

Unmasking and Evaluating Humanitarian Aid in the Conflict-Hit Zones of Cameroon

Morfaw Yvette mina

1st Year PhD Student, University of Yaounde II, Soa, Cameroon

DOI: 10.55662/JLSR.2024.10501

Abstract

Cameroon is currently facing a complex humanitarian crisis, with ongoing violence and conflict in the Anglophone regions. The crisis resulted in thousands of deaths, widespread displacement, and a severe humanitarian need for food, shelter, and healthcare. The conflict has also led to numerous breaches of human rights such as extrajudicial execution, arbitrary detentions, and the targeting of civilians by both state and non-state actors. In this context, evaluation of humanitarian assistance is essential as it addresses the cries of the affected population by highlighting the role of various organizations, which are pivotal in realizing humanitarian aid. Humanitarian organizations and aid agencies play important roles in providing life-saving assistance to those impaired by the conflict.

Furthermore, this article elucidates on a human rights-based approach, ensuring that these two concepts integrate, as they both protect integrity and dignity. However, the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid should be carefully unmasked to see how they have been able to provide the needs of the impacted community while abiding by international humanitarian law and human rights standards despite various hindrances security threats, bureaucratic hurdles, poor transportation, funding, which impedes the interventions of humanitarians. This article evaluates actors actively responsible for humanitarian intervention alongside human rights as an

integral of humanitarian aid focusing on how effective they have been and the challenges aid organizations face in accessing the affected areas.

Keywords: *Humanitarian aid, Human Rights, Cameroon, Anglophone crisis, Conflict.*

1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) plays an important role in providing humanitarian aid in stricken areas across the globe. One such region facing instability and violence is Cameroon. The UN actors, including its agencies, programs, and personnel, have exhibited a remarkable influence on the ground, striving to relieve the distress of the impacted population, promote peace, and initiate dialogue for conflict resolution. This article aims to highlight the substantive impact of UN actors in providing humanitarian assistance in conflict areas in Cameroon, unmasking the extent of their influence and the challenges they face.

Humanitarian assistance has been considered by the Institute of International Law in 2023¹ as “activities and the human and material resources for the provision of goods and services of an exclusive human character which is indispensable for survival and fulfillment of all needs of victims to disaster”². That is, providing material or logistic aid to both sides in a conflict, to deter or eliminate human suffering and to uphold life and health.³ More often than not, it is usually short-term until long-term helps replace either the government or other public bodies.⁴

¹ H.J Heintze and A. Zwitter(2011), *International Law and Humanitarian Assistance*, Springer-Verlag Berlin. Heidelberg.

² Institute of International Law, Resolution of the 16th commission, 2nd September 2003.

³ Robert Muggah (2023). *Organized crime in Armed Conflict and other situations of violence*, IRCC, No 933. ICJ, *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua V. United States of America)*, Judgment, ICJ Reports 1996.

⁴ Kate Mackintosh (2007). "Beyond the Red Cross: The Protection of Independent Humanitarian Organization and their Staff in International Law" Volume 89, *International Review of the Red Cross*.

Humanitarian assistance essentially means providing for survivals like food, water, medical supplies, clothing, and other related items. This activity is mostly done by people with a passion to reduce suffering and improve people's lives. Such assistance demonstrates compliance with the fundamental humanitarian ideals of humanity, impartiality, independence, neutrality, and most especially compassion.⁵ All these are universal guiding principles, which hold immeasurable power to alleviate human suffering. The United Nations is built upon these principles with the primary objective of saving lives, alleviating poverty, creating empathy and solidarity, and maintaining dignity.

International humanitarian law is a collection of regulations aimed at mitigating the impact of armed conflicts and limiting the methods and means of warfare. Unlike justifying the reasons for war, this branch of international law focuses on the treatment of individuals during warfare and attempts to uphold a certain degree of humanity. The concept of humanitarian assistance, which is a fundamental aspect of this law, aims to prevent or alleviate suffering without any form of bias based on religion or any other criteria.

The UN actors in Cameroon ensure the coordination and delivery of humanitarian aid to conflict regions. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) facilitates the coordination between UN agencies, NGOs, and government entities involved in humanitarian assistance. By coordinating efforts, the UN actors pool their resources to efficiently provide food, water, shelter, healthcare, and other essential needs to the affected population.⁶ This collaborative approach ensures that the assistance reaches those in need promptly and effectively, thereby making a tangible difference in the lives of the conflict victims.⁷

⁵ OCHA (2018). UN Civil Military Coordination Handbook.

⁶ Kevin M. Cahill, M.D (1993), "A Framework for Survival: Health, Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance in conflict and Disaster", Routledge and the Center of International Health and Cooperation.

⁷ OCHA, (2024) North-West and South-West Situation Report.

In close collaboration with international humanitarian law⁸, the concept of human rights is constitutionally established and accepted. It encompasses the laws designed to protect the dignity and well-being of human beings.⁹ These laws impose obligations on both states and citizens to respect one another. The right to humanitarian aid is categorized as a fifth-generation right, among the three generations of rights that exist.¹⁰ This group of rights is deeply rooted in principles of Western liberal ideology, emphasizing that individuals should be able to exercise their rights freely without undue governmental interference. Some examples of these rights consist of the right to life and equality before the law. They are safeguarded by the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which was established in 1966.¹¹

UN actors in Cameroon play a substantial role in the protection of human rights,¹² especially in conflict zones. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) monitors the human rights situation, investigates violations and ensures that perpetrators are held accountable. Through its reporting, advocacy, and training programs, the OHCHR raises awareness about human rights abuse and influences the local and national governments to take corrective measures.¹³ Their remarkable influence not only helps the victims receive justice but also contributes to prevention through deterrence.

Although both international humanitarian law and human rights law cooperate as complementary regimes¹⁴ of public international law, they differ in various aspects. One

⁸ Scott Sheeran, Nigel Rodley (2014), "Routledge Handbook of International Human Rights Law" (1st ed.) Routledge

⁹ Knight, W.A., Egerton, F. (2012). The Routledge Handbook of the Responsibility of Protect (1st ed.) Routledge

¹⁰ American Red Cross, International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

¹¹ Danieli Y, Rodley N.S, and Weisaeth L. (1996) International Responses to Traumatic Stress: Humanitarian, Human Rights, Justice, Peace and Development Contributions, Collaborative Actions and Future Initiatives (1st ed.) Routledge

¹² Rhoda K.M. (2019) "Text and Material on International Human Rights" 4th ed.) Routledge-Cavendish

¹³ OCHA, Cameroon: Multilateral action is needed to address the human rights crisis in Cameroon, June 2021, <http://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/hrc47-multilateral-action-needed-address-human-rights-crisis-cameroon>

¹⁴ Aldo Zammit B. (2010) "International Humanitarian Law and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (1st ed.) Routledge.

distinction is related to when they should be applied. While both laws are applicable in certain circumstances, there may be debates on which one should be applied first and why.

During the conflict, the demand for precise and prompt information becomes imperative as it facilitates swift and cohesive coordination among the global humanitarian community. Inaccurate data becomes one of the initial casualties, hence the continuous flow of up-to-date and pertinent information becomes essential to expedite informed decision-making for both the assistance providers and the affected individuals. Restricted access to unbiased information during conflict situations can easily exacerbate existing tensions.¹⁵ In emergencies, the prompt evaluation of the population's needs, the creation of emergency maps, and the alignment of these requirements with available resources significantly enhance transparency, efficiency, and the overall progress of the response, thereby preventing unnecessary expenditure and duplication of services. Recent experiences have undoubtedly illustrated that reliable information is indispensable for a comprehensive and coherent strategic response.

2. Actors involved in Decision-Making for Humanitarian Assistance in Cameroon

The efficiency of providing humanitarian assistance relies heavily on receiving timely and accurate information. The speed at which the humanitarian community can collect, analyze, and act upon crucial information directly affects the effectiveness of their response and the degree of support provided to the affected population. In 1991, The United Nations created the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) with a specific mission of collaborating with relief agencies on the ground to ensure a comprehensive response that avoids duplication of efforts.¹⁶ When making important decisions, it is essential to gather detailed information about the areas in need and their specific requirements. This includes determining the urgency of assistance and developing strategies to deliver aid efficiently to

¹⁵ Tidwell Alan C., (1988) *Conflict Resolved: A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution*, Pinter London and New York.

¹⁶ General Assembly Resolution 46/182. Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. 19 December 1991

these regions. In the crisis in Cameroon, OCHA plays a crucial role in decision-making by collecting field information to monitor and enhance ongoing response efforts. They coordinate various activities and produce informative reports. It is their responsibility to provide timely and accurate updates to their superiors at the headquarters. They also collaborate with other key stakeholders to gather and verify information regarding the humanitarian situation, facilitating a smooth flow of vital information between OCHA and its partners.

Within the United Nations structure, the coordination of decision-making processes in Cameroon falls under the purview of the Humanitarian Affairs Officer. This role lies within the Operations and Advocacy Division (OAD) which operates under OCHA and is part of the United Nations Secretariat.¹⁷ Their primary objective is to bring humanitarian actors¹⁸ and ensure a coherent and effective response during emergencies. The Humanitarian Affairs Officer must organize and lead humanitarian activities in collaboration with both international and national actors, aiming to eliminate human distress. The office of the Humanitarian Affairs Officer is based in Yaoundé and reports directly to the OCHA headquarters.

The coordination and public information units are within the purview of the humanitarian affairs officer. Their main focus is to advise on various policy matters that pertain to upholding humanitarian principles and ensuring the efficient implementation of humanitarian aid within the country's borders. Additionally, they assume the important role of coordinating the response to complex emergencies. Moreover, they are tasked with preparing reports for the international community that detail the country's needs and current situations, as well as spearheading the production of assistance appeals. Specifically, in the case of Cameroon, they are responsible for planning the humanitarian response and developing a comprehensive overview of the country's humanitarian needs.

¹⁷ In the absence of an HC position, the Resident Coordinator (RC). The term HC also refers to both RC/HCs and stand-alone HCs

¹⁸ Anderson R., & De Siliva (2017) *Routledge Companion to Media and Humanitarian Action* (1st ed.) Routledge.

Furthermore, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) is a strategic and operational decision-making body that operates under the guidance of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC).¹⁹ Comprised of representatives from organizations such as IOM, international NGOs, and the Red Cross, the HCT plays a crucial role in overseeing and establishing an effective and comprehensive approach to humanitarian efforts. By functioning efficiently and conveniently, the HCT can contribute to long-term recovery efforts that alleviate suffering and safeguard the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of the affected population. This office also plays a vital role in the decision-making processes related to humanitarian assistance.²⁰

It is crucial to differentiate between operational agencies and non-operational agencies when it comes to decision-making. Operational agencies, such as the WFP, UNDP, UNHCR, and UNRWA, are responsible for managing and operating programs and funds. These agencies have an intergovernmental body dedicated to making policy decisions. Their main goal is to guarantee the application of the guidelines developed by the General Assembly and to align their actions with the guidance received from the FAO, which stands for the Food and Agricultural Organization.

Additionally, non-operational agencies, like OCHA, have a distinct role in decision-making. OCHA is often perceived as an impartial and unbiased body compared to the operational agencies mentioned earlier. While they may not directly manage programs or funds, their focus is more on providing coordination, support, and guidance.

In addition to actively making decisions in humanitarian assistance, operational agencies work tirelessly to promote peace and foster dialogue for conflict resolution. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) plays a pivotal role in supporting peacebuilding initiatives.²¹ By engaging with local communities, civil society organizations, and government institutions, the UNDP helps identify the root causes of the conflict and formulates sustainable strategies to address them. Through capacity-building programs, they

¹⁹ Humanitarian Country Team, available at <https://response.reliefweb.int/cameroon/humanitarian-country-team> accessed 21st July 2024.

²⁰ IASC (2017) Standard Terms of Reference for Humanitarian country terms.

²¹ UNDP (2022) The Renewed Governance and Peacebuilding Framework for Africa.

equip local stakeholders with the necessary skills and resources to peacefully resolve conflicts and maintain social cohesion. This remarkable influence contributes significantly to the restoration of stability and the prevention of future conflicts

Another entity involved in humanitarian policy-making in Cameroon is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, which comprises representatives from major humanitarian assistance organizations rather than country representatives.²² It operates at the regional level in Cameroon and is overseen by the interagency coordination officer. Its authority as the primary interagency mechanism for coordinating humanitarian assistance was established by the General Assembly RES 48/57²³. Led by the emergency relief coordinator, and is responsible for formulating humanitarian policies, delineating precise roles and duties for different facets of humanitarian aid, addressing deficiencies in response endeavors, and promoting the efficient implementation of humanitarian values.

Furthermore, certain primary organs of the UN can also have decision-making powers. These organs include the Secretary-General (SG), the Security Council (SC), the General Assembly, and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The decision-making authority granted to these organs depends on the subject matter, with most decisions being made at the appropriate level for each topic.²⁴

In the realm of assistance, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)²⁵ plays a prominent role. It was established through a General Assembly report directed to the ECOSOC executive board. The council includes organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP, all of which significantly contributed to aid efforts in Cameroon. ECOSOC negotiates agreements with programs and funds that define the relationship with the UN,

²² *Ibid*

²³ RES/48/57 on strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of UN: resolution adopted by the General Assembly.

²⁴ UN Security Council, permits the import of petroleum and petroleum products originating in Iraq, as a temporary measure to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people, 14 April 1995, UN Doc, S/RES/986

²⁵ *Ibid*

coordinates their activities through collaborative consultations, provides recommendations to the General Assembly, and considers its recommendations during its substantive sessions.

3. Humanitarian Aid and Human Rights

Adhering to and bolstering human rights is of utmost importance in any humanitarian crisis, whether caused by conflicts or natural disasters. It is widely believed that human rights should be an integral part of humanitarian assistance, and therefore, a comprehensive human rights approach should be implemented to promote and protect these rights in humanitarian projects.²⁶ However, this process is not without its challenges. Issues such as the balancing of meeting immediate needs versus defending rights, the tension between human rights advocacy and the principle of neutrality, the level of cooperation and coordination between humanitarian and human rights organizations, and the role of NGOs all present potential obstacles.

Although human rights and international humanitarian law have different origins, it is widely accepted that they complement each other more than any other area of law. However, this does not suggest a merger between the two bodies of law. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has highlighted the importance of maintaining the distinction between these two areas of law to ensure the fulfillment of their respective legal obligations. Nevertheless, as the scope of international humanitarian law and human rights law often overlap, it is necessary to explore how human rights law can contribute to the realization of international humanitarian law. While international humanitarian law sets a minimum humanitarian standard to be adhered to in all circumstances through common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, it is often not effectively implemented in reality, especially, compared to human rights law.

The 2005 OHCHR Action Plan states that human rights protection is not a specific tool or strategy, but rather a desired outcome in which rights are recognized, respected, and fulfilled by those who must do so, increasing dignity and freedom. Human rights protection occurs

²⁶ Niels Dabelstein (1999) "Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies" OECD.

when individuals who might otherwise be at risk or denied their rights can fully exercise such rights through focused efforts. This strategy is based on international law and focuses on delivering emergency answers in circumstances where people are threatened, as well as working towards long-term solutions that create and reinforce laws and institutions that protect rights.²⁷

Cameroon is unfortunately plagued by various humanitarian crises, conflicts, internal displacement, and natural disasters that have left significant portions of the population vulnerable and in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. However, in addressing these crises, it is crucial to ensure that human rights are respected and protected. Humanitarian assistance should not merely involve the provision of basic needs but also prioritize the fundamental rights and dignity of individuals, irrespective of their background or circumstances.

Humanitarian assistance should ensure the provision of necessities, such as food, clean water, shelter, and healthcare, to affected populations. Evaluation should focus on the fulfillment of these needs and to what extent human rights are being upheld.²⁸

An evaluation must assess the extent to which the rights of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and the disabled, are protected. Measures such as gender-based violence prevention, education for children, and accessibility for disabled individuals should be monitored and improved if necessary. Evaluation should assess the extent to which humanitarian actors operate with accountability and transparency. This includes transparent resource allocation, adherence to human rights principles, and responsiveness to complaints or violations.

²⁷ Plan of action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the world programmed for Human Rights Education (A/59/525/Rev.1,2 March 2005).

²⁸ Giustiniani, F.Z., Sommaro, E., Casolari, F. & Bartolini, G. (Eds). (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Human Rights and Disasters* (1st ed.). Routledge.

4. Areas for Improvement in Human Rights in Humanitarian Assistance

Strengthening security measures: Collaborative efforts between government security forces and humanitarian actors can enhance the security of aid delivery, allowing for the safeguarding of human rights.²⁹ Also, the development and implementation of a comprehensive coordination mechanism can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian assistance. This can minimize human rights violations resulting from delays or inadequacies in aid delivery.³⁰

Not also forgetting the Non-discriminatory aid provision, humanitarian organizations must adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination and actively work towards providing equal rights and access to all affected populations.³¹ This may involve capacity-building programs, awareness campaigns, and inclusive policies.

In this light, human rights in humanitarian aid in Cameroon has its highlights and challenges and areas for improvement in the protection and provision of aid. Address and security risk, improving coordination, and promoting nondiscriminatory provisions are crucial for the effective humanitarian efforts. These are all factors for upholding human rights. On this note, it is essential to implement human rights protection for affected populations while carrying out humanitarian missions.

- **Effectiveness of Humanitarian Assistance**

In 2018, the UNHCR analyzed the crisis in Cameroon and found that its violent nature had led to a significant number of Cameroonians being displaced internally and across borders.³² By October of that year, OCHA estimated that there were approximately 437,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Cameroon. Out of this total, 246,000 were from the southwest,

²⁹ Daniela Santos (2017) "The Inclusion of Human Rights in Humanitarian Assistance: The difficult but necessary way between Theory and Practice" *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, No 1, 41-84. Yearbook of Humanitarian Action and Human Rights.

³⁰ The Protection of Humanitarian Crisis, Joint Background Paper by OHCHR and UNHCR, 2013.

³¹ J. Moore (1998) *Hard Choice: Moral dilemmas in humanitarian invention*, Oxford-New York, Rowan and Littlefield publishers Inc.

³² OCHA (2019) *Cameroon: North West and South West Crisis Situation Report*.

105,000 from the northwest, and 6,000 in the littoral and West regions. To address this massive population movement, the UNHCR allocated additional funds to enhance the protection of IDPs.³³ The total financial requirements for this effort amounted to \$183 million. To ensure an effective response, the UNHCR declared a level 2 emergency on December 4, 2018, specifically for the situation in Cameroon.³⁴

The UN resident coordinator in Cameroon, Allegra Baiocchi, expressed concern to the Human Rights Watch in November about the acute underfunding of the humanitarian response, stating that it leaves millions of people without the vital assistance and protection they need.³⁵ This lack of support reinforces the vicious cycle of vulnerability and violence.³⁶

Fortunately, in September 2019, the Secretary General of Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock, announced the release of \$75 million from the central emergency response fund to support underfunded responses, including Cameroon, which received \$5 million.³⁷ The objective is to prioritize assistance to those most at risk, including people with disabilities.³⁸ Between September and November 2019, Human Rights Watch conducted interviews with 24 people with disabilities living in the anglophone regions, as well as their family members and representatives from UN agencies and national and international humanitarian organizations. Their research indicates that people with disabilities are more susceptible to danger from attacks due to barriers that hinder their escape and attempts to stay safe.

In November 2019, the UN issued guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. These guidelines, developed by the UN Interagency Standing

³³ UNHCR (2018) Cameroon factsheet, Situation Report.

³⁴ Cameroon situation responding to needs of internally displaced persons and Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria supplementary appeal.

³⁵ HRW (2019) Cameroon: Make Humanitarian Response More Inclusive

³⁶ Launch of the IASC Guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-guidelines-on-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-humanitarian-action-2019>

³⁷ OCHA (2019) UN Emergency Fund provides \$ 75 million to eight underfunded crises.

³⁸ Cameroon: Make Humanitarian Response More Inclusive/Human Rights Watch, online at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/10/cameroon-make-humanitarian-response-more-inclusive>

Committee (IESC),³⁹ aim to ensure that aid agencies include people with disabilities in all phases of humanitarian actions, from planning to coordination and monitoring. These guidelines have been circulated among UN agencies and non-governmental organizations in Cameroon to raise awareness.⁴⁰ Progress is being made, and the livelihoods of people with disabilities affected by the crisis in Cameroon are being acknowledged and addressed.

The UN and agencies, as well as humanitarian organizations operating in the northwest and southwest regions, must now deliver on their commitments and ensure that their response is as inclusive and accessible as possible. People with disabilities participated in an event commemorating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2019, in Buea, in the southwest region.⁴¹

To better coordinate the humanitarian response, the cluster system was activated in October 2018. UNHCR assumed leadership of the protection and shelter cluster.⁴² Through protection monitoring activities initiated in mid-November 2018, 1,756 protection incidents were identified in Fako, Lebalem, Menyu, and Meme divisions in the southwest,⁴³ as well as Mezam division in the northwest.⁴⁴ Community-based protection structures and mechanisms were strengthened through targeted protection efforts.⁴⁵

Additionally, since mid-November 2018, nearly 349,861 IDPs have received non-food assistance in the subdivisions of Konye and Mbonge in Meme division, as well as Manfe in Manyu. In December 2018, the UNHCR distributed 6,000 non-food item kits to 30,000 IDPs in remote areas of the southwest region. Furthermore, protection and shelter strategies have been developed, with implementation beginning in 2019.⁴⁶ Since 2019, a total of 10,575 children

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ *ibid*

⁴² UNHCR (2022) North West and South West Cameroon: Shelter Cluster Strategy

⁴³ UNHCR (2019) Cameroon situation: Responding to the needs of IDPs and the Cameroon Refugees in Nigeria

⁴⁴ OCHA (2022) Humanitarian Needs Overview <https://www.unocha.org/>

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ *ibid*

affected by the conflict, including 5,040 girls and 5,535 boys, have had improved access to education through psychosocial support and non-formal learning. Additionally, 122,607 people in the northwest and southwest regions have received food and livelihood assistance from WFP⁴⁷ and UNHCR.⁴⁸ These organizations have also collaborated with members of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of various states to initiate legal changes and uphold the rule of law.

Furthermore, humanitarian actors have worked closely with the media to disseminate information and raise awareness through humor, educational campaigns, and seminars. The Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) has diligently monitored human rights violations in the northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon. The organization has also ensured the implementation of established standards in the region and engaged stakeholders to bring about positive changes. CHRDA has developed an admirable initiative to establish and empower training centers for internally displaced persons, providing them with practical skills. They also have partners such as the Canadian High Commissioner which has been able to donate at least 30 sewing machines, inaugurating the initiative on December 18, 2019, and making it fully operational in 2020.

Additionally, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has played a leading role in the international response. They have exerted pressure to make decisions that could lead to lasting solutions to armed conflicts, allowing people to rebuild their lives in these affected areas. They have utilized strategies such as debates, social movements, dialogue, and pressure groups to amplify the voices of the affected individuals.⁴⁹

Moreover, several NGOs have made significant contributions in providing shelter and medical care, particularly for women and children. The Frights Foundation has advocated for a judicial environment that respects international and regional conventions, such as the

⁴⁷ Enow Tabi, M. (2018), "WFP set to distribute food to IDPs in Cameroon's crisis-torn English-speaking regions", published on the 30th of October, 2018, Accessed August 2024

⁴⁸ UNHCR, Supplementary appeal, Cameroon situation Responding to the need of IDPs and Cameroon Refugees in Nigeria, 2019.

⁴⁹ International Review of the Red Cross, The International Committee of the Red Cross; ICRC Role in situations of violence below the threshold of armed conflict.

African Charter of Human and People's Rights, in defense of the rights of vulnerable populations. These non-governmental organizations have contributed to the consolidation of peace and the rule of law, while also undertaking small and large-scale projects to improve the internal well-being of the population. Plan International has organized capacity-building training to empower vulnerable populations and educate them about the importance of protecting their basic rights. Training has also been conducted to empower women and enable them to stand against injustice. This has been crucial due to the high incidence of sexual violations and discrimination against women during the crisis, including sexual exploitation, rape, public humiliation, and torture.

The Ayah Foundation⁵⁰ has provided humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons, offering psychological support to children through social workers, organizing child-friendly spaces, and facilitating the reunion of separated children with their families through alternative care placements. They have also provided technical assistance to ensure that children arrested by security forces during operations are reunited with their families. The organization has supplied teaching and learning materials to displaced children, aiming to protect them from exploitation and various forms of abuse while facilitating their quick recovery from psychological trauma. Additionally, organizations like Hope for the Needy Association and the Hope Center Cameroon have focused on gender-based violence and female empowerment, providing sanitary pads to women in rural areas regularly.⁵¹

International bodies, including UNICEF, continue to advance initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions in line with their strategic plans and efforts to reform the humanitarian and development system. This includes strengthening coherence between humanitarian action and development programming, providing support to local and national partners, increasing the use of cash-based programming, and enhancing coordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Program. UNICEF also prioritizes systematic community engagement and accountability to

⁵⁰ Ayah Foundation (2018) Annual Report.

⁵¹ Eugene Muambah M., (2020) An Appraisal of the involvement of humanitarian mission in Cameroon's conflict zones, *ILOLS*, 8(2) 147-166

the affected population while consistently working to improve its mechanisms and responsiveness to humanitarian crises in a timely and effective manner.

5. Challenges faced by various Actors toward Humanitarian Aid in Cameroon

While the influence of humanitarian actors in providing humanitarian assistance in conflict areas in Cameroon is remarkable, they face numerous challenges. Limited funding, inaccessibility to conflict zones, bureaucratic hurdles, and political tensions can impede their efforts to deliver aid effectively. Additionally, these actors often face security threats from armed groups, hindering their presence and operations in some regions.⁵² These challenges necessitate increased collaboration with local authorities, enhanced diplomatic efforts, and a united international community's support to overcome these obstacles. Humanitarian assistance plays a crucial role in the lives of people affected by conflict, poverty, and natural disasters. In Cameroon, a country battling with internal conflicts and socioeconomic challenges, actors involved in humanitarian activities face numerous obstacles that hinder their efforts to provide relief to those in need.⁵³

One of the first challenges actors offering humanitarian assistance in Cameroon face is the prevailing insecurity in the country. The ongoing conflicts in the Anglophone regions, as well as the activities of terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in the Far North, have created a volatile environment that makes it difficult for humanitarian actors to operate effectively. Insecurity poses a significant threat to the safety of aid workers, limiting their ability to reach and provide assistance to affected populations.⁵⁴ The fear of attacks, kidnappings, and violence greatly hampers the delivery of much-needed relief in these conflict-affected areas.

According to Ilaria Allegrozzi, a senior researcher from the Rights Group in Cameroon, aid workers have become frequent victims of kidnapping, killing, extortion, and various forms of

⁵²OCHA Cameroon (2024) Six things to know about the humanitarian crisis, Cameroon Situation Report.

⁵³ ICRC, (2003), "International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Army Conflicts", Reported by the International Committee of Red Cross.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

abuse in Central Africa. These attacks not only profoundly impact the lives and well-being of those working on the front lines under extremely challenging conditions,⁵⁵ but they also disrupt the provision of life-saving assistance and services to two million people who rely on humanitarian aid, as well as over 600,000 internally displaced individuals.⁵⁶

Rene Emmanuel Sadi, the Cameroon spokesman, asserts that “these crimes against aid workers are primarily committed by separatist fighters who are determined to undermine the government's efforts to bring peace to the English-speaking regions”⁵⁷. Due to the escalating attacks against aid workers, the United Nations has expressed deep concern over the interruption of aid delivery to thousands of people in urgent need. This is particularly significant in regions that have been severely affected by violence, where the need for aid is even more intense, especially in terms of healthcare and shelter. Many hospitals throughout the country lack the necessary resources and equipment, resulting in their closure, frequent attacks, or even arson. Medical staff members have been subjected to insults, threats, and the forced denial of medical care access for the general population.⁵⁸

Furthermore, aid workers have been unjustly accused by the conflicting parties of cooperating with opposing sides. Each party believes the other is utilizing aid workers for their purposes. Separatist fighters claim that their attacks on aid workers are justified because they believe these organizations exploit humanitarianism as a cover to infiltrate local communities and spy on the civilian population, subsequently providing reports to the government. They strongly believe that aid organizations bribe local religious leaders to rebuild the devastated local economy, as they perceive it to be a government tactic to diminish local support for their fight for independence. These persistent attacks on aid workers have significantly affected the nature of their work. Some have had to flee for their lives, resulting in reduced effectiveness and inefficiency in providing assistance and support.

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ Morel, M. (2014), *The Right Not to Be Displaced in International Law*. Dissertation, Cambridge: Intersentia

⁵⁷ Moki Edwin K. (2020) *Rights Groups Condemn Attacks on Aid Workers in Cameroon*. Voice of America

⁵⁸ MSF. (2021), *Doctors without Borders ambulance fired on, in South West Cameroon*

Moreover, the financial resources allocated to humanitarian efforts in Cameroon are far from adequate which increases the risks faced by the affected population. Their basic needs, including food, shelter, sanitation, health, and education, are not adequately met. Humanitarian operations require substantial financial resources to cover expenses such as logistics, staff salaries, and procurement of essential supplies. However, funding for humanitarian assistance in Cameroon is often insufficient, leading to a gap between the needs on the ground and the resources available. Limited funding restricts the scale and quality of assistance provided, preventing actors from reaching all vulnerable populations and addressing their specific needs adequately.

In addition to insecurity and inadequate funding, limited access to affected populations is yet another challenge faced by humanitarian assistance actors in Cameroon. The country's geography, with its diverse landscape and difficult terrain, makes it challenging to reach remote and isolated areas. Poor infrastructure, including damaged roads and bridges resulting from conflicts or natural disasters, further exacerbates the problem of accessibility. This limited access prevents humanitarian actors from reaching those in need, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach regions, leaving vulnerable populations without the required assistance.

OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Cameroon seeks a substantial amount of \$298 million to address the urgent needs of millions of people, including refugees from Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and those within Cameroon. A specific focus of this plan is to allocate \$93.5 million towards the response in the northwest and southwest regions of Cameroon by April 2019. Sadly, the funding for this critical appeal in those regions stands at a mere 9.1% thus far.⁵⁹

Furthermore, actors involved in humanitarian assistance in Cameroon encounter challenges related to coordination and collaboration. The complexity of humanitarian operations, involving multiple organizations, government entities, and international actors, demands effective coordination to avoid duplication and ensure a comprehensive response. However, coordination efforts in Cameroon often face hurdles due to bureaucratic processes, limited

⁵⁹ OCHA (2019) Humanitarian Respond Plan.

communication channels, and differing priorities among the various actors. Lack of coordination not only leads to inefficiencies but also results in gaps in service delivery, where certain populations are left underserved or overlooked.

Ilaria Allegrozzi expressed concern that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated an already existing crisis in Cameroon, particularly in the anglophone and Far-North regions. She emphasized the urgent need for greater efforts to protect those at higher risk and those seeking refuge from infections, ensuring they receive proper care if they fall ill. However, attacks by separatist fighters and military operations severely restricted access for aid agencies, hindering their capacity to assist those in need. Furthermore, the government's suspension of aid groups' flights further impeded their operations, complicating the fight against the spread of the virus.

In addition to these challenges, the infusion of racism, bias, and politicization into humanitarian aid efforts has discredited the entire operation, undermining the fundamental principles of assisting. The willingness of the white race to aid Africans is often questioned, and when aid is eventually offered, it is sometimes tainted by ulterior motives. As discussed at the 2019 Asia Pacific humanitarian leadership conference, the existing humanitarian system is plagued by racism, perpetuated by the dominance of UN and Non-governmental organizations, primarily led by whites who hold the decision-making power.

Furthermore, humanitarian aid can have significant political and economic implications for recipient countries, and it is also influenced by the political considerations of donor governments. Increasingly, it is being used as a strategy to fulfill political objectives, leading to favoritism and a violation of the principle of impartiality. It should be remembered that humanitarian aid is meant to be rendered without bias, providing assistance solely based on need.

The concept of "they do not harm" principle emerged as a response to the growing recognition of potential negative impacts of aid. Originally devised by Mary Anderson in the 1990s, this approach is aimed at effectively addressing conflicts and their aftermath. However, various practices and behaviors have undermined the effectiveness of this principle. These include a lack of respect in the relationship between aid organizations, local bodies, and rulers, as well

as incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse by staff members. Furthermore, the provision of corrupt services by unqualified personnel and the interference in community functions have also contributed to the discrediting of this principle. Additionally, the imposition of inappropriate cultural strategies has been observed, further weakening the impact of the "they do not harm" principle. Although it aims to prioritize assistance based on the severity of suffering, this preference contradicts the principle of impartiality as it favors certain individuals. Ultimately, these issues cast doubt on the credibility of aid organizations and their efforts.

The persistent acts of violence pose a grave concern as they severely hinder the effectiveness of aid efforts. In situations where violence persists, the provision of humanitarian assistance becomes increasingly futile and burdensome. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has acknowledged the ongoing violence between English-speaking cities and the central government forces, characterizing it as a relentless conflict.⁶⁰ The escalation of attacks, physical and sexual violence, as well as the destruction of homes,⁶¹ has left an alarming 530,000 individuals displaced,⁶² pushing them to seek refuge in rural areas where extreme poverty prevails. These vulnerable individuals rely on various organizations that offer aid to meet their basic needs. However, the worrisome question that arises is the sustainability of these organizations in the face of such perilous conditions. How long can they continue to operate and assist amidst these risks?

In conclusion, actors involved in humanitarian assistance in Cameroon face numerous challenges that hinder their efforts to provide effective relief to those in need. Insecurity, lack of funding, limited access to affected populations, and coordination issues are some of the key obstacles encountered in their work. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from international organizations, national authorities, and local communities to ensure the safety of aid workers, secure adequate funding, improve access to affected populations, and strengthen coordination mechanisms. Only through overcoming these obstacles can

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ Reisman M.& Roza P. (2023) "Human Flourishing: The End of Law" Faculty Book.

⁶² Journal du Cameroon (2018), "Anglophone crisis: Violence has driven over 160,000 persons into bushes", published on the 16th May 2018, Accessed on the 17th August 2024.

humanitarian actors fulfill their crucial roles in assisting the vulnerable and promoting recovery and resilience in Cameroon.

6. Conclusion

The remarkable influence of various actors in humanitarian assistance while considering human rights in conflict areas in Cameroon cannot be underestimated. Their coordinated efforts, delivery of assistance, protection of human rights, and promotion of peace contribute significantly to the well-being and long-term stability of the affected population as this coordinated approach is essential to address immediate needs and initial causes of the conflict. Despite the challenges they face, these actors continue to strive for positive change, ensuring that the suffering of people afflicted by violence becomes less severe and that the route for peace and development in the region is paved. The international community must recognize and support their efforts, enabling the stakeholders to continue their significant impact on the ground in Cameroon.

7. References

1. Aldo Zammit B. (2010) "International Humanitarian Law and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. (1st ed.) Routledge.
2. American Red Cross (2011) International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights. <https://www.redcross.org>
3. Anderson R., & De Silvia (2017) Routledge Companion to Media and Humanitarian Action (1st ed.) Routledge.
4. Ayah Foundation (2018) Annual Report.
5. Reisman Michael W. & Roza Pati (2023) "Human Flourishing: The End of Law" Faculty Book
6. Cameroon: Make Humanitarian Response More Inclusive Human Rights Watch, online at <https://www.hrw.org>

7. Daniela Santos (2017) "The Inclusion of Human Rights in Humanitarian assistance: The difficult but necessary Way between theory and Practice". *Deusto Journal of Human Rights*, no. 1, 41-84. Yearbook of Humanitarian Action and Human Rights.
8. Danieli Y, Rodley N.S, and Weisaeth L. (1996) *International Responses to Traumatic Stress: Humanitarian, Human Rights, Justice, Peace and Development Contributions, Collaborative Actions and Future Initiatives* (1st ed.) Routledge
9. Enow Tabi, M. (2018), "WFP set to distribute food to IDPs in Cameroon's crisis-torn English-speaking regions", Accessed August 2024
10. Eugene Muambeh M., (2020) "An Appraisal of the involvement of humanitarian mission in Cameroon's conflict zones", *ILOLS*, 2020; 8(2) 147-166
11. General Assembly Resolution 46/182. Strengthening the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. 19 December 1991
12. Giustiniani, F.Z., Sommario, E., Casolari, F. & Bartolini, G. (Eds). (2018). *Routledge Handbook of Human Rights and Disasters* (1st ed.). Routledge.
13. H.J Heintze and A. Zwitter(2011), *International Law and Humanitarian Assistance*, Springer-Verlag Berlin. Heidelberg.
14. HRW (2019) *Cameroon: Make Humanitarian Response More Inclusive*
15. Humanitarian Country Team, available at www.humanitarianresponse.info(accessed 21st July 2024).
16. IASC (2017) *Standard Terms of Reference for Humanitarian country terms*.
17. IASC Guidelines (2019) *Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*
18. ICRC, (2003), "International Humanitarian Law and the Challenges of Contemporary Army Conflicts", Reported by the International Committee of Red Cross.
19. International Bureau for Children's Rights,(2010) "Children in Armed Conflict" [,http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story](http://www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story)
20. *International Review of the Red Cross, The International Committee of the Red Cross; ICRC Role in situations of violence below the threshold of armed conflict.*
21. J. Moore (1998) *Hard Choice: Moral dilemmas in the humanitarian invention*, Oxford-New York, Rowan, and Littedied Publishers Inc.

22. Journal du Cameroon (2018), "Anglophone crisis: Violence has driven over 160,000 persons into bushes", published on the 16th May 2018, Accessed on the 17th August 2024
23. Kate Mackintosh (2007). "Beyond the Red Cross: the protection of independent humanitarian Organizations and their Staff in international law" Volume 89, International Review of the Red Cross.
24. Kevin M. Cahill, M.D (1993), "A Framework for Survival: Health, Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict and Disaster", Routledge and the Center of International Health and Cooperation.
25. Knight, W.A, Egerton, F. (2012). The Routledge Handbook of the Responsibility of Protect (1st ed.) Routledge
26. Launch of the IASC Guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Available at <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org>
27. Moki Edwin K. (2020) *Rights Groups Condemn Attacks on Aid Workers in Cameroon*. Voice of America
28. Morel, M. (2014), *The Right Not to Be Displaced in International Law: Dissertation*, Cambridge: Intersentia
29. MSF. (2021), *Doctors without Borders ambulance fired on, in South West Cameroon*
30. Niels Dabelstein (1999) "Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies" OECD.
31. OCHA (2018). UN Civil-Military Coordination Handbook.
32. OCHA (2019) Cameroon: North West and South West Crisis Situation Report.
33. OCHA (2019) Humanitarian Respond Plan.
34. OCHA (2019) UN Emergency Fund provides \$ 75 million to eight underfunded crises.
35. OCHA Cameroon (2024) Six things to know about the humanitarian crisis, Cameroon Situation Report.
36. OCHA Humanitarian Affairs officer available at www.humanitarianresponse.info accessed 21st July 2024. In the absence of an HC position, the Resident Coordinator (RC). The term HC also refers to both RC/HCs and stand-alone HCs
37. OCHA, (2024) North-West and South-West Situation Report.

38. OCHA (2021) Cameroon: Multilateral action is needed to address the human rights crisis in Cameroon, <https://reliefweb.int/country/cmr>
39. OCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2022 <https://2022.gho.unocha.org>
40. Plan of action for the first phase (2005-2007) of the world programmed for Human Rights Education (A/59/525/Rev.1,2 March 2005).
41. RES/48/57 on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of UN: resolution adopted by the General Assembly.
42. Rhoda K.M. (2019) "Text and Material on International Human Rights" (4th ed.) Routledge-Cavendish
43. Robert Muggah (2023). Organized crime in Armed Conflict and other situations of violence, IRCC, No 933. ICJ, Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaraguan (Nicaragua V. United States of America), Judgment, ICJ Reports 1996.
44. Scott Sheeran, Nigel Rodley (2014), "Routledge Handbook of International Human Rights Law" (1st ed.) Routledge
45. The Protection of Humanitarian Crisis, Joint Background Paper by OHCHR and UNHCR, 2013.
46. Tidwell Alan C., Conflict Resolved: A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution, Pinter London and New York, 1988.
47. UN Security Council, permits the import of petroleum and petroleum products originating in Iraq, as a temporary measure to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people, 14 April 1995, UN Doc, S/RES/986
48. UNDP (2022) The Renewed Governance and Peacebuilding Framework for Africa.
49. UNHCR (2018) Cameroon factsheet, Situation Report.
50. UNHCR (2019) Cameroon situation: Responding to the needs of IDPs and the Cameroon Refugees in Nigeria
51. UNHCR (2022) North West and South West Cameroon: Shelter Cluster Strategy
52. UNHCR, Supplementary appeal, Cameroon situation Responding to the need of IDPs and Cameroon Refugees in Nigeria, 2019.
53. United Nations Organizational Chart available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> accessed 21st July 2024