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Role of Local and External Development Agencies in the Implementation of Development Projects within the Context of Conflict and Insecurity: Case of the Southwest Region of Cameroon

Neneng Glein Megeneh

University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon
Email: nenengglein@gmail.com

Abstract

The reemergence of conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon since 2016, has greatly impacted socioeconomic activities and the execution of development projects within the two regions in Cameroon. According to the Public Investment Budget (PIB) in Cameroon, the Northwest and Southwest regions have seen varied performances in terms of project execution. In 2022, the Northwest region reported an execution rate of 87.86%, which is commendable given the security challenges in the Anglophone regions. On the other hand, the Southwest region had a lower execution rate of 73.6%. These figures reflect the complex dynamics of project implementation in these regions, where factors such as the security crisis and project management efficiency play significant roles. However, most development projects within these regions have been halted, witnessing stagnation, development workers attacked and some areas marked as red zones, which makes it difficult to agree with the success rate of the Public Investment Budget, especially in the Southwest region of Cameroon. This research examines the role of local and external development agencies in project execution and the impacts of conflict and insecurity on development within the Southwest region of Cameroon. The study made use of the conflict and development theory which examines the development efforts that are being implored by different structures and how they manage the impacts of insecurity on development. Also, this paper looks at the different ways in which conflict and insecurity have influenced the livelihood of the people in the Southwest region. This paper makes use of quantitative research method with empirical data obtained

through interviews and the use of development evaluation forms and structured interview guides. This paper revealed that, despite the efforts to implement significant development activities by development agencies, conflict and insecurity remain an impediment to the implementation and execution of development projects in most parts of the Southwest region, especially in rural areas. However, some parts of the region such as Tiko, Buea, Mutegene, Kumba and Limbe continue to witness development growth due to some level of security as a result of political, administrative and socio-economic functions.

Keywords

Conflict, Insecurity, Development

1. Introduction

The economic and social development of the third world, as such, was clearly not a policy objective of the colonial rulers before the Second World War. Such an objective would have been inconsistent with the underlying division of labor and trading patterns within and among colonial blocks (Erikson, 2006). To salvage the poor and improve their living conditions, Truman proposed what he called "democratic fair dealing" (Erikson, 2006). According to him, democracy alone can provide the vitalizing force to stir the people into triumphant action. By this, he meant, according a voice to the local people in deciding their own affairs. The Trumanian framework also suggests that politics and economics could work together to achieve development and political freedom. According to Szirmai (2005), the post-cold war era partly experienced challenging debates and concerns on various perspectives, theories and "deep" differences in opinion (ranging from policies to strategies and approaches) on various dimensions of development, the aim has been to arrive at concrete recommendations for action to foster development.

On the other hand, conflict is a struggle between individuals or collectivities, over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aim of the opponent is to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals (Stewart, 2001). In other words, conflict is an escalated competition at any system between groups, whose aim is to gain advantage in the area of power, resources, interests, needs, and at least one of the groups believes that this dimension of the relation is mutually incompatible. Another definition of conflict by Stagner (1967) is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals that they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not by both, each party is mobilizing energy to obtain this goal, a desired object or situation, and each party perceives the other as a barrier or threat to achieving that goal.

There are important advances that do not explicitly incorporate conflict and security as aspects of development. People may have the potential to do and be

many things, yet this potential may be cut off, or people's sense of well-being may be seriously and adversely affected with high levels of insecurity. Such insecurity described by (Stewart, 2001) includes the possibility of economic vicissitudes, health crises, and injury or death as a result of criminal or political violence. There is no question that if such events are widespread, they have serious and negative impacts on many people's lives, and therefore adversely affect the achievement of development. To the extent that policies towards security may become a significant part of development policy because, in so far as they enhance security, they will contribute to development and policies towards development may become part of security policies because enhanced development increases security.

Very opinionated (Stewart, 2001) emphasizes that some development costs are obvious—people who join the fighting forces, who are killed or flee, can no longer work productively; schools, power stations and roads that are destroyed reduce the productive capacity of the economy. There are also more complex interactions between events associated directly with conflict (fighting, movement of people, deaths, physical destruction, international embargoes and military expenditures) and developments in the macro, meso and micro economy which mostly lead to adverse changes in individual entitlements, both economic and social.

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a serious interest among scholars and policymakers in studying and understanding the development process in a broader way and as a basis for designing appropriate development policies and strategies (Erikson, 2006). However, before the 1990s, African states were not so concerned with the issue of development at the time because, they were involved in liberation struggles and wars of independence from their colonizers (Voors et al., 2010)

Furthermore, with the persistence of conflict and insecurity in most African states, it has resulted to the near absence of some basic services and infrastructure, especially in vulnerable and rural communities such as schools, health centers, water supply and road networks (Stewart, 2007). In order to create a balance in development between urban and rural areas, many governments felt the need that a substantial state intervention was required to achieve greater equity, poverty alleviation and development. (Voors et al., 2010).

In Cameroon, Development is championed by the government and accompanied by local and external development agencies, the local development agencies include: 1) local councils; 2) local development institutions; 3) regional delegations; 4) private development companies. On the other hand, external development agencies include: 1) international development banks; 2) development cooperation; 3) international organizations; 4) diplomatic missions. The aforementioned local and external development agencies play different but significant roles in the quest for development in Cameroon.

However, both local and external development agencies are affiliated with funding sources which enable them to carry out development activities. Among

these sources is the Public Investment Budget (PIB), which is the main source of funding for local and private development agencies operating at a national scale in Cameroon. This study is limited to the Southwest region with consideration of other parts affected by the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon.

In development project execution, the execution rate of the Public Investment Budget (PIB) in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions affected by armed conflict, recorded a varied performance. In 2022, the Northwest region reported an execution rate of 87.86%, which is commendable given the security challenges in the Anglophone regions and the Southwest region had a lower execution rate of 73.6%. These figures reflect the complex dynamics of project implementation in these regions, where factors such as the security crisis and project management efficiency play significant roles. It is important to note that these rates can fluctuate due to various on-the-ground realities, including administrative, security and logistical challenges.

Due to the persistence of conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, some parts of the Southwest have witnessed little or no development, while other parts have witnessed a standstill in development projects as a result of the ongoing conflict and insecurity. This study aims to interrogate the role of local and external development agencies in the implementation of development projects within the context of conflict and insecurity, with the following objectives:

1) To analyze the role of local and external development agencies in development project implementation and execution.

2) To evaluate the impact of conflict and insecurity on development activities in the Southwest region.

Conflict and Development Theory

The conflict and development theory by Barbanti & Olympio (2004) has categorized development into three categories: micro, macro and meso perspectives. Accordingly, macro issues pertain to a nation's overall pattern of growth; meso, however, refers to problems such as river drainage plans. Whereas, micro issues are concerned with local community development plans. In summary, these three issues are interrelated and spread out in various dimensions or forms such as economic, development, cultural, social and gender issues.

Additionally, the current conflict and development theory focuses on the structural changes that are required to implement development efforts, thereby preventing conflict and at the same time managing any outbreak of conflict. This theory does not only look at development efforts as they are being implemented, but at the same time look at structures put in place to manage such efforts.

Coiler and Hoiffer (2001) looked at conflict in relation to economic advancement either as an effort or as a cause, and he further explains that civil wars retard development. The retardation brought as a result of war leads to more conflict and economic stagnation. Societal change most often requires structural change. While this may be true in any country, it is probably more often true in the developing worlds. Yet most development interventions are locally targeted

and short-term, which do not try to implement structural changes across the entire society.

Barbanti & Olympio (2004) state that, the interconnection of development factors often causes further conflict escalation. For example, administrative chaos is under-financed, and governmental bodies often cause the transference of responsibilities from the central state to NGOs, local governments, and the private sector. The result is that such organizations assume duties that may go well beyond their capacities, which causes further conflict. For example, NGOs, local governments, and the private sector lack training in facilitation, mediation and negotiation, as well as the theoretical knowledge of conflict resolution. So, conflicts escalate, with no one knowing what to do about it.

It is remarkable that conflict resolution theory and instruments are also not taken into account either by indigenous organizations, or by international development agencies. This is clearly evidenced by the Human Development Report of 2015, published by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2015). The report reflects a deep concern with armed, violent and military conflicts such as interstate or civil wars. However, it does not consider more subtle forms of conflict or the notion that conflict processes can preclude the achievement of development goals. However, development is not the only influence on a nation; local political processes also have significant effects, which directly influence the quality of development in different circumstances.

Additionally, the development field helps to overcome human rights abuses, protect the environment and empower women. While the debate about the pros and cons of different approaches to development still ranges, the constant critiques have inspired a quest for diversity among development theories and studies.

2. Methodology

This study employed the use of qualitative research techniques. The qualitative data was collected with the use of structured interview guides and a development evaluation form, covering a range of Twelve (12) development actors across seven (7) development institutions in the Southwest region as key respondents. All informants were interviewed from different development institutions as seen in Table 1. In other to protect the identities of the respondents, fake names were assigned to them.

In using interview guides and development evaluation forms, individuals in key strategic positions in development institutions were targeted, since they could provide more reliable information, needed for this study, which included the impact of the conflict and insecurity on their activities and their roles in the various agencies in implementing development initiatives in the Southwest region.

This study made use of two (02) interview guides for data collection tool/ techniques that included structured interview guides and a development evaluation form. In-depth interviews were carried out, with the key personalities in these development institutions listed below, who provided sufficient information on responding to the evaluation of development projects in the Southwest re-

gion, and also shared information on their activities in relations to local and external development agencies in the implementation of development projects and to examine some challenges development institutions face in implementing development projects and the solutions adopted to overcome these challenges. The interviews were based on the role of local and external development agencies in project implementation within the context of the ongoing armed conflict and insecurity in the Southwest region, carried out in the following institutions as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Development institutions in the southwest region.

N/O	Development Institutions	No. of Respondents	Type of Institution
1)	South West Development Authority (SOWEDA)	2	Government
2)	Regional Delegation for Housing and Urban Development	2	Government
3)	Buea Municipal Council	2	Government
4)	Regional Delegation for Public Health	1	Government
5)	Regional Delegation for Secondary Education	1	Government
6)	Regional Delegation for Public Contract	1	Government
7)	The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon	2	Church
Total	7	12	7

Source: Researcher's fieldwork.

The above institutions were selected to guarantee the safety of the researcher and to guarantee the reliability of the information gathered for this study, which validates the results. The presence of the author in the field managed to examine the quality of the projects implemented. In the field, events related to the subject matter of the study area were observed. Particular, note was taken on development activities such as infrastructure, agriculture, social services (schools and health facilities).

3. Role of Local and External Development Agencies in Development Project Implementation

The interrelationship between local and external development agencies has been analyzed in this part of the study, looking at the role of the different agencies in the implementation of development activities in the Southwest region of Cameroon.

3.1. Local Development Agencies

Local development agencies are the main actors when it comes to implementing development initiatives in the South West and other parts of Cameroon. The government, through her organs, develops and implements development projects based on different thematic, including health, education, agriculture and infra-

structure, through local development agencies. These agencies vary in size, scale and function and have been created with specific objectives which include reconstruction, enhancing rural development, and improving socioeconomic conditions of the people and infrastructure. However, these results specifically look at the case of the South West, one of the four regions in Cameroon affected by armed conflict since 2016.

These different areas of implementing development initiatives, influence development in different ways, as they significantly contribute to livelihood, access to social services, employment, quality of health and education and the beautification of the town. However, the government is not solely responsible for driving development initiatives, other agencies include Civil Society including religious bodies and Non-governmental Organizations. These different groups work in close proximity to deliver development projects within the area of study.

3.2. External Development Agencies

External development agencies, support and compliment local development agencies in implementing and delivering development projects which are sustainable and impactful to the local communities. External development agencies, such as development banks, international development cooperation and international organizations provide financial and technical resources to local development agencies to facilitate the implementation of development projects and support local development initiatives as a part of their foreign policy and to strengthen their diplomatic relations with Cameroon.

External development agencies operate on specific thematic of interest or needs of the local population. Local development agencies carry out a needs assessment thereafter, they write projects, requesting for funding from external agencies. Furthermore, external agencies operate sometimes based on diplomatic relations with the host country, whereby they support development initiatives of these communities.

3.3. The Implementation Process

Local development agencies work closely with private companies to deliver or implement development projects. Through the process of launching tenders, whereby private companies apply based on specialization, competency based on a proven track record of executing past development projects of the required nature. Private companies play a very important role, as they have the resources both human and financial to carry out execution of development projects. Projects are awarded on a contract basis, which these private companies must execute within the required time frame, some of these private companies include (Table 2).

The table above indicates that local development agencies work closely with private companies to execute development projects, although there are a few exceptions like the South West Development Authority (SOWEDA) with a department of trained experts, who execute various projects based on their operational programs (Table 3).

Table 2. Local development agencies and private companies.

Development Agency	Private Executing Company/Agency
The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (Buea)	Ngeme Construction Company Ltd.
Regional Delegation for Housing and Urban Development	Edge Construction Company Ltd.
Buea Municipal Council	J and J Enterprise
Regional Delegation for Public Health	E.T.S Unite Service

Source: Researcher's fieldwork.

Table 3. Outsourcing local and external development agencies.

Local Development Agencies	External Development Agencies
The Buea Municipal Council	The Cameroon Government
South-West Development Authority (SOWEDA)	The Islamic Development Bank
Government Institutions	World Bank/World Health Organization
The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (Religious Institution)	German Development Cooperation

This further explains that the task of implementing development projects in Buea is not the sole responsibility of that state, but civil society, private companies and community efforts. These different groups mobilize the population through the implementation of development projects based on needs or specialty and operational thematic, a clear example is SOWEDA, which specializes in rural development with the aim to improve the socioeconomic status of the rural people in the South West region.

Development agencies are not only limited to sourcing for funding and implementing development projects, but they provide employment, carry out social, environmental and rural projects, and serve as a source of education and training through workshops, campaigns, mobilization and seminars, while the community plays an important role, in participating and supporting project activities, while holding development agencies accountable for their actions.

Nonpublic actors or stakeholders with specialty in certain skills contribute to development, by building the capacity of development agents through training and the provision of technical skills, which facilitate access to development implementation by funding development needs, mobilizing and empowering community members to participate in development initiatives.

Through effective decentralization, development institutions such as the Municipal Councils have been delegated more administrative powers to initiate and implement more development projects at the municipal level. In other to make the decentralization process more effective, other state development institutions

within the South West such as the various government regional delegations, accompany Municipal Councils in delivering development within the South West. This requires a future study, to see how effective the decentralization process in Cameroon, has influenced the implementation of development projects within the different regions.

4. Challenges to Project Implementation

4.1. Insecurity

According to the World Bank (2021), more than 700,000 deaths have been recorded and more than 1200.000 people displaced internally and externally as a result of the ongoing armed conflict in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, these figures precede what development agencies go through in the implementation of development projects. NSAG, continues to reject and sabotage development initiatives from the Cameroon government, by destroying equipment, torturing, killing and threatening construction workers. This has led to very insecure environments and difficulty in implementing development projects in most areas of the South West.

4.2. Overdue Lockdown Imposed by NSAG

Insecurity works hand in hand with overdue lockdowns imposed by Non State Armed Groups in the South West regions of Cameroon. Mondays have been reserved as a permanent lockdown day, commonly known as "ghost town day" respected in parts of the North-West and South-West regions. Aside from Mondays, some national days and significant activities are boycotted with the imposition and declaration of ghost towns. This has greatly affected the quality of work and level of development project implementation by development agencies. Those who fail to adhere to these lockdowns, often face serious insecurity, which could result in assault and violations and in most cases death.

4.3. Delay in the Disbursement of Project Funds

Most development institutions mentioned the problem of delay in the availability of funds as a major issue, affecting the implementation of development projects within the South West. Most of these institutions were state development agencies, this problem brings about a standstill of project activities and milestones which development institutions have to wait or improvise to carry on with the implementation of these projects.

4.4. Solutions to Challenges of Project Implementation

In other to tackle the above problems and carry out the implementation of development projects, development agencies indicated the following strategies/ solutions they adopted to facilitate the implementation of Development Projects within conflict and insecurity in the South West region.

4.5. Implementing Projects in More Secure Zones

As a strategy to mitigate the insecurity nature of some parts of the region and to successfully implement development projects, when asked of the strategies development authorities adopt for the implementation of development projects within the South West, most responded that implementing in secured and less conflict-affected communities within the region is more feasible. Development institutions/agencies such as the Buea Municipal Council, and the regional delegations responded that, some parts of the region, are very challenging areas to implement development projects within Buea, due to insecurity. However, most of these communities are under observation, on how development activities can move on, while development projects have been relocated and implemented in more secure locations such as Mamfe Town, Limbe, Mutengeneh, Likombe and Buea Town.

4.6. Cooperating and Involving Community Members in the Implementation Phase

Cooperating and involving the community in development initiatives has been a very successful strategy in the implementation of development projects by agencies in the South West. SOWEDA in particular mentioned that, due to the fact that most of their projects target rural communities, it is sometimes impossible to implement projects without involving community members. In most cases, they provide cheap labor, especially in agricultural projects, for which they are the target beneficiaries. The Presbyterian Church of Cameroon also emphasized the importance of community-led development initiatives, where community members get involved and drive their development, through a community-based approach.

4.7. Pre-Financing Development Projects

When asked how the problem of delay in disbursement of funds was addressed, some institutions indicated that they pre-finance development projects, mostly the first and second activities of the development project. Pre-financing is a situation whereby, a development institution uses its own funds, to initiate, start, or complete the implementation of a development project while waiting for their funders to do an initial disbursement of funds. This is common with development institutions, civil society, nonprofits and private companies. While some development institutions pre-finance development projects, others wait for the funder to disburse funds to start implementing development projects.

5. Summary of Research Challenges

The data for this study was collected at a time of insecurity and prolonged lockdown, imposed by Non-State Armed Groups, (NSAG) which brought about reservations from respondents in discussing sensitive issues. This was due to the fact that, development authorities could not independently confirm, if the re-

searcher was a spy from the government or Separatist fighter, as such information about government operations became a matter of concern.

Access to rural and remote areas for interviews was a matter of concern, as these areas are the most affected with the ongoing conflict, security checks and safety measures had to be put in place or observed, to make sure that the researcher was safe. This challenge was coupled with the fact that most inhabitants in the rural areas refused to cooperate, reason being that, they feared for their lives and would avoid any attacks from separatist fighters.

It was a challenge acquiring previous and current data in terms of emerging enterprises and employment status related to development activities within the Southwest region, due to the ongoing conflict. The last census conducted by the National Institute for Statistic (NIS) in Cameroon was in 2016 and due to insecurity and conflict, the NIS has not been able to access the field, to collect data relating to development activities. This posed a serious challenge to this research in terms of acquiring figures and statistics for related activities in development.

5.1. Impacts of Conflict and Insecurity on Development in the Southwest Region of Cameroon

The Southwest region of Cameroon has faced significant challenges due to ongoing conflicts and insecurity. These issues have had profound impacts on development, affecting economic growth, social stability, and the overall well-being of the population. The humanitarian crises resulting from these conflicts have led to displacement, with millions of people requiring assistance and protection. The region's contribution to the national economy, particularly through cash crop production, has been hindered, affecting livelihoods and increasing poverty levels.

Most of the officials interviewed expressed their thoughts, challenges and strategies used to implement development projects in the midst of conflict and insecurity in the Southwest region. Although the respondents expressed different views, they unanimously agreed that the impacts of conflict and insecurity are both negative and positive. The project coordinator for the regional delegation for housing and urban development in Southwest said: "… the conflict and insecurity have affected the region and precisely the implementation of projects both positively and negatively. Positively, some parts of the region, such as Buea and limbe has witnessed high infrastructural development in terms of housing and road construction. Negatively, most parts of the region are in accessible as a result of the conflict and attacks on development workers by Non State Armed Groups…"

The project coordinator further explained that: "…work has not been very effective on Mondays and other ghost town days with the region, imposed by Non State Armed Groups…this has led to the prolongation of development project scope and timeframes initially allocated for project implementation…"

The conflict and insecurity have exacerbated structural development weaknesses and chronic vulnerabilities, undermining long-term recovery efforts. The

population's resilience is being eroded, leading to an increase in negative coping mechanisms such as child labor and forced marriages. Access to basic social services and opportunities, especially for women and youth, has been limited, further entrenching gender inequalities and socio-cultural constraints. The chief of Project and Development Unit of the regional delegation of secondary education said: "… although schools have witnessed a significant increase of students in most parts of the region, many children are still left out of school, especially in hit hard areas of the conflict. When succeed in relocating to secure areas, with little or no financial assistance, they become victims of child abuse and human rights violations…"

The Chief of project and development unit later emphasized that: "… the education sector is one of the most affected by the conflict and insecurity in the Southwest, it is challenging to construct or renovate schools in conflict affected areas, that is why these funds have been relocated to renovating and constructing schools in secure areas facing high population growth and inflow of displaced persons…"

The educational sector continues to suffer, with schools being targeted and many children unable to attend classes, which contributes to a cycle of illiteracy and vulnerability. The health sector is similarly affected, with healthcare facilities becoming inaccessible or damaged, impeding the delivery of essential services.

In terms of infrastructure, the conflict has led to the destruction of tangible assets like roads and buildings, which are crucial for development. The agricultural sector, which employs a significant portion of the labor force, has seen a reduction in productivity due to insecurity and displacement. The chief of service and for construction, water and energy at the Southwest Development Authority (SOWEDA) shared his view on infrastructure and project implementation, when he said: "… the main challenge we face is accessing some areas for data collection to conceive and design development projects. When we succeed to collect this data and start implementation, the Non State Armed Groups will stop the project or sometimes attack and kill development workers… however, implementing projects in secure areas awaken the need for the implementation of development activities in conflict affected areas, forcing inhabitants to corporate with state forces to ensure safety…"

The prolonged nature of the crises has made it difficult to implement development projects, and the lack of security has deterred investment and economic activities. Humanitarian needs continue to grow, and the capacity to respond is stretched thin, further complicating the situation. Efforts to address these challenges require a multi-faceted approach that includes peacebuilding, economic support, and the strengthening of social services. International aid and cooperation are essential in providing the necessary resources and expertise to assist the Southwest region in overcoming these obstacles to development.

However, the conflict and insecurity has disrupted the normal flow of life and business, leading to significant economic downturns. Agriculture, which is a cornerstone of the region's economy, has been severely affected, with farmers

unable to safely tend to their crops or access markets. This has led to food shortages and increased prices, further exacerbating poverty levels. The destruction of infrastructure, such as roads and schools, has hindered both transportation and education, with many children unable to attend school. Businesses have suffered due to the instability, with many closing down or relocating, resulting in job losses and decreased economic activity.

The healthcare system is also under strain, as medical facilities have been targeted and healthcare workers have fled, leaving the population vulnerable to diseases without adequate medical care. Furthermore, the conflict has led to a significant displacement of people, creating a humanitarian crisis with thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who require shelter, food, and basic services. A medical doctor at the Buea regional hospital expressed his frustration, saying that: "… I have never seen something like this in my entire life. There is high inflow of patients, more than we can accommodate, we don't have sufficient doctors to match the high number of patients, talk less of the infrastructure. The few doctors available end up over working themselves. The situation is critical…"

A civil engineer in charge of project implementation at the regional delegation of public health further said: "…the persistence of conflict makes it hard for us to properly implement projects and renovate the existing infrastructure. The people in the rural areas suffer more because they have very limited access to health facilities and the Non State Armed Groups will not allow us work in these areas, they constantly threaten us and sometimes kidnap our collogues to request ransoms. The situation is really bad, and we hope that the government is taking measures to bring an end to the conflict…"

5.2. Research Findings

Local and external development agencies work together, to ensure the implementation of development projects. These agencies make use of private companies or their technical departments to foster the implementation of development projects. Development agencies with wide operating scopes, involve different communities of the Southwest region, in project implementation. These communities play significant roles, such as, providing a large and affordable labor force, which facilitates the implementation of development projects although the region, also improving their living conditions.

The intensity of the arm conflict in other parts of the Southwest region, have caused people to move to more safe and stable environments, coupled with education, administrative and employment opportunities, some parts of the region are far safer than others. However, this has brought about a drastic population growth rate in stable communities. Movement is voluntary and involuntary as a result of the conflict. Thousands of people continue to witness force displacement finding themselves in neighboring towns and communities with high security measures, it is important to note that, most of these displaced people, find it

difficult to integrate into their host communities with little or no sustainable livelihood activities. This is a result of the ongoing armed conflict.

When asked the question of project and staff security, development authorities responded that, as a strategy to ensure the smooth implementation of project activities and to ensure safety of personals, most of the projects are implemented in more safe and secured zones (green zones) while avoiding the conflict affected areas (red zones). This is because, development authorities face harassment and violations from the separatist fighters including maiming, kidnapping, torture and in some cases death. Project materials are sometimes destroyed by separatist fight such trucks, cars and other construction equipment, which drastically affects the implementation of development projects.

Development agencies face administrative, logistics and project management challenges in the field, which hinders the smooth implementation of development projects. These challenges are numerous as agencies face a delay in disbursement of project funds, lack of specialized field development workers to provide the technical skills needed for the successful implementation of development project in the region, lack of access to remote and rural areas to conduct proper needs assessment and the prolonged lock downs. This disrupts the implementation of projects at different stages and the deliverables to its end users. This has proven to be a severe challenge, undermining the work of development agencies. Measures have been put in place to address these key challenges, but how effective are these measures with the persistence of conflict in the region.

6. Conclusion

This article sets out to interrogate the applicability and processes in the implementation of development projects and the role of local and external development agencies in project implementation in the Southwest region of Cameroon. Findings indicate that, despite the persistence of conflict and insecurity within the region, development agencies (private, public and external partners) continue to implement development activities within their various capacities in secure areas with the use of various strategies. Although there is still a persistence of conflict and no reconciliation efforts have been put in place within the Southwest region to foster reconstruction, development agencies operate under the observation of "green" and "red" zones. The National Development Strategy of Cameroon for 2035, incorporates security as an important element of development, which takes into consideration the various conflicts in Cameroon. This gives citizens the hope that the Cameroon government is finding solutions to the Anglophone conflict, which will curb insecurity and foster development within the region.

The conflict has influenced the social fabric of communities which has been torn apart, with trust in institutions eroded, social cohesion and socioeconomic activities under threat, negatively affecting livelihoods and the implementation of development projects within the region. Efforts by development institutions and

the government to address these issues have proven to be futile, as there is little or no development taking place in most parts of the Southwest, especially in rural areas where the conflict persists. Project implementation has been subjected to losses, both human and financial by development agencies, as Non-state Armed Groups continue to resist government efforts to bring about development in most parts of the region. The situation underscores the critical importance of peace and security for the prosperity and well-being of the region's inhabitants and to re-boost the degrading economic situation. The World Bank (2021) and other entities have documented these impacts, providing a detailed analysis of the conflict, with long-term projections of the conflict on education, health, social services, economic growth and the overall development of the region.

Local and external development agencies continue to play their respective roles in project implementation. Although they face numerous challenges coupled with the persistence of conflict and insecurity in the Southwest region, the project execution rate of the Public Investment Budget (PIB) of Cameroon indicates that the Northwest and Southwest regions witnessed an execution rate of 87.86% and 73.6% respectively in 2022. This however indicates that, with the persistence of conflict and insecurity in the Southwest region of Cameroon, to some level, development has been achieved within the context of the conflict and insecurity within the region, but at what cost?

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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