



An assessment of the impact of separatist-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns on the development of the Anglophone regions of Cameroon

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Abstract

Despite their wide implementation since the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns are not spatial interventions unique to public health emergencies but have also recently been used to tackle the aftermath of acts of terrorism against crowded public spaces in cities. Lockdown, as a state-sanctioned security measure, bears longer political (often violent) histories that link individual mobility to geopolitics in corporeal and even visceral ways. This paper assesses the impact of separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns on the development of the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. A major concern about this downturn is that its impacts span a longer horizon, threatening to erase much of the progress made towards eliminating poverty. Prior to the Cameroon Anglophone conflict, the two regions were marked by a slowdown of economic growth, unemployment and poverty. In agriculture, farmers were faced with broken supply chains, lack of market outlets, poor demand and falling output prices. Micro and small enterprises are the most acutely affected. The Cameroon Anglophone conflict has affected all levels of society within the two regions. This research made use of the secondary method of data collection to describe the existing situation. Separatists-imposed lockdowns and school closures have significantly disrupted the daily lives of children and adolescents, restricted freedom of movement, online learning, and limited or no physical social interaction with their peers. Despite the potential for greater connection within families, this isolation also risks loss of peer support and community networks, education and learning, social isolation and uncertainty about the future.

Keywords: Lockdown, ghost towns and development

Introduction

Anglophone Cameroon has been in conflict since late 2017, which left the population in great distress as more than one million people needed humanitarian assistance, more than 750,000 fled the two English-speaking regions as internally displaced within the other French-speaking regions. This left more than 60% of the population of the two Anglophone regions living below the poverty line. Ghost town and lockdown operations have almost intensified since August 2018. In addition to the Mondays already established as "Ghost town" days, other shutdown days were imposed and observed on the margins of the days corresponding to the appearance of the leaders of secession since late 2017. To these were added so-called Lock down operations, especially around the period of the youth day and National Day celebrations every 11th February and 20th May respectively not forgetting September during school resumption. During the more than one-month lockdown imposed by Separatists in the Anglophone regions on week days between September 08-October 13, 2025, all essential and non-essential goods at least doubled or tripled in price. This caused people to panic as household and living expenses, including food became very high despite their incomes remaining the same. People were now suffering from a shortage of food, and no practical solution was available. Despite some resistance, the fear of reprisals made these watchwords to be widely respected. They result in almost generalized shutdowns of most production and marketing activities, both in the formal and informal sectors within the two regions.

Post-traumatic stress disorder and anger are among the most common mental health issues experienced during lockdowns. Moreover, infection fears, anxiety, frustration, disabling loneliness, financial loss and boredom are among

the major stressors. This study estimates the effect of ghost towns and lockdowns on development in the conflict-hit Anglophone regions weeks after the termination of the September 2025 lockdown and the reopening of schools, restaurants and cafes. In addition to the ghost town and lockdown operations which paralyse economic activities, there are certain measures taken by the public authorities to deal with the climate of insecurity. At the start of the crisis, the Government had decided to cut the internet signal in these Regions; interruption which lasted three months. In some areas, curfews have been temporarily put in place and some authorities continue to operate through intimidation and even harassment of private operators, to force them to open their sites on days declared ghost town days.

Statement of the Problem

In 2016, thousands of teachers and lawyers in the Anglophone regions took to the streets to protest what they termed as a systematic marginalization by the Cameroon government. Among many other claims, these groups of protesting lawyers and teachers accused the government of deploying jurists who were only conversant with French civil laws and not the common law that applied to the Anglophone regions. Government teachers deployed to the Anglophone regions were also faulted for not being able to speak in English. This led to the creation of a Consortium of Anglophone Teachers and Common Law Lawyers but which was eventually banned by government on grounds of illegality and subsequently arresting some of its members including Agbor Bala and Fontem Neba. The demonstrating Anglophone lawyers also claimed to have been subjected to brutal treatment and humiliation including the confiscation of their professional attires such as gowns and wigs by the security forces. These events organized by Anglophone

Cameroonians to show their defiance to the francophone-dominated central government and the response of the government through brutal force led to the open declaration of independence on 1st October 2017. In typical fashion, the government responded and a reportedly 122 Anglophone Cameroonians who were celebrating the declaration of independence in the region were killed by government security forces (BBC Africa 2017; International Crisis Group 2017).

Research Question

How have separatist-imposed lockdown and ghost towns affected the development of the two Cameroon Anglophone regions?

Objective of the Study

To assess the impact of separatist-imposed lockdown and ghost towns on the development of the two Cameroon Anglophone regions

Literature Review

Ethnicity and social division have defined and shaped relations since the end of the colonial era. It is well established that race-based policies of a government (like that of apartheid South Africa or minority ruled Rhodesia) do have critical effects on development (Wilson, 2012 Louw, 2004; Winant, 1994; Wolpe, 1984). Yet, a general review of the literature does not reveal significant studies directly linking development or its lack thereof with ethnic conflict in Third World developing societies. In 'Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon' Piet Konings and Francis B Nyamnjoh (2003) ^[11] focus on Anglophone Cameroon which has been at the forefront of ethno-regional protests and demands for rearrangement of state power. It was not until the political liberalization process in the early 1990s that the Anglophone elite began to mobilize the regional population against the allegedly subordinated positions of Anglophones and to demand self-determination and autonomy, reintroducing federalism and secession to the political agenda. It soon became evident, however, that the Anglophone elite were divided, offering conflicting explanations for the origin of and proposals for addressing the so-called 'Anglophone problem'. Konings (2004) observed that marginalization and poor governance system has been at the Centre of ethnic division in Cameroon but as Kriesberg (2009) reported, engaging in a mutual solution finding process is necessary to satisfy the grid of the conflicting parties.

Colonial boundaries have had an ambivalent impact on what has come to be known as the Cameroon Anglophone problem. On the one hand, the boundary between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon has laid the foundation for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities and the development of cleavages between the two elites. On the other hand, this boundary has failed to erase the existing ethnic relations between both territories altogether, enabling the Anglophone and Francophone elites to cement alliances if they well felt to be opportune (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003:9) ^[11]. There is general agreement that the root of the Anglophone problem can be traced back to the partitioning of the erstwhile German Kamerun Protectorate into British and French mandate and Trust Territories after the First World War (cf

Johnson, 1970; Le Vine, 1964 and 1971; Benjamin, 1972). Separate colonial state formation and the development of territorial differences in languages and cultural legacies laid the spatial and historical foundations for the construction of Anglophone and Francophone identities (Konings and Nyamnjoh, 2003:10) ^[11].

Theoretical Review

Several theories have been used to critically assess the impact of lockdown and ghost towns on the development of the two Anglophone regions. Theories that have been widely used to study the phenomenon include: Development theories (the modernization and dependency theories) and the conflict theory. Development theories emphasize on development and underdevelopment. Modernization theory sees development from the prism of western civilization. Its major exponents include Gabriel Almond, Bingham Powell, David Coleman and Lucian Pye amongst others. The modernization theorists see development from the prism of western civilization. They argued that the west is developed because it has certain socio-political and economic attributes that are amenable to positive change and development. The underdeveloped states don't possess such attributes; thus, they lack development. But they can achieve development by trying to be like the west via the imbuelement of western culture.

On the other hand, the dependency theory came as a direct response to the short-comings of the Modernization theory in explaining why the core is developed, while the periphery is underdeveloped. Its proponents include; Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, et cetera. Dependency theory sees development and underdevelopment as two sides of the same coin in the sense that they are the inevitable outcomes and the physical manifestations of the World Capitalist system and its inherent contradictions and exploitations. The theory classified the world into two; the Core or Centre (which is made up of the industrialized capitalist nations), and the Periphery or satellite (which is made up of the colonized and poor countries of the world). Dependency theory argues that the export of capitalism by the West to other parts of the World and its resultant colonialism is responsible for the underdevelopment and dependency of the Third World. Capitalism is driven by the quest for profit maximization, the theory argues.

Conflict theory, first developed by Karl Marx is a theory that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. Many Sociologists have contributed to the development of Conflict theory including Max Gluckman, John Rex, Lewis A. Coser, Randall Collins, Ralf Dahrendorf, Ludwig Gumplovitz, Pareto Vilfredo and George Simmels. However, Karl Marx is often credited as being the father of conflict theory. Conflict theory seeks to scientifically explain the general contours of conflict in society; how conflict starts and varies, and effects it brings. The central concerns of conflict theory are the unequal distribution of scarce resources and power. What these resources are might be different for each theorist, but conflict theorists usually work with Weber's three systems of stratification: class, status and power. The conflict theory and economic development focuses on the structural changes that are required to implement development efforts thereby preventing conflict while at the same time managed conflict in the event that it erupted. The conflict theory is

important in the study of public corporations and regional economic development in the conflict-hit South west region of Cameroon. This theory does not only look at development efforts as they are being implemented but it also looks at the structures put in place to manage such efforts. Similarly, Collier (1999) looked at conflict in relation to economic advancement either as an offshoot or as cause. He claimed civil war retards economic development. The retardation brought as a result of war led to more conflict and economic stagnation.

Data Set and Methodology

Documentary analysis also known as secondary data is one of the most used methods in collecting data. Secondary data means data that are already available, that is data which have already been collected and analyzed by someone else. This has been the source of new knowledge on which the theoretical background of this study grounded on. The use of documentary analysis as a method of data collection as well is to triangulate the data collected at a later stage of the methodological process. Secondary data is gathered from a variety of sources, including articles, books, and the internet. For the analysis and interpretation of the obtained data, several statistical tools and techniques were used. Secondary data is 'the data already collected in some other context than the present study' (Robson, 2002:552). It provides the necessary background information, builds credibility for the research report and helps to clarify the problem during the exploratory research process. Anney (2014:277) defines triangulation as using 'multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence'.

Secondary data were accessed from government documents, books, articles, TV, and online publications. These different sources helped us get an insight on the impact of separatist imposed ghost towns and lockdown on the development of the two Cameroon Anglophone regions. We consulted books because they contain authoritative information. They gave a background information and context to our topic, and they also gave analytical examples and points for easy understanding. However, books alone were not enough to keep us well informed on the impact of separatist-imposed ghost towns and lockdown in Anglophone Cameroon, so we consulted newspapers too. But since Cameroonian journalists analyze their information on the armed conflict in the North West and South West of Cameroon with discretion due to the reported cases of the government crackdown on them limiting freedom of speech and expression, this was also not enough so we also read articles and journals where the conflict was not given in detail but briefly explained since little is written on it so far. We then read specialized reviews which only highlighted the situation faced by the Anglophone minority in Cameroon. Still not satisfied with the information that we gathered, we decided to consult the internet. Websites enabled us to read works which are not found in our world. We also discovered websites which broadens our ideas on ghost towns and lockdowns.

Key Findings

Higher levels of depression, fear, anxiety, anger, irritability, negativity, conduct disorder, alcohol and substance use and sedentary behaviours compared with pre-conflict rates were commonly reported in children and adolescents complicated

by the recent separatists-imposed lockdown in September 2025, but there were also positive perceptions of time spent with family. Children living in poverty or in families with lower socio-economic status were found to be at greater risk of stress and depressive symptoms, whereas higher socio-economic status was found to be a protective factor for externalizing behavioural problems during the lockdown. Spending more time on physical activity and maintaining daily living routines protected against depression and were associated with better mood states. Stress management, leisure-time activities (e.g., learning an instrument or cooking) and regular communication with loved ones were other proactive coping strategies used to deal with lockdowns. Engaging in recreational activities, including using technology to communicate with loved ones, having more time for oneself or for one's family and having more flexible schedules, protected against anxiety and contributed to children's and adolescents' overall well-being during the lockdowns.

Weekly ghost towns and lockdowns, restrictions on movement, and insecurity are affecting business transactions through slowed flow of goods, people, and services. Businesses and transport vehicles that refuse to respect lockdowns and ghost town days have been threatened and targeted. The security forces have also been accused of vandalizing and burning business premises and markets. Consequently, hundreds of businesses have been paralyzed in the region. In some areas administration authorities went as far as sealing off shops of traders who obeyed separatist-imposed lockdown for fear of the unknown instead worsening their already bad situation. Since the start of the conflict in late 2017 Mondays have been made non-effective working day in the English-speaking regions for fear of the unknown. This has greatly paralyzed economic activities within the two regions.

Analysis of Data

The challenges facing the population of the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon include access to adequate shelter, clean water, sanitation, food, health and services, security and safety for vulnerable populations including women and girls, and education for children whose lives have been uprooted. The living condition are dire exacerbated by separatists-imposed lockdowns. In the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, conflict has further damaged an economy that was already strained by inequality, low agricultural productivity, and high unemployment, especially among youth. Agricultural production, the dominant economic sector in the regions, has been severely cut. Buildings and transportation infrastructure have been destroyed, while road closures and separatists' lockdowns have impeded the movement and sale of certain goods. Many businesses are fully or partially closed, investment is reduced, and market activity is suppressed during separatist-imposed lockdowns. Frequent attacks on markets have led to closures and reduced market activity across the regions as well as reduced trade in agriculture.

Political Impacts

Contemporary data on political freedom in the crisis regions is staggering. An estimated 81% of Anglophones have less freedom to express their political views than a few years earlier and they are twice more likely to fear violence and

political intimidation than Francophones (Lazar 2019). The Anglophone crisis is characterized by human rights violations. The Cameroon Anglophone conflict has left more than six thousand deaths and wounded many, with psychological trauma, and huge amounts of financial losses due to damage of private and government property, infrastructure and crops, among other effects. Conflict can also increase mortality indirectly. For example, destroyed health infrastructure and degraded living conditions have led to increased deaths from disease and hunger. The recent separatist one month imposed from September 08, to October 13, 2025 really contributed in the low voter turnout within the two Anglophone regions during the October 12th Presidential elections in Cameroon. The impact and means around the ghost towns were strong. As mentioned, some private business owners chose to stay open. Some of these businesses were attacked by armed men, which later were identified as members of the Ambazonia defense forces. The Ambazonia forces also attacked schools, higher institutions, and government offices across the Anglophones regions who did not respect the ghost towns. Those who didn't respect the imposed ghost towns and lockdowns were seen as betrayers. In some cases, some of these victims were brutalized, kidnapped and some even killed (Ngoh, 2018)^[20]. These nonbearing situations made it difficult for the Anglophones, thus led to a high rate of criminal activities in both Anglophone regions.

Government security forces have been accused of using excessive force, extrajudicial killings, torture, and ill treatment of suspected separatists and detainees. They have also razed and burnt property including houses in more than 170 villages in the Anglophone region. A notable case is the alleged massacre of 21 unarmed civilians in Ngarbuh village (North West Region) on February 14, 2020. Accusations have also been levied against armed separatists for abductions and killing of security forces, administrators, and civilians perceived to be colluding with the government (Ajumane 2018; Craig 2020; Egeland 2019; HRW 2018, 2020; GRID 2019; ICG 2019). The intentional attacks on schools in the Anglophone region have forced many families to send their children to the Littoral, West, and Centre regions where they can pursue their education. The influx of displaced persons in the last year has put a strain on the limited basic resources and services that cater to women and children. Since the start of the Anglophone Conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions, there has been an increase in both maternal and infant mortality rates. Women and girls are also facing a heightened risk of sexual and intimate partner violence and exploitation as a result of displacement, and sexually transmitted diseases have been on the rise in some regions due to the increase of survival sex. Young girls are more vulnerable to early marriage and unwanted pregnancies, and young boys are more vulnerable to recruitment in extremist groups.

Economic Impacts

The overall economic impacts of separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns in Anglophone Cameroon are reflected in the negative economic growth rates estimated for the two regions since 2018. The drastic fall of prices and demand for commodities due to lockdowns, loss in key sectors have impacted negatively on the development of the two regions. Impacts on transport and trade facilitation include travel restrictions and requirements which have

delayed the movement of goods and services across other Francophone regions of the country during the period of ghost towns and lockdowns. The separatists-imposed lockdowns have resulted in significant slowdowns in the movement of goods and services which has affected the trade potential of the two Anglophone regions. Many people were pushed into poverty, many of them women, children and people from marginalized communities. The impact to food security in the two Anglophone regions due to repeated separatists-imposed lockdowns and ghost towns entailed an increase in the prevalence of undernutrition and other instances of food insecurity, which have been further exacerbated by inflation in food prices as trade and agricultural sectors have slowed down and disruptions in supply chains.

The living conditions brought upon by separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns in the two Anglophone regions led to an increase in anger, negativity, irritability and inattention, particularly among children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and/ or autism. Parents also reported worsening of conduct problems and disruptive behaviours among adolescents, as well as clinginess among younger children. Moreover, the living conditions and livelihoods of families were adversely impacted by financial hardships during the separatists-imposed lockdowns, exacerbating sadness and worry in caregivers and children complicated by the conflict. Moderate anxiety was reported by children and parents across the Anglophone regions and age groups, especially because of disruptions to daily routines and school closures as well as to growing worry and concern over risk to their own livelihood and that of their families. The direct impact of the lockdown presented above is already dramatic, but its short length may allow affected households to support basic livelihoods with help from family and friends in other French-speaking regions of Cameroon who have fled the conflict or through borrowing.

Many have lost their income and livelihoods due to displacement, cuts in agricultural production and trade, and economic destruction described above, leaving them vulnerable and reliant on humanitarian assistance. Many households can no longer afford two square meals per day as a result of souring inflation driven by two key factors: fall in output and inability to receive supplies especially of manufactured goods from other parts of the country due to separatist-imposed lockdowns and regular Monday ghost towns. The negative effect on poverty and hunger are immeasurable. Transport difficulties and the additional costs caused by disorganized supply chains have a direct impact on prices. Thus, episodes of shortages and inflation are becoming more and more recurrent in the main cities and agglomerations of the South-West and North-West Regions.

Socio-Cultural Impacts

A prominent impact of the separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdown has been the rise of importance of digital connectivity and information communications and technology (ICT). This sector has lagged significantly in suburbs of the two regions in the past, where less than half of the rural population in the two regions have access to electricity. The two main telecommunication companies (MTN and ORANGE) have provided free or discounted options for calls, SMS, and data, as well as offering services such as e-learning to children who have deprived from

education for the past eight years. Education is the sector that has suffered the most from the conflict as the separatists from the onset used education as a political tool to mount pressure on the state for political reform. The main reason behind the last lockdown from September 08th to October 13 2025 was to boycott school resumption with the other Francophone regions of Cameroon and equally to boycott the October 12 presidential elections in Cameroon.

The Ambazonia separatist group has heavily targeted schools in its insurgency, burning or attacking those that have not closed down or those that defy separatist-imposed lockdowns and the Monday ghost towns. The group announced a total boycott of schools at the end of 2017 that led to more than 80 percent of schools being forced to shut down in the Anglophone region, affecting the education of over 855,000 children. Separatists-imposed lockdown's impact on education has varied in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon depending on whether schools are open and the range of available options for alternatives to in-person instruction since the beginning of the conflict. In terms of gender equality, evidence shows that the impacts and implications of the lockdown and ghost towns are exacerbating existing gender inequalities and posing an additional burden for women and girls. Incidence of gender-based violence increase as many women are facing increased intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence while confined at home during separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns.

Studies showed increased stress and adjustment issues among adolescents, especially because of fear of attack and uncertainty due to lockdown and disruptions to daily routines. After eight years of the Cameroon Anglophone conflict with unspeakable horrors like torture, sexual assault, and losing family, the two English-speaking regions topped by the daily stress and anxiety of life add to overwhelming need for mental health services. Depressive symptoms (including sadness, loss of interest in activities, hopelessness, low energy, irritability and guilt) were commonly reported in children and adolescents during separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns. Moderate increase in depressive symptoms and sadness were reported, especially among older adolescents and females too.

The rich Anglophone culture has not been left unaffected. Traditional rulers and custodians of the cultures and traditions of the Anglophone region (particularly those perceived to be collaborating with the government) have been publicly attacked, beaten, kidnapped, or killed. In February 2018, armed men killed the supreme chief of the Balondo people in Ekondo Titi (South West Region). A few months later, 8 chiefs in Fako Division were kidnapped. Inevitably, dozens of tribal chiefs went into hiding and currently live out of their palaces (Journal du Cameroun 2018b; Kindzeka 2018). Exercising your professional activity (public, private, formal or informal) means risking kidnapping or death. Threats and intimidation are now the daily reality of workers in the South West and North West regions. Those in the public services seem to be particularly targeted by the intimidation during separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns.

Measures and Obstacles

Since the start of the crisis, the government of Cameroon has taken a series of measures expected to resolve the problem in the crisis regions. When manifestations arose in

October 2016, spearheaded particularly by lawyers and teachers, the Cameroonian government took some steps to address the situation. While the manifestations were heavily stifled by security forces, a commission led by the Prime Minister, Mr. Philemon Yang was dispatched by President Paul Biya on the 25th November 2017 to Bamenda to dialogue specifically with the leaders of the Teachers and Lawyers' Association of the Anglophone Regions with regards to their tabled grievances (Nfor 2017). While some heralded this initiative as a good step towards resolution, it ended up failing primarily because most of the demands made by the various groups such as releasing those who were arrested unjustly were rejected. The crowning failure of this initiative came on the 17th January 2017 when the same leaders who had been called to dialogue were arrested by the regime and brandished as terrorists. Decree No. 2017/013 of 23rd January 2017 on the National Commission on Bilingualism and Multiculturalism was issued by the President. This decree was to lay down the institutional structure for the National Commission on Bilingualism and Multiculturalism which was charged with the responsibility of regulating the linguistic and cultural imbalances with the purpose of maintaining peace and promoting national unity within the country.

The next approach was directed towards the Common law system. On the 30th March 2017, the Minister of Justice and Keeper of Seals announced that the parliament had endorsed the President's bill which recommended the creation of a Common Law Bench at the Supreme Court and a Department of Common Law at the National School of Magistracy and Administration (ENAM). This initiative was heralded by some Lawyers who remarked that it showed good faith but it ultimately failed in pacifying the Anglophone crisis and convincing the lawyers to return to work (Kometa 2017). This attempt failed because, the crisis was not only about the lawyers' complaints. Furthermore, the Major National Dialogue was held in October 2019 at Yaoundé chaired by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Cameroon at the instructions of the President of the Republic. The government invited representatives of political parties, civil society, religious and traditional authorities, the Cameroonian diaspora, and selected separatist leaders to participate in the five-day event held in the Palais de Congres in Yaounde. A total of 400 participants agreed to form working groups and discuss the government-set agenda.

Notwithstanding, the Major National Dialogue did not bring about the much hoped-for political change, nor did it contribute to reducing violence in the Anglophone regions. Several of the ensuing measures were actually the long-overdue implementation of legal provisions adopted during the democratization process of the 1990s. For example, the laws on decentralization and bilingualism signed in December 2019 have their roots in the 1996 Constitution (Mehler *et al.* 2021: 13). Moreover, while the new decentralization law confers special status to the North West and South West regions based on their linguistic and historical heritage, Anglophones have criticized the law as inadequate; it does not enable political self-determination but continues to concentrate decision-making power in the hands of the Francophone political elite. Importantly, despite pledging to invest in the development of the Anglophone regions and dedicating part of the national budget to a joint decentralization fund, President Biya

further intensified military intervention in the wake of the Major National Dialogue. The role of international actors, in particular European governments and their complicity in the conflict, deserves a critical review. Willis and her co-authors (2020) conducted a thorough investigation of the involvement and impact of nation-state actors and supranational organizations in Cameroon. They show that several governments have been complicit in the Anglophone conflict by way of economic interest and development aid.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The frequent separatists-imposed ghost towns and lockdowns in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon had a devastating impact on the already fragile economy of the two regions, which in turn affected the mental health of the population far more than the impact of eight years conflict. The psychological burden is enormous, and urgent aid is required as the prevalence of depression is now at its highest, and financial needs are increasing. Household expenses and a reduced ability to obtain food were identified as major stressors after the lockdown. Not being able to go out, a reduced ability to earn income, increasing living expenses, and difficulty providing food were also among the stressors that had a higher impact on stress, anxiety, anger, and depression. This study suggests that solutions are required other than the forced ghost towns and lockdown.

The government of Cameroon can do more by accepting the organization of a real, genuine and inclusive dialogue between representatives of the separatist camp identified by separatists themselves, representatives of the Cameroon government and the negotiated dialogue can be moderated by an independent external party. The government should organize an inclusive dialogue with the separatists rather than organizing one which is premeditated and resolutions arrived at even before the dialogue. Recommendations for maintaining education systems within the two regions include government working to build back better with more resilient education systems to boost access to available platforms and support teachers and parents/caregivers. The government and the development partners must continue to invest in education in the two regions and the government should mobilize/allocate additional financial resources to cover related costs in the education sector and support the safe reopening of schools during the next academic year within the two Anglophone regions.

Promoting positive action through play, support to parents and quality family time have proved helpful in alleviating stress and fear associated with the recent September 2025 one month lockdown and mobility restrictions. As thousands of children and young people return to school in the conflict-hit Anglophone regions after the lockdown, it is vital that families, and the government listen to them and seek to address some of the mental distress that both the absence of school, and schooling itself, may cause them. Ways should be explored to help them catch up while also reducing exam stress to bolster their mental health, and avenues to make schools safer and more inclusive for all students should be found.

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