

A Legal Assessment of the Effects of the Conflict in the English-Speaking Regions of Cameroon on Sustainable Development

MOFOR SANDRA NING¹

¹ Department of English Law, Faculty of Laws and Political Science, University of Buea, Cameroon

Correspondence: MOFOR SANDRA NING, Department of English Law, Faculty of Laws and Political Science, University of Buea, Cameroon.

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Abstract

Sustainable development, as crystallized in major international legal and policy instruments, is contingent upon the coexistence of economic advancement, social justice, environmental protection, peace, and institutional stability. Despite the measures put in place for the promotion of sustainable development in Cameroon, the protracted Anglophone conflict has gravely affected the practical efficacy of these mechanisms. The crisis has led to widespread destruction of social infrastructure, aggravated poverty, displacement, and human rights violations, disrupted access to education and healthcare, and occasioned serious violations of fundamental human rights. These consequences are incompatible with the essential preconditions for sustainable development and have rendered its attainment in the affected regions ineffective. Although the State has adopted various initiatives, including the Grand National Dialogue, special status arrangements, reconstruction programs, and DDR mechanisms, these responses have not yielded a sufficiently coherent, inclusive, and enforceable framework capable of addressing the root causes of the crisis and restoring the conditions necessary for sustainable recovery. The study concludes that sustainable development in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon will remain more theoretical than real unless peacebuilding, accountability, human rights protection is treated as indispensable components of the development process. It therefore advocates a more rights-based, conflict-sensitive, and justice-oriented legal approach as the necessary foundation for meaningful and enduring sustainability in the affected regions.

1. Background

Sustainable development has become a fundamental strategy to guide the world's social economic and environmental transformation.¹ The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) in Stockholm was the first world conference to make the environment a major issue. The participants adopted a series of principles for sound management of the environment including the Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan for the Human Environment and several resolutions. Principle 1 and 8 affirms that "Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality, and the enjoyment of adequate living conditions, in an environment of such quality as to enable him to lead a dignified life and enjoy well-being and has a solemn obligation to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations."² The Earth's natural resources must be preserved for the benefit of present and future generations through careful planning or management, as

¹ Shi Longyu, Linwei Han, Fengmei Yang, and Lijie Gao. (2019). The Evolution of Sustainable Development Theory: Types, Goals, and Research Prospects. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 7158, 1-16, 1.

² United Nations, Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm Declaration), 1972, Principle 1 and 8, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/stockholm1972> (Accessed 14th May 2025).

appropriate.¹

The concept of sustainable development gained significant attention following the publication of the Brundtland Report. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which was established in 1983, released a report titled “Our Common Future.” This document became widely known as the “Brundtland Report,” named after the Commission’s chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundtland. It developed guiding principles for sustainable development as it is generally understood today. The Brundtland Report defines sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs.²

The Earth Summit which convened in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) from June 3 to 14, 1992, stands as a landmark event in the trajectory of sustainable development. The Rio Summit aimed to create a blueprint for international cooperation on environment and development, which emphasized the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental factors.³ The participating world leaders signed five major instruments: The Rio Declaration and its 27 universal principles (a statement of principles); Agenda 21 (a framework for activity into the 21st century addressing the combined issues of environment protections and fair and equitable development for all, and includes the creation of a new Commission for Sustainable Development); The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); the Convention on Biological Diversity; and the Declaration on the principles of forest management.⁴ The principles established at the Earth Summit provided a framework for subsequent global initiatives, paving the way for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and, later, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁵

In September 2000, at the UN Millennium Summit, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The Declaration, which called for a global partnership to reduce extreme poverty, was the first ever global strategy with quantifiable targets to be agreed upon by all UN member states and the world’s leading development institutions.⁶ To support the Declaration, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan established eight accompanying objectives. These objectives were set with a deadline of 2015 and became known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They include the following: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; Achieve universal primary education; Promote gender equality and empower women; Reduce child mortality; Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; Ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.⁷

As the MDGs expire at the end of 2015, the U.N. General Assembly adopted their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (“SDGs”), in September 2015.⁸

After Cameroon gained its independence, numerous attempts have been made towards achieving sustainability. These efforts have evolved alongside the country’s political, economic, and social development priorities, reflecting an increasing awareness of the need to balance natural resource exploitation with environmental protection. In the immediate post-independence period, development policies were extractive in orientation, driven by the imperatives of economic growth, state-building, and national consolidation. Environmental considerations, where they existed, were fragmented and largely embedded within sector-specific regulations rather than articulated as a coherent legal or policy objective.⁹

Despite the fact that Cameroon is striving towards attaining sustainable development, that endeavour has been

¹ *Ibid* Principle 2.

² United Nations. (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future.

³ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>. (Accessed 6th April, 2025).

⁴ European Environment Agency, Earth Summit Rio de Janeiro. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/help/glossary/chm-biodiversity/earth-summit-rio-de-janeiro> (Accessed 6th August 2025).

⁵ Library of Congress, The Rio Earth Summit. (1992). <https://guides.loc.gov/brazil-us-relations/rio-earth-summit-1992>. (Accessed 6th April, 2025).

⁶ McArthur John. (2014). The Origins of the Millennium Development Goals. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 34(2), 5-24.

⁷ Fehling Maya, Brett D. Nelson, and Sridhar Venkatapuram. (2013). Limitations of the Millennium Development Goals: A Literature Review. *Global Public Health*, 8(10), 1109-1122.

⁸ G.A. Res. 70/1, U.N. Sustainable Development Goals Sept. 25, 2015.

⁹ Maurice Kamto, *Droit de L'Environnement en Afrique* (Paris: EDICEF (Éditions Didier Érudition France) and AUPELF-UREF (Association des Universités Partiellement ou Entièrement de Langue Française - Université des Réseaux d'Expression Française), 1996), 21-24.

undermined by the conflict which is ongoing in the English Speaking Region of the country. The surge of armed conflict in the Anglophone region of Cameroon¹ broke out in October 2017 after separatist groups unilaterally announced their secession from the Francophone government in Yaoundé and the formation of a separate state in the Anglophone region.² The call for independence by separatist groups followed widespread demonstrations throughout 2016 by civil society organizations, demanding an end to economic, political and cultural discrimination that they felt was being imposed by the government in Yaoundé against the Anglophone region.³ Armed violence in this region escalated after October 2017, when state forces cracked down on those they perceived as secessionists, resulting in several deaths and hundreds of arrests.⁴

2. The State of Sustainable Development Prior to the Armed Conflict in Anglophone Cameroon

An appraisal of sustainable development in Anglophone Cameroon prior to the outbreak of the armed conflict necessarily engages the core pillars of sustainability including economic viability, social equity, environmental protection, and infrastructural development within Cameroon.

2.1 Economic Sustainability

Prior to the outbreak of the Anglophone armed conflict in 2016, the North-West and South-West Regions occupied a strategically important place within Cameroon's productive economy. In this sense, the pre-crisis period cannot be described simply as one of prosperity; rather, it was a period in which economic sustainability existed, but in an incomplete form.⁵ Prior to the conflict, the state-run CDC was an important revenue stream for the government. The corporation generated 58.39 billion francs CFA (approximately US\$101.8 million) from produce sales in 2016.⁶ The CDC not only contributed significantly to national export earnings but also sustained local economies through direct employment, out-grower schemes, and the provision of social amenities such as worker housing, healthcare facilities, and schools. Before the outbreak of the conflict, CDC's workforce stood at 20,595 persons. But as of 31 December 2021, this number had dropped to 15,505 workers, with about 50% of the manpower on unpaid 'technical leave'.⁷ Complementing this were other agro-industrial enterprises such as PAMOL Plantations Plc and Del Monte Cameroon, which further enhanced the anglophone region's position in global markets, particularly in bananas and palm products.

This agro-industrial dynamism was also seen in the thriving smallholder agricultural sector, particularly in the North-West Region. The region was made up of diverse agricultural production systems, with farmers cultivating both subsistence and cash crops, including maize, beans, Irish potatoes, vegetables, and coffee.⁸ The North-West Region, often described as Cameroon's "breadbasket," played an important role in ensuring national food security, supplying urban markets across the country with foodstuffs.⁹ In addition, the region's well-developed livestock sector, particularly cattle rearing, contributed to the domestic meat supply and supported a wide network of economic activities, including dairy production, butchery, and transportation.¹⁰ Notwithstanding these strengths, a wider examination reveals a plethora of issues affecting Anglophone regions and the nation at large. The IMF's 2015 Article IV Consultation reported that Cameroon's growth was broad-based and projected

¹ Given the nature of the dispute, many ways to refer to the region invoke support of a particular group. Referring to Northwest and Southwest regions implies territorial integrity with the government in Yaoundé, while referring to Ambazonia, Southern Cameroons or Ambaland implies support for pro-independence groups. Recognizing these linguistic connotations, this research refers to the Anglophone Cameroon or the Anglophone region as such, and its subnational regions as Northwest and Southwest to avoid more polarizing terminology.

² Nshom, Elvis, Immaculate Mkong, Kwoh Elong, and Isidore Agha. (2024). Independence or a Federation? Perceived Discrimination as an Antecedent of Anglophone Cameroonians' Attitude Towards the Form Of State. *Ethnicities*, 24(3), 340-358.

³ International Crisis Group, Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis at the Crossroads. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/250-camerouns-anglophone-crisis-crossroads>. (Accessed 8th July, 2025).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Konings, P. (1999). The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 37(3), pp. 511–530.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Kibebsii, N.M., Angwafo, T.E. and Egwu, B.M.J. (2025). Addressing Sustainability Strategies and Agricultural Productivity: Farmers Based Evidence in Tubah Sub-Division North West Region, Cameroon. *Journal of Agricultural Chemistry and Environment*, 14, 37-55.

⁹ Yengoh, G.T. and Ardö, J. (2013). Crop Yield Gaps in Cameroon. *Ambio*, 43, 175-190.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

real GDP growth at 5.9% in 2015.¹ The average growth over the strategy period was about 4.6%, while underemployment rose from 75.8% in 2005 to 77% in 2015. The same review notes that the poverty rate stood at 37.5% in 2014, and increased to 44% in 2015.² These figures show that pre-crisis Cameroon was experiencing growth without sufficient inclusion. For Anglophone Cameroon, this meant that even in regions that were agriculturally productive and commercially dynamic, many households remained economically insecure.

2.2 Social Development

Before the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, the North-West and South-West Regions were not social deserts. On the contrary, they contained a plethora of educational, health and community-service institutions. This signified measurable progress in the social dimension of development. In the South-West Region, for example, the Buea Communal Development Plan identified the presence of the Regional Hospital Annex in Buea, the District Health Office, and eleven integrated health centres located in places such as Bojongo, Likombe, Bova, Bokwaongo, Buea Town, Muea, Bonakanda, Bokova, Lysoka, Mile 16 and Molyko.³

Again, prior to the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, the North West and South West regions of Cameroon benefitted from a historically entrenched Anglo-Saxon institutional legacy, which distinguished them from the Francophone majority of the country.⁴ This legacy was most visible in the structure, pedagogy, and governance of the education system, which emphasized participatory learning, local accountability, and the use of English as the principal medium of instruction. The establishment of the University of Buea in 1993 as the first Anglo-Saxon university in Cameroon further consolidated this educational identity, serving as a major hub for professional training and research and attracting students from across the country and the Central African sub-region.⁵ In the North-West, the creation of the University of Bamenda in 2010⁶ further reflected progress in access to English-language higher education and teacher training.

However, beneath these achievements lay deficiencies that constrained the quality and inclusiveness of education. Although school enrolment had expanded, the education system continued to suffer from overcrowding, insufficient infrastructure, shortages of teaching materials, and uneven deployment of qualified staff. At the national level, the World Bank observed that the student-teacher ratio in primary education by 2016 was 46: 1, which was higher than the averages for Sub-Saharan Africa and lower-middle-income countries.⁷

More importantly, the education sector became an important site of political contestation and grievance prior to the crisis. Anglophone teachers, lawyers, and civil society actors increasingly voiced concerns over what they perceived as the gradual erosion of the Anglo-Saxon educational subsystem.⁸ A key issue was the deployment of Francophone teachers to Anglophone schools, many of whom lacked sufficient proficiency in English and familiarity with Anglo-Saxon pedagogical methods. This was widely interpreted not only as an administrative inefficiency but also as a form of cultural and institutional marginalization.⁹ The situation was further exacerbated by concerns over curriculum harmonization, the dominance of Francophone educational norms in national examinations, and the perceived neglect of technical and professional education tailored to local needs. These concerns culminated in teachers' strikes in 2016, which served as a catalyst for the broader socio-political

¹ MF, *Cameroon: 2015 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report* (2015). Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2015/cr15331.pdf> (visited on the 10/03/2026)

² *Ibid.*

³ Buea Council, *Buea Communal Development Plan* (2012) 1–2, listing the municipality's social sectors and development vision, Available at https://www.pndp.org/documents/04_CDP_Buea.pdf (visited on the 21/03/2026)

⁴ Patrick Mbicho Monju. *The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: Exploring Development gaps During the Crisis*. Available at <https://wacsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-Anglophone-Crisis-In-Cameroon-Exploring-Development-Gaps-During-The-Crisis-Ne.pdf> (visited on the 21/03/2026).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ The University of Bamenda was created by Presidential Decree No 2010/371 of 14 December 2010.

⁷ World Bank, *Republic of Cameroon: Priorities for Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity: Systematic Country Diagnostic* (2016). Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/527781467208782508/pdf/103098-SCD-P151164-SecM2016-0193-IDA-SecM2016-0126-IFC-SecM2016-0072-MIGA-SecM2016-0072-Box396255B-OUO-9.pdf> (visited on the 21/03/2026)

⁸ Daniel OJONG. *Cameroon and the Anglophone Crisis and its Impact on Education*. Available at <https://politeknik-international.org/pi8220/> (visited on the 12/03/2026)

⁹ Konings, P. and Nyamnjoh, F.B. (1997). The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35, 207-229.

crisis.¹

In the domain of health, the Anglophone regions similarly exhibited a pattern of modest progress. Cameroon as a whole had recorded gradual improvements in key health indicators in the years preceding the crisis, including reductions in under-five mortality and increased immunization coverage.² In the North West and South West regions, healthcare delivery was supported by a combination of public facilities and mission-run institutions, the latter often providing higher-quality services and better management. Notable examples include the Banson Baptist Hospital, Mbingo Baptist Hospital, and St. Mary's Hospital in Mamfe, which served as important referral centers for large segments of the population.³ Despite these positive contributions, access to healthcare remained a challenge, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas.⁴

2.3 Environmental Sustainability and Natural Resource Management

Before the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, the environmental sustainability situation in Cameroon's North-West and South-West Regions reflected a mixed picture. At the national level, Cameroon had already enacted a plethora of environmental legislations, notably the 1994 Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Law, which expressly pursued the sustainable conservation and use of forest, wildlife and fisheries resources, and the 1996 Framework Law on Environmental Management, which recognized the environment as a national common heritage and made its protection a matter of public interest.⁵ From a legal standpoint, therefore, the pre-2016 period was not one of total regulatory absence; rather, it was one in which substantial legal commitments coexisted with implementation deficits.

In the South-West Region, around Mount Cameroon, forest loss and degradation had become serious enough to justify the creation of the national park in 2009 and the subsequent REDD+ initiative, which aimed to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while preserving biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods.⁶ Likewise, in and around Korup and Takamanda, conservation policy had to contend with the dependence of local populations on forest resources for farming, fuelwood, bushmeat, and non-timber forest products.⁷ In the North-West Region, the environmental challenge manifested somewhat differently, particularly through land degradation, watershed deterioration, and unsustainable agricultural use of fragile highland ecosystems.

2.4 Infrastructure Development

Before the outbreak of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, infrastructural development occupied a central place in Cameroon's development planning. At the policy level, the State had already linked national transformation to the expansion of transport, energy, communications and urban infrastructure. Cameroon's Vision 2035 expressly stated that infrastructure development was to be closely tied to economic objectives, with emphasis on the maintenance, rehabilitation and densification of communication, energy and telecommunications infrastructure in order to create an integrated national economic space and position Cameroon as a commercial hub in Central Africa.⁸ This policy orientation was operationalized through the *Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et l'Emploi* (DSCE) 2010–2020, which treated major infrastructure projects as the backbone of growth and anticipated increased investment in capital goods because of the realization of “grands projets

¹ *Ibid.*

² Ewang BF. *Vaccination Coverage Under the Expanded Program ... – PMC*. Available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7359757/> (visited on the 21/03/2026)

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Republic of Cameroon, *Health Sector Strategy 2016–2027* (Ministry of Public Health, 2016). Available at https://www.minsante.cm/site/sites/default/files/HSS_english_0.pdf (visited on the 21/03/2026).

⁵ See Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 to Lay Down Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries Regulations, and the Law No. 96/12 of 5 August 1996 Relating to Environmental Management.

⁶ Anne M Larson and others, ‘REDD+ around Mount Cameroon, southwest region of Cameroon’ in *REDD+ on the Ground* (CIFOR, 2014). Available at https://www.cifor-icraf.org/knowledge/publication/5270/?utm_source (visited on the 21/03/2026).

⁷ INFOE. (2014). *Deforestation, REDD and Takamanda National Park in Cameroon*. Available at https://www.infoe.de/wp-content/uploads/Case-Study-Cameroon_2014.pdf?utm_source (Available on the 21/03/2026).

⁸ *Republic of Cameroon, Cameroon Vision 2035*. Available at https://www.cameroon-embassy.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Cameroon_VISION_2035_English_Version.pdf (visited on the 20/03/2026)

d'infrastructures.”¹ This policy framework was significant because it showed that, prior to the conflict, the Cameroonian State had formally accepted that the realization of development depended in substantial part on public infrastructure and territorial connectivity.²

In the energy sector, the pre-2016 period witnessed some of the most visible infrastructural achievements in the country. The Government's program for the 2016 fiscal year reported the commissioning of the Kribi gas power plant with a capacity of 216 megawatts, the partial priming of the Lom Pangar dam, and the near-finalization of the Mekin and Memve'ele hydropower dams, each said to have reached implementation rates averaging 70 percent by that time.³ These projects mattered greatly for national development because electricity shortages had long constituted a structural bottleneck to industrial activity, household welfare and service delivery. Yet several researchers have mentioned that, notwithstanding such flagship investments, electricity before 2016 remained expensive and unreliable, and Cameroon still underutilized its substantial hydroelectric potential.⁴ Thus, even before the outbreak of conflict, the country exhibited the classic contradiction of many developing states: high-profile energy projects advanced, but universal and reliable access remained far from achieved.⁵

In the transport sector, the pre-crisis period was similarly characterized by uneven progress. The Government reported completion of Phase I of the Kribi Industrial-Port Complex, which was intended to relieve pressure on Douala and improve Cameroon's role in regional and international trade.⁶ It also reported the completion of the 21 km feeder road to the Kribi deep-sea port, the construction of logistics infrastructure in Douala, and the completion of works on the Limbe Shipyard together with the procurement of a 5,000-ton dock. These were not symbolic works. They represented a strategic reconfiguration of the country's maritime and industrial infrastructure: Kribi was conceived as a deep-water alternative to the more congested Douala port, while Limbe's shipyard infrastructure strengthened the industrial and maritime profile of the South-West Region.⁷ In the context of sustainable development, such projects augmented international trade, create industrial employment, reduce transport costs and broaden the productive base of the economy.

The water sector reveals this mixed developmental picture even more clearly. According to the Government's 2016 programme statement, potable water supply centres were being constructed in 52 localities, expressly including Bamenda, Buea and Limbe.⁸ This indicates that both English-speaking regions were within the formal geographical scope of state and donor-supported water investments before the crisis. However, the later World Bank reported that access to basic sanitation in the North-West and South-West stood at 14% and 16% respectively, compared with 15% nationally, while access to basic water was 42% in the North-West and 27 percent in the South-West, compared with 30% nationally.⁹ This demonstrates that even where water infrastructure expansion was underway, its reach and developmental impact remained partial.¹⁰

The road sector offers perhaps the clearest illustration of both real progress and unresolved grievance. Government records for the 2013–2015 period stated that several road projects had been completed, including

¹ Document de Stratégie pour la Croissance et l'Emploi (DSCE) 2010–2020. Available at https://www.paris21.org/sites/default/files/Cameroon_DSCE2010-20.pdf (visited on the 20/03/2026)

² *Ibid.*

³ See the 2015 *Government's Economic, Financial, Social and Cultural Programme for the 2016 Fiscal Year*, Presented by H.E Philimon Yang. Available at <https://www.spm.gov.cm/site/sites/default/files/DISOURS%20PM%20AN%20Novembre%202015%20%20ENGLISH%20B.pdf> (visited on the 20/03/2026)

⁴ Carolina Dominguez & Vivien Foster. (September 2011). *Cameroon's Infrastructure: A Continental Perspective* (Policy Research Working Paper 5822 by The World Bank Africa Region Sustainable Development Unit) WPS5822.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Republic of Cameroon, Government's Economic, Financial, Social and Cultural Programme for the 2016 Fiscal Year. Available at www.spm.gov.cm/site/sites/default/files/DISOURS%20PM%20AN%20Novembre%202015%20%20ENGLISH%20B.pdf (visited on the 20/03/2026)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Republic of Cameroon, Government's Economic, Financial, Social and Cultural Programme for the 2016 Fiscal Year, *Op.cit.*

⁹ World Bank Group. (2021). *The Socio-Political Crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon: Assessing the Economic and Social Impacts*. Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/795921624338364910/pdf/The-Socio-Political-Crisis-in-the-Northwest-and-Southwest-Regions-of-Cameroon-Assessing-the-Economic-and-Social-Impacts.pdf> (visited on the 24/03/2026)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the Numba–Bachuo Akagbe section of 52 km in the South-West Region and the 50 km Ndop–Kumbo section of the Ring Road in the North-West Region.¹ These were important achievements. The Ring Road has long been regarded as one of the most strategic transport corridors in the North-West because it links numerous divisional headquarters and facilitates the movement of goods and people across the region.² At the same time, the same official statement acknowledged that other projects remained ongoing, including the Bamenda–Batibo–Numba road and the Bachuo Akagbe–Mamfe section.³ This means that, on the eve of the crisis, several major transport links in Anglophone Cameroon were still incomplete and remained part of an unfinished development agenda.

Yet it is precisely in this road sector that the pre-crisis limits of infrastructural development in Anglophone Cameroon became most politically visible. The World Bank's 2021 study on the crisis records that many Anglophone grievances were tied to perceptions of deliberate underinvestment in key transport corridors. It reproduces the Buea Declaration's complaint that the all-season trunk road running from Victoria through Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda to Wum and Nkambe had been abandoned, while the Douala–Bafoussam route had been developed, thereby forcing Anglophones to depend on Francophone territory for movement between major Anglophone towns.⁴ The same report is careful to note, however, that prior to the crisis the North-West and South-West did not objectively lag behind the rest of the country in broad economic and social indicators and in fact had some of the country's strongest human capital outcomes.⁵ This implied that, the conflict's infrastructural dimension was not reducible to absolute absence of infrastructure, but rather to perceived inequity, historical memory, territorial symbolism and the belief that strategic integration of Anglophone space had been systematically under-prioritized.⁶

3. Effects of the Crisis on Sustainable Development

This ongoing conflict has undermined sustainable development; it has increased the rate of poverty, displaced the population, and caused massive destruction and violated human rights as well as loss of thousands of lives which per the Brundtland Report are consequences that undermine the achievement of Sustainable development. Hospitals, schools, churches, houses and villages have been burnt down. For example, in the South West region of Cameroon precisely in Kumba on the 11th February, 2019, the Kumba District hospital was burnt down by armed fighters. The government of Cameroon said at least 20 armed separatists attacked and set fire to the hospital in the early hours of Monday. It says four people, including two patients, were killed.⁷ In 2022 the Mamfe District Hospital was equally burnt down on the 8th June 2022. The attack, destruction and burning down of the hospital effectively left over 85,000 people, who depended on it, stranded without a better alternative.⁸

In addition, in 2017, separatist activists began to burn school buildings, threatening education officials with violence if they did not enforce a boycott of schools in the Anglophone regions. As of June 2018, UNICEF indicated that 58 schools had been damaged in the two regions.⁹ Human rights groups and international organizations have reported deteriorating political, humanitarian, and security conditions as a result of extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, severe deprivations of liberty, and mass displacements of civilian populations. International, regional, and domestic actors, such as the United Nations, the International Crisis Group (ICG), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, among others, as well as the media and Cameroonian human rights organizations, including the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), have been reporting on the crisis and expressing grave

¹ Republic of Cameroon, Government's Economic, Financial, Social and Cultural Programme for the 2016 Fiscal Year (*Op.cit.*).

² The Kumbo Council Development Plan had long described the Ring Road as the main road in the North-West Region linking virtually all divisional headquarters. See the Plan at https://www.pndp.org/documents/20_CDP_Kumbo.pdf?utm_source (visited on the 24/03/2026)

³ Republic of Cameroon, Government's Economic, Financial, Social and Cultural Programme for the 2016 Fiscal Year (*Op.cit.*).

⁴ World Bank. (2021). The Socio-Political Crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon: Assessing the Economic and Social Impacts. *Op.cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Moki Edwin. (13th February, 2019). Cameroon Hospitals Attacked; Medical Staff; Patients Flee. *ReliefWeb*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-hospital-attacked-medical-staff-patients-flee> (4th July, 2025).

⁸ Burning of Mamfe District Hospital: CHRDA, Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities Report Indict Separatist. *Journalistes en Afrique pour le Développement (JADE) Cameroun*, 19th December, 2022. <https://jadecameroun.com/2022/12/19/burning-of-mamfe-district-hospital-chrda-cameroon-anglophone-crisis-database-of-atrocities-report-indict-separatists/> (Accessed 4th August 2025).

⁹ Human Rights Watch. These Killings Can Be Stopped: Abuses Against Civilians in Cameroon's Anglophone Regions (New York: Human Rights Watch, July 2018) p. 10.

concern. More than 200 villages have been partly or completely destroyed, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee. The rate of attacks on villages has increased steadily, usually causing significant damage. Between 450,000 and 550,000 people have been displaced as a result of the crisis, representing about 10 percent of the regions' population. An additional 30,000 to 35,000 people have sought asylum in neighbouring countries.¹ All of this chaos and instability hinders the attainment of sustainable development in Cameroon.

In the agricultural sector, one of the most enduring challenges is the continuing inability of farmers to access land, inputs, markets, and safe transport corridors on a reliable basis. Agriculture remains central to livelihoods in the conflict-affected regions, yet the conflict has repeatedly interrupted the production and commercialization of key crops. The World Bank's assessment of the crisis notes that the North-West and South-West conflict prevented Cameroon from benefiting fully from favorable prices and rebounds in important agricultural exports such as cocoa, coffee, and bananas, while displacement, lost working days, underused capital, and supply disruption all contributed to declining productivity and welfare.

The socio-political crisis has greatly affected the CDC plantations (Rubber, Banana and Palm) in Tiko as the corporation has witnessed severe damages and destruction of the plantation properties with direct consequences on the livelihood situation of the plantation workers. In 2019, only 7 out of 29 CDC production sites were fully operational in Tiko. Twelve had been shut down while 10 were partially functioning. This had an adverse impact on the production capacity and the workers in the plantations.² For rubber, annual production dropped from about 16,894 tons in 2017 to 2,884 tons in 2019, palm oil production dropped from 125,370 tons in 2017 to 72,435 tons in 2020 while banana production dropped from 113,858 to 6,178 tons over the same period with a variation in the % of crops achieved at the end of the year.³ The drop in productivity was because workers were forced to stop work as a result of the Anglophone crisis.

Moreso, the CDC processing plants in Tiko and its workers suffered from the negative effect of the crisis as some separatists fighters established their operation camps at the CDC plantations, forcing workers to abandon the farms and flee for safety. The disruption in activities saw CDC's revenue plummet, and the company has since continued to default in the payment of workers' wages especially the rubber and palm workers in Tiko thus, the socio-political crisis has negatively affected the CDC plantations and the livelihood of the workers most especially in Tiko.⁴ The CDC, with an initial work-force of 20,000 workers, (...) almost 12,500 workers were jobless. Only 7,500 workers were effectively working and this number included clerical worker.⁵ Thousands of workers have left the agro-industrial company either forcefully or unexpectedly as a result of the Anglophone crisis.⁶ The aim of the separatist fighters was to prevent other CDC workers going to work, an attempt to harm the government, creating chaos and gain more power and support from the society and thus, led to the reduction of government revenue.⁷

The environmental of the crisis in Anglophone Cameroon remain serious even though they are less frequently foregrounded than humanitarian and political issues. One central difficulty is that conflict has increased pressure on land, forests, and other natural resources by displacing populations, concentrating them in safer areas, and weakening ordinary systems of land management and environmental regulation. During armed conflicts, natural habitats and ecosystems can be severely damaged or destroyed. This may be due to direct belligerent/military activities, such as deforestation, land degradation, and the disruption of wildlife habitats.⁸ The destruction of forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats directly impacts ecosystems and biodiversity. According to some key reports of some reputable international institutions in charge of environmental protection, the weaponry used in

¹ Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa and Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, "Cameroon's Unfolding Catastrophe: Evidence of Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity in the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon" (June 3, 2019) Online www.chrda.org and www.rwhrc.org. (Accessed 8th May, 2024).

² *Ibid.*

³ International Crisis Group. (2023). Crisis in the plantation sector: Impacts on workers and strategies for resilience. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/crisis-plantation-sector-impacts-workers-and-strategies-resilience> (visited on the 23/03/2026)

⁴ Damian, R. (2021). Resilience and adaptation strategies of plantation workers in times of crisis: A case study in the rubber industry. *Journal of Development Studies*, 41(5), 789-805.

⁵ Ngoh VJ. (2018). *Cameroon 1884–Present The History of a People*. (Limbe: Design House).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See amnesty international 2023 human rights report on Cameroon, Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street London WC1X 0DW, UK, 2023.

armed conflicts most often have direct consequences on the environment in armed conflict.¹ For instance, the remnants of explosive in the armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon has severely affected the environment especially through the contamination of the soil and water sources, and harming wildlife within the conflict hit region. According to some community members in Bamenda, water sources, including rivers, lakes, and wells, have been contaminated by various factors, such as: discarded Munitions from explosives and ammunition remnants which contaminate water bodies.² The management of the dump sites during the armed conflict like the one in Masake in Buea and Mbellewa in Bamenda have been made impossible by the armed conflict.³

Evidence from research shows that the conflict has displaced over 712,000 people⁴, many of whom are farmers and herders. According to other sources, more than 200 villages have been partly or completely destroyed, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to flee. The rate of attacks on villages has increased steadily, usually causing significant damage. Between 450,000 and 550,000 people have been displaced as a result of the crisis, representing about 10% of the regions' population. An additional 30,000 to 35,000 people have sought asylum in neighbouring countries. Displacement disrupts agricultural activities and access to land, making it difficult for people to produce or obtain food and results in large-scale displacement of populations, leading to increased pressure on natural resources in host communities, such as water, arable land, and forests. This, in turn leads to overexploitation of resources, deforestation, and habitat degradation as communities struggle to meet their basic needs.⁵

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The foregoing analysis irresistibly demonstrates that the armed conflict in Cameroon's English-speaking regions has greatly affected the attainment of sustainable development by rendering the State's otherwise appreciable legal, institutional and policy framework largely ineffective in practice, as protracted insecurity and the breakdown of public order have displaced constitutional and statutory guarantees with conditions of destruction, displacement, poverty, educational collapse, environmental harm, human rights abuse and public distrust; accordingly, the study maintains that the principal difficulty lies not in the absence of legal instruments, but in their limited legal efficacy under conditions of armed conflict, since the State's responsive measures, though indicative of institutional recognition of the crisis, have thus far fallen short of establishing a coherent, enforceable and rights-based framework capable of confronting both the structural causes of the conflict and its far-reaching developmental consequences.

From the standpoint of this research, the central problem is not the total absence of law, but the insufficiency of legal effectiveness in times of armed conflict. The measures adopted by the State, including the Grand National Dialogue, special status arrangements, DDR initiatives and reconstruction efforts, demonstrate an acknowledgment of the crisis, but they have not yet yielded a sufficiently coherent, enforceable and rights-based framework capable of addressing the structural roots of the conflict and its devastating consequences for development.

In essence, this research recommends a rights-based and conflict-sensitive reconstruction framework in which sustainable development in the North-West and South-West Regions is pursued through genuine constitutional dialogue, accountability, and the rule of law, while simultaneously strengthening the legal enforceability of development obligations in key sectors such as education, health, environmental governance, and local administration; it further urges the urgent restoration and protection of essential public infrastructure and livelihoods, the reactivation and adequate resourcing of public institutions, the creation of a dedicated mechanism for monitoring the conflict's impact on the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the legal mainstreaming of community participation so that post-conflict recovery is not only institutionally effective but also locally legitimate, socially responsive, and enduring.

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- ¹ The Goldstone Report, was a United Nations fact-finding mission established in April 2009 pursuant to Resolution A/HRC/RES/S-9/1 of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) of 12 January 2009, following the Gaza, 2020 Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict.
 - ² In an interview with some community members around the wetland in Ntanhah community in Bamenda, north west region, Cameroon on the 16 of December 10/2026.
 - ³ Shing Praise Wandia. (November 2024). Challenges and Prospects of Environmental Protection in the Anglophone Armed Conflict in Cameroon. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(XI), 2728-2949: 2734.
 - ⁴ *Human Rights Watch 2022 Report on Cameroon*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/worldreport/2022/country-chapters/cameroon> (Visited on the 23/03/2026)
 - ⁵ Shing Praise Wandia (2024). *Op.cit.*

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