Introducing Peace: Women in Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis

Cameroun is on the brink of civil war. The Northwest and Southwest, Cameroon’s two English-speaking regions and home to roughly 20% of the population, have been embroiled in violent conflict since October 2016. Anglophone teachers and lawyers in Bamenda and Buea, the capitals of the two Anglophone regions, began a nonviolent protest movement. The Cameroon government responded with force and the crisis escalated. It is estimated the conflict has resulted in at least 2,000 deaths and 500,000 displaced.

Women and children are often disproportionately impacted by conflict. But media reporting on the Anglophone crisis has largely excluded women: of some 1,964 English articles written on the crisis from October 2016 to March 2019, only 16% mention women, whereas 61% discuss men. Conflict and peacebuilding experts emphasize the importance of women’s inclusion and acknowledge their pivotal role in achieving peace.

This project seeks to use spatial analysis and a vulnerability assessment to calculate the numbers of women particularly vulnerable in the divisions of the Northwest and Southwest. Using the same analysis on development data from before the conflict, the project assesses whether these indicators could have predicted patterns of violence or vulnerability.

Methodology

I conducted vulnerability analysis on development indicators from before the crisis, as well as on humanitarian and violent incident data. This was to assess both the locations of vulnerable populations and the numbers of vulnerable women from both before and after the start of the crisis. This information can be used to inform a targeted humanitarian response and peacebuilding possibilities and capacities.

Development data came from IPUMS and dated from 2005, while population data was retrieved from the Cameroonian Census Bureau’s 2010 assessments. Conflict information from October 2016–April 2019 came from ACLED; HDX provided information on humanitarian needs and administrative boundaries dating from March 2019.

Vulnerability was assessed by the following normalized indicators:
- Years of Education
- Literacy
- Dirt Floors
- Electricity Access
- Formal Employment of Men
- Formal Employment of Women
- Female Distribution
- Young Men Density
- IDPs
- Non-Food Items Needs
- Education Needs
- Nutrition Needs
- Child Protection Needs
- Health Needs
- Food Needs
- WASH Needs
- Gender-Based Violence Needs
- Violent Incidents
- Fatality Density

Results and Discussion

The development vulnerability and conflict vulnerability assessment composite maps appear to contradict each other. This is shown, however, that in the case of the Anglophone crisis, development indicators were not predictors of the conflict. However, three of the development indicators—concentrations of young men (ages 15–39), density of female population, and density of the female labor force—are correlated with the conflict vulnerability.

The Northwest, which has one of the highest densities of women in the country, has a lower conflict vulnerability, despite being quite underdeveloped. The statistical significance of the “Female Density vs. Conflict Vulnerability” graph supports the assertion that women contribute positively to peacebuilding. Women are vital actors in conflict mitigation and any possible solutions for the Anglophone crisis must ensure women’s meaningful inclusion and participation.

Conclusion

The statistically significant inverse relationship between female density and conflict vulnerability provides high hopes for the fledgling women’s peacebuilding initiatives in the crisis. IDP numbers continue to grow and women are increasingly vulnerable. But the presence of women—especially those who are gainfully employed—can play an important role in conflict mitigation.

References

Cartographer: Sarah Raydi (Sasha) Lanza
Class: DHP 207
Date: May 6, 2019
Projection: WGS 1984 UTM 32N
Sources: ACLED, Cameroon Census Bureau, GADM, Humanitarian Data Exchange, IPUMS

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