

FACTSHEET

Unarmed Civilian Self-Protection in Cameroon's Anglophone Conflict

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Introduction

This factsheet provides a brief about the findings of a research conducted in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon in February 2023 exploring ways affected civilians in the ongoing conflict protect themselves and fellow civilians through nonviolent means. It demonstrates the agency, proactiveness and resilience of affected civilians in maximising homegrown and digital unarmed protection strategies to mitigate threats and violence.

Methods

Employed a blend of qualitative and arts-based research methods inclusive of semi-structured interviews, poetry, drawing, and storytelling. A total of 40 local civilians from affected regions participated in the arts-based workshops, 22 from the South West and 18 from the North West. Of these, 15 participated in the drawing, 12 in the poetry, and 13 in the storytelling workshops. Further, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with communities, CSOs and CBOs in the two regions.

Research Participants



Interviews
15 with
CSOs and CBOs



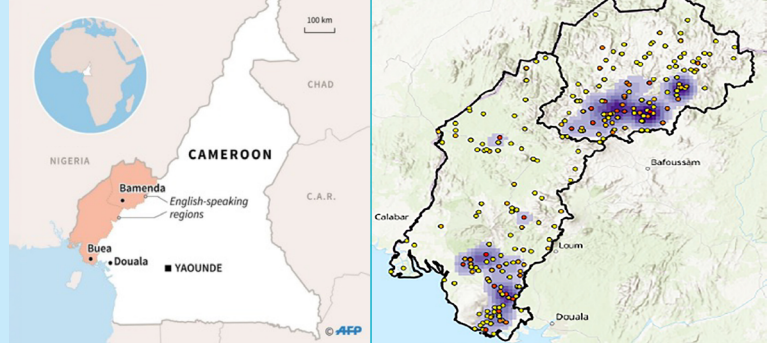
Drawing
15 with
affected civilians



Poetry
12 with
affected civilians



Storytelling
13 with
affected civilians



► **Affected regions – North West and South West**

► **Conflict hot-spots**

Kernel Density Map .25 Search Radius (with ACLED database) shows those most conflict-affected rural areas in both regions. Constructed by Billie Burton from the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities.

Key Findings

Unarmed Community Self-protection Strategies

In general, the research shows that affected civilians use diverse and innovative nonviolent strategies in protecting themselves. These are categorised under 3 main domains- spontaneous, early warning and response, and preventive measures. However, challenges were equally identified.

Community Self-protection Strategies

Spontaneous

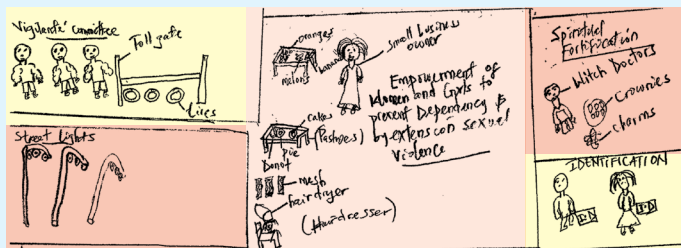
- evasive measure (lying on floors, under beds etc.)
- running to bushes, farms, neighbouring villages
- temporary shelters

Early Warning and Early Response

- phone calls/messages
- WhatsApp calls and platforms
- word of mouth/town crier
- sound signals – whistles, pots/pans
- unarmed vigilantism
- social media

Preventive

- staying indoors
- neutrality and protective silences
- adherence to rules
- relocation
- disguise
- rebuilding social cohesion
- appropriate dressing
- relevant documentation



Participant's drawing showing some of the nonviolent strategies

Challenges

Declining social cohesion

Unarmed vs armed vigilantes

Intimidation by warring parties

Confiscation/tracking digital tools

Financial constraints



Recommendations

- Community self-protection can be strengthened through enhanced linkages from the grassroots to local and international NGOs. Local NGOs can support community self-organisation by facilitating the formation of community-based organisations out of loose networks of individuals and community leaders. In turn, international NGOs can provide financial assistance to enable local NGOs to expand support and training activities.
- The nature of CBO-NGO partnerships is crucial, however, with careful reflection by NGOs on how to best support community self-protection strategies without the imposition of NGOs' preconceived agendas. Local agency should be enhanced not undermined.
- Best practices of community self-protection can be disseminated by local civil society organisations within the English-speaking territories, and by international NGOs to wider audiences in Africa and globally, potentially adapted to other conflict contexts.
- Urgent prioritisation of negotiations and dialogues by all relevant actors, inclusive of national, regional, and international policymakers and practitioners, is essential to ensure sustainable protection of civilians.

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