

Reframing the Trajectory of Vulnerability: A Historical Analysis of Multidimensional Insecurity and Development in Cameroon (1960–2023)

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Abstract

Since independence in 1960, Cameroon, once widely characterized as an “oasis of peace” in Central Africa, has experienced a gradual yet profound expansion of multidimensional insecurity that increasingly challenges national stability and development. This study adopts a historical and qualitative approach, triangulating archival materials, policy documents, and digital datasets to examine the evolution, drivers, and interconnections of security threats over six decades. The findings demonstrate a marked intensification and diversification of insecurity across six principal domains: criminal, cross-border, food, sociocultural, economic, and environmental. The analysis shows how early post-independence internal conflicts have transformed into complex contemporary crises, including violent extremism in the Far North, separatist conflict in the Anglophone regions, and structural economic fragilities rooted in the late-twentieth-century downturn. By mapping these overlapping dynamics, the article argues that insecurity in Cameroon now operates as an interconnected system rather than a set of isolated challenges, with significant implications for sustainable development, governance, and human security.

Keywords: Cameroon; multidimensional insecurity; historical analysis; human security; sustainable development; conflict dynamics.

1. Introduction

Often described by the epithet “*Africa in miniature*,” Cameroon has, since independence in 1960, navigated an increasingly complex and evolving landscape of insecurity. Over the past six decades, the country’s security architecture has been shaped by a dynamic interplay of threats spanning criminal, cross-border, food-related, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions. These pressures have exerted profound effects on national stability, institutional resilience, and long-term development trajectories. The multidimensional nature of insecurity in Cameroon is well documented in existing scholarship; however, the majority of studies examine these dynamics within specialized analytical silos. Some focus primarily on criminality and cross-border threats, particularly along the northern and eastern frontiers;¹ others

¹ Kenfack Nanfack and Saha (2022); Essomo Belomo (2007); Etoga (2021); Souman Zanminy and Njupuen Njiembokue (2021); Saibou Issa (2006), primarily examining criminal and cross-border insecurity.

analyse food insecurity and nutritional vulnerability in Sudano-Sahelian regions;² still others explore socio-cultural tensions, economic fragility, or environmental stressors.³ While this body of literature has generated valuable insights, few works provide a comprehensive, longitudinal historical analysis that integrates these dimensions into a unified interpretive framework.

This article addresses that lacuna by advancing a holistic historical assessment of plural insecurity in Cameroon between 1960 and 2023. The analysis is organized around three interrelated thematic axes: (1) criminal and territorial threats, including internal, cross-border, and food-related insecurities; (2) structural socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities; and (3) environmental insecurity as an emergent threat multiplier. Methodologically, the study adopts a historical-qualitative approach based on triangulation of archival sources, documentary materials, and digital reports drawn from both national and international datasets. This multi-source evidentiary strategy enables a historically grounded and analytically balanced evaluation of shifting security dynamics across time.

By tracing the interconnections among these forms of insecurity, the article argues that contemporary insecurity in Cameroon should be understood not as a collection of discrete sectoral crises but as an interconnected system of mutually reinforcing vulnerabilities. Such an integrated perspective is essential not only for historical interpretation but also for informing policy frameworks aimed at fostering sustainable peace, strengthening institutional resilience, and promoting inclusive development.

2. The dynamics of criminal and cross-border insecurity (1960–2023)

Cameroon has experienced multiple forms of insecurity, most prominently criminal, cross-border, and food-related threats. Rather than emerging as isolated phenomena, these forms of insecurity have evolved historically through shifting political, economic, and regional dynamics that have shaped their intensity, geographic distribution, and societal impact. This section analyses the historical trajectory of these threats, emphasizing major turning points, regional patterns, and their implications for population welfare and national development. The discussion is organized around two interrelated dimensions: criminal and cross-border insecurity on the one hand, and food insecurity on the other.

2.1 Criminal and cross-border insecurity in Cameroon (1960–2023)

The historical trajectory of criminal insecurity in Cameroon reveals a transformation from localized post-independence unrest into complex and increasingly transnational systems of violence and illicit activity. In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1960, the nascent state confronted major internal security challenges linked primarily to the insurgency of the *Union des Populations du Cameroun* (UPC). Former UPC militants, driven underground following the movement's prohibition by colonial authorities, formed clandestine networks that contributed to the diffusion of organized criminal activity.⁴ While these early conflicts were fundamentally political and ideological in origin, they generated zones of weakened state authority in which rural banditry and illicit economies took root. Despite the establishment of auxiliary forces and

² Njupuen Njiembokue, Habiba (2021); Fofiri Nzossie (2016); Voumo Azobou (2022); Meyounyo Adjou (2025); Ngah Ateba (2022), analysing food scarcity and nutritional vulnerability.

³ Lémouogué, Brain Asong (2026); Kamdem; Etoa Oyono; Mekinde, focusing on socio-cultural insecurity; Mohamed (2016) and Messi on economic insecurity.

⁴ C. Kenfack., « Les supplétifs camerounais face aux menaces sécuritaires, 1955–1971 », *Revue Della/Afrique*, 9(4), 2022, pp. 24.

community self-defense groups across several localities, criminal insecurity persisted and gradually intensified.⁵

Urban centers soon became key theatres of criminal activity. In Douala, for example, insecurity manifested in diverse forms, including bank robberies, market arson, *feymania* (confidence fraud), vandalism targeting commercial establishments, pharmacies, schools, private residences, and public buildings, as well as armed assaults and organized banditry.⁶ Certain neighborhoods, such as Ntala, Nkol Ndongo, and Madagascar in Yaoundé, and Ndokoti in Douala, acquired reputations as high-risk zones, illustrating the spatial concentration of insecurity within specific urban environments.⁷

By the late 1990s, criminal violence had escalated in both scale and symbolic significance, affecting not only ordinary citizens but also state officials and foreign residents. A series of high-profile incidents between 1999 and 2000 underscored the growing boldness of criminal actors. In July 1999, the spouse of the head of the European Union delegation in Yaoundé, Mrs S. Nagel, was robbed twice within a single week.⁸ In December of the same year, a French businessman was assassinated in Douala. On the nights of 12–13 and 13–14 January 2000, both the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN) and the Ministry of Defense were burglarized, while Pierre Midjo, former Director of Presidential Security and General Delegate for National Security, also suffered a break-in during this period. On 7 March 2000, the Dutch Consul General and his spouse were attacked, followed three days later by an armed assault on the United States Ambassador in Yaoundé.⁹ The assassination of Magistrate Louis Ndzé, President of the Mfou Courts, further signaled the extent to which insecurity had begun to threaten the institutional foundations of the state. Collectively, these incidents undermined both domestic perceptions of safety and Cameroon's international image as a stable polity.

Beyond urban centers, insecurity along national borders intensified as a result of porous frontiers and instability in neighboring states. The Far North Region experienced recurrent attacks linked to Boko Haram, while road banditry proliferated in the East and South Regions. Kidnappings for ransom became increasingly frequent in the East and Adamawa Regions, and the North-West and South-West regions witnessed rising criminality associated with secessionist conflict, armed banditry, and political violence. Urban environments simultaneously faced growing challenges related to firearms circulation, cybercrime, narcotics consumption, and organized criminal networks. These developments demonstrate that criminal and cross-border insecurity in Cameroon evolved not only quantitatively but structurally, becoming more diversified, geographically dispersed, and institutionally disruptive.

From 2014 onward, insecurity intensified dramatically in Cameroon's northern frontier zones. The Far North, North, and East Regions became operational spaces for armed groups originating from neighboring countries, particularly rebel militias from the Central African

⁵ During this period, the *maquis* zones in the West and Littoral regions required heavy mobilisation of the national gendarmerie and armed forces, establishing an early pattern of state-centred security management.

⁶ H. Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun : Quelles stratégies pour le maintien de l'activité dans les régions du Nord, de l'Extrême-Nord, du Nord-Ouest, du Sud-Ouest et de l'Est du pays? » *Revue Espace Géographique et Sociétés Marocaines*, 47/48, 2021, pp. 114–116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁸ P. Essomo, « L'ordre et la sécurité publique dans la construction de l'État au Cameroun » PhD thesis, University Montesquieu-Bordeaux IV, 2007, pp. 422–423.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Republic and Chad.¹⁰ Terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings and improvised explosive device explosions targeting markets, churches, and mosques, inflicted severe human and material losses. Boko Haram kidnappings beginning in 2013 included the abduction of seven French nationals in Dabanga and a priest in Nguetchewé, with ransom demands reportedly reaching 5–7 million CFA francs.¹¹ Population displacement further reshaped local demographics as refugees from Nigeria settled in localities such as Zelevet, Mafa, Zamay, Tourou, Kewara, Amchidé, Fotokol, and Mogode.¹² Armed confrontations between insurgents and state forces resulted in thousands of casualties and the depopulation of numerous border villages. Between 2013 and 2014 alone, approximately 353 deaths and 52 injuries were recorded, followed by roughly 1,759 deaths across 115 attacks between June and December 2014.¹³ These figures illustrate the scale and severity of insecurity affecting northern Cameroon.

In the South and East Regions, cross-border insecurity has taken the form of persistent “road bandit” activity along the Cameroon–Central African Republic–Chad tri-border zone since the 1980s. These armed groups employ ambushes, raids, and hostage-taking as strategies of territorial control and economic extraction.¹⁴ Kidnappings for ransom have become particularly prevalent in the Adamawa and East Regions, frequently resulting in executions of villagers, herders, and children when ransom demands are resisted or unmet. Saibou Issa characterizes such victims as “refugees of banditry,” highlighting the forced displacement generated by criminal violence.¹⁵

The Anglophone crisis represents another major turning point in Cameroon’s security landscape. Beginning on 11 October 2016 with protests by lawyers and teachers against the perceived “francophonization” of educational and judicial institutions, the movement rapidly escalated into armed confrontation.¹⁶ Despite governmental responses, the conflict destabilized local governance structures and produced nationwide repercussions. Public infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, gendarmerie posts, and police stations, was destroyed; students, political figures, and clergy were killed; and traditional leaders and schoolchildren were abducted.¹⁷ Numerous villages were burned, and the conflict continues to disrupt livelihoods and social cohesion across affected regions.

Across other parts of the country, criminal violence has included assassinations of senior officials, kidnappings of minors, ritual killings reported in Mimboman and Dschang, bank robberies, taxi assaults, organ trafficking, and the theft of vehicles and motorcycles accompanied by executions in cities such as Yaoundé, Douala, and Bertoua. Attacks on eco-guards in protected areas further illustrate the expansion of insecurity into environmental governance zones.¹⁸ Urban

¹⁰ Y. Souman, « Regard croisé sur la situation des réfugiés suite aux exactions de Boko Haram à l’Extrême-Nord Cameroun. *International Multilingual Journal of Science and Technology (IMJST)*, 5(3), 2020, p. 831.

¹¹ G. Njiembokue, « Insécurité alimentaire et stratégies d’adaptation dans les régions de l’Extrême-Nord et de l’Est du Cameroun », PhD thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 195.

¹² Souman, « Regard croisé sur la situation des réfugiés... » p. 833.

¹³ Njiembokue, « Insécurité alimentaire et stratégies d’adaptation... » p. 196.

¹⁴ I. Saibou « La prise d’otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad : Une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier ». *Polis/R.C.S.P/C.P.S.R.*, 13(1–2), 2006, p. 119.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁶ R. Mates, « Cameroun : Analyse de la littérature sur la crise sécessionniste anglophone ». In S. Jisa, S. Miscoiu, et al. (Eds.), *Raconter les politiques conflictuelles en Afrique - Regards croisés*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2021, pp. 43–52.

¹⁷ Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun... » p. 117.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

centers continue to experience elevated levels of organized crime, drug abuse, gender-based violence, and generalized insecurity. Taken together, these developments reveal a long-term pattern in which criminal and cross-border insecurity has become increasingly systemic, affecting governance, social stability, and national development over more than six decades.

2.2 *The nexus of conflict and food insecurity in Cameroon (1960–2023)*

Food and nutritional insecurity in Cameroon has historically been shaped by a complex interplay of structural, environmental, and security-related factors. In the immediate aftermath of independence in 1960, the Cameroonian state undertook several policy initiatives to address chronic food insecurity, which already posed a significant challenge for the newly sovereign nation. Central to these efforts was the delineation of agro-ecological zones and the territorial organization of agricultural production.¹⁹ This policy framework promoted agricultural specialization between the northern regions, dominated by savannah ecosystems, and the southern forested zones. In parallel, the state encouraged the creation of public agro-industrial enterprises, designed both to harness regional agro-climatic potential and to stabilize food supply to urban centers.

Several state-owned enterprises emerged during this period, including the Cameroon Sugar Corporation (SOSUCAM) in 1964 (forest zones), the Cameroon Palm Plantations Corporation (SOCAPALM) in 1968 (Littoral region), the Yagoua Rice Expansion and Modernisation Company (SEMRY) in 1971 (Logone Plain), and the Wheat Development Corporation (SODEBLE) in 1975 (Adamawa Plateau).²⁰ These initiatives initially strengthened national food systems and mitigated urban food insecurity. However, persistent challenges in management, financing, and institutional oversight gradually undermined these structures, contributing to the resurgence of vulnerability in both rural and urban populations.

The structural fragility of Cameroon's food systems was further exacerbated by the economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s, which diminished agricultural productivity and reduced household purchasing power. Subsequent decades witnessed the compounding effect of security-related crises. Boko Haram attacks in the Far North, armed conflict in the North-West and South-West regions, and widespread road banditry, later transforming into kidnappings for ransom in the Adamawa and East regions, disrupted agricultural production, trade routes, and local livelihoods.³ Refugee inflows into the East, Adamawa, and Far North, along with growing populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in these regions and others such as the West, Littoral, and Centre, further heightened community vulnerability.

Environmental and natural factors compounded these human-induced stresses. Recurrent climatic shocks, including droughts and floods, alongside crop losses caused by pests, locusts, grain-eating animals, and pachyderms, repeatedly undermined agricultural output.²¹ While vulnerability varies regionally, food insecurity has become a nationwide phenomenon. Empirical data indicate a sharp deterioration in recent years, with national food insecurity rates rising from 12.8% in 2019 to 20.4% in 2020.²²

¹⁹ J. Nzossie, « Les déterminants de l'offre alimentaire vivrière dans le Nord-Cameroun » PhD thesis, University of Ngaoundéré, 2013, p. 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ G. Habiba, « Le Programme Alimentaire Mondial (PAM) et la lutte contre l'insécurité alimentaire dans les régions septentrionales du Cameroun (1968–2018) » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 3.

²² M. Voumo, « État des lieux du suivi de la sécurité alimentaire au Cameroun » Master's thesis, University of Liège, 2022, p. 26.

According to the Harmonized Framework (Cadre Harmonisé) workshops of October 2021, approximately 34.2% of Cameroon's population, representing 9,088,528 individuals, experienced moderate to severe acute food insecurity. Of these, 6,645,418 were classified as "under pressure," while 2,430,110 were in "crisis" or "emergency" phases.²³ Overall, more than 2.7 million people faced acute food insecurity corresponding to phases 3 to 5 of the Harmonized Framework classification. Food insecurity remains more pronounced in rural areas (9.6%) than urban areas (6.7%), with marked regional disparities. The 2017 GC/FAO/WFP report identified the Far North (17.9%), North (14.6%), East (10.3%), West (7.3%), Adamawa (7.1%), and South (6%) as the most affected regions, with severe food insecurity particularly acute in the Far North (4.1%), North (3.7%), and West (3.3%).²⁴ Similarly, the 2011 Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis revealed that 9.6% of rural households experienced food insecurity (2.2% severe; 7.4% moderate), compared to 6.7% of urban households (0.7% severe; 6% moderate).

Nutritional outcomes reinforce the severity of Cameroon's food insecurity. The country ranks among the 36 most affected by chronic malnutrition globally, with nearly 44% of chronically malnourished children in the CEMAC region residing in Cameroon. In 2006, 30.4% of children under five suffered from chronic malnutrition, rising to 33% in 2011 before a slight decline to 31.7% in 2014. Acute malnutrition affected 5.2% of children under five in 2014, compared to 6% in 2011, while 14.8% were underweight in 2014. The northern regions and the East remain disproportionately affected across all forms of malnutrition.

Persistent structural constraints continue to exacerbate these vulnerabilities. Limited access to safe and sufficient water, insufficient school feeding programs, restricted financial support for new agricultural development, and constrained access to agricultural inputs collectively undermine household resilience and national food security. These structural weaknesses, compounded by insurgencies, banditry, and refugee inflows, create a self-reinforcing cycle in which insecurity and food scarcity exacerbate each other.

Understanding the evolution of food and nutritional insecurity from 1960 to 2023 is therefore critical for comprehensively assessing the multidimensional nature of Cameroon's insecurity and its impact on human well-being and development. This historical perspective highlights that food insecurity is not merely a result of climatic or policy failures, but is deeply intertwined with broader security and socio-economic dynamics, a pattern that will be further examined in the subsequent analysis of socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities.

3. Structural vulnerabilities: Socio-cultural and economic insecurity in Cameroon (1999–2023)

While insurgency, food scarcity, and criminal threats pose immediate dangers, they are compounded by deeper, structural vulnerabilities that have evolved over decades. Understanding why specific regions and populations are disproportionately affected requires a chronological examination of sociocultural, economic, and environmental insecurity. This perspective reveals both long-term trends and critical turning points that have intensified vulnerability in the 21st century.

²³ Action contre la Faim, « Le premier Plan National de Réponse : un outil de prévention et d'action contre l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Cameroun », 2024, assessed 20 March 2024, Cameroun : un outil contre l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle.

²⁴ Rapport final d'audit institutionnel et organisationnel du comité de gestion de l'assistance de la FAO et du PAM (GC/FAO/PAM), novembre 2017, p. 27.

3.1 Sociocultural insecurity in Cameroon

Over the past three decades, Cameroon has witnessed a rapid and multidimensional rise in sociocultural insecurity, reflecting structural vulnerabilities that undermine social cohesion, livelihoods, and human development. One of the most visible manifestations of this insecurity is the persistent employment crisis. Underemployment increased from 70.6% in 2010 to 77% in 2014, representing a rise of 6.4 percentage points.²⁵ Approximately 90% of the working population is employed in the informal sector, highlighting the country's limited capacity to generate sustainable, productive, and decent employment. Mechanisms for job creation, skills development, self-employment support, and youth integration into the labor market remain insufficient.

Beyond employment, sociocultural insecurity is reinforced by persistent deficiencies in education, health, housing, and cultural promotion, particularly amid the growing influence of Western cultural models. Recurrent crises linked to ethnic, linguistic, and political differences have further weakened social cohesion, impeding peaceful coexistence across communities.

In education, national progression rates declined notably in 2017 due to disruptions caused by the North-West and South-West crisis.²⁶ For example, primary completion fell from 76.7% in 2016 to 72.1% in 2017.²⁷ Educational infrastructure remains severely deficient: many nursery, primary, and secondary schools lack latrines, potable water points, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds, and canteens.²⁸ In conflict-affected regions such as the Logone-et-Chari and Mayo-Tsanaga divisions of the Far North, at least 170 schools closed between 2014 and 2015 due to terrorist and secessionist attacks.²⁹ Chronic teacher shortages further compound these educational challenges.

In the health sector, Cameroon faces persistent structural deficits, including limited qualified personnel and inadequate infrastructure. Childhood diseases remain a major concern: in 2018, infant mortality stood at 48 per 1,000 live births, while under-five mortality reached 79 per 1,000.³⁰ HIV prevalence was estimated at 3.4%.³¹ Recurrent epidemics, such as measles, yellow fever, and poliomyelitis, continue to afflict the population, alongside endemic diseases including malaria, cholera, meningitis, tuberculosis, and an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and cancer.

In 2015 alone, Cameroon recorded approximately 7,000 measles cases with 32 deaths across 15 district health centers.³² Diarrheal diseases affected 20% of children under five, of whom 25% required hospitalization; only 5.2% received treatment with oral rehydration salts and zinc.³³ Fever affected 25.6% of children and 52.3% of pregnant women. Vitamin A deficiency affected 35% of children aged 1–5, particularly in the North (62.7%), Far North (47.7%), and Adamawa (40.5%)

²⁵ Rapport de la Stratégie nationale de Développement 2020-2030 pour la transformation structurelle et le développement inclusif (SND30), janvier 2020, p. 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁸ Etoga, « Tourisme et insécurité au Cameroun... », p. 119.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, 31 août 2015, p. 10.

³³ *Ibid.*

regions.³⁴ Similar deficiencies exist in health personnel and technical equipment, limiting the effectiveness of healthcare delivery.

Access to potable water represents another critical dimension of sociocultural insecurity. In 2014, only 49% of the national population had access to safe drinking water, with rural areas disproportionately affected.³⁵ Challenges include delays in borehole construction, dilapidated distribution networks, service interruptions, and poor water quality.³⁶ UNICEF reports that 21% of households rely on unimproved water sources, while 21% of water supply facilities are non-functional, predominantly in rural areas.³⁷ Poor water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions account for 13.4% of diseases nationally.³⁸

The water and sanitation sector is heavily reliant on Official Development Assistance (ODA), accounting for over 80% of external funding.³⁹ Key partners include UNICEF, WHO, GIZ, the Global Water Partnership (GWP), and UNOPS. Collectively, these sociocultural vulnerabilities, spanning employment, education, health, and access to essential services, exacerbate Cameroon's broader insecurity landscape and interact with economic and environmental risks to undermine long-term social stability.

3.2 Economic insecurity in Cameroon (1980–2023)

Cameroon's economic insecurity has deep roots in the crises of the 1980s, when the depreciation of the US dollar and the collapse of major export commodity prices, initially affecting Europe, reverberated across Africa and significantly impacted Cameroon.⁴⁰ Facing mounting fiscal and macroeconomic pressures, the country entered into an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1987 and adopted a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) under the strict conditionalities of the Bretton Woods institutions.⁴¹

By the early 1990s, the consequences of these reforms became increasingly evident. Unemployment surged, with 57.7% of the population without formal employment, while wages fell by 19.2%.⁴² Public investment projects were suspended, domestic public debt went unpaid, numerous enterprises closed, and large-scale layoffs became common. The 50% devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 further eroded purchasing power and amplified inflationary pressures.⁴³ Collectively, these developments marked Cameroon's transition from relative post-independence economic stability to prolonged systemic insecurity, generating cascading socio-political and humanitarian challenges.

In the decades that followed, successive governments sought to restore macroeconomic stability through structural reforms and policies designed to correct imbalances and stimulate growth. Despite these efforts, poverty remained entrenched. Nearly 40% of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁵ Rapport de la Stratégie nationale de Développement 2020-2030, p. 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Rapport final d'Agence japonaise de coopération internationale (JICA), février 2018, p. 24.

³⁸ Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, p. 19.

³⁹ Rapport final d'Agence japonaise de coopération internationale (JICA), février 2018, p. 26.

⁴⁰ L. Embolo, « Le Cameroun sous les fourches caudines du FMI après les journaux : 1988–2006 » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2023, p. 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² S. Guillaumont, S., & S. Guillaumont-Jeanneney, « La zone franc, les institutions de Bretton Woods et la conditionnalité ». *Revue d'Économie Financière*, pp. 443–457.

⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 443–457.

households lived below the monetary poverty line, while more than 56% of children experienced at least two deprivations in basic needs.⁴⁴ Poverty was particularly pronounced in rural areas, rising from 52.1% in 2001 to 55% in 2007. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, the elderly, victims of abuse or exploitation, indigenous populations, socially marginalized individuals, refugees, orphans, and internally displaced persons, remain disproportionately exposed to economic insecurity.⁴⁵

These structural economic challenges are reflected in global human development metrics. The 2010 Human Development Report ranked Cameroon 131st out of 179 countries, underscoring the persistent material vulnerabilities facing a significant portion of the population.⁴⁶ Overall, the trajectory of Cameroon's economic insecurity illustrates how global shocks, structural adjustment, and limited state capacity have interacted over four decades to create a context of chronic economic precarity, which in turn exacerbates sociocultural and environmental vulnerabilities across the national territory.

3.3 Environmental insecurity in Cameroon (20th–21st century)

Cameroon has faced persistent environmental insecurity affecting the entire national territory since the twentieth century.⁴⁷ This insecurity manifests through multiple phenomena, including pollution, floods, droughts, bushfires, deforestation, and ecological degradation linked to agricultural practices, as well as the exploitation of fuelwood, timber, and mineral resources. Environmental stressors not only compromise livelihoods but also act as significant threat multipliers, intensifying existing socio-cultural and economic vulnerabilities.

Pollution represents one of the most pervasive dimensions of environmental insecurity. Urban centers such as Yaoundé, Douala, and Bafoussam are particularly affected by water pollution caused by the uncontrolled discharge of waste and wastewater into rivers and drainage networks. Solid waste accumulation overwhelms municipal systems, while oil dumping and vehicle-related contamination exacerbate the problem. With rapid urbanization and population growth, these forms of pollution have become increasingly widespread, presenting severe public health and ecological challenges.

In addition to pollution, Cameroon is highly exposed to climatic hazards, particularly recurrent droughts and floods. These phenomena are most pronounced in the northern regions, including Adamawa, North, and Far North, but also affect other parts of the country. Droughts often trigger bushfires and destroy agricultural crops, while floods wash away farmlands, disrupt livelihoods, and displace communities. In Garoua, especially in the floodplains locally known as “yarés,” flooding is a recurring threat. Between 2010 and 2014, successive floods in localities such as Lagdo, Maga, Yagoua, Gobo, and Kousseri led to significant population displacement, creating an urgent need for identification and registration of affected populations by public authorities and civil society organizations.⁴⁸

Ecological degradation from bushfires further exacerbates environmental insecurity. While all regions are affected, Adamawa, Centre, East, and West are most exposed. In 2015 alone, more than 80% of pastureland in the Adamawa region was destroyed by uncontrolled fires.

⁴⁴ Rapport DRAFT FINAL sur la politique nationale d'alimentation et de nutrition 2015-2035, 31 août 2015, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ M. Popadem, « Les politiques de protection de l'environnement et de lutte contre la famine des ONG internationales au Cameroun (1992–2012) » Master's thesis, University of Yaoundé I, 2021, p. 24.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Similarly, agricultural expansion has contributed to deforestation, soil depletion, and habitat loss. The unsustainable search for fuelwood and the exploitation of mineral resources, including gold, cobalt, aluminum, iron, and diamonds, pose additional threats, particularly in the East and South regions. These activities often result in complete destruction of vegetation and intensify ecological vulnerability.⁴⁹

Overall, environmental insecurity in Cameroon is the cumulative result of anthropogenic pressures and natural hazards. Pollution, climatic shocks, bushfires, deforestation, and unregulated resource extraction have persisted across decades, undermining agricultural productivity, human health, and social stability. The country's experience illustrates how ecological degradation is both a direct source of risk and a multiplier of broader socio-economic and cultural vulnerabilities.

4. Conclusion

The historical trajectory of Cameroon from 1960 to 2023 illustrates a shift from post-colonial political instability toward a complex and interwoven landscape of multifaceted insecurity. Contemporary challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North, the Anglophone crisis in the North-West and South-West regions, systemic economic precariousness, and widespread environmental degradation, cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, they form a mutually reinforcing web, in which weaknesses in governance, economic structures, and social services amplify the impact of external and ecological shocks. Even the relative stability of the 1970s, once seen as a period of state-led prosperity, now appears in retrospect as fragile, masking latent vulnerabilities that have persisted into the twenty-first century.

Sociocultural insecurity remains a central driver of instability. Persistent underemployment, the proliferation of informal labour, deficiencies in education and health infrastructure, and recurrent cultural and linguistic tensions have undermined social cohesion and constrained human development. These vulnerabilities have been compounded by recurring crises and targeted attacks on social infrastructure, which have disproportionately affected peripheral and historically marginalized regions. Economic insecurity similarly continues to shape the daily lives of millions. Structural adjustment programs, currency devaluation, and the progressive withdrawal of the state from productive sectors have left a large portion of the population living in poverty, with rural communities, women, children, and other vulnerable groups most exposed. Environmental insecurity further exacerbates these dynamics, as pollution, deforestation, floods, droughts, and unregulated resource exploitation create both immediate and long-term threats to livelihoods and territorial stability.

Addressing these overlapping crises requires a multifaceted and proactive approach. Strengthening the nexus between security and development is essential, ensuring that interventions in conflict-affected areas go beyond military responses to include investments in education, health, and infrastructure that restore the social contract. Institutional reform and anti-corruption measures must go beyond symbolic prosecutions, focusing on digitalization, transparency, and the empowerment of independent oversight bodies to ensure public resources serve collective, rather than private, interests. Climate adaptation and resource governance are equally urgent; integrated water management, regulation of artisanal mining, and early-warning systems for floods and droughts are crucial to prevent environmental shocks from triggering humanitarian crises. Finally, promoting genuine national dialogue, particularly around the linguistic and cultural divides, is necessary to build inclusive governance and ensure that decentralization translates into tangible improvements for citizens in peripheral regions.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

In conclusion, the multifaceted nature of insecurity in Cameroon demands an equally multidimensional response. By tackling structural weaknesses in governance, economic opportunity, and environmental management alongside immediate security threats, Cameroon can not only stabilize its present situation but also safeguard its “Africa in miniature” identity and secure a sustainable, peaceful future for its diverse population.

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