

ARMED CONFLICT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT OF PWD TO SOCIO- ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN CAMEROON: EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS FROM MEZAM DIVISION

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Abstract

The overall goal of this study was to assess the impact of armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon on the protection of the rights of PWDs to socio-economic integration in the Mezam Division. The main issue at stake here is that despite the multiplicity of national and international legislations protecting the right of PWDs to socio-economic integration, such as the 2010 Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of PWDs in Cameroon; the Convention on the Rights of PWDs of 2006; and Common Article 4 of the Geneva Convention of 1949, the armed conflict in the English speaking regions of Cameroon has violated the integration of PWDs in Mezam Division into socio-economic life. To realize the aim, the Survey Research design was used to collect and analyse data from PWDs having visual, hearing, speech and locomotive impairments. Data was collected from a sample size of 130 using the Snow Ball Sampling Technique. The main instruments used to collect data were questionnaires. Data collected were analysed using simple descriptive statistics, with the use of the Statistical Package for

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Social Science (SPSS) Version 23. While using the Social Exclusion Theory as an analytical tool, the main findings showed that an overwhelming majority of PWDs have been socio-economically disintegrated in Mezam Division due to the ongoing armed conflict. It is from this perspective that policy recommendations have been made to the government, civil society organisations and the belligerents on the various ways PWDs can be holistically integrated into socio-economic life even amid the ongoing conflict.

Keywords: *Armed conflict, Protection, Persons with disabilities, Socio-economic integration, Mezam Division*



INTRODUCTION

Armed conflict has very negative repercussions on society at large. It does not only lead to death, but it has other consequences that extend far beyond it, such as forced migration and destruction of infrastructures¹. Social, political and economic institutions have been permanently damaged in many countries because of armed conflicts. Armed conflicts mostly affect the population. The most common of these armed conflicts is in Sub-Saharan Africa, which has witnessed different types of armed conflicts. Some of these conflicts are as follows: state-based, which involves violence between two organized groups where at least one party is the government; nonstate-based, which occurs between two organized groups, neither of which is a government; and one-sided events where an organized group, which could be the government or a non-government actor, targets civilians². The loss of human life, destruction of infrastructure, human capital, and institutions, political instability, and greater uncertainty associated with conflicts have impeded investment and economic growth in Africa. These conflicts have been particularly deadly. Estimates demonstrate that in the 1990s alone, verified conflict-related deaths totaled at least 825,000 over two-thirds of global conflict deaths. The high death toll was driven by the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda; the Ethiopian-Eritrean war; and protracted violence in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, and

¹ S. Gates, H. Hegre, H.M. Nygård & H. Strand, "The consequences of internal armed conflict for development (part 1)" *available at*: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2015/consequences-internal-armed-conflict-development-part-1> (last visited on: 10.09.2021)

² X. Fang, S. Kothari, C. McLoughlin & M. Yenice. "The Economic Consequences of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa", *available at*: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2020/10/30/The-Economic-Consequences-of-Conflict-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa-49834> (last visited on: 10.09.2021)

Sierra Leone. As several of these conflicts ended in the early 2000s, the number of conflict-related deaths in the region fell sharply, reaching its lowest level of about 2,400 deaths in 2010.

Among the population, the most affected in armed conflict, which are often not documented are PWDs³. These are persons with diverse forms of long-term impairments⁴ that cannot properly act or behave like normal persons when confronted with a problem. It is worth noting that, over one billion people worldwide are living with some form of disability, with 16% of them attributable to armed conflict. Everyone living in armed conflict faces unthinkable challenges in striving to protect themselves and their loved ones. For persons with disabilities, those challenges can be even more daunting. Many come up against additional barriers in seeking protection; some, particularly women and girls with disabilities, are physically unable to flee violence and many are vulnerable to human rights violations, violence and abuse, including sexual abuse. Also, they face disproportionate hurdles in accessing limited services, such as nutrition, health and psychosocial support. Survivors of explosive ordnance incidents and their families are often left without the support they need – from the provision of prosthetics to socioeconomic reintegration assistance – to rebuild their lives⁵. It is against this backdrop that in events or crisis like armed conflict, this group

³ A. Priddy, “Disability and armed conflict”, The Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, *available at*: <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Academy%20Briefing%202014-interactive.pdf> (last visited on: 10.09.2021)

⁴ World Health Organization, Disability: People with disability vs persons with disabilities. *available at*: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/people-with-disability-vs-persons-with-disabilities> (last visited on: 11.09.2021)

⁵ United Nations Mine Action Service, “Persons with disabilities in armed conflict” (2020) *available at*: <https://unmas.org/en/persons-with-disabilities-armed-conflict> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

of people are the most affected. This affection can be manifested through their socioeconomic disintegration from society.

In Cameroon, the inception of the Anglophone crisis in 2016 and its escalation into an armed conflict has had negative repercussions on PWDs in the English-speaking regions of the Northwest and South West Regions. This crisis, which initially owes its origin in November 2016, is based on the politics of marginalized people of Anglo-Saxon origin in the educational and judicial⁶ domain. Since 2017, this conflict has transformed into an armed conflict between state armed groups and non-state armed groups demanding the separation of the English-speaking parts from Cameroon. Mezam Division, which is the geographical scope of this study, is one of the divisions found in the Northwest territory of the English-speaking region of Cameroon. PWDs have negatively been affected by this armed conflict. Besides losing their lives, many of them have had limited access to education and vocational training opportunities, information and engagement in cultural activities, infrastructure and housing and employment. This scenario of the affliction of PWDs in the ongoing armed conflict has been painted by Tebeck as follows: “...*A good number of persons with disabilities have lost their lives, a good number of them have lost property, their houses have been burnt...Almost all of them have lost economic activities and a good number of them have lost access to education...*”⁷. Human Rights Watch⁸ has also

⁶ T. T. Mengnjo, *The Institutionalization of the use of the Internet for political communication by the Social Democratic Party (SDF) Party in Mezam Division of Cameroon*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis) University of Dschang)

⁷ A. Tebeck, “Challenges faced by Cameroonians living with disabilities aggravated by the Anglophone crisis”, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-people-disabilities-caught-crisis> (last visited on: 12.06.2021)

noted that in the ongoing armed conflict, PWDS and older people have been among those killed, violently assaulted, or kidnapped. It is on the bases of the foregoing that this study sets is based on the following specific research questions:

1. What legal instruments protect the rights of PWDS to socio-economic integration in Mezam?
2. How has the Anglophone crisis affected access to education and vocational training of PWDS in Mezam?
3. To what extent has the Anglophone crisis affected access to information and participation in cultural activities of PWDS in Mezam?
4. To what degree has the Anglophone crisis influenced access to infrastructure, housing and transport of PWDS in Mezam?
5. How has the Anglophone crisis affected the participation of PWDS in sports and leisure activities in Mezam?
6. To what rate has the Anglophone crisis affected access to employment of PWDS in Mezam?

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION: THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION THEORY

⁸ Human Rights Watch, “Cameroon: People With Disabilities Caught in Crisis”, *available at*: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-people-disabilities-caught-crisis> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

The Social Exclusion Theory is used to analyse how armed conflict has disintegrated PWDs from socioeconomic life. Proponents of this theory include French sociologist Emile Durkheim, British sociologists, Garry Runciman and Peter Townsend, a German Sociologist, Axel Honneth amongst others. Exclusion is a process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically blocked from their rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of other groups within a society⁹.

According to Muddiman¹⁰, Social exclusion relates not simply to a lack of material resources, but also to matters like inadequate social participation, lack of cultural and educational capital, inadequate access to services and lack of power. The main assumption of this theory is that social exclusion theoretically emerges at the level of four correlated factors: deprivation of material resources; denial of social rights; prevention of social participation and prevention of cultural integration.

Social exclusion happens when society fails to keep all its groups and individuals together in its social sphere. This Theory has been criticized for laying more emphasis on the fact that social exclusion exists in all aspects of society. Despite this criticism, the theory is still relevant to this work. Its relevance is based on the fact that during the ongoing armed conflict in the Northwest and Southwest Regions, PWDs have not fully been socially and economically integrated in Mezam. This is justified by their limited access to

⁹ J Thanni, "Theories and Practices of Exclusion", *available at*: <https://medium.com/@jacobthanni/theories-and-practices-of-exclusion-1-43904f64e26b> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

¹⁰ D. Muddiman, "Theories of Social Exclusion and The Public Library" Working Paper 1. Available at: <http://eprints.rclis.org/7118/1/vol3wp1.pdf> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

education and vocational training, housing conditions, and high unemployment amongst others.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research Method and Design

This article is purely a Mixed Method comprising both the qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. In this light, the Descriptive Survey Research Design has been adopted because it gives room for data to be collected from a small segment of the population that can be generalized.

The population of the study, Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study population comprised all PWDs in Mezam with a disability rate of 50 per cent with the following impairments: visual, hearing, locomotive and speech. Statistics obtained from the Northwest Regional Delegation of Social Affairs; Cameroon (2022) indicate that PWDs with a 50 per cent disability in Mezam Division are estimated at 200 persons.

The sample size has been determined using the *Krejcie and Morgan Table for Determining the Sample Size*. According to this table, a population size of 200 inhabitants has a sample size of 132.

Since the target population is known and widely dispersed around the Division, the Snowball Sampling Technique was used to select the respondents. In this light, some leaders of PWDs were identified and administered questionnaires, and thereafter, they directed us to their peers for the same exercise.

Techniques of data collection and Analysis

The main research instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. Out of the 132 questionnaires administered, 92 of them were retained, thus, giving a percentage retained rate of 68.14 per cent, which is above average.

Data collected via questionnaires were analysed using simple descriptive statistical tools, such as tables and percentages, with the aid of *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS Version 25)*.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORKS GUARANTEEING THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PWDS TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Legislations exist at the national and international levels guaranteeing the protection of the rights of PWDs to socio-economic integration in Mezam. These include the following:

National legislation

The main national legislation is Law No 2010/002 of 13 April 2010 relating to the protection of PWDs in Cameroon. Section 27 (1) of this law defines “*integration*” as any social or economic measure that guarantees the full participation of PWDs in social life. Section 27(3) notes that the socio-economic integration of PWDs includes the following domains:

- 1. Access to education and vocational training*

Given access to education, Section 28 notes that it is the role of the state to take specific measures to guarantee PWDs access to education and

vocational training. These measures to this provision include the provision of their material and financial needs and pedagogic support. To Section 29(1), it is also the responsibility of the state to contribute to the expenses for the education and initial vocational training of destitute people and students with disabilities. Such cover entails partial and total exemption from the payment of school or university fees and the award of scholarships. The cover referred to also includes children born to destitute parents with disabilities. Also, Section 30 notes that children and adolescents suffering from any disability are entitled to conditions for education and apprenticeship. Section 31 argues that children with disabilities are entitled to special conditions, notably, age weave, assignment of suitable teaching aids and specialized teachers.

2. Access to information and participation in cultural activities

Section 32 notes that the state, regional and local authorities and civil society are to take all relevant measures to facilitate: access by PWDs to information and communication technologies; the participation of PWDs in productions and artistic works; and access of PWDs to equipment, activities and culture-related trades.

3. Access to infrastructure, housing, and transport

From the position of Section 33(1) government and private buildings and institutions opened to the public are to be designed to facilitate access and use by PWDs. When carrying out renovations or measure transformation works on buildings, Section 33(2) noted that existing government or private buildings and facilities opened to the public are to be refurbished such as to facilitate access and use by PWDs. The construction of passages according

to Section 33(4) is to take into account facilities reserved for PWDs. The state, regional and local authorities and civil society as per Section 34 are to take measures to provide PWDS preferential access to low-cost housing. Also, to Section 35(1), PWDs who are holders of a national disability card are to be entitled to preferential treatment in public and private transport in particular: reduction in transport fare; priority during embarking and disembarking and reserved seats.

4. Participation in sports and leisure activities

As per Section 36, the state, regional and local authorities and civil society are to take necessary measures to encourage the participation of PWDs in sports and leisure activities and are to organize their participation in international competitions. As such, to Section 37, a sports and physical education program for PWDS is to be included in the school and university systems.

5. Access of PWDs to employment

From the view of Section 38(1), PWDs with vocational training or vocational training are entitled to preferential treatment in particular through an aged weaver through recruitment into government or private jobs when competing with non-handicapped persons where the position is compatible with their conditions. According to Section 28(2), with equal qualifications, priority in recruitment is to be given to PWDs. Section 38(3) notes that disability should not be a reason for discriminating against a PWD for employment. Section 39 (1) postulates that PWDs who on account of the seriousness of their disability cannot withstand normal conditions of work in a natural setting are to be entitled to protected

employment. Protected employment refers to a workstation arranged by taking into account the functional possibilities and the performance capacities of the PWDs. Also, Section 40 (1) observed that the state, regional and local authorities and civil societies are supposed to encourage PWDs to establish private enterprises and cooperatives. Furthermore, Section 40(2) highlights that PWDs are to be encouraged through tax and customs duty waivers granted as the case may be and upon the proposal of the minister in charge of social affairs; the granting of business type of assistance; assignment of technical trainers; and loan guarantees and technical support from government development organizations, particularly within the framework of project studies and monitoring.

International legislations

At the international level, the socioeconomic integration of PWDs is defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of PWDs adopted on December 13th, 2006, and the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which protects civilians during armed conflict.

The UN Convention on the Rights of PWDs adopted on December 13th 2006

This convention was adopted by the United National General Assembly in 2006. It upholds the socio-economic integration of PWDs in the following ways:

- *Recognition of the right to education of PWDs by state parties*

With regards to education, Article 25 (1) of the CRPD stipulates that States Parties shall recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and

lifelong learning directed to: the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential; and enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society. Sub-section 1 argues that States Parties shall ensure that: firstly, that PWDs are not excluded from the general education system based on disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or secondary education, based on disability; secondly, that PWDs can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. Sub-section 5 is of the view that States Parties shall ensure that PWDs can access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others.

- *Recognition of the right to health* by state parties

In the health sector, Article 25 of this convention notes that States Parties should recognize that PWDs have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination based on disability. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure access for PWDs to health services that are gender-sensitive, including health-related rehabilitation. In particular, States Parties as per this law shall have to:

- provide PWDs with the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health care and programmes as provided to other

persons, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health and population-based public health programmes;

- provide those health services needed by PWDs specifically because of their disabilities, including early identification and intervention as appropriate, and services designed to minimize and prevent further disabilities, including among children and older persons;
- provide these health services as close as possible to people's communities, including in rural areas;
- require health professionals to provide care of the same quality to PWDs as to others, including based on free and informed consent by, inter alia, raising awareness of the human rights, dignity, autonomy and needs of persons with disabilities through training and the promulgation of ethical standards for public and private health care;
- prohibit discrimination against PWDs in the provision of health insurance, and life insurance where such insurance is permitted by national law, which shall be provided fairly and reasonably;
- Prevent discriminatory denial of health care or health services or food and fluids based on disability.
- *Promotion of the habilitation and rehabilitation of PWDs by state parties*

In the domain of habilitation and rehabilitation, Article 26 of this convention noted that States Parties shall take effective and appropriate measures to enable PWDs to attain and maintain maximum independence,

full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life. To that end, States Parties shall organize, strengthen and extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programmes, particularly in the areas of health, employment, education and social services, in such a way that these services and programmes.

- *Promotion of the right to employment of PWDs by state parties*

In the sphere of work and employment, Article 27 is of the view that States Parties shall recognize the right of PWDs to work on an equal basis with others. This includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to PWDs. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:

- Prohibit discrimination based on disability about all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, a continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;
- Protect the rights of PWDs, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;

- Ensure that PWDs can exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;
- Enable PWDs to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for PWDs in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
- Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business;
- Employ PWDs in the public sector;
- Promote the employment of PWDs in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
- Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to PWDs in the workplace;
- Promote the acquisition by PWDs of work experience in the open labour market;
- Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for PWDs.
- *Promotion of the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection by state parties*

In the arena of an adequate standard of living and social protection, Article 28 is of the position that, States Parties shall recognize the right of PWDs to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right without discrimination based on disability. It also moves on to stipulate that, States Parties have to recognize the right of PWDs to social protection and to the enjoyment of that right without discrimination based on disability, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right, including measures:

- To ensure equal access by PWDs to clean water services, and to ensure access to appropriate and affordable services, devices and other assistance for disability-related needs;
- To ensure access by PWDs, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection programmes and poverty reduction programmes;
- To ensure access by PWDs and their families living in situations of poverty to assistance from the State with disability-related expenses, including adequate training, counselling, financial assistance and respite care;
- To ensure access by PWDs to public housing programmes;
- To ensure equal access by PWDs to retirement benefits and programmes.

- Promotion of the right to participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports by state parties

In the domain of participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports, Article 30 postulates that, States Parties shall recognize the right of PWDs to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that PWDs:

- enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;
- enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;
- enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.

It has also argued that States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable PWDs to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their benefit but also for the enrichment of society. To enable PWDs to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:

- To encourage and promote the participation, to the fullest extent possible, of PWDs in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;
- To ensure that PWDs have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities

and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;

- To ensure that PWDs have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;
- To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;
- To ensure that PWDs have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities.

The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilian population during armed conflict

The protection of civilians during armed conflict under International Humanitarian Law is regulated by the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and was later reinforced in the two Additional Protocols of 1977. PWDs constitute part of this civilian population. However, the adoption of the fourth 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the protection of the civilian population and its Additional Protocols was a particular advancement since it introduced the most specific humanitarian protection to civilians¹¹. As such, in the conduct of hostilities either of international or non-international character, parties to the conflict, whether State or non-state armed groups are required to minimize harm to the civilian population resulting from armed conflict. Persons who are no longer or not participating in hostilities

¹¹ R. Adam & G. Richard, *Documents on the Laws of War*, 299 (3rd Ed., Oxford University Press)

including civilians, the wounded, the sick as well as prisoners of war are entitled to respect for their lives, and parties to conflict must treat them humanely. The provisions of Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 establish minimum standards that parties to the conflict, including state and non-state armed groups shall respect. Thus, under Common Article 3 warring parties are prohibited from engaging in acts of violence against persons taking no active part in hostilities including members of the armed forces who do not bear arms without any distinction whether the armed conflict is of international or non-international character. This provision reads as follows: In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict should be bound to apply, as a minimum the following provisions:

(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those not taking part in hostilities, the sick, wounded, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria. To this end, the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever concerning the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) Violence to life and person, in particular, murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) Taking hostage (c) Outraging upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment;

(d) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgement pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

2) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for. An impartial humanitarian body, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, may offer its services to the Parties to the conflict. The Parties to the conflict should further endeavour to bring into force, using special agreements, all or part of the other provisions of the present Convention. The application of the preceding provisions shall not affect the legal status of the Parties to the conflict.¹²

THE IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING REGIONS OF CAMEROON ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF PWDS IN THE MEZAM DIVISION

The socio-economic integration of PWDs in this light is measured in terms of their accessibility to education and vocational training; information and participation in cultural activities; infrastructures, housing and transport; participation in sports and leisure; and their access to employment as demonstrated below:

Impact of the armed conflict on PWDs' Access to Educational and vocational training

¹² Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949

According to findings obtained through questionnaires, the armed conflict has affected PWD's access to educational and vocational training activities as presented in Table 9 below:

Table 1: Opinions of respondents on the impact of the armed conflict on access to educational and vocational training in Mezam Division.

Item	F/%	A	SA	D	SD	N
Since the armed conflict started, I have had access to educational training	F	7	5	57	19	4
	%	7.6	5.4	62.0	20.7	4.3
I have access to vocational training in the course of the armed conflict	F	10	3	56	16	7
	%	10.9	3.26	60.9	17.4	7.60

Source: Designed by Author (2022)

Table 1 above which is based on the opinion of PWDs on their access to educational and vocational training indicates that most of them were not opportune to have access to these services since the start of the armed conflict. An overwhelming majority of 82.9% (62 % disagreed and 20.7% strongly disagreed) and 78.3% (60.9% disagree and 17.4% strongly disagreed) respectively denied that they had had no access to educational and vocational training before the outbreak of the crisis, meanwhile, a minority of 13% (7.6% agree and 5.4% for strongly agree) and 14.16% (10.9% for agreed and 3.26% for strongly agreed) of our respondents held

affirmation views. However, 11.9% of our respondents expressed neutrality on their part. This finding falls in line with a study carried out by *Thomas, Brush, Jüriloo, Maladwala, Mitra & Risser*¹³ in Syria, Iraq, Sudan and Sierra Leone, when these authors concluded that armed conflicts have negatively affected children with disabilities in these countries. While using the example of 2018 related to Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, these authors have equally pointed out that among children of 13 years and above, refugees with disabilities were more likely to be illiterate and to have never been enrolled in school. Another study by *Amnesty International*¹⁴ in Yemen also concluded that PWDs are disrupted from exercising their rights to education during armed conflict. Another work carried out by *Mitra*¹⁵ in Syria, Somalia and Palestine also agree with the mentioned finding when it concludes that children with disabilities experienced a greater risk of exclusion during the armed conflicts, as an estimated 9.7 million PWDs were forcibly displaced. More so, this finding is in accord with that carried out by *Amah*¹⁶ in Cameroon. Using the case of the armed conflict in Northern Cameroon about the counter against the Boko Haram terrorist groups, and the armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of

¹³ “Children with Disabilities In Situations Of Armed Conflict”, Discussion Paper, *available at:*

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Children_with_disabilities_in_situations_of_armed_conflict.pdf (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

¹⁴ Amnesty International, “Living with Disabilities in Yemen’s Armed Conflict”, *available at:* <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1227171/download> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

¹⁵ G. Mitra, “Children with disabilities affected by armed conflict”, *available at:* <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/children-with-disabilities-affected-by-armed-conflict/> (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

¹⁶ J.P.P.A. Amah, “Attack on the child’s right to education: reinforcing resilience using the human rights-based approach in Cameroon”, A Master’s Thesis in Human Rights and Democratisation, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany, *available at:* <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11825/1804/Pwa%20Abe%20Amah%20John%20Paul.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> last visited on: (12.02.2021)

Cameroon, Amah noted that these armed conflicts have negatively affected children’s right to education especially those with disabilities. Specifically, the author underlined that vulnerable groups like PWDs, the girl-child and young children are more exposed to dangers. *Human Rights Watch*¹⁷ has corroborated this, by mentioning in their study of armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, South Sudan, and Syria that children with disabilities in the face of armed conflict often face serious obstacles in accessing education. In Afghanistan, the study estimated that 80 per cent of girls with disabilities are not enrolled in schools.

IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT ON PWDS ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The impact of the armed conflict on PWDs’ access to information and their participation in cultural activities is summarized in the Table below:

Table 2: Opinions of respondents on the impact of the armed conflict on access to information and participation in cultural activities of PWDs

Item	F/%	A	SA	D	SD	N
I had access to	F	71	7	7	5	2.4

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “Submission to the U.N. Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding Persons with Disabilities in the Context of Armed Conflict June 8, 2021”, available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/06/Protection%20of%20Persons%20with%20Disabilities%20in%20Armed%20Conflict.pdf (last visited on: 12.02.2021)

information and communication technologies (computers, laptops, phones, internet...) since the armed conflict						
	%	77.1	7.7	7.7	5.4	2.1
Since the armed conflict began, I have been participating in all forms of artistic works	F	14	4	57	3	14
	%	15.5	4.3	62.0	3.3	15.2
With the on-armed conflict, I have been participating in cultural activities	F	7	3	46	28	8
	%	7.6	33.3	50.0	30.4	8.7

Source: **Designed by Author (2022)**

Table 2 above hosts the opinions of respondents on the rate of access to information and participation in artistic and cultural activities of PWDs. It indicates that 73.9% (66.3% Agreed and 7.6% strongly agreed) of our respondents had had access to information and communication technologies, such as computers, laptops, phones and the internet since the outbreak of the ongoing armed conflict, while 13% of the respondents shared a contrary view that they do not have access such ICT services (7.6% disagreed and 5.4% strongly disagreed). 13% of the respondents expressed neutrality.

Regarding their participation in artistic activities, findings demonstrated that the majority of PWDs have not been able to engage in these activities since the outbreak of this crisis. 65.3% (62.0% disagreed and 3.3% strongly agreed) of PWDs acknowledged that they have not had access to participate in various forms of artistic works, while 19.8% (15.5 agreed and 4.3 strongly agreed) of them noted that they have been participating in different forms of artistic works since the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2016.

Also, the vast majority of our respondents constituting 80.4% (50.0% disagreed and 30.4% strongly disagreed) of our total population affirmed that they have not been participating in cultural activities since the outbreak of the current armed conflict, while 10.9% (7.6% agreed and 3.3% disagreed) of the proportion of our respondents agreed, that they have been participating in cultural activities since this crisis began in 2016. However, 8.7% of our respondents remained neutral.

Thus, it is evident that although the majority of PWDs have access to information and communication technologies since the armed conflict began, it is worth noting that their participation in artistic and cultural activities has been limited. This is partly due to their displacement from their original localities and insecurities, which have been manifested through rampant kidnappings, indiscriminate shootings, torture and arrest. This finding is in accord with a study carried out by *Tebeck*¹⁸ on the challenges faced by Cameroonians living with disabilities aggravated by armed conflict. This study observed that as a result of this armed conflict, PWDs have limited to access public and private infrastructures, housing and transport facilities. He also noted that besides the fact that some of them have been

¹⁸ A. Tebeck, Op Cit

killed, wounded, or abandoned, others have been forced out of their homes. He further underlined that as the armed conflict persists, PWDs are faced with heightened dangers of attacks because most of them find it difficult to flee when their communities come under assault. *Human Rights Watch*¹⁹ has also agreed with this finding when it conducted a study on how PWDs are caught in the war. According to this study, displaced people with disabilities face additional difficulties in getting assistance and meeting their basic needs such as food, sanitation, and health care. *Thomas, Brush, Jüriloo, Maladwala, Mitra & Risser*²⁰ in their study on the impact of armed conflict on children with disabilities have as well noted that children in war-torn countries, like Syria, Sudan and Sierra Leone have had limited access to key infrastructures, housing and transport facilities due to the armed conflict.

IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT ON PWDS’ ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURES, HOUSING AND TRANSPORT

The level of PWDs’ access to infrastructures, housing and transport facilities is summarized in the Table below:

Table 3: Opinions of respondents on the impact of the armed conflict on access to infrastructures, housing, and transport of PWDS

Item	F/%	A	SA	D	SD	N
Since the armed conflict, I have had access to government	F	12	1	54	15	10
	%	13.0	1.1	58.7	16.3	10.9

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch (2019)., Op Cit
²⁰ Thomas, E et al, Op Cit

and private buildings and institutions.						
I have access to housing in the ongoing armed conflict	F	11	3	59	16	3
	%	12.0	3.3	64.1	17.4	3.3
I can access public transport services during this armed conflict	F	17	2	56	11	6
	%	18.5	2.2	60.9	12.0	6.5

Source: Designed by Author (2022)

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of respondents on the impact of armed conflict on access to infrastructures, housing and transports of PWDs. From the table, we observe that 75% (58.7% disagree and 16.3% for strongly disagree) of our respondents pointed out that they had no access to government and private buildings and institutions since the start of the ongoing armed conflict. Meanwhile, 14.1% affirmed that since the start of the ongoing crisis, their access to government and private buildings and institutions has not been affected. 10.9% indicated that they were neutral showing that they might or might not have had access to such institutions. With regards to access to housing, an overwhelming majority of 81.5% (64.1 disagree% and 17.4% strongly disagree) of our total respondents disagreed with the fact that since the ongoing armed conflict they have had no access to housing facilities. Whereas, 15.3% (12.0% agree and 3.3% strongly disagree) of our total respondents sampled affirmed that they have had

access to housing facilities. 3.3% of our respondents however remained indifferent.

In the domain of transport services, 72.9% (60.9% disagree and 12% strongly disagreed) of our respondents negated the fact that they have had access to public transport services in the course of this ongoing armed conflict as opposed to 20.7% (18.5 for agree and 2.2% for strongly agreed) who affirmed satisfaction with regards to their access to public transport services. Meanwhile, 6.5% of our total respondents stood on grounds of neutrality. From the mentioned information, it is clear that since the beginning of the armed conflict, PWDs' access to public and private infrastructures, housing and transport facilities has been limited. This has been affirmed by a 27-year-old visually impaired student, who narrated his ordeal to Human Rights Watch²¹ as follows:

Here in Bamenda, I don't have a place to stay, I sleep where the night meets me. It's difficult, I am displaced. I have no friends or family to rely on, and generally, people don't like to have a disabled person around, so if you are blind or deaf or on crutches, no one will welcome you home. I often struggle to find a shelter

THE IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT ON PWDs' PARTICIPATION IN SPORTING AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES

The participation rate of PWDs in sporting and leisure activities since the armed conflict is demonstrated in the Table below:

²¹ Human Rights Watch, Cameroon: People with Disabilities Caught in Crisis (2019) available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/cameroon-people-disabilities-caught-crisis> (last visited on: 12.02.2021))

Table 4: Opinions of respondents on the impact of armed conflict on the participation of PWDs in sporting and leisure activities

Item	F/%	A	SA	D	SD	N
I have been taking part in sporting activities in the armed conflict	F	13	4	52	22	1
	%	14.1	4.3	56.5	23.9	1.1
As the ongoing armed conflict started, I have been taking part in leisure activities (swimming, dancing, partying etc.) before the	F	11	6	48	22	5
	%	12.0	6.5	52.2	23.9	5.4

Source: Designed by Author (2022)

Table 12 above depicts the opinions of respondents on the level of participation of PWDs in sporting and leisure activities pursuance to the beginning of the armed conflict. With regards to sporting activities, 76.1% (52.2% disagree and 23.9% strongly disagreed) were for the fact that they have not been participating in sporting activities as a result of the armed conflict and 20.7% (18.5% agree and 2.2% for strongly agree) affirmed that they have been part in sporting activities even with the ongoing armed conflict. Concerning leisure activities a majority of 76.1% (52.2 disagree and 23.9% strongly disagreed) of our respondents indicated that since the start of the ongoing armed conflict, they have not been taking part in leisure activities such as swimming, dancing, and partying among other things.

5.4% of our respondents remained neutral. On these points, it is therefore clear that the majority of PWDs in Mezam have not been participating in sporting and leisure activities as a result of the armed conflict.

THE IMPACT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF PWDs

With the inception of the armed conflict, the employment rate of PWDs is summarized as follows:

Table 13: Opinion of respondents on the impact of armed conflict on the employment of PWDs

Item	F/%	A	SA	D	SD	N
I have been benefiting from tax and custom duty waivers in my business even in the ongoing armed conflict	F	6	3	32	49	2
	%	6.52	3.26	34.8	53.26	2.17
With the current armed conflict, I have been granted a business start-up assistance	F	6	1	29	51	5
	%	6.52	1.1	31.5	55.4	5.4
I have benefited from a loan and technical support to start up a business during the	F	7	4	30	47	4
	%	7.6	4.34	32.60	51.01	4.34

armed conflict						
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Source: Designed by Author (2022)

Table 4 shows that an overwhelming majority of the total respondents constituting 88.1% (53.3 strongly disagreed and 34.8% disagree) pointed to the fact that as a result of the armed conflict they have not been benefiting from tax and custom duty waivers in their businesses compared to a minority constituting 9.8% (6.5% for agree and 3.3 for strongly agreed) of respondents who attested that they have been benefitting from tax and customs waivers even with the ongoing armed conflict, hence boasting their business profits. 2.2% of the respondents expressed neutrality.

With regards to business start-up assistance, a vast majority of our respondents constituting 88.9% (31.5% disagree and 55.4% strongly disagreed) indicated that they have not been granted any business start-up assistance even with the persistence of the armed conflict. This was followed by 17.5% (6.5% agree and 11% strongly agree) of the total respondents who affirmed that they had been granted business start-up assistance since the start of the armed conflict. Meanwhile, 5.4% of our respondents were neutral.

In this same light, 83.7% (32.6 agree and 51.1% disagreed) constituting a majority of the sampled respondent for this study stated that due to the ongoing armed conflict they have not benefited from any loan and/or technical support to start up a business venture, while 11.9% of the respondents affirmed their reception of such benefits. 4.3% of the respondents remained neutral. On this note, it is visible that since the

outbreak of the current armed conflict, which began in 2016, the level of employment amongst PWDs is limited and has remained low.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This write-up has demonstrated that the protection of the rights of PWDs in Mezam has been violated as a result of the ongoing armed conflict in the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. As a result of this armed conflict, the right of PWDs to education, vocational and training services has been violated. Their accessibility to information and communication technologies; and participation in sporting and leisure activities have also been hampered. Their accessibility to public and private institutions as well as transport and housing facilities is also limited. Added to this, their rate of employment in terms of benefits from tax and custom duty waivers; business startup assistance; and loan and/or technical support to start-up a business venture, have all been reduced. From this perspective, it can thus be concluded that the armed conflict in the English-speaking regions in Cameroon has limited PWDs' access to socio-economic integration in Mezam. This finding is in line with the Social Exclusion Theory, which postulates that social exclusion, which is faced by PWDs in Mezam due to the ongoing armed conflict, has manifested itself through the following four correlated ways: *material resources deprivation; social rights denials; prevention from social participation; and to prevention from cultural integration*. It is from this backdrop that the following policy options have been recommended to PWDs, the belligerents, the government and to civil society organisations on how to ensure the socio-economic integration of PWDs even amid this armed conflict:

1. PWDs

It is recommended that PWDs displaced by the armed conflict should identify themselves with deconcentrated government services, like the Ministry of Social Affairs and other related structures so that they could easily be assisted. They are also advised to form and join disability organisations to better defend their interest by putting pressure on public authorities to take decisions that are favourable to them.

2. *The belligerents*

It is recommended that since they are the main actors in the ongoing armed conflict, they should endeavour to respect International Humanitarian Law by upholding the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 protecting the civilian population, and other places open to the public, such as schools, civilian homes, hospitals and markets during armed conflict.

3. *The government*

It is recommended that it should work with its deconcentrated services and developmental partners in Mezam to ensure that PWDs are better integrated into all aspects of socio-economic life. In this light, the following measures could be adopted:

- Individuals judged to have violated the rights of PWDs in the course of this armed conflict should be investigated and punished within the fabric of the law. This could serve as a deterrence to others not to emulate.
- There is a need for a special "*redistributive program*" to be set up to rehabilitate PWDs displaced by the crisis. This program could be

designed and implemented in partnership with organisations or associations of PWDs.

- There is an urgent need for the government to adopt a more broad-based approach with all the key stakeholders at the grassroots to end this conflict. Permanently resolving this crisis will serve as a stepping stone towards assuring the socio-economic integration of PWDs. No meaningful integration can occur during armed conflict.

4. *The civil society organisation*

There is a need for them to work together to identify and assist all PWDs in dire need, who have been socio-economically disintegrated by the armed conflict. They could work with the population, community leaders, traditional authorities and other grassroots militant to identify and assist PWDs to be integrated into socio-economic life.