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Exploring the Child Labour and Human Security Nexus in an Armed Conflict Setting: The Case of the Anglophone Regions of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the intricate relationship between child labour and human security in the context of armed conflict, with specific focus on the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Despite international conventions and national legislation prohibiting child labour, armed conflicts often exacerbate its prevalence due to the breakdown of societal structures, displacement, and economic instability. In the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, the protracted conflict has significantly impacted the lives of children, pushing many into exploitative labour practices for survival, posing significant threats to the well-being and security of the children and communities. Using the quantitative research design, this article elucidates the ways in which armed conflict perpetuates and intensifies child labour practices in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. It explores how factors such as displacement, economic hardship, breakdown of social structures, and lack of access to education contribute to the vulnerability of children to exploitative labour conditions. Consequently, the article examines the various forms of child labour prevalent in the region, including the worst forms of child labour such as child trafficking, and recruitment by armed groups, and assesses their implications for human security. Findings reveal that child labour has multifaceted impacts on human security, affecting not only the immediate well-being of children but also the stability and security of the communities and societies as a whole. The various dimensions of human security such as: education, health, personal and economic security of the child labourers is affected imposing long term consequences such as perpetuating cycles of poverty and limiting future opportunities for socio-economic advancement and also hampering broader efforts to build resilient and prosperous communities. This research contributes to the broader discourse on child labour and human security by highlighting the specific dynamics at play in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

KEY WORDS: Armed Conflict, Anglophone Regions of Cameroon, Child Labour, Human Security.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of child labour is worsened in times of armed conflict as it increases and it effects are exacerbated. The UN Secretary-General in a report on children and armed conflict in 2015, indicates that the incidence of child labour in countries affected by armed conflict is 77 per cent higher than the global average, while the incidence of hazardous work is 50 per cent higher in countries affected by armed conflict than in the world as a whole (UN, 2015). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2010) presents a clear picture of how this happens. Accordingly, violent conflict increases child labour and the worst forms of child labour by: generating worst forms of child labour such as the use of children in armed conflict and child sexual exploitation; deepening poverty and increasing the proportion of impoverished households, leading to a greater reliance on child-generated income; disrupting education provisions and increasing barriers to access quality education, leaving children unskilled and consequently more likely to engage in the worst forms of child labour; increasing the demand for children in the informal economy since their labour is often cheaper than that of adults; breaking down the social fabric of families and communities and undermining through displacement, poverty and a culture of violence, traditional child protection mechanisms, while exposing children to the worst forms of child labour; reducing legal protection mechanisms as State's institutional capacity is diverted towards the war effort, generating a culture of impunity; constituting a major challenge in the fight against child labour.

Child labour and human security represent intersecting concerns in armed conflict contexts, particularly in regions with protracted crises. In Cameroon's Anglophone regions (the North West and South West regions), the conflict that erupted in 2016 has created a precarious environment, forcing children into exploitative labour as a survival strategy. This dynamic not only undermines their development but also destabilizes the broader community. Reports by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as of November,

2019 held that over 855,000 children are out of school in the North West and South West with 80% of schools shut down. According to Toby Fricker - UNICEF's spokesperson, this situation exposes these children to a higher risk of recruitment by armed groups, child marriage, early pregnancy and other forms of exploitation and abuse (Child Protection Cluster, 2019). Children especially boys risks being recruited into armed groups which have short and long term consequences for their health and development (Child Protection Cluster, 2019). Also, by June 2020, 679 thousand people have been internally displaced, 59 thousands displaced as refugees in Nigeria as a result of the conflict with a majority being women and children (United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), (2020). The majority of the displaced population previously relied on agriculture or raising livestock for both food and income (Fox & Lamarche, 2019). Forced to flee their villages, they now lack access to fields and markets. This circumstance has increased the threat of food insecurity. According to OCHA (2019) 315 thousand people in the regions are in extreme food insecurity. These conditions (school disruption, displacement, food insecurity) presents opportunities for getting more children involved in child labour and its worst forms as coping mechanisms in these regions. This has serious consequences on the health and education of children involved which poses threats to human security. The ILO (2010) observed that when children are unable to acquire educational competencies such as reading and writing, this will leave them as youth and adults with very restricted options besides working in low remunerate jobs, consequently recreating the conditions for the perpetuation of poverty, inequality and social exclusion thereby reinforcing those grievances that once led to a conflict break-out.

This paper investigates the link between child labour and human security in these regions. The analysis is guided by the human security framework, which prioritizes the protection of individuals from critical and pervasive threats to their well-being. As such the study seeks to answer two major research questions: 1) how does the conflict in the Anglophone region exacerbate child labour? 2) What are the human security implications of child labour in this context?

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Child Labour

International law operates on a series of key assumptions about child labour. Most of these regard it as a negative phenomenon, a social evil, something from which a child ought to be shielded from (Abernethie, 1998). The general reasoning behind this assumption is that childhood is exclusively a time for school, leisure and play, and not a time for burdening a child with responsibilities other than those of education. Another assumption is that all work under a certain age is bad for children, because they are not sufficiently physically and psychologically developed. Employment for children is considered to be wrong as wage labour is characterised by the marginal quality of the tasks, which are unproductive, ill-paid, and can be done without any formal skills whatsoever (Rodgers and Standing, 1981). Employment thus 'exposes children to exploitation, as they are in no position to negotiate their salaries or to demand proper working conditions' (Rodgers and Standing, 1981). Western societies also assume that children who work are generally unable to attend school, and that work itself gives them no opportunity to acquire the skills that may in future help in retaining a job in the formal sector ((Pierik R & Houwerzijl, 2006). Another assumption is that work by children for unrelated adults is likely to be harmful because children will not be protected by the natural affection linking kinfolk (Rodgers and Standing, 1981). In sum, the term "child labour" encompasses work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and dignity, and opportunities for education, often harmful to their physical and mental development (ILO, 2020).

2.2 Armed Conflict

Armed conflict is broadly defined as a situation involving the use of armed force between two or more organized parties. The Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols distinguish between international armed conflicts (IAC), involving at least two states, and non-international armed conflicts (NIAC), occurring within a state between government forces and non-state actors, or among non-state actors themselves (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2016).
The armed conflict in Cameroon is often referred to as the Anglophone Crisis. This conflict involves government forces and various non-state armed groups. Cameroon has long been viewed as a model of stability in a region fraught with conflict. Under the surface, however, tensions between its Anglophone and Francophone populations have simmered for decades. The Anglophone minority, mostly concentrated in the North West and South West regions, has been marginalized, discriminated against, and economically disenfranchised since a referendum ended federalism and joined the two populations in a full political union in 1972. Looking back at Cameroon's history, it is largely recognized that the source of the conflict takes roots in the Colonial era. Under European occupation, 80% of the country was administered by the French and 20% was in the hands of the British Empire. French and English-speaking mandated territories were unified in 1961 to form what we know today as the Republic of Cameroon. Subsequently, the country officially adopted the two languages, two educational systems and two legal systems (Searcey, 2018). However, due to the disproportionate demography within the country, "the government was accused of relying heavily on people trained in the French legal and educational tradition to work

in key posts and generally marginalizing Cameroon's English-speaking minority, who make up about 20% of the population" (Tah, 2018). The Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) (2020: 3) advances contested state structures and political and socio-economic inequality as the main causes of the Anglophone crisis. The changes in the political structure (spanning from the federal to unitary systems) that Cameroon has undergone in trying to consolidate post-colonial unity are the reasons why many protesting Anglophones feel their cultural and historical uniqueness has been trounced in the union (IPSS, 2020:4).

In late 2016, instability gave way to violence when protests against the government's imposition of Francophone teachers and lawyers in Anglophone schools and courts were met with military action (Tah, 2018). The government's reaction to the protests resulted in the formation of several non-state armed groups and fueled existing separatist sentiment. Following the protests that emerged in October 2016 from Anglophone teachers and lawyers, according to International Crisis Group, "the situation escalated towards an armed insurrection at the end of 2017 and has since degenerated into a civil war" (International Crisis Group, 2019).

2.3 Human Security

The human security approach, as defined by the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, focuses on protecting individuals from violence, poverty, and other existential threats. In conflict settings, human security encompasses physical safety, access to basic needs, and the preservation of dignity.

The Commission on Human Security (CHS), in its final report *Human Security Now,* defines human security as:

> //…to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. Human security means protecting fundamental freedoms – freedoms that are the essence of life. It means protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people's strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity." (CHS, 2003: 4).

Overall, the definition proposed by the CHS re-conceptualizes security in a fundamental way by: (i) moving away from traditional, state-centric conceptions of security that focused primarily on the safety of states from military aggression, to one that concentrates on the security of the individuals, their protection and empowerment; (ii) drawing attention to a multitude of threats that cut across different aspects of human life and thus highlighting the interface between security, development and human rights; and (iii) promoting a new integrated, coordinated and people-centered approach to advancing peace, security and development within and across nations (United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS), 2009).

III. FINDINGS ON CHILD LABOUR AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE ANGLOPHONE REGIONS OF CAMEROON.

Through employing the quantitative research design with data collected from primary sources such as face to face interviews with 350 children involved in child labour and secondary sources such as documentaries, reports, articles, policy documents and books, the study made the following findings:

3.1 THE FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR DURING ARMED CONFLICT

This section critically examines the the manifestations of child labour in an armed conflict situation and their driving forces.

The findings from this study carried out in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon, prove that a lot of children have become/and are becoming increasingly involved in child labour due to the conflict that has plagued these regions since 2016. Reports hold that children from Anglophone Cameroon are facing serious long-term consequences for their development, and have become extremely vulnerable in the short term. This has been caused by school boycotts, separation from families, destruction and closure of schools, destruction of villages. School boycotts which is one of the main instruments used by the separatist fighters to advance their course, is severely affecting a whole generation of children. According to OCHA (2019), this is not only due to the intrinsic dangers and physical violence involved, but because forced absenteeism has exposed these children to significant risks of diverse forms of sexual violence, association to armed forces and armed groups, and family separation; all leading to extended psychosocial distress and mental disorders. In particular, young men and boys who have been targeted by armed forces and armed groups are often forced to flee their homes to avoid being recruited, yet voluntary enrollment has also been reported to be a coping mechanism adopted by many of them (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The children in these regions are therefore found to be involved in many forms of child labour, including the worst forms.

The study found that children in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon get involved in various type of child labour activities both paid and unpaid. Of the three hundred and fifty (350) children interviewed, eleven (11) different areas of work were identified for them. These children are involved in hawking/street vending (28%), domestic service/labour (20%), babysitting (9%), farming (17%), truck pushing (7%), store/kiosks keeping (6%), child prostitution/commercial sexual exploitation (4%), street children (4%), drug trafficking (1%)   forced or compulsory use of children in non-state Armed Conflict (4%) and child

trafficking. There is no percentage allocation for child trafficking because most of the children involved in the other forms of child labour identified here (such as hawking, domestic service) have been trafficked for such purposes. Table 3.1.1 below clearly indicates the findings on the various forms of child labour in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon.

Table 3.1.1: Work Activities of Children in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon during the conflict

Type of activity	Age range for the various activities	Girls		Boys		Total
		Foster child	Own child	Foster child	Own child	
Hawking/street vending	5-17	32	18	30	20	100
Domestic service/labour	9-17	40	13	12	05	70
Farming	6-17	12	18	07	13	60
Babysitting	6-17	15	08	05	02	30
Truck pushing	9-17	00	00	17	06	23
Store Keeping	9-17	03	01	14	04	22
Street children	7-17	07	00	07	01	15
Forced or compulsory used of children in non-state Armed Conflict	10-17	02	01	06	06	15
Child prostitution/child sexual exploitation	13-17	10	03	00	00	13
Drug trafficking	12-17	00	00	02	00	02
Total		**121**	**62**	**100**	**57**	**350**

Source: field work (August to September, 2019)

Findings from the study indicated that many of the working children live with guardians (foster children) and some with their biological parents (own children). Also, as noted some of the children living with guardians had been separated from their parents due to the conflict. For instance, major interviews conducted in the towns of these regions such as Buea, Limbe, Kumba, Mutengene, Tiko and Bamenda, which experience relative calm compared to the villages, came across many child workers that have fled from the hard hit conflict villages to live with guardians in these towns. Of those living with biological parents, majority are from single-parent households and in most cases, it is the mother that is present and the father absent due to death, separation or divorce. In some instances, these are just single mothers who have never been married and the fathers of these children are irresponsible and do not recognise the children. In essence, these households are female headed. The guardians under which these children work were found to be mostly family relations such as brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins. In other cases, the children live and work with people with whom they have no blood relationship.
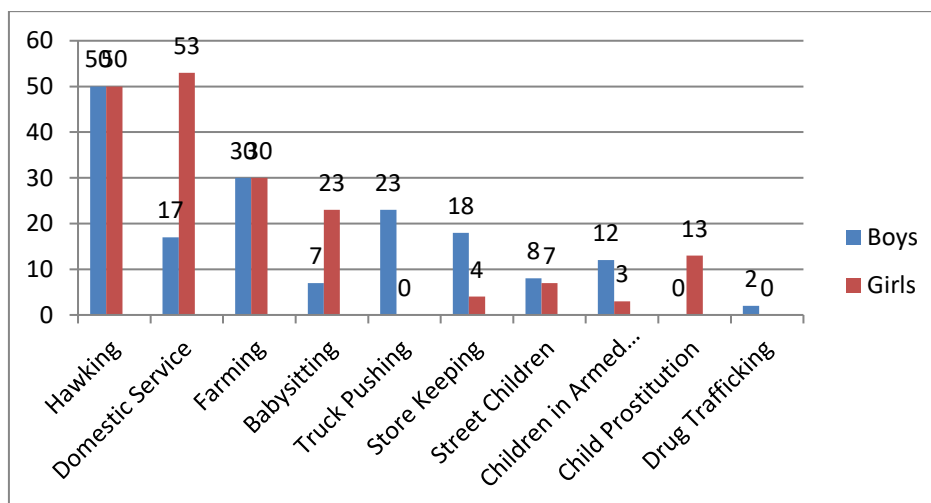

Figure 3.1.1 Column Chart: The participation of children in each activity according to sex.
Source: Field work (August to September, 2019).

As seen in Fig. 3.1.1 above, findings proved that the girls are generally more economically active than the boys with some of the work activities portraying this gender gap clearly. Of 350 children interviewed, 183(52%) were female, while 167(48%) were male. This is just a slight variation of 16. Fig. 3.1.1 presents the activities that adequately portray this gender gap are domestic service; out of 70 domestic servants, 53 (76%) are females and 17 (24%) are males, babysitting; out of 30 babysitters, 23 (77%) are females and 7 (23%) are males, and finally child prostitution or commercial sexual exploitation; of 13 child sex workers, no male was found. While two activities, that is, hawking and farming had an equal number of males and females.

This gender gap can be attributed to the adherence to traditional gender roles which have left most girls denied their right to education and more inclined to domestic labour than boys.

Table 3.1.2 and Fig.3.1.2 below presents findings on the schooling and working of children during conflict in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon.

Table 3.1.2: Schooling and Working by children in the North West and South West of Cameroon during the Armed Conflict

Schooling and working by children	Number of children	Percentage of children
Working only	205	59%
Combining school and work	105	30%
Work only during holiday	40	11%
Total	350	100%

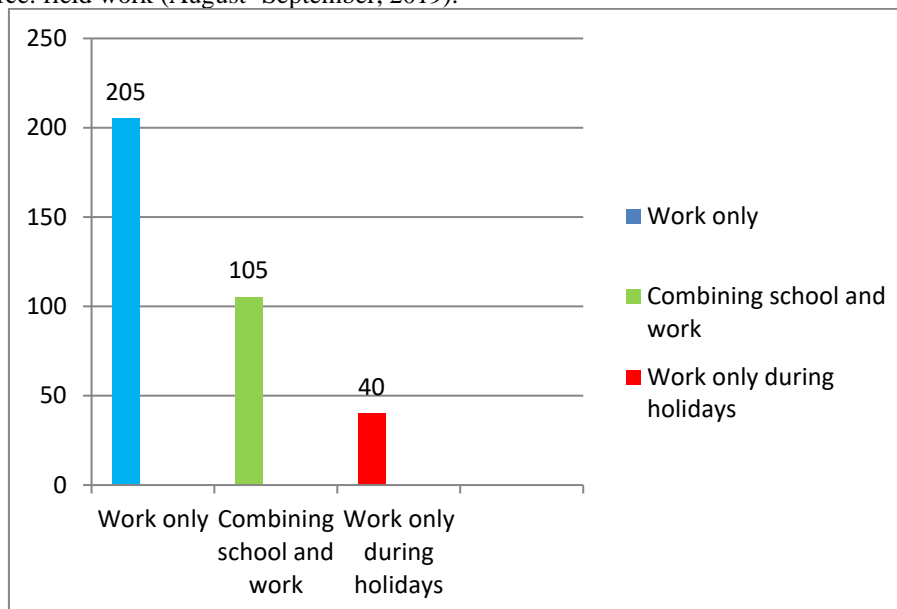Source: field work (August- September, 2019).

Figure 3.1.2 Column Chart: Schooling and working of children in the North West and South West of Cameroon during the Conflict

Source: field work (August to September, 2019).

The findings as presented in table 3.1.2 and Fig. 3.1.2 above revealed that many children in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon are into full time labour as majority of them concentrate on work only. Of a sample size of 350 children, 205 (59%) of them concentrate on work only, 105 (30%) combine school and work, while the remaining 40 (11%) work only during holidays. The concentration of most children on work only, is greatly explained by the armed conflict that has plagued these two regions. Schools have been shut down and others burnt/destroyed. Most individuals including parents, teachers, pupils and students have fled their localities for their safety. Consequently, children in these regions are unable to attend school. Some that have fled to other areas are struggling with issues of basic necessities such as clothing, feeding and housing and education has gradually become a far fetch idea for many of them. These children therefore get involved in various child labour activities to fend for themselves. Others are used by their relatives for their own selfish interests. 105 (30%) of children combining school and work are mostly located in the urban areas of these regions as Bamenda, Kumba, Buea, Tiko, Limbe and few others. A vast majority, of the rural areas have their schools shut down and some of the villages are completely non-existent either because they have been burnt down or almost all human beings have fled for their safety to other places.

Child trafficking which is considered a Worst Form of Child Labour is one of the forms of child labour identified in this study. It has been perpetuated by the crisis in these regions. Children are trafficked from these regions to other regions for labour purposes. Some have been trafficked from the villages to the towns in the same regions where there is relative calm and security. More than 530,000 people including many children are reported to be internally displaced, 35,000 have sought refuge in neighbouring Nigeria (OCHA, 2019). The displacement of children due to the conflict greatly exposes them to dangers including child trafficking.

The discussion above on the forms of child labour in the NW and SW of Cameroon clearly brings out four types of child labour distribution according to status in employment. These are:

1. Children working for their family or guardian without pay
2. Children working for their own survival
3. Children working with other families on agreement to later learn a skill or go to school.
4. Children working for other families with pay

The above distribution of child labour according to status in employment is presented in Table 3.1.3 and Fig. 3.1.3 below.

Table 3.1.3: Child Labour Distribution by Status in Employment

Employment Status	Type of Activity	Number of Children	Total Number of Children	percentage of Children
Children working for their family or guardian without pay	-Hawking -Farming -Store Keeping -Truck pushing	88 43 1 8	140	40%
Children working for their own survival	-farming -Truck Pushing -Street Children -Armed Children -Child Prostitution -Drug Trafficking	17 15 15 15 13 2	77	22%
Children working on agreement to learn a skill or school	-Domestic Service -Babysitting -Store Keeping	50 26 17	93	27%
Children working with other family for payment	-Hawking -Domestic Service -Babysitting -Store Keeping	12 20 4 4	40	11%
Total		350	350	100%

Source: Field work (August to September, 2019).

Figure 3.1.3 Pie Chart: Status of Employment for Child Labourers in the North West and South West Region.

Source: Field work (August to September, 2019).

3.2 DRIVERS OF CHILD LABOUR DURING ARMED CONFLICT
i) Disruption of Education

Child labour increases with conflict and its effects are exacerbated. Due to the conflict in North West and South West regions several children have become increasingly involved in child labour and especially its worst forms. Since the start of the conflict in October, 2016, schools have not been going on in the North West and South West regions especially in the rural areas. Even in the major towns of the regions where schools are ongoing, forced absenteeism imposed by separatist armed groups have significantly affected the education of children. OCHA humanitarian report of June, 2020 states that only 6% of the 2020 targeted 355,000 children (3 – 17 years) affected by crisis have had access to quality formal or non-formal basic education (OCHA, 2020). Also, that according to statistics from the North West Regional Delegation of Secondary Education, exams scheduled for secondary level students in June, 2020, registered just 82 candidates (OCHA, 2020).The absence of schooling has led many children into child labour. Of course, when children cannot go to school, they are forced to work. Child labour has become a coping mechanism for many children in these regions. This explains why of all the forms of child labour identified in this study, the conflict in these regions was advanced by many of the children involved as a major push factor. Some parents have put their children below the age 14 (which is the minimum age for employment and apprenticeship in Cameroon) as apprentices to various skills. This could have adverse effects on their health. A 9 year old boy in Bafmeng, a village in the North West region narrates that:

> Since there is no school, my mother decided to enroll me into welding so that I can learn something useful. Her fear is that I will be roaming the village and there is a high risk of me getting abducted by armed men. My elder brother who is 12 years old has also been enrolled into carpentry for the same reasons (Interviewed on August 9, 2019).

ii) Displacement

Several villages have been completely burnt down and destroyed leaving inhabitants and children frustrated and homeless. The Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA) reported in April, 2019 that over 206 villages have been burnt down in Anglophone Cameroon (107 in the North West and 99 in the South West) (CHRDA, 2019). As a result, a vast majority of the population has been displaced. OCHA reports in June, 2020 that 679,000 people have been internally displaced and that 59,000 Anglophone Cameroonians are now refugees in Nigeria due to the Anglophone conflict. This has greatly encourage child trafficking (both domestically and externally), a worst form of child labour for various purposes especially domestic service according to the findings of this study. Many of these children have become involved in armed conflict, 15 of whom were interviewed in this study. Others have become street children, some involved in child prostitution. And many others involved in domestic labour, hawking and farming. A 13 year old boy who fled from Kwakwa (a village that has been completely burnt down in the South West region) to Kumba explained that:

> Our house and many other houses in the village were burnt down and my father shot and killed by military men. My mother and 2 of my siblings succeeded in fleeing to the bush. After spending 3 weeks in the bush, it was very difficult for us to cope. We found our way to my uncle's house in Kumba. Back in Kumba things are very difficult and we cannot even feed well. My uncle roast cow meat (commonly called soya) and he has decided to look for another place for me, where I roast meat from 9 am to 11pm every day. It is very tiring for me, but it is the only way for us to raise money to take care of ourselves now (interviewed on September 20, 2019).

Furthermore, displacement and deaths caused by the conflict has led to family separation. A report from DW - a popular international TV channel on June 24, 2020 holds that over 3,000 persons have lost their lives as a result of the conflict. Several children have been separated from their families due to displacement or death and as a result, they are left to fend for themselves. As such, many have turned to child labour practices as coping mechanisms. As noted by the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ICTILO) (2010) family separation is intricately linked to child labour, particularly its worst forms, yet families have proven difficult to reunite in many cases. This may be due to an inability to recognize and remember long-lost family members, but it may also stem from the refusal of parents to accept the return of children who have been living on the street and are seen as "contaminated" by harsh or illegal activities. The children too may refuse to return to their parents, especially after they have experienced the sort of independence that goes with earning their own income, however meagre. Even when a family is reunited, this may not be permanent.

iii) Economic Hardship

In addition, the conflict has perpetuated household poverty which is a main cause for child labour. This is because thousands of people have lost their sources of livelihood and some have become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) struggling to make ends meet. The West and the Littoral regions have become homes to many fleeing the conflict hit North West and South West regions. Adults and children alike have adopted various coping mechanisms in these regions. Child prostitution has become common among many of these girls. Media reports triggered ruffle over IDPs of the Anglophone conflict turning to prostitution in the city of Douala to earn a living. These victims of war are reported to be engaging in sex with men just for a plate of food. In report by a French TV channel on June 12, 2019, one of the respondents, 18 years old said she was a student in Ekona (a village in

the South West region), before the crisis (Inang, 2019). According to her, the killing of four boys in her vicinity forced her to relocate. She explained that she does odd jobs during the day and at night she returns to a popular bar in Douala known as "Kwakwasa International" for prostitution. She added that her price ranges between 1,000 to 2,000 CFAF. Others are refugees in neighbouring Nigeria with many children getting into exploitative labour to get basic needs.

The entire of social fabric of the North West and South West region has been disconnected with businesses paralysed (Ngangnchi and Wujung, 2019: 380). The breakdown of the social structure in the North West and South West has been considered as one of the major social consequences of the crisis. Apart from the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC), Upper Noun Valley Development Authority (UNVDA) Ndop and a few other agro industrial plantations such as Cameroon Tea Estate, Delmonte Banana Plantation in the Regions, no major manufacturing company exists (Ngangnchi and Wujung, 2019: 380).According to the general manager of CDC over the famous CRTV radio programme – 'Cameroon Calling' on Sunday August 5th, 2018, out of 11 estates in operation prior to the crisis, none is working normally. The report further suggests that all the rubber estates have been shut down, leading to the loss of 7000 direct jobs in rubber, over 5000 job loss in Banana and 4500 lost jobs in the Palm sector. At least 500 business entities have been damaged in separate locations in connection to the uprising, including but not limited to the burning of markets, shops, individual stores, taxi cars and other transport buses, just to name a few (Ngangnchi and Wujung, 2019: 380). The production of goods and services in the two English speaking regions have dropped by more than 75% as the main agro industries are almost completely paralyzed (Ngangnchi and Wujung, 2019: 380). At the CDC, bananas, palms, rubber and other cash crops have been abandoned to themselves with no possibility of short term revival. The income of farmers, business persons and other economic interest groups has fallen sharply if not lost completely.

iv) The use of Children in Armed Conflict/child soldiers

This has to do with the use of children in armed conflict. According to the ILO (2015:4), this involves the unlawful recruitment or use of children through force, fraud, or coercion as combatants, or for labour or sexual exploitation by armed forces. Perpetrators may be government forces, paramilitary organizations, or rebel groups. Some children are made to work as porters, cooks, guards, servants, messengers, or spies. Young girls can be forced to marry or have sex with male combatants. Findings from this study indicate that children are becoming more involved in the armed conflict between the "Ambazonian" separatists' armed group and the Cameroon state. Several children of both sexes have picked up arms and joined the non-state armed group - the "Amba Boys" in the fight to separate from the Republic of Cameroon. As seen in table 3.2.1 below, the study came across 15 child soldiers belonging to the "Amba Boys" camp. Among these 15 children there were 3 girls. This children fall between the ages of 10 – 17 and do not attend school.

Table 3.2.1: The use of children in non-state armed conflict

Activity	No. of Children	Male	Female	Age range	Main activities	Have been Sexually Exploited
Use of children in armed conflict	15	12	3	10-17	-combatants -caretakers -cooks -spies	3

Source: Field work (August to September, 2019).

Some of these children have been forced to join the separatist group while others have joined voluntarily due to several circumstances; some because their parents or family members have been killed in the struggle, others because they believe in the course and believe that their living conditions will be better off, if their aim is achieved, and others see it as a coping mechanism. These children, who are all below 18 years of age, are involved in open hostilities in the battle field. The use of children in armed conflict is considered a worst form of child labour. Article 38 and Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), respectively, prohibit the use of children in armed conflict. In addition, Article 1 of the CRC Optional Protocol on the use of Children in Armed Conflict states that "states parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces who have not attained the age of 18 do not take direct part in hostilities." And in Article 2, it states that "states parties shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 are not compulsorily recruited into their armed forces.

These children spend most of their time in the bushes where their camps are located. The girls explained that they act as care takers to the combatants; preparing their food, taking care of those that have sustained minor wounds in the battle field, acting as spies by getting information from government forces and relaying it to the Amba Boys. All the three girls admitted being sexually exploited by the combatants and that sometimes their weapon as spies is offering sex just to get the information they need. According to the ILO (2015:6), sexual exploitation involves "any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another."

One of these girls - a 13 year-old in Konye (a village in the South West region) explained that she was abducted by the Amba Boys and she only found herself in their camp. And she has been sexually exploited severally against her wish. All the children in armed groups spent some of their time in their homes and most of the time in their hideouts.

3.3 CHILD LABOUR IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN SECURITY
    Child labour in the Anglophone Conflict undermines several dimensions of human security as evident in this study.

i)   Education Security
    Child labour is seen to have adverse negative effects on the education of children involved in it. Children as young as 7 work instead of attending school. The findings of this study showed that 205 (59%) of children were not attending school. These children including those as young as 7 concentrated on work as main activity. Of these 205, 110 (54%) reported to have dropped out of school because of school boycotts caused by the conflict. These children explained that their parents do not have the financial means to relocate to other regions in the country where schools are functioning to enroll them in school. One respondent, an 11 years old working as truck pusher in Santa (a village in the North West region) had this to say:

> I stopped going to school 2 years ago because of the crisis. My mother could not afford to send me to school in another region. For the first year, I just stayed at home doing nothing and it was really frustrating. My mother, for fear that I might join bad groups in the quarter or even join the Ambazonian separatists armed group, decided that I start pushing truck. We had a wheel barrow in the house which made it easier for me (Interviewed on August 12, 2019).

Most child labourers do not attend school as revealed by this study. This is aggravated by the conflict situation as the conflict has disrupted schooling. The implication of no schooling for human security is appalling. Child labour perpetuates illiteracy and last for generations to come. According to the ILO (2010:7) youth illiteracy as a result of conflict has wider consequences for a country's stability and general security level. Illiterate youths will only be able to find low-paid employment with which they are likely to be dissatisfied. Such dissatisfaction can result in the same grievances that originally started the conflict, thus bearing great security risks (ILO, 2010: 7). This is because there would be a perpetuation of poverty due to children's lack of even basic education. The ILO (2010) has equally observed that opportunities for ensuring human security and rebuilding lives will be considerably lowered, if the worst forms of child labour are a prominent feature of post-conflict situations. The absence of education for children has been seen to be a major future loss of human capital for them, thus encouraging the vicious cycle of poverty created by child labour.

Moreover, findings from this research and other research works have proven that, the education of the parents of a working child, determines to a great extent whether that child gets involved in labour or not. And it has been revealed that parents with a low level of education are more likely to send their children to work than those with a high level of education. The implication of this is that parents who worked as children and did not attend school, will more likely send their own children to work than to school and the cycle continues. Education enables children to acquire skills and experiences that will enable them gain decent employment. The absence of it leads to a vicious cycle of poverty, which is a persistent human security threat especially in most developing countries.

ii)   Health Security and Personal Security
    Child labour has negative effects on the health of the children involved in it. It affects the physical and mental development of the children involved. The health consequences of child labour have short and long term effects on the children. Health is a major component for development and individual well-being. For human development and individual well-being to be guaranteed, people need to be sufficiently protected against threats to their health. Armed conflict as seen in this study, increases the intensity of the effects of child labour as it pushes children to dangerous and hazardous forms of labour as coping mechanisms, which in turn are very dangerous for their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Findings from the study revealed that the health of the children is affected in three major ways: physiologically, psychosocially, and psychologically.

a)   Physiological effects
    All human beings and children especially need food to grow. A most basic requirement for good child development is energy to grow and this energy needs to come from a healthy and balanced diet. A hard working child needs more energy than a less active child because the body will burn a higher amount of calories during the working process. If there is insufficient energy for growth, the child's physiological development will suffer. This study found that of 350 children interviewed, 200 (57%) had feeding problems. These children reported that they are underfed. Table 3.3.1 below shows the feeding of these children.

Table 3.3.1: Children with Feeding Problems

Number of meals a day	Number of children	Percentage of children
1	52	26%
2	80	40%
3	68	34%
Total	200	100%

Source: Field work (August- September, 2019)

As shown in table 3.3.1 above, of these 200, 52 (26%) had just one meal a day. 80 (40%) had two meals and 68 (34%) have three meals a day. Even with three square meals a day, a majority complained that they are not fed to their satisfaction. This explains why many of them look malnourished and malnutrition has devastating effects on the physical and emotional development of a child. An 11 year old hawker of fried snails in Buea explained that:

> I leave the house as early as 6 am from Mutengene to Buea without eating. While on the field I have permission from my employer to use just 100 CFAF to buy something to eat. And usually whatever, I buy I do not get satisfied but I only have to endure the hunger till I get back home late in the evening before I eat (Interviewed on August, 25, 2019).

The conflict in these regions has a lot to do with the malnourishment of children. People have been displaced, lost their jobs, children have been separated from their families, others have had their parents and siblings killed, and normal daily activities have been interrupted. The conflict-affected populations are unable to engage in traditional coping mechanisms for food shortages resulting in higher rates of malnutrition. For instance, many who concentrate on agriculture in the rural areas have abandoned their farms for safety purposes. People are now just struggling to survive using various coping mechanisms. Among this coping mechanisms are: families fleeing with children to live in safer places, involving children in child labour, sending children to work for people; and also sending them off for early marriages. Having a meal a day has become very difficult for many families due to the conflict. As such many children are malnourished. An OCHA humanitarian report in 2019, estimates that, about 462,000 people in the North West and South West regions fall within the Crisis and Emergency phases of food insecurity calling for urgent action to protect and revive livelihoods, reduce food consumption gaps and reduce acute malnutrition (OCHA, 2019). This report equally estimated that up to 7,000 children between 6-59 months with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) were expected in the two regions until the end of 2018.

As presented in table 3.3.2 below, findings from the study also revealed that a good number 153 (44%) of these child labourers frequently get ill. Of these 153, 56 (37%) are hawkers, 20 (13%) are domestic servants, 10 (7%) are babysitters, 13 (8%) are truck pushers, 16(10%) are farmers, 12 (8%) are street children 8 (5%) are store keepers, 8 (5%) are child prostitutes, 10 (7%) are children in armed conflict.

Table 3.3.2: Children with frequent ill health due to work

Type of work activity	Number of children	Percentage of children
Hawking	56	37
Domestic Service	20	13
Babysitting	10	7
Truck pushing	13	8
Farming	16	10
Street children	8	5
Store keeping	8	5
Children in armed conflict	10	7
Total	**153**	**100**

Source: Field work (August to September, 2019).

Many of the hawkers and street children reported frequently catching cold, cough and fever due the rains and cold outside while they are hawking. A good number of the child farmers reported being exposed to toxic chemicals that sometimes affect their breathing and eyes. As observed and also affirmed by the children, the child farmers do not use any safety measure when applying chemicals on their farms. Some of the street children, hawkers, farmers and truck pushers as observed had skin diseases such as rashes, eczemas and ringworms. 7 of the truck pushers reported haven sustained wounds on their legs in the course of pushing rusted wheel barrows. Some of the street children, hawkers, domestic servants, and children in armed conflict explained that they have been faced with sexual abuse/rape.

Unfortunately, as shown in Fig. 3.3.1 the employers of these child workers do not have a health safety policy and over half, 192 (55%), of the child labourers lack access to proper medical care and only 158 (45%) get proper medical care by visiting hospitals when sick and following up their treatment.
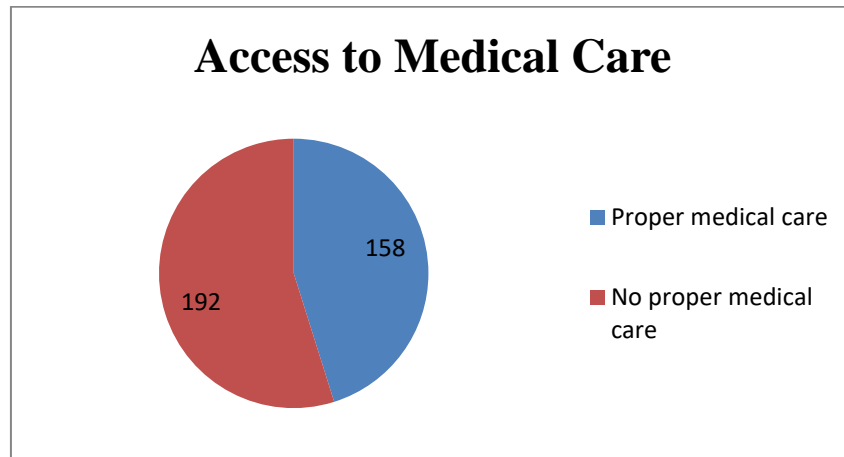
Figure 3.3.1 Pie Chart: Access to medical care for child labourers
Source: Field work, (August to September, 2019).

b) Psychosocial Effects

Childhood is a period where children need harmony, affection and play. By engaging a child in early working life, the true social insertion of the child is disturbed and this has a lot of psychological and social consequences for the child. Indeed from the study, the children experience long working hours daily (working for 8-12 hours daily) and they have little or no time to play or interact with their peers. A majority, 222 (63%) of the children, work on average 10 hours per day. These long working hours also give them little or no time to rest or play. This makes the children to be more isolated from their peers in essence lacking exposure to integration. Consequently, it plays a negative role on the mental health of the children. Playing is an essential part of child development. In addition, the trauma some of these child labourers have experienced as a result of the conflict, impacts on the mental health of children. According to Elbert et al. (2009), children who experienced conflict-related trauma and met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an anxiety disorder that develops after exposure to psychological trauma, were often associated with poor school achievement and memory impairments (Elbert et al. 2009). Child soldiers in Sierra Leone who wounded or killed others had feelings of anxiety and hostility, but it was their experience of feeling stigmatized in their communities (considered a form of chronic daily stress) that mediated the subsequent development of psychiatric symptoms (Betancourt et al., 2008). Conflict often destroys informal social networks for children and disrupts community structures, and children may be forced to be self-sufficient (UNICEF, 2009).

Some symptoms of psychosocial behaviours to include; "insecurity, inhibition, low social confidence, conflictual relationships, social exclusion or rejection, deviant or antisocial behaviours, stress, trauma, fear, anxiety, depression, anger distress, despair, disturbed sleep and eating" (Bourdillon et al. 2010:173). According to the authors these psychosocial behaviours prevent or hinder schooling, leads to anxiety from excessive expectations, to loss of confidence after failing to cope with excessive stress and to social isolation. According to Uddin et al (2009:10), "children who are in risky fields of job have no opportunity to build their natural psychosocial health."

c) Psychological Effects

This has to do with the mental health of the child labourers. The study found that child labour psychologically disturbs children making them to develop inferiority complex. For instance, a 14 year old female house maid in Kumba explains that she feels so inferior working as a house maid while her age mates are in school. And that each time the children in the house where she works and other children around are going to school, while she is working, she becomes psychologically disturbed. She adds that this puts her to tears always (interviewed on September 19, 2019). In another case, a 12year old girl in Bamenda who works as babysitter in a house where children of her age group go to school, explained that she was feeling somehow inferior to the other children because all the children in the house go to school, except her (interviewed on August 22, 2019). This inferiority complex obviously gives these children low self-esteem which can affect them even in future. As remarked by Kielland and Tovo (2006:129) that:

> Good mental health implies not only the absence of mental illness and psychiatric disorders, but also balanced self-esteem and a sound self-confidence - that is a realistic perception of one's own capacity as well as the ability to analyze constructively and respond adequately to one's surroundings.

Moreover some the street children, domestic servants, hawkers and armed children who reported facing sexual abuse and rape explained that this gives them psychological trauma and they are not sure of ever forgetting such experiences throughout their entire lives.

Child labour subjects children to abuse, whether verbally, physically or sexually which ultimately results in psychological disturbances and behavioral disorders. Moreover, peers and colleagues at work can affect the behavior of children, for example, smoking or drugs. The effects of child labour on psychological health can be

long lasting and devastating to the future of children involved. Tamashiro (2010) has observed that children, especially girls, are subjected to an increased risk of sexual violence from armed combatants during conflict. Rape has been a prevalent component of armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo causing increased risk of psychological trauma, unwanted pregnancy, and susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections (Tamashiro, 2010).

iii) Economic Security

Child labour has adverse economic effects which extend from the child, to the family and to society as a whole. Children receive pathetic amounts that are hardly commensurate to the labour they put in. Indeed, based on the study, the average income of the child labourers is around 10,000 FCFA a month and out of the 57 (16%) children who are paid, only fourteen (14) get paid 15,000FCFA a month for more than 10 hours of work a day. This money in most cases is not paid directly to the child labourers but to the persons who provided them for employment. In most cases, the children's income is not spent for their own development. Instead, they are bound to work for feeding family members. The tragedy according to Betcherman et al (2004:1) is that the child labourers may lose their future working potentiality and may then become dependent on their own children. In the domestic work sector, many employers are feeling comfortable to work with the children, which then replace male and female adults. Furthermore, formal contracts do not typically exist with children, which then allow employers to make arbitrary decisions regarding working hours, payment of wages, and the termination of services. One 15 year old girl working as a domestic servant in Limbe explained that:

> I am being paid 10,000 CFAF every month as per agreement between my cousin who provided me for employment and my employer. However, the amount I actually get from this money is 2,000 CFAF monthly. This is because my cousin takes 8000 CFAF and then sends 5,000 CFAF to my mother back in the village and 3,000 CFAF for herself (interviewed on August 28, 2019).

The implications of these on the economic security of these children cannot be underestimated. Working in low remunerate jobs, has been associated with recreating the conditions for the perpetuation of poverty, inequality and social exclusion. The emphasis is that, it also brings the inevitability of permanent poverty and working for low wages in their future life (Acaroglu and Kutlu, 2015:502). Emphasizing the role child labour plays in enhancing generational cycles of poverty, Andvig (2002: 4) defined child labour as:

> Work performed by children who are too young for the task in the sense that performing it, they unduly reduce their present economic welfare or their future income earning capabilities either by shrinking their future external choice set or reducing their individual productive capabilities.

Hussain and Maskus (2003), have concluded that the level of child labour has a negative relationship with the human capital currently possessed by their parents. Together with this, they have shown that the participation in the child workforce has a reducing effect on the accumulation of human capital.

iv) Community and Political Stability

Findings from this study reveal that child labour undermines community and political security through its erosion of social cohesion and weakening of the state legitimacy. Social cohesion is eroded by the fact that child labour contributes to intergenerational cycles of poverty and instability, destabilizing communities in the long term. Also, the legitimacy of the state is weaken due to its inability to protect children from exploitation especially during conflict which undermines trust in state institutions, fueling grievances that perpetuate the conflict.

IV. CONCLUSION

The nexus of child labour and human security in Cameroon's Anglophone regions highlights the multifaceted impacts of conflict on vulnerable populations. This study has explored the intricate relationship between child labour and human security within the context of the ongoing armed conflict in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. The findings reveal that armed conflicts create conditions that significantly exacerbate child labour, primarily by disrupting education, spurring displacement, destabilizing economies, and increasing household vulnerabilities. As families struggle to survive amid the armed conflict, children are often compelled to engage in various forms of labour, such as domestic servitude, hawking, babysitting and even in the worst forms of child labour such direct involvement in the conflict as child soldiers, couriers, or informants, child prostitution and drug trafficking. These circumstances not only violate children's fundamental rights but also pose serious threats to their physical, psychological, and educational well-being, thereby undermining the broader framework of human security. Several dimensions of human security are affected in the process. These include; the educational security of the children, their health security and their personal security, economic security as well as community and political security. In light of these findings, this study advocates for a holistic response to child labour in conflict settings, with a strong emphasis on policy-driven and grassroots solutions. Strengthening child protection mechanisms, ensuring access to education in conflict-affected areas, and providing economic alternatives for vulnerable households are crucial measures. Additionally, international organizations, national governments, and local actors must collaborate to enforce existing legal frameworks against child exploitation while addressing the root causes of the conflict. Ultimately, sustainable peace and human security in Cameroon's Anglophone regions cannot be achieved without prioritizing the rights and welfare of children. By addressing the

child labour crisis within the broader framework of human security, stakeholders can contribute not only to the protection of children but also to the long-term stability and development of the region.

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