





National Dialogues as a peacebuilding tool in African conflicts: A critical analysis of the Cameroon Grand National Dialogue

Anslem Wongibeh Adunimay¹ , Maureen Lifongo² 

¹ Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

² Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT

National dialogues have emerged as key instruments in Africa's peace-building arsenal, designed to foster inclusive political settlements in protracted conflicts. This paper critically examines the 2019 Cameroon Grand National Dialogue (GND) as a case study to assess the effectiveness of national dialogues in resolving entrenched conflicts in both the Northwest and Southwest regions of the country. Convened by President Paul Biya in response to the Anglophone crisis, the GND sought to address issues of governance, cultural identity, peace, security, national unity, and decentralization by bringing together different stakeholders within the country. Employing a qualitative analytical approach, the study draws on secondary data from official records, media reports, speeches, civil society reports, and scholarly critiques to argue that while the GND represented a critical peacebuilding effort, its limitations, especially regarding inclusivity and implementation, have constrained its impact. Despite producing several resolutions, including special status for the Anglophone regions and reintegration of ex-combatants, the dialogue was marked by notable exclusions, particularly the absence of key separatist factions and limited civil society participation. This exclusion has been linked to ongoing violence and deep mistrust among conflict actors. The findings emphasize the necessity of genuinely representative dialogues backed by strong political will to achieve sustainable peace. This case contributes to broader debates on the role and design of national dialogues in conflict resolution across Africa.

Keywords: Cameroon Grand National Dialogue, Peacebuilding, Ambazonia Secessionist Movement, Political Recognition

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the effectiveness of the Cameroon Grand National Dialogue (CGND) in promoting long-lasting peace in the conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. The CGND aims to restore peace in Cameroon's English-speaking regions through a locally led initiative. The Ambazonia war of independence began on 11 October 2016 as peaceful protests by Anglophone

CORRESPONDENCE –Anslem Wongibeh Adunimay Email: anselma@uj.ac.za

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lawyers and teachers demanding reforms in the education and judicial systems.¹ However, the protests eventually spiralled out of control into a political crisis and full-blown conflict. The government responded to the protest by deploying security forces, arresting hundreds, and charging activists with security-related offences.²

This crisis has revived the Anglophone question and exposed the weaknesses of Cameroon's highly centralised governance model, driven by a state-captured elite and elite co-optation.³ It has further highlighted the importance of recognising the rights of the English minorities. Since its outbreak in 2016, the conflict has claimed the lives of over 6,000 civilians, internally displaced 630,000, with 86,000 seeking refuge in Nigeria,⁴ and over 2-2 million in both regions are seeking humanitarian support.⁵ With the widespread socioeconomic and political impact, the conflict in Cameroon persists, thus gaining recognition by many as one of the world's overlooked humanitarian crises. This is largely due to its failure to draw international attention because of insufficient funding, inadequate media coverage, and political oversight.⁶ However, to promote peace and stability, the Head of State, on 10 September 2025, convened the CGND to address the fallouts of the conflict. Nonetheless, the conflict continues to persist years after the convening of the CGND and other peacebuilding initiatives, such as the Swiss Peace Seeking Process of 2022 and the 2023 Canada-mediated talks.⁷ Within this context, this article seeks to examine the implications of the CGND as the crisis continues unabated by critically examining its pitfalls vis-à-vis the war in both Anglophone regions. It argues that while the Dialogue produced significant policy recommendations aimed at addressing the Anglophone crisis, including decentralization and reintegration measures, its exclusion of key separatist stakeholders and insufficient trust-building measures ultimately undermined its effectiveness, revealing that inclusive participation, sustained implementation, and genuine political commitment are essential for national dialogues to contribute meaningfully to conflict transformation and lasting peace in Cameroon. Therefore, this paper comprehensively unpacks what triggered the CGND while examining the causes and impact of the conflict in both regions. Furthermore, it focuses on the various initiatives to resolve the conflict by specifically focusing on the National Dialogue. By so doing, it probes into the principles of a successful dialogue and the dialogue-peace interface. It also focuses on the findings and wraps up with recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The article adopted a qualitative research approach to evaluate how effective the Cameroon Grand National Dialogue has been in promoting lasting peace in the conflict-affected Anglophone regions of Cameroon. This research design used secondary data to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them within a natural setting, like the CGND.⁸ Despite allowing the description of the subject matter, it also assists in the uncovering of implications through this interpretative approach, thus providing a comprehensive overview of the CGND and its implications for peace and security.

¹ Ansem W Adunimay, "Secessionists Movements and Their Implications for Security in Africa: The Case of Southern Cameroons," 2022; Michaela Pelican, "The Anglophone Conflict in Cameroon—Historical and Political Background," *Freiburg: ABI Working Paper* 20 (2022).

² M. Sixtus, "Cameroon: Anglophone Activists Call for Month of 'Ghost Towns' Moments before Arrests and Internet Shutdown," 2017, <https://africanarguments.org/2017/01/cameroon-anglophone-activists-call-for-month-of-ghost-towns-before-arrests-and-internet-shutdown/>; Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Africa (CHRDA), "Cameroon's Unfolding Catastrophe: Evidence of Human Rights Violations and Crimes Against Humanity," 2019, <https://chrda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Camerouns-Unfolding-Catastrophe-CHRDA-RWCHR-2019.pdf>.

³ Mohamed Diatta et al., "Done Properly, National Dialogue Could Stabilise Cameroon," *ISS Peace and Security Council Report* 2019, no. 117 (2019): 14–15.

⁴ H. Kinkoh and T. Boudjekeu, "Time to Resolve Cameroon's Persistent yet Forgotten Crisis," 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/time-to-resolve-camerouns-persistent-yet-forgotten-crisis>.

⁵ T.N. Pinto, "In Cameroon, Centralization Leads to Strife," 2023, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/cameroon-anglophone-crisis/>.

⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council, "The World's Most Neglected Displacement Crises," 2019, <https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/fr/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crises/index.html>.

⁷ Oxford Human Rights Hub, "Cameroon Conflict Human Rights Report 2022/23: From January 2021 to April 2023," 2023, https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Cameroon-Conflict-Human-Rights-Report-2022_23.pdf.

⁸ Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, "Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research.," 2008.

The article used secondary data as it provided an overview of the Cameroon government's CGND peace initiative. These include: Official government gazettes, media reports, scholarly journal articles, books, and newspaper articles relating to the CGND and its implications for the crisis in the Anglophone regions. The data was analysed through thematic analysis as it was used to systematically analyse, interpret, and identify patterns and themes arising from the secondary data.

DISCUSSION

Motivations of the Anglophone Crisis

The current Anglophone problem in Cameroon arose from unresolved post-independence issues-economic exploitation, political marginalisation, social divisions, and clash of cultural identities, with a common theme being the perception of Anglophones as second-class citizens.⁹

Political subordination has been highlighted as one of the motivations for the Anglophone problem, as English-speaking regions felt colonized even after independence.¹⁰ For instance, Southern Cameroonians joined French Cameroon in the 1961 UN-led plebiscite seeking autonomy through federation under the leadership of John Ngu Foncha due to their continuous dissatisfaction with the British system of governance and influence from Nigeria in the region.¹¹ Nonetheless, the constitutional agreements were ignored, and they were instead absorbed into a centralised unitary state that marginalised them.¹² The crisis is also driven by long-term economic exploitation, as with the formation of the unitary state, Anglophones lost key financial institutions, businesses such as the Cameroon Bank, West Cameroon Development Authority, Tiko, Weh, Besongabang, and Bali airports, West Cameroon Produce Marketing Board, and Santa Coffee Estate. It also resulted in the collapse of private business ventures in Anglophone Cameroon, like Niba Automobile, Fomenky Direct Suppliers, and Nangah Company.¹³ Furthermore, they received little investment in development projects such as market centres, schools, and hospitals, and were marginalised in industries like the SONARA oil refinery despite their region's major contribution to the national economy.¹⁴

Communal stratification of the Anglophone region into culturally distinct administrative territories after independence weakened their autonomy. This was further exacerbated by the 1962 presidential decree (dividing the federation into six administrative unit intended to handicap and cloud the federal system) and the 1972 referendum (which abolished the federation in favour of a unitary state, dividing West Cameroons into the Northwest and Southwest provinces) and the centralisation of power under the president, further fueling Anglophones' push for secession.¹⁵

Another explanation for the Anglophone crisis stems from the systematic marginalisation of the English-speaking region. Francophones have always been appointed to strategic institutional and ministerial positions, while Anglophones have often been relegated to subordinate roles, thus reinforcing a sense of cultural and political inferiority. In addition, the above grievances varied and became solidified due to the enormous power of the president, who ruled by decrees and progressively violated constitutional agreements.¹⁶

Anglophones have consistently challenged the central government's efforts to marginalize their culture and language.¹⁷ The abolition of the federation and the centralisation of power under the

⁹ Billy Agwanda, Israel Nyaburi Nyadera, and Ugur Yasin Asal, "Cameroon and the Anglophone Crisis," in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 1–11, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5_115-1; Carlson Anyangwe, "A Country Decolonised Becomes Coloniser: Republique Du Cameroun's Colonial Occupation of the Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia)," *British Southern Cameroons: Nationalism & Conflict in Postcolonial Africa*, 2014, 1–12.

¹⁰ Agwanda, Nyadera, and Asal, "Cameroon and the Anglophone Crisis," 5.

¹¹ Piet Konings, "The Anglophone Cameroon-Nigeria Boundary: Opportunities and Conflicts," *African Affairs* 104, no. 415 (2005): 275–301.

¹² Joseph B Ebune, *The Growth of Political Parties in Southern Cameroons, 1916-1960* (CEPER, 1992).

¹³ Michael Ndobegang, "The Anglophone-Francophone Divide in Cameroon: Diagnosis of a National Disconnection," *Public. Unionky. Ed/Fulbright/Files/2009/07*, 2009; A. Mukong, *The Case for the Southern Cameroon* (Enugu: CAMFECO, 1990).

¹⁴ Agwanda, Nyadera, and Asal, "Cameroon and the Anglophone Crisis."

¹⁵ Verkijika G Falso, "Constitutional Problems in the Construction and Legality of the Unitary State in Cameroon," *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights* 3, no. 2 (2009): 4–16; Agwanda, Nyadera, and Asal, "Cameroon and the Anglophone Crisis."

¹⁶ Victor Julius Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800* (Presbook, 1996).

¹⁷ Anyangwe, "A Country Decolonised Becomes Coloniser: Republique Du Cameroun's Colonial Occupation of the

president undermined local accountability.¹⁸ Also, the removal of the word ‘united’ from the country’s name in 1984 to ‘Republic’ was perceived as an attempt to assimilate Anglophones, while the French language and administrative systems were increasingly imposed in education, courts, and government institutions.¹⁹ Apart from the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Board, the appointment of Anglophones in other educational institutions, such as the School for Administration and Magistracy (ENAM) and Combined Military Academy (EMIA), is almost non-existent, as these positions are often headed by francophones. Although some efforts have been made to publish official documents in both languages, sometimes their translations are incomprehensible or inaccurate.²⁰ This, therefore, threatens the preservation of the Anglophone cultural identity, common law, and administrative practices.²¹ From the above, it is evident that these grievances culminated in the civil unrest, exemplified by the February 2017 lawyers’ and teachers’ strikes. These protests were about the imposition of French systems and disregard for Anglophone identity as Common Law Lawyers, for example, as they were compelled to make court submissions in the French language because of the appointment of French magistrates.²² Teachers, on the other hand, protested against the ‘injection’ of French values and language into Anglophone schools with little regard for Anglophone values and identity.²³ Although different, the central theme was the disregard for the Anglophone cultural identity through the imposition of the French system of administration. The government’s slow response to the different memoranda submitted by both teachers and lawyers’ groups and repressive measures, including curfews, the banning of civil society groups, and internet shutdowns, fueled further discontent.²⁴ This environment gave rise to separatist and advocacy movements such as the Southern Cameroons National Council (SCNC), Ambazonian Movement, and the Free West Cameroon Movement (FWCM).²⁵ Initially, these groups sought the return of the two-state federation, except the Southern Cameroons Independence Restoration Council (SCIRC), which pursued independence through armed struggle.²⁶ However, with the government’s lacklustre efforts, perceived neglect, and repression, they were emboldened to continue fighting. In addition, the banning of the civil society group, the Consortium (consisting of both lawyers and teachers), not only created a leadership vacuum, which was regrettably exploited by extremist or radical Anglophone diaspora, but also resulted in the absence of an Anglophone leadership with which the government could engage.²⁷ As the crisis gained momentum internally, it also did internationally, with calls for the government to take concrete action towards its resolution.

Various Conflict Resolution Initiatives

Since the beginning of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, multifaceted local and international efforts have been made at various levels, but the crisis continues unabated. Whilst this section focuses on the CGND, it is of utmost importance to highlight some of these initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict.

International and Regional Response

Both international and regional responses have been largely inconsistent and influenced by political and economic interests. The United States, for example, has taken several steps, including visa restrictions,

Southern Cameroons (Ambazonia),” 50.

¹⁸ E. Tembon, “Crisis in the Republic of Cameroon: An Overview of the Anglophone Crisis 2016-2018,” 2018.

¹⁹ Falso, “Constitutional Problems in the Construction and Legality of the Unitary State in Cameroon.”

²⁰ Clarisse Awamengwi, “Understanding the State of Fragmented Nation-Building in Cameroon” (University of Virginia, 2015).

²¹ Christian P Musah, “Linguistic Segregation in Cameroon: A Systematic Tool for the Assimilation of the Anglophones,” *Asian Journal of Language, Literature and Culture Studies* 3, no. 3 (2020): 35–44.

²² V Kum Ngwoh, “An Evaluation of Nation Building Policies in Cameroon since Colonial Times,” *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2017): 1–23.

²³ Ngoh, *History of Cameroon since 1800*.

²⁴ Musah Basig Diaboh, “Challenges of Mobilizing Revenue by MMDAS for Local Level Development (A Case of Tamale Metropolitan Assembly-TaMA),” *Africa Development and Resources Research Institute Journal* 31, no. 2 (2022): 23–34.

²⁵ Joseph Lon Nfi, “Stages and Changing Modus Operandi of Anglophone Separatists in Cameroon since 1984,” *Africana Studia*, no. 33 (2020): 35-38.

²⁶ Piet Konings and Francis Beng Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*, vol. 1 (Brill, 2003), 214.

²⁷ N. E. Okereke, “Analyzing Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 3 (2018): 11.

travel warnings, economic sanctions, and Temporary Protected Status for eligible foreign-born Cameroonian nationals unable to return home due to the conflict.²⁸ But these measures have been largely reactive rather than solutions-oriented. In contrast, former colonial powers, the UK and France, have adopted lukewarm approaches, prioritizing political, economic, and security ties over meaningful intervention. France, for example, supports superficial decentralisation, while the UK has undertaken continuous military collaboration and trade with Cameroon despite the ongoing human rights abuses.²⁹ Although other states like Canada, Switzerland, and Norway have attempted mediation or raised awareness on the crisis, their efforts have often been stymied by the Cameroonian government's resistance or denial of external facilitation.³⁰ At the multilateral level, the UN and EU have been largely passive, issuing statements without applying substantive pressure on the Cameroonian government.³¹ Research institutions, NGOs, and civil society organisations have been more proactive, publishing reports and policy recommendations to highlight the crisis and urge action.³² For the EU, for example, despite being a weighty partner in sectors such as trade, humanitarian aid, and development, its political influence to end the crisis has also been limited, seldom advocating for inclusive dialogue to end the crisis and issuing resolutions through its council,³³ thus highlighting their prioritization of new trade investments over the resolution of the crisis.

Although the international response has been ambivalent, this paper argues that the possible reason for the stalling of the crisis is due to regional indecisiveness as they preferred to act rather discreetly. Regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) have similarly taken minimal action, offering largely rhetorical calls for dialogue. For example, apart from statements issued at the start of the conflict in 2016 by the former Chairperson, Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma calling for restraint,³⁴ and later in 2018, during a two-day visit to Cameroon, by the then AU Chair, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat expressing the need for inclusive dialogue the AU has been questionably silent.³⁵ Hence, there is a need for a more robust approach and not just mere rhetorical statements from the AU. Also, the silence of ECCAS has been duly noted, considering Cameroon is one of its members.³⁶ Neighbouring states like Nigeria continue to act cautiously, balancing trade, historical, and security ties with Cameroon, while suppressing separatist activities like the Boko Haram within its borders and arresting and repatriating the leader of the Ambazonia secessionist group, along with 46 others, in January 2018 to Cameroon.³⁷

²⁸ Immigration Law Centre, "Fact Sheet: Temporary Protected Status for Cameroon," 2023, <https://www.ilcm.org/latest-news/fact-sheet-temporary-protected-status-for-cameroon-2/#:~:text=If you are a Cameroonian,also meet the eligibility requirements;> Congressional Research Service, "Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy," 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46919/2>.

²⁹ S., Tametong, F. Tazoacha, and D. Tsafack, "Cameroon Welcomes Emmanuel Macron: A Visit Amid Multidimensional Challenges. ON Policy. Available at: <https://onpolicy.org/cameroon-welcomes-emmanuel-macron-a-visit-amid-multidimensional-challenges/>," 2022; Andrew Miller, "Countering Extremism through Interfaith Cooperation," *Journal of Peace and Religion* 17, no. 4 (2022): 231–45; J. Lunn and L. Brooke-Holland, "The Anglophone Cameroon Crisis: April 2019 Update," *House of Commons Library, BRIEFING PAPER Number 8331*, 2019. F. Foute, "Emmanuel Macron's Remarks Spark Public Outcry in Cameroon," *The Africa Report*, 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/23912/emmanuel-macron-remarks-spark-public-outcry-in-cameroon/>.

³⁰ Norwegian Refugee Council, "The World's Most Neglected Displacement Crises"; the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust, "Preventing And Mitigating Mass Atrocities in Northwest and Southwest Cameroon: Identifying Policy Options," Policy Brief, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/policy-brief-preventing-mass-atrocities-cameroon-identifying-policy-options>; M. E. Kindzeka, "Cameroon Denies Canada's Mediation with Separatists," *Voice of America*, 2023.

³¹ International Crisis Group, "Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2024," *Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°195*, 2024.

³² Human Rights Watch, "To All UN Security Council Members," 2019, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/news_attachments/ngo_joint_letter_cameroon_final.pdf; J. Mutah, "Global Responses to Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: The Inadequate International Efforts to End the World's Most Neglected Conflict," 2022, <https://saisreview.sais.jhu.edu/cameroon-anglophone-crisis-global-response/>; International Crisis Group, "Eight Priorities for the African Union in 2024."

³³ B.E. Nwenfor, "Cameroon: European Union Advocates Inclusive Dialogue to End Anglophone Crisis," *Pan African Voices*, 2019, <https://panafricanvisions.com/2019/10/cameroon-european-union-advocates-inclusive-dialogue-to-end-anglophone-crisis/>.

³⁴ M. Baretta, "AU Offers to Negotiate: Calls for Restraint and Effective Dialogue," *Baretta News*, January 26, 2017, <https://www.baretta.news/au-offers-negotiate-calls-restraint-effective-dialogue>.

³⁵ African Union, "Readout of the Visit of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission to Cameroon," 2018.

³⁶ African Centre for Strategic Studies, "Growing Instability in Cameroon Raises Fundamental Questions about the State," 2018, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/growing-instability-cameroon-raises-fundamental-questions-about-state/>.

³⁷ S. Nuhu, "Cameroon Separatist Leaders Who Sought Refuge in Nigeria Jailed for Life," *Premium Times*, 2019, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/347695-cameroon-separatist-leaders-who-sought-refuge-in-nigeria-jailed-for->

From the above, both regional and international responses to the Anglophone crisis have been selective, ambivalent, and influenced by strategic interests, thus leaving the crisis unresolved.

Internal Responses

Since the outset of the Anglophone crisis in 2016, the Cameroonian government has pursued a hybrid approach combining administrative, political, and security measures. These include:

- Creating an English division of the Supreme Court and a Common Law section at the National Administration and Magistracy
 - Translating legal texts into the English language, such as the Organisation pour l'harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires (OHADA) Uniform Act.
 - Recruiting bilingual teachers for secondary schools
 - Promoting decentralisation
 - Establishing the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism
 - Implementing DDR programmes for separatist combatants
 - Launching the President's Plan for reconstructing the Northwest and Southwest regions.³⁸
- Despite all these measures, violence persists, highlighting limited government effectiveness.

This paper, however, argues that the 2019 Cameroon Grand National Dialogue was arguably the government's most significant attempt to resolve the crisis. Before examining the CGND, it will be important to explain the concept of National Dialogues (NDs) and their relevance in the peacebuilding narrative.

The Concept of National Dialogues in Perspective

NDs are a state-owned, defined political process identified as a fundamental tool for peacebuilding for decades,³⁹ as they aimed to prevent violent conflict, manage political crises, and transitions.⁴⁰ In doing so, they become powerful mechanisms in nation-building.⁴¹

Globally, NDs have registered mixed success with examples in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America illustrating both achievements and failures.⁴² For instance, President Salva Kiir of South Sudan formally initiated the National Dialogue in May 2017 after the onset of the 2013 conflict, while it was initiated in Zimbabwe in 2019 after the political crisis following the March 2018 elections. In addition, the ND took place in Yemen from March 2013 to January 2014 after ten months of deliberation, and in Myanmar, though unsuccessful, it was held in 2015.⁴³ Whilst the list is not exhaustive, the paper emphasises that it is not in all conflict cases that NDs have been successful.

life.html?tztc=1; United Nations Development Programme, "Conflict Analysis in The Lake Chad Basin 2020-2021: Trends, Developments, and Implications for Peace and Stability," 2022, [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-08/Conflict Analysis in the Lake Chad Basin.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-08/Conflict%20Analysis%20in%20the%20Lake%20Chad%20Basin.pdf).

³⁸ F. Tazoacha, "State-Centric Approach to Resolving The Anglophone Conflict In Cameroon: What Prospects?," *Nkafu Policy Institute*, 2021.

³⁹ Surafel Getahun, "Success and Failure of National Dialogue Selected Countries Cases Study: General Lesson to Ethiopia," *Available at SSRN 4473420*, 2023.

⁴⁰ Marike Blunck et al., "National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners," *Berlin: Berghof Foundation*. https://www.berghoffoundation.org/fileadmin/Redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/NationalDialogue/BF-NationalDialogue-Handbook.Pdf, 2017.

⁴¹ Seth Kaplan and Mark Freeman, "Inclusive Transitions Framework," *Institute for Integrated Transitions*, 2015.

⁴² C. Zambakari, "Six Factors for Successful National Dialogues," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 2016.

⁴³ S. Stigant and E. Murray, "National Dialogues A Tool for Conflict Transformation?," *United States Institute of Peace, Peace Brief 194*, 2015; Katia Papagianni, "National Dialogues and the Resolution of Violent Conflicts," *International Law and Peace Settlements*, 2021, 313–32.

This paper also argues that there is no clear-cut definition of the concept of ND, the reason being that “scholars and practitioners have used the term to describe a range of diverse arrangements.”⁴⁴ This is also because NDs have been explored within specific cases and contexts. Nonetheless, NDs “are inclusive negotiating mechanisms which expand participation in peace processes and political transitions by including a wide array of political, military, and civil society groups.”⁴⁵ It serves to expand participation beyond elites by involving political parties, armed groups, civil society, religious and tribal leaders, and other stakeholders.⁴⁶ They are highly structured and typically follow three stages: preparation, process, and implementation.⁴⁷ They also seem to address wide-ranging reforms such as reshaping state-society relations, crafting social agreements, and creating political bodies.⁴⁸ While NDs have potential as powerful peacebuilding tools, their success depends on adherence to key principles and well-structured engagements.⁴⁹ However, before examining the principles, it is important to highlight the significance of dialogues within the peacebuilding discourse.

The Dialogue-Peacebuilding Nexus

The link between dialogue and peacebuilding is fundamental in addressing the complexities of conflict situations. This paper opines that dialogue is a powerful tool in peacebuilding, providing a structured platform for communities affected by conflict to communicate, build trust, and address sensitive issues. It refers to “deliberate, arranged conversations across conflict lines with a focus on building bridges between the different parties, by providing safe spaces for direct communication between people from opposing sides.”⁵⁰ It also enables stakeholders to understand differing perspectives, identify root causes of conflict, and collaboratively develop constructive and contextually relevant solutions. Furthermore, effective dialogue also serves as a learning and conscientization process, fostering relationships, trust and community resilience. While solutions are key to the dialogue process, stakeholders should be mindful of solutions which are not organic. This is because foreign methodologies and approaches, which some stakeholders might suggest have the propensity of not reflecting the realities of the issues being discussed, and hence may not be the panacea that will resolve the issues.

Nonetheless, dialogues are not always intended to resolve a specific conflict; sometimes their goal is to strengthen community capacities and improve mutual understanding. For dialogue to be effective, key principles such as inclusiveness, transparency, and setting an appropriate agenda must be carefully observed. The next section examines the principles to be adhered to for a successful national dialogue.

Principles Guiding the Success of National Dialogues

Inclusivity and Participation

All key stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society, religious groups, political parties, and traditional authorities, must be meaningfully involved. This is paramount as the level and degree of inclusion will shape their perspectives of the ND as their grievances can be suitably addressed and aspirations met.⁵¹ Also, participation should be carefully managed to prevent unconnected actors from derailing the process; therefore, proper casting is essential for its success.

An Agenda that Addresses the Root Causes of Conflicts

⁴⁴ E. Murray and S. Stigant, “National Dialogues in Peacebuilding and Transitions,” *United States Institute for Peace*, 2021.

⁴⁵ Papagianni, “National Dialogues and the Resolution of Violent Conflicts.”

⁴⁶ Papagianni, “National Dialogues and the Resolution of Violent Conflicts.”

⁴⁷ Getahun, “Success and Failure of National Dialogue Selected Countries Cases Study: General Lesson to Ethiopia”; Papagianni, “National Dialogues and the Resolution of Violent Conflicts.”

⁴⁸ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners”; Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework”; Tania Paffenholz, Anne Zachariassen, and Cindy Helfer, “What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?” (Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative, Graduate Institute of International ..., 2017); J. Harlander and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “Supporting a National Dialogue: Dilemmas & Options for Third Parties,” *HD Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*, 2016.

⁴⁹ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁵⁰ International Alert, “Community Dialogue in Somalia: Lessons Learned from Implementing Peacebuilding Dialogues in Mogadishu,” 2017, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/community-dialogue-somalia/>.

⁵¹ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners”; Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework.”

The ND agenda should reflect the primary objective that led to the initiation and organization of the ND. It should also constitute sessions where potential triggers of issues plaguing and may lead to instability are discussed and viable solutions proffered.⁵² According to Stigant and Murray, ND agendas should come up with meaningful discussions on the significant concerns of all primary interest groups.⁵³ This is essential as the act of reaching a consensus on a program represents a ‘mini’ compromise where the exclusion of specific participants can weaken their support and the perceived validity of the national dialogue.⁵⁴

Transparency and Public Participation

Effective NDs require open communication with the public through community meetings, public hearings, civil society dialogues, a website, and social media to promote trust and legitimacy. More efforts should be made to educate the public and ensure the active involvement of all citizens in the process. Failure to do so, the entire process will be in jeopardy.⁵⁵

A Credible and Neutral Convener

NDs are called up under the leadership of a central individual or organization.⁵⁶ The credibility of NDs also relies on the neutrality and credibility of the convener. According to the National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG),⁵⁷ the convener should be a “respected and agreed single person, a group or an organization with no political aspirations or objective that will cause a conflict of interest”. In addition, considering that the choice of a convener can make or mar the process, the power to leverage, age, experience, and gravitas are criteria that should constitute the casting toolkit.

Clear Mandate and Tailored Structure, Rules, and Procedures

The Berghof Foundation opines that the mandates constitute the “backbone” and, as such, “define both its prerogatives and objectives.”⁵⁸ Considering that the contexts in which NDs are organized always differ, it is paramount that meetings are held to evaluate the suppositions of the key participants.⁵⁹ This is because stakeholders have the potential to influence the drafting of the mandate, which will consequently have a bearing on the outcome of the ND. It is also essential that for the goal/s of the ND to be met, mandates should exhibit clarity and transparency in terms of objectives and authority.⁶⁰ In addition, due to the diverse nature of NDs, it is also important that every ND establish a unique set of guidelines and processes for decision-making. These processes must also incorporate methods to resolve deadlocks.⁶¹

Widely Agreed Mechanism for Implementation of Outcomes.

The effectiveness of NDs can be evaluated on two fronts: the reaching of a consensus and the degree to which it is executed.⁶² It therefore does not end once the formal process is completed, but continues in its execution.⁶³ The implementation phase, according to Haider, should be critically and carefully

⁵² Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁵³ Stigant and Murray, “National Dialogues A Tool for Conflict Transformation? .”

⁵⁴ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁵⁵ United Nations Development Programme, “Guide on the National Dialogue Process in South Sudan,” 2017, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/guide-national-dialogue-process-south-sudan>.

⁵⁶ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁵⁷ National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG), “National Transitional Justice Working Group Zimbabwe: Outreach Programme & Establishment of Provincial Peace Committees,” 2019, <https://ntjwg.org.zw/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NPRC-Watch-8th-Edition.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Harlander and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “Supporting a National Dialogue: Dilemmas & Options for Third Parties.”

⁵⁹ Harlander and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “Supporting a National Dialogue: Dilemmas & Options for Third Parties.”

⁶⁰ Harlander and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “Supporting a National Dialogue: Dilemmas & Options for Third Parties.”

⁶¹ National Transitional Justice Working Group (NTJWG), “National Transitional Justice Working Group Zimbabwe: Outreach Programme & Establishment of Provincial Peace Committees.”

⁶² Paffenholz, Zachariassen, and Helfer, “What Makes or Breaks National Dialogues?”

⁶³ Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework.”

designed and planned.⁶⁴ Also, for its easy implementation, it is important to guarantee the establishment of accountability systems, and the provision of adequate resources and skills,⁶⁵ as this stage is supported by several Interim entities and/or new organizations to execute the results. Establishing verification and monitoring systems is also crucial, like monitoring arrangements by civil society, so that key stakeholders may feel obligated to adhere to the agreement and be held responsible.⁶⁶

National Ownership and The Role of External Actors

Local ownership is crucial for the success of any ND, and they should be primarily led and financed by national authorities. Considering that NDs are expensive, international actors should provide supplementary funding, technical support, and expertise through capacity-building programmes for delegates to engage in meaningful deliberations while ensuring accountability remains national. Concerning international funding, donors should also ensure that such funding is directed towards the implementation of policies resulting from the ND and request accountability for the usage of these funds.⁶⁷

Institutional Framework and Support Structures

NDs are unique in their varied contexts; hence, it is essential that when setting up structures, they should correspond to the identifiable requirements and objectives of each procedure.⁶⁸ Kaplan and Freeman also note that the design and setting up of institutional and support structures during transitions are critical turning points and hence should cover a wide range of issues:

electoral systems, judicial systems, decentralization, the distribution of money, the independence of different parts of the government (such as the central bank), and the role of any local traditional structures or external institutions such as regional organizations. It should include ways to reduce corruption, cronyism, elite domination, ethnicity-driven politics, and extremism.⁶⁹

For institutional and support structures to be legitimate, they should address local realities.⁷⁰ To ensure resilience, it is important to build on what already works in the country and not adopt or copy a ‘foreign blueprint’, no matter how good-looking the latter may seem.

The Cameroon Grand National Dialogue: Objectives and Resolutions

Confronted with persistent attacks and instability in the Far North, the South-West and North-west regions of the country, and with the hope of finding lasting solutions for a return to peace and stability, President Paul Biya declared the convening of the CGND from 30 September to 4 October 2019. Presided over by Prime Minister, Chief Dr. Dion Ngute, the ND was aimed to address instability in both the Northwest and Southwest regions by promoting peace, social cohesion, decentralisation, reconstruction, and reintegration of displaced persons and ex-combatants.⁷¹ While “appealing to the patriotism and sense of responsibility of all”, Cameroonians, President Biya entreated them to take advantage of this auspicious moment in history and guide the country toward peace, harmony, security, and progress.⁷²

⁶⁴ H. Haider, “National Dialogues: Lessons Learned and Success Factors,” 2019, https://www.epdn.org/Uploads/543_National_Dialogues_Lessons_Learned_0907.pdf.

⁶⁵ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁶⁶ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners”; Harlander and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, “Supporting a National Dialogue: Dilemmas & Options for Third Parties”; Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework.”

⁶⁷ Stigant and Murray, “National Dialogues A Tool for Conflict Transformation? .”

⁶⁸ Blunck et al., “National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners.”

⁶⁹ Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework.”

⁷⁰ Kaplan and Freeman, “Inclusive Transitions Framework.”

⁷¹ Government of Cameroon, “Report by the General Rapporteur of the Grand National Dialogue,” Yaoundé Conference Center, October 4, 2019, <https://nationaldialogue.cm/fr/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/10/GDNRapport-rapporteur-général-fr-ok.pdf>.

⁷² Presidency of Cameroon, “The Head of State’s Message to the Nation,” September 10, 2019, https://www.prc.cm/en/multimedia/documents/7804-head-of-state-s-message-to-the-nation-10-sept-2019-en?album_id=9113580.

Before the main dialogue, the Prime Minister conducted pre-dialogue consultations with political leaders, civil society, religious figures, diaspora members, members of the judiciary, student organisations, independent personalities, and some participants involved in violent acts in both regions. These pre-dialogues were conducted to establish a suitable framework for discussions during the main dialogue and focused on information gathering.⁷³ Members of the diaspora were also invited to various sessions by the Cameroonian Diplomatic Mission, commissioned by the Cameroonian government.⁷⁴

As per the guidelines in the Heads of State's 10 September 2019 message, the main dialogue was to be conducted through plenary sessions and commission break-out groups. The Prime Minister emphasised the coverage of eight themes, which include:

Bilingualism, cultural diversity, and social cohesion; educational System; Judicial System, Return of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, Reconstruction and Development of conflict-affected areas, Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants, Role of the Diaspora in the Crisis and the Country's Development, and Decentralization and local development.⁷⁵

The dialogue, which lasted for a week, contained key resolutions to resolve the conflict, which include, amongst others, the granting of "special status" to both Northwest and Southwest regions, allowing for greater autonomy in the management of local affairs⁷⁶ in the reconstruction and development of the Anglophone regions in what was referred to as the Presidential Plan for the Reconstruction and Development of the North West and South West regions (PPRD-NW/SW), the promotion of political decentralisation, the return of displaced individuals, and the reintegration of combatants. After the dialogue, President Biya also ordered the release of 7018 detainees and the discontinuation of proceedings against 333+ persons, including Maurice Kamto.⁷⁷ As a follow-up to the resolutions and to ensure their effective implementation, President Biya issued a decree No. 2020/136 creating a follow-up committee on the implementation of dialogue resolutions on March 23, 2020.⁷⁸

A Critique of the CGND

The CGND has been highly criticized for its lack of inclusivity and participation. For instance, the principle of inclusivity is grounded on the premise that it gives room for all key stakeholders, such as those with a vested interest, to actively participate in the process,⁷⁹ but this was not the case with the CGND. Although the government did invite representatives from political parties, civil society, religious and traditional leaders, the Cameroonian diaspora, along with chosen secessionist leaders, to participate in the process, it was unwilling to invite 'key separatist leaders', especially those abducted from Nigeria, or make genuine arrangements for them to participate.⁸⁰ since the dialogue was held in Yaounde, where they were detained. This sparked concerns about the credibility and eventual success of the CGND as a whole.

Also, the CGND lacked a credible and neutral convener as it was more of a government-led process, with proceedings dominated by pro-government officials with little room for public engagement, given the limited time frame. Begealawuh argues that there was only a three-week gap

⁷³ Cameroon Tribune, "Major National Dialogue: Recommendations to Restore Peace, Stability, and Development," 2019, <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/28306/fr.html/major-national-dialogue-recommendations-restore-peace-stability#>.

⁷⁴ Embassy of the Republic of Cameroon to the Kingdom of Belgium and the European Union, "Consultations Ahead of the Major National Dialogue Held in Brussels" (2019).

⁷⁵ Cameroon Tribune, "Major National Dialogue: Recommendations to Restore Peace, Stability, and Development."

⁷⁶ M. Bone, "Cameroon Grants 'Special Status' to Its Restive Regions. They Don't Feel Special," 2020, <https://africanarguments.org/2020/01/cameroon-grants-special-status-anglophone-conflict/>.

⁷⁷ Congressional Research Service, "Cameroon: Key Issues and U.S. Policy."

⁷⁸ Republic of Cameroon, "Decree No. 2020/136 of 23 March 2020 to Lay down the Establishment, Organization and Functioning of the Committee to Follow up the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Major National Dialogue," 2020, <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/decrees/4177-decree-no-2020-136-of-23-march-2020-to-lay-down-the-establishment-organization-and-functioning-of-the-committee-to-follow-up-the-implementation-of-the-recommendations-of-the-major-national-dialogue?highlight=WzIwMjAsMTM2LClYMDIwIDEzNiJd>.

⁷⁹ Blunck et al., "National Dialogue Handbook: A Guide for Practitioners"; Kaplan and Freeman, "Inclusive Transitions Framework."

⁸⁰ Kinkoh and Boudjekeu, "Time to Resolve Cameroon's Persistent yet Forgotten Crisis."

between the announcement of the dialogue and its beginning.⁸¹ The time allocated for pre-dialogue consultations and preparations was insufficient for the public to actively engage and consult. This is opposite to the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation (KNDR) of 2008, whose success was largely attributed to the role played by the African Union Chair John Kufuor, who persuaded the parties to join the dialogue mediated by the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, chaired by Kofi Annan, as well as the active role played by civil society.⁸²

The CGND's lack of inclusivity was further reinforced when some of the invited political parties, such as the Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC) of Professor Maurice Kamto, alongside other parties like Alliance des Forces Progressistes (AFP), Cameroon People Party (CPP), Movement Now (MN), and Parti de l'Alliance Libérale (PAL), decided to pull out after day one of the sessions.⁸³ Also, the AFP leader Alice Sadio referred to the dialogue as a "hypocritical monologue" arranged and controlled by the ruling party.⁸⁴ Others even described the event as a "congress of the ruling party", given that the chosen venue was in the Palais de Congrès in Yaoundé, which is known as the headquarters of the national party RDP and where party congresses for the past three decades have been hosted.⁸⁵ Efforts to coerce the government to hold the dialogue on neutral territory with third-party mediation to foster greater inclusion proved abortive.

In addition to the dialogue's lack of inclusivity, another cardinal principle that marred the credibility of the dialogue is directly linked to its agenda. It is important to highlight that the CGND was not only convened by the head of State, President Paul Biya, but the themes that anchored the agenda were also formulated by the latter. Thus, the agenda failed to capture the crux of the issue that led to the conflict, which is the form of the state. Hence, during deliberation calls made by Anglophones to discuss the form of state in line with federalism and talk less of secession were carefully and meticulously ignored. Even prominent Anglophone figures who advocated for a discussion on federalism were heckled by government supporters.⁸⁶

Furthermore, regarding the mechanism for implementation of outcomes, many have argued that during the dialogue and post the dialogue, this has been one of the criteria that has been effectively enforced.⁸⁷ For instance, they argue that one of the groundbreaking decisions and outcomes of the dialogue, amongst others, was the bestowing of the Special Status to NoSo regions. It should be highlighted that the provisions of the 1996 constitution include a section for the Special Status that alludes to and recognizes "the specificities of certain Regions"⁸⁸ thus giving these regions a measure of greater autonomy and power than the other eight Francophone regions. But interestingly, one would therefore question why, for all these years, the Cameroonian government had not passed laws to ensure its implementation. Nonetheless, by invoking this provision for the Nosos regions, the government officially accepted the Special Status, signed it into law on 24 December 2019, and outlined its meaning and applicability.⁸⁹

⁸¹ N.C. Begealawuh, "Cameroon's National Dialogue Is Repeating Other Countries' Mistakes," 2024, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2024/09/25/camerouns-national-dialogue-is-repeating-other-countries-mistakes/>.

⁸² Murray and Stigant, "National Dialogues in Peacebuilding and Transitions."

⁸³ Foute, "Emmanuel Macron's Remarks Spark Public Outcry in Cameroon."

⁸⁴ El. Asen, "Le Grand Dialogue National Tourne Court Au Cameroun. In: Deutsche Welle," October 2, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/fr/le-grand-dialogue-national-tourne-court-au-cameroun/a-50684200>; J. Kouagheu, "Au Cameroun, La Libération Du Premier Opposant Ne Calme Pas La Déception Après Un Grand Dialogue Jugé Trop Muselé," *Le Monde*, 2020, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/10/05/au-cameroun-la-liberation-du-premieropposant-ne-calme-pas-la-deception-apres-un-grand-dialogue-juge-tropmusele_6014394_3212.html.

⁸⁵ B.A. Lassaad, "Cameroun/Grand Dialogue National: L'opposition et La Société Civile Insistent Sur Le Fédéralisme," Anadolu Agency, October 2, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/cameroun-grand-dialogue-national-l-opposition-et-lasociete-civile-insistent-sur-le-federalisme-/1599836>.

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group, "A Second Look at Cameroon's Anglophone Special Status," *Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°188*, 2023.

⁸⁷ Henry Kam Kah, "'Come-No-Go/l'ennemi... Dans La Maison': Reflections on the Lingoes of Conflict in Cameroon's Urban History," *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society* 7, no. 1 (2019): 137–60.

⁸⁸ Republic of Cameroon, "Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon: Law No. 96-06 of 18 January 1996 to Amend the Constitution of 2 June 1972," 1996, <https://www.cnpbm.cm/en/legal-framework/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-Cameroon>.

⁸⁹ Republic of Cameroon, "Law No. 2019/24 of 24 December 2019, the General Code for Regional and Local Authorities," 2019, <https://www.prc.cm/en/news/the-acts/laws/4049-law-no-2019-024-of-24-december-2019-bill-to-institute-the-general-code-of-regional-and-local-authorities>.

Besides, critics argue that granting a Special Status whilst the conflict was still ongoing was “putting the cart before the horse”. In many nations where a conflict has taken place between a particular group and the central State, there is usually a Peace Agreement established (signed by the Government and the combatant forces), followed by a Law granting the Special Status. As an example, this is how the conflict that endured for more than 30 years between Indonesia and armed groups desiring independence in its Aceh island province was addressed (Peace Agreement in 2005, Special Status Autonomy Law in 2006). A similar approach was taken to address a prolonged dispute between the Philippines and its Bangsamoro Region (Peace Agreement in 2012, Special Autonomy Status Law in 2018).⁹⁰ A Peace Agreement is crucial because it establishes (i) a ceasefire, (ii) the withdrawal of offensive forces by all parties involved in the conflict, (iii) the proper initiation of safe Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, (iv) amnesty, release, and rehabilitation of prisoners related to the political conflict, and (v) a national effort for reconciliation, healing, and reparations for victims to address the injustices they suffered. More so, critics further opine that the Special Status was a futile attempt to salvage the image of the government, which had outrightly refused that there was anything like an Anglophone problem, but later recognized the latter. Based on this, they argue that granting the Special Status was a unilateral decision made by the government without any prior consultation with the Anglophone community.⁹¹ Furthermore, despite the Special Status giving the NoSo regions autonomy, it is argued that their autonomy is limited because the central government, alongside its appointed governors, still has full administrative and financial control of the Anglophone regions.⁹² This is the complete opposite if one were to highlight cases such as the South Tyrol region of Italy⁹³ and the Basque⁹⁴ and the Navarra region of Spain.⁹⁵

Although the government argues that the ND was successful due to the resumption of socio-economic activities in both regions, evidence from other NGOs suggests that little has been achieved to foster the socio-economic situation of both regions, even though the Presidential Plan anchored the Reconstruction and Recovery of both regions on three pillars: social cohesion, infrastructural rehabilitation, and local economic revitalisation.⁹⁶ According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, since the start of the crisis in 2017, non-state armed groups in both regions have continuously prohibited the functioning of government-administered schools.⁹⁷ As of November 2023, 38.5 percent of schools were not functional in the NoSo regions.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, if schools have effectively resumed, as government officials claim, it will only be in the major towns of Bamenda, Buea, and Limbe, which are highly militarized.

Another sector that has been severely affected is health. Folefac confirms this in her study.⁹⁹ The latter highlights that access to health facilities in several villages in the NoSo region has become a daunting task since the crisis erupted in 2017. In addition to the dysfunctional educational system and the limited access to health facilities, livelihood has also been greatly impacted because of the disrupted supply chain. For instance, roads leading to farms, markets, and business establishments, especially in rural areas, are regularly blocked, leading to increased transportation prices and basic commodities.

⁹⁰ P. Simo and E.A. Gatsi Tazo, “Cameroon: Major National Dialogue- 5 Years Later- Understanding The Special Status,” 2024, <https://panafricanvisions.com/2024/10/cameroon-major-national-dialogue-5-years-later-understanding-the-special-status/>.

⁹¹ International Crisis Group, “A Second Look at Cameroon’s Anglophone Special Status.”

⁹² International Crisis Group, “A Second Look at Cameroon’s Anglophone Special Status.”

⁹³ A., Bergmann and H. H. Hinterhuber, “Fiscal Autonomy and Fiscal Sustainability in South Tyrol,” *Regional Science* 4, no. 1 (2017): 121–34.

⁹⁴ Alejandro Barón, “Why Public Finance Matters: Evolution of Independence Movements in Catalonia and the Basque Country during the Twenty-First Century,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 35, no. 2 (2015): 91–103.

⁹⁵ F. Zipfel, S. Vetter, and D. Pietzker, “Better off on Their Own? Economic Aspects of Regional Autonomy and Independence Movements in Europe,” *Technical Report, Deutsche Bank Research*, February 6, 2015.

⁹⁶ R. Mbonteh, “Crisis Regions: The Path to Reconstruction,” *Cameroon Tribune*, 2024.

⁹⁷ UN OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian Needs Overview Cameroon,” Humanitarian Programme Cycle, May 11, 2023, https://www.unocha.org/attachments/fb6e7f31-3931-463a-b9d65d243e9f3071/CMR_HNO_2023_v7_20230405.pdf.

⁹⁸ UN OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian Needs Overview Cameroon.”

⁹⁹ Helen Chapany Folefac, “The Impact of the Anglophone Conflict on Youth’s Education, Health and Nation Building in Cameroon from 2017 to 2023,” *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 12, no. 11 (2024): 204–18.

In addition, Decree No. 2020/136 was signed by President Paul Biya to establish a follow-up committee for the execution of dialogue resolutions on March 23, 2020. Since then, the Prime Minister of Cameroon, Joseph Dion Ngute, has conducted and led various meetings to implement recommendations from the dialogue, including a session in Buea in 2023, to assess the advancement of the execution. It is against this backdrop that, despite these moves, several pressure groups and leading civil society organizations in Cameroon believe that the 2019 hyped CGND's failure to discuss the fundamental issue, which was the form of the state, was all but a façade. Furthermore, it is an aberration and misleading by the government to claim that the conflict in the NoSo has been resolved when many continue to live in fear. Armed separatists continue to demonstrate their strength, and lockdowns are still observed, especially on Mondays. Kidnappings by armed men and arrests by state forces have become the norm

This paper, therefore, argues that the CGND was a government-controlled façade, and the fundamental and contentious reason for holding the dialogue was never discussed or given due consideration.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the effectiveness of the Cameroon Grand National Dialogue (CGND) in promoting long-lasting peace in the conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon. Initiated by the Head of State in September 2019, the paper notes that the CNGD served as a platform for the recognition of grievances of both Anglophone regions and the institution of measures by the government for the resolution of the conflict. It has also highlighted both the benefits and limitations of national dialogues as peacebuilding instruments in African conflicts while assessing the principles of a successful dialogue.

The paper noted that although the convening of the CGND was regarded as important in addressing the socio-economic, political, and cultural challenges faced by Anglophones, it failed to live up to its expectations. Firstly, discussions on certain issues were limited and controlled by pro-government officials, thus failing to address the core issues of the state's structure and federalism. This, therefore, fueled mistrust from the stakeholders against the officials as it was regarded as another medium of French assimilation, under the guise of CGND. Secondly, the CGND lacked inclusivity as key separatist leaders were excluded, public engagement was limited, and political parties withdrew from the process due to a limited preparation period, thus undermining its capacity and credibility to address the root causes of the Anglophone crisis. In addition, the granting of 'special status' to Anglophones was regarded as a façade as full administrative and financial control remained with the central government, thus questioning its intention to promote decentralisation.

From the above, it is evident that the success of national dialogues is not hinged on the convening of various stakeholders, but on neutrality, inclusivity, and a willingness to interpret reforms and ensure their full implementation. Failure to do so, they will remain performative exercises instead of transformational instruments for peace and stability. The Cameroonian situation has become a vivid example where the government continues to make partial concessions instead of resolving the crisis by addressing its root causes of governance and cultural identity to guarantee peace and stability in both regions of the country. Also, there needs to be genuine representative dialogues backed by strong political will for the attainment of sustainable peace.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr. Anslem W. Adunimay is a peace and conflict researcher and fellow with the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He holds a PhD and a master’s degree in politics and international relations, focusing on conflict resolution and peace studies, and a B.A. Hons in international relations from the University of Johannesburg, and a Bachelor's in Law and Political Science from the University of Douala in Cameroon. Anslem has published and co-authored several book chapters and policy-relevant and academic papers in peer-reviewed and accredited journals and has participated in regional and international conferences and training programs. His analytical competencies and expertise are in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, and his research interests include political risk, African conflicts and cooperation dynamics, the politics of representation, post-conflict reconstruction, development, and sustainability, electoral politics and leadership in Africa, and migration and human security.

Dr Maureen N. Lifongo is a researcher and fellow in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. She holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations, a Master's degree in Politics, and an Honours degree in International Relations from North-West University, South Africa, as well as a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Buea, Cameroon. Her research focuses on electoral governance, regional organisations' politics, gender, and democracy in Africa. She has published and co-authored journal articles and book chapters on topics including electoral governance, hybrid regimes, gender and democracy.