

HIGHLIGHTS

- The current crisis in North-West and South-West regions erupted in October 2016 with protests over perceived marginalisation. It has degenerated into armed violence and insecurity.
- The escalation of tension and hostilities between non-state armed groups and defence and security forces triggered major humanitarian needs across the two regions, linked to significant internal displacement
- In May 2018, the humanitarian community launched a three-month Emergency Response Plan to assist 160,000 internally displaced persons.

KEY FIGURES

People in need **160 K**

No. of people targeted **160 K**

Duration of the Emergency Response Plan **3 months**

Funding requirement **15.1 M**

(0% funded at date of publication)

No. of Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria **21.3 K**



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Crisis with colonial roots

The crisis in Cameroon's North-West and South-West regions that has uprooted around 160,000 people from their homes and forced more than 21,000 others to seek refuge in neighbouring Nigeria has roots in the country's colonial past.

At the end of the First World War, then Kamerun and German colony since 1884, was placed under Franco-British protectorate. Much of the country was under French supervision while Britain administered the western region bordering Nigeria.

The French-speaking region gained independence in 1960 and became the Republic of Cameroon. In a referendum the following year, the British-administered Southern Cameroon voted to unify with the Republic of Cameroon. Southern Cameroon became the present day North-West and South-West regions. A United republic of Cameroon was formed in 1972. In 1984, the word "united" was abolished and the Republic of Cameroon was established. Feelings of marginalisation and resistance to the assimilation of the English-speaking minority to French-speaking majority later emerged.

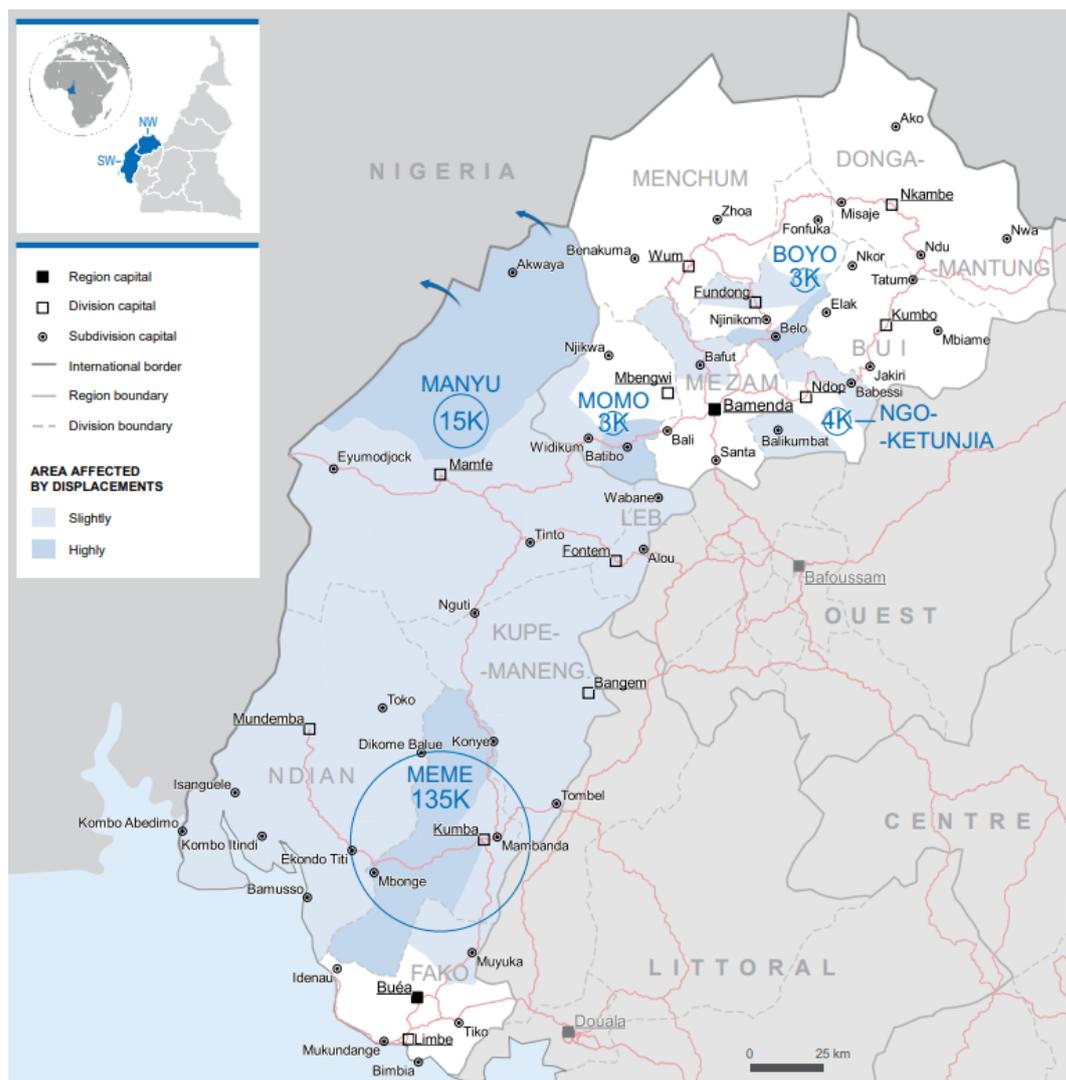
October 2016 uprising and acts of violence

Tensions leading to the current crisis erupted in October 2016 in Bamenda, capital of the North-West region with a strike by English-speaking lawyers demanding respect of the Common Law and the translation into English of the Code of the Organization for the Harmonization Business Law in Africa and other laws. Weeks later, teachers also mobilized, organizing a rally against lack of English-speaking teachers and the non-respect of the "Anglo-Saxon" education system in the English-speaking regions. Thousands of students and citizens joined them, driven by various demands ranging from the lack of decentralization of power to the lack of investment in infrastructure.

The strikes initiated in the North-West, gradually spread to the South-West region. Police clampdown on a university student march and at a political rally in Bamenda fanned the crisis.

Despite a Government-led dialogue mission on 25 November 2016, trust between the administration and the English-speaking activists gradually eroded.

French- and English-speaking Cameroon unified in 1972. Feelings of marginalisation by the English-speaking community progressively emerge



Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) location in the South-West and North-West Regions
OCHA, May 2018

A worsening crisis

January and February 2017 were marked by several demonstrations and violent riots in which vehicles and administrative buildings were torched. The ban on the activities of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium and the Southern Cameroon National Council, the arrest of several figures of the protest movement as well as the three-month Internet shut-down ordered in January aggravated the situation. Protesters also organised boycott demonstrations. The two regions were badly hit by violent security incidents, economic slowdown and schools closure.

On 1 October 2017, the anniversary of the official reunification of the English and French speaking regions, at least 17 people were killed and more than 100 wounded during the symbolic proclamation of the independence of "Ambazonia", the name the protesters call the two Anglophone regions. The protest leaders would later demand for a return to the federalist system before 1972. A minority wanted the independence of the state of Ambazonia.

November 2017 marked a major turning point in the crisis, with the first attack against the security and defence forces on 8 November resulting in the death of three gendarmes. Facing the worsening crisis, President Paul Biya declared war on the secessionists on 30 November, announcing his intention to defeat the "terrorists". International arrest warrants were issued against secessionist leaders and a new wave of military reinforcements was deployed in the South-West region.

Since the end of 2017, security incidents have increased: targeted assassinations or abductions of state officials and security and defence forces and retaliation by security and defence forces. Civilians have been severely affected by the deteriorating violence.

Insecurity and increasing mistrust between civilians, armed groups and state officials are the main factors behind the crisis that the bulletin focuses on in this special edition.



Evolution of security incidents between September 2017 and May 2018, ACLED

In focus: Emergency Response Plan

A response based on rigorous needs assessments

As early as October 2017, several humanitarian actors undertook exploratory missions in North-West and South-West regions. Assessing general or sector-specific aspects, their objectives were to measure the impact of the crisis on the lives of local populations, estimate the extent of displacement and assess consequent humanitarian needs.

Shared amongst all sectors, data collected through these missions allowed partners to set up a multi-sectoral assessment mission to the South-West region which took place in March 2018. The crisis started in Bamenda in the North-West region and spread to Meme and Manyu departments as of early 2018. The most affected people are in these areas, where the largest population displacements have also been recorded.

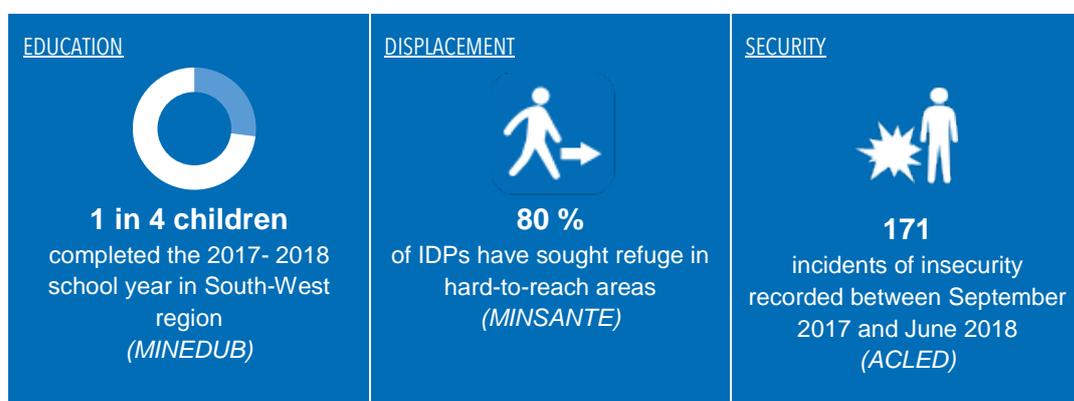
The evaluation focused on collecting data on displacement, identifying priority needs of the affected people and selecting the humanitarian activities to be carried out.

A month later, Plan International conducted a similar multi-sectoral evaluation in North-West region. The results of these two assessments led to the estimation that more than

160,000 IDPs need emergency humanitarian assistance across the two regions. They also confirmed that protection of civilians is the main issue given the insecurity, fear and suspicion between the population and the armed forces.

According to the assessments, priority needs of displaced people are the following:

- Shelter and basic household items, especially for families who have sought refuge in the forests.
- Food, especially for the most vulnerable people: pregnant and lactating women, girls and boys, and elderly people.
- Access to primary health care, especially in case of emergencies, including trauma and gunshot wounds.
- Access to drinking water for hygiene and sanitation.
- Access to better protection, particularly for victims of violence and abuse or whose basic rights have been violated.
- Access to education. Since the beginning of the crisis, many schools have been closed due to vandalism and threats to teachers and students.



Strategic objectives and scope of the response

Given the extent of the needs, the humanitarian community has developed an Emergency Response Plan to provide emergency assistance to displaced populations in North-West and South-West regions. Launched on 28 May, the Plan is for an initial three months to start operations, increase humanitarian response capacity and improve access to populations in need.

A total of \$15.1 million are needed to provide emergency assistance to 160,000 people in need in the following sectors: Education, Protection, Health, Food Security, Shelter and Non-Food Items as well as WASH. The implementation of the plan will reinforce the Government Assistance Plan presented by the Ministry of Territorial Administration on 18 June.

The Emergency Response Plan has two strategic objectives:

- Provide emergency assistance to displaced populations in both regions to reduce morbidity and mortality related to displacement.
- Provide essential protection services to those affected by the crisis, including women and children, and improving access to beneficiaries.

Civilian protection and the respect of humanitarian principles are the fundamental requirements that must guide relief response

After the initial three months, relief response in both regions will be included in the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) alongside response strategies in priority regions of Far North, North, East and Adamawa.

The humanitarian community has placed protection at the centre of the response. In a context of armed violence where civilians are the hardest hit, their protection and the respect for humanitarian principles are two fundamental requirements that must guide all relief operations.

First responders on the ground: meeting local NGO AMEF

Since the socio-political crisis escalated into armed violence, local NGOs have been on the frontline to provide emergency relief to the affected population

Local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are often the first responders when a humanitarian crisis erupts. They have deep understanding of the context and the legitimacy to work with communities before, during and after the crisis. Since the North-West/South-West socio-political crisis escalated into armed violence in late 2017, existing CSOs have been on the frontline, providing emergency relief to families forced to flee their villages. With no humanitarian actors present in the two regions, building up the capacity of these CSOs is critical to access and assist people in need, especially in hard-to-reach areas where most families have sought refuge.

Authentic Memorial Empowerment Foundation (AMEF) is one of the first CSOs which, along with local communities and the church, have shifted from traditional development-related operations to life-saving assistance for those in need in the North-West and South-West regions. Created in 2006, the organisation originally provided a range of activities, from Child-centred Education and Protection, to Women and Youth Economic Empowerment as well as Literacy and Information Technology.

Atim Evenye Taniform, AMEF programme head, describes the humanitarian situation in the South-West region, particularly the severely affected Kumba town where the organisation is based.

As one of the first responders to the crisis, how has the situation evolved?

The crisis started with strikes by lawyers in October 2016, followed by various strikes by teachers in November, leaving the two English-speaking regions in a state of socio-political instability. Grippled by tension and fear due to a “No School” policy declared by armed groups, parents progressively stopped or timidly sent their children to school. This situation has persisted for the past two years reinforced by periodic clashes between the military and armed groups.

By June 2018, in the South-West city of Kumba for example, 50 out of 75 Government and private secondary schools and over 40 nursery and primary schools have been shut down. Imposed by armed groups, boycott protests are observed every Monday. This is slowly draining the economy and therefore livelihoods opportunities for families.

What are the most urgent needs of the displaced families you met?

Through interviews and sex disaggregated data collected, we can see that needs differ from one category to the other. Displaced families are comprised of men, women, children, youths and the elderly, ranging from an average of 5-15 inhabitants per household. They have sought refuge in urban and semi-urban towns like Mamfe, Kumba, Buea, Limbe in the South-West but some have also spontaneously gathered together and are hiding in the bush.



AMEF team conducting IDP registration in Kwakwa, May 2018

With the onset of the rainy season, the latter urgently need shelter, but also access to medication, drinkable water and food. Those in urban towns have various needs, including shelter, cash-in-hand, and food for daily subsistence.

Who are the most vulnerable?

Children are exposed to nutritional deficiencies, lack of health care, unsafe water and sanitation. This has led to some cases of infant mortality.

Women, particularly nursing mothers and pregnant women, have no or little access to health care during pregnancy and childbirth nor to postnatal care. Communicable diseases, unsafe water and sanitation, poor menstrual hygiene, and nutritional deficiencies especially for women-headed households, are also amongst the hardships women are facing.

Elderly people are also seriously at risk with an already deteriorating health condition compounded by poor nutrition and psychological trauma, in addition to no or little access to health services.

Health data collected also reveal that about 500 internally displaced persons registered as HIV-positive at the general hospital in Kumba are now unable to access regular treatment.

How are you responding to those needs?

In December 2017, we started bringing assistance in the form of food (rice, Maggi, salt and tomatoes) to a group of elderly at Ekombe village, Meme department. In March 2018, some displaced families from Kwakwa settled in the bushes, benefited from clothing for children and women as well as soap, rice, and salt. These were families who knew of our solidarity gestures over the years. We then realized that, on assisting one, several others in similar or even more deplorable conditions showed up. We decided to start registering the displaced people and giving them assistance as per what was available through our limited resources.

By April as the numbers kept rising, we contacted CARITAS whom we had earlier met in the field to partner and assist in meeting the needs of the rising number. After AMEF visit to IDP sites in March, some took our contact and began calling for health assistance. We then liaised with The Faith Medical Foundation Clinic, referring cases to them. Our partner, Fire Bible School Yaoundé provided some medications for adults. By April, some level of confidence between our institution and the displaced population was built. So they began coming freely to register. From the registration, we realized that IDPs from Kwakwa, Bole and Kombone were the majority, so we decided to focus in those areas with NFI (blankets, mats and soap) donated by UNICEF and UNHCR at CARITAS Kumba, and eventually progressed to other villages affected.

Assessment reports indicate that most families fled to the bushes and forest, in areas highly difficult to access. How do you assist them in such context?

Access is and remains a critical and risky issue as per the context. We have and are still working to make everyone understand our neutral position in the crisis. Our interest is and remains the displaced population and AMEF remains a non-governmental organization. Through our partner CARITAS our team obtained authorisation to ease movements at police check points. I think the basis is confidence-building and acceptance. We are conscious of the importance of maintaining our identity and objectives and we hold to the humanitarian principles of neutrality and humanity. We also wear uniforms (t-shirts) and badges to stand out when in the field.

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