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POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND INSTITUTION BUILDING IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Cameroon has been embroiled in prolonged conflicts, including the Anglophone Crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency, both of which have deeply impacted the nation's socio-political fabric. The central problem is the breakdown of institutions, displacement of populations, and socio-economic instability, necessitating urgent post-conflict reconstruction. This study aims to explore the key challenges and barriers to reconstruction, assess the roles of national and international actors, and analyze strategies to build institutions for sustainable peace and stability. The research draws on hybrid peace and conflict transformation theories and adopts a qualitative research design, relying on secondary data sources. Through an in-depth analysis of official documents, scholarly articles, and reports from international organizations, this study provides a comparative examination of similar post-conflict settings, such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone. Data were systematically analyzed to identify key themes related to governance, security, and institutional reform. Findings reveal that political instability, lack of decentralization, and limited financial resources significantly hinder effective reconstruction efforts. Governance challenges, including corruption and centralization of power, impede institution-building, while socio- economic issues, such as ethnic and linguistic divisions, further complicate peacebuilding efforts. International actors and NGOs play a vital role but often lack coordination, limiting the effectiveness of their interventions. The study concludes that Cameroon's post-conflict reconstruction requires comprehensive reforms. Decentralization, inclusive governance, and accountability must be prioritized. International efforts should align with local needs, emphasizing long-term development over short-term aid. Effective security sector reform, alongside strategies for institutional capacity-building, will be essential to fostering peace and preventing future conflict.

KEYWORDS: Post-conflict reconstruction, Anglophone Crisis, decentralization, institution-building, governance reform.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Cameroon, situated in Central Africa, has encountered numerous conflicts that have profoundly influenced its socio-political and economic framework. The most notable are the Anglophone Crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency. Both conflicts pose distinct challenges to Cameroon's national security and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives, affecting the rehabilitation of institutions and the extent of peacebuilding efforts.

The Anglophone Crisis originates from enduring grievances between Cameroon's two language groups: the Anglophone minority and the Francophone majority. This conflict arises from the colonial division of Cameroon between Britain and France after World War I. The British-administered territories chose to join the Republic of Cameroon in 1961, establishing a bilingual state. Nonetheless, tensions between the Anglophone regions (Northwest and Southwest) and the

Francophone-dominated government have endured due to perceived marginalization and systemic discrimination against English-speaking citizens in domains such as education, law, and political representation (Nkongho, 2021).

The situation escalated in 2016 when attorneys and educators in the Anglophone regions orchestrated demonstrations against the perceived imposition of French legal and educational frameworks in their territories. The protests prompted severe military responses, intensifying the situation into an armed struggle between government troops and separatist factions advocating for an independent state referred to as "Ambazonia" (Ngang, 2022). This violent conflict has led to extensive displacement, with over 700,000 individuals internally displaced, and has resulted in thousands of fatalities (Amnesty International, 2023). The United Nations and other human rights organizations have denounced the

bloodshed, urging the Cameroonian government to engage in dialogue and halt military operations against separatist combatants.

Besides the Anglophone Crisis, Cameroon is contending with the Boko Haram insurgency in its Far North territory. Boko Haram, a jihadist organisation originating from northeastern Nigeria, extended its activities into Cameroon circa 2013. The organisation seeks to build an Islamic caliphate in West Africa, and its operations in Cameroon have encompassed bombings, abductions, and violent assaults on villages. The conflict has significantly destabilized the region, resulting in extensive instability and the mass displacement of approximately 300,000 Cameroonians (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022).

The Cameroonian military, in conjunction with regional forces of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), has endeavored to mitigate Boko Haram's influence through military operations and regional collaboration (Zenn, 2020). Nonetheless, despite these endeavors, Boko Haram continues to pose a substantial threat, executing periodic assaults on civilian populations and governmental objectives. The persistent insurgency has severely impacted development in the Far North, restricting access to education, healthcare, and economic possibilities (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). Boko Haram's assaults have intensified pre-existing socio-economic disparities in the region, facilitating the recruitment of marginalized young into the insurgency.

The Anglophone Crisis and Boko Haram insurgency have generated a complex and varied conflict landscape in Cameroon. The government's attempts to concurrently address both wars have strained the nation's military and financial resources, constraining its ability to undertake extensive rehabilitation and economic projects. Furthermore, the humanitarian repercussions of both conflicts, encompassing extensive displacement and pervasive human rights abuses, have intensified the necessity for post-conflict institutional development. The crises have revealed the insufficiency of current governance frameworks and the pressing necessity for decentralization, judicial reform, and inclusive discussion (Mbuh & Smith, 2021).

This study aims to achieve three primary objectives. First, it seeks to identify the key challenges and barriers hindering effective post-conflict reconstruction and institution building in Cameroon. Second, it examines the roles of both national and international actors in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts within the country. Finally, it analyzes strategies for improving institution- building to ensure long-term peace and stability in Cameroon.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature on post-conflict reconstruction in Africa by focusing on Cameroon, specifically the under-researched Anglophone Crisis and Boko Haram insurgency. By examining the impact of these conflicts on institutional development, governance, and social cohesion, the research aims to enhance existing theories of peacebuilding and state-building in conflict-affected regions. Furthermore, it seeks to provide policymakers, international organizations, and NGOs with practical insights and recommendations for effective intervention strategies in Cameroon, ultimately contributing to long-term peace and stability in the country.

Empirical Review

Challenges and Barriers to Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Post-conflict reconstruction is a complex process fraught with socio-political and economic challenges that, if left unaddressed, can hinder recovery, and increase the likelihood of conflict recurrence.

A significant impediment to post-conflict rehabilitation is the absence of political inclusivity and engagement. Political power frequently stays centralized among a limited elite, marginalizing portions of the populace, especially those adversely affected by the conflict (Ngang, 2022). The marginalization observed in Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis intensifies tensions and obstructs the establishment of an inclusive government. Ngang (2022) observes that the Francophone- dominated government's inability to meet the Anglophone population's desires for

increased autonomy has exacerbated frustrations and eroded trust in governance. Moreover, political instability and ineffective governance, marked by tenuous administrations attempting to establish authority and uphold order, provide considerable challenges. The Cameroonian government's ineffectiveness in governing the Anglophone areas, alongside persistent violence, and instability, has obstructed reconstruction initiatives (Nkongho, 2021). This reflects the difficulties encountered by other post-conflict African nations, where ineffective administration obstructs significant reforms and extends the reconstruction period (Zenn, 2020).

In addition to political issues, post-conflict economies contend with economic instability. Conflict frequently devastates essential infrastructure, disrupts economic institutions, and results in elevated unemployment, less access to services, and heightened poverty. Mbuh and Smith (2021) emphasize the economic devastation in Cameroon, especially in the Anglophone regions, where infrastructural degradation obstructs investment and economic rehabilitation. Furthermore, securing financial resources for reconstruction is frequently challenging. Dependence on international assistance, however essential, may lead to challenges with sustainability and local ownership. Mismanagement and corruption can redirect aid from its original objectives, as evidenced in Cameroon, where apprehensions regarding the misappropriation of international funds for reconstruction persist (Amnesty International, 2023).

Cho's (2024) study offers a critical perspective for analyzing the complex interplay between civil conflict and urban sustainability in Anglophone Cameroon. Using a content analysis methodology, Cho examines existing literature, reports, and documents to evaluate the effects of the ongoing conflict on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) in Anglophone cities.

The study's findings illustrate the negative impacts of conflict on urban environments. Cho (2024) identifies the disruption of livelihoods, damage to critical infrastructure, increased insecurity, and the exacerbation of social divisions as significant outcomes of the conflict. These factors collectively hinder progress in achieving the targets of inclusivity, safety, resilience, and sustainability outlined in SDG 11 for Anglophone cities.

Cho (2024) argues that the existing socio-economic and political instability stemming from the conflict has significantly hindered initiatives aimed at promoting urban sustainability. The author argues that conflict resolution and the establishment of enduring peace are critical prerequisites for the attainment of SDG 11 in Anglophone Cameroon.

This aligns with this study on post-conflict reconstruction and institution building in Cameroon, highlighting the necessity of a comprehensive approach to tackle the root causes of conflict and foster sustainable peace (Teneng Cho, 2024). Both studies recognize the interrelation of peacebuilding, governance, and development, emphasizing the necessity of addressing the fundamental political, economic, and social grievances that drive the conflict.

This research examines the complexities of post-conflict reconstruction and institution building in Cameroon, while Cho (2024) specifically analyses the conflict's impact on urban sustainability in Anglophone cities. This variation in scope offers a potential for the exchange of ideas. This study aims to address a gap in Cho's research by offering a detailed analysis of reconstruction and institution-building efforts in Anglophone urban areas, focusing on their successes, challenges, and implications for the attainment of SDG 11.

Additionally, Cho's (2024) findings correspond with those of other researchers who have recorded the severe effects of the Anglophone Crisis on multiple facets of Cameroonian society. Reports

from Amnesty International (2023) support the findings regarding human rights abuses and infrastructure destruction. Meanwhile, Mbuh and Smith (2021) highlight the significance of inclusive governance and local ownership in post-conflict reconstruction, aligning with Cho's advocacy for a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution.

Cho's (2024) claim that the pursuit of SDG 11 is a "futile venture" in Anglophone Cameroon may be perceived as excessively pessimistic by scholars such as Elischer and McNulty (2022). They recognize the challenges but highlight positive developments in humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding initiatives. This study seeks to offer a detailed evaluation of advancements and ongoing challenges in post-conflict reconstruction, with a specific focus on urban sustainability in Anglophone cities.

Institutional deficiencies exacerbate these issues. State institutions, frequently debilitated or disintegrated by violence, encounter difficulties in providing fundamental services, upholding the rule of law, and overseeing restoration initiatives. Elischer and McNulty (2022) assert that institutional deficiencies in Cameroon, especially within the judiciary and security sectors, obstruct justice and accountability for crimes related to conflict. The lack of reform in these institutions fosters an atmosphere of impunity, undermining public trust in the state.

Institutional failures significantly affect post-conflict reconstruction. Robust institutions are essential for sustaining stability, fostering effective government, and upholding the rule of law. Nonetheless, ineffective, or dysfunctional institutions degrade government and service provision. The Cameroonian government's failure to deliver critical services like as healthcare and education in conflict-affected areas exacerbates discontent and prolongs the conflict (Ngang, 2022). Moreover, institutional shortcomings obstruct justice and accountability. The failure to hold offenders accountable cultivates a sense of impunity, hindering reconciliation and healing. The judiciary's inability to prosecute individuals accountable for human rights violations during the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon undermines confidence in the judicial system (Amnesty International, 2023).

Analyzing post-conflict reconstruction in other African countries provides significant comparative information. The rehabilitation of Rwanda following the genocide, frequently regarded as a success narrative, underscores the significance of robust leadership and efficient institutions (Zenn, 2020). The centralized governance of Rwanda enabled the effective execution of reforms and resource mobilization. The introduction of Gacaca courts, and community-based tribunals, facilitated reconciliation and accountability. Nonetheless, Rwanda's centralized strategy has been criticized for constraining political liberties (Mbuh & Smith, 2021). Liberia's experience, however indicative of advancements in institutional reconstruction and economic revitalization, highlights the persistent issues of corruption and ineffective governance (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). Liberia's efforts to eliminate corruption impeded economic development and exacerbated ongoing poverty and inequality.

Case Studies of Successful Institution-Building Strategies in Conflict-Affected Regions Rwanda:

Analyzing successful institution creation in post-conflict environments necessitates the examination of context-specific tactics. Case studies from African countries provide significant insights into successful strategies for reconstructing institutions in conflict-affected areas. Rwanda's post-genocide rebuilding, frequently referenced as a paradigm, emphasised robust central governance, accountability, and reconciliation (Zenn, 2020). The creation of Gacaca courts, a community-oriented judicial system, was crucial in fostering justice and reconciliation while restoring confidence in the legal framework. Rwanda's emphasis on effective governance and anti- corruption initiatives has reinstated public trust and drawn international investment (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). Moreover, Rwanda's focus on inclusion and participatory governance, especially the advancement of gender equality in political representation, guaranteed that post-conflict institutions mirrored the diverse composition of its populace (Ngang, 2022).

Sierra Leone:

The reconstruction of Sierra Leone following its civil conflict provides significant insights. The formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) tackled human rights violations and fostered national healing (Mbuh & Smith, 2021). Emphasizing security sector reform (SSR),

aided by international entities, facilitated the re-organization of police and military forces to enhance professionalism, accountability, and civilian control (Ngang, 2022). This tackled corruption and misconduct in the security sector, aiding in the re-establishment of security and the prevention of additional violence.

Challenges Faced in Decentralization and Governance Reforms in Post-Conflict Societies

Decentralization and governance reforms are crucial elements of post-conflict institution creation; however, they pose considerable problems. Decentralization, frequently promoted to enhance government proximity to citizens and resolve concerns, may be obstructed by inadequate local competence, opposition from central authorities, and the potential entrenchment of local elites (Nkongho, 2021). Insufficient local capacity, especially in conflict-affected areas where administrative infrastructure is compromised and populations are uprooted, requires substantial investments in capacity building to enable local governments to competently fulfil their obligations (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). Opposition from central authorities, hesitant to relinquish authority and control, can hinder initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive governance (Ngang, 2022). Furthermore, decentralization may unintentionally result in the entrenchment of local elites who prioritize their interests above those of the wider populace (Nkongho, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research design, concentrating on the comprehensive examination of secondary data sources to elucidate the complex process of post-conflict reconstruction and institution development in Cameroon. The study encompassed an extensive examination of current literature about post-conflict rebuilding, institutional development, and governance change, including official papers, scholarly articles, and policy briefs from international entities. Case studies from nations with analogous post-conflict recovery experiences, such as Rwanda and Sierra Leone, were analyzed to offer useful background and comparative insights.
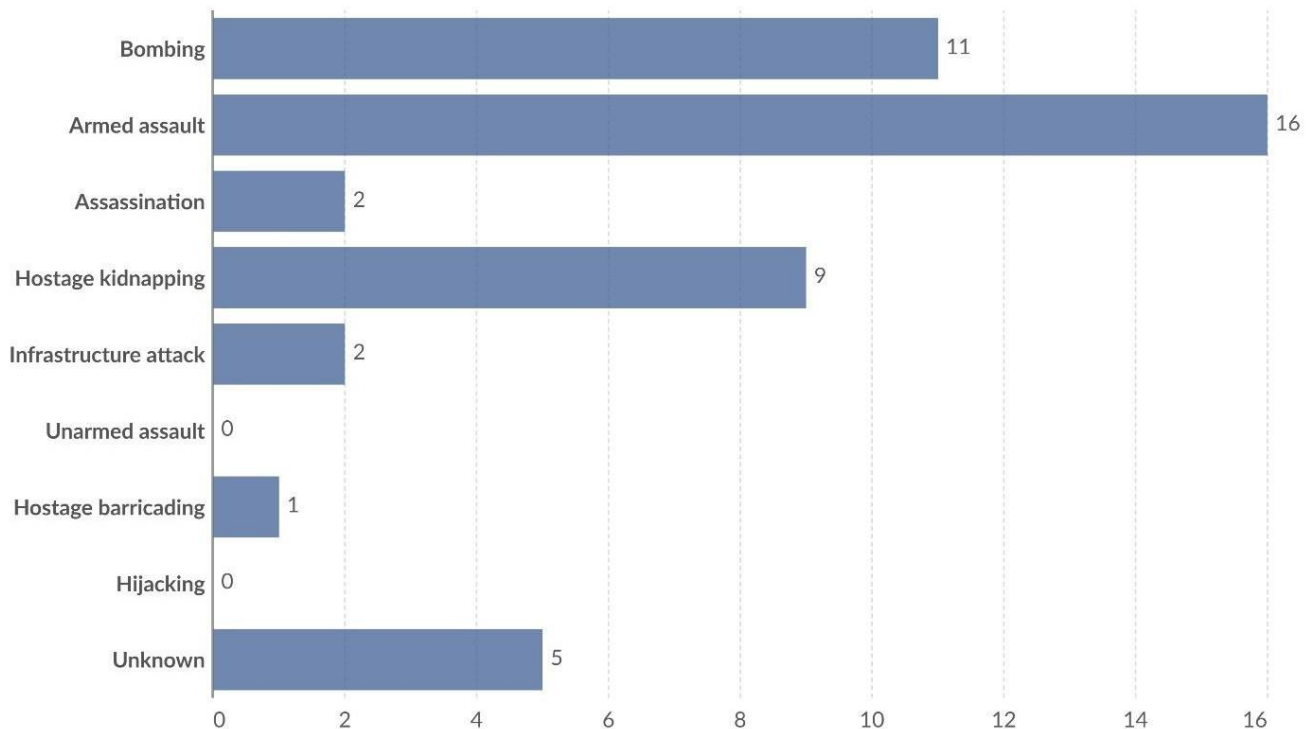
RESULTS

o Challenges to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Cameroon

Post-conflict reconstruction in Cameroon has been impeded by various interrelated obstacles, chiefly stemming from political instability, governance deficiencies, budgetary limitations, and entrenched societal divisions. These impediments hinder the reconstruction of essential institutions, the promotion of peace, and the assurance of sustainable development following extended conflict, especially in the Anglophone regions. The results from multiple research and reports elucidate the interaction of these elements that hinder the advancement of post-conflict reconstruction in Cameroon.

Terrorist attacks by method, Cameroon, 2021

Number of terrorist attacks[1] by the primary method the perpetrators used.

Our World
in Data

Method	Value
Bombing	11
Armed assault	16
Assassination	2
Hostage kidnapping	9
Infrastructure attack	2
Unarmed assault	0
Hostage barricading	1
Hijacking	0
Unknown	5

Data source: Global Terrorism Database (2022)   OurWorldinData.org/terrorism | CC BY

Note: Method of attack is classified as unknown when it cannot be determined from the available information.

Figure 1 Terrorist attacks by method.

Author's analysis 2024.

The graph depicts the distribution of terrorist attacks in Cameroon for the year 2021, classified by the primary methods utilized by the perpetrators. Data from the Global Terrorism Database (2022) indicates that armed assaults represented the most common tactic, with 16 documented incidents. Bombings constitute the second most prevalent method, with 11 instances recorded. Hostage kidnapping represents a notable fraction, amounting to 9 occurrences. Infrequent methods comprise assassinations, infrastructure attacks, and hostage barricading, with recorded events totaling 2, 2, and 1, respectively. There were no recorded incidents of unarmed assaults or hijackings in 2021. Five attacks remain unclassified due to a lack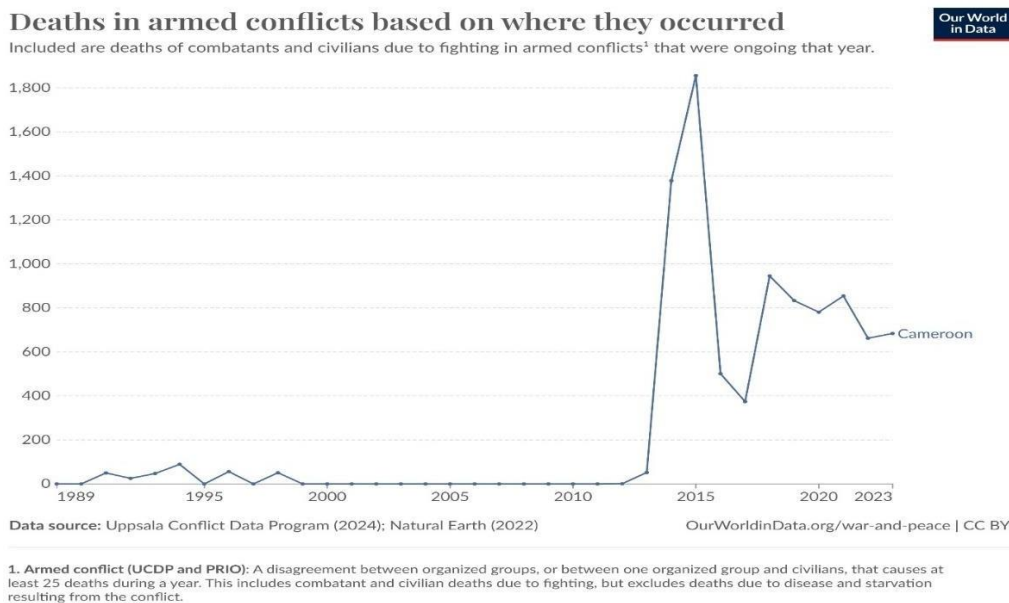 of sufficient information concerning the employed method. This data illustrates the variety of tactics utilized in terrorist activities in Cameroon during this period, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive security measures to address these evolving threats.

• Political Instability, Lack of Decentralization, and Limited Financial Resources

A significant finding concerning post-conflict reconstruction in Cameroon is that political instability and insufficient decentralization are substantial impediments to the nation's rebuilding efforts. Political instability, especially in the conflict-affected Anglophone regions, persists in obstructing initiatives aimed at stabilizing government and establishing the prerequisites for enduring peace. The persistent conflict between separatist factions and government forces has

resulted in population displacement and hindered the state's ability to exert control and restore critical infrastructure in these areas (Nkongho, 2021). The incomplete execution of

decentralization measures, as requested by the Anglophone populace, has intensified tensions and hindered reconstruction initiatives.

Figure 2 Deaths in armed conflicts

Author's analysis 2024.

The graph illustrates a significant rise in conflict-related fatalities in Cameroon from 1989 to 2023. Data obtained from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (2024) indicates a comparatively low death toll from 1989 to 2012, with sporadic surges not above 200 fatalities. A significant increase is apparent from 2013 onwards, corresponding with the intensification of the Boko Haram insurgency and the onset of the Anglophone Crisis.

In 2016, a maximum of over 1800 fatalities were recorded, signifying a phase of heightened violence in both combat areas. Although a decrease is apparent in the following years, fatality figures remain markedly higher than those of the pre-2013 era. Fluctuations are evident, marked by a significant rise in 2018, a decline in 2019, and another increase in 2021. The 2023 data reveals a reduction in conflict-related fatalities; yet, the figures are still considerable, underscoring the

persistent effects of these conflicts on human security in Cameroon.

This trend highlights the severe repercussions of the increasing violence in Cameroon, stressing the critical necessity for efficient conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts to tackle the underlying causes of these conflicts and alleviate the human toll.

The sluggish progress of decentralization in Cameroon has hindered the development of efficient local governance, crucial for post-conflict recovery. Ngang (2022) asserts that the central government's hesitance to delegate significant authority to regional and local entities, especially in the Anglophone regions, has perpetuated the impression of marginalization among these communities. The absence of decentralization has sustained the complaints that originally ignited the Anglophone Crisis, hindering efforts to attain reconciliation and restore trust in the government.

The constrained financial resources for

reconstruction exacerbate the political and governance difficulties. Cameroon encounters substantial economic limitations, exacerbated by the expenses of military engagements in conflict areas and the necessity to rectify extensive infrastructural damage. Mbuh and Smith (2021) assert that the government has faced challenges in obtaining sufficient money for extensive rehabilitation initiatives, especially in regions severely impacted by the violence, namely the Northwest and Southwest sectors. International donors have offered some financial assistance, but the extent of devastation and persistent security issues necessitate significantly larger investments than those now allocated. Furthermore, the improper allocation and management of resources, frequently intensified by corruption, have further undermined the efficacy of the reconstruction project (Amnesty International, 2023).

Financial limitations also impact the delivery of essential services, like healthcare, education, and housing, which are vital for community stabilization and facilitating the return of displaced populatio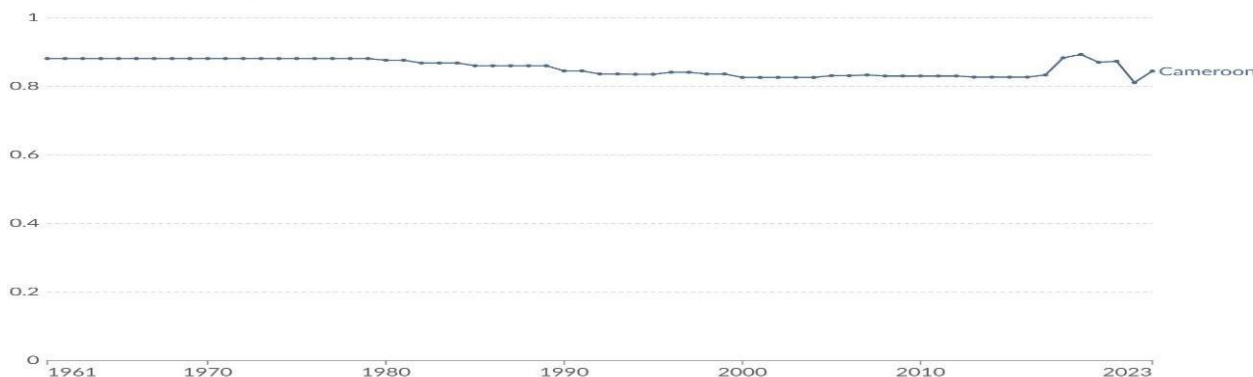ns to their residences. The lack of sufficient financial resources has postponed the restoration of schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure, resulting in numerous communities being deprived of important services. The deficiency of services erodes faith in the administration and obstructs the overarching peacebuilding initiative.

- Governance Issues: Corruption and Power Centralization

Governance issues, notably the enduring corruption and the centralization of authority, have obstructed institution-building initiatives in post-conflict Cameroon. The Cameroonian government has faced criticism for its inability to tackle systemic corruption, which hampers the efficacy of restoration initiatives. Corruption in both public and private sectors impairs resource allocation, hinders development project execution, and compromises service delivery. Ngang (2022) asserts that corruption is widespread within Cameroon's governance frameworks, significantly undermining the nation's capacity to reconstruct essential institutions, especially in conflict-affected areas where oversight is minimal.

Figure 3 Political Centralization Index.

Author's analysis 2024.

This graph utilizes expert estimates and the V-Dem

index (V-Dem, 2024) to effectively illustrate political centralization in Cameroon from 1961 to 2023. The index quantifies the degree of executive

power's autonomy from other governmental branches, including the legislature, judiciary, and electoral management bodies, with a score of 1 indicating complete centralization.

The data indicates a persistent pattern of significant political centralization during the examined time. Between 1961 and the late 1970s, the index remained approximately 0.9, signifying a highly centralized political system characterized by restricted checks and balances on executive authority.

A minor decrease in centralization occurred during the 1980s and 1990s; however, the index remains above 0.8, indicating that the executive branch retains considerable authority. In the 2000s, a phase of relative stability was observed, characterized by the index fluctuating around 0.8.

Notably, political centralization increased around 2015, coinciding with the escalation of the Anglophone Crisis and the intensification of the Boko Haram insurgency. This indicates that the government may have centralized authority in reaction to these security challenges.

A minor decrease in centralization is noted around 2023; however, the index continues to be high relative to earlier decades. This trend suggests that Cameroon's political system remains marked by significant executive dominance, with few limitations on presidential authority.

The ongoing centralization prompts critical enquiries regarding its effects on democratic governance, accountability, and the safeguarding of human rights in Cameroon. This highlights the necessity for reforms that enhance institutional checks and balances while fostering increased political participation and inclusivity.

A major governance difficulty is the centralization of authority within the executive branch, which constrains the capacity of local governments and civil society to contribute effectively to the reconstruction process. In post-conflict environments, decentralized governance is crucial for promoting local ownership of the r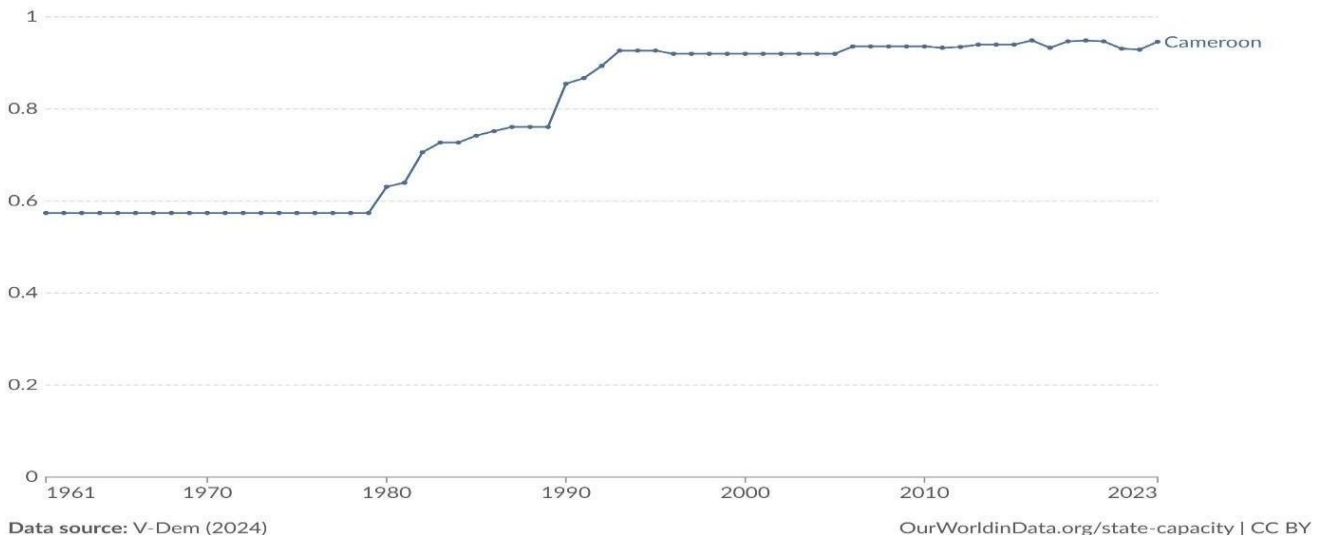econstruction process and addressing the needs of various populations. In Cameroon, authority is centralized in the national government, especially within the presidential office, resulting in inefficiency and insufficient accountability in the rehabilitation efforts (Mbuh & Smith, 2021). The centralization of authority has hindered local governments' ability to address the specific concerns of their communities, especially in the Anglophone regions, where the lack of power devolution has exacerbated discontent and opposition.

Corruption undermines the legitimacy of governmental institutions, hindering the establishment of public trust, which is essential for post-conflict reconstruction. Corruption in Cameroon has undermined trust in the government's capacity to administer reconstruction funding and fulfil its commitments to decentralization and governance reform. Amnesty International (2023) reports that accusations of embezzlement and misappropriation of reconstruction funds have fostered a climate of distrust and frustration, especially in areas that have not experienced significant advancements in the reconstruction of schools, hospitals, and other essential infrastructure. Corruption also impacts the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, exacerbating governance issues by facilitating impunity for individuals accountable for human rights breaches and other transgressions during the conflict (Nkongho, 2021).

The lack of significant judicial changes to combat corruption and impunity has impeded initiatives to foster justice and accountability, which are crucial for attaining durable peace. In post-conflict environments, strong and open judicial systems are essential to ensure accountability for those responsible for crimes committed during the conflict and to provide justice for victims. The ongoing centralization of authority in Cameroon's executive branch has constrained the judiciary's independence, hindering its ability to effectively tackle corruption and human rights abuses (Elischer & McNulty, 2022).

Political corruption index, 1961 to 2023

Based on the expert estimates and index by V-Dem[1]. It captures the extent to which the executive, legislative, judiciary, and bureaucracy engage in bribery and theft, and the making and implementing of laws are susceptible to corruption.

Data source: V-Dem (2024)

OurWorldinData.org/state-capacity | CC BY

Figure 4. Political Corruption Index.

Author's analysis 2024.

This graph, sourced from the V-Dem project (V-Dem, 2024), illustrates a concerning trend of political corruption in Cameroon from 1961 to 2023. The index, derived from expert evaluations, measures the degree to which corruption infiltrates the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, affecting the formulation and execution of laws.

Between 1961 and the late 1970s, the measure indicates a very steady corruption level, remaining at about 0.6. A significant increase was noted in the early 1980s, with the index reaching 0.7 at the decade's conclusion. The rising trend persisted throughout the 1990s, culminating at around 0.9 by the year 2000.

The index subsequently stabilizes, oscillating from about 0.9 until around 2010. This indicates a deep-seated and enduring level of corruption within the Cameroonian political system.

Post-2010, the graph demonstrates volatility, featuring a significant decline circa 2017, succeeded by an increase. Notwithstanding these fluctuations, the prevailing trend demonstrates a persistently elevated degree of political corruption in Cameroon, with the index continuously over 0.9 in recent years.

This enduring and widespread corruption presents a substantial obstacle to effective governance, economic advancement, and the rule of law in Cameroon. It erodes public confidence in institutions, obstructs efficient resource distribution, and fosters an atmosphere that permits impunity and the misuse of authority.

• Social Challenges: Ethnic and Linguistic Divisions and Their Influence on Peacebuilding

Ethnic and linguistic barriers have exacerbated social issues, complicating national reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in Cameroon. The nation's intricate socioeconomic structure, consisting of more than 250 ethnic groups and two predominant language communities (Francophone and Anglophone), has rendered post-conflict

reconstruction a particularly delicate and arduous endeavor. Ethnic and linguistic tensions intensified during the conflict persist in obstructing initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and facilitating reconciliation between the Francophone and Anglophone communities (Nkongho, 2021).

The Anglophone Crisis, stemming from enduring frustrations of linguistic and political marginalization, has exacerbated differences between the Anglophone minority and the Francophone majority. Ngang (2022) asserts that the perception of Anglophone marginalization has intensified due to the government's inability to execute decentralization policies that would grant the Anglophone regions increased autonomy. This has intensified separatist sentiments and severely polarized the two linguistic populations, complicating reconciliation efforts.

Ethnic divisions have complicated peacebuilding efforts, especially in areas where intercommunal hostilities have intensified due to conflict. The erosion of trust among many ethnic groups, many of which were either directly engaged in the conflict or impacted by its repercussions, presents substantial obstacles to the restoration of societal cohesiveness. In some instances, ethnic communities have withdrawn within their enclaves, establishing parallel societies that hinder reconciliation and integration with other communities (Elischer & McNulty, 2022).

The influence of these ethnic and linguistic barriers is evident in the challenges encountered by peacebuilding efforts designed to foster national unity. Mbuh and Smith (2021) assert that numerous peacebuilding initiatives in Cameroon have had difficulties in gaining momentum due to their insufficient engagement with the fundamental societal differences that triggered the conflict. Unless these divides are addressed, endeavors to foster national healing and unity are improbable to succeed. Furthermore, the persistent exclusion of some groups from the political process, especially the Anglophone minority, has compromised the legitimacy of peacebuilding efforts and hindered substantial advancement towards reconciliation.

o   **Roles of National and International**

Actors in Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Cameroon

The contributions of national and international actors in the restoration of post-conflict societies are essential for achieving enduring peace and stability. The government, foreign organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have each assumed unique responsibilities in the ongoing post-conflict reconstruction effort in Cameroon. Nonetheless, these initiatives are hindered by numerous obstacles, such as inefficiency, insufficient inclusivity, fragmentation, and inadequate coordination. Moreover, despite the engagement of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian interventions, core concerns like governance deficiencies and socio-economic inequalities persist unresolved.

•   The Role of the Cameroonian Government in Reconstruction Efforts

A critical concern regarding the post-conflict reconstruction process in Cameroon is the government's inefficacy and lack of inclusivity, particularly in the Anglophone regions. The centralization of authority and limited engagement with local stakeholders have created substantial barriers to effective rehabilitation. The conflict, notably the Anglophone Crisis, has revealed persistent political and economic challenges arising from the marginalization of the English-speaking population by the Francophone-dominated administration. The Cameroonian government's response to the crisis has been characterized by a top-down approach that has inadequately addressed issues such as political inclusion, decentralization, and equitable resource distribution (Nkongho, 2021).

The ineffectiveness of the Cameroonian government in overseeing reconstruction initiatives constitutes a substantial impediment to advancement. Corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and resource mismanagement have all impeded the reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected regions.

Ngang (2022) asserts that the government's failure to provide critical services and restore infrastructure in the Anglophone regions has

intensified the populace's distrust of the state. In numerous regions, schools, hospitals, and highways devastated by the battle remain unreconstructed, depriving residents of essential services. The inefficiency stems from the centralization of decision-making authority within the executive branch, which has suppressed local governance initiatives and impeded the proper allocation of restoration money.

Furthermore, the government has faced criticism for its failure to implement significant decentralization reforms, a main aspiration of the Anglophone community. Decentralization is viewed as an effective solution to the political and economic marginalization of the English- speaking regions by granting them increased control over local governance and resource allocation. The government's reluctance to fully delegate authority to local entities has hindered progress in this domain, intensifying the alienation of the Anglophone community and prolonging the dispute (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). The lack of participation in the government's rehabilitation efforts has led to considerable dissatisfaction among local communities, who feel their viewpoints are overlooked and their needs unaddressed.

Absence of Inclusiveness in Political and Social Reforms: Inclusiveness is essential for the efficacy of post-conflict rebuilding, as it guarantees the participation of all societal segments and the consideration of their concerns. The Cameroonian government's restoration strategy has faced criticism for its insufficient inclusivity, especially in the Anglophone regions. Amnesty International (2023) asserts that the government has not engaged in substantive conversation with Anglophone leaders and civil society organizations, hindering the formulation of a comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding policy. This exclusionary strategy has incited animosity and obstructed endeavors towards national healing.

Furthermore, the government's inability to resolve the fundamental political and economic grievances of the Anglophone populace has exacerbated the ongoing conflict. The Anglophone Crisis stems from enduring problems of political exclusion, economic marginalization, and cultural discrimination, which remain inadequately managed by the government. Failure to address these fundamental issues will certainly impede the restoration process from attaining enduring peace and stability. The government's failure to adopt an inclusive strategy has fostered an environment conducive to the proliferation of armed separatist organizations, hence hindering reconstruction efforts in the afflicted regions (Mbuh & Smith, 2021).

• International Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations:

International organizations and NGOs have significantly contributed to humanitarian relief, peacebuilding, and reconstruction efforts in Cameroon. Entities including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), alongside numerous international NGOs, have played a crucial role in meeting the humanitarian requirements of populations impacted by conflict, especially in the Anglophone regions and the Far North, which has been influenced by the Boko Haram insurgency. These entities have supplied sustenance, accommodation, medical treatment, and education to displaced individuals, alleviating certain immediate consequences of the violence (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022).

Although international organizations and NGOs significantly contribute to reconstruction, their initiatives are sometimes disjointed and inadequately coordinated. The absence of coordination has diminished the efficacy of international interventions, resulting in redundant efforts, inefficiencies, and service delivery gaps. Zenn (2020) asserts that numerous foreign organizations function autonomously, each pursuing distinct mandates and purposes, lacking adequate cooperation with other entities, including the Cameroonian government and local civil society organizations. Consequently, international aid is frequently focused in specific places, leaving other areas inadequately supported.

In post-conflict environments, good collaboration between national and international entities is crucial for ensuring that reconstruction initiatives

are thorough and meet the needs of all impacted communities. In Cameroon, the absence of a centralized coordination system has impeded the integration of foreign and local initiatives. The fragmentation poses significant challenges in Anglophone areas, where the extent of devastation and persistent insecurity necessitate a cohesive and coordinated response from national and international stakeholders (Mbuh & Smith, 2021).

• Limited Engagement with Local Actors:

A significant difficulty for multinational organizations and NGOs in Cameroon is their restricted collaboration with local stakeholders. Although multinational organizations offer vital resources and technical skills, their interventions frequently lack the local understanding and community- oriented strategies necessary for long-term sustainability. Ngang (2022) asserts that numerous international entities prioritize immediate humanitarian assistance over the enhancement of local capacity for sustainable development. This has resulted in local communities and civil society organizations being marginalized in the reconstruction process, hence diminishing the efficacy of international efforts.

Involving local stakeholders is essential for making reconstruction initiatives attuned to the requirements of impacted communities and for fostering local ownership of the peacebuilding endeavor. In Cameroon, multinational organizations have encountered difficulties in forming successful collaborations with local NGOs and community leaders, mostly due to governmental restrictions on civil society and persistent security challenges in conflict-affected areas. Achieving sustainable success in the restoration of Cameroon would be challenging without enhanced coordination between foreign and local stakeholders (Elischer & McNulty, 2022).

o **Peacekeeping Operations and Humanitarian Interventions:**

Peacekeeping operations and humanitarian interventions are vital elements of post-conflict reconstruction, offering security, protection, and assistance to populations impacted by violence. In Cameroon, peacekeeping missions and humanitarian initiatives have been pivotal in stabilizing conflict-affected areas and alleviating the effects of the Anglophone Crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency. Nonetheless, although these initiatives have been essential for tackling urgent security and humanitarian requirements, they have not comprehensively resolved the underlying causes of the war, including governance deficiencies and socio-economic inequalities.

The primary restriction of peacekeeping missions in Cameroon is the absence of an official foreign peacekeeping presence in the Anglophone regions. Although the UN and AU have helped through humanitarian supplies and war monitoring, there has been an absence of substantial peacekeeping operations to enforce ceasefires, safeguard civilians, or facilitate the peace-building process. The lack of peacekeepers has assigned the duty of ensuring security to the Cameroonian security forces, who have been alleged to perpetrate human rights violations and intensify tensions in the Anglophone regions (Amnesty International, 2023).

In the Far North region, where Boko Haram operates, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has contributed to counterinsurgency efforts; however, its operations have concentrated on military objectives, neglecting the underlying causes of the conflict, including poverty, unemployment, and political marginalization (Zenn, 2020).

Humanitarian efforts have been crucial in delivering immediate assistance to conflict-affected populations in Cameroon, specifically in terms of food, healthcare, housing, and education. Nonetheless, these measures have not adequately resolved the fundamental socio-economic imbalances that caused the conflict initially. Elischer and McNulty (2022) assert that numerous places significantly impacted by the conflict, especially the Anglophone areas, experience elevated levels of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. These socio-economic inequalities have incited animosity and facilitated the emergence of separatist groups and insurgencies.

DISCUSSION

This analysis elucidates the considerable challenges encountered in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Cameroon. The presence of political instability, especially within the Anglophone regions, along with insufficient decentralization, obstructs initiatives aimed at peacebuilding and reconstruction (Nkongho, 2021). The constraints of financial resources intensify these difficulties, postponing the revitalization of critical infrastructure and services (Mbuh & Smith, 2021).

Challenges in governance, such as ongoing corruption and centralized power dynamics, hinder the development of institutions (Ngang, 2022). Corruption erodes public confidence and obstructs the effective distribution of resources, whereas the concentration of authority restricts community involvement and intensifies marginalization (Amnesty International, 2023).

Profound social divisions, especially those rooted in ethnic and linguistic differences, significantly hinder the processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding. The Anglophone Crisis has exacerbated these divisions, obstructing national unity and social cohesion (Ngang, 2022; Elischer & McNulty, 2022).

Although the Cameroonian government and international entities are pivotal in the reconstruction process, their initiatives frequently encounter obstacles due to inefficiency, insufficient inclusivity, and inadequate coordination (Nkongho, 2021). The government's centralized strategy, coupled with its inability to confront the fundamental issues underlying the Anglophone Crisis, has exacerbated dissatisfaction and obstructed advancement (Elischer & McNulty, 2022). International interventions, although they offer essential humanitarian aid, frequently suffer from a deficiency in coordination and local involvement, which constrains their enduring effectiveness (Zenn, 2020; Ngang, 2022).

Notwithstanding the existence of peacekeeping missions and humanitarian efforts, core challenges such as deficiencies in governance and socio-economic disparities continue to endure (Amnesty International, 2023; Zenn, 2020). Confronting these entrenched challenges necessitates a thorough and inclusive strategy that emphasizes local stewardship, fortifies institutions, and fosters equitable progress.

To foster sustainable peace and development in Cameroon, the government must prioritize decentralization reforms that empower regional and local authorities, particularly in Anglophone regions, ensuring inclusivity and autonomy in decision-making. A comprehensive peacebuilding framework, including truth and reconciliation commissions, is crucial to address past injustices and promote social cohesion. Judicial reforms should focus on strengthening the rule of law and ensuring accountability for human rights violations. Furthermore, enhanced coordination between national and international actors is needed to ensure effective reconstruction and development efforts. Targeted investments in conflict-affected regions, coupled with security sector reform and disarmament programs, are essential for addressing socio-economic disparities and preventing future violence.

CONCLUSION

The study of post-conflict reconstruction and institution-building in Cameroon demonstrates a complex interaction of challenges and opportunities. The persistent Anglophone Crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency have resulted in severe humanitarian repercussions and revealed significant deficiencies in governance and institutional capacity. The findings highlight that successful post-conflict reconstruction in Cameroon depends on tackling essential political, economic, and social issues, especially in conflict-affected areas like the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest, as well as the Far North, where Boko Haram continues to operate.

Political instability, insufficient decentralization, and governance deficiencies have obstructed effective reconstruction initiatives. The centralized governance structure and the restricted involvement of local stakeholders, particularly in the Anglophone regions, have diminished the legitimacy of state institutions and sustained perceptions of marginalization. The gradual advancement of decentralization and governance reforms has perpetuated tensions and diminished

the likelihood of achieving sustainable peace.

International actors, including the United Nations and various NGOs, have significantly contributed to humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding initiatives; however, insufficient coordination and misalignment with local needs have constrained their effectiveness. The lack of a strong peacekeeping presence and the emphasis on immediate humanitarian assistance rather than long-term development strategies have led to ongoing socio-economic disparities.

Achieving enduring peace and stability in Cameroon requires a thorough, inclusive, and effectively coordinated strategy for post-conflict reconstruction. The findings of this study highlight the necessity for a decentralized governance framework that empowers local communities, improves accountability and transparency in government institutions, and guarantees the active involvement of local actors in the reconstruction process. Addressing the root causes of conflict, such as political marginalization and economic inequality, is essential for fostering sustainable peace. Neglecting these fundamental issues is likely to sustain instability and obstruct the potential for enduring peace in Cameroon.

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