



# ADVOCACY NOTE TO DONORS

**THE STATE of the HUMANITARIAN CRISIS in the NORTHWEST and  
SOUTHWEST regions of CAMEROON**

May 2024

Julien is a 36-year-old single mother of four, originated from Ndu subdivision, in the Northwest region. She was forced to flee with her children due to unprecedented violence in her community. ©NRC, 2024.



## Context

The conflict in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon has deep roots, but its recent escalation began in 2016 when the government suppressed the protests by workers in the regions' educational and judicial systems.

After 7 years of a volatile and complex crisis, the humanitarian situation in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon is still very alarming. Chronic instability due to the protracted fighting between Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) and State Security Forces (SSF) is still leading to human rights violations and increased constraints on humanitarian access.

NSAGs continue to disrupt daily life in the North-West and South-West regions. "Monday ghost town" strikes halt public activities, delaying school reopening and threatening farming livelihoods. NSAGs have been documented, punishing non-compliance with these strikes through violence. The situation further escalated with extortions, kidnappings and violence against civilians perceived to be affiliated with the central government because they carry legal documentation or seek basic services such as healthcare services in public health facilities.

Clashes between NSAGs and government forces are frequent, with roadside bombings and military operations causing casualties on both sides. And while the government targets prominent NSAGs fighters, civilian casualties are also rising due to the destruction of houses during military operations and deliberate attacks on civilians by NSAGs.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has also increased: at least 9 incidents were reported during the month of March alone<sup>1</sup>, while prolonged roadblocks and lockdowns prevent humanitarian aid to reach those in need. This violence has led to the deterioration and destruction of many basic social services infrastructure and has forced over 1.04 million people to move since the start of the crisis<sup>2</sup>.

### Humanitarian needs

According to HRP 2024, **over 1.3 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in the two regions with a level of severity of needs deemed "extreme" (4/5) in 7 out of the 13 divisions in the North-West and South-West regions<sup>3</sup>. Displaced and conflict-affected populations face severe challenges accessing basic services, notably protection, education and healthcare.**

Food insecurity still affects 11% of the population in the North-West and South-West regions<sup>4</sup>, amounting to over 854,000 food-insecure persons<sup>5</sup>. Access to clean water and sanitation is precarious, with 33% consuming unprotected water<sup>6</sup>. Property destruction caused by the conflict has intensified the need for shelters, prompting individuals to seek safety in distant and/or hard-to-reach locations where basic services are scarce or in semi-urban areas, on the outskirts of urban centres, thus increasing pressure on already strained resources. Local capacity is critically under-resourced and the number of local Non Governmental Organisations (LNGOs) recognised by the Cameroonian state is far too low to answer the humanitarian needs of both regions.

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<sup>1</sup> [OCHA. Cameroon: North-West and South-West SitRep, March 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [idem](#)

<sup>3</sup> [OCHA. Cameroon 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Cadre Harmonisé, Oct 2023](#)

<sup>5</sup> [OCHA. Cameroon 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview](#)

<sup>6</sup> [idem](#)



### A Complex Crisis with Limited Solutions

Unlike other crises in Cameroon (e.g. Far North), the conflict in North-West and South-West regions is rooted in deep-seated cultural and linguistic identity issues. Reconstruction efforts will be unlikely to succeed unless these root causes are addressed.

While some development initiatives have improved infrastructure, most public services remain disrupted due to destruction or fear of reprimand by NSAGs. In remote areas, NSAGs demand "liberation taxes" and threaten civilians, making travel very dangerous. Additionally, access for humanitarian organisations is becoming increasingly difficult due to bureaucratic hurdles placed by regional authorities and some divisions or locations remain inaccessible for the time being.

### An Invisible Crisis

Despite its severity, the crisis receives less attention because displaced people are typically hosted by relatives and neighbouring communities, unlike situations with formal displacement camps.

The sensitive nature of the North-West South-West crisis has also led to a deliberate misleading narrative on humanitarian needs from certain stakeholders.

This lack of visibility makes it even more critical to mobilise international attention and humanitarian assistance to those most affected. No communities that have humanitarian needs should be bypassed for assistance.

**CHINGO and its member organisations are therefore requesting donors to:**

Create discussions opportunities with INGOs, LNGOs to hear from them about the humanitarian situation. INGOs and LNGOs commit to regularly strive to depict the humanitarian situation to donors, as they are often not able to go to the field in NWSW for security reasons, through sitreps, virtual visits, videos, and oral briefings.

Strengthen advocacy work towards governmental authorities to accredit local organisations in the NWSW and simplify internal processes for LNGOs to be eligible to direct funding from international donors.

Ensure increased funding and flexibility of funding for a timely, evidence-based and high-quality response to new and ongoing displacements in the NWSW (for instance, strengthening IM capacities).

Use the opportunities of different forums and media (e.g. UN meetings, donor meetings etc.) to inform international decision-makers of the on-going fighting and dare needs in these two regions.

## Sector-specific recommendations

We recognize the sensitive nature of the North-West and South-West regions crisis and however, we are calling for the donor community (humanitarian and development) to mobilize efforts and resources on the following sectors where gaps are harming lasting positive changes.

### Protection

Ongoing violence, including clashes between NSAGs and SSF, deteriorates the protection environment, leads to frequent pendular displacement, and exposes conflict-affected populations to multiple forms of deprivation and increased protection risks. The protection needs of women, men, boys and girls are increasing. For women and girls, the risk of GBV is higher while men and boys are increasingly exposed to mass arrests, beating, illegal detention, torture, kidnapping, extra-judicial executions. Enrolment into NSAGs and disappearance<sup>7</sup>. GBV cases are on the rise, while life-threatening coping strategies such as sex for survival have been adopted in many divisions<sup>8</sup>. Adding to this, only a limited number of people in their community have birth certificates (confiscated, lost or destroyed). The lack of civil documentation associated with the fear of arrest therefore restricts freedom of movement, hindering access to livelihood opportunities. This contributes to domestic violence as women take on the breadwinner role and can also increase the number of children being involved in child labor<sup>9</sup>. In the recent years, the effective protection response has been challenged due to a significant reduction of specialized partners and low response capacities in addressing protection risks such as force evictions and damaged houses. We ask donors to:

Box 1. A snapshot of DRC's monthly incident tracker

In April 2024 alone, 2 people were killed by NSAGs for failing to respect ghost town rules and 6 others were abducted and tortured then released for ransom in Kupe. Another person was beaten up under suspicions of spying for NSAGs and over 110 civilians were arrested during mass search operations in their homes in Fako division.

Support local stakeholders in the NWSW promoting civil rights, GBV-responses and awareness of civil documentation issues through financial and technical assistance.

Ensure continuity of funding between humanitarian and development donor communities to build sustainable interoperability amongst social protection services.

### Health

The North-West and South-West regions crisis has severely disrupted healthcare access. Many health facilities remain destroyed and unrepaired, leaving the population without vital services. Shortages of qualified staff, medicines, essential equipment, medical supplies and vaccine cold chain equipment worsen barriers. With routine power and water outages, health facilities cannot run under minimum standards. Inadequate sanitation heightens disease risks, as seen with cholera outbreaks in 2023, demanding urgent improvements in 2024.

Box 2. Attacks on health facilities and health workers

Attack to the Integrated Health Centre (IHC) in Ballin is an example of the blindness of violence as it was destroyed during intercommunal clashes, killing over 30 people, including women and children.

Community health workers lack recognition and are not paid regularly, hindering outreach and incentive to go to hard-to-reach areas where counterfeit drugs are highly prevalent. Absence

<sup>7</sup> Delphine Brun, 2021. [A failure to address the vulnerability of men and boys | NRC](#)

<sup>8</sup> CARE and Interos, March 2024. Protection monitoring in the West and Littoral Regions.

<sup>9</sup> DRC, Quarterly Protection Monitoring Report, April-June 2023



of ambulances services complicates emergency care during conflict. In many instances, people have had to carry the victim on their heads for several hours before reaching the nearest health centre. Mental health services are scarce, aggravating distress amid traumas. We ask humanitarian and development donors to:

Strengthen community health care and mental health support by investing more in the rehabilitation and strengthening of health infrastructures.

Prioritize Mental Health Services and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities.

Encourage and support national and international health actors to intervene in hard-to-reach areas to provide quality medical care services.

### Education

Since the start of the crisis, thousands of girls and boys have dropped out of school as a result of schools being burnt, closed or because they have been displaced to new areas where there are no functional schools or where schools are being targeted by armed groups. With the slow reopening of schools/community schools, more internally displaced persons and returnee children have returned to school within the North-West South-West regions – 59% are now functional<sup>10</sup>. However, efforts are hampered due to continuous attacks on education, lockdowns and calls for school boycott. Overcrowded classrooms and increased school fees were also noted in localities less affected by insecurity. The conflict not only hampers access to education but also perpetuates a cycle where children, seen as economic assets, forego their developmental rights. Child labor has detrimental impacts on children, causing physical and mental harm and school dropouts. It exposes children to GBV and exploitation. Humanitarian NGOs need to be empowered to implement tailored educational strategies in the regions, ultimately mitigating the risk of child recruitment by armed groups. We ask donors to:

Box 3. Extract from CEC's Joint Education Needs Assessment NWSW, March 2024

Primary schools in North-West have experienced an estimated 154 attacks and preschools, 56 attacks. Majority of the children and youth in school affirmed that they are not safe on the way to/from school especially schools that are further away from town. They further said that they are afraid of being attacked, force recruitment, kidnap, and rape.

Advocate with the Ministry of Basic Education for the swift approval of accelerated learning program modules to expedite children's return to education and address dropout rates.

Propose long-term funding opportunities for education in the North-West and South-West regions that allow partners to adapt tools and approaches that respond to the direct needs for out-of-school children.

We, CHINGO and Country Directors of international NGOs intervening in Cameroon, thank you for your support and urge you to consider the urgent need for action on filling the humanitarian gaps in the North-West and South-West regions.

<sup>10</sup> [Cameroon Education Cluster/UNICEF. Education Under Attack Northwest & Southwest Regions Updates \(January 2024\)](#)