arts-based research enables a non-verbal means to articulate emotions, it can also be emotionally draining both for the researcher and research participants (Coemans and Hannes, 2017). Thus, it requires susceptibility in navigating the process.

Another challenge relates to the practicalities of conducting arts-based research. These include issues around time, preparatory training, and cost. Levy and Weber (2011) for instance assert that arts-based research can be time consuming, hence can lead to fatigue or unwillingness of research constituents to participate. Furthermore, research participants and facilitators are likely to require more preparatory training which can also impact time and cost (Coemans and Hannes, 2017). The process thus requires flexibility, including around time, budget, and most especially sensitivity to the needs of the research constituents.



4. *Forms of Violence and Civilian Vulnerability*

Since the commencement of the conflict, civilians in the English-speaking regions have been subjected to various forms of violence, including extreme violence. The

poem below was written by a research participant to highlight the violence experienced by civilians in the Anglophone conflict.

Hopes

My homeland now feels like a strange land
Like a place I have never been to
A place full of hatred, a place where people
No longer feel safe and secure
Because anything can happen at any time
Families have been separated; lives have been lost
We no longer have rights, we are governed by fear

Hopes are lost and no one thinks of the future
Because you may see young boys have been killed
Young girls have been raped, some into forced marriages
Others into early marriages with lots of unwanted pregnancy
Our hearts are heavy, our eyes are full of tears
Nowhere to go or run to, we sleep every night
Thinking that when we wake up, it will all be a nightmare
But every day we keep hoping.

Poem 1: Hopes⁴

At the same time, it is evident that different categories of people are more or less vulnerable to different forms of violence, dependent, for instance, on gender, age, social position, and circumstances. This section explores the different forms of violence experienced by civilians, highlighting those who are most vulnerable. Our research participants described many incidents where violence was committed against civilians by both warring parties. These have been categorised into three main domains – physical violence; mental and psychological violence; and violence against property.

4.1. Physical Violence

Civilian communities have faced various forms of physical violence. These include unlawful killings (including summary execution), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), arbitrary arrests, torture, and other human rights violations, kidnapping and extortion. As explained by a research participant:

“Actually, some of the physical violence that the civilian communities are suffering within the context of this crisis we have physical abuse, and some include hitting, kicking, biting, shooting, threats with weapons, and equally assault”⁵

Like all other forms of violence against civilians, the different forms of physical violence were found to be overwhelmingly perpetrated by “men with arms [military], violence from citizens who have just joined the other side of violence [armed separatists]”⁶.

This section discusses the types of physical violence experienced by civilians in the Anglophone conflict.

4.1.1. Killing of Civilians

The killing of civilians by state security forces commenced during the initial period of peaceful protests, most notably when 17 protestors were killed on 1 October 2017 during demonstrations to mark the declaration of independence for the Republic of Ambazonia (Amnesty International, 2017). During the subsequent civil war, it is estimated that over 6,000 civilians have been killed (HRW, 2023; ICG, 2023), a likely underestimate given the absence of official figures. Civilians are killed at the hands of both warring sides, as well as caught in the crossfire (Amnesty International, 2023; CHRDA, 2021, 2022, 2023; HRW, 2022a, 2022b; Willis et al., 2019, 2020). This was affirmed by our research participants during the fieldwork lamenting that: “Most of those killed have been unarmed civilians and this victimisation is from both parties”.⁷ State security forces are responsible for arbitrary and indiscriminate killings of civilians and used to punish and intimidate local people for perceived support for the separatist cause. The ‘Ngarbuh massacre’ in the North West region on 14 February 2020 when 27 people were killed, including 13 children and a pregnant woman, by the military supported by Fulani militias, was one of the worst examples and received international attention (CHRDA, 2020). Yet such killings occur on a regular basis, including to date. For instance, on 24 June 2023, five young men in

5 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

6 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

7 Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

Ekona in the South West region were extrajudicially killed by the Cameroon military (CHRNA, 2023: 16). Armed separatist groups are also responsible for killings of civilians, including government officials and those accused (often falsely) of being informants or ‘blacklegs’, as well as people who do not comply with their instructions regarding lockdowns or school closures (Amnesty International, 2023: 15). One particular atrocity was the killing of six workers and injuring of 52 others from the Cameroon Development Corporation – a state-owned company – on 10 February 2023 in Tiko municipality in the South West region on their way back from work during a separatist-imposed lockdown (CHRNA 2023: 14).

While all civilians are at risk of being killed in indiscriminate attacks by the military or for not obeying separatist orders, young men in particular are vulnerable to targeting by the military, and elderly people may have less physical capacity to flee when violence occurs. As one interviewee expressed it: *“Elderly persons are abandoned, killed in their homes because they can’t run”*, with an example shared of an elderly woman who died in her house because she couldn’t move when her house was razed.⁸ Further, participants narrated their experiences and stories of civilians killed in the Anglophone regions. One had direct knowledge of the Tiko killings (noted above) that had occurred the week before our fieldwork:

*“Those suffering are the civilian population, like what just recently happened in Tiko banana plantation. They [armed separatists] said it was ghost town and CDC [Cameroon Development Corporation] workers went to the plantation and they got ambushed. Five people were killed [a sixth later died of injuries]. You could even see how they threw bullets on the tar, meaning it was really intensive. I have a classmate that was even killed in that process”.*⁹

Another participant shared an incident in Bamenda when six civilians were killed in a crossfire during an exchange of shooting between the military and the separatists.¹⁰ These atrocities have become the everyday realities of many Anglophone civilians, so much that *“killing is a normal thing and... people are losing their lives every day”*.¹¹ As a result, *“the death rate is very high, we bury in our communities every day and it is not like you bury just one and it traumatizes... every day you open your phone you see a lot of killings”*.¹² Ultimately, *“many [civilians] are becoming widows and orphans”*.¹³

Killings of civilians can be arbitrary, as with the above case in Bamenda, or civilians can be targeted based on suspicion, rumours, or association with certain groups. For instance, the ‘blackleg’ phenomenon has escalated the killing of many civilians due to their alleged association with either of the warring factions. It was noted that such

8 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

9 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

10 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

11 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

12 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

13 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

allegations can be false and a means of 'settling scores':

"People are not safe. Sometimes there are 'set-ups' which put a target on people. A girl was beheaded because she was labelled as 'blackleg'. People are killed by association".¹⁴

Additionally, civilians who fail to show allegiance either to the Ambazonian struggle or to the government are used as scapegoats to intimidate and instil more fear in the population. In a poetry workshop, a participant lamented:

"There is an example of a couple who openly told them that they were tired of living in fear. This armed group rounded the indigenes and told them to choose between the couple or the armed group [their allegiance to the armed group]. The couple had to be killed in front of the community".¹⁵

Moreover, the military's inability (or unwillingness) to differentiate between unarmed civilians and the armed separatists has meant that ordinary civilians, especially those seeking shelter in the bushes, are mistakenly identified or suspected to be armed separatists, hence killed in the process. The narrative below explains:

"They [civilians] are being killed because they are considered as Amba Boys. This is partly because they hide in the Ambas hideouts. So, since the military cannot differentiate between the Amba Boys or the civilians, they just kill everybody".¹⁶

4.1.2. Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV)

Rape and other forms of sexual violence have increased dramatically during the conflict. Rape is described as 'pervasive' and 'rampant' in a UN report (Craig, 2021). Other forms of gender-based violence include forced prostitution and survival sex, early and forced marriages, and high rates of teenage pregnancy. This epidemic of SGBV is directly and indirectly related to the conflict. Directly, acts of sexual violence against women and girls, especially rape, are committed with impunity by both warring parties. In one horrific example, about 50 Cameroonian soldiers attacked Ebam village in the South West region on 1 March 2020, invading 75 homes and raping at least 20 women, including four with disabilities (HRW, 2021). Indirectly, various forms of gender-based violence have surged at the societal level due to conflict-induced contexts of forced displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the breakdown of the education system and of community protective mechanisms (AMEF, 2021).

Women and girls were found to be the most vulnerable to sexual violence. Sexual violence committed against local women by the fighters from both sides is most evident. One interviewee noted that:

"Women have been used as weapons of war. The amount of gender-based violence on women and young girls in the Anglophone regions is huge...A publication shows they [women] are raped, they are tortured, they are kidnapped, by both sides. The military

¹⁴ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁵ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁶ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

and the separatist fighters prey on them so they are unprotected”.¹⁷

Young girls “are taken advantage of and demanded for sex at gunpoint”.¹⁸ Elderly women are also not spared such violations. As one interviewee expounded:

“There is high rate of rape in the communities, no matter the age group... When state security forces move into a community for intervention, they rape some of the girls, same thing with the NSAGs. Yeah, even grandmothers, nobody is safe. When we are going there, we meet little children at the age of 11, 12, 13, they are all pregnant, and when you ask them, they give you their stories. It is really pathetic [terrible]”.¹⁹

One CSO representative further narrated a particularly harrowing account of a schoolgirl being raped by both warring sides:

“I interviewed a young girl who was raped by the separatists and the military. She was in class, they heard gunshots and run, run, run. They were in the biology class with their teacher who was also raped. They were raped [by the armed separatists], they were tied up, and when the military came to rescue them, they thought it was over. But they were raped by the other side too. She finally found her way and came to Limbe. We had an interview at xxxx hotel and the image is still with me”.²⁰

Women’s vulnerability to rape by the military is increased when their men folk run to the bush to protect themselves, indicating a dimension of gender inequality:

“When the military are about to invade the village to attack the Amba Boys, there is always this violence on women.... Women are being violated sexually. So, when they get into a community and they see that the men already ran away, and when they meet women, they rape some of them. So, the men have the power to run into the bush and hide”.²¹

Tragically, the innocence of some young girls has been stripped away by the constant sexual molestation by armed actors from both sides. The experience of one very young girl was shared by one interviewee:

“She ran from somewhere around Ekona and is now in Limbe, and we were talking with the child. She had been instigating the other classmates telling them about sex, puberty and all what not. But she is in primary 6, but she has been constantly telling those stories to her friends in school, instigating some sort of fear in them. So, when we talked with the child she said no, she has been in the bush for more than 3years and those [Amba] Boys there, each time they feel like having sex, they just come into the bush where they [civilians] are staying. If you are available, they catch you and they rape you. So, she was already

¹⁷ Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁸ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁹ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

²⁰ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

²¹ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

*used to the trend of being molested constantly. So, when she came here, and the environment was somewhat peaceful, it was strange to her because she was already used to that lifestyle [of being molested]”.*²²

The normalisation of sexual violence, such as the experience of this young girl narrated above, could potentially create a new generation of Anglophone children and youth, whose upbringing and life would not only be marred by traumas of abuse, but also saddled with unwanted pregnancies as many are *“carrying children which are not of their liking”*.²³ The young women and girls are vulnerable not only to mature armed actors but also to child soldiers. For example: *“A child of 12 years can just sit and ask you to open your legs and he will rape me because I am a woman, and I am vulnerable and I don’t have a gun to fight back”*.²⁴ It is important to note that boys and men were also noted to be victims of rape. As affirmed by a participant, *“you also have men who are being raped.”*²⁵ Often these go unreported due to the stigmatisation attached to such incidents.²⁶

Although SGBV existed prior to the start of the conflict, research participants highlighted that the conflict has increased its prevalence in society generally. Sexual violence has intensified not only in conflict zones but also within families, between spouses, and neighbours. One participant highlighted:

*“Gender-based violence is not limited to conflict zones, as some cases occur within families, communities, and schools. The crisis has intensified existing gender-based violence, including violence perpetrated by family members, neighbours, and familiar persons”.*²⁷

There was a consensus that displacement and social disruption have increased instances of sexual exploitation and violence. Notably, IDPs are taken advantage of at times by relatives and other civilians in host communities. Internally displaced children and young girls are *“being raped or exploited by host families”*.²⁸ Sometimes due to the high cost of rents, IDPs are crammed into one room, mixed with other children from different family backgrounds and forced to sleep together on the same bed, at times leading to abuse and rape. One participant shared with honesty her own family experience:

“Because of the crisis you get children sent from villages to come and stay with families in town. I am living in town, I have a two-bedroom house, one for my husband and I, and one for my two sons. My sister sends her girls from the village to live with me and go to school and they are mixing up in this room. This is because I don’t have the funds to rent a bigger space where I can separate the male and female children. You see they are turning around in the same room and at the end of the day these my children are

22 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

23 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

24 Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

25 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

26 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

27 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

28 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

male, and they intimidate the female ones, sometimes they are abusing them, and they keep quiet. The fear of being chased away makes the girls to succumb and say okay. So, you get a lot of rape coming from family members, neighbour and familiar persons to the survivors”.²⁹

Equally, participants lamented that the growing poverty, unemployment and “idleness” of many displaced girls and young women has resulted in “prostitution, or sex for survival”, thereby perpetuating another form of sexual exploitation and violence.³⁰

Across the two English-speaking regions, SGBV was noted to be committed with impunity, with little or no channel for redress for survivors, and perpetrators enabled to go free due to corrupt legal processes. One NGO representative noted:

“As of the moment we have about 56 cases of rape. We equally saw the magistrate judge passed a judgement in favour of a rapist. This shows a bribe was taken”.³¹

Further, when it comes to the military in particular, the government was noted to cover up offences. One example was given of a high school in Bamenda “whereby 14 children were reported pregnant by the military. In such a situation we realised the government starts taking sides and it doesn’t end with a logical conclusion.”³²

4.1.3. Arbitrary Arrests and Unlawful Detention

Our research participants also highlighted cases of arbitrary and unlawful detention based on mere suspicion, appearance, lack of proper documentation or due process. The detained individuals often face an uncertain fate, with some being found dead later, presumably due to extrajudicial killings by state security forces.

“As far as the Anglophone crisis is concerned, [and] the nature of physical violence perpetrated to civilians, the first one is illegal detention of civilians. Because they face a situation whereby people are just being accused from their looks. Yeah, when people just look at you, they say you just resemble one of those guys [Ambas], and before you know you are gone, you’re taken to an unknown destination. And at times if you’re lucky enough you might be found in any of the prisons around the country. But if you’re not lucky enough, they will only discover your dead body somewhere along the way, the street or along the bushes, yes, and this is most often carried away by the State Security Forces”.³³

Arbitrary arrests have been “very common” since the start of the conflict as “people are arrested and locked up and some are still in prison till today”.³⁴ Cases in point include leaders of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium, political activists and

29 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

30 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

31 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

32 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

33 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

34 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

journalists who were arrested by the Biya government in 2017 prior to the armed conflict. Such arbitrary arrests and detention have continued throughout the conflict. Indeed, during our fieldwork in February 2023, local women from the town of Ekona marched some 17km to the prison where some 100 young men were being held after arbitrary arrest and detention by the military a few days previously. The women, holding peace plants as a symbol of their non-violence, demanded the young men's release, who included their own children, and were partially successful with the release of some but not all of those detained. One of our participants noted that *"most often when the military comes, even if you're innocent, they just arrest everybody, they don't care"*.³⁵ Therefore, while men and women of different ages can be arrested on the slightest (often incorrect) suspicion, the Ekona example above and many others demonstrate that it is young men and boys who are most at risk of arbitrary arrest, detention, and at times, extrajudicial execution.

Illegal detention and interrogation are also carried out by the armed groups, notably of suspected local informants, despite such suspicions often being the result of misinformation. Perversely, such kidnapping and interrogation can also happen to civilians after arrest and detention by the military, given separatists' fears of the interaction that has occurred with the military. Equally, after release from captivity by armed groups, civilians live in constant fear of being re-arrested or questioned by the military despite having no involvement in the conflict. This threat to civilians

of violence from both sides was expressed by one interviewee who had been kidnapped and interrogated by a separatist armed group, and then faced similar problems with the military on his release:

"But at the same time, you also have the other part where the military people if they hear that you have been in their hands [armed separatists], they also need to pick you up for investigations. So, it makes people to run from the moment they are freed from the [Amba] Boys so that you don't get interrogated, because the moment you get interrogated you are in another trouble".³⁶

This vicious cycle of violence against civilians, where illegal detention and interrogation by one side leads to the same from the other side, can often only be broken by relocation. The above interviewee stated that this was the main reason he had been forced to move from Kumba, a conflict hot spot, to a safer location in the South West region. This situation also leads to an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and distrust among civilians about sharing any information with either set of armed actors or indeed with fellow civilians.

4.1.4. Forced Recruitment

Based on interviews, it is evident that young men in particular are vulnerable to forced recruitment by local separatist groups. Fighters coerce young men into joining their ranks, giving them no choice but to either fight or flee the area. The conflict has severely impacted the lives

³⁵ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

³⁶ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

of these young men, as noted by one interviewee:

“One of the forms of violence they suffer is the violence of recruitment. Fighters want to recruit them with the killings, and they don’t have the right to refuse, so you either fight or you leave, so that kind of violence takes place. I feel the conflict has reduced young men into a shadow of themselves because they can’t make plans”...³⁷

Another distressing form of violence highlighted in the data is the use of children by armed groups. These children are exploited and manipulated by being sent on errands, thereby building a psychological connection that might eventually lead them to join the armed groups willingly. In some communities, children are given ultimatums, either to join the armed groups or be considered as enemies ('black legs') and face severe consequences, as expressed by one interviewee:

“It also goes as far as child soldiers. You move along the road, and you see how these children are used... in some communities you find community informants telling you that when it gets to non-state actors, they have an age group where they say that you either join us by fire or by force. You will not live in this community if you are not part of us, and if you are not part of us, you are a blackleg”.³⁸

4.1.5. Kidnapping and Extortion

Kidnapping for ransom is a tactic and weapon of war used mainly by the armed separatist groups, with extortion also common amongst the military. Professional groups are especially vulnerable to kidnapping, notably government officials, community and religious leaders, businesspeople and other professionals such as teachers, journalists and NGO workers. Kidnapping is also used against those accused of being 'blacklegs', as a means of exerting control. An increase in kidnapping cases was reported in 2023, perhaps as a result of disruptions to external funding sources (CHRNA 2023: 20).

Teachers are especially vulnerable, given the continuing separatist ban on government schools. As one participant noted:

“Ambas hate teachers so much. If you are in a car and they find out you are one they would have to hold you and take a ransom”.³⁹

Government officials and civil servants occupying top administrative and/or political positions are equally at risk of attack and kidnap, as noted by one interviewee:

“The government people are vulnerable because the Ambas believe that they are the ones not doing the right thing”.⁴⁰

³⁷ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³⁸ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³⁹ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

⁴⁰ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

Religious leaders have been targeted, threatened or even killed by both warring parties, with kidnapping more commonly by the armed separatists. As noted, *“sometimes clergymen were being arrested and taken into the field”* where they are potentially harassed and abused.⁴¹ Like their Christian counterparts, Muslims and their leaders have equally been attacked.

Journalists are another highly vulnerable group, caught *“in-between the devil and the deep blue sea”*.⁴² That is, if they report the violations of the separatists, they are perceived as ‘anti-separatists’ and if they report those of the government, they are ‘anti-government’.⁴³ Such complex terrain of practice makes journalists vulnerable to violence from both warring factions. As one journalist stated:

“Journalists are exposed from their offices right up to the field.... You can be taken kidnapped from your office, and no one knows what happened to you. You are a very easy target... Another risk is that journalists get embedded and make themselves vulnerable. You mix up with the military and you become a communications soldier. In that case if you are killed, you are not a civilian”.⁴⁴

Another group of vulnerable professionals are those humanitarian workers in the conflict-affected regions, especially in more remote and hard-to-reach communities. These workers can be attacked by the warring parties, though they are particularly liable to kidnap for ransom by the armed separatist groups. As noted by one NGO representative:

*“We have been victims unfortunately. One of my colleagues, the programme coordinator, has been a victim... staff being taken hostage, goods being seized, goods being vandalized and all of that...”*⁴⁵

The findings show the devastating consequences of kidnapping on families and communities, leading to emotional distress and financial burdens, as noted by one interviewee:

“I know of a case of one guy, one of the Cameroon representatives of the Forestry Council...they [armed separatists] attacked this guy’s parents, killed the father, tortured the mother, and asked this guy to send 10 million [CFA francs] otherwise they will also kill the mother”.⁴⁶

Findings also points to disappearances, with several individuals still unaccounted for. Criminal elements have also infiltrated the crisis, posing as separatist fighters and perpetrating acts of kidnapping and theft. In an interview, an NGO representative highlighted:

41 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

42 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

43 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

44 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

45 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

46 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

"We have cases of about 19 disappearances from North [West] and South West in my office... some of them even [human] rights defenders and some of them just NGO [workers] and up to this moment they are not able to be found... Yes it is, and this is infiltrated by thieves who come and claim to be Amba Boys where they kidnap women, go to rich people and collect ransom from them".⁴⁷

Drugs have been observed to influence the behaviour of armed groups involved in kidnapping activities with some fighters noted to be resorting to stealing and kidnapping to sustain their drug habits.⁴⁸

Linked to kidnapping for ransom, participants also raised the issue of extortion. They noted that civilians have faced extortion, with some receiving calls from ex-separatist fighters in prison demanding money; and failure to comply could result in threats against their children. One participant elaborated:

"I did my investigation and I realized that the ex-separatist fighters who were locked up at the Buea central prison. Now when they call you, they talk like those separatist fighters, 'We know you, we know where you stay, give us CFA 500,000 to support our cause, if you don't give it in two weeks' time your children will be killed'".⁴⁹

Extortion can occur at any time in unexpected circumstances, resulting in significant financial loss:

"I am a president of the men in my church. We left and were going on an outreach. On our way, we saw Ambas. They came to arrest one of our members and when we asked why, they said he was an IDP from Kumbo and that before leaving he had a case with Amba that he did not finish... So we pleaded with this man and paid him 30,000 CFA".⁵⁰

Extortion is not limited to the armed separatists and also regularly carried out by state security forces, especially at roadblocks. One participant narrated his experience when travelling from Nkambe to Bamenda where he was stopped by the military at their check point and ordered to pay a ransom of 10,000 CFA.⁵¹ The threats of being kidnapped, coupled with other forms of physical violence, have had devastating impacts on the mental and psychological wellbeing of civilians.

4.2. Mental and Psychological Violence

"Of course, there is a lot of psychological violence. I, for one, receive a lot of threats".⁵²

The above quote from one of our interviewees affirms the psychological violence perpetrated by the warring factions against civilians. The use of "threats with weapons"⁵³ and intimidation, coupled

47 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

48 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

49 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

50 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

51 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

52 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

53 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

with exposure to forms of extreme violence such as rape and killings, have exacerbated civilians' psychological trauma and distress. Participants noted that there is *"emotional or psychological violence because they live in perpetual fear, and they are exposed to conflict which is not healthy"*.⁵⁴

Warring factions threaten and intimidate civilians to do their bidding often at gunpoint. As one participant added: *"They use their guns to intimidate every other person"*.⁵⁵ Civil society groups noted that sometimes food items for humanitarian assistance are confiscated by the warring factions using threats; and refusal to obey their commands could lead to killings. One CSO representative lamented:

"One day we went to Bambili to do food distribution. The [Amba] Boys came, 'We need our food' they said, 'We need 4 bags of rice and 2 cartons of groundnut oil'. We said no, it's beneficiaries food, we cannot give them. They just started shooting".⁵⁶

Those women and girls subjected to sexual violence are especially vulnerable to ongoing psychological trauma, and greatly in need of psycho-social support. As noted by one interviewee:

"Survivors of SGBV, including rape, face severe psychological trauma. The crisis has led to an increase in domestic violence and disrupted relationships. Psycho-social support is crucial to help survivors cope with the mental toll of the violence".⁵⁷

What is more, sexual violence does not only cause psychological trauma to individuals but also creates a cycle of mental/psychological violence within families. One interviewee expounded:

"Imagine you meet a girl of 12-years who was raped by three Ambas who now is pregnant, and she doesn't know who the father of the child is. That kind of child is already tormented. What about the mum or the aunty who is living with the child? They are also tormented because she is going through psychological depression".⁵⁸

At the community level, the constant sound of gunshots has heightened fear among community members:

"Yes, even this morning you could get gunshots even though they were coming from afar. And actually when you are going out, you must have that fear in you because you don't know the next thing will happen".⁵⁹

Indeed, fear has prevented many civilians from going about their everyday activities, including farming because *"they don't want to be harassed"*.⁶⁰ It was also found that the constant extortion has exacerbated the poverty levels within communities. For men in particular, not being able to perform their socially assigned responsibilities due to poverty has also resulted in psychological trauma and increased levels of domestic violence. The quote below explains:

54 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

55 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

56 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

57 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

58 Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

59 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

60 idem

"[The conflict] has caused a lot of poverty and when people cannot go about their daily responsibilities, they become really psychologically disturbed, especially the men when they cannot live up to their responsibility. They get very violent and sometimes it results in domestic violence. ... It transmits to the way he treats the wife, and the wife gets into a psychological depression, so it is a really bad cycle".⁶¹

There are others who have experienced such severe traumatic situations that *"they can no longer talk"*.⁶²

Consequently, the mental and psychological violence against civilians has resulted in a lack of trust within and among communities, families, and institutions. Often civilians no longer trust their fellow civilians nor the institutions that are supposed to support or protect them. At times young girls dealing with psychological traumas after SGBV, do not know who they can trust or talk to for support.

4.3. Violence Against Property

Our findings showed an increase in violence against properties. This is often done through arson and vandalism. Hundreds of buildings and infrastructures including homes, schools and hospitals have been burnt down by the warring factions. In fighting a counter-insurgency campaign, state forces have been responsible for the razing of hundreds of villages in the Anglophone regions,

displacing tens of thousands of civilians, especially in the earlier years of the conflict (CHRDA, 2021). The burning of individual civilian homes and properties by state security forces has continued to date, notably targeting houses that have allegedly sheltered separatist fighters (CHRDA, 2023). Armed separatists have also burnt the homes of those alleged to be 'blacklegs' (CHRDA, 2023), as well as homes in Mbororo/Fulani communities (Amnesty International 2023: 30) and been responsible for the destruction of hospitals and schools. The prevalence of arson and vandalism has forced some people to relocate.⁶³ One interviewee expounded on property destruction by the military, inclusive of homes and farms:

"One other aspect of violence is that of burning of houses. [Local people's] houses have been shattered with bullets or some have been burnt. So, they have built small small bush houses in the forest where they seek refuge. [But] even their farmlands are being destroyed because that is one of the tactics of the state security forces. After burning the houses, they identify their cocoa farms, their crops, they destroy everything, they set everything on fire".⁶⁴

Other participants attested to such razing of properties by the military: *"Many people have lost their properties. They [the military] have burnt down so many houses and destroyed so many business places".⁶⁵* Instances of terrible atrocities were cited where *"women have been burnt with babies in their homes while the men were*

61 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

62 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

63 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

64 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

65 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

away at work”.⁶⁶ The destruction of houses has led to the loss of important documents such as birth certificates and ID cards, which then affects people’s safe mobility and access opportunities like employment:

“Houses near that one was burnt; certificates were burnt and other documents. ... So, it is affecting our neighbours till today....They will need to go to Buea to get the certificates. So, it has really affected some of these people in getting a job”.⁶⁷

Education has been severely impacted during the conflict, with the separatist boycott of state schools as colonial education, now ongoing for eight years. Schools that continue to operate in defiance of the separatists’ instructions are targeted, with school premises destroyed at times. Schools have also been damaged in gun fights between the warring parties, with premises also used as hideouts and shelters by both sides. Many Anglophone citizens did not expect the conflict to take this dimension. As highlighted in one workshop:

“When the Anglophone Crisis started, it was about teachers and lawyers protesting, then it became an issue of burning schools, and no one knew that it will all get to this stage.⁶⁸ Access to education for so many children and youth has been so adversely affected, especially in rural communities where schools have been shut down for a number of years...[and] students deprived of education”.⁶⁹

Participants also lamented of the violent arson attacks on hospital, churches, and on Amba camps where some civilians were sheltering. Regarding hospitals, one participant added:

“Then we also see scenarios where hospitals got attacked with patients inside”.⁷⁰

66 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

67 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

68 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

69 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

70 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023



5. Unarmed Self-Protection Strategies

“We are not only the authors of our stories but the authors of our own protection”.⁷¹

The above quote by a participant during the storytelling workshop is demonstrative of how communities, in times of violence, find their own means of protecting themselves due to the often-non-existent support from the state, UN and other external actors. As critiqued by Jose and Medie (2016), the failures and absence of external and internal actors to protect civilians in violent situations has led to the growing discourses on civilian self-protection strategies. The case of Cameroon is a classic example. Since the conflict started in 2016, there has not been any known presence of UCP practitioners on the ground, and this is coupled with the limited support and interest of the international community to the plight of affected civilians. As a result, the Anglophone population have had to adopt and develop their own self-protection mechanisms to protect themselves and fellow civilians. Indeed, throughout the study, the growing understanding that civilians only have themselves and God as their sole protector was emphasised by various research participants. One participant expressed during an interview:

“When you get to those communities what they usually say is “Cow wey ei no get tail na God di drive ei fly” that is the first statement they use. When you meet them, they already know they don’t have anybody apart from God”.⁷²

The above statement also demonstrates the increasing reliance on faith as elements of protections within Anglophone communities. This will be further discussed in a subsequent section. Moreover, participants were quick to add that, the conflict has precipitated a growing “safety consciousness”⁷³ among community members including children:

“We have emergency bags and carry everything along to be in safe hands. Everyone is always prepared. The crisis opened our eyes within the three years of 2017, 2018, and 2019. Even little children have developed modes of safety when a call of escape comes”.⁷⁴

Ultimately, as evidence from the research demonstrates, self-protection measures or strategies have become a core part of community life in Anglophone Cameroon. While findings show some similarities in the various strategies, it equally demonstrates that different communities use different mechanisms.

Participants highlighted a plethora of unarmed self-protection strategies, some of which are captured in the poem below.

⁷¹ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

⁷² Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

⁷³ Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

⁷⁴ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

Security Challenges

Many schools were closed especially government schools
 How will children go to school with many security challenges?
 Then I discovered many lay private and community schools had been opened
 Which makes movements shorter and more secure for children to go to school.

Dressing becomes a problem
 If badly dressed, you are gone
 Especially the young men
 Dress neatly and decently to avoid
 Problems and embarrassment
 Communities have formed quarter meetings
 For identification of community members
 WhatsApp groups have also been formed
 For dissemination of information
 Whistles and bells have been adopted
 For members of the community to use
 In times of problems and danger
 Information is not given to a stranger
 Especially during crises
 Avoid unnecessary discussion in public.

Keeping late nights is prohibited
 Many hide outs have been put in place
 Many roads have been formed
 To ease movements during trouble
 The community will prefer time in their farms
 During lock down than being at home.

Those serving the community are well known
 And they are identified by community leaders
 Services done by external people is done
 With the help of community leaders
 Health services for example
 Is done via community leaders.

Quarter heads and executive members of
 Quarter meetings have been empowered
 By community members to oversee and cross examine
 Problems and security issues within the community.

Always make sure you have identification papers
 Or gadgets when you are out for any service or any movement
 Make sure you obey the orders passed by
 Any armed group around your community.

Drawing from our findings, these strategies have been categorised into three domains - spontaneous measures; early warning and response measures; and preventive measures. They are discussed in three sub-sections below.

5.1. Spontaneous Protective Measures

Spontaneous measures are those taken

in the context of sudden violence or an immediate threat of violence. The poem (below) 'Just To Be Safe' vividly describes the terrifying situation for local residents when faced with violence from the military or armed separatist groups, or of conflict between them. In this instance, the threat of violence against civilians comes from a night-time raid by the military, with a number of evasive protective strategies outlined.

Just To Be Safe

It's the early hours of the morning
Places are very cold, bed is warm, sleep is sweet
Something sounded, what has fallen?
It must be from the neighbours
Hey! It is echoes from gunshots
It sounded louder this time, tear gas
No, it is not, I have rubbed Vaseline on my nostrils
To prevent pollution for my safety
The sounds get clearer, that means they are coming closer
I have to off my lights, and sleep on the floor far from the door.

A knock on my neighbour's door, strange voices
My heartbeat increases, have chest pain
And I am facing difficulty breathing already
I had to go to the hospital today for my medicine
They are coming towards my door, my heartbeat increases
I try to get raw eggs and drink to reduce my heartbeat
There is a knock on my door, what do I do?

They are talking among themselves
In a language I don't understand fluently
But I hear them talking about fire
I have to escape because the next thing will be fire
While thinking, the compound is already in flames
And the strange voices all gone
I have to find my way through the ceiling to the nearest bush

The road is crowded, everybody in the neighbourhood
Rushing to the bush for safety
The children who can hardly understand what is going on
Breastfeeding mothers carrying big bags filled with baby's dresses
Looking at everybody's faces, you can tell the frustration
Hoping that the bush will be quiet and safe
To brighten our faces again.

Poem 3: Just To Be Safe⁷⁶

In general, our research found that local civilians spontaneously took a range of protective measures when violence and conflict erupted, including some mentioned in the poem – lying on the floor, rushing to the bush. We cluster these measures here into evasive actions at home, running to the bush or to farms or to neighbouring villages, and seeking temporary shelter in safer places. The large majority of such spontaneous measures were to escape from potential military violence, as is implicitly depicted in the poem.

5.1.1. Evasive Measures at Home

"When you are already in the house, you turn off lights, lay far from windows or the door".⁷⁷

"When they are shooting you don't run because you don't know where the bullet is coming from. Lie down on the floor and observe".⁷⁸

At times, it was deemed safer to stay inside the home, especially when gun fire had already commenced, but to take simple evasive measures, as noted in the poem and in the quotes above. Mutual support and assistance was noted between family members and also within the wider community: *"Those who had plank houses join those with block houses as we lay on the floor so that bullets could not go through".⁷⁹* People who lived by the roadside, and thus more

⁷⁶ Poetry workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁷⁷ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁷⁸ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

⁷⁹ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

susceptible to gunfire from soldiers in vehicles, moved to safer houses:

“They left their houses and joined others within the community and we were everyone’s keeper”.⁸⁰

People took to sleeping on the floor in an attempt to remain safer from exchanges of gunfire during the night. But the arbitrary brutality of the army towards civilians was evident:

“When the military realised that people were sleeping on the floor, they started shooting on the floor and many people died from that”.⁸¹

5.1.2. Running to the Bushes

By far the most common spontaneous measure taken to escape violence was simply to run and hide, most frequently into the surrounding forest or bushes, as recounted in the poem 3 above and by numerous participants. Similar to the scene depicted in the poem, one woman described how most of her community members had run together into the bush:

“We were so many of us, more than a hundred, because nearly everyone in the town was in the bush”.⁸²

Another account noted how everyone had to flee when the military suffered casualties:

“A military officer had been killed in a quarter [neighbourhood] and all inhabitants fled because ... everyone becomes a culprit [suspect]. The best one can do is to flee”.⁸³

Fear of the military and the possibility of arbitrary arrest was sufficient for many local people to run and seek safety elsewhere. As one interviewee described, when a military vehicle was seen approaching a village many people:

“Would run as fast as possible to avoid any confrontation with the military, reason being that most often when the military comes, even if you’re innocent, they just arrest everybody. They don’t care, so that’s the reason most [people] when they see that they are coming, they run”.⁸⁴

Many workshop participants outlined their experiences of running into the bush and the hardships incurred:

“When this war started, we all ran and went to the bush, my two kids, one boy and girl, 10 and 13 years. We made our small bush house and covered it with leaves and then we made our small beds with sticks and made our fireside where we kept our things”.⁸⁵

Ongoing conflict meant that civilians often had to remain in the bush for

80 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

81 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

82 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

83 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

84 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

85 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

months and even years. As Figure 2 below shows, one drawing workshop participant depicted a situation where she and her daughter remained in the bush for two years, during which time her daughter gave birth.

In her drawing, she used lines and text to narrate her story. She stated that they were fortunate that there was a nurse amongst them in the bush to give assistance when her daughter gave birth, but the situation became life-threatening when:

"The placenta stayed inside her womb for four hours and I did not know this was dangerous until we explained to one woman. And she ran and looked for a bottle and gave her that [and told her] she should blow it. And when she did the placenta came out".⁸⁶

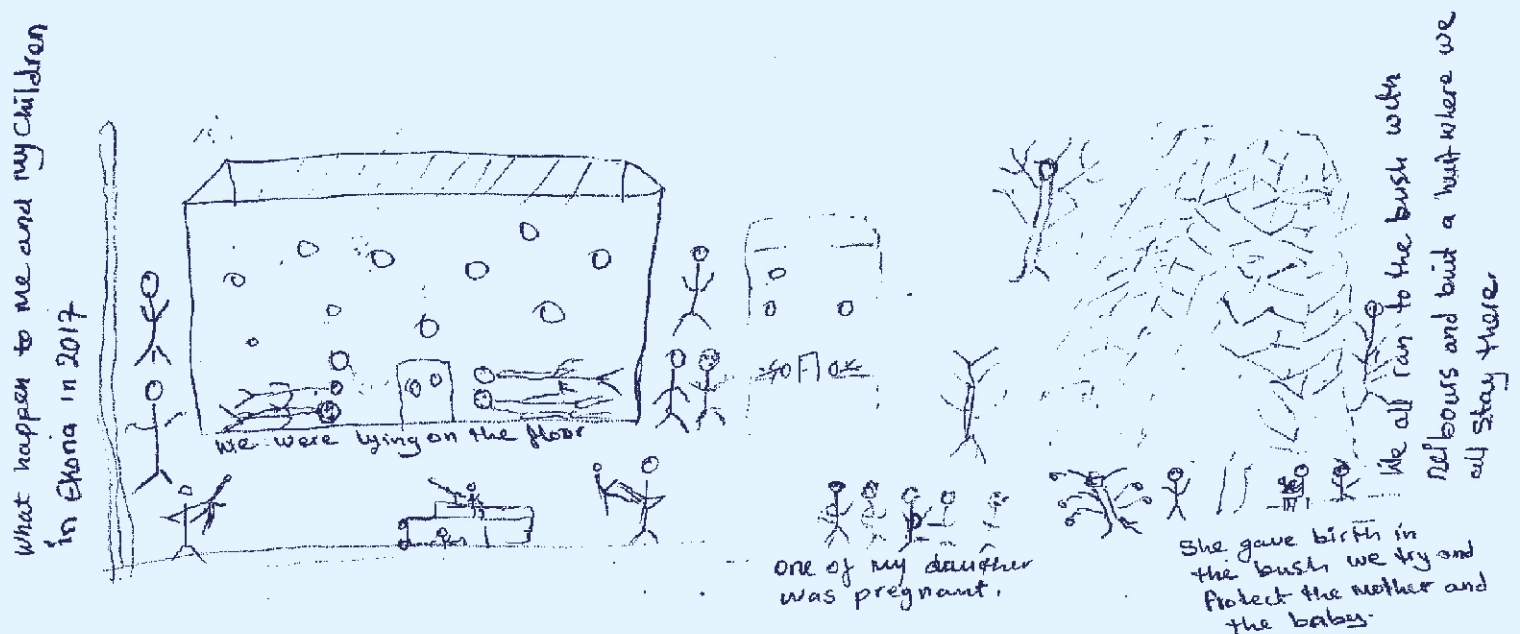
When asked how they survived for such long periods in the bush, another female participant replied:

"We planted vegetables, and we ate plantain. We cook food in the bush house. When we have a small chance [we go] and buy small fish and njanga [crayfish] and then we go back to the bush because it wasn't safe".⁸⁷

Another noted the support from local farmers:

"Neighbouring farms when they know that we don't have what to eat, someone may bring a bunch of plantain. We manage and eat, and we use this palm nuts. We used to make oil and put it inside and eat".⁸⁸

Figure 2: Living and Giving Birth in the Bush⁸⁹



86 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

87 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

88 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

89 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

Local herbs were used for sickness: “We used herbs in the bush”.⁹⁰ But sometimes this was not sufficient to cure sickness:

“My children were too sick and were lacking blood. So, I picked leaves and boiled for them to drink but I still couldn’t withstand. I went to town with the attire I had. Those who saw me just welcomed me, so I went to general hospital in Buea. Some nurses gave me medicine as I explained to them my situation. With that explanation some even dashed me money. I went to the market and bought some things, I also bought medicine for body pain”.⁹¹

Again, this example shows the solidarity and practical support provided by local people, including hospital staff. One workshop participant confirmed the frequency of local civilians fleeing into the bush, and the hardships experienced there, leading at times to death:

“We lived in the bush for about two weeks while being malnourished. There was a pregnant woman in our midst... My uncle passed away in that bush”.⁹²

The harshness of life in the bush meant that people would try to return to their village, which has led to a pattern of ‘regular pendular migration’ (UN OCHA 2021: 19), whereby civilians flee into the bush when localised conflict occurs and return home when hostilities cease.

However, finding homes intact was not guaranteed, given that houses were frequently burnt and looted by the military: “When they come back their homes have been destroyed”.⁹³ Village life in the midst of conflict may have become so difficult that the family moves away and seeks shelter further afield:

“Due to the way the children were falling sick, we could not stay in the bush. We left after two months. We came back to the house, but we left [again] and went to Tiko”.⁹⁴

Villagers have become well-prepared for having to flee regularly and immediately:

“We have emergency bags and carry everything along in order to be in safe hands. Everyone is always prepared. The crisis opened our eyes within the three years of 2017, 2018 and 2019”.⁹⁵

Safe locations are often pre-planned, and people flee to the nearest safe place. Children are also aware of where to run to, at times without their parents: “Even little children developed modes of safety when a call of escape comes”.⁹⁶ In these respects, running has become less of a spontaneous measure, as it could be described in the earlier times of the conflict, and more of a planned protection measure.

90 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

91 Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

92 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

93 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

94 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

95 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

96 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

5.1.3. Running to Farms

Running and seeking safety in other locations was also commonly mentioned. Those with farms outside the village would often run there and shelter temporarily in their farm huts. They would get there avoiding the main road:

“Most of the civilians are farmers who use short cuts to go to their farms. So, these roads were safe passages during conflict because the military men are from different communities. Civilians escape their communities to live in these farmhouses”.⁹⁷

Participants indicated a gender dimension here, with men more frequently running for safety to their farms:

“You find men who have decided to make the most part of their lives in their farmhouses and they leave the women in the settlements to take care of the children”.⁹⁸

In one workshop, a male participant stated that:

“Most of the men go to their farms that are far and only sneak back later to check on their wives. There is no way you can protect yourself when the military is coming. Either you run and go back, or you will face the military. So, you go and focus on your farm work and cultivate your crops. That is the only way you can protect yourself from the military”.⁹⁹

Local farmers would also give shelter to others: *“I once harboured more than 100 people in my farm while feeding those who were vulnerable. We are one another’s keeper”.¹⁰⁰* A drawing workshop participant similarly noted: *“As you can see this is my farm and my bush house. You have plantain trees and, as you can see, we have some people there which I took for safety”.*

Figure 3 below depicts people fleeing to their farms in the bush, as well as to neighbouring villages, as discussed below. However, nowhere was completely safe, with farms also targeted (see 4.3).

⁹⁷ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

⁹⁸ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

⁹⁹ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁰⁰ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023



Figure 3: Running to Neighbouring Villages¹⁰¹



5.1.4. Running to Neighbouring Villages and to Francophone Regions

Another alternative was to run and seek shelter in neighbouring villages, as noted by one interviewee: *“They run away from their residence to neighbouring villages”*.¹⁰² This action was more likely where individuals had family or friends in neighbouring villages, but safety was not assured, given that nearby villages could also be subject to attack. In the drawing above (Figure 3), one participant showed how people either fled to their farms in the

bush or to neighbouring villages for safety. As she recounted, the main reason for fleeing to neighbouring villages was the fighting between separatist fighters and the military that threatened the lives of virtually all civilians in what used to be a very vibrant community.¹⁰³ Other villagers would flee to bordering francophone regions, especially if relatively close by (see 5.3.6). One drawing workshop participant depicted how local people ran to the river that acts as the regional border and were assisted by those working there as sand diggers to cross the river:

101 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

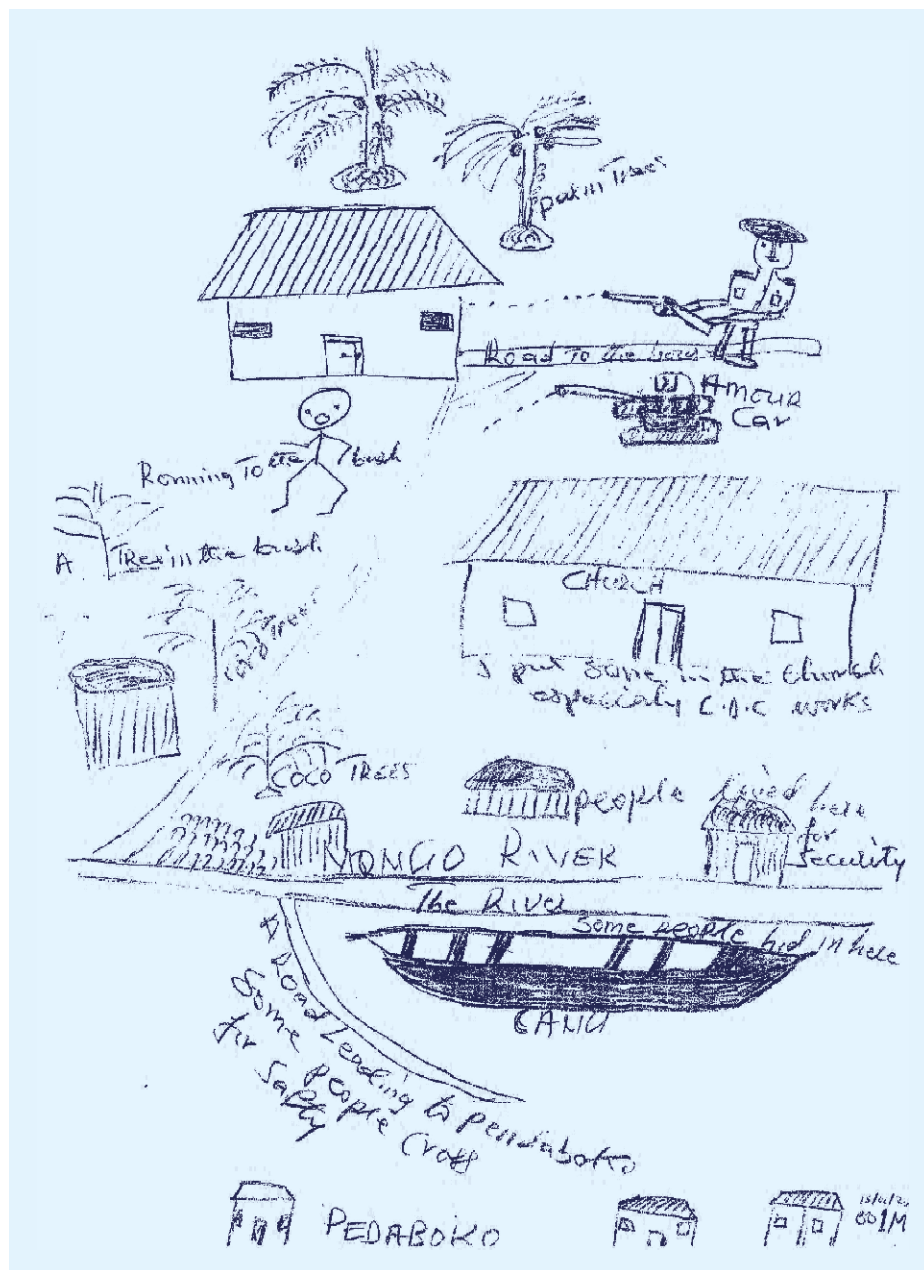
102 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

103 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

"Now some people they run to the Mungo.... At the banks of the Mungo, people scrub sand, we have sand scrubbers. So, we carry them for safety across this river using these canoes. This is done mostly at night. We cross them to this village called [xxx] for safety".¹⁰⁴

The Mungo River depicted in the drawing below (Figure 4) shows the border between the South West Region and the Littoral Region, a Francophone region.

Figure 4: Providing Shelter and Crossing the River to the Francophone Region¹⁰⁵



104 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

105 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

5.1.5. Seeking Temporary Shelter

When people flee from violence, they often seek temporary shelter in available locations in the immediate vicinity. Within villages, churches and chiefs' palaces were regarded as relatively safe spaces. Firstly, regarding churches, *"the church is a safe space ...the people still have that belief in the church as a safe space"*.¹⁰⁶ Churches were seen as a place where women and girls could seek protection from sexual violence perpetrated by the military:

"We discovered that when the military are about to invade the village to attack the Amba Boys there is always this violence on women. So, one of the measures we took is that the safest place for the women and the girls is to rush to the nearest church. ... You hardly hear that they [the military] will go there, so we usually advise that they will be more protected if they go into the church. Even if the men are running into the forest, the women should run into their churches. At least it will protect them from being violated".¹⁰⁷

These spaces are also regarded as a safe place for the elderly:

"When the place is 'hot', we take them [the elderly] into church buildings because it is difficult for them [the military] to burn churches".¹⁰⁸

Moreover, workers on state-owned plantations are also vulnerable to attack from the armed separatists, especially on 'ghost town' (strike) days and have been given shelter in churches. Figure 4 (above) also depicts this, as recounted by the artist:

"This is a church and this church, we take some CDC [Cameroon Development Corporation] workers to safety, hide them here, keep them to take care of them".¹⁰⁹

Secondly, the palaces of the local traditional leaders (Chiefs and Fons in Cameroon) are regarded as another safe place to seek temporary shelter, believing that the military is unlikely to breach:

"Chiefs' palaces are considered a safe space in some communities because of the belief in the traditional powers and deity and people feel that it is wrong to destroy the palace in search of civilians".¹¹⁰

A variety of other places were mentioned where desperate people sought temporary shelter to escape from violence, such as abandoned vehicles, incomplete buildings and the beach:

"They started using uncompleted buildings and some slept in abandon vehicles as well as in Limbe in beach areas where they use this shelter to sleep".¹¹¹

106 Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

107 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

108 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

109 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

110 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

111 Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

5.2. Early Warning Early Response (EWER) Measures

Early warning early response strategies were found to include modes of intelligence exchanges, communication and information dissemination aimed at enabling civilians to prevent and mitigate violence and threats. These involve the use of diverse strategies including local and homegrown ones, as well as contemporary methods such as social media/digitalisation. The different early warning and response strategies are categorised into two interrelated domains - communication and intelligence exchange; and unarmed vigilantism. These are discussed below.

5.2.1. Communication and Intelligence Exchange

The communication and intelligence exchanges are generally modes of information dissemination employed by civilians to inform each other about impending or imminent threats to prevent violence. The narrative below expounds:

*“The community people, the civilian population equally try as much as possible to intensify their communication system. They have built a strong communication system such that they turn to understand what is happening elsewhere.... There is strong communication amongst the civilians themselves, inter-villages, and they equally communicate a lot with those in the cities”.*¹¹²

As demonstrated above, civilians have developed strong communication systems that ensure that they inform each other of what is happening in each village before they travel to prevent and protect themselves from possible attacks. These communication and intelligence networks are not limited to conflict-affected communities, but also extend beyond to less affected cities and towns. Participants noted the usefulness of these networks when, for example, the military comes into their communities for random checks. In one instance, about 50-100 military personnel invaded one community, and began random searches of the people. Hence to protect themselves, the community members informed each other and their neighbouring communities of military attacks. In an interview, a research participant noted:

*“That is how they [military] have been doing. That is how they [military] go to Bansa, and when they are coming the people, as a protective mechanism, communicate to tell everyone in the village that they should be careful that the military is coming. The military has come several times and burnt several houses, so all those people who live along the road, when they hear that trucks are coming, they would leave and go and hide. And the following morning they are observing and when they [military] leave Fundong, they inform the Njidikom people that they have left. That is how they were doing”.*¹¹³

¹¹² Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹¹³ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

Establishing these communication and intelligence strategies enables communities to access information quickly which then triggers an immediate response to the impending threat or violence. Thus, due to these “*strong communication networks that exist*”¹¹⁴ within communities, “*news circulates quickly about the presence of the military and everyone disappears*”.¹¹⁵

Interestingly, participants also mentioned the aspect of ‘triangular communication’. This involves communication between civilians and the military or the armed separatists. The triangular communication is used sometimes to tip off warring factions of impending attacks. For example:

*“There have been situations where the military has to attack a village because they know that those Amba Boys are there. But before the military deploys themselves and get there the Boys have moved. How did they get the information? Somebody in the military is communicating with someone in the community”.*¹¹⁶

Equally, it was found that there are instances where the Amba Boys would plan an attack against the military, but before they could get there, “*the military too has moved because somebody has also informed them that those Boys are coming*”.¹¹⁷ This is dangerous particularly for civilians involved as it could lead to being accused of taking sides (‘blackleg’ phenomenon) which could result in further violence. Arguably, the reason for

this could be to deter clashes between the armed groups (state and non-state) which then prevents possible loss of civilian lives, at least momentarily. This approach concurs with Barter’s (2023) research on ‘The Partisans: Civilian Support & Indirect Violence’ in Indonesia and the Philippines where he found civilians informing and alerting rebels and troops to flee (as part of their nonviolent support to armed groups) in order to prevent violent clashes between the groups that may harm civilians.

5.2.2. Tools for Communication and Intelligence

The communication networks make use of various tools to disseminate information. Phone calls, WhatsApp messages, whistles, word of mouth, gong beating, use of town criers, church bells, gun shots and social media were some of the communication tools highlighted by participants, as discussed below.

Mobile Communication and Alerts: Phone Calls and WhatsApp

Over the past two decades, mobile communication has grown exponentially in most African countries including Cameroon. Records show an increased number of mobile phone users in Cameroon from 10 million in 2011 to 24 million in 2020 (Ford, 2022). This represents almost 90% of the country’s 27 million population. Mobile communication has become a crucial medium for interaction, business, and other social activities in Cameroon. For populations living in the conflict-affected

¹¹⁴ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹¹⁵ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

¹¹⁶ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹¹⁷ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

communities, mobile communication is not only a medium for everyday interaction, but also a crucial tool for early warning and response. This involves the use of phone calls and WhatsApp (a social communication software) messages to alert family members, loved ones and community members of impending violence or attacks. Ultimately, for most people in these communities, communicating and sharing intelligence through the mobile phone is very useful because *“it is so easy and so simple, once you are on a WhatsApp group and you reach out to people even abroad”*.¹¹⁸

During the study, participants shared their experiences of the effective use of phone calls in alerting civilians to avoid violence. In a storytelling workshop, one participant noted:

“I faced a situation when I was working in WIWAC (Refugee Welfare Association)... The next day was supposed to be the International Day of the Refugees and we were packing things, suddenly they [armed groups] started shooting. My father called me and told me to stay where I am even if it is to sleep there because you are not safe coming back to the house”.¹¹⁹

In affirmation to the above narrative, other participants noted that whenever they are leaving the house or community, they ensure to keep communication channels open with their families or community groups, providing and sharing regular updates on the security

situation. There are constant calls and text messages within and between families, and any community member who has information passes it on to fellow neighbours. Further, some civilians give mobile phones to their *“parents and grandparents so that if there is something they can call”*.¹²⁰ This intra-family and intra-communal communication helps prevent civilians from possible violence from the warring parties. One participant elaborated:

“What I do is that if I am leaving the house my family knows that I am going to this particular place, and I shouldn't go and divert. Then when I am there, I have to inform them, and they too have to inform me on what is going on in the house and the quarter. When you are out you call and get the information and when you get information that the military is there, or the Boys are in the quarter, you distribute that information with your neighbours that you are in contact with. Most of my neighbours are on analogue [phones] so I have to call. That is why I said collaboration and vigilance in the quarter is the key thing that is protecting us”.¹²¹

As indicated in the above quote, phone call is one of the methods often used by civilians. For example, *“When it comes to sharing information on safety and protection people don't hesitate to call you that the military and the Boys are in this quarter, don't go there”*.¹²²

118 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

119 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

120 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

121 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

122 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

The use of phones goes beyond families. Some civilians have taken on the challenge to inform the community members by phone in situations where there is a risk of a violent attack. One participant in the drawing workshop in Limbe, for example, used their drawing to illustrate how this strategy is used to inform the community when they see military vehicles or soldiers approaching the village. This participant explained their drawing in the following words:

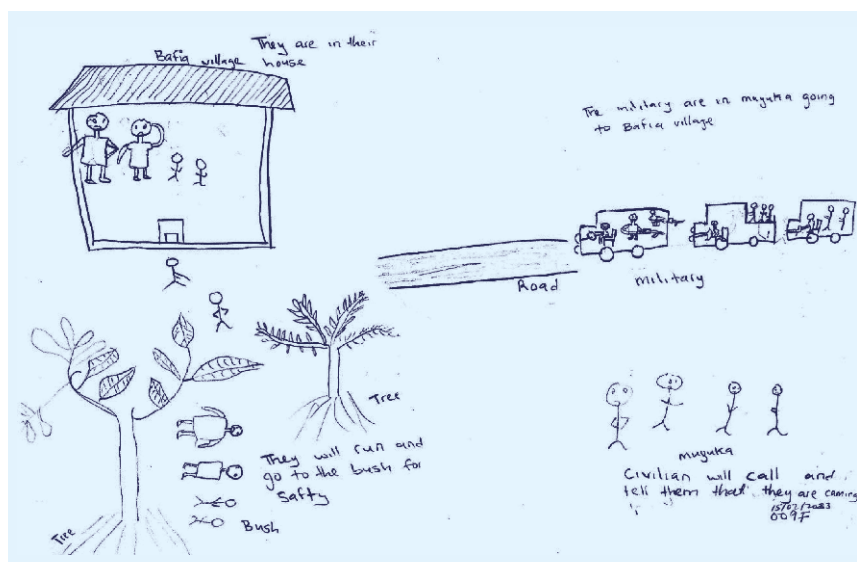
“This is Muyuka, then that is Bafia, these are the military and when we see them turning towards Bafia, we call on phone... So, they leave their houses and run to the bushes and look for a comfortable place to rest till they pass. Some run and go to different villages. And when they are coming back, some are there studying their [the military’s] movements to see if they are coming back, and if they are they will inform the others that they are going back towards Muyuka, so they can now go back to their house”.¹²³

This participant further explained how those who play this role of informing the community position themselves to be able to provide timely information on the risk of violence:

“Some of them stay like this place... that is up hill. When they stand there, they can see as the cars are passing”.¹²⁴

Moreover, it was found that majority of civilians prefer the use of ‘analogue’ phones or what is locally called ‘choronko’ for calls instead of smart/android phones. The ‘choronko’ and the walkie talkies are preferred to the android because *“with them [android] it is challenging to make calls due to network issues”*.¹²⁵ Additionally, civilians fear that the use of smart phones put them in significant danger with the warring factions as smart phones can easily be tracked *“when they [military] stop you on the road and they check your phone and see a video of maybe an incident of something that happened somewhere, they just conclude you’re one of the Amba Boys”*.¹²⁶

Figure 5: Use of mobile phone communication for protection¹²⁷



Civilians also use phone calls to share information with and receive information from the community unarmed vigilante groups. They can *“call a vigilante group using some agreed key words, that is*

123 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

124 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

125 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

126 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

127 Drawing workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

how the information spreads”.¹²⁸ Use of mobile phones by vigilante groups is further elaborated in the section on unarmed vigilantism. For civilians using smart phones, WhatsApp messaging is the most popular medium for communication. They create WhatsApp forums or platforms with their families, neighbours, and community groups to regularly give updates of security situations in their communities, either through group calls or messages (mostly the latter). In an interview, one participant underscored:

*“Another safety mechanism in Bamenda is that a lot of people are in WhatsApp groups so people can now know safe paths to take.... So if we were to have a gunshot while having this conversation, you will notice that they will all be on the floor, then look for their phones and try to look for one or two WhatsApp groups to send information to. You will be amazed at how rapid the information will be circulated within five minutes from six to seven WhatsApp groups that you belong to... So, it is not only a security strategy, but it has become a common practice”.*¹²⁹

Generally, *“the main objective [of the WhatsApp forums] is that information is passed”*.¹³⁰ These platforms are created purposely to share valuable information concerning the security and safety of civilians. In a storytelling workshop, one participant shared:

*“I would like to share a story. We have a WhatsApp forum with my family and some family friends, whereby when you get up you check for information just to know that if I am to go to town today is it safe for me to go out. For instance, in Bamenda you don't just get up that you want to go to the food market, and you do. In that forum there are people who live around. If there is shooting, we inform each other that this place is not safe so you should not go. That is already protecting the person from conflict and harm”.*¹³¹

Civil society organisations (CSOs) also affirmed the use of WhatsApp platforms *“so in case something is happening, it is being shared through the groups and you can avoid going towards that direction or even call your own family to be careful”*.¹³² Evidently, these platforms are not only used by civilians to protect themselves and their fellow civilians within the affected communities but also utilised by CSOs who work in these communities to protect civilians as well as their staff.

Mobile phones either used for calls, text messages, or WhatsApp forums, have become common and popular, and it is notably the fastest way to communicate and share intelligence. There was a consensus that *“information is spread rapidly”*¹³³ via mobile phones. Even when the government on several occasions between 2017 and 2018 blocked internet access in the Anglophone regions,

¹²⁸ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹²⁹ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

¹³⁰ Poetry workshop, Dschang (21/02/2023.)

¹³¹ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

¹³² Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

¹³³ Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

civilians managed to access VPN¹³⁴ on their mobile phones which enabled them to communicate and share intelligence. This also demonstrates the resilience of civilians to navigate antagonistic conditions, inclusive of government internet ban, to find ways of protecting themselves.

Embracing Digitalisation: Social Media

Digitalisation, like in most places, is a fast-growing phenomenon in Cameroon inclusive of the Anglophone regions. According to research participants, the conflict has necessitated the increasing use of digital technology not only for business but also as an early warning tool. A participant explained during a drawing workshop:

*“Another preventive mechanism I have observed is that we have embraced digitalisation... there’s a lot of the virtual world that has been adopted by a lot of people as a preventive mechanism to reduce outside movement. Even in terms of economic activities, people buy and sell online. People offer a lot of services online just to reduce that excess movement because we know town is not safe. Anything can happen to you at any time, so if you can do anything that can limit you stepping out of your house you do it. So, to prevent people have adopted digitalisation”.*¹³⁵

To reiterate, the digital world is not only used for economic activities but also for communication and intelligence exchanges. Civilians use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to sensitize each other on safety pathways and share security updates. For instance, via social media, civilians receive and share information on how to avoid violence, including reducing movement after 6pm.¹³⁶ As a result, social media has become part of the regular routine of many civilians. One participant shared his experience:

*“Another strategy that I do personally to protect myself is that when I get up and I know that I have to move around and I don’t know what may be happening in town, what I do is I go to Facebook and I check on all those news outlets and if I see five outlets that are saying one and the same thing about a particular area, [then] I dodge [avoid] from going there. So that is what I do to protect myself”.*¹³⁷

In other words, social media has become a useful source for communication and intelligence sharing among the Anglophone population, enabling them to avoid violent attacks from the military and the armed separatists; and ultimately protect themselves.

¹³⁴ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023 - A VPN is software that people download onto computers, phones, and tablets that enables them to access different apps, websites, and data even when internet or websites are blocked by the state.

¹³⁵ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹³⁶ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

¹³⁷ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

Use of Word of Mouth, Language, and the Town Crier

With the constant electricity and internet cuts coupled with the limited mobility due to the ongoing violence, ‘word of mouth’ is another tool for communication and intelligence exchange, as part of civilian early warning and response mechanisms. As noted by one participant:

*“We used to write down our letters but now that movement is limited, how do they even move? We can only talk with word of mouth”.*¹³⁸

Civilians use word of mouth to alert others to stay indoors when government officials are visiting the communities, perhaps in fear of possible attacks, as well as to avoid dangerous areas or seek shelter in case of impending attacks. For example, while fleeing from violence in the communities, some civilians begin to shout as a way of alerting fellow civilians to find a secure hiding place. One participant indicated:

*“As they [civilians] are running into the bush to alert the others, they are shouting so that everyone in the bush can take cover. So immediately let me say if it [an attack] happened in community A, before they complete search of community A, community B is already on alert, so they take off before they even get to the next community”.*¹³⁹

Additionally, to protect themselves and others from dangerous places or areas where there is ongoing shooting, civilians *“use word of mouth especially by roadsides to inform people if direction is unsafe”*.¹⁴⁰ Equally, it was found that communities use a ‘town crier’ to verbally share security information, sometimes using megaphones. As noted by one interviewee: *“We also have the town crier that goes from place to place telling people information”*.¹⁴¹ In rural parts of the Anglophone regions, *“each community has a town crier”* who *“speaks a language everyone understands”*¹⁴² hence can communicate effectively with the local population, alerting them of any impending violence and safety measures. Having a town crier, is thus, a common practice; and they are mostly men.

Whether communication or intelligence is shared through word of mouth or the town crier, civilians often do so through the use of local language or dialect. Pidgin is the popular local language in the affected communities, commonly used among Anglophones. Civilians *“use their local language or dialects”* to alert fellow civilians in the community so *“they will leave their homes and run behind to the bush before the military comes”*.¹⁴³ They also change the use of certain terms so that it will not draw attention of the military. Popular language [or term] known as ‘Country Sunday’ is used instead of ‘ghost town’ because *“when we used to say ghost town you can get into problems with the military”*.¹⁴⁴ Verbal communication is

¹³⁸ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

¹³⁹ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

¹⁴⁰ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁴¹ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

¹⁴² Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁴³ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁴⁴ Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

used alongside non-verbal interactions as participants further alluded that they “*have to learn sign language*”¹⁴⁵ to alert each other. An example is ‘waving’ at someone which means that the person should stand still. This is then followed by informing the person in pidgin “*to stop and go back, they are fighting*”.¹⁴⁶ Such sign language may differ from community to community. Perhaps there is need for further exploration into the nonverbal early warning signs among civilians. Nonetheless, for the majority of participants, they “*communicate in the local dialect*” because “*this automatically makes someone to know they are brothers*”.¹⁴⁷ Put it differently, it helps builds trust which then makes it easy for civilians to believe the information that is shared.

Despite the potential limitation of the ‘word of mouth’ and the town crier, that is, information might not reaching fellow citizens or other communities quickly, they are very useful early warning tools embedded in the people’s culture and communal living.

Sound Signals and Alerts

The Collins English Dictionary defines sound as an energy that can be heard and often travels in waves through air, water, or other substances (Collins English Dictionary online). Whether pleasant or unpleasant (eg noise), sound can be

a medium for transmitting or sharing information. Our findings in Cameroon demonstrate this. We found that, in addition to using the aforementioned methods, civilians in the affected communities communicated and exchanged intelligence through sounds including using whistles, gongs, pots and bottles, as well as church bells as part of their early warning mechanisms.

The whistle was found to be the most commonly used object for sound alerts. This was agreed across the majority of research participants who highlighted that blowing whistles and sometimes vuvuzelas are used “*to indicate that there is danger*”.¹⁴⁸ These dangers often include the military or armed separatists approaching or about to attack the community. In one community for example, “*when they hear the sound of military invading or something like that, they quickly blow their various whistles to alert others that there is danger around*”.¹⁴⁹ Once the civilians hear the “*whistle being used in a violent way they run away*”¹⁵⁰ and find a secure hiding place either by running to the bushes, church, hospitals or hiding under the bed or lying on the floor. Thus, blowing the whistle has become a means of self-protection for many communities. One participant used poem to highlight the use of whistle:

¹⁴⁵ Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

¹⁴⁶ Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

¹⁴⁷ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁴⁸ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁴⁹ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

¹⁵⁰ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

Unpleasant Surprise

As I stepped into the village square
I was so excited but for some reason
My heartbeat faster for an unknown reason
I could see people in the square
But something unusual caught my sight
A mother carrying a baby on her back
Another boy carrying an old man on his back
Ah! The sounds of Poom! Poom! Poom!

Just one long blast of the whistle
Then everyone uses their mouth to whistle
Not the whistle that is melodious
But that whistle that everyone knows
They all take to flight through the village square
I have no time for questions
I just have to follow the trend.

Poem 4: Unpleasant Surprise¹⁵¹

The whistle can be used by children, adults, families, neighbours, and everybody in the community inclusive of the community-led nonviolent vigilante group who “sends us [fellow civilians] signals with the whistles”.¹⁵² As a result, in most communities everybody owns a whistle. As explained by an interviewee:

*“They blow the whistle. If you go to most communities, even here in Limbe in some quarters everybody there has whistle. When there is something at night, immediately you hear somebody blowing the whistle. [Then] everybody starts blowing the whistle, that means they are alerting that there is a problem, there is danger around, so everybody has that whistle”.*¹⁵³

By blowing the whistle simultaneously, it sends alert or signal not only to a particular community but to other neighbouring communities enabling them to also find ways of protecting themselves before the perpetrators reach their community.

Similarly, in IDP camps, often set up by the communities themselves or an NGO (either local or international), the IDPs use whistles to signal each other in case of violence. For instance, where there are clashes between different armed separatists close to their camp, the IDPs “blow the whistle to indicate that something is happening, so when they hear this, they run and hide in cocoa houses”¹⁵⁴ in the bush.

¹⁵¹ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁵² Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

¹⁵³ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁵⁴ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

While the majority noted that blowing the whistle is common and was initially a useful strategy, they were quick to add that it is increasingly becoming 'ineffective' because *"sometimes the Ambas also blow whistle to cause confusion so that they can escape since the community is now alert"*.¹⁵⁵ This makes it difficult for the community to know which is the correct signal to follow. Moreover, blowing the whistle reportedly put the lives of civilians at risk so now *"they don't use whistle."*¹⁵⁶ For example, in one community, one person was shot (luckily, he didn't die) *"because immediately he blew the whistle, they [military/separatists] were able to identify and trace where the sound was coming from, and they started shooting towards that direction"*.¹⁵⁷ As a result, such *"strategies change all the time"*¹⁵⁸ and may differ from community to community.

In addition to the whistles, other strategies for sound signals and alerts include gong beating, pots and bottles, as well as church bells. Civilians use any of these objects to *"notify people in case of any trouble"*.¹⁵⁹ With regards to gong beating, participants noted that this is often from the Chief's palace and when they hear the sound of the traditional gong especially at night or an odd hour, they *"find out why they are sounding it... because it is not something that is done*

all the time".¹⁶⁰ Because gong beating is rarely used, it sends a warning signal to the community members of a potential danger, enabling them to find ways of escaping impending attacks.

Similarly, participants noted that some communities also *"use pots, bottles and anything that can raise alarm, they just use it just to create noise"*.¹⁶¹ Other kitchen utensils such as the lids of pots are also used, even though there were concerns that going to the kitchen (which in most rural communities is an outhouse) late at night or in the heat of violence might be possibly dangerous.¹⁶² Furthermore, it was found that civilians also *"ring the church bell when they hear the military is approaching to avoid violence"*.¹⁶³ Like the others, the church bells are used as early warning signal to alert civilians.¹⁶⁴ Participants also mentioned that sometimes gun shots are equally used as sound signals. However, they emphasised that these are not used by civilians, but rather civilians use the gun shots from the military or the armed separatists as alerts for them to seek shelter or run.¹⁶⁵

Investigation and Rumour Control

As part of their early warning and response mechanisms, civilians in collaboration with their respective community-led nonviolent vigilante groups (discussed in the next

¹⁵⁵ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁵⁶ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

¹⁵⁷ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

¹⁵⁸ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁵⁹ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁶⁰ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

¹⁶¹ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁶² Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁶³ Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁶⁴ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁶⁵ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

section) also conduct investigation of incidences and rumours to confirm their reliability and credibility. In part, these investigations are precipitated by misinformation, rumours, and false alerts within communities. Participants noted that some alert information have been false or merely rumours. In an interview, one NGO participant shared the following:

*“There was a situation that happened in Kumba where someone just came on a bike and shouted, ‘They are coming’. The whole of Kumba was in commotion. You don’t know if it’s the military or the others. We locked up the office. Because our office in Kumba is directly opposite the police, the police also locked up their gate. I mean the police! They had almost 100 people requesting for ID cards, they sent them away that they should go due to the commotion”.*¹⁶⁶

The stampede caused by the above false rumour resulted in several casualties with a few civilians crushed to death.¹⁶⁷ Similar incidences happened in Buea and Limbe. In Limbe, it was said that a rumour led to parents rushing to pick up their children from school. And for two days, the whole town was shut down but nobody attacked the city. People slept in their shops for the two days with no food and water.¹⁶⁸ Evidently, such false information

and rumours play on civilians’ fears, sometimes leading to catastrophic ends.

Further, there were concerns of misinformation and disinformation around the whole conflict as the state and other actors politicise the conflict to their own benefit, and some *“people believe this and get harmed”*.¹⁶⁹ This not only makes finding solutions difficult but *“makes the whole thing really, really complex and those suffering are the civilian population”*.¹⁷⁰ When asked if fifty percent of alerts shared have been false, participants were reluctant to say and were unsure of the percentage of false information. However, some participants noted that *“about 70 percent of the information shared on social media [in particular] has been false”*.¹⁷¹ Thus, to control the false rumours and alerts, and misinformation, *“communities do their research on who the armed groups are...and also check the background of strangers”*¹⁷² in order to have trust in the information being disseminated.

5.2.3. Unarmed Vigilantism¹⁷³ and Regrouping

Our research participants referred quite frequently to ‘vigilante groups’. It became apparent that there are different forms of vigilante groups, both unarmed and armed. Some groups

¹⁶⁶ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁶⁷ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁶⁸ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁶⁹ Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

¹⁷⁰ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁷¹ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

¹⁷² Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁷³ While vigilantism is generally perceived and categorised under violent self-protection strategies by authors such as Jose and Media (2016), the case of Cameroon presents a new understanding of the term. Hence, vigilantism is used and perceived differently to connote communities forming watch groups which mainly use non-violent means to alert and protect fellow citizens of impending violence. Thus, in this study, vigilantism is not necessarily associated with violence, but can also be a non-violent protective strategy.

have emerged through community organisation in response to the threat of violence from warring parties and are generally unarmed. Others have been established by governmental authorities with a more specific role to report the movements of armed separatist groups to those authorities or directly to the military. These latter groups are mostly armed, either with traditional arms such as hunting rifles and machetes, or with more sophisticated arms provided by the military. While our interest is in unarmed groups, it is important to acknowledge the existence of the armed vigilantes, especially when both, despite their distinctiveness, are commonly referred to as 'vigilante groups'. This section however will focus primarily on the community-led unarmed vigilante groups while also making references to some findings on the armed vigilante groups.

In general, evidence from the study shows the rise of unarmed or nonviolent vigilantism across the two English speaking regions. Given the prevalence of violence perpetrated by the military, the separatists, and criminal gangs referred to as 'fake ambas', coupled with the lack of assistance from external actors, communities have mobilised vigilante groups, or what may be more appropriately called 'community watch groups', to provide protection through early warning and response. An excerpt from a poem from a North West resident noted such community self-organisation in his village:

"We formed vigilante groups for our protection, We blew vuvuzelas, whistles for our protection".¹⁷⁴

In an interview, another participant further expounded:

"The first measures that are put in place in most communities is what they call vigilante groups. These vigilante groups are made up of people in the same community who want peace and nonviolence.]. The vigilantes in most cases are unarmed, they are unarmed civilians who group themselves to prevent violence. You know the composition of these people is not trained. They are just people of good will from the community who will sit together and prevent violence in a way ... So, the vigilantes are most often unarmed. I mean they don't carry weapons like guns, they have sticks, and they have something that will make people to scare away not like the power to kill".¹⁷⁵

As noted in the above quotation, these groups are generally unarmed and nonviolent whose primary roles include undertaking nightly patrols to monitor access into their villages or quarters, and to alert residents of any incoming armed actors or criminals, as well as report any incidences to relevant authorities. This was reaffirmed by other participants who emphasised the non-violent nature of these community-led vigilante groups adding that they are formed to "monitor people who go in and out of the community, what they go in and out to do and what they carry in and out of

¹⁷⁴ Poem 7, North West Region resident

¹⁷⁵ Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

the community".¹⁷⁶ By monitoring and identifying strangers, potential criminals and armed actors and alerting the communities, these vigilante groups help to prevent civilians from being victims of violence.¹⁷⁷ It is imperative to note that strategies differ from community to community as *"there is no harmonized approach in all communities"*.¹⁷⁸ In other words, not all communities have unarmed vigilante groups, and if they do, there are possible variations of how they operate.

So how do these nonviolent vigilante groups operate? Participants noted that usually the unarmed vigilante groups operate at night (in some communities they may stay throughout the day) and are positioned at strategic points in the communities, including the entrance of the community or in derelict buildings. They keep watch in these strategic points, operating in shifts. Some members take their shift from the:

*"Early hours of the morning and change in about 2 to 3 hours shift. They change or swap, so immediately you see something, you quickly rush into the bush and start alerting other persons. Before you know it, it has gotten to the last person in the forest".*¹⁷⁹

This quote also indicates that vigilante groups are also active within the forest areas to enable those civilians living

in the bushes (due to violence in their communities) to keep moving further to find more secure and safe places. Most of the time, those living or hiding in the bushes are the women and children who cannot fight when their communities are attacked. The vigilante groups leave them (vulnerable groups) in the bushes and keep watch in the communities to alert them of impending violence or danger.

Sometimes the vigilante groups also respond to alerts from fellow civilians. In such instances, the civilians inform vigilante groups about the location of the armed groups: *"So they [vigilantes] hide out along paths waiting for the Boys [Ambas], then they immediately gather"*¹⁸⁰ around them. Participants added that, the vigilante groups can gather and capture the perpetrators because they (vigilantes) often outnumber the armed groups, who usually move in groups of three and use motorcycles. The vigilante groups climb the bikes, seize their arms, and take them to the nearest gendarme points.¹⁸¹ This is potentially dangerous for the vigilante groups as they are unarmed and *"a few of them have been killed"*.¹⁸²

What was equally evident from the study is that, while these community vigilante groups are generally neutral, their collaboration or links with government officials or the gendarme, as noted above, arguably compromises their impartiality, making them somewhat partisan. For instance, to avoid being wrongfully labelled as Amba Boys, after

¹⁷⁶ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

¹⁷⁷ Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

¹⁷⁸ Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

¹⁷⁹ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

¹⁸⁰ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁸¹ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁸² Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

the community forms the vigilante group, the quarter heads must inform:

"... the SDO [Senior Divisional Officer] who must go to the [regional] Governor. That's the only way. If not, they will say they are non-state armed groups who have come to cause chaos in the community, and they will be picked up and locked up and disappear".¹⁸³

It can be further argued that the collaboration with state institutions is needed as additional support system for these unarmed vigilante groups, which may be less equipped to deal with the perpetrators once they are captured. Another reason relates to a shift away from the armed separatists being seen as protectors (against the military), as initially was the case from 2017 onwards. As one poetry workshop participant stated:

"There is a gradual shift from seeing them [the Amba fighters] as redeemers to seeing them as demons. But that does not take away the fact that the war is a distraction which needs to be solved on the table".¹⁸⁴

This has led to a situation where some unarmed vigilante groups appear to have become more oriented to detecting the presence of the separatist groups, and to protecting their communities against them. This was referred to as a situation of 'regrouping', as noted by one interviewee:

"People are regrouping themselves in their various communities. That's a way in protecting themselves in order to say no to various activities like kidnapping and attacks from the [Amba] Boys".¹⁸⁵

"Some have established community alliances, so they ring bells to create awareness on what is going on in the community... they come out to identify these [Amba] Boys".¹⁸⁶

Others were of the view that this shift is a result of the military changing its operational strategy: whereas *"before they were violent, they have now become friendly and nice to communities and so they get information."*¹⁸⁷ As a result, these unarmed watch groups are often perceived negatively by the armed separatists, fearing that they were government-linked:

"The separatists thought that most of the vigilant groups were sponsored by the government. I have witnessed a situation in which vigilante members are taken to separatists' camps and beaten while a ransom was paid before they are freed".¹⁸⁸

While clearly unacceptable that unarmed civilians were subjected to such violence and extortion, the armed separatists' fears have heightened due to the emergence of the armed vigilante groups organised by government officials or local politicians from the ruling party, as noted above. This ambiguity about the nature of 'vigilante

¹⁸³ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁸⁴ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁸⁵ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁸⁶ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁸⁷ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

¹⁸⁸ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

groups' could be associated with the governments divide and rule strategy undermining trust not only among civilians but also the armed separatists.

Moreover, since these vigilante groups are unarmed, they often operate with most of the tools for early warning which were discussed in the previous sections including mobile phones, whistles, sticks and communicate in their local dialects. During the poetry workshop in Dschang, participants underscored:

"They only have whistles and sticks. They are for thieves and the protection of the community. Some of them have been beaten by the armed groups. The aim is to alert the population of any danger, whether from the military or armed groups. Torches are equally used to communicate".¹⁸⁹

The majority of the nonviolent vigilante groups are composed of young men within the community or quarter. As noted by one participant:

"Yes! All the men and youths spend sleepless nights outside. We had whistles and torches to indicate and alert for response".¹⁹⁰

Additionally, they are not comprehensively trained but are given basic training or guidelines on vigilantism. One participant explains:

"Vigilante groups get like battery for the torch, pullovers, and gloves for the night because they are not given any security training per se, but they have basic vigilante guide like being alert, but they are not armed... it is forbidden to have arms".¹⁹¹

As a community-led group, the formation of the vigilant group involves a consultation process with community members led by the quarter head/chief (who is responsible for the vigilantes). They sit together, discuss, and decide how the group would be run; encourage all able-bodied men of the community to participate; and every member of the community *"chip[s] in money to be able to support them to able to come out to protect the quarter"*.¹⁹²

Further, many participants affirmed the utility and benefit of the nonviolent vigilantes to their communities since their formation. To them, establishing these unarmed groups is a demonstration of their quest to protect themselves in the face of devastating violence and to be vigilant of the protection of their fellow civilians. Having these groups *"goes a long way to protect yourself, your family and even the community in which you are living"*.¹⁹³

To some extent, it could be argued that the existence of these nonviolent vigilante groups within communities serves as a protective presence for civilians. Although in general the notion of protective presence is often associated with the presence of international UCP

¹⁸⁹ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁹⁰ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

¹⁹¹ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

¹⁹² Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

¹⁹³ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

practitioners serving as protection to civilians (Oldenhuis et al, 2021), in the case of Cameroon, it is civilians serving as protective presence for their fellow civilians. As the foregoing demonstrates, the unarmed vigilante groups not only monitor the movements of armed groups and alert civilians of impending violence, but also their presence at strategic points in the communities and their different methods of interventions, such as blowing the whistle, prevents armed groups from attacking their communities enabling civilians to escape to safe locations thereby reducing violence against civilians.

While unarmed vigilantism has been an effective ‘early warning’ measure, it has clearly been complicated by the creation of armed vigilante groups and emerging trends in the conflict. Such challenges are discussed in more detail in section 7.2 below.

5.3. Preventive Measures

Preventive measures focus on strategies adopted by civilians to prevent attacks and violence from the military or the armed separatists. These measures include staying indoors, neutrality, dressing appropriately, disguise, and relocation, as discussed below.

5.3.1. Staying Indoors

To ensure civilian safety and protection across communities, emphasis was placed on avoiding unnecessary movement; paramount of which

is staying indoors. Indeed, this was noted as one of the main preventive measures employed by civilians to protect themselves and their families. Research participants affirmed that *“one of the ways of protection is that we were always indoors and hardly went outside.”*¹⁹⁴ Hence,, for many Anglophone affected communities, there is the believe that *“the walls are our source of protection”*.¹⁹⁵ Due to the complexity of not knowing who the separatists are, and when or where attacks would emerge, staying indoors has become an essential protective mechanism for civilians.¹⁹⁶

Civilians employ ‘staying indoors’ as a preventive measure in three ways or situations. First is during the heat of violence. Participants expressed that when there are violent clashes between the warring factions or invasion of their communities, they stay indoors to prevent being killed or hit by stray bullets. In a drawing workshop, one participant highlighted:

*“In terms of human safety, they always find it in the house because it is a committed area, and they will just be in their houses for safety. When the shootings are reduced then they can come out. So, they provide the safety by themselves”.*¹⁹⁷

In an interview, another participant underscored that when there is gunshot in his community *“I stay put, I don’t go out”*.¹⁹⁸ Staying indoors is highly emphasised among the young and the old. As indicated by one research

¹⁹⁴ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

¹⁹⁵ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

¹⁹⁶ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

¹⁹⁷ Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

¹⁹⁸ Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

participant: *“Like I earlier said, the elderly are just advised to stay at home”*.¹⁹⁹

Attacks on properties and farms has also meant that farmers are forced to stay indoors for their own safety. Participants elaborated:

“Yes, also farms have been attacked, properties have been attacked, crops also have been attacked. So, you see that nowadays a lot of people no longer go to the farms like they used to go... And you find that instead of going out into the very remote areas to farm, people are now using their immediate environment to do farming, to cultivate... A lot of people now want to do farming around their homes”.²⁰⁰

While farmers are staying indoors and resorting to backyard/subsistence farming for their protection, it also has implications for their livelihoods, with income levels reduced due to lack of largescale harvests for commercial purposes. Similarly, children are sometimes home schooled to prevent being caught in possible violent attacks at school. A participant noted:

“Some even have to be taught at home because the parents are afraid to send their children to school. So, those are some of these security measures that were taken”.²⁰¹

Secondly, during lockdowns, often imposed by armed separatists, participants admitted to staying indoors to avoid being killed or attacked:

“When they say tomorrow there is lockdown, we have to stay at home, anybody who wants to go out honestly, I will not allow it to happen”.²⁰²

Thirdly, civilians have adopted ‘self-imposed curfews’ to restrict their movements at night. There was a general view among research participants that the night is when violent attacks occur,²⁰³ so most civilians in affected communities “avoid moving at night”.²⁰⁴ This they highlighted has “become the new normal in this place, you see people no longer keep late nights”.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, 6pm has become the ‘self-imposed curfew’ across most communities. As one participant elucidated:

“Another point is that you should avoid strolling and going out after 6pm. This is like a self-imposed curfew. You need to stay indoors from that time because it has been noticed that people who go out after this time do not return”.²⁰⁶

Churches and other social gatherings equally close early for the protection and safety of attendees. In a drawing workshop, a participant underscored:

199 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

200 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

201 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

202 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

203 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

204 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

205 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

206 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

*“Because of this, you discover that most churches now no longer close late. At first, they could have their programmes and even go to church and close at 8:00 o’clock [pm]. But now you find out that people want to be home, so they no longer exceed 6:00 pm. They have to take that security measure to be safe”.*²⁰⁷

Participants were equally quick to emphasise that failing to comply with the self-imposed curfew, particularly by those who have been provided shelter by fellow civilians, is not acceptable as it puts others at risk.²⁰⁸

5.3.2. Avoiding Suspicious and Dangerous Locations

Linked to staying indoors, participants also expressed that avoiding dangerous locations, or what they refer to as “hot areas”,²⁰⁹ is another way for staying clear of violence. As elaborated by one interviewee:

*“They avoid being in places where it can easily attract attention like bars, ...because those are places where the military or the non-state armed groups usually attack easily or come to look for who they are looking for”.*²¹⁰

Aside from bars, other dangerous locations include main roads, used at times by armed groups to attack civilians.²¹¹ For young girls in particular,

avoiding ‘hot areas’ is emphasised to prevent sexual violence, as highlighted in the narrative below:

*“For the girls who are exposed to rape, we advise them to stay alert. Like I just described about them minding the kind of clothes they wear, where they go to, with whom they are going, and at what time. So they have to consider all these things”.*²¹²

In addition to avoiding ‘hot areas’, communities also avoid group gatherings, such as where “boys used to stand in those days at the entrance of their quarters to gist about quarter issues. Don’t be together in a group, you will be mistaken for people planning to go for a mission.”²¹³

5.3.3. Neutrality and Protective Silences

Neutrality is one of the major preventive measures of unarmed self-protection underscored by the research participants in Cameroon. The notion of neutrality is an agelong ethos embedded in political liberalism and international law and it is used by many organisations and institutions inclusive of the UN, AU, EU and INGOs to demonstrate impartiality in cases of conflict especially when facilitating mediation, peace negotiation, and other conflict intervention strategies (Macdonald and Birdi, 2020; Huijbers, 2017). In Cameroon, neutrality is a crucial unarmed self-protection strategy for many affected civilians and communities. During a poetry session, participants affirmed:

207 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

208 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

209 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

210 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

211 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

212 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

213 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

“The resolution to remain neutral is another degree of protection... Many have been harmed because of what is said and so we discovered that neutrality is important for everyone”.²¹⁴

Taking sides or suspected to be taking sides with either of the warring factions, puts civilian lives at risk of violent attacks, resulting in the growing utility of neutrality amongst the civilian population. This includes being calm and even-handed in encounters with both warring parties, as an interviewee expounded:

“Yes, they know that I was harassed, so to protect yourself you must be neutral. You don’t have to [take a] side. You need to be friendly to both, meaning that when you get into a control [road checkpoint], you must control your temper and prove that you like them. I have about three colleagues who died in the field because they were caught walking in the field with some government documents”.²¹⁵

The relevance of neutrality was further affirmed in a poem:

Say No to Armed Conflict

During the period of armed conflicts in our country
I have witnessed a lot of killing and bloodshed
Which has brought untold suffering to human life
On the community especially the vulnerable ones.

I have seen many innocent civilians being killed
Some raped and treated badly as if they are not human beings
As a notable community leader, I have devoted myself as a volunteer
To raise awareness sessions on protection concerns
And the dangers of arms on human beings
I also talk to community members
About the need for neutrality to stay safe from harm
And also stop violence in any form.

I quote one Pa Samantha in 2018
Who was saved from the hands of the military
Because after thorough investigation he was found neutral
Say no to armed conflicts
Neutrality is the way out for civilians.

Local measures are many and varied
Be law abiding, avoid illicit drug consumption,
Be independent so you can cope with challenges.

Poem 5: Say No to Armed Conflict²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²¹⁵ Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

²¹⁶ Poetry workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

From the findings, neutrality as protection in the context of the Anglophone conflict is demonstrated in three interconnected ways. The first is citizens' mindfulness or cautiousness around what they say or their opinions about the conflict in relation to the warring parties. For many, the best approach is *"don't talk, don't get involved, don't have an opinion"*.²¹⁷ They believe that having an opinion or talking too much increases the risk of being labelled as *"blacklegs either for the military or the non-state armed groups"*.²¹⁸ Therefore, for Anglophone Cameroonians, it is very important to *"watch your tongue; be careful where you sit and discuss and be careful with whom you talk to as well"*.²¹⁹ to avoid being targeted by the warring factions; and ultimately to *"protect themselves"*.²²⁰

The second is avoiding any form of physical contact (visible) with either side of the warring parties. This involves avoiding being seen, walking, talking, or fraternising with the armed separatists or the military. One participant highlighted:

"Another point that they tried to manage is also making sure that they are not a victim by being seen with any of the parties, so they try to be as neutral as possible in order that they don't get tagged as being those who are taking sides".²²¹

In other words, affected civilians and communities often avoid instances where *"they [fellow civilians] always see you with the military or they always see you with the armed group"*.²²² Civilians who are seen to be talking or fraternising with the warring parties, compromises their neutrality and risk being attacked.

The third manifestation is silence. In the two English speaking regions, findings demonstrate that individual and collective silences have become the new norm for the majority of the population. To put in another way, in Anglophone Cameroon, silence is employed as preventive unarmed protective strategy. In an interview, a research participant explained:

"One of the protection mechanisms is silence. Because if you ask why this person did this you are a 'blackleg', and they need to question you. If you question the police, you are an Ambazonian [Amba]... Yes, know nothing, do nothing, say nothing, just be a passive receiver of actions".²²³

As illustrated above, silence as protection or 'protective silences' are used by civilians to navigate their everyday experiences of threats and violence. Silence, as Mannergren (2020) notes, *"is never 'nothing'"*. It has the potential to be constructive and not always negative or destructive. Beville and McQuaid (2012: 2) highlight the complex duality of silence describing the concept as both *"purposeful or one that is forced..."*

217 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

218 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

219 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

220 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

221 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

222 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

223 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

[and] invokes the problematics of both empowerment and disempowerment.”

As rightly put by these authors, and in the case of Cameroon, although protective silence may emerge out of fear and may demonstrate passivity, apathy, or even powerlessness, it is also a strategic tactic used by civilians to prevent and avoid violent attacks and threats. During a drawing workshop, a research participant elaborated:

“So, some of those security measures include being quiet, being silent, not being able to talk... Now another thing I have observed is a culture of silence... We used to make jokes that Bamenda people when we enter taxis or buses, we usually solve family problems, we talk about everything. It’s like meetings in taxis and public transport. But that has really reduced with the phenomenon of ‘blacklegs’... Because you have people talk about things in taxis and the next day you hear they were shot or killed or kidnapped. There has been a culture of silence... people just keep to themselves because you don’t know who is who”.²²⁴

Navigating the perilous environment in the conflict-affected regions where civilians are constantly caught in a bind and face diverse forms of violence, speaking up or using one’s voice is not always the best strategy to protect oneself. The growing phenomenon of ‘blacklegs’ and its related consequences of deaths and kidnapping, as highlighted in the above quotes, is a case in point. Hence the culture of silence.

Our findings concur with the research by Blomqvist, Olivius and Hedström (2021) on the agency of silence in women’s everyday peacebuilding in Myanmar. Their findings emphasise that silence should not be perceived merely a sign of weakness, but a form of agency used by women to navigate their everyday experiences in Myanmar. They note that *“to live, or simply survive, in a precarious post-war context might require silence as a means for not only smoothing out social relations, but for avoiding tensions and violence”* (Blomqvist et al., 2021: 225-233). Equally, the recent work of Allouche et al. (2023: 216) on ‘Breaking the Culture of Silence and Women’s Protection Groups in North and South Kivu’ in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) points to such findings where silence is not only a source of insecurity but also a “strategic choice and constitute a form of protection”. Such findings are like Cameroon where affected civilians use silences to prevent attacks, arrests, and violence against themselves, their families, and the community.

It is relevant to note that silence as a form of protection in conflict-affected societies is hardly explored in the broader peace and conflict literature. Most of the research on the utility or disadvantages of silence has often drawn from or focused on the feminist perspectives and discipline such as those of Blomqvist et al (2021), Corey (2021), Jones (1991), and Parpart (2020), to name a few. While the work of these authors largely focuses on feminine/feminist silences, our research demonstrates that protective silence is not only used by women, but also by men to protect themselves in times of conflict and violence. As noted by a research participant: *“like every other*

²²⁴ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

man, they [women] choose to be silent about certain things so that they are protected".²²⁵ Thus, our research, to the best of our knowledge, presents a contribution to the broader peace and conflict literature on the utility of silence as protection in conflict-affected societies. Further research on silences in conflict-affected spaces would be an added value.

Moreover, the different manifestations of neutrality, although a protective mechanism, has implication for trust and social relations, given that it unveils distrust and suspicions within communities. As one research participant expressed: *"I even know those who don't have relationships because they don't want to be caught like your boyfriend is this and you find yourself being beaten and exposed and all of that".²²⁶*

5.3.4. Dressing Appropriately

Dressing appropriately is another preventive measure. Participants noted that dressing in line with the appropriate 'dress code' has become an important strategy used by civilians to prevent exposure to violence:

"To protect yourself from the Ambas is to do as they say, while that of the military is to dress well... Also you need to dress well for instance if there is a fight between the Amba and the military I cannot be suspected due to the way I'm dressed".²²⁷

Dressing and appearances of civilians have been particularly problematised and securitized by the military since the start of the conflict, forcing many to *"dress decently and neatly"²²⁸, to avoid harassment and attacks.* Young men are the main targets. They are labelled as 'Amba boys' (armed separatists) based on the way they dress. One interviewee admitted that *"boys who had dreads and dressed shabby have changed because the military usually make assumptions that they are Ambas".²²⁹* To avoid such labelling and accompanied violence, young men have begun dressing appropriately, including shaving, looking kempt, wearing smart clothes, while also avoiding dreadlocks, or wearing 'tchang' [rubber sandals] shoes.²³⁰ Doing this prevents them from being:

"...easily mistaken for an Amba, because a lot of people have lost their lives like that, just by mistaken identity, others have been arrested locked up, others are still locked up till date".²³¹

However, dressing well is equally presumed as a sign of 'wealth' which makes civilians vulnerable to other violence such as kidnapping. To avoid this, civilians live and dress in ways that downplay their wealth or economic standing. One of the participants noted: *"Also this attitude of dressing, when you dress so much these Ambas think you are very wealthy, so it is good to live a low-key life".²³²* It was indicated that in Bamenda, for example, many people are

225 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

226 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

227 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

228 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

229 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

230 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

231 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

232 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

more modest and less ostentatious in their dress so as not to appear wealthy; to do otherwise is to risk becoming a victim of kidnapping for ransom.²³³

Further, young women and girls are also targeted by the way they dress by the warring factions. In contrast to young men, young women and girls are encouraged to dress “*shabby for protection*”. This is further explained in the narration below:

*“Women will not do their hair because sometimes when you are raped, they say you asked for it. When you do your hair, you look good, you put on something short. They [other women] say you don’t do that, you should tie a scarf and wear Kaba, just try to be shabby for protection. What is the sense of dressing good, and you need to give your ID card and they [soldiers] need to take your phone number and call you and threaten you that if you don’t have a relationship with me, I know your children, I know your this, so you need to really go underground”.*²³⁴

Tying a scarf or wearing Kaba is a traditionally accepted way of dressing in the majority of rural communities in Cameroon, and other places across Africa. Therefore, as implied by the above quotation, to stay safe and protected from sexual violence, especially rape, young women must restrict themselves to traditionally acceptable ways of dressing, which arguably also limits their freedom of choice.

Interestingly, what can also be gleaned from the above narratives is that while women are forced to dress ‘shabby for protection’, young men avoid dressing shabby for protection from the military. This presents a contrast in the dress codes and norms for women and men in the conflict affected regions. Ultimately, by refusing to follow these dress codes or norms, “*you don’t have a life, you reserve yourself to just struggling to be safe*”.²³⁵

5.3.5. Disguise

Disguise is a term generally defined as the act of changing one’s appearance or usual character to conceal your true identity (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). In Cameroon, disguise is used, similar to ‘appropriate dressing’, as a form of nonviolent self-protection. In a storytelling workshop, a participant recounted his experiences:

*“We got a new concept where we do a lot of disguises in our dressing. For instance, maybe I’m a government worker and I am moving from here to Kumbo, I disguise like an old woman, and I mask up. And even while traveling they [armed separatists] came in our vehicle and they looked inside. The other young people who were smartly dressed were removed out of the vehicle and I was kept there, and I continued to keep myself in that mood. There were even some elderly people who were older than me, but they removed all of them, placed them on the tar and started beating them. I was just praying. So, disguising in terms of your dressing is some of the ways that some of us are already practicing”.*²³⁶

233 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

234 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

235 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

236 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

Jenkins and Noyes (2019) describe this form of disguise as ‘evasion disguise’ where an individual tries not to appear as him or herself. Evasion disguise has been used as protection in other conflict settings. In 2011, a United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (UN OHCHR) ‘Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring’ underscored that in the Democratic Republic of Congo, to meet a witness hiding in a market at Goma, an international human rights officer dressed in local garb and interacted in local language to disguise her appearance in order to make their meeting less visible, ultimately to protect the witness (UN OHCHR, 2011). The contrast here is that, whereas disguise was used by an international actor to protect a civilian, in Cameroon, it is an improvised form of self-protection used by civilians to protect themselves. Arguably, such type of disguise as highlighted in the quote above can also be linked to the phenomenon of dressing ‘shabby for protection’ highlighted in the previous section.

Dressing was not the only form of disguise highlighted by participants. Professionals and government workers, such as teachers and veterinarians, were noted to obtain a second unofficial identification (ID) card as a form of disguise to protect themselves, given that their profession put them in danger from the armed separatists. One research participant noted during the storytelling workshop:

*“Some of us are moving with double ID cards. I got some other things [documents] printed that doesn’t have the Cameroon flag on it. So, when they [armed separatists] come, it’s like she’s not using the Cameroon type and they allow you [to pass]. Because on the other one [official Cameroon ID] I am a veterinarian, [but] it’s not written there as veterinarian, it’s just empty... As soon as they see a teacher, a government worker, you are in danger. So, we disguise ourselves with some of these things to protect ourselves especially during traveling”.*²³⁷

Further, school children were noted to use forms of disguise as a way of protection. Approaches used by those in government schools differ from those in community schools. For government schools, where separatist groups have demanded closure, children avoid wearing school uniforms as a protective measure. As noted by a research participant:

*“Where schools were attacked, children were attacked and because of this some measures were taken. For example, right now in Bamenda they go to school without uniforms. Children have to go to school without uniforms for such security measures”.*²³⁸

In contrast, those in community schools are made to “put on specific uniforms so that they are easily identified by the schools and communities to easily protect them”.²³⁹ Women’s groups were also noted to avoid wearing organisational clothing to protect themselves from identification with a civil society group and therefore possible kidnapping.²⁴⁰

²³⁷

²³⁸ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²³⁹ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁴⁰ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

5.3.6. Relocation

Another preventive unarmed protection strategy is relocation. It was noted that with the increasing violence, civilians often relocate or migrate to neighbouring or more distant communities as a form of protection. In a drawing session, a participant noted:

*“You see people abandoning their homes and moving, migrating, to other areas, for security or safety, and they move now into maybe less comfortable or overpopulated areas. So, one of those security measures that they took is that they migrated from the places where they were staying to other places where maybe they are not really known, they cannot be attacked”.*²⁴¹

In an interview, another participant added:

*“The first common strategy is displacement. That is people move out of that area and try to seek safety somewhere else. So, every angle in this town is a potential host community for people who have fled from their own area... That is basically what they do, it is common sense”.*²⁴²

As implied in the above extract, displacement is not necessarily a negative impact of the conflict but also a protection strategy. Arguably, displacement can be a source of protection and vulnerability at the same time (Mooney, 2016). This is true, at least

in the case of the Anglophone conflict, where in the heat of violence coupled with no external assistance, civilians use displacement or relocation as a strategic choice to protect themselves while simultaneously saddled with its consequences.

Similarly, children are relocated by their families to protect them from violence: *“Some people removed their children from the conflict zone and sent them where there is no conflict”.*²⁴³ For example, some have moved their families from Muyuka (conflict zone) to Douala (safe francophone zone). Given the prevalence of sexual violence in the conflict, communities relocate girls at puberty, children, and wives to safe zones²⁴⁴ as a preventive measure including from unwanted pregnancies. As shared by participants, in some communities:

*“They have men who also sent out their wives and their children because you had families too who their wives were raped... So we have villages that the men decided to remove all their wives and their girl children and send them out”.*²⁴⁵

Moreover, survivors of sexual violence are also relocated to safer places as a protective measure and as part of trauma healing support. Relocating the survivors can help in their trauma recovery *“because sometimes when they are in the place where it [SGBV] occurred, it gives them a fresh, memory of the occurrence, and it’s difficult for them to come out of the trauma. Yes,*

241 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

242 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

243 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

244 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

245 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

to a safer space”.²⁴⁶ Although the use of relocation as a protective measure in this case often occurs after the incidence of sexual violence, it however becomes a preventive mechanism against further mental or psychological deterioration of the affected civilian.

Evidence also showed that hospitals are relocated to safer communities to prevent further attacks on civilians and the facilities. This was raised by a research participant:

*“The Shisong hospital was moved to Douala. That was something that came about because of the crisis as people could no longer move into the hospital freely so the hospital was moved and transferred”.*²⁴⁷

While the relocation of the hospital is highlighted as a preventive protective measure, it is not clear whether the decision to relocate was made by the hospital itself, or by the government. Additionally, it was not clear how the relocation of the hospital impacted civilians’ access to healthcare, especially if it is very far from the affected community.

Linked to relocation, civilians have also created safe passages and escape routes within their communities. They use these passages to relocate and flee from violent attacks by the military and the armed separatists. Participants noted:

*“Safe passages have equally been organized which ease movements during hideouts. We have many roads in between houses which take one another to safe zones”.*²⁴⁸

These safe passages enable civilians to travel through the bush to a “totally different place or town” and are “created by civilians for their safety”²⁴⁹. They have evolved organically over time created out of the usual shortcut routes used by farmers and other community members to go to the bush or to neighbouring communities. They can be footpaths or roads beside and behind houses in the community. As further explained by participants:

*“Most of the civilians are farmers who use short cuts to go to their farms, so these roads were safe passages during the conflict because the military men are from different communities. Civilians escape their communities to live in these farmhouses”.*²⁵⁰

Relocating civilians can be accompanied by some challenges. A case in point is Ngoketunjia community in the North West Region where the men (mostly Muslims) were attacked by the armed separatists for relocating their young girls. According to participants, when the separatists invaded the village:

*“The men got terribly beaten, asking where they have sent all their girls, yes, they tortured them well [because] there was virtually no girl, no woman... They [civilians] were preventing their children and their wives from being sexually violated”.*²⁵¹

246 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

247 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

248 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

249 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

250 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

251 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

5.3.7. Adherence to Rules and Payment of Taxes

*“Don’t resist them. Obey to protect yourself”.*²⁵²

The above quotation emphasises the importance of adhering to and respecting rules and instructions imposed by warring parties in the affected communities. During the study, many participants noted that adhering to and respecting rules is an important protective strategy. They noted that:

*“Some of the strategies that the community people use is to respect instructions. If they [armed separatists] say ‘it’s a ghost town don’t move’, they [civilians] don’t move. If they say ‘there’s an event taking place don’t move’, they don’t move. So they respect instructions... Follow orders and you are safe, that’s the highest”.*²⁵³

Indeed, obeying rules imposed by the armed separatists particularly around lockdowns were emphasised by many participants:

*“I want to talk about respect of our lockdowns and our ghost towns because it is already becoming a culture to us. That is one of the ways we can protect ourselves on such days. Everywhere is just quiet and that is why those who don’t follow the instructions expose themselves to stray bullets and all those rapes and all those kinds of things. So we respect our ghost towns and our lockdowns. That is one of the ways we protect ourselves and our community”.*²⁵⁴

The strategy of lockdowns or ‘ghost town’ days was initially employed in 2016 and 2017 by the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium as part of its nonviolent resistance following the strikes and protests by lawyers and teachers. Since then, the armed separatists have instrumentalised this strategy to control the population and engage in counter-attacks against the military. Thus, ‘ghost towns’ have become normalised in the Anglophone regions and civilians who fail to obey can be targeted or caught in crossfire between the conflicting parties. As noted by one participant in an interview:

*“If they call for a lockdown or maybe there is shooting going on somewhere you are bound to stay put, you don’t go and expose yourself to all of that. There is obviously no need for you to go out if there is a lockdown... So when such happens you just have to respect because if you don’t respect you might expose yourself to further harm... If they call for any lockdowns for ghost town, respect them”.*²⁵⁵

There are ‘ghost town’ days every Monday. For civilians with businesses, obeying lockdown rules is not to only protect themselves but also their business and ultimately their sources of income. In other words, *“they follow the lockdown procedures in fear so that they do not lose their businesses”.*²⁵⁶ In line with the above quote, participants added that in places such as Bamenda, there are some goods that have been banned (from selling) by the armed separatists, for

252 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

253 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

254 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023 [Coverage]

255 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

256 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

example French beer: *“When they say you should not sell them and you do, you endanger yourself”*.²⁵⁷

In addition to respecting lockdowns, civilians also adhere to the payment of taxes and fees imposed by both warring parties. Such payments are problematic and essentially a form of extortion that civilians adhere to in order to protect themselves and avoid the violent consequences of not doing so. Separatist-imposed taxes and fees include market taxes, park and loading fees, roadside checkpoint fees, as well as the ‘personal tax’ or ‘Ambazonia Liberation Tax’ instituted by the different armed groups. The ‘liberation tax’ was initially instituted by the Ambazonia Defence Forces (ADF), one of the largest separatist groups led by Ayaba Cho Lucas, as a way of generating funds for the struggle. Civilians generally pay the personal/liberation tax, albeit unwillingly in many cases. As outlined by one participant:

“An armed group that is prevalent in a community comes in and gives rules. No one is getting up to retaliate. They just succumb because they want peace. For example, they [armed separatists] say from now henceforth every woman will pay a tax of 3000 [CFA] francs and every man a tax of 5000 francs, you can’t argue. To have your peace you pay and show your receipts and go about your activities in the community”.²⁵⁸

On the other hand, the market tax and the park and loading fees, originally collected by the state, have been taken

over by the armed separatists demanding weekly and monthly payments from business and vehicle owners. Participants shared that:

“You discover that most at times these people want to pay these people off. They’re taking like a security measure; they try to pay them off for their security. Like if I have to transfer fuel into the city of Bamenda, I have to find a way to pay or do something”.²⁵⁹

The roadside checkpoint fees are imposed by both state forces and the armed separatists, forcing civilians to pay before accessing the roads. The fees can start from relatively small amounts of 500 CFA francs upwards. Generally, the taxes could increase to 10,000 CFA francs (\$17) for men and 5,000 (\$8) for women as per the case reported in Big Babanki in the North West in May 2023 (France 24 News, 2023). These taxes or fees are applicable to everyone, and while often a fixed amount, they are also subject to change depending on the mood of the military or armed separatists. Failure to pay them could result in diverse consequences including burning of shops, markets, looting, and kidnapping.

Linked to payment of taxes is an emerging trend which participants refer to as ‘appeasement’. They noted that sometimes institutions are equally forced to pay money to the warring parties to prevent attacks:

“Another mechanism I have observed is that of appeasement. I think they have mentioned it but in different words, where people have actually

257 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

258 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

259 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

given money to some of these generals in exchange for their safety. Not only people, even institutions. I do remember that, because I'm a student at the University of Bamenda, and one thing that happened I think between the periods of 2018 and 2020, we seldom had attacks on campus. But in 2021 academic year, I do remember there were 2 or 3 times I had to sleep on the floor for over three hours at school because these guys came and attacked. The word on the ground is that normally every academic year, the Vice Chancellor and other people in charge do some sort of appeasement to these Ambazonian fighters. But that particular academic year they didn't, no they did it, but there are so many factions. So, these ones who attacked were a different faction that money was not given to. So there was some sort of, it's a way of retaliating. So, to prevent such, some institutions and individuals and families do appeasement. But it goes both ways, goes to the Ambazonia fighters, goes to the military".²⁶⁰

5.3.8. Ransoms and Protection Money

In wartime, given the increase in crimes and violence, civilians can be forced to pay ransoms as a strategic means to ensure their protection (Jose and Medie, 2016), especially in kidnap situations. Civilians pay protection money (also protection payments) for the same reason (Suarez, 2017). Protection payment is considered as an “*ad hoc payment for protection only*” (Buba, 2023: 3) in a conflict situation. The case of the

Anglophone conflict in Cameroon is no exception. Civilians were found to pay protection money to either side of the conflicting parties, to prevent and avoid violence as well as ensure their own protection.

Making protection payments is common as many civilians are forced, often driven by fear of kidnapping or other forms of violence, to pay money either to the military or armed separatists to secure their protection and that of fellow civilians. Participants shared experiences of paying protection money and ransoms to secure the release of family or community members. In a poetry workshop a participant shared:

“A group of armed men had come to kidnap a neighbour, but those around interjected, and they left him. Indeed, they did not know the man. After negotiations, 10000 CFA was given and he was free”.²⁶¹

Sometimes, communities mobilise money to pay the ransom of fellow citizens to secure their release. They do so through fundraising with contributions from “*community members and the family members ... so this is the preventive method we take after our people are being kidnapped and our cattle being taken*”.²⁶²

In general, ransoms and the payment of protection money were found to be an ineffective protective strategy as it creates a vicious cycle which only benefits the perpetrators. Participants emphasised that:

²⁶⁰ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁶¹ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁶² Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

"It doesn't really help because, it's like a cycle, they end up abducting people and ransoms being paid. But after the ransom is given or cattle are given, they continue coming. So, a ransom is not an effective protection mechanism. It's not an effective way... Its peaceful but it's a cycle, it repeats itself all the time".²⁶³

Thus, though demanding ransoms was generally perceived by Anglophone civilians as an exploitative mechanism by the warring factions, succumbing to such demands and paying ransoms can be a necessary strategy for their safety and protection. The findings however also show that the civilians do not consider protection payments and ransoms as sustainable protection strategies. This is consistent with the findings of Buba (2023: 12) who argues that protection payments can exacerbate violence against civilians.

5.3.9. Travelling with Relevant Documentation

In Cameroon, identification documentations, especially identity cards (IDs), are very important. They are critical requirement for employment, mobility and general access to state-funded social services. In the context of the Anglophone conflict, since the deployment of the Rapid Intervention Battalion or 'Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide' (BIR) in 2017, there have been many checkpoints mounted in the two English-speaking regions, both by the military and the armed separatists, often demanding proof of identification

and other documentation. Civilians who fail to show their documentation or IDs are vulnerable to violence at the hands of both warring parties. A research participant noted this during a drawing workshop:

"Another thing is identification. I think this one of the most important, I think among youth, if you are walking around without your ID card it's over for you".²⁶⁴

Civilians are often subjected to intimidation, torture, extortion, and unlawful detention for lack of proper documentation. Hence, to protect themselves, civilians travel with their ID cards and other documents, as well as encourage their fellow citizens to do so, as part of their preventive protective strategies. As highlighted by a research participant: *"When moving around the community, we move along with identification papers to avoid issues with both parties".²⁶⁵* In an interview, another participant advised: *"Always move with your identification documents...and if we have to move, we ensure that all our documents are intact".²⁶⁶*

What is deemed proper or relevant documentation is sometimes at the discretion of the military or the armed separatists. The latter are against Anglophone citizens using the ID cards from 'La Republique' (Cameroon) hence, they can subject civilians using Cameroonian ID cards to intimidation and violence. In sharing his story, one participant underscored:

²⁶³ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁶⁴ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁶⁵ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁶⁶ Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

"I was traveling from Kumbo to Bamenda. It was in 2018 precisely December. We took a bike to Jakiri..., and the guys who were on this road at that time were all Ambas... I bumped into their checkpoint in the quarter. So this guy [Amba] told me I should settle the road [tax]. So, I removed the money I had and gave them 500 [CFA] francs..... He said I should bring out my ID card and I brought it out. He removed a knife to cut, and I said please don't cut the ID. He said if I talk, he will shoot me, and I said he will cut it over my dead body and this money I have given you... He removed the gun and pointed it at my forehead and said he will shoot me".²⁶⁷

This is the reality for most Anglophone civilians in the two regions. As a result, some of them have begun travelling with dual IDs, one for the military and the other for the armed separatists, as also highlighted in section 5.3.5. To avoid intimidation, one participant shared that:

"Those of us who are retired teachers we are moving with double identity cards for the Ambas and the military, and you make sure that whenever you are traveling, you put them in different pockets. When I was traveling to Kumbo, the Amba fighters took my ID and cut it and warned me that if next time they see me with it I am going to be killed. I came back and decided to pick the other half because if I meet the military people, it would be another issue. So now I use the two. That is one of the measures that I take to protect myself because if you don't have this you will not pass anywhere with control".²⁶⁸

Similar experiences were shared by other participants, noting that armed separatists cut the Cameroon flag off their IDs forcing them to use double IDs: *"So now when I meet the military, I show my ID with the flag, and when I meet the Amba Boys, I show the one without the flag".²⁶⁹*

Professionals including government workers, teachers and veterinarians in particular were noted to obtain a second unofficial identification (ID) card to protect themselves, given that their profession put them in danger from the armed separatists. One research participant noted during the storytelling workshop:

"Some of us are moving with double ID cards. I got some other things [documents] printed that doesn't have the Cameroon flag on it. So, when they [armed separatists] come, it's like she's not using the Cameroon type and they allow you [to pass]. Because on the other one [official Cameroon ID] I am a veterinarian, [but] it's not written there as veterinarian, it's just empty... As soon as they see a teacher, a government worker, you are in danger. So, we disguise ourselves with some of these things to protect ourselves especially during traveling".²⁷⁰

ID cards are not the only documents civilians have to travel with to protect themselves. Some noted the use of hospital/medical books or records and financial documents. For example, one participant explained how travelling with his 'hospital book' helped prevent violence from the warring factions:

267 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

268 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

269 Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

270 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

"Let me share another story. I left Bamenda and I was traveling to Nkambe. I usually just travel with my medical documents and hospital book. I got to a control [checkpoint] because I have problem with my leg. The military suspected me that I must be one of those [Amba] who have just been shot. I tried to explain to them, but they called me to come and sit down and I said I can justify with my hospital book. I had to remove it and show them that I have had it since 2007. That helped me to pass the control. When I got to the Amba control, they also said I am a military man that was shot so I had to explain and show my documents to them. I learned a lesson from then and I always tell my family members that if you are traveling take your hospital book.... If I did not have this card maybe the military would have finished [detained or killed] with me before the Amba control".²⁷¹

5.3.10. Confidence and Self-composure

Confidence or self-composure is another unarmed protective strategy. As noted by participants in the storytelling workshop in Dschang: *"The greatest thing that is saving people is self-composure".²⁷²* Demonstrating confidence and self-composure when interrogated by the military or the armed separatists is important. Participants believe that the warring factions tend to react negatively to panic. One participant shared his experience:

"I was in Bamenda with a friend. We decided to go to Fonja Street and take his [car battery] charger. So we left in the private car. While going I told him that now that we are in the midst of conflicts its best to use the main road rather than short cuts. But he insisted that we should use this road. So while going we ran into a fight. There was serious shooting between the Amba and the military... Six civilians were killed. When the shooting stopped, the military asked us to go. But we were stuck there because of the car battery, so I had to go down and push the car. As I was walking towards the car, the military saw me and so they called for me. I was very brave. They asked who I was, so I explained myself. If I was panicking, I could be shot".²⁷³

Another participant recounted his experience:

"The second thing is that you don't panic. That is the approach we have been using and what we advice others to do. No matter the situation, you don't argue. Feel free as if you are in your house, and when they ask you a question, you need to answer directly. Those are the measures that we usually used and we have advised family and friends to do and it works. ... It will help you so much because when you panic to them you are a suspect, so that is already a strategy".²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

²⁷² Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

²⁷³ Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

²⁷⁴ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

5.3.11. Rebuilding Social Cohesion

Social cohesion in the Anglophone regions has been severely affected due to the conflict. According to participants, *“there is a lot of limitations as far as trusting each other is concerned and then it comes to make [social] cohesion very difficult because each family makes themselves different and unique.”*²⁷⁵ Put differently, the growing lack of trust among civilians due to suspicions and displacements have severed social cohesion within and among families, friends, and communities. Consequently, the lack of trust has further heightened insecurities. As noted by one participant: *“there is no trust within communities and families. The lack of trust leads to insecurity.”*²⁷⁶ A case in point is the phenomenon of ‘blacklegs’ which has led to some civilians losing their lives. A “girl was beheaded because she was labelled as ‘black leg’”.²⁷⁷ Another example is revenge killing where some civilians take advantage of the conflict to settle scores:

*“The aspect of trust in this conflict has also brought about some sort of revenge amongst families. Take for instance, this family has a grudge with this family maybe way back before the conflict started so now in the presence of this conflict...they have now gotten an opportunity to get on each other’s toes or to actually pinch that person where it hurts...”*²⁷⁸

This was not the case prior to the conflict. People used to greet each other and commune together, however as one participant aptly explains:

*“Now you enter in that same community, they are no longer the same people you knew before the war they have become so alert. There is no trust, and everybody is a suspect and for that reason a nice person becomes a bully.”*²⁷⁹

As a result, re-building social cohesion through strengthening social relationships and trust was another preventive strategy of civilians. Community members and social groups within the community organise and engage in social activities that helps to build relationships and trust among the civilians. These include sports, cultural activities, as well as reuniting and reintegrating lost families and ex-combatants respectively.

With regards to sports, participants noted that within their communities, they organise sporting activities in the quarters to enable community members to interact. One participant highlighted:

*“The community also use sporting activities in the quarters such as work out sessions, sporting groups to enable interaction among community members. They also share drinks together to help calm tensions”.*²⁸⁰

275 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

276 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

277 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

278 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

279 Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

280 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

They further noted that these activities do not only create spaces for interaction and dialogue among community members but also serve as avenue for protecting the youth from being easy recruits for the armed groups or de-motivate them to join such groups as it keeps them active. In an interview one participant noted:

*“Like in my place the chief organizes competitions like football and handball and at the end they receive prizes which keeps them busy”.*²⁸¹

The resurgence of cultural activities such as musical concerts and artistic competitions were equally noted to contribute to social cohesion by building trust among the civilians and communities. A research participant expounded:

*“We have cultural activities now at the centre of the communities not at the periphery because the periphery still has walls. So, at the centre of the community, we have a little of social cohesion acts, we have musical concerts, awards, artistic competitions, community development activities which are gradually coming back then there is growing trust in Alma Mater associations. They are growing now because it’s a lot of classmates, my school mates so there’s a lot of trust there... so, there is a new community of trust which is growing”.*²⁸²

In addition, during school holidays *“children are taught dancing”*²⁸³ to reconnect them to their culture and rebuild interaction. Participants noted that the resurgence of these social cohesion acts (re-emerging between 2020 and 2023), is shifting the distrust and suspicions among civilians that have been created by the conflict to enabling spaces for trust, thus restoring community relationships.²⁸⁴

Other ways that civilians are protecting themselves through relationship building is reuniting families (those displaced especially) and accepting ex-combatants back into the communities. The quote below underscores:

*“There is what we call community village social associations which makes up the Northwest and Southwest, so they are re uniting families in order to talk about a way forward about development and this is gradually working”.*²⁸⁵

281 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

282 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

283 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

284 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

285 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

Another participant added that Chiefs are opening their communities “*in case one of the children [Amba] want to come back there is no problem*”²⁸⁶ to reintegrate them back into the community. However, it is not clear whether this initiative is done in consultation with the community members especially those whose lives and loved ones have been injured or killed by the ex-combatants as well as the level of preparations of the communities to accepting and supporting these ex-combatants.

It is important to note that civilians also build relationships for protection through mediation, dialogue, and negotiation which are discussed in subsequent sections of the report.

286 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

6. Collective Protection and Local Agency

Following on from the variety of self-protection strategies implemented by local civilians, this section identifies the particular social groups within affected communities that have been at the forefront of protecting fellow civilians, notably through enabling collective forms of protection. When asked, participants indicated the family, women's groups, youth groups, community leaders, religious and traditional authorities as instrumental contributors to the protection of civilians. Moreover, local NGOs and CSOs were also found to contribute towards unarmed civilian protection. The work of these social groups and actors was interlinked, including collaboration with each other at times. In this section, we first situate the element of collective protection which we found to be the bedrock of unarmed civilian protection in the Cameroon case. We then discuss the role of various community groups, and finally that of local non-governmental organisations.

6.1. Collective Protection

To prevent violence and protect themselves, our study found the growing culture of collective protection among Anglophone civilians. Most of our research participants noted that since the start of the conflict, citizens and communities have been their own sources of protection and they do so collectively. Thus, collectivism, as indicated elsewhere in

this report, is core to communal living in the majority of the affected communities and is the bedrock of civilian unarmed protection strategies in the Anglophone conflict. Although collectivism has always been in existence within communities, it has grown since the start of the conflict. One participant underscores:

"We come together to protect ourselves from the military and other armed groups. Firstly, we have to always think of the other's safety [collectivism] and this is embedded in our culture as Africans - 'I am because you are'.... We avoid the philosophy of indifference".²⁸⁷

This culture of collective protection is manifested in diverse ways, some of which have already been highlighted in other sections of the report. However collective protection can further be captured in the following three categories - community security meetings, provision of shelter and food to fellow citizens, and accompanying vulnerable groups.

Firstly, through community security meetings, civilians discuss security issues and safeguarding tips which contributes to the collective protection of the community. As noted by one participant: *"There is also community meetings where they discuss security challenges and how to protect themselves."*²⁸⁸ Such community meetings may include quarter meetings which is made up of community leaders. At these meetings,

²⁸⁷ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

²⁸⁸ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

not only do community members discuss security challenges, but they also provide “feedback of experiences to serve as advice and caution to others.”²⁸⁹ In doing so, they strengthen the collective security of civilians within the community as they learn from each other. Further, these community security meetings also serve as a platform to identify and get to know the people living in the community in order to collectively address their security challenges.²⁹⁰ These security meetings can be linked to their early warning and response mechanisms.

Secondly, civilians demonstrate collective protection by providing food and shelter to fellow civilians affected by the conflict. Shelter has been a major target in the Anglophone conflict as hundreds of homes have been destroyed or burnt (Human Rights Watch, 2018: 45). Several reports have covered the burning of houses in the Anglophone conflict as noted by participants. The BBC Africa Eye for example has confirmed the burning of homes in places such as Kuke Mbomo, 25km north of Mount Cameroon (BBC News, 2018). Therefore, people open their doors to others, including when there is shooting or imminent attacks in the community; thus, “everybody’s home is your home”.²⁹¹ Civilians whose farms have been destroyed or do not have means to feed themselves are provided for by fellow civilians:

“I once protected more than 100 people in my farm while feeding those who were vulnerable. We are one another’s keeper. The males give to children and pregnant women while looking for protection and safe ways”.²⁹²

Furthermore, civilians also protect fellow civilians by providing shelter to IDPs and those whose homes have been burnt by the warring factions. Participants in a storytelling workshop shared:

“At times, we have IDPs from CDC [Cameroon Development Corporation]. When they are attacked, they run and come to us. We give them our houses as shelter... When they were running, they went somewhere into the bush where there was a farmer in his hut and they were received for refuge [shelter], and they went to the next village where they were also received for refuge”.²⁹³

In other words, at every stage of their displacements, IDPs were supported by fellow civilians to ensure that they are protected from further harm.

Figure 4 in Section 5.1.4 above demonstrates how shelter has been used to protect civilians. It shows the two types of shelters used: temporary shelters built in the bushes and hosting those at risk in one’s home. Participants also shared that providing shelter for those whose houses have been burnt and those sleeping in the street is an important contribution to protecting each other. They noted:

289 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

290 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023]

291 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

292 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

293 Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

"If we are staying two of us in a house and I see my friend in the village like sleeping in the streets, I cannot leave him there I will try to come and talk with my brother or friend that we should accommodate this man for a period of time".²⁹⁴

It was equally evident that, in the heat of violence or during shooting, civilians most at risk are provided shelter by others as part of collective protection, as noted in 5.3.1. The need for shelter, including temporary shelter, as a means of protection in situations of conflict is highlighted by institutions such as the 'European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations' of the European Commission that asserts that, *"Shelter is also key to reduce vulnerability and build resilience"* (European Commission, 2023). This is also evidenced in Yemen and Ukraine where shelter is used as a protective strategy (Camp Coordination and Camp Management 2022; Mahanty 2023). Equally, providing food and shelter to affected civilians reduces their vulnerability to violence by preventing them from being exposed to violence.

Thirdly, our study found that collective protection is equally manifested through civilians accompanying vulnerable civilians during violence. Civilians accompany women, children, the elderly, and persons with disability to escape violence or take them to safer locations. We argue that this could be linked to the UCP element of protective accompaniment (Oldenhuis et al 2021), implemented by civilians for civilians. As noted by one participant:

"I once helped a lady with disability to escape danger and because of the intensity, she has been unable to walk. I looked for a safer environment for her to regain her mind".²⁹⁵

Civilians also accompany fellow civilians to escape violence by helping them to cross the river to safer communities. One participant expressed:

"We have people especially those that cannot stand the sound of guns and cannot swim because it is deep, we help them to cross immediately and when places are calm we still help to bring them back. We also help to keep others within the banks [riverbanks] so from that area when you cross you are under Littoral [part of Francophone region and a safe zone]".²⁹⁶

Such accompaniment by civilians is *"done mostly at night"* carrying civilians to *"safety across this river using these canoes"*. They do this at night because it is safer during that time.²⁹⁷

Overall, collective protection, premised on the belief that 'we are one another's keeper', connotes an understanding that amongst the Anglophone population, protection cannot only be perceived or achieved through the prism of individualism, but it is a collective affair involving the whole community including families, women, youth, religious and traditional authorities, and community leaders.

²⁹⁴ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

²⁹⁵ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

²⁹⁶ Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

²⁹⁷ Drawing Workshop, Limbe, 15/02/2023

6.2. Role of Community Groups

6.2.1. The Family

The family is a core system of support for many people including in wartime. In the affected communities in Cameroon, the family plays a key role in supporting vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly, and persons with disability. Participants affirmed this, noting that the family is the main source of protection for many vulnerable groups, especially where other institutional structures have broken down. In an interview, one participant describing the state of vulnerable groups in the affected communities:

“They don’t have any source of protection apart from their family members. The government has no social structure for them, the council has no social structure for them, even the churches have no social structure protection mechanisms for them”.²⁹⁸

Another participant added that during the conflict most of the vulnerable groups have been largely left unprotected and that it *“depends on the family”* to protect them.²⁹⁹ Indeed, there was a consensus that it is the family that *“gives assistance and support”³⁰⁰* to vulnerable groups. For instance, with regards to the elderly, the families protect them by sending them *“to town to live with their children”³⁰¹*, thereby escaping the dangers of the conflict. In such instances, the elderly also give back to the family by caring for the

grandchildren while their parents go to work.³⁰²

Additionally, families provide protection by relocating their loved ones to safer communities. One participant expressed that:

“In some towns, you have families who moved their children because family A was a victim, so they said let’s take our children out of this place. So, we have families that moved their children as a preventive measure, so that should there be an attack their children are already safe”.³⁰³

Another participant indicated that, *“After some days, there was another round of gun shots more serious than the former, and I carried my uncle who could not walk”.³⁰⁴* In such ways, family members, and at times other community members, carry along their vulnerable members such as children, elderly or persons with disability in order to secure their protection in the midst of the chaos and violence.

There was a consensus among research participants that within the family unit, women play a key role in providing protection. This is in part linked to the core role women play in the care economy, caring for their children, the elderly, and others in need of care within the family, mostly unpaid. One participant elaborates how women have become the main care bearers and protectors in their families amidst the conflict:

298 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

299 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

300 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

301 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

302 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

303 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

304 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

"We have women and children [who] mostly suffer within the context of this crisis because when the men go out there to fight [struggle to make a living]³⁰⁵ the women are left at home and they become the heads of the households and they are actually left alone to cater for family. So, they shoulder the burden of taking care of the family alone because the men are out there fighting".³⁰⁶

Adding to the above, women were also noted to help their families to escape from violence. They *"inform their family members to take their belongings and escape at night"*,³⁰⁷ enabling them to escape without being noticed.

6.2.2. Women's Groups

In addition to playing a key role in protecting their families, our study found that women and women's groups have been at the forefront of community protection. One interviewee summarised:

"Yes, women have been at the forefront of ensuring security to protect their communities because they intervene at the level of their families, nationally and internationally. They do a lot of peace education and sensitisation; they do a lot of advocacy to ensure that we have basic protection, and the place is secured at least".³⁰⁸

In general women's groups were found to contribute to unarmed civilian protection through four main ways: advocacy; mobilisation for protection; mediation and negotiation; and trauma healing.

With regards to advocacy, our study found that women's groups have been at the frontline in peace campaigns as well as awareness raising. They do so through social mobilisation where they come together as a social group to sensitise both the communities and fellow women on protection issues as well as advocate for peace. One interviewee noted:

"Women have actually formed themselves into groups. They have organised peaceful marches, and workshop participation where they have devised a coping mechanism, educating people on how to avoid 'hot' areas. Those are some of the coping strategies that the women have devised".³⁰⁹

Examples of such women's groups are the Southwest Northwest Women's Taskforce (SNWOT) and the Northwest Women Peace Builders (WOFEM). These women go on peace marches and 'lamentation' protests (a traditional nonviolent method where the women wail and weep to call for peace), as well as use their voices to advocate for peace and protection of women and children against sexual and

305 'Fighting' is used here to describe the situation where the men are forced to flee to neighbouring towns or francophone regions to earn a living or 'struggle for survival'. This typifies the Anglophone spirit where hard work to earn a living is considered as 'fighting'. Some of these men have not been able to return as the conflict persists, but send remittances to their families, while others simply abandon their responsibilities thereby leaving their wives as family heads.

306 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

307 Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

308 Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

309 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

gender-based violence. Equally, they use their voices to call on stakeholders to respond and meet the needs of women.³¹⁰ As remarked by one research participant: *“We [women] come out as mothers because we are most affected.”*³¹¹

With women being one of the most vulnerable groups in the conflict, women's groups go further to educate women on diverse topics pertinent to their protection and safety, including human rights. One interviewee elaborated:

*“You know every woman is encouraged to be in a social group these days, like not staying in their confines and homes. They are encouraged to belong to a social gathering be it online or physically. These social groups are encouraged to build members with the knowledge of how they can be able to protect themselves. For example, you get into a group where women are in, educated or not they have these basic information on human rights, marital rights, child upbringing. ... You also get them educated on income generating activities and you see that it helps them into self-sustainability. That is why they are able to take care of families and protect their children from harm.”*³¹²

Linked to mobilising fellow women towards advocacy and sensitisation, our study also found that the women mobilise themselves as social groups by moving and working together either on a farm or a common initiative to protect each other from sexual violence. One interviewee explained:

*“Yes, I will always get back to communities because I like talking from community-based experiences. You get into a community where there is a woman living and men have left, she has a farm, but it is dangerous for her to move there alone. These women come together to form an initiative where they agree to form themselves into a common initiative group... They can put up the time when they have to work like 2 days to 3 days where... they go to lady A's farm as a group to work on the farm. This gives them that self-confidence of I am protected by my sister because you see that a perpetrator won't catch many women at once.”*³¹³

The sisterhood of protection created from such collective action helps these women feel protected and safe. Such an approach is not only employed by young women but also elderly women in the community. When asked how elderly women survive and protect themselves, another research participant underscored:

*“They do their small farming, not those far away, they work farms just around. Some of them are working farms in areas where they can spend the night there in case there is any form of shooting in their community. Sometimes they do it in groups because normally they move together, and they always hide in groups.”*³¹⁴

Furthermore, women contribute significantly to protection through

³¹⁰ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³¹¹ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³¹² Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³¹³ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³¹⁴ Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

mediation and negotiation. Participants noted that women's groups such as SNWOT and WOFEM also mediate and dialogue with the warring factions, especially the armed separatists, to bring peace and ultimately protect civilians from violence. The narrative below highlights:

"In fact, women groups are more at the forefront because they are more impacted. I belong to Southwest Northwest Women's Taskforce (SNWOT) which brings more women together to bring peace. The group also mediate and dialogue with both groups especially the Amba....We also have the North West Women Peace Builders (WOFEM) who dialogue with both parties".³¹⁵

When it comes to negotiation, women and women's groups do not only negotiate for the release of their family members, but also for other civilians within the community. They negotiate with either the armed separatists or the military by using key individuals within their group rather than collectively for fear of suspicion. One participant explains:

"We have done that [negotiation] but we do not go as a big group because it will be suspicious. We use individuals to negotiate. When Senator Mundi was kidnapped, we did a lot for her release in terms of underground work such as released position papers, using social media. We always canvass for dialogue. Guns don't talk".³¹⁶

Senator Regina Mundi is an Anglophone member of Biya's government who was kidnapped by the armed separatists for one month in 2022 (Kindzeka, 2022). The women group's support for the release of Senator Mundi in part demonstrates that unarmed civilian protection is not biased against a person's political or socio-economic background. They come together with the common goal of protecting all citizens. Further, through mediation, dialogue and negotiation, the women help build horizontal and vertical relationships between themselves, the warring factions and key government stakeholders. The case of Senator Mundi, for instance, creates the space for a vertical relationship between the women's group and a key political stakeholder which has the potential of enabling more collaborative work in support of civilian protection. In UCP, relationship building between stakeholders and conflicting parties is essential (Oldenhuis et al., 2021).

Additionally, women's groups were found to protect fellow civilians by preventing and reducing psychological violence through trauma healing. When it comes to protection, including within UCP literature, the focus is often on physical protection, with limited attention to psychological protection. As highlighted in section 4 of this report, many civilians have suffered psychological violence in this conflict, especially women. Thus, women's group contribute to protection by providing trauma healing. As an interviewee affirmed: *"Women are coming together in self-support groups to have that mental strength to be able to talk about these issues to see if they survive".³¹⁷*

³¹⁵ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³¹⁶ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³¹⁷ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

6.2.3. Youth Groups

Youths were also found to be at the forefront of protection. Among the different contributions made by young people towards protection, topmost is early warning and response mechanisms, especially through their efforts in nonviolent vigilantism. As highlighted in section 5.2.3, the youth in most of the communities form the majority of the nonviolent vigilante groups providing protection for their fellow civilians. Participants indicated that *“the youths are like the vigilantes, so when it happens and you hear a whistle from that end you cannot pass.”*³¹⁸ In an interview, another participant affirmed:

*“Yes, in most of these communities [it is] the youths, because they are more energetic, and they can easily get this information and rush back into the forest or into the bushes and inform their parents that this is the situation. So most often the youth and the able men in the community are the ones that have taken this responsibility upon themselves to serve as spies [unarmed vigilantes] in their community, to monitor their community to make sure that in case of anything they can alert the others”.*³¹⁹

The youths were also found to contribute to negotiations with the warring factions especially the armed separatists to reduce and stop violence against civilians in the communities. Participants noted

that the youth often collaborate with the quarter heads to *“negotiate whereby the [Amba] Boys in the bushes give their terms”*.³²⁰ In other words, the young men negotiated with the armed groups and agree terms that ensure the safety and protection of the local community members. Additionally, having grown up with some of the armed separatists in the same communities, they leverage that to negotiate with them to drop their guns, stop the fighting and return to the communities. As one participant highlighted:

*“I would say that the youth group have done a lot in harmonizing a way to help call their brothers back from the bushes since they hold meetings and since they know the Boys they try to negotiate with them and dialogue with them”.*³²¹

The youth also engage in sensitisation and awareness raising. Findings demonstrate that awareness raising largely focuses on peace and conflict management, often done through youth forums.³²² As shared during a drawing workshop:

*“And the next is, the youth. Right now, in our communities, youth mostly spend their time preaching about peace. And when they preach about peace, they practice it as well and thereby building peace in the community”.*³²³

³¹⁸ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

³¹⁹ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

³²⁰ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³²¹ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³²² Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³²³ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

6.2.4. Community, Religious, and Traditional leaders

Our study also found that community leaders, religious and traditional authorities are key frontliners when it comes to unarmed civilian protection. The study highlights four main categories of contributions made by these three social groups, and they are mostly complementary. These are: interpositioning; mediation and negotiation; counselling and spiritual fortification; and awareness raising and sensitisation.

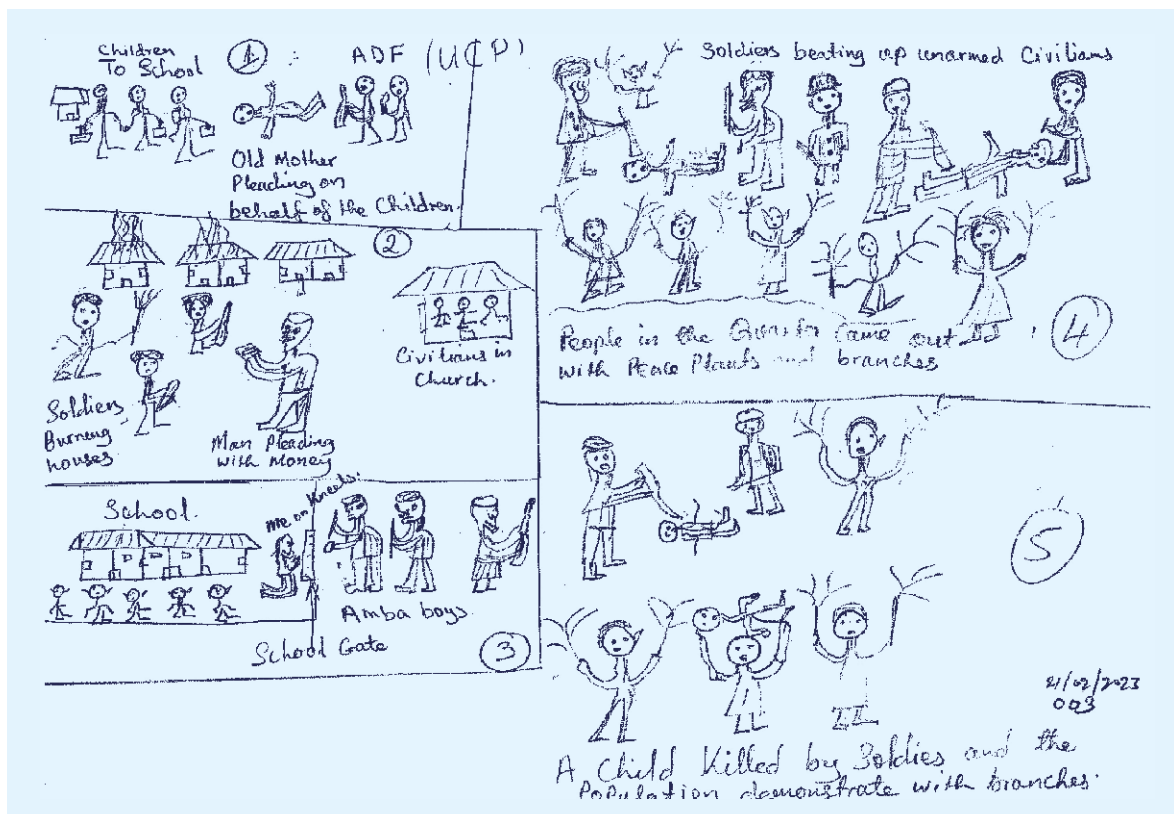
Interpositioning

Participants mentioned interpositioning or presence as one of the ways civilians have elected to

protect other civilians in the face of danger, usually involving respected members of the community coming between any of the armed groups and a civilian or civilians under threat of violence from them. Interpositioning has been seen by scholars such as Schirch (2006) to be widely used in Africa, especially by women. Schirch (2006: 17), argues that:

“Across Africa, there are stories of unarmed women interpositioning themselves as peacekeepers between warring tribes. In many traditional African communities, it was prohibited to kill women. Only other warriors were allowed as targets. In some societies women would walk between armed groups to prevent them from fighting each other”

Figure 6: Use of Interpositioning ³²⁴



Participants in this study similarly said women leaders have primarily used this strategy, as well as chiefs, neighbourhood heads (commonly called quarter heads), leaders of church groups and other community and religious leaders. Although interpositioning is often considered to require *“mobilizing a larger number of UCP team members for just one activity”* (Oldenhuis 2022: 128), participants here showed that it has been more often used by one of the categories of persons cited above. The drawing in Figure 6 (above), for example, shows interpositioning by an elderly woman and by members of the community depicted holding peace plants to protect other civilians.³²⁵ The drawing also shows an instance where community members went on their knees to prevent separatist fighters from attacking a school.

Mediation and Negotiation

As earlier indicated, mediation and negotiation are core to unarmed civilian protection as they enable relationships between and among conflicting parties, civilians, and other relevant actors towards the protection of civilians. Like the women’s and youth groups, community and religious leaders and traditional authorities were found to contribute significantly to unarmed civilian protection through mediation and negotiation. They were found to mediate social conflicts among civilians as well as with the armed separatists as

part of conflict resolution. For instance, participants shared that community leaders, including the quarter heads, seek to resolve conflicts to prevent people from using the armed separatists to settle scores.³²⁶ One interviewee noted their role:

*“Also resolve conflict in amicable ways so that they will not use the Amba to settle scores. Quarter head and community leaders intervene in resolving conflicts. Offenders are fined to promote peaceful co-existence. They deal with issues such as gossip, envy, backstabbing”.*³²⁷

They resolve or mediate these conflicts using traditional conflict resolution approaches such as the ‘Ngumba House’. This is a traditional mechanism where community and traditional leaders (Traditional Council) lead in resolving conflict. Often this approach is only open to the community and traditional leaders and not public and what they say is final.³²⁸ As indicated in the above quote, offenders can be fined, not as retribution but to enable reconciliation through compensation to the victim. These fines depend on the type of offence and the gravity of the offence and it is decided by those leading the process. Such fines may include, by not limited to, *“a goat, a crate of drinks, fowls”*, among others.³²⁹ The downside of this process is that, *“Some people have abandoned communities because of the fines [they disagreed with the fines]”*.³³⁰ Nonetheless, mediating

³²⁵ Drawing workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

³²⁶ Participants noted that there is increasing revenge attacks where civilians take advantage of the conflict to settle scores by using the armed separatists to attack people who have offended them in the past.

³²⁷ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³²⁸ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³²⁹ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³³⁰ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

social conflicts through such traditional conflict resolution mechanisms creates the spaces for dialogue and restores relationships as *“They encourage people to speak to each other”*.³³¹ When it comes to mediation with the armed separatists, participants shared some examples of efforts by religious and traditional leaders. An example is the Imam of Buea who visited the armed separatists in the bush on several occasions to dialogue with them.³³² It was added that in a village under Muyuka sub-division, where the separatists had been attacking the communities and hiding in the bushes, the Imam spent several days with them, dialoguing with them and conducting needs assessments.³³³ Another example relates to:

“The Fon of Bafut, a traditional leader, has been a key mediator for his community, mediating with both warring parties and has worked so hard to protect civilians in the community”.³³⁴

Furthermore, it was noted that sometimes government officials and administrators engage with religious and traditional leaders to initiate mediation and dialogue with the armed separatists. A case in point is an incident in Bambili where armed separatists burnt motorbikes over their suspicion of a government-led community water project which they assumed was a decoy to attack or gather information

about them.³³⁵ To resolve this issue, the government officials collaborated with the Fon to initiate dialogue and mediation with the Amba Boys; and given the respect the particular Fon had, the separatists trusted the latter and apologised.³³⁶

With regards to negotiation, it was found that community and religious leaders play a key role. For example, one participant shared her experience as a Fulani (popularly known as the Mbororos in Cameroon) where the separatists attacked her community and abducted some of the people and cattle. In this instance she noted that:

“The Ardos [community leaders] in the community go to the camp [separatist camp] to negotiate with them that please we are going to give you this number of cattle, so you release this person. So, there is negotiation between the Ardos and the separatists”.³³⁷

Participants also shared an example of the Christian community negotiating with the separatist groups, including for the release of kidnapped victims. In one instance, the church had to pay *“30,000 [CFA] francs for the Ambas”* to secure the release of a church member, and *“through negotiation he was prevented from going to that camp because if he went, he would have lost his life”*.³³⁸ Negotiations can be conducted not only in relation to kidnapping

331 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

332 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

333 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

334 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

335 Storytelling workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

336 Storytelling workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

337 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

338 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

and ransoms, but also to negotiate terms around holding events in the community, or desisting from attacking certain properties, as well as releasing seized goods.³³⁹ However, while such negotiations can provide immediate relief from violence or the threat of violence, and indeed save lives as the example above, we re-emphasise (see section 5.3.8) that paying ransoms are noted to be an ineffective and unsustainable protective strategy, tending to create a vicious cycle which only benefits the perpetrators.

Counselling and Spiritual Fortification

Religious leaders, especially the church, were equally found to play leading roles in religious and psychosocial counselling. This is often done as a rehabilitation intervention after violence has occurred. Religious leaders often draw on their faith through prayers and preaching to help counsel civilians, including those mentally affected by the conflict. As noted in relation to Boko Haram attacks in the north of Cameroon:

“It is a holistic approach such that the churches play a role in comforting people with trauma. They use their faith to heal people’s trauma. They preach non-violence, forgiveness. They also give assistance to the vulnerable”
(Heungoup, 2015).

In most African countries, given the relevance of religion to peoples’ everyday lives, much of what they do is intertwined with their faith, and Cameroon is no exception. As a country composed

of 63% Christians, 22% Muslims, 14% Animists (traditional religion) and 1% Gnostic (Heungoup, 2015), the majority of the people draw from their faith or religion to mitigate and address difficult situations, including around trauma healing and psychosocial counselling. The Christian community in Cameroon, such as the Catholic Church, *“bring church teachings, bible lessons and other moral teachings”*³⁴⁰ to affected communities. An interviewee shared an example of Catholic priests, most of whom *“always side with the most vulnerable and there are Christians in these bushes. So sometimes they are allowed to go do mass with their Christians”*³⁴¹ which serves as an encouragement for the civilians hiding in the bushes. Additionally, they offer prayers in the communities, including for those armed separatists who have dropped their weapons and returned. One participant noted:

“And at the same time, we come to the other side spiritually, you have pastors like madam pastor here, their husbands have also been praying. They pray in communities [where] some of those guys who have killed come for prayers and all of that. You have those approaches and gradually some other villages are practicing it”.³⁴²

Religious leaders also offer counselling for survivors of sexual violence. One interviewee, himself a religious leader, cited a situation in 2019 in Buea where he encountered over *“5000 displaced persons. Some [women] were raped and as a pastor I had to encourage them by*

³³⁹ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁴⁰ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³⁴¹ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁴² Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

*preaching, giving them a way forward.*³⁴³ Through this medium of psychosocial counselling, religious leaders enable a sense of optimism and “hope” which to some research participants “*is another form of protection which is immaterial but psychological traumas exist*”.³⁴⁴ Such intangible or immaterial protection, they add “*cannot be quantified but has a great impact on what is carried*”.³⁴⁵

Along similar lines, findings show that religious and traditional leaders provide spiritual fortification for civilians as a source of protection from bullets, death, and other atrocities. One participant shared during a drawing workshop:

*“Another thing is spiritual fortification. This one, I have not been seeing, but I have heard. You know the African man; they always say we believe so much in our ancestors and in our traditional way of doing things. So, we have people who move around with cowries and charms to fortify themselves for their individual protection, especially when you are travelling to the villages where we know it is really ‘hot’ [there is shooting] in there. So, we have people who actually visit their witch doctors; whoever they believe in to get charms and other things to fortify themselves”.*³⁴⁶

Fortifying themselves through incantations, concoctions, charms,

cowries and rituals provided by traditional leaders, makes some civilians believe that they are protected from bullets and other forms of violence, enabling them to survive in the midst of the chaos.³⁴⁷ Further, the cleansing rituals done by traditional authorities and custodians is thought to serve as a deterrent from attacks by armed separatists, who are afraid to contradict their authorities and the powers of deities. One participant explained:

*“You can’t talk culture without talking about the people... for example, around the Kupe-Manenguba area where chiefs came together and did some traditional rights. That’s one of the things that has actually quenched down this crisis in that area because most of the chiefs came and did some traditional rights like the cleansing ceremony”.*³⁴⁸

Christians were also found to pray for protection.³⁴⁹ While such spiritual fortification cannot be scientifically proven, for many civilians in the Anglophone regions, they believe that they hold some power and contribute to their protection.

Awareness Creation and Sensitisation

As noted by Oldenhuis et al. (2021), advocacy is a core component of UCP including the organisation of peace campaigns, outreach work, and sensitisation and awareness-raising

³⁴³ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁴⁴ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁴⁵ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁴⁶ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁴⁷ Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

³⁴⁸ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

³⁴⁹ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

on protection guidelines and safe passages. Like the other social groups aforementioned, community, religious and traditional leaders also engage in advocacy to safeguard the protection of civilians in their communities. They organise and participate in peace campaigns and talks, write letters to key stakeholders around reducing violence and building peace, as well as creating awareness within communities on peaceful co-existence, drawing on their faith and religion. For instance, participants noted that within communities, traditional and religious leaders are regrouping themselves to ensure protection of women against sexual violence.³⁵⁰ In the Presbyterian churches, for example, there are special lessons created to discuss sexual violence with the congregation. Similarly, religious leaders have been engaging in conversations and preaching around safeguarding guidelines and peace on diverse platforms including church activities.³⁵¹ They use this platform for:

“preaching of love, peace, the gospel, so maybe the armed men can come to the knowledge of God and be able to abide by Godly principles and maybe drop their arms....So I think the church also has been helping to mentally transform their thinking”.³⁵²

Sometimes these religious leaders go beyond the confines of their chapel and community into the bushes to sensitise and dialogue with the armed separatists,

ignoring all risks *“and at the end of the day you found like three or four of them [armed separatists] who really actually responded positively”*.³⁵³ This according to participants transformed the mindsets of the separatists to drop their weapons and ultimately reduce violence against civilians. Moreover, participants noted that, religious leaders also raise awareness by writing letters and providing briefs on the history of the conflict as well as possible solutions. For example, the:

“Catholic Church with the help of the two Bishops in the Northwest and Southwest Regions... have done two write-ups to narrate the truth in terms of history and provide solutions for peace”.³⁵⁴

According to one research participant, the publication of the peace letters written by a Catholic Archbishop helped reduce violence and contributed to the reopening of schools as *“the levels of attacks on schools have quickly reduced”*.³⁵⁵

To reduce the phenomena of ‘blackleg’ and revenge killings, one participant shared an example of the sensitisation effort of the Fon (traditional leader) in his community who entreated the people to come to him first with their problems which ultimately *“helped protect the village and I think the entire village benefited from this and it reduced the rate of torture that we used to have in the village”*.³⁵⁶

Overall, although the role of traditional leaders was commended, participants

350 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

351 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

352 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

353 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

354 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

355 Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

356 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

were quick to add that sometimes they are not effective because *“these ones, their wings have been clipped. If not so, the government will seize your chieftaincy title and give it to somebody who is working for them”*.³⁵⁷ This caveat pertains to the increasing role of government administrators in appointing chiefs and in the endorsement of Fons (see footnote 2).

6.3. Role of Local CSOs/NGOs

This research has focused on civilians in conflict-affected communities as active agents in their own protection. This contrasts with other work on unarmed civilian protection that has highlighted the role of international NGOs in particular. Nonetheless, our research has noted the involvement of local civil society organisations (CSOs) in providing support and protection to those civilians most-affected by the conflict. While the primary role of such CSOs is to provide humanitarian assistance, for

which they have obtained governmental permission, they did not want to be *“silent witnesses”*,³⁵⁸ and sought to contribute to protective mechanisms, albeit at times indirectly and informally and under the cover of humanitarian assistance (as indicated in 3.2 above). Thus, our findings here echo those of Mahony’s study on humanitarian field presence that humanitarian agencies *“want their presence to protect, even if that is not their primary mandate”* (Mahony, 2006: 4).

The CSOs in this study were largely local NGOs that are active in the Anglophone regions. Some have reoriented their activities to focus on the provision of humanitarian support to conflict-affected civilians and communities. This section outlines a range of seven types of the activities undertaken by such local NGOs, occasionally in collaboration with international NGOs, aimed at supporting various forms of civilian protection. The poem below captures the role played by local NGOs.

A Humanitarian Worker

I am a bike rider in my community
I supply potable water to people in my community
I give door to door lectures about Human Rights,
I discourage gender-based violence like rape,
Physical assault and early and forced marriages.

I also go in search of internally displaced persons
I seek them in the bushes and offer items to them
These include, mosquito nets, tarpaulins, jugs of water.

I advise young boys not to rape our women
I also help pregnant women to give reports on their condition
I also take my kids to school on my bike
We pray this war comes to a stop.

Poem 6: A Humanitarian Worker³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁵⁸ Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

³⁵⁹ Poetry Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

6.3.1. Fostering Unaccompanied children

The conflict has resulted in many children becoming detached from their families and homeless, for instance due to parents dying or disappearing in the war. One interviewee who ran a small, local NGO noted how children could become separated from their families:

*“You know when they [the military] raze down those villages, when there’s any chaos, people will just run from those villages. Maybe children were playing, and their parents were in the farm. So, they [the children] just come in a group”.*³⁶⁰

He stated that his NGO organised fostering arrangements for homeless and unaccompanied children with local families, with some financial support provided by a British NGO:

*“We had a project with Street Child UK. We had to equip these children and send them back to school. We even had to send them to families because I didn’t trust orphanages because when they go there it’s another trouble, so you are adding to the trauma. So, we had to look for families that my focal points knew and trusted, and we had to place them with [those] families”.*³⁶¹

A storytelling workshop participant similarly highlighted how her organisation found foster parents for street children, especially girls, in order to

protect them from further violence and abuse:

*“We identify foster parents as most of them [unaccompanied minors] sleep in the streets, especially the girls. We take these girls or boys that are on the street and then we negotiate with these foster parents, and they sign and we support them with the little that we have. Because when we leave them on the street either they are being killed or raped or tortured. We also sign this consent form with them [foster parents] in order to protect these children and we come from time to time to check if they are well protected”.*³⁶²

6.3.2. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Protection

The huge rise in incidences of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) associated with the conflict has led to organisations taking various measures to protect women and girls. Gender-based violence mapping is one such measure. This mapping is undertaken with communities through focus group discussions in order to identify safe and unsafe places and times, as expounded by one interviewee:

“My organisation does what we call gender-based violence mapping. There we could identify protection issues... We did the safe and unsafe areas. We had to map it out with the help of the community. It was inclusive, everybody was involved since they were the ones who know the community better. They were the

³⁶⁰ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁶¹ Interview No 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁶² Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

ones telling us that, no this area is unsafe for boys, this area is unsafe for girls, this area is unsafe for women and this is pretty safe for everybody. So, we did that mapping and after every 3 months we came to reinforce it because things change".³⁶³

Youth leaders, for instance, then played a role in disseminating this information and sensitising local young people with regard to "safe areas for them". For example:

"Young girls, you don't go out after 6pm, you don't pass through this road because maybe there are boys who are taking drugs who may rape you".³⁶⁴

Another interviewee commented on the role of NGOs in the protection for women, notably through the provision of training for leaders of women's groups, who then share information with their communities:

"Thanks to support from the civil society, a lot of women's groups take their security issues seriously. They try to change behaviours and attitudes to increase the level of protection. There have been trainings that target our women leaders who now take it to their communities, and everybody is alert. Now you have that awareness being raised on potential insecurity and some tips being shared".³⁶⁵

Similarly, a participant at a drawing workshop noted the efforts by local organisations to protect women and girls against gender-based violence through both information-giving and creation of safe spaces:

"We have seen a lot of organisations and individuals organising a proliferation of workshops and seminars, just to educate on gender-based violence... If you are in danger, what you can do, what you should not do, how you should act as a girl, places, how you should not move around in lonely places and all of that, and equally the creation of safe spaces".³⁶⁶

Another interviewee talked about the creation of safe spaces for women and girls, including in inaccessible locations, with assistance from international organisations as appropriate:

"For both girls and women these [safe] spaces were created here and in the hard-to-reach communities we had temporary shelters. I share reports and do the linking. So when it has issues to do with health, we call the WHO [World Health Organisation], or ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] will come in and other organisations in communities where it is challenging to reach".³⁶⁷

Measures to protect women and girls from potential violence can be very practically-oriented. One participant at a storytelling workshop noted a campaign for water taps to be located in open areas

³⁶³ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁶⁴ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁶⁵ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³⁶⁶ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁶⁷ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

where unwanted sexual attention was less likely to occur:

"I work with an association and one way that we protect our young girls and our women is this campaign to protect them from having unwanted pregnancies and also, we had campaigns on how they shouldn't go to certain places. The taps should be in open areas where if something were to happen, they would be seen. So those are some of the protective measures".³⁶⁸

Supporting the development of livelihood activities was another means to reduce the dependency and vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence, especially those displaced by the conflict, as outlined by a drawing workshop participant:

"We have realised that one of the leading causes of violence or the vulnerability of women to violence is the dependency. We have a lot of young girls who have left the suburban areas and are now in the Bamenda urbanity. They are homeless, some are forced to live with friends, family relatives and so on, and because of their vulnerability and dependency on these people, they are now very exposed to violence. So, the strategy used here is the empowerment of these girls. I have drawn small businesses in cakes, hair dressing, yes, tailoring and all of that, just to empower them and they should have a source of income for themselves and in a way just reduce their vulnerability to sexual abuse and violence".³⁶⁹

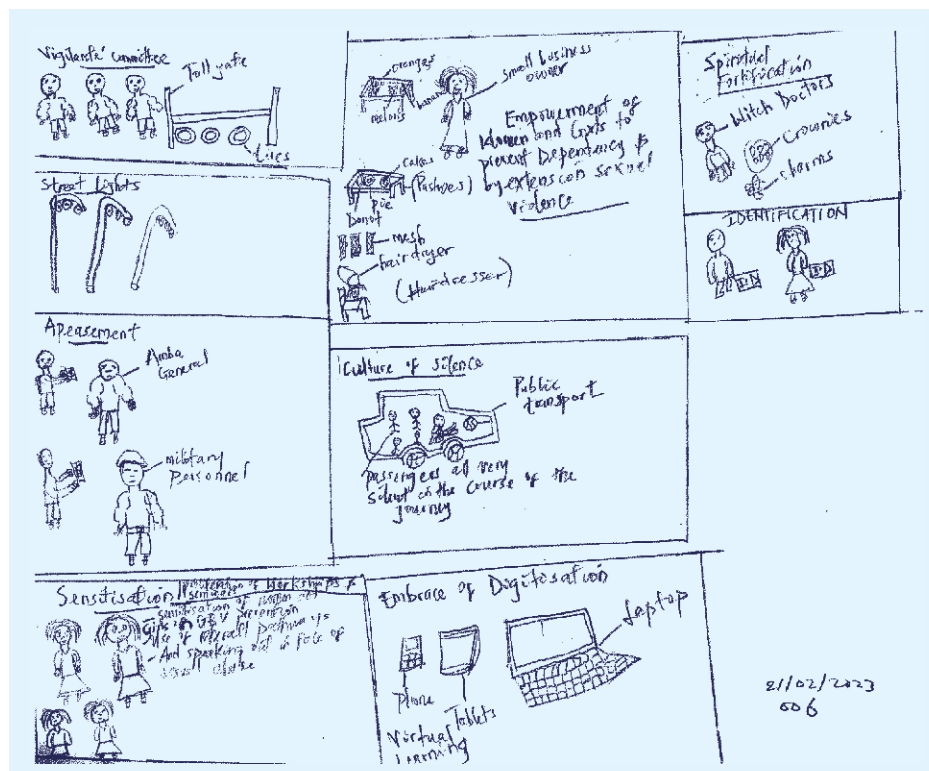


Figure 7: Empowerment to Protect Women from SGBV³⁷⁰

368 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

369 Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

370 Drawing workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

6.3.3. Security Awareness

Local NGOs have assisted conflict-affected communities with becoming more risk aware and safety conscious, including through training programmes. One larger NGO spoke of its ‘Safety Resilience Programme’ that *“trains communities on how to stay safe”*.³⁷¹ The organisation’s representative outlined the reasoning behind the training and the various elements of becoming more security aware:

“Before the crisis, civilians in the English-speaking regions were not used to the sound of the gun. These sounds were generally attributed to hunters, funerals, and festivals. Nobody thought that a gun could be pointed at somebody. But the crisis changed the dynamic. Also, before the crisis, civilians had trust in the military, but that has evolved with time negatively. Most of those killed have been unarmed civilians and this victimisation is from both parties. We train people on how to deal with hostage negotiations, how to conceal information, what to share on social media, what to communicate with others, and how to identify themselves with the military and separatists”.³⁷²

Another NGO similarly explained that they identified focal persons in conflict-affected communities and provided training to them on ‘conflict management strategies’. The training is then disseminated by the focal persons to the wider community. Such training

includes coping mechanisms when faced with confrontations between the warring parties and possible alternative strategies to address the risks associated with running away:

“[We provide training] on how they can cope in times of conflict and how they can seek refuge during confrontations. One of the challenges they have is that during confrontation when people are struggling to run, that is when they are being caught by stray bullets and we have to give them a strategy that when there is confrontation you don’t need to run”.³⁷³

One organisation involved in education programmes for children finished all learning activities by 2pm after analysing when violence by armed actors most commonly occurs:

“You compare and see that the evil that is done in the morning and before midday is 20-25% lesser than the evil committed from afternoon till night, and that is why these crossfires and shootings are done [mostly] in the afternoon. So that is why we begin to protect these children [and] make all programmes to end before 2pm. So that when the dangerous period is coming, they are safe”.³⁷⁴

Another organisation encouraged women farmers to form ‘common initiative groups’ to undertake collaborative farming activities as a means of mutual support and security, as outlined in 6.2.2, enabled in turn by loans and saving schemes:

371 Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

372 Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

373 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

374 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

"We advise them to go in groups of 4 and 5. They go for this one's farm and when it comes to harvesting, planting, they do it [together]. We do it within what we call community loans and savings schemes".³⁷⁵

6.3.4. Documentation Assistance

As discussed above (5.1.9), the loss and/or destruction of identity cards and other official documentation is a major source of vulnerability for civilians when confronted by armed actors, especially the military. It is a particular problem for many IDPs who lost documents when fleeing from violence. NGOs play a key role in assisting citizens to obtain replacement documents. One interviewee, the director of a small NGO, noted the problem and worked with a larger Cameroonian human rights organisation to address it:

"If you don't have an ID card, you're [i.e. the military regards you as] an Ambazonian. So instantly you're at risk, and you'll be locked up and we won't even know what will happen to you. I had more than 2000 IDPs who needed ID cards and birth certificates. So the only way to help them was to volunteer my services to [organisation XXXX who had a documentation project]. Now, I know the people who are in need of those, so we had to do 2000 birth certificates and ID cards because documentation is very important. If not, it takes your vulnerability to 100 [percent]".³⁷⁶

6.3.5. Health and Psycho-Social Support

With many local health posts closed or razed due to the conflict, local NGOs have stepped in to provide some health services, including food-related needs, to those most in need. One interviewee stated that her organisation had worked in four districts heavily affected by the conflict and *"provid[ed] some medications and health education".³⁷⁷* Another remarked that they *"make accessible health services, not at the high level, but a minimal health service to those at risk".³⁷⁸* She also noted that her organisation liaised with the World Health Organisation and the Government of Cameroon with regard to those communities in need, as well as the World Food Programme on food security issues, given that they, as a local organisation, knew *"exactly where it [assistance] is needed".³⁷⁹* One NGO director added that they provided healthcare through a 'mobile clinic'.³⁸⁰

Psycho-social support is probably the most common health-related element provided by NGOs to victims of violence, seen as a form of protection against long-term mental health issues. Such support is often provided to rape survivors. One interviewee, representing an NGO that *"give basic psycho-social first aid to the communities",* outlined a particularly distressing case where counselling was being given to a school girl raped by both the separatists and by the military

³⁷⁵ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

³⁷⁶ Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

³⁷⁷ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

³⁷⁸ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³⁷⁹ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

³⁸⁰ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

when 16 years old (see 4.1.2).³⁸¹ Another NGO interviewee, when asked about protection for girls and women vulnerable to gender-based violence, replied that:

*“The best we could offer to such group of persons is psycho-social support. That is, after they have already survived the incident, we just try to counsel them, giving them constant counselling because we have girls who have been raped, molested”.*³⁸²

But such protection and support is needed by a wide range of civilians affected by conflict and violence. Another interviewee, when discussing the high demand for such counselling services, gave an example of the support required by an older man:

*“You will receive a lot of [calls] from all ages, from elderly men who even weep over the phone. Imagine a man who has lost all his four sons, those children were his source of survival, support system, they are all gone, and he is now left alone”.*³⁸³

6.3.6. Monitoring Compliance with International Humanitarian Law

A further means to protect civilians is the provision of training to both warring parties on the need to respect international humanitarian law, with the aim that this will reduce future violations. This is provided mainly by legally-orientated NGOs. One organisation had proposed online training to the leaders of both the military and

the armed separatist groups, who would then train their respective fighters on the ground. The proposed training focused on: *“The importance of IHL and peace, as well as on how to stay clear of civilians in their work, also schools shouldn’t be attacked, as well as no sexual violence or denial of access to humanitarian services”*.³⁸⁴ At that time (February 2023), the organisation was awaiting a response to its proposal.

Another organisation equally felt that it is *“only the civil society organisations who can speak to both parties in conflict”* and *“to educate duty bearers on the need to protect the civilian population”*. The representative spoke of:

*“The need to tell them that schools and hospitals are not targets, that communication needs to be made. They (CSOs) should find a way to tell both parties in the conflict that civilians need protection; they need to drill them on the international humanitarian law”.*³⁸⁵

However, the difficulties in getting such collaboration from the warring parties was not underestimated:

*“How do you get separatists fighters in a conference and start training them in a seminar? How do you do that? You need to find a means. You may get them through influencers to talk to them where they are.... [and] tell them that they need to protect civilians because civilians are not part of the war”.*³⁸⁶

381 Interview 9, Douala, 27/02/2023

382 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

383 Interview 13, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

384 Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

385 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

386 Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

6.3.7. Security and Safety within Organisations

Protective measures are also necessary for NGO staff working within the conflict zones. The staff at an environmental NGO noted that they themselves were “*victims of the conflict*”.³⁸⁷ Staff members had been kidnapped and ransomed by armed separatists, their premises vandalised, and goods stolen, and they had been forced to move from a conflict ‘hot spot’ to a safer location within the Anglophone region.³⁸⁸ A number of NGOs similarly outlined the measures taken to try and ensure the safety of their staff. Measures involved internal training and the establishment of security plans, as well as compliance with government requirements, including possession of correct documentation and authorisation, for work in the conflict areas.

One larger organisation stated that it held a ‘safety and security’ briefing for all staff twice a week, indicating the serious attention to such issues:

“Twice every week the safety and security officers share an element on safety and security. For example, the officer could choose to brief the team on how to prepare themselves, ensuring psychological preparedness and physical preparedness. What you have to do when you have to leave the office, how you have to dress, how you have to behave, how your vehicles have to be checked, who has to speak at the checkpoint, who has to respond, and what documentation is needed to be shown. All of these are mitigation

*measures put in place by an institution to ensure that their staff going out on a mission are safe”.*³⁸⁹

Even the daily journey to the office is collectively monitored by all staff:

*“All the staff are members of a WhatsApp platform. When you get up in the morning, you share the security temperature of your area to indicate if it is safe for you to come to work, if it is safe for other persons to move along that stretch”.*³⁹⁰

Another NGO outlined its security plan and the procedures that all staff must follow, including the important role of local staff in the field:

“We have a security plan for the organisation, and it has a series of points and steps of things that we must do or must not do when we are going out. You don’t leave the office without signing to indicate where you are going to, with whom you are going, when you are expected to be there and when you are expected to be back. We also have a staff WhatsApp group, so as you leave, you inform the group. We have a strategy so that the moment you start seeing [armed actors] there should be a beep, so their phones are always kept in a way that they beep one to two times so that we can be following up to know what is happening. Also, before going to the field, they talk to the field [co-ordinator] to have clearance because there are days you can go to the field and others where you can’t. So, it is the

387 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

388 Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

389 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

390 Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

person on the ground who can inform us if we can come or not”.³⁹¹

Notwithstanding all the above precautions, NGO workers remain a target for kidnap and ransom demands by the separatist groups. When this happens, NGOs negotiate with the separatists for the release of their staff, at times with the assistance of community members. One organisation gave the example of how the release of a staff member was achieved through the mediation of a community member who had been assisting with the distribution of goods. After this incident, the organisation decided to recruit him as a full staff member:

“He’s now recruited as one of us and a channel through which we access that area and he also understands where and how to move into the communities”.³⁹²

The dangers to life are very real and NGOs will negotiate a ransom as the ultimate protection for their staff:

“You come to an agreement because life is more precious than the money they are asking for, so you need to let go. One of my very good friends that we started this NGO together has lost two staff in Bamenda. They were killed because of this dragging and they [armed separatists] said they don’t have time and before they [NGO] noticed they were shot”.³⁹³

This section has outlined the various ways in which local NGOs have provided support and protection to those civilians most-affected by the conflict. However, it is also notable that such protection is often based on mutual cooperation between NGOs and community members, aiming to ensure the security of all. Indeed there is evidence above to support Oldenhuis et al.’s (2015: 16) statement that UCP can “even [involve] local civilians protecting international or non-local civilians”, whereby local civilians become central to the protection of those working for local and international organisations, thereby reversing the usual expected roles.

³⁹¹ Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

³⁹² Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

³⁹³ Interview 4, Limbe, 18/02/2023

7. Successful Strategies and Challenges

Following the comprehensive discussions of the diverse unarmed protection strategies employed by Anglophone civilians to protect themselves and their fellow civilians in sections 5 and 6, this section goes further to discuss the successful strategies that emerged from the findings, as well as the challenges and limitations that have been encountered. We first identify the range of successful strategies, followed by the challenges.

7.1. Successful Strategies

The focus here is on the relative success of the different strategies and not how widely they have been employed. Identifying what has worked with these strategies can help inform support in this and other conflict terrains. It can also help generate ideas on the kind of support needed by civilians working to protect others in this and other conflicts. The successful strategies are discussed under the following domains: collective protection, early warning strategies, non-engagement strategies, and interpositioning.

7.1.1. Collective Protection: A Core UCP Strategy

As underscored in section 6 of this report, collective protection is the bedrock of unarmed civilian protection in the context of the Anglophone conflict. Even in times when civilians are engaged in their self-protection, they do so mindful

of their collective protection. Collective protection, as demonstrated in the report, is manifested in diverse ways including through creating WhatsApp forums, unarmed vigilantism where young people in particular volunteer to keep watch and protect their communities, community security meetings, assisting fellow civilians to flee violence, providing food and shelter for vulnerable groups, to name a few. Thus, collective protection is manifested, either directly or indirectly, in the majority of unarmed strategies employed by civilians. For example, as illustrated in section 6.1, shelter is one of the ways civilians demonstrate collective protection. For many participants, providing shelter for persons fleeing from a neighbourhood under attack has helped save lives and protected women from rape, among other risks. In some cases, the shelter provided was a house in a safer town or region, but in most cases, it was freshly built in the bush. Collective protection is also manifested in how civilians are mindful to assist vulnerable civilians such as the elderly and persons with disability to flee from violence.

Two main factors account for the relevance of collective protection in Cameroon's Anglophone conflict. First is related to the culture of collectivism. For many Anglophone civilians, the culture or "*spirit of togetherness and oneness in all our communities...and the way we interact bring life to communities*"³⁹⁴ is at the core of collective protection. This

³⁹⁴ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

is also linked to the culture of Ubuntu ('I am because you are') which is embedded in Anglophone communities and by extension several African societies, emphasising that the individual cannot protect him/herself by ignoring the needs and security of every member of the community. This was evident in the phrase "we are everyone's keeper"³⁹⁵ that was used by a number of research participants. To further affirm the relevance of the culture of collectivism in UCP, one participant shared that:

"There is a proverb in my mother tongue which is translated as 'I am a person because of other people'. In this light, when running from danger,

the elderly cannot be left behind. My life finds meaning in the existence of others. Therefore, when something happens in the community, everyone is affected. My arm is not just part of my body, it is my body".³⁹⁶

The quote above demonstrates that within the Anglophone society, an individual's protection has meaning only when it is connected to the collective protection of the whole community. In other words, collective protection is what shapes and influences UCP interventions in this context. In the poem below, one participant equally emphasises collective protection as a core UCP strategy in Anglophone communities.

The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection

I left them when he was dying, being brutally
Killed by violent soldiers. But as he was dying
he was thinking of others. He begged them to
let me go, he was thinking of my safety unto
Death and this saved my life. When we reached
the community, we resolved to always think
of the safety of the other, if we have to remain safe.

I left them limping from the torture meted on me
But I left them thinking about the other
My life saved because when I was in danger he spoke,
he did not remain silent. When I got to the community,
the community resolved to avoid the philosophy of indifference
If we have to remain safe.

I left them and ran into the community
Knowing that I belong to the community
Do I really belong to the community?
No. I went into the community because
I am the community, and the community is me
It was here that we resolved to always put
Community first if we have to stay safe.

³⁹⁵ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

³⁹⁶ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

When sleeping my whistle is by my bed
To signal my neighbour if there is reason
to escape into the farms.
I left them being neither the 'they' nor the 'them'
I left them with the resolve to remain impartial
Our community resolved to remain neutral
If we are to remain safe.

Poem 7: The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection³⁹⁷

The author of the poem explains this by citing belongingness, community-centredness, and collectivism as three of the four key components (the fourth being neutrality) of what he calls 'The Four Commandments of Unarmed Civilian Protection'. He explained that the first three elements are embedded in their culture. He associates belongingness (where he talks about 'I ran to the community knowing that I belong to the community'), collectivism (where he talks about 'I am the community and the community is me'), and the community-centred approach (where he talks about 'putting the community first if we have to stay safe'), to the importance of collective protection in UCP in Anglophone communities.³⁹⁸ Further, the participant explained that even in the case of neutrality (the fourth component), though a self-protection measure, is also a collective protection strategy stating: *"our community resolved to remain neutral if we are to remain safe"*.³⁹⁹

The second factor associated with collective protection is linked to how community members, including the

different community groups and actors, mobilise to collectively protect their fellow citizens. This is where collective protection intersects with local agency. In Section 6.2, we demonstrated how these different groups come together to use and leverage their agency to support their fellow civilians within the affected communities. We see how families mobilise themselves to be the main source of protection for vulnerable groups in particular, considering the breakdown of social structures/services due to the conflict. Similarly, we see how youth groups, community and traditional leaders, religious leaders and women's groups use their agency to engage in advocacy, awareness raising, mediation and negotiation, spiritual fortification, counselling, and trauma healing to help protect civilians affected by the conflict. For instance, the sisterhood of protection enabled women's groups to help protect fellow women from SGBV through their social mobilisation initiatives (see section 6.1). In a poem, one participant further illustrates how women mobilise themselves to care for the vulnerable groups, empower the young, feed the hungry and nurse the wounded even in the bushes to ensure their safety and protection.

³⁹⁷ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁹⁸ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

³⁹⁹ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

Our Mothers, Our Strength

Guns blazing, houses razed
Confusion and panic everywhere
Where do we go? Who do we turn to?
Who can protect us?

In our confusion our mothers arose
As phoenix from the burning ashes
They empowered the young
They carried the elderly, our children
They carried the disabled too as we ran into the bushes.

In the bushes they fed the hungry,
Consoled the broken and nursed the wounded
With their pans they sounded the alarm
They provided us shelter as war drums drew near.

They gave us hope amid hopelessness
Encouraged our weak to persevere
Don't give up! They said,
Victory is on the horizon, they encouraged.

Where would we be without our mothers?
Our strength amidst the turmoil.

Poem 8: Our Mothers, Our Strength⁴⁰⁰

These interventions, which are critical to UCP, would not be possible without the collective efforts or agency of these groups. Elsewhere in this report, we have highlighted the lack of presence and support from external actors, especially international organisations, to address civilian needs in the conflict. Hence, the collective protection provided through local agency is pivotal to UCP in Cameroon. Overall, for many participants, collective protection is critical UCP strategy because it demonstrates

“solidarity and reconciliation” among community members.⁴⁰¹

7.1.2. Early Warning Strategies

Early warning strategies were equally found to be successful within the context of the Anglophone conflict. Paramount among these are the digital measures and unarmed vigilantism. Digital measures, including social media and WhatsApp groups for instance, were found to be successful early warning strategy of UCP. Two reasons account for this. First, social media and WhatsApp

400 Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

401 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

platforms are noted to be among the safest means of communication and intelligence exchanges within the affected communities. The narrative below explains:

*“You see, you get information there [digital platforms] on what is happening. I want to go to Buea and someone will say, ‘No it’s not safe at Mutengene’. So that is the safest means of information sharing on different social media platforms”.*⁴⁰²

The safety of the platforms was linked to its encryption. WhatsApp for instance is preferred because it is encrypted. This means that it is difficult to be traced and monitored by the military or armed separatists; hence limits the risk of possible reprisals. As one participant affirmed: *“Calls you know on WhatsApp is encrypted, but with normal calls I’m sure that they listen”.*⁴⁰³

The second reason relates to the fact that information shared on these platforms travels faster and is easily accessible to the majority of the Anglophone population. According to one participant:

*“[The groups] have been very instrumental in keeping people safe. For example, if I have to go to Buea, I have four checkpoints to pass through. The fastest means for me to get information is through my cultural group, my NGO WhatsApp group, my church group”.*⁴⁰⁴

As indicated in section 5, almost 90% of Cameroon’s 27 million population have access to mobile phones (Ford, 2022) and at the start of 2023, there were 12.89 million internet subscribers and 3.90 million social media users in the country (Kemp, 2023). This implies that a growing number of civilians in the country are able to easily access internet and social media platforms which makes it equally easy for information sharing within families, communities and among friends. Such access to digital platforms becomes a useful and critical tool in times of conflict and violence. Information shared on these platforms is notably received immediately and easy to forward to groups. As one participant explained: *“WhatsApp groups are the most effective. Forward as received [and] it goes viral”.*⁴⁰⁵ Ultimately, using these digital strategies not only protects civilians through the exchange of essential security information, but they also protect the users of the platforms since they are arguably safe and secure.

In addition to the digital strategies, unarmed vigilantism was found to be another effective and successful early warning strategy. For most civilians in conflict-affected communities, these unarmed vigilante groups (discussed in Section 5.2.3) are successful since they are one of the main sources of protection. These groups have helped to protect communities through keeping watch over who enters and leaves the community and who does what in the community, as well as alert the communities of impending violence. When asked which UCP strategy is successful, one participant highlighted:

402 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

403 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

404 Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

405 Interview 1, Limbe, 17/02/2023

“So far, the one that has been relatively successful is the one put in place by the youths whereby they have persons who sit at strategic positions in the community you know to alert the community in case of any danger, yes that has been very successful”.⁴⁰⁶

To affirm the above quote, other participants cited examples where the presence of unarmed vigilante groups has reduced incidences of kidnapping. One participant expressed:

“There are some quarters around Nkwen where there have been some armed groups that are kidnapping people. There is a particular quarter in Mile 5 where kidnapping was so rampant, so the quarter members had to form a vigilante group and advice every household to own a whistle and monitor their neighbours. Anytime there is an intruder in compound A, the nearest neighbour will start sounding the whistle and that has worked to prevent more than 5 kidnappings that would have happened. When the whole quarter is sounding the whistle, they alert people and the group [armed groups] escapes or move away and it is a good strategy that other quarters have copied”.⁴⁰⁷

The figures of prevented cases of kidnapping highlighted in the above quote could be more since data on the contributions of these local strategies are often underestimated or non-existent. Furthermore, in Figure 8, one participant showed how vigilante groups made it possible for people to return to their homes using whistles and phone calls.

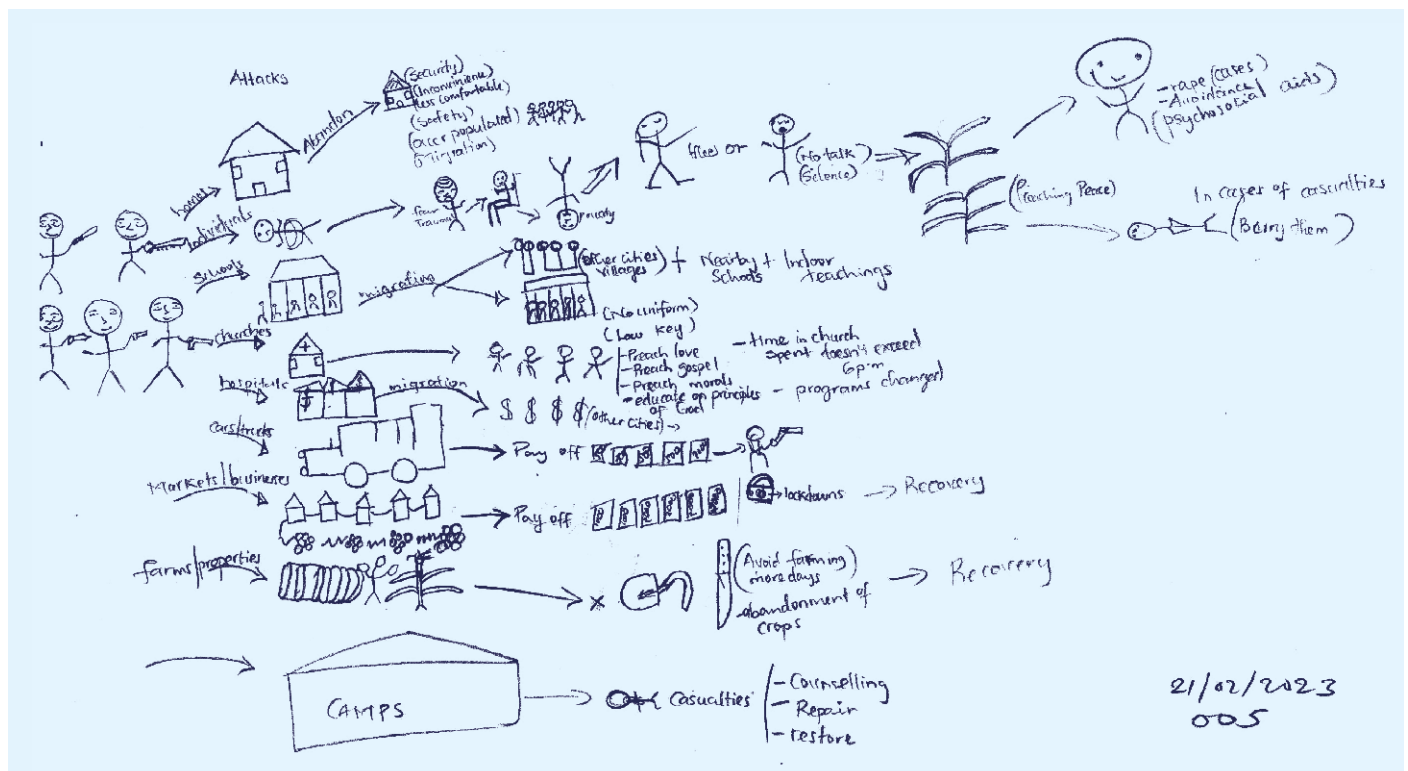
⁴⁰⁶ Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

⁴⁰⁷ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

imminent violence or during violence. In Section 5.3 we have detailed the different ways civilians use running to protect themselves, inclusive of running to nearby bushes, farms or further afield to other towns. They run to avoid any form of confrontation with the warring factions, especially the military who can attack civilians irrespective of their innocence. Figure 9 below shows how one participant presented the use of running as a successful protection strategy. It

shows that by choosing to abandon their homes, civilians avoid being targeted by the belligerents. Another participant explained that running was successful because it prevented people being killed by the warring parties: “*Running into the bushes is protection because anyone can be shot*”⁴¹⁰. In other words, for civilians in the affected communities, running is an effective protective strategy as it protects them from violent attacks.

Figure 9: Non-Engagement Strategy⁴¹¹



The drawing above also shows that those who do not find it necessary to run away have stayed quiet or silent at home. We refer to this in Section 5.1 as protective silences. In discussing her drawing, this participant noted that staying silent enabled people to evade armed groups while at home. She explained that

sharing your opinion about the conflict, including when armed actors are in one's community, may attract their attention, and when they enter your home, there is a high risk of the occupants being shot, raped, tortured, or at the very least extorted or intimidated.⁴¹² As emphasised in Section 5.1, silence should not be seen

⁴¹⁰ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴¹¹ Drawing workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴¹² Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

as a sign of weakness or powerlessness, but a strategic choice for protection in times of violence. In Cameroon, such protective silences are civilians' way of navigating their everyday realities in the context of conflict and violence, enabling them to successfully protect themselves. As one participant expressed: *"So, to prevent and keep yourself safe, you just sit quiet and seal your lips".*⁴¹³

Although in their categorisation of civilian self-protection strategies, Jose and Medie (2015) separate silence and neutrality into different domains, non-engagement and non-violent engagement respectively, our research found protective silences to be a manifestation of neutrality. Hence in the Anglophone conflict, protective silences and neutrality are intertwined. This affirms, which Jose and Medie (2015) equally concur, the fluid nature of civilian self-protection strategies in conflict as they are influenced by the dynamics and realities of the particular context.

7.1.4. Interpositioning

Another successful strategy has been interpositioning. This strategy entails persons with a certain reputation putting themselves between the military or separatists and those civilians at risk, thus creating a barrier with the aim of preventing harm on the latter. In the Cameroon context, as demonstrated in Figure 9 above, this strategy has been used very successfully by older women, some traditional rulers, and priests/church leaders. In Figure 6 (Section 6.2), one participant's drawing demonstrated

how interpositioning was used to protect school children. According to this participant, older women, or other persons with a good reputation in the community have been able to protect civilians, especially students, by their presence. They have formed a barrier between the targeted civilians and the separatists or the military and successfully pleaded for the civilians not to be harmed on several occasions. This drawing also showed how peaceful protests, mostly composed of women with peace plants or branches, have been successful in protecting people on other occasions.

The success of interpositioning is also linked to relationship building. It becomes a very effective strategy when the categories of persons depicted in Figure 2 establish good relationships with different actors and the community. For instance, some priests were said to have built a strong relationship with local communities, as well as with the army and the separatists, making it possible for them to intervene and protect civilians from harm by using their presence.⁴¹⁴ One participant for example explained why some priests have been able to protect civilians:

*"They trust them. Even if we have to leave Bamenda, ... in order to gain access we have to negotiate with the parish priest because they are really trusted within those communities".*⁴¹⁵

According to this participant and others, the relationships that worked were those that had been built in a way as to ensure the person seeking to or protecting other

⁴¹³ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴¹⁴ Drawing Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴¹⁵ Interview 10, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

civilians is trusted by the parties in the conflict. Another participant emphasised the need for such persons to be seen as neutral. This is consistent with the view of Baines and Paddon (2012: 236) who contend that neutrality requires “*masking any allegiance to either side and seeking protection in non-combatant status*”. This means that simply being a church leader or traditional leader by itself was not what made them successful. The next section discusses some of the challenges associated with UCP in Cameroon.

7.2. Challenges

The scale and complexity of challenges to UCP in the Anglophone conflict mirror the complexity of threats to civilians in this conflict. Left alone, it is unlikely that local self-protection efforts, though useful as discussed above, can mitigate these challenges. Scaling-up these local protection efforts is thus important, but this requires understanding and addressing the challenges encountered by local UCP actors in this conflict. Research shows that challenges faced by unarmed UCP actors are common and have been experienced in other conflicts (Duncan, Carriere, and Oldenhuis, 2015). The aim of this section is to increase the understanding of these challenges faced by local UCP efforts. The main challenges identified by participants in this study were: weakened social cohesion; challenges of vigilantism; intimidation by warring parties; risks of running away; and financial constraints.

7.2.1. Decline in Social Cohesion

We noted collective protective measures as a successful strategy. However,

one significant challenge is that such measures are simultaneously undermined by another trend - the overall decline in social cohesion that is occurring in conflict-affected communities (Crawford et al. 2022: 41). Social cohesion is defined as the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other to survive and prosper (Stanley, 2003: 5, cited in Crawford et al. 2022: 41), and activities to promote it have been perceived as part of civilian protection interventions (Barbelet 2015: 17). We have noted in particular how it is a necessary attribute for communities to come together in collective protection activities. At the outset of the conflict, communities were relatively unified and regarded the armed separatists, referred to colloquially as ‘the Boys’, as their protectors against military aggression (Willis 2020: 51-54). It should be recalled that the Amba fighters were civilians, mainly young men, from the same communities with the same experiences of marginalisation and discrimination by the Cameroonian state. Yet the debilitating effects of seven years of war on civilian populations has had an adverse effect on social cohesion. We identify three inter-related factors that have undermined social cohesion and contributed to increased community divisions: the phenomenon of ‘blacklegs’; increased violence towards Anglophone civilians from the armed separatist groups; and the rise of state-sponsored armed vigilante groups.

The phenomenon of ‘blacklegs’ refers to alleged traitors or informants. While the military has actively sought to recruit informants or spies, allegations of spying (often unfounded) are also made by some

community members against others. One division within communities can be between those indigenous to the locality and others not originally of the given locality, with the latter more likely to be suspected as ‘blacklegs’ just because they speak a different local language. According to participants, this has undermined protection efforts. As noted by one interviewee:

*“The dialects prevented this, because when they [non-indigenous] go into the community, they are seen as ‘blacklegs’ since most people cannot recognise them, and when the [Amba] Boys see you, they start shooting”.*⁴¹⁶

The response of armed separatist groups to alleged ‘blacklegs’ involves extreme violence, often killings, at times without substantive evidence. One brutal example was the public execution of two civilians in Guzang, North West Region, on 4 October 2023 for allegedly collaborating with government forces. Responsibility for this callous act was openly claimed by the Ambazonia Defense Forces (ADF) in a clear attempt to intimidate the local population (Cameroon News Agency, 2023). Such extreme violence has created an atmosphere of fear, mistrust, and suspicion, and caused community members to withdraw from engagement and interaction among themselves.

As well as violence against alleged informants or traitors, it appears that separatist violence against Anglophone civilians in general has also increased as the conflict has persisted. This is evident, for instance, in more violent responses to non-payment of separatist-imposed taxes. For example, a group of approximately 30

women were abducted and detained by an armed separatist group in Big Babanki in the North West Region on 19 May 2023, after publicly protesting against the level of monthly dues or taxes demanded by the separatists. Although soon released, the women were subjected to verbal abuse and threats of death, with such treatment described by CHRDA (2023) as “*cruel and degrading*”. A particularly horrific incident occurred on 6 November 2023 when at least 50 civilians were killed in an attack in Egbekaw village near Mamfe in the South West Region, with houses set ablaze in the nighttime attack and villagers fleeing. Although no organisation claimed responsibility, it is suspected that the perpetrators were armed separatists (Global Protection Cluster, 2023: 3) possibly in response to recent killings of two separatist leaders by the military (Mbunwe, 2023). The attack also coincided with the 41st anniversary of President Paul Biya coming to power, with the government scheduling celebrations in Mamfe later that day. Whatever the motivation in this instance, a trend is evident of increased attacks on Anglophone civilians as separatist groups attempt to maintain control over the local population and to extract the financial resources vital to sustain themselves and their liberation struggle. The president of CHRDA has described this shift as one where the “*so called ‘protectors’ of the population are now persecutors of the population*” (CHRDA 2023). Such separatist violence against civilians simultaneously leads to greater community divisions, with support for the separatist cause declining and, at times, a greater degree of tolerance of the military presence as a form of armed protection. In one comment that appears indicative of this emerging change, one interviewee stated that civilians are now

⁴¹⁶ Interview 3, Limbe, 17/02/2023

blowing their whistles to alert both fellow civilians and the military about impending attacks by the armed separatists, in contrast to the start of the conflict where the opposite was the case. Indeed, the same participant noted that now, “When *the military is coming, they don’t use phones or whistle.... because recently they [military] are friendly*”.⁴¹⁷ While such ‘friendliness’ by the military may be tactical, calculated to extract information about separatist activity from local people, this emerging trend is also in part related to the increasing attacks and exploitation of civilians by the armed separatists who many initially supported.

The rise of armed vigilante groups is also an indicator of these trends. While such groups have been formed and armed largely at the instigation of state officials or members of the ruling party, a changing atmosphere in local communities has enabled this to occur. While armed vigilante groups are presented as performing a protective function, they are clearly partisan and operate as an anti-separatist force, reporting back to government or military contacts. As well as a means of gaining information about the movements of separatist fighters, this

is clearly a divide and rule strategy of the state, with the recruitment of local civilians into such armed vigilante groups leading to greater community divisions.

These inter-related factors have all contributed to increasingly polarised communities, characterised by mistrust, fear and suspicion, and thus a decline in social cohesion. As one participant stated:

*“You see there is a very great challenge of getting one person in the community to trust the other. There is a lot of limitation as far as trusting each other is concerned and then it comes to make cohesion very difficult”.*⁴¹⁸

The trends have emerged partly due to the protracted nature of the conflict. While support for the ‘liberation struggle’ was widespread at the outset among the civilian population, even if implicit, the conflict’s long-term adverse impact on civilians has led to a weakening of support. A constant refrain from study participants was of ‘tiredness’, tired of the violence and deprivations that the conflict has entailed, with no end in sight. One participant explicitly describes this war fatigue through poem:

We Are Tired

We are tired!
Tired of burying our dead daily
Tired of fleeing into the bushes daily
Tired of hiding under the bed from flying bullets
Tired of putting out flames from burning corpses, houses, and hospitals.

⁴¹⁷ Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴¹⁸ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

We are tired!
Tired of lying politicians
Tired of armchair leaders telling us that everything is under control
Tired of being victims of terror from warring parties
Tired of losing money to kidnappers and thieves at gun point

We are tired!
Tired of the silence of religious moral authorities nationwide
Tired of the loud sounding silence of the other eight regions of the country
Tired of the silence of the international community in the face of such inhumanity
Tired of waiting on God to answer our prayers for peace.

Poem 9: We Are Tired⁴¹⁹

Almost inevitably, it would seem that the protracted conflict has led to exhausted communities becoming increasingly divided with a gradual breakdown in the social cohesion that enabled community members to engage in mutual cooperation and collective protection activities. While some civilians have attempted to (re-)build social cohesion as an important protection strategy, as discussed in Section 5.1, it is difficult to envision a reversal of this decline except through a ceasefire and an end to violence, followed by dialogue and a just and peaceful political settlement. While the conflict endures, the collective protection mechanisms that the civilian population has creatively employed may become increasingly difficult to maintain.

7.2.2. Challenges of Vigilantism

While the formation of unarmed vigilante groups within communities have played an important ‘early warning’ role, the use of vigilante groups has also faced several challenges. One challenge has been the infiltration of unarmed vigilante groups by those with links to the warring parties,

while the presence of more than one group in some communities has led to rivalries between groups, with the poor organisation of some groups also noted as a weakness. One interviewee, for example, stated:

*“They are too informal and at times the community may have about two or three which will also have a conflict in terms of vigilante groups, and they may have a case where there is infiltration. Your group maybe infiltrated and betrayed. It’s kind of a makeshift structure, it’s not permanent”.*⁴²⁰

Nonetheless, the key problem has been the existence of both armed and unarmed vigilante groups, at times with a lack of clear distinction between them. As noted above (5.2.3), the armed vigilante groups have generally been formed through links with state security forces or government officials, who have provided the groups with arms. One interviewee discussed one such group established by the local Divisional Officer:

⁴¹⁹ Poetry workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴²⁰ Interview 2, Limbe, 17/02/2023

"The authority concerned is the DO... He was the one who created these groups... Also, the case in xxxx where these guys put in place [by the DO] were parading around as if it is an intertribal war... The [previous] vigilante groups were never armed but these ones were armed".⁴²¹

Other participants indicated that these government-formed vigilante groups had direct links to the military and reported separatist activities to them. Worse, they were said to perpetuate violence against civilians under the guise of 'Amba fighters' to discredit the latter: *"The military who give them guns, so these guns are being rented and when they are done, they give them back to the military. This is done to discredit the real Ambas".⁴²²* This has affected the trust in vigilantes, as noted by one participant: *"We used to collaborate with government but got dissatisfied when government started arming some groups. We could no longer be sure of who to trust".⁴²³*

While unarmed vigilantism was an effective 'early warning' measure at earlier stages in the conflict, it has clearly been complicated by the creation of armed vigilante groups with direct links to the military. The common name of 'vigilante groups' serves to blur the distinction between unarmed non-partisan civilian protection and armed, partisan groups that offer little protection.

7.2.3. Intimidation by Warring Parties

Successful UCP measures can be subject to disruption by violence or threats of violence from the warring parties.

Digital strategies are dependent on the use of mobile phones, and intimidatory targeting of civilian phone use by the military has disturbed such efforts. The various alarms and noise-making, such as blowing whistles, as an early warning method has also been undermined through intimidation of key individuals. We look at both here.

Digital Strategies

UCP efforts using social media groups have faced some setbacks according to participants. A major challenge to this strategy has been the illegal search and seizure of phones by state security forces. One interviewee for example described the risks experienced in using social media groups for protection purposes:

"The only thing that is slowing the groups, because I have many groups I belong to, is this military harassment. People tend to sometimes exit those groups for fear of harassment because some military officers when they take your phone and see that you are in groups, they will say that is where they hold Amba meetings. So that is the downside of that, but with care from family and friends, messages still circulate on the media, so we don't dismiss WhatsApp as a security tool for those living here".⁴²⁴

According to this participant, the military tends to treat persons who belong to social media groups as separatist fighters or supporters. Such illegal search and seizure of phones has led to fear and worry about the use of social media

⁴²¹ Interview 6, Dschang, 23/02/2023

⁴²² Interview 5, Dschang, 22/02/2023

⁴²³ Poetry Workshop, Dschang, 21/02/2023

⁴²⁴ Interview 11, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

groups for civilian protection, causing some to unsubscribe or “you forward as received and delete immediately once it goes”⁴²⁵. While potentially limiting the use of these groups and their effectiveness, this participant notes that these groups have remained necessary in spite of the risks associated with this arbitrary search of phones by the military.

Another significant challenge to the use of digital strategies for civilian protection has been the limited access to the internet since the start of the conflict. This is caused by power cuts and poor network connection. As one interviewee stated:

*“There are lots of internet problems. Something may happen and you try to get to people fast and it is not going. ... People go for days without having internet or months without having electricity, so even if they have the telephone and internet, they may not be able to charge it”.*⁴²⁶

This participant noted that to solve this problem several innovative options have been used, for instance, installing the VPN application, using power banks or solar energy to recharge phones. In some situations, people go to neighbouring areas to charge their phones so they can remain connected to their groups for access to protection-related information. According to this participant:

“We are advised to download the VPN or something that can bypass, but then not many of them in the community have that kind of telephone. So that continues to be a challenge. But nevertheless,

*we may have 5 to 10 people who can ... download alternative apps which could still work if there is no internet. Then concerning electricity people have bought rechargeable bulbs where they just charge and keep. And power banks, laptops anything that can store current [so] that I can use it to warm [charge] my phone for some time. During the day people carry their phones to the nearest place where there is current to charge their phones just because they are afraid to sleep without a means of communicating”.*⁴²⁷

The use of social media groups in spite of these challenges faced has remained very useful, as discussed above. This means that ensuring access to the internet in situations of conflict can be vital for civilians seeking to protect each other.

Targeting of Early Warning Providers

The targeting of those who blow whistles or sound other alarms has constituted a major obstacle to this early warning strategy. The military, according to participants, has targeted and killed some of those who have sounded an alarm to inform other civilians of their approach. This has caused some to fear using this strategy. One interviewee explained how using the whistle to protect yourself against assailants has become dangerous:

“We have the whistle blowing, and wherever we go to in the community we tell people to take their whistles. Although at times it causes more danger to them once they start blowing from the house where there is danger. So, they (either warring party) say you

425 Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

426 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

427 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

are blowing the whistle to inform them (the other side) that we are around... But if it is a neighbour that notices, they blow it, and it is a lot easier".⁴²⁸

According to this participant, the challenge is mitigated when the whistle is blown by a neighbour. As others hear and also blow their whistles, it can scare assailants away. The military has also targeted the direction from which a whistle is blown. A participant narrated how someone was shot after blowing the whistle and how this resulted in their community stopping using the strategy:

"They don't use whistles because one of the persons who blew the whistle was shot even though he didn't die. He was shot because immediately he blew, they were able to identify and trace where the sound was coming from, and they started shooting in that direction".⁴²⁹

Another reason why whistle blowing has faced challenges, thus reducing its effectiveness, is its use by non-state armed groups. They have used the whistle to serve their own interests, adding to the confusion. As one participant argued:

"Blowing the whistle was initially effective. However sometimes the Ambas also blow the whistle to cause confusion so that they can escape.... The community whistle and run. It is strange because you cannot know who is who. However, strategies change all the time".⁴³⁰

7.2.4. Risks of Running Away

Civilians running away to a safe place still face various problems. These can be directly related to the particular terrain, especially running into the bushes. One participant noted the risk of being *"bitten by snakes and you have difficulty when it rains. Women are giving birth in the bushes with no medical attention; some die."*⁴³¹ One participant in the drawing workshop stated that he chose not to run away because *"those who ran got shot."*⁴³² Women that run to the bushes, if discovered, can be victims of rape at the hands of separatist fighters and the military. Those who run to other towns often have little social protection there. These findings are similar to those of Jose and Medie (2016: 15) who argue that "Fleeing, a type of non-engagement strategy, can also make civilians more vulnerable to attacks. Reflecting the impact of gender norms, men who flee to nearby towns are vulnerable to these attacks". People fleeing violence can also "be left without access to food and shelter" (Fast 2018: 6). Citing South et al. (2012), Fast (2018: 6) argues that flight may protect people from bombing, *"but it concurrently exposes them to different threats that could result in death from exposure or hunger"*. Fleeing is therefore a strategy that has been used by civilians to successfully protect themselves from being killed and other threats, but which has also exposed them to other dangers.

428 Interview 14, Bamenda, 31/03/2023

429 Interview 15, Buea, 21/04/2023

430 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

431 Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

432 Interview 7, Dschang, 21/02/2023

7.2.5. Financial Constraints

A final challenge regarding community self-protection measures is a financial one. Some measures, especially those associated with protecting others, have a financial cost. Additionally, UCP measures such as training or other support provided by NGOs can be restricted due to the non-availability of external funds. We explore these two instances below.

Cost of Hosting Community Members at Risk

The high cost associated with providing shelter to those at risk has made it difficult for many to provide such protection. Providing shelter according to participants often required that the host should be able to cater for other needs of the vulnerable including health and food. One workshop participant explained how it was difficult to cope with the expenses from hosting those at risk or fleeing violence:

*“When your house is a safe ground where others meet, there is high expenditure. When many people come together, diseases are equally prevalent. We therefore live unsatisfied when many people come together as everyone has their own policy”.*⁴³³

Another challenge to the use of this strategy has been that those in danger sometimes are afraid of taking up an offer of shelter because of instances where *“host families abuse and exploit IDPs- sexually, economically, physically”*.⁴³⁴

In spite of the challenges faced in efforts to provide affected persons with shelter, this form of protection has remained widespread throughout the conflict and warrants particular attention. Supporting community-based organisations and civilians seeking to provide housing to those affected by the conflict can contribute positively to their safety.

Limited Funding for UCP Activities

Another important challenge to civilian protection efforts has been the limited funding or the lack thereof for UCP activities. Participants expressed the need for sufficient funding to enable UCP training and the scaling-up of protection activities such as the provision of shelter. One participant stated:

*“Sometimes there could be other ways of going about it, but the funding is really tight. And also getting experts who can come in and address the situation is hard to get. So, you see that there is limitation in accessing expertise. There is limited funding in activities”.*⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Storytelling Workshop, Dschang, 22/02/2023

⁴³⁴ Interview 8, Dschang, 23/02/2023

⁴³⁵ Interview 12, Bamenda, 30/03/2023

As mentioned above, hosting civilians at risk is costly and it is even more expensive to build temporary or permanent shelter for them. In spite of the high cost of meeting such important and widespread protection needs, as identified by participants, there has been virtually no funding for civilians making efforts to protect themselves and others. The absence of traditional international

UCP providers such as Peace Brigades International (PBI) and Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP), and the limited presence and activities of others such as the UNHCR and ICRC also suggests that there has been little or no direct funding for UCP engagements. The importance of funding explains why Nonviolent Peaceforce recently applauded the latest U.S. funding for UCP (Public News Service, 2023).



8. Conclusion

The ongoing armed conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, now in its seventh year, has had a catastrophic impact on the civilian population. They have experienced and been subjected to terrible acts of violence, as outlined in section 4. The poems, drawings, and stories of our participants, who were residents of conflict 'hot spots', all bear witness to incidents of killings, rapes, arbitrary arrest and detention, kidnappings, and burning of homes. Both warring parties are responsible for these acts of violence against civilians. While the military was the main perpetrator of violence against English-speaking civilians in the earlier years (Willis et al., 2020: 35-36; World Bank (2021: 28), the armed separatist groups have increasingly been responsible for violent acts, including extreme violence, against local civilians perceived as unsupportive of their cause. The overwhelming feeling expressed by participants was of one of tiredness, tired of the conflict and its adverse impact on their lives, with a strong desire for the cessation of violence and the restoration of peace. This is not to say that they are content with the position of English-speakers within Cameroon. On the contrary, the experience of decades-long marginalisation and discrimination remains a source of dissatisfaction and frustration, and is vital to address in future peace negotiations if a sustainable political settlement is to be reached.

This study has focused on civilian self-protection in those communities most affected by conflict. The Anglophone conflict in Cameroon offers a rather

unique case due to the absence of more traditional top-down unarmed civilian protection (UCP) measures and actors. Since the Anglophone conflict broke out, the government has shown little or no interest in external efforts, including mediation, to resolve the conflict and thereby protect civilians. Two mediation initiatives, one by Switzerland and another by Canada, have ultimately been rejected by the Cameroon government and failed to receive sufficient international support to put pressure on the government to enter into negotiations with the separatist political leadership. Unarmed civilian protection measures from international non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental bodies could potentially have reduced the violence against civilians. Yet such intervention has been virtually impossible given the opposition to any such efforts by the Cameroon government and the general lack of international interest in the conflict. Nonetheless, civilians in the Anglophone regions have taken up the challenge to protect themselves using non-violent means. These efforts have undoubtedly saved many lives and have shielded many others from violations. Yet, such efforts face important challenges that need to be addressed to increase their effectiveness. This study therefore sought to examine the strategies of unarmed civilian self-protection that have been used successfully in this conflict along with the challenges that have limited their impact.

To explore this topic of unarmed civilian self-protection, the study employed

several participatory and qualitative methods that made it more possible for people from conflict-affected communities to be engaged in the research process. Arts-based methods, notably poetry and drawing workshops, were particularly useful in creating a safe space for participants to engage in without fear. In this conclusion, we revisit the three elements of the primary question posed at the outset and outline our summary answers, and then we examine the contributions made to the study of unarmed civilian protection in terms of the overall literature and the use of arts-based methods.

8.1. Approaches and Types of Unarmed Civilian Self-Protection

The first element of our primary research question asked: *What approaches to and types of unarmed self-protection have been taken by local civilians in the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon?* As examined in section 5, study participants identified a large range of strategies used by civilians and by local communities and groups for their own protection and that of others. Unlike in conflict situations where those who implement UCP come from outside the community (Molz 2018; Wallis 2010), distinctively in this setting these strategies were deployed by locals. The strategies adopted by civilians in this context were grouped under three main headings: spontaneous protective measures; early warning early response measures; and preventive measures. The predominance of local civilians protecting themselves in this conflict has important implications for the future of UCP.

The study identified several spontaneous protective measures used by civilians for self-protection. These were mainly individual and family measures, taken in situations of an immediate threat of violence. Evasive measures at home included lying on the floor to self-protect from bullets. But the most widely-used spontaneous strategy has been fleeing or running to the bushes during periods of fighting between the armed actors and/or when there is an imminent attack on their village. Many participants recounted periods of months and years spent living in the bushes, with births and deaths occurring there, especially in the earlier years of the conflict. The strategy of running has also led to the phenomenon of 'regular pendular migration', back and forth from village to bushes to escape from the violence. Civilians also run to farms or to neighbouring villages and other regions and seek temporary shelter, and at times permanent shelter, there. In this way, an initial spontaneous strategy can evolve into a planned strategy.

In addition to the more spontaneous measures, several early warning and response strategies were also identified by participants, including communication and intelligence exchange. These are more collective in nature and enabled civilians to access and share reliable information on the impending or imminent threat of violence. Several tools were used for communication and intelligence sharing including: WhatsApp groups, whistles and other alarms and sounds. Another important strategy under this category has been the use of nonviolent or unarmed vigilantism. The unarmed vigilante groups have been increasingly used in the Anglophone conflict to monitor the movement of armed actors and help

civilians run away from their homes and villages when attacks or fighting occurs.

Finally, civilians were quick to learn various preventive strategies to avoid being subjected to violence by either warring party. Such strategies were generally adopted by individual civilians to protect themselves and family members. They spread rapidly around the general population and were used both in everyday community life and when travelling, especially in direct encounters with armed actors. Neutrality and protective silence were adopted to prevent being associated with the opponent of either side. Travelling with identification cards and relevant documentation, adhering to the instructions and rules of both warring parties and dressing appropriately were ways to avoid being targeted. Information about safe passages and escape routes were shared between local community members and used during periods of intense fighting to avoid encountering armed actors. Confidence and self-composure were considered important when interrogated by the military or separatists to avoid being harmed. Relocation was identified as a more major protective strategy, often considered necessary where homes had been burnt and civilians indiscriminately detained or killed. Moving to neighbouring villages and to other regions was therefore a strategy adopted to avoid harm in such situations, leading to large-scale internal displacement. Compliance with the payment of fees demanded by the separatists and bribes demanded by the military is widespread in this conflict as a means of preventative protection, especially when travelling. Fees are also paid by business owners to avoid

violence. The decline in social cohesion orchestrated by this conflict was believed by participants to have made individuals and the community more exposed to violence. Therefore, rebuilding social cohesion was considered as another important preventative strategy, and seen as creating the renewed trust necessary for collaborative protective measures, such as intelligence gathering and sharing, to be more effectively used.

It is evident that civilians in the Anglophone conflict have been innovative and resourceful in the strategies adopted to protect themselves and fellow civilians in the midst of armed conflict and threats of violence from both warring parties. Some strategies such as 'dressing appropriately' have been rather unique to this conflict, while others such as neutrality and protective silence are seen in other conflicts and/or discussed in UCP literature. This means that considerations of external support for civilian protection in this conflict needs to take into account the particular context and the unique local strategies to ensure appropriate support is provided. This research has confirmed that there is no one-size-fits-all model of community (self-) protection. Rather the specific context and local agency are all-important, with a recognition of these aspects in situations where external organisations are able to provide support.

8.2. Strengthening Successful Measures of Civilian Self-Protection

The second element of our primary research question asked: *How successful have they been and how can civilian self-*

protection be strengthened? We explored in Section 7 the relative success of various UCP measures adopted by local civilians for their self-protection, as well as some of the challenges faced. Collective protective measures have been particularly successful, and examples abound, including community security meetings, provision of shelter to those civilians at risk, women farmers working collectively to provide security on each other's farms, and various early warning and alert systems. Such measures have often required the self-organisation of local people in rural villages and urban neighbourhoods (quarters). This mobilisation has largely occurred spontaneously, but often facilitated by community leaders, notably women. For instance, women's groups have organised peace marches to demand the release of their sons and young men from arbitrary detention by the military, and also negotiated directly with the armed separatists to release local kidnappees. They have provided safe spaces for girls and women, and organised support groups for SGBV survivors. In addition, youth leaders have been at the forefront of organising early warning systems, often implemented by predominantly young people. While these examples of community self-mobilisation have largely occurred without outside support, we noted that local NGOs, usually urban-based, have been able at times to engage in UCP-related activities under the guise of humanitarian assistance and lacking the formal approval of government. In order to strengthen community self-organisation, local NGOs could potentially provide useful support, for instance by facilitating the formation of community-based organisations out of the loose networks of individuals and community leaders that have emerged from the conflict situation.

However, our findings also noted a trend as the conflict has persisted, one that is simultaneously undermining mutual cooperation and collective protection measures. Whereas social cohesion is needed for collective protection, social divisions within communities are increasingly evident, with a consequent breakdown in social cohesion. Building or restoring social cohesion was thus considered by study participants to be crucial in strengthening UCP efforts in the Anglophone conflict. Yet, this is not a straightforward task, given that trust has been tested in dramatic ways in this conflict. It was thought that increasing communication among community members, as well as strengthening links between local communities and local and international non-governmental organisations were important. The organisation of local workshops with all stakeholders to explore building trust and restoring social cohesion could potentially help in this regard. Nonetheless, it is difficult to envision a reversal of this decline in social cohesion except through a ceasefire and an end to violence, followed by dialogue, negotiation, and a just political settlement that addresses Anglophone grievances. While the conflict persists, the collective protection mechanisms that the civilian population has creatively devised may become increasingly difficult to maintain.

The role of religious and traditional leaders has also been highlighted at the local community level. They contribute in various ways ranging from practical measures such as providing shelter to those fleeing violence, to negotiating with both warring parties, to awareness raising and the provision of counselling. These important functions of local religious and traditional

leaders can potentially be strengthened through the hierarchical structures of their organisations, namely the churches and Traditional Councils. The structures at regional level within Cameroon can identify examples of successful local self-protection strategies, inclusive of their institutional or leadership role, and disseminate good practices more widely. A clear position of independence and non-partisanship is necessary if local church and traditional leaders are to gain the trust and respect of community members, as well as that of the warring parties. One caveat here, however, is that the Chiefs in the South West region are increasingly government appointees, while the Fons in North West region, although remaining hereditary, have to be endorsed by the administration. This leads to their independence being questioned by many local people, thus limiting their effectiveness.

We have emphasised that individuals and communities have largely devised their own self-protection strategies, with support from outside agencies either absent or limited to humanitarian assistance from local NGOs. Yet community self-protection can potentially be strengthened through enhanced vertical linkages to local and international NGOs, while acknowledging the difficulties of doing so when faced with government hostility. Community-based organisations are having to deal with unprecedented situations of conflict and violence, and local NGOs can potentially provide much-needed support and training. It was notable above (6.3) that NGOs were able to link-up with local groups in various ways: in undertaking gender-based mapping to protect girls and young women from SGBV; in providing training to women

leaders on hostage negotiation and security awareness, partly based on their own experiences and internal security arrangements; and in assisting with the replacement of lost ID documents. Local NGOs can contribute their skills and experiences to enhance the work and capacity of local community groups, while respecting the autonomy of the communities' own efforts. Financial assistance can also support community leaders' activities, for example, the practice of 'protective presence', thereby potentially increasing their influence over armed actors, or at the very least enabling them to access information and travel to locations where their presence is urgently needed to protect other civilians.

Moving upwards through the vertical linkages between organisations at different levels, there is also a potential role for international NGOs in strengthening community self-protection, albeit one that is necessarily concealed within the Cameroon context. This research has confirmed the virtual absence of international NGOs from civilian protection activities in Anglophone Cameroon. Nonetheless, some local NGOs do receive funding from international counterparts. Importantly, this funding can enable local NGOs to expand those activities, discussed immediately above, that are oriented to strengthening the capacity of community-based organisations (CBOs) to undertake community self-protection measures. Reflection is needed, however, on the appropriate funding model and partnership approach. One important requirement is that funding is unconditional, such as a block grant, allowing appropriate community self-protection strategies to be supported without the imposition of international

NGOs' preconceived UCP agendas. The nature of these CBO-NGO partnerships is crucial, requiring NGOs to carefully reflect on how they can best support community self-protection strategies. This study has demonstrated how people in conflict-affected communities are active agents in their own protection, devising protective measures appropriate to their own particular contexts, needs and capacities, and this local agency should be enhanced not undermined.

Although many of the UCP strategies employed have been successful in protecting many civilians in the ongoing conflict, they have been subject to setbacks and challenges. Participants agreed that the illegal search and seizure of phones by state security forces made the use of digital strategies difficult and risky. Intimidation by both warring parties could undermine early warning measures such as whistle-blowing and noise-making. The absence of external funding has limited community-led protection efforts. These and other challenges have not made the use of the strategies irrelevant. Rather, understanding how such challenges can be addressed will increase the effectiveness of the strategies, given their indispensability in conflict situations where international intervention to protect civilians is limited or impossible.

8.3. Scaling-Up and Broadening-Out of Community Self-Protection Measures

The final element of our primary research question asked: *In what ways can positive examples of self-protection strategies be scaled up and broadened out to*

community-based organisations within Cameroon and across countries? The process of scaling-up self-protection measures is closely connected with the strengthening of grassroots efforts through linkages with local and international NGOs. The research has identified a range of positive examples of community self-protection strategies, and these can be disseminated to other conflict-affected communities within Cameroon, notably through the linkages to local and international NGOs discussed above. The activities of those local NGOs whose work extends throughout the North West and South West regions are especially relevant here. Likewise, where an element of training is involved, then international organisations can play a funding role.

A related means of sharing good practice is through the coordination structure of humanitarian agencies established in the North West and South West Regions through UN OCHA. This cluster system, as it is called, enables local and international agencies to work together in various thematic areas, such as health, education, and food security, and includes a 'protection cluster' as a cross-cutting priority. This aims to ensure that all humanitarian interventions and activities are implemented based on standard operating principles that protect the safety of staff and civilians (or beneficiaries) through considering, for instance, the time of intervention, the distance of sites from beneficiaries' homes or communities, the type of assistance, and so forth. Potentially the protection cluster is an important means to disseminate and discuss various forms of community-led UCP. Equally the SGBV cluster is a core priority for UN OCHA, with many local, national and international

NGOs implementing or funding interventions across the North West and South West Regions, and is a vehicle for the dissemination of good practices aimed at protecting women and girls from sexual violence and providing support to SGBV survivors. However, it is also important to note that humanitarian protection is somewhat distanced from the UCP approach, as per the literature. Humanitarian assistance activities must have prior acceptance by the warring parties, as well as the population, to avoid safety and security issues. To navigate such differences, humanitarian organisations, when developing their standard operating principles, could consider integrating feasible and effective UCP measures into their practices. Additionally, peacebuilding-related organisations could voluntarily and systematically integrate UCP measures into their interventions. Such efforts can further be coordinated and supported by UN OCHA and other INGOs in compliance with the triple nexus of humanitarian, peace and development activities within the current response in the North West and South West Regions. The Cameroon context is certainly one where humanitarian assistance and civilian protection are intertwined, given the limited presence of external UCP actors and interventions, and one which provides a somewhat unique case of UCP-related activities being conducted under the rubric of humanitarian assistance.

The dissemination of positive examples of community-led UCP is also possible through networks of Anglophone civil society organisations and trade unions, including sectoral organisations in health and education, for instance. Although CSOs

have been undermined somewhat by the Cameroon government's crackdown and shrinking of civic space since the protests of 2016 (Annan et al., 2021), they remain active and UCP should not be a contentious or controversial subject. Dissemination is also possible through the media, notably the first civil society newspaper, *The Advocate*, published by the Cameroon Association of Media Professionals (CAMP), and through the social media sites of relevant CSOs. Similarly, a UCP compact can be developed to be disseminated through multiple media and social media outlets to civilians within different communities across the restive regions.

International NGOs also have an important role to play both within Cameroon and internationally. As well as funding local organisations to enhance their capabilities within Cameroon, international NGOs are also well-positioned to take the positive examples of locally-devised civilian self-protection strategies that emerge from the Anglophone conflict and disseminate these to wider audiences in Africa and globally, with the potential for such strategies to be adopted and adapted in other conflict situations.

8.4. Contributions to the UCP Literature: A Bottom-Up Perspective

This study has provided a detailed account of local unarmed civilian self-protection measures, thereby contributing significantly to closing a gap in the extant literature. We noted (section 3) that UCP has been viewed primarily as a protective strategy

implemented by external bodies (Molz 2018: 14), so-called ‘UCP practitioners’, with Oldenhuis et al. (2015) and Wallace (2017) similarly acknowledging the limited focus on local actors and approaches as compared to international ones. However, such external bodies are not able to operate in Cameroon. Government hostility to any intervention in the conflict-affected regions, apart from humanitarian assistance, makes for a challenging context for external organisations, especially international ones, as evidenced by the experiences of MSF (see 3.2). Some local Anglophone NGOs have managed to undertake some basic protective measures, as noted in Section 6. For instance, NGOs have worked with local CSOs in providing training to community leaders, who have then undertaken the protection measures independently. Nonetheless, NGOs have had to conceal UCP-related activities under the guise of humanitarian assistance, given that formal government approval would not be forthcoming.

Therefore, in the absence of external bodies, this study has focused on the measures taken by civilians themselves in the conflict-affected areas to protect their families and communities. In doing so, the study has demonstrated how people in conflict-affected communities are active agents in their own protection, something rarely covered in the literature (Birkeland, 2016; Furnari et al., 2015; Duncan 2016). One exception, however, is the case of Colombia where most UCP measures are similarly undertaken by local actors, although here outside organisations such as Peace Brigades International are also able to operate (Ospina and Lopez 2023). Thus this study has contributed to countering this

neglect of local self-protection measures (Niland et al., 2015: 59). At a minimum, the study has highlighted the significance of grassroots actors in the provision of UCP, a category that was missing from Wallis’s (2015) typology of UCP actors. We go further, however, and claim that community self-protection measures are important not only in the absence of external actors, but also that such external bodies, both national and international, should learn from the protective measures adopted by local actors, and seek to support and strengthen these. Grassroots actors are most familiar with the terrain and context and play a critical role in their own protection. Therefore, it is essential that outside bodies, especially international organisations, acknowledge this and allow local groups to take the lead in determining the most appropriate community protection measures.

Nevertheless, this is not to imply that local actors always know best, or that there are no divisions between them. Our findings have highlighted successes such as instances of collective protection where communities have displayed a degree of collective mobilisation and organisation. Yet limitations and shortcomings were also evident. Protective measures were often more spontaneous and *ad hoc*, taken by individuals or families as basic coping or survival strategies in the face of immediate danger. At times such measures involved the ‘survival of the fittest’ to the detriment of the most vulnerable, with instances of elderly or disabled people being left behind as other community members ran from the violence, left to an uncertain fate, as highlighted in section 4.1.1. A press report has indicated that people with mobility impairment or visual impairment have

been particularly vulnerable in the midst of violent combat and “have lost their lives... just because they couldn’t run” (Mboh 2023). Reports on the attack on the village of Egbekaw in Mamfe district in November 2023 (Global Protection Cluster 2023: 3) showed horrific pictures of a child left behind, as well as elderly people and a pregnant woman, when houses were set on fire and villagers ran to save their lives.

The breakdown of social cohesion within communities in contexts of violence and fear, with divisions increasing as the conflict persists, has often not been conducive to collective organisation but rather led to social anomie and isolation. In such contexts there is a role for external organisations. In the spirit encouraged above, local NGOs in particular could facilitate the strengthening of community-based organisations (CBOs) and their role in community mobilisation to implement the self-protection strategies identified by community members. In situations where such CBOs are not present, then the local NGO could facilitate their formation. An additional role could be the creation of networks of local CBOs to support and learn from each other, enabled by small-scale funding being made available. The provision of training could be another important role of local NGOs, for instance in how to undertake discussions and negotiations with armed actors. In turn international NGOs can play a key supporting role, especially through the provision of funds to local or national NGO counterparts or partners. Therefore a key proposition from this study’s findings is that UCP efforts can be effectively organised on a bottom-up rather than a top-down basis, where local actors are the key drivers of locally-generated self-

protection measures. External bodies, notably local NGOs, can in turn contribute to building the resilience of communities by supporting them in what they are already doing, thereby giving more structure to community measures and a strong protective network or safety net that they can fall back on. Equally, if such support is backed by a strong international influence, then this will give it more weight as well as deterring warring parties from revenge attacks or other negative actions against civilian populations. Importantly, this orientation reverses the dominant conceptualisation of UCP to date where international organisations are seen as the most significant actor, undertaking measures to protect relatively passive civilian populations. The conceptualisation of UCP that emerges from this research is of active agency and self-protection at the local level, with support where possible from national and international organisations. It is a conceptualisation that is broadly in line with the local turn in peacebuilding (Mac Ginty, 2010, Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013), where local populations play a key role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

Our findings also pertain to the relationship between humanitarian assistance and externally-led civilian protection. In noting that local NGOs in particular have been able to undertake some protection activities under the guise of humanitarian assistance, we have advocated for a closer integration of UCP measures with humanitarian intervention. In many respects, this appears in line with the major review of civilian protection in the context of UN-co-ordinated humanitarian action (Niland et al. 2015). This highlights the importance of the protective dimension

within humanitarian assistance, while noting its newness and oft absence (Niland et al. 2015: 10). Yet, our advocacy of such integration is for a different reason. It is due to the specific context of government hostility, and therefore seen as a second-best approach. UCP is a peace-related tool, not necessarily a humanitarian concept. But in the Cameroon context, the path to peace has to be trodden with much caution by both local and international actors, given the government's intent on a military victory, thus prolonging the war. This explains why UCP measures and peace-related activities in Cameroon have to remain hidden under humanitarian intervention. Yet this is a less desirable option than taking overt UCP measures as a strategy and objective in itself in political contexts that allow this.

8.5. Use of Arts-Based Methods in Conflict Contexts

Our focus on a bottom-up approach to UCP equally informed the methodology used in this study. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to explore UCP in Cameroon using arts-based methods. This in part contributes to the originality of the study. Participatory and arts-based methods, including poetry, drawing and storytelling were used. Employing these data collection methods was relevant and beneficial for two reasons. Firstly, the workshops provided safe spaces for participants to share their experiences freely and creatively without fear of possible reprisals from warring parties, given the fragility of the context. Through the drawing workshop, for example, participants

found a non-verbal safe space in which to express their experiences, emotions and perceptions of the conflict and the unarmed protection strategies that were devised. This concurs with the views of Van der Vaart et al. (2018) and Wang et al. (2017) who emphasise the utility of arts-based research in enabling innovative safe spaces for research participants to express their emotions and opinions through non-verbal means. Secondly, it empowered participants to be authors of their own stories and experiences through the creative processes of storytelling, drawing, and poetry writing. Participants felt a sense of pride in demonstrating their 'hidden' skills in expressing themselves and telling their stories through these mediums, and thereby contributing to the data collection. Coemans and Hannes (2017) similarly attest to this, noting that such personal empowerment or what they refer to as 'personal transformation' is often engineered through arts-based research. Indeed, such transformation was evident among our research participants especially after seeing their creative product at the end of the process.

In practice, we employed a locally-led approach where facilitators for these arts-based methods were selected from local actors working in the Anglophone regions and familiar with the context. This was useful because these facilitators did not only have expertise in arts-based methods, but they also brought a sense of familiarity to the participants who could freely relate to and be comfortable around them. Also, participants could speak their local language, which helped them to be open and engage freely whenever they wished to speak in their local English dialect - Pidgin English (which is popular in the

Anglophone region). With the participants having no prior professional experience in arts-based methods, the facilitators provided brief sessions to prepare the participants for the data collection. This helped participants to understand the process, and the expectations from the workshops. Local examples were also shared, for instance, we used a local Cameroonian book of poems as an illustration. More importantly, participants were given the spaces to capture their arts in their own ways and understanding without imposition from the facilitators or the research team.

Three key learnings can be drawn from the use of arts-based methods in conflict affected contexts such as Cameroon. The first is security. It is important to ensure the security and safety of the participants, which applies to all research contexts. However, in the context of Cameroon, given the rise of suspicion and lack of trust as linked to the 'blackleg' phenomenon, as well as the threat from the military if suspected to be involved in the research, then extra care was required to ensure the safety of the research participants. Thus, participants were transported from their communities, which were mainly 'hot spot' areas to safe locations in the Northwest and Southwest so that they can freely engage in the process without being seen or suspected by fellow citizens, armed separatists, or the military. This required flexibility, which we found is essential in such contexts. Moreover, the data collection was carried out in enclosed venues - safe/secure meetings rooms to prevent access by non-research participants. Again, this was in line with ensuring a secure environment for participants to freely engage in the data collection, as noted by Water et al. (2020).

The second is allowing the methods to emerge from existing arts-based methods used within the communities. Here we would aspire to do things somewhat differently. The three arts-based methods used were designed *a priori* as part of the grant application process. Although they were beneficial, it equally begged the question, would the findings have been different if participants were allowed to highlight the everyday 'indigenous' arts methods used in their communities such as mime, songs/music, drumming and dance? We acknowledge that using a more open approach would also be dependent on the funding available and the requirements of the funders. Nonetheless, it is one learning to consider for future research.

The third is availability of local expertise in arts-based methods for research. We found that in a conflict setting, it is often difficult to identify and access the appropriate local actors with extensive expertise in arts-based methods. This was particularly challenging when using the storytelling method. It was difficult to access a local facilitator with in-depth skills in the use of storytelling in research. While authors such as Coemans and Hannes (2017) underscore the time required to train facilitators and research participants in arts-based research, they do not however acknowledge this constraint. The lesson here is to ensure that adequate time is allocated to finding the facilitator with the requisite expertise when conducting arts-based research in conflict contexts. In general, using arts-based methods was insightful, beneficial, and useful for the context in which they were applied.

8.6. Final Reflections

The levels of violence experienced by civilians in the current secessionist war in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon are unprecedented. While the current war can be attributed to the many decades of marginalisation and discrimination experienced by the English-speaking population, previous Anglophone opposition to the dominant Francophone state has always been non-violent. Indeed, the beginnings of the current conflict entailed peaceful demonstrations and mass civil disobedience. It was the violent and repressive response by state forces that led to the rise of an armed separatist movement and the current war that is accompanied by previously unknown levels of violence. Civilian lives have been turned upside down, with mass displacement, killings and destruction, sexual violence, fear and insecurity, and disruption of livelihoods. In such circumstances, civilians have taken measures to protect themselves, their families and communities. What has occurred in Anglophone Cameroon can genuinely be described as *community self-protection*. As one workshop participant noted: “We are... our own protection”.⁴³⁶ This self-protection may have happened largely by default, given the absence of those external actors often associated with unarmed civilian protection, effectively banned by the Cameroon government, and the restriction of local NGOs to provision of humanitarian assistance. Nonetheless, local people, especially those that have remained in the conflict zones, have shown great resourcefulness and innovation in devising the large

range of self-protection measures that have been identified here. Measures taken have often been on an individual basis to protect their own families, but there has also been a significant degree of community organisation and mobilisation in order to secure collective protection. Any external support and leverage, notably from local NGOs, has been (and will continue to be) welcomed, but essentially its role is to supplement the community self-protection measures. This is a major shift from the previously predominant notion of UCP as something that is instigated from above and outside and implemented by external agencies.

UCP is increasingly important in a world where conflicts around the globe appear to be ever more numerous, with devastating impacts on civilian populations. This study has highlighted how local people affected by conflict, often living in poor, rural locations, have demonstrated agency as their own protectors, with lessons to be learnt for other conflict situations. This agency also has the potential to bring together members of the communities affected by the conflict, along with civil society leaders, government officials and separatist representatives, in dialogue to address not only issues of civilian protection but the conflict itself. The fact that UCP strategies incur less political sensitivities can create a space in which trust grows between different parties. In such ways, progress towards a just and fair resolution of this long-lasting conflict could potentially be achieved, the ultimate form of civilian protection.

⁴³⁶ Storytelling Workshop, Limbe, 16/02/2023

References

- Allouche, J., Nazneen, S., Mugumo, M., Kulumbwa Lulego, E., & Hamuli, I. (2023). Breaking the Culture of Silence and Women's Protection Groups in North and South Kivu (Democratic Republic of Congo). *Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence*, 1(2), 208-235.
- Amnesty International. (2017a). Cameroon: Police shooting that led to deaths of protestors must be urgently investigated. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/cameroon-police-shooting-led-deaths-protestors-must-be-urgently-investigated> (accessed 4 March 2022).
- Amnesty International. (2017b). Cameroon: Arrests and Civil Society bans risk inflaming tensions in English-speaking region. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2017/01/cameroon-arrests-and-civil-society-bans-risk-inflaming-tensions-in-english-speaking-regions/> (accessed 1 August 2020).
- Amnesty International. (2023). Cameroon: With or against us: People of the North-West region of Cameroon caught between the army, armed separatists and militias. [online]. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr17/6838/2023/en/>
- Annan, N., Beseng, M., Crawford, G. and Kewir, J. (2021). Civil society, peacebuilding from below and shrinking civic space: the case of Cameroon's "Anglophone" conflict. *Conflict, Development and Security* [online], 21(6), 697-725. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14678802.2021.1997454>.
- Authentique Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF). (2021). GBV Situational Analysis for South West Region by AMEF. October 2021. (Unpublished document)
- Baines, Erin, and Emily Paddon. (2012). This Is How We Survived: Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection. *Security Dialogue*, 43 (3): 231-247.
- Bama, V. (2017). Ban on Consortium, SCNC: Activists go underground as leaders are arrested. *Eden Newspaper* [online]. Available at: <https://www.edennewspaper.net/ban-on-consortium-scnc-activists-going-underground-as-leaders-are-arrested> (accessed 1 August 2020).
- Barbelet, V. (2015). 'Central African Republic: addressing the protection crisis'. Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Working Paper, London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI).
- Barone, T., & Eisner, E. W. (2012). *Arts-Based Research*. Washington, DC: Sage Publications

- Barter, S. J. (2023). The Partisans: Civilian Support & Indirect Violence. *Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence*, 1(2), 269-290.
- BBC News. (2018). Burning Cameroon: Images you're not meant to see. BBC News [online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-44561929>.
- Beville, M. and McQuaid, S.D. (2012). Speaking of Silence: Comments from an Irish Studies Perspectives. *Nordic Irish Studies*, 11(2), 1-20.
- Birkeland, T.K. (2016). Unarmed civilian protection: The methodology and its relevance for Norwegian church-based organizations and their partners. Norwegian Ecumenical Peace Platform.
- Bliesemann de Guevara, B., Allouche, J., & Gray, F. (2023). Introduction: Enacting Peace Amid Violence: Nonviolent Civilian Agency in Violent Conflict. *Journal of Pacifism and Nonviolence*, 1(2), 161-180.
- Blomqvist, L., Olivius, E. and Hedström, J. (2021). Care and silence in women's everyday peacebuilding in Myanmar. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 21:3, 223-244.
- Bone, M. (2021). "We had No Choice": The Emergence of Secessionist Violence in Anglophone Cameroon. MPhil Dissertation, Cambridge: University of Cambridge, UK.
- Brazg, T., Bekemeier, B., Spigner, C., & Huebner, C. E. (2010). Our community in focus: The use of photovoice for youth-driven substance abuse assessment and health promotion. *Health Promotion Practice*, 12, 502-511
- Buba, I. (2023). Civilian Protection Payment and the Escalation of Violence against Civilians in Northwestern Nigeria. *Global Studies Quarterly*. 3, 1-15
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2023). Disguise. Cambridge Dictionary [online]. Available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/disguise>
- Cameroon News Agency (CNA). (2023). ADF kills two civilians for collaborating with government forces. CAN [online], 4 Oct 2023. Available at: <https://cameroonnewsagency.com/adf-kills-two-civilians-for-collaborating-with-government-forces/>.
- Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM). (2022). Joint-advocacy briefing note from the Shelter/NFI, CCCM and Protection Clusters. Yemen Pledging Conference, 16 March 2022, Global CCCM Cluster. Available at: <https://www.cccmcluster.org/news-events/news/joint-advocacy-briefing-note-shelternfi-cccm-and-protection-clusters-yemen> (accessed 2 August 2023).

- Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). (2019a). 206 villages raided and partially or severely burnt in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon since 2016. CHRNA [online]. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/206-villages-raided-and-partially-or-severely-burnt-in-the-Anglophone-regions-of-cameroon-since-2016/> (accessed 3 August 2023).
- Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). (2019b). Cameroon: The Anglophone Crisis. CHRNA [online]. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/206-Villages-burnt-.pdf>.
- Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). (2020). CHRNA statement on the findings of the commission set up by the head of state to investigate NGARBUH-Cameroon Massacre of 14th February 2020. CHRNA [online]. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/chrda-statement-on-the-findings-of-the-commission-set-up-by-the-head-of-state-to-investigate-ngarbu-Cameroon-massacre-of-14th-february-2020/>.
- Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). (2021). Human Rights Situation Report of the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon between October 2020 and February 2021. CHRNA [online]. Available at: https://www.chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UPDATED-CHRNA_HUMAN_RIGHTS_REPORT_BETWEEN_OCTOBER_2020_AND_FEBRUARY_2021.pdf.
- Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRNA). (2023). Midterm Report On The Human Rights Situation In The Conflict-Affected Regions Of Cameroon: January to June 2023. CHRNA [online]. Available at: <https://www.chrda.org/midterm-report-on-the-human-rights-situation-in-the-conflict-affected-regions-of-cameroon/>
- Coemans, S., and Hannes, K. (2017). Researchers under the spell of the arts: Two decades of using arts-based methods in community-based inquiry with vulnerable populations. *Journal of Educational Research Review*, 22, 34-49. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1747938X17300301>.
- Coemans, S., and Hannes, K. (2017). Researchers under the spell of the arts: Two decades of using arts-based methods in community-based inquiry with vulnerable populations. *Journal of Educational Research Review*, 22, 34-49.
- Corey, J.R. (2021). *Materializing Silence in Feminist Activism*. First Edition. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Craig, J. (2021). Sexual violence pervasive in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. *Al-Jazeera* [online], 29 Apr 2021. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/29/gender-based-violence-pervasive-in-cameroons-Anglophone-regions> (accessed 18 November 2021).

- Craig, J. (2021a). Violence in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis Takes High Civilian Toll. Aljazeera [online]. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/1/violence-in-cameroon-Anglophone-crisis-takes-high-civilian-toll> (accessed 1 October 2021).
- Crawford, G., Kiven, J., Annan, N. (2022). Voices from 'Ground Zero': Interrogating History, Culture and Identity in the Resolution of Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict. Available at: <https://bit.ly/Voices-Ground-Zero-Report>.
- Demleitner, N. (1998). Witness Protection in Criminal Cases: Anonymity, Disguise or Other Options. American Journal of Comparative Law, 46, 641-664.
- Duncan, M. (2016). Case Studies of Unarmed Civilian Protection. Nonviolent Peaceforce [online]. Available at: https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UCP_Case_Studies_v5.3_LQ.pdf (accessed 29 February 2024)
- Duncan, M., Carriere, R., and Oldenhuis, H. (2015) 'The Growth in Unarmed Civilian Protection', Global Observatory [Online] 29 April 2015. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2015/04/unarmed-civilian-protection-south-sudan-mindanao/> (accessed 29 February 2024)
- Duncan, M., and Ai-Lin-Loh, K. (2017). 'Sustaining Peace Through Unarmed Civilian Protection'. IPI Global Observatory [online] 21 September 2017. Available at: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/09/sustaining-peace-unarmed-civilian-protection/> (accessed 4 February 2024)
- European Commission. (2023). European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Union: Shelter and settlements. European Commission [online]. Available at: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/shelter-and-settlements_en (accessed 2 August 2023).
- Fast, L. (2018). Crossing boundaries in protecting civilians: Mapping actors, insights and conceptual spaces. Overseas Development Institute [online], Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Working Paper. Available at: <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12334.pdf>.
- Ford, N. (2022). Mixed fortunes for telecoms innovation in Cameroon. African Business [online] 13 May 2022. Available at: <https://african.business/2022/05/technology-information/mixed-fortunes-for-telecoms-innovation-in-cameroon#:~:text=By%20contrast%2C%20the%20number%20of,make%20up%20for%20lost%20time>.
- France 24 News. (2023). Thirty women abducted by Cameroon's English-speaking separatists freed. France 24 [online]. Available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230527-thirty-women-abducted-by-cameroon-s-english-speaking-separatists-freed> (accessed 17 November 2023).

- Furnari, E., Oldenhuis, H., and Julian, R. (2015). Securing space for local peacebuilding: the role of international and national civilian peacekeepers. *Peacebuilding* 3(3), 297-313.
- Global Protection Cluster. (16 November 2023). Forced displacement following attack on Egbekaw village (Mamfe Central Subdivision/Manyu Division/Southwest Region). NWSW Protection Cluster Report #4. [online]. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/hsw-cameroon-protection-cluster-report-4-forced-displacement-following-attack-egbekaw-village-mamfe-central-subdivisionmanyu-divisionsouthwest-region-16-november-2023>
- Heungoup, H. De M. (2015). Cameroon's Rising Religious Tensions. International Crisis Group [online]. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-s-rising-religious-tensions>.
- Hewitt, A. (2018). 'Why Unarmed Civilian Protection is the Best Path to Sustainable Peace'. *Waging Nonviolence* [online] 6 July 2018. Available at: <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2018/07/unarmed-civilian-protection-sustainable-peace/> (accessed 14 January 2023)
- Huijbers, L. (2017). Procedural-Type Review: A More Neutral Approach to Human Rights Protection by the European Court of Human Rights? *European Society of International Law (ESIL), 2017 Research Forum (Granada)*. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3045270> (accessed 17 July 2023).
- Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2023), *World Report 2023: Cameroon Events of 2022*. Human Rights Watch [online]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/cameroon>.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2018). *These Killings Can Be Stopped: Abuses by Government and Separatist Groups in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions*. Human Rights Watch [online]. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/cameroon0718_web2.pdf.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW). (2021). *Cameroon: Survivors of Military Assault Await Justice*. Human Rights Watch [online], 26 Feb 2021. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/26/cameroon-survivors-military-assault-await-justice> (accessed 8 February 2022).
- Husted, T. (2021). *Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy*. Congressional Research Service [online], R46919. Available at: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46919/2> (accessed 20 August 2023).

- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2018). 'Cameroon: Situation of Anglophones, including returnees, in Bamenda, Yaoundé and Douala; treatment by society and by the authorities (2016-August 2018)'. Ottawa: Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. [online]. 24 August 2018 CMR106141.E. Available at: <https://irb.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=457577> (accessed 20 August 2023)
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (ICRC). Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Fourth Geneva Convention, 12 August 1949, 75 UNTS 287.
- International Crisis Group (ICG) (2023b). A Second Look at Cameroon's Anglophone Special Status. Crisis Group [online], Africa Briefing N°188, 31 March 2023. Available at: https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-03/b188-cameroon-Anglophone-special-status_1.pdf (accessed 20 August 2023).
- International Crisis Group (ICG). (2017). Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads. Crisis Group [online], Africa Report 250, 2 August 2017. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-cameroots-Anglophone-crisis-crossroads>.
- International Crisis Group (ICG). (2023a). Cameroon. Crisis Group [online]. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon>.
- Jones, L. F. (1991). Breaking silences in feminist dystopias. *Utopian Studies*, 3, 7–11.
- Jose, B., and Medie, P.A. (2015). Understanding Why and How Civilians Resort to Self-Protection in Armed Conflict. *International Studies Review* (2015) 1–21.
- Jose, B., and Medie, P.A. (2016). *Civilian Self-Protection and Civilian Targeting in Armed Conflicts: Who Protects Civilians?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jua, N. and Konings, P. (2004). 'Occupation of Public Space Anglophone Nationalism in Cameroon'. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, no. 175, 609-633. <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.4756>
- Julian, R., and Schweitzer, C. (2015). The Origins and Development of Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping. *Peace Review: a journal of social justice*, 27 (1). 1 – 8.
- Kanchana, M.A. (2017). Participatory action research for emotionally meaningful stories. PhD Thesis, Dundee: University of Dundee.
- Kaushal, T. (2020). Contextually Engendering Conflict Analysis: The Case of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon. Working Paper 11, 2020, Geneva: Gender Centre, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies.

- Kemp, S. (2023). Digital 2023: Cameroon. DATAREPORTAL [online]. Available at: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-cameroon> (accessed 18 December 2023).
- Kewir, J.K., Crawford G., Beseng, M., Annan, N. (2021). Shrinking Civic Space and the Role of Civil Society in Resolution of Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon. Available at: https://www.coventry.ac.uk/globalassets/media/global/08-new-research-section/ctpsr/civic_space_cameroon-web-report-jan-2021.pdf.
- Kindzeka, M.E. (2022). Cameroon's Military Frees Senator, Other Separatist Hostages. VOA News [online]. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/cameroon-s-military-frees-senator-other-separatist-hostages-/6596695.html>
- Konings, P. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (1997). The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon. The Journal of Modern African Studies [online], 35, 207-229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X97002401>.
- Konings, P. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (2019). 'Anglophone secessionist movements in Cameroon' in De Vries L., Englebert P., and Schomerus, M (Eds). (2019). Secessionism in African Politics: Aspiration, Grievance, Performance, Disenchantment. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.59–89.
- Levy, L., & Weber, S. (2011). Teenmom.ca: A community arts-based new media empowerment project for teenage mothers. Studies in Art Education: A Journal of Issues and Research in Art Education, 52, 292-309.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2010). 'Hybrid Peace: The Interaction between Top-Down and Bottom-Up Peace'. Security Dialogue 41(4), 391–412. doi:10.1177/0967010610374312
- Mac Ginty, R. and Richmond P. (2013). 'The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace'. Third World Quarterly 34(5), 763–783. doi:10.1080/01436597.2013.800750.M
- Macdonald, S. and Birdi, B. (2020). The concept of neutrality: a new approach. Journal of Documentation, Vol. 76 No. 1, pp. 333-353.
- Mahanty, D. (2023). Five ways to protect civilians in contemporary armed conflict. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) [online]. Available at: <https://sipri.org/commentary/blog/2023/five-ways-protect-civilians-contemporary-armed-conflict> (accessed 2 August 2023).
- Mahony, L. (2006). Proactive Presence: field strategies for civilian protection. Geneva, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (hd) (online). Available at: <https://hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Proactive-Presence-January-2006.pdf>

- Mannergren, S.J. (2020). Gendered Silences in Post-conflict Societies: A Typology. *Peacebuilding* 8(1), 1–15.
- Mboh, P. (2023). 'Anglophone crisis rendering persons with disabilities more vulnerable, excluded'. Cameroon News Agency, 4 December 2023 (online). Available at: [Anglophone crisis rendering persons with disabilities more vulnerable, excluded – Cameroon News Agency](#)
- Mbunwe, T. (2023). Mamfe attack: Capo Daniel accuses ADF of revenge attack. MM Info [online], 10 Nov 2023. Available at: <https://mimimefoinfos.com/egbekaw-massacre-capo-daniel-accuses-adf-of-revenge-attack/> (accessed 10 November 2023).
- Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). (2021). Doctors Without Borders forced to withdraw medical teams from North-West Cameroon. MSF [online]. Available at: <https://www.msf.org/doctors-without-borders-forced-withdraw-medical-teams-north-west-cameroon> (accessed 21 September 2021).
- Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). (2022). MSF Suspends Medical Activities in South West Cameroon. MSF [online]. Available at: <https://www.msf.org/msf-suspends-medical-activities-south-west-cameroon>.
- Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). (2023). All MSF staff acquitted in military tribunal in Cameroon. MSF [online]. Available at: <https://www.msf.org/all-msf-staff-acquitted-military-tribunal-cameroonm>.
- Minority Rights Group (MRG). 2017. As death toll rises in Cameroon's English-speaking regions, MRG condemns violence, calls for impartial investigation into killings and long-term solutions to ongoing crisis. [online]. Available at: <https://minorityrights.org/2017/10/04/death-toll-rises-cameroons-english-speaking-regions-mrg-condemns-violence-calls-impartial-investigation-killings-long-term-solutions-ongoing-crisis/>
- Moletsane, R., Mitchell, C., de Lange, N., Stuart, J., Buthelezi, T., & Taylor, M. (2009). 'What can a woman do with a camera? Turning the female gaze on poverty and HIV and AIDS in rural South Africa'. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22, 315-331
- Molz, E. (2018) 'Does Intercultural Competence Matter? New Perspectives on Relationship-Building in Unarmed Civilian Protection'. Masters Dissertation, University of Tampere
- Mooney, E. (2016). Displacement and the Protection of Civilians under International Law. *Arrow* [online], 177–204. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198729266.003.0009>.

- Niland, N., Polastro, R., Donini, A., and Lee, A. (2015). 'Independent Whole of System Review of Protection in the Context of Humanitarian Action'. Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2015. Available at: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2015-10/independent_whole_of_system_protection_review_report_may_2015.pdf (accessed 4 February 2024)
- Noyes, E., and Jenkins, R. (2019). Deliberate disguise in face identification. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 25(2), 280–290.
- Okereke, C. (2018). Analysing Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis. *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 10(3), 8–12. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26380430>.
- Oldenhuis, H., Carriere, R., Duncan, M., Furnari, E., Frisch, A., and Wagstrom, T. (2015). *Unarmed Civilian Protection: Strengthening Civilian Capacities to Protect Civilian against Violence*. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Nonviolent Peace Force [online], Training Manual. Available at: https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/archive/UCP_Course_Manual.pdf (accessed 17 February 2022).
- Oldenhuis, H., with Furnari, E., Carriere, R., Wagstrom, T., Frisch, A. and Duncan, M. (2021) (2nd. Edition). *Unarmed Civilian Protection: Strengthening Civilian Capacities to Protect Civilian against Violence*. United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and Nonviolent Peace Force, January 2021 [online]. Available at: <https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/ucp-manual/>
- Ospina, L.S. and Lopez. BE.A. (2023), 'Unarmed Civilian Protection and Community Self-Protection in Colombia'. *Creating Safer Space Working Paper Series Vol.1 (3)* (online). Available at: <https://creating-safer-space.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Creating-Safer-Space-Vol.-1.3-UCP-in-Colombia-English.pdf>
- Parpart, J. (2020). Rethinking silence, gender, and power in insecure sites: Implications for feminist security studies in a postcolonial world. *Review of International Studies*, 46, 315–324.
- Public News Service. (2023). MN Group Applauds Funding for 'Unarmed Civilian Protection'. Public News Service [online], 23 Jan 2023. Available at: <https://www.publicnewsservice.org/2023-01-23/budget-policy-and-priorities/mn-group-applauds-funding-for-unarmed-civilian-protection/a82515-1>.
- Rydzik, A., Pritchard, A., Morgan, N., and Sedgley, D. (2013). 'The potential of arts-based transformative research'. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 40, 283–305
- Schirch, L. (1995). *Keeping the Peace. Exploring Civilian Alternatives in Conflict Prevention*. Uppsala, Sweden: Life and Peace Institute.

- Schirch, L. (2006). *Civilian Peacekeeping: Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy*, Uppsala, Life & Peace Institute.
- Sonkey D. J. (2017). Biya declares war on Anglophone separatists. The SUN Newspaper [online], 5 Dec 2017. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/thesunnewspapercameroon/posts/biya-declares-war-on-Anglophone-separatistsby-doh-james-sonkeythe-president-of-t/545921992422722/> (accessed 24 October 2023).
- South, A., Harragin, S., Corbett, J., Horsey, R., Kempel, S., Fröjark, H. and Carstensen, N. (2012). *Local to Global Protection in Myanmar (Burma), Sudan, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe*. Overseas Development Institute [online], Humanitarian Practice Network Network Paper, 72. Available at: <https://www.cmi.no/file/1538-Local-to-Global-Protection-in-Myanmar-Burma-Sudan-South-Sudan-and-Zimbabwe.pdf>.
- Suarez, C. (2017). 'Living Between Two Lions': Civilian Protection Strategies During Armed Violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo'. *Journal Of Peacebuilding and Development*, 12(3), 54–67.
- The Economist. (2019). English-speaking villages are burning in Cameroon: A report from a forgotten conflict. The Economist [online]. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2019/11/07/english-speaking-villages-are-burning-in-cameroon> (accessed 3 August 2023).
- United Nations (UN). (N.D). *United Nations Treaty Collection*. UN [online]. Available at: <https://treaties.un.org/pages/showdetails.aspx?objid=0800000280158b1a> (accessed 13 November 2023).
- United Nations Human Rights Committee (2005), 83rd Session, 14 March – 1 April 2005, Fongum Gorji-Dinka v. Cameroon. 17 March 2005. *World Courts Database* [online]. Available at: www.worldcourts.com/hrc/eng/decisions/2005.03.17_Gorji-Dinka_v_Cameroon.htm
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). (2021). *Humanitarian Needs Overview Cameroon*. UN OCHA [online], Humanitarian Programme Cycle: Issued March 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroonhumanitarian-needs-overview-2021-march-2021>.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). (2023a). *Cameroon: Situation Report*, 12 April 2023. UN OCHA [online]. Available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/cameroon>.

- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human rights (UNOHCHR). (2011). 'Protection of victims, witnesses and other cooperating persons' in UNOHCHR. (2011). Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring. UNOHCHR [online], Revised Edition, 1-56. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Chapter14-56pp.pdf> (accessed 17 July 2023).
- Van der Vaart, G., Van Hoven, B., and Huiggen, P. (2018). Creative and Arts-Based Research Methods in Academic Research. Lessons from a Participatory Research Project in the Netherlands, Qualitative Social Research Forum, 19 (2), Art 19.
- Wallace, M.S. (2017). Security Without Weapons: Rethinking Violence, Nonviolent Action, and Civilian Protection. New York and Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Wallis, T. (2010). 'Best Practices for Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping' in Schweitzer, C (Ed). (2010). Civilian Peacekeeping: A Barely Tapped Resource. Belm: Sozio Publications, 25-34.
- Wang, Q., Coemans, S., Siegesmund, R., & Hannes, K. (2017). Arts-based Methods in Socially Engaged Research Practice: A Classification Framework. Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal, 2(2), 5–39.
- Water, T., Payam, S., Tokolahi, E., Reay, S., Wrapson, J. (2020). Ethical and practical challenges of conducting art-based research with children/young people in the public space of a children's outpatient department. Journal of Child Health Care, 24(1), 33-45.
- Willis, R., Angove, J., Mbinkar, C. and McAuley, J. (2020). We Remain Their Slaves: Voices from the Cameroon Conflict. A Working paper. Oxford: Faculty of Law, University of Oxford, 1-88.
- World Bank. (2021). The Socio-Political Crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon: Assessing the Economic and Social Impacts. World Bank [online]. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35933/The-Socio-Political-Crisis-in-the-Northwest-and-Southwest-Regions-of-Cameroon-Assessing-the-Economic-and-Social-Impacts.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed 7 January 2022).

Annex: List of Interviewees and Workshop Participants

List of Interviewees

SNL	Codes	Position	Date
1	Interview 1	NGO director/civil society activist	17/02/2023
2	Interview 2	Journalist	17/02/2023
3	Interview 3	NGO Director/Pastor	17/02/2023
4	Interview 4	NGO Director	18/02/2023
5	Interview 5	NGO Director	22/02/2023
6	Interview 6	Human Rights Practitioner	23/02/2023
7	Interview 7	University Student	21/02/2023
8	Interview 8	CSO Representative	23/02/2023
9	Interview 9	NGO Director	27/02/2023
10	Interview 10	CSO Leader	30/03/2023
11	Interview 11	CSO Leader	30/03/2023
12	Interview 12	CSO Leader	30/03/2023
13	Interview 13	CSO Leader	31/03/2023
14	Interview 14	CSO Leader	31/03/2023
15	Interview 15	NGO Senior Staff	21/04/2023

List of Storytelling Workshops

SNL	Storytelling-Gender	Location	Date
1	Mixed- 2 (M) 5 (F)	Limbe	16/02/2023
2	Mixed- 3 (M) 3 (F)	Dschang	22/02/2023

List of Drawing Workshops

SNL	Drawing/Gender	Location	Date
1	Mixed- 4 (M) 5 (F)	Limbe	15/02/2023
2	Mixed- 1 (M) 5 (F)	Dschang	21/02/2023

List of Poetry Workshops

SNL	Poetry/Gender	Location	Date
1	Mixed- 4 (M) 2 (F)	Limbe	16/02/2023
2	Mixed- 2 (M) 4 (F)	Dschang	21/02/2023



{ }

**CREATING
SAFER SPACE**
STRENGTHENING CIVILIAN PROTECTION
AMIDST VIOLENT CONFLICT

