

The Impact of Governance on Structural Violence in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Governance inefficiency is responsible for unspeakable feelings of structural violence and political disenchantment. Cameroon like many other African countries is afflicted by weak governance. This study investigates the intricate relationship between governance and structural violence in Cameroon, a nation grappling with multifaceted crises rooted in historical injustices and socio-political challenges. Structural violence, defined as systematic ways in which social structures harm individuals by preventing them from meeting their basic needs, manifests in various forms, including economic deprivation, social inequality, and political marginalization. This research reveals that governance in Cameroon, characterized by corruption, sociopolitical crisis, and lack of accountability, exacerbates structural violence, particularly affecting marginalized communities. By employing a qualitative methodological framework, this study analyzes governmental policies, civil society responses, and the pervasive impact on civilian populations in the education sector, health sector, and economic sector which are domains where structural violence inflicted on the poor is the product of poor governance or bad policies. It argues that the failure of governance to address socio-economic disparities not only perpetuates structural violence but also contributes to the escalation of direct violence, further destabilizing an already fragile social fabric. Ultimately, this research emphasizes the urgent need for inclusive governance reforms that address the root causes of structural violence to foster peace, social justice, and sustainable development in Cameroon.

Keywords: governance; structural violence; Cameroon.

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of governance in a country is critical in determining societal well-being as it decides the interaction between the formal state actors as well as the media and citizens at large. Given the legacy of armed struggle and ongoing internal conflict in Cameroon, coupled with the forthcoming general election, examining the influence of governance on issues of structural violence has never been more important. It is very relevant to study all sorts of resistance and discrimination at all levels of governance in the country¹. Daily, denials and rejections are perpetuated across the boundaries of states assembled mainly along language². This feeling is further compounded by poor economic policies, limited opportunities, and lack of justice. Structural violence goes beyond the exercise of physical power and domination. It often includes the unseen harms for which those in power do not feel responsible but are integral to the prevailing social order³. In such a context of publicly declared political animosity at the two levels, socio-economic policies will generally favor the in-groups in terms of infrastructure. Given all these factors, the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of governance on structural violence in Cameroon. That served as a window to understand and appreciate social welfare in Cameroon⁴. The conceptual analysis of governance not only helps to build our understanding of bottom-up initiatives, but governance practice is another lens for understanding the everyday exercise of power.

This analysis begins with a brief contextual background and then moves into the theoretical and methodological aspects of the study.

1.1. Background and Rationale

Governance failures continue to stigmatize the administration of socio-political life in Cameroon, where violence towards particular social categories of people has become ordinary. Even though governance is tied to political order, it is also possible to disentangle its essence from norms and rules that underpin relations among people. Governance involves the management of the fair and just distribution of society's collective resources, respect for other people's dignity, and a duty of care irrespective of differences. However, in Cameroon and many other countries afflicted by weak governance, vulnerable people are often relegated to the margins of society; inequalities hardly raise the attention of governments, and the rule of law protects only some. Governance problems are perpetual drivers of structural forms of violence, which cumulatively erode human dignity, equity, human rights, and social justice. Drawing on recent socio-political turbulence, protracted crises, governance performance records, and lack of engagement with the relationship that intertwines governance and structural violence in the Cameroon literature, this paper makes a case for an empirical and nuanced interpretation of governance and structural violence relationships in Cameroon⁵.

This study is underpinned by the precept that sustained governance failures engender structural violence⁶. Though largely silent on the specific point of discussing governance-structural violence relationships in Cameroon, it provides the lens through which one can come to understand the relationship between governance and violence. The wide gap of the Gini coefficient, which stands at 0.39, perfectly confirms the socio-economic consequences of governance malfunctions, most of which lead to structural violence⁷.

1.2. Scope and Objectives

The present paper embarks on an interdisciplinary examination of the structural violence generated through processes of governance in Cameroon. It proposes a multi-focal analysis of how violence is directly linked to governance beyond resisting the application or framing of a policy. We understand governance in a broad conception and ground our study upon the pertinent zones where violence (especially its structural form) seems to be more expressed⁸. The paper's focus is to go beyond the general literature to take a close look at those domains in which the nexus of governance and violence is very strong. This paper aims to meet three main objectives. Firstly, it seeks to understand how actors, in strong but different ways, are distancing themselves from the functions they are attributed to engage in or support various parallel governance structures. Secondly, we wish to analyze the mechanisms through which the elite in Cameroon work or fail to tackle violence at its very roots to perpetuate disturbances throughout the country. Finally, we intend to offer a sound background to the scientific analysis of the empirical case studies. Beyond these primary aims, the present paper also constitutes an effort to crystallize existing theoretical insights on the problem and to formulate lines of research investigating the intersection of governance and violence further⁹. This paper explores the domain of structural violence in Cameroon with a main focus on several sectors because it is our opinion that these domains provide us with an opportunity to make theoretical interpretations and take a fresh look at the nexus through which governance and structural violence are interwoven. We focus on such sectors that can help better approach the conduct of politics and the birth of violence elsewhere in the country. This way, we not only account for what is not always considered violence, but we also capture some of its attributes. This renders in no way our analytical approach descriptive, but more attentive to various situations that today make governance fail when they are, however, considered to be success cases.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

How do we analyze governance and structural violence in the Cameroonian context? Before embarking on the complexities of these phenomena, several concepts should be clarified to facilitate a better and more nuanced understanding of these subjects.

2.1. Defining Governance and Structural Violence

Governance consists of the dimensions of policymaking and implementation; it encompasses the formal institutional structures that shape decisions, adjudicate power, and govern interaction¹⁰. Governance also includes informal institutional behavior, public-private partnerships, the role of non-governmental organizations and companies, and networks that steer social action and associative organizations on national, regional, and international levels. In sum, governance deals with the determination of who gets what, where, how, and when in interactions between various stakeholders to ensure equity, justice, freedom, and fair play¹¹. Institutions at the domestic, regional, and international levels, as flat or horizontal networks, should value the individuality and personality of their interlocutors in terms of dialogue, mutual consultation, and consent. Governance is not simply the government's performance but concerns a wider political realm across government, the market, and civil society, which relate primarily to a society's structures and to how society is being conducted¹². Governance, therefore, is concerned with analytical and practical dimensions of the concept and practice of government and management. This approach seeks to stress the importance of power and the interests of specific social actors playing a role in decision-making. It also includes the mechanisms available in various ways to redress and mitigate the malpractices of entities, their elected and appointed officials, and other civic leaders and representatives. It also emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, and participation as measures for good governance¹³.

Structural violence consists of actionable tasks, established with the understanding that the quality of life between segments of the human population that are seemingly distant geographically and/or temporally has significant power implications. Structural violence is the engine of social inequality and acts as the root cause of social problems¹⁴. It serves as the inefficacious energy obstruction on the highway to social and economic wealth, eventually leading to structural adjustment processes¹⁵. On the other hand, structural violence is illustrated as an epitaph mainly for unavoidable natural disasters or in connection with the cultural and violent behavior of the state and its interest in wars and conflicts. Structural violence is described as the increase of violent disasters and losses resulting from physical and political aggregate results, physical, psychological, or economic deprivation, and traumas directly due to social and economic inequality and coercive power¹⁶. Thus, the origin of death is violence¹⁷. Structural violence paves the way out of the physical and, in balance, the world's resources tend to accumulate wealth, restrict entry, and exact debts and dependency. The above definition leads us to the normative stand where it now behooves society to reflect on these norms at the expense of any other good¹⁸.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives

The relationship between governance and structural violence in Cameroon can be analyzed using various theoretical perspectives. We find inspiration from human development theories to evaluate adequate governance principles conducive to eradicating social inequalities leading to inequities. The human rights paradigm is used to consider how dominant power relations operating locally impel marginalized group outcomes. To our knowledge, the majority of theories addressing governance and structural violence are borrowed from sociology and political science or are based on Northern experiences¹⁹. While they provide useful analytical inputs, the Cameroonian context calls for some adjustments and may even prevent us from applying them in their exact form. This is the reason to develop syntheses of these theories for practical applications in case analysis. Unlike liberal development paradigms that placed institutions at the core of explanatory frameworks alongside a rule-of-law focus, the economic sociology of institutions is underlined by the importance of the interrelationships between uncoupled, coupled, and semi-coupled institutions embedded within a given context. Political scientists also argue that institutions that determine the rights of access to the state and natural resources should earn political legitimacy²⁰. In other words, the ability of those in control of ruling networks to permit and disallow access to their structured network explains the power to subordinate that shapes Cameroonian society. The role of political institutions in the deployment of state-led poverty reduction strategies is also key to analyses that draw directly from such a tradition. Unlike human development theorists, they argue that social inequality concerning elites' control over strategic nodes embedded within institutions determines marginalized group outcomes²¹.

3. METHODOLOGY

To study the governance-structural violence nexus in Cameroon, a comprehensive, structured approach is necessitated. This need arises not only from the paucity of literature on this topic but also in light of the various nuances and complexities that characterize the impossible task of inchoately delinking governance from multidimensional violence outcomes. As such, a qualitative approach to data procurement was deemed instrumental. This exploratory expedition to discern the systematic character of governance mechanisms in Cameroon and their impacts on people's private and professional lives must stem from a set of unique, typologized case studies. The advantaged typification generated by these specific case studies was then further compared with similar case studies to ascertain the inevitable relation between the state of governance in Cameroon and structural violence. The data was garnered via secondary data, as well as unsystematic information gathering. This article is the conclusion of a qualitative research conducted to address the issues formulated during the analysis of previous research. The choice to resort to qualitative research is based on the objectives assigned to the study, namely to answer research questions.

4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE IN CAMEROON

Governance inefficiency in post-colonial Cameroon is responsible for unspeakable feelings of structural violence and political disenchantment²². Because the seeds of today are contained, yesterday's events often explain the context within which a political system develops. In Cameroon, this political system has to do with governance. Cameroon had been governed by Germany and thereafter by two colonial powers, Britain and France²³. The historical past of Cameroon leads from these colonial periods to the nature of today's governance. Colonial rule in Cameroon began in 1884 and lasted for 30 years²⁴. On July 20, 1919, the German mandate was not renewed, and the League of Nations duly ratified the mandate to Britain and France²⁵. Cameroon's colonial history is central to understanding its contemporary structural violence. Colonial governors, guided by metropolitan principles of indirect rule and assimilation, adopted a structure of governance that relied heavily on traditional institutions but did so without paying attention to the specificities of the indigenous socio-political organization. Policies such as forced labor, superior consumption laws, overbearing taxes, and privatization of land skewed nominal cooperation between rulers and the ruled. Consequently, customary leaders, lesser traditional rulers, and common people moved so far away from each other that they formed today what some analysts have called the collapsed traditional political system. This deliberate violation of social justice led to local communitarization among the people. The result was a closed structure where identity is rigidly tied to the group; where every human encounter becomes a potentially hierarchical power struggle²⁶. Those in power have learned over time to maintain their position and foster their interests at the expense of others. Individuals in a position of authority learn how to maintain their position and exert their interest at the highest price for others²⁷.

5. STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN CAMEROON: A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

French sociologist and philosopher Jacques Ellul conceptualized violence as the negation of the Other, whereby the power of the "one" is imposed on the will of the "other". Drawing on this logic, a similar extension introduced three main forms of violence, ranging from direct or personal violence to structural and cultural violence. The most pervasive and least understood is structural violence (systematic ways in which some groups are prevented access to resources, resulting from the institutional, political, and cultural frameworks in place). This form of violence entails more than just simple "deprivation" inflicted passively by absence; rather, this phenomenon is seen to arise in part due to "affirmative processes" that frame this deprivation, including legislation, policies, governance, and institutional modes of working²⁸. In their applicability, these affirmative processes help systematically and disproportionately contribute to the stratification of social populations.

This form of social violence “kills” more than direct violence and is “morally grimy”²⁹. In the Cameroonian context, however, one description cannot fully articulate the type of violence citizens grapple with daily. Violence is encountered in a variety of forms and is tied to the socio-economic and political systems in place, denying some their voice, their economic security, and others their dignity. Cameroonian scholars hold that structural violence operates through processes that are interactive and interrelated. Falling under the wider political landscape is governance, integral to all forms of violence³⁰. This paper argues that it is governance that catalyzes and disregards the human, in other words, civil rights and the legal administration that may help alleviate structural acts of evil. Framing violence in the governance system destabilizes these postulates and makes the elucidation of all other forms easier.

6. CASE STUDIES OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN CAMEROON: EDUCATION SECTOR, HEALTH SECTOR, ECONOMIC SECTOR

The education sector, health sector, and economic sector are domains where structural violence inflicted on the poor is the product of poor governance or bad policies with the impact on vulnerability³¹.

6.1. Education Sector

The education sector has been one of the most affected areas concerning the lack of good governance in Cameroon. The failure of educational policies to address the deeply felt needs of the majority of the citizens has led to the prevalence of inequality in access and quality of education, which can explain the increasing levels of marginalized Cameroonian youths. Across the board, the voices of the marginalized in Cameroon are increasingly found among those Cameroonian children who are not in school, those enrolled in poor-quality, low-resource schools, and more often, peasant girls and orphans. We argue for the importance of the education sector simply because of the high levels of inequality and stratification of educational quality across the country³². Through a thorough analysis of the root causes of structural violence and governance failures within the Cameroon educational sector, it is possible to argue that the lack of access and low quality of educational opportunities is invariably the cause of limited access to productive resources and has a long-term impact on poverty reduction.

Cameroon, like many other nations in the African continent, faces a range of educational challenges that limit access to quality education and hinder the development of human capital. Despite progress in recent years, significant gaps in access, quality, and relevance of education persist, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized populations. Inadequate infrastructure and resources, gender inequalities, poor quality of education, vocational training mismatches, and limited funding are some of the key challenges that Cameroon’s education system faces. 700,000 children have been affected by school closures in Cameroon’s Northwest (NW) and

Southwest (SW) regions (referred to from now on as the NWSW regions), as a result of the Anglophone crisis that began in 2016 (key informant interview 16/11/2020; OCHA 31/05/2019). Some separatist armed groups are protesting against the Government of Cameroon’s education system by forcing schools to close and attacking students, teachers, and education facilities. In 2017, the separatists imposed a boycott on formal education that uses the current curriculum, and most schools in the NW and SW regions were closed for the fourth consecutive year³³.

According to UNESCO data, in 2019, the net enrollment rate for girls in primary school in Cameroon was 83.5%, compared to 92.4% for boys. For secondary school, the net enrollment rate for girls was 33.5%, compared to 42.1% for boys. Dropout rates for girls are also significantly higher than for boys at both the primary and secondary levels. According to the Ministry of Basic Education, the primary school dropout rate for girls was 10.6% in 2018, compared to 7.6% for boys. At the secondary level, the dropout rate for girls was 36.5%, compared to 26.2% for boys. This has a direct bearing on the goals of breaking the circular trend of poverty through a reorientation of the policies that tend to provide equitable opportunities in all sectors. Despite its immense importance, Cameroon’s education sector receives one of the lowest per capita expenditures in the world³⁴. There are profound disparities within the education system relating to the costs of or access to basic services such as textbooks, access to school facilities, distance traveled to schools, free meals, incentives for girls’ education, and the quality of teachers’ toolkits. High rates of social promotion, teacher absenteeism, their successive strikes demanding promotion and the payment of their salary reclassification through the union trade called “on a trop supporté” (OTS). The inadequate infrastructure in the educational sector has been criticized, and financial aid has been made conditional on reforming the sector³⁵. Our central argument is based on the analysis of the prevailing situation in the country as gradualistic, and immediate reforms in the governance structures and the formal and informal institutions are of dire necessity. Addressing the failures at the governance level can be the most direct way to impact structural violence, thereby ensuring that there are formal laws in place to regulate the sector and that the violence will be directly regulated or eliminated.

6.2. Health Sector

The health sector is a key expression of both state and citizen-negotiated trust and ability. Citizens contribute funds to the state and expect fair treatment in healthcare delivery, while the state realizes that the poor health of an important proportion of the population constitutes a block to economic and political development. However, it is within the health sector that most of the manifestations of systemic violence can be seen. There are glaring statistics of inequalities in access to health, quality of healthcare services, and related health outcomes.

Health indicators are worse among the more marginalized populations. Women, children under 5, youth, the extremely poor, refugees, and internally displaced persons are overrepresented in the death and disease-related indicators of the country³⁶. In addition, most of the indicators for the aforementioned vulnerable populations present exacerbated disparities in treatments and outcomes; in a nutshell, they have worse healthcare indicators no matter the standardized variable of comparison. The evidence from annual health statistics confirms the weakness in addressing structural violence perpetrated in the health sector³⁷. Cameroon's health system had perennial cracks even before the outbreak of the coronavirus. It wasn't tailored to handle a pandemic of such complexity and severity. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the citizens in Cameroon had difficulties accessing healthcare services. Between 2016 and 2018, 27% of the population went without medical care many times, while a further 38% didn't get medical care even once, according to Afro barometer in 2020. Close to 50% of the population that had contact with a public health facility had difficulties obtaining the care they needed³⁸.

Poor governance in the health sector is apparent. Corruption is still high, and accountability is low. The health sector budget remains one of a residual budget based on handouts from the treasury rather than on the original need-based resource allocation system³⁹. Indeed, corruption is spread throughout the entire chain of healthcare sector operations, ranging from user fee management, drug procurement and distribution, under-the-table bulk cash collection, and embezzlement of funds. At the higher levels of the pyramid, healthcare providers, as knowledgeable policy and decision-makers, divert health resources to their private clinics and hospitals. The impact of poor governance in the health sector is self-evident. According to data from the third general census, the ratio of health personnel to population is 1.07 per 1000 inhabitants⁴⁰. The very high concentration of human resources in urban areas contrasts with the shortage in rural areas. Disparities are sharp between districts. The 2014 personnel census revealed that 147 districts out of 181 had less than 50% of staff required. The economically wealthier regions (Centre, Littoral, and West) concentrated 11 777 out of 19 709 health workers, or 59% to serve 42.14% of the country's total population⁴¹. The case narratives concur in sharing the idea that good governance is highly necessary for addressing health-related structural violence. It is the idea underlying our conviction that the assessment of good governance, especially in the health sector, can be made from the prism of structural violence and systemic inequalities⁴².

6.3. Economic Sector

The economy is an essential domain where structural violence inflicted on the poor is the product of poor governance or bad policies. Indeed, bad policies are made worse by poor economic governance that sustains poverty in many dimensions. These include political obstruction of genuine pro-poor growth, poor redistribution, and

the conduct and performance of institutions at the intersection of political and economic opportunities that disempower the poor in their labor relations and access to other resources. They result not only in the reproduction of poverty but also in the creation of new spaces of disenfranchisement. Poor people need due process and a justice system that works if they are to access the economic opportunities provided for by policies⁴³. They require functional, accessible markets and fair wages that recognize the value of their labor and give them real purchasing power in their daily lives. To illustrate the intersections of poor governance and the shrinking access to economic opportunities, Cameroon's economic recovery slowed down in 2023, with real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) expanding by only 3.3%, down from 3.6% in 2022. Until the beginning of 2024, all estimates of real GDP growth in 2023 were around 4.0% but the latest national accounts of the last two quarters of 2023 showed a marked deceleration in growth. The weaker growth performance was witnessed across the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors in the context of ongoing fiscal consolidation, higher domestic inflation, and multiple sources of fragilities including internal conflicts. Ranked 140 out of 180 countries in the 2023 Transparency International corruption perceptions index, Cameroon suffers from weak governance, hindering its development and ability to attract investors⁴⁴.

Poverty will continue to be reproduced and perpetuated by the current policy frameworks, which focus uniquely on economic growth. True, economic growth is necessary, indeed required, for poverty reduction and improvement of the lives of people⁴⁵. Unfortunately, the current economic structure that prevails in most countries results in growth that does not spread to all and does not guarantee human dignity for all. This results in growing relative inequality where a few surplus groups become outrageously wealthier while the majority continue to wallow in misery. In Cameroon, and for its people, economic inequalities are not only a cause but also a consequence of structural violence. Structural violence generated by inequality will continue to kill children, maim women, and produce the kind of emotional suffering that gnaws at our very souls when we see the dying.

7. KEY ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN GOVERNANCE: GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS

7.1. Government Agencies

Government agencies with relative autonomy vis-à-vis the formal decision-making organs such as the Presidency of the Republic and the Prime Minister's Office, with a great potential to impair or enhance the systemic and integrative nature of power and policy analysis. They are a key interface between the governance-structural violence nexus. These entities are charged with shaping policies of power, gender, and discrimination and implementing them through frontline service providers across Cameroon.

Several empirical case studies illustrate how the failed bureaucratic systems of many government agencies work and the effects that they have on marginalized groups' access to basic livelihood resources, information, human rights, and opportunities. In these case studies, it is often the most recently marginalized who bear the brunt of this interdependence in the governance-structural violence nexus. In Cameroon, Government agencies and administration are present in most parts of the country but are largely ineffective in terms of performance or the provision of public services. In 2020, only 44.6% of the population had access to sanitation, while less than two-thirds had access to drinking water (65.7%) and electricity (64.7%)⁴⁶.

Cameroon is divided into 10 regions, each governed by a presidentially appointed governor and an indirectly elected council. In response to demands for greater autonomy, in 2019, the Anglophone regions were granted a special status that entailed creating regional assemblies with greater powers than the regional councils in Francophone regions have. However, the regional assemblies are still very weak and under the control of appointed regional governors. The regions are subdivided into 58 divisions or departments, which are headed by presidentially appointed divisional officers. Departments are divided into sub-divisions that correspond with 360 elected municipal councils and 14 unelected urban councils. Despite constitutional provisions, decentralization has only partially been implemented and has not translated into effective resource allocation (local councils do have the ability to levy local taxes and licensing fees). Consequently, access to public services remains limited, especially in rural areas where roughly half the population lives. Only half the country has access to improved sanitation facilities, and in rural areas, this rate is even lower at 20%⁴⁷. Roughly one-third of the country has no access to electricity or a safe water source. All levels of government are eroded by corruption. It is common to find instances of petty corruption among the police, judiciary, and tax and customs officials. While several high-level government officials have been prosecuted for corruption, many have had charges dropped, and it is assumed that many elites in Cameroon are involved in large-scale corruption.

A key consequence of the failure of poverty alleviation and structural adjustment is the huge and, in many cases, growing disparity in income, access to resources, and political representation in urban areas. However, it is also the increasing marginalization characterized by the consolidation of marginalized social positions that has been a key feature of research in Cameroon. As a result of this, the poor are disproportionately affected by policies of increase and continued lack of control on the part of public and private agencies. Models of effective governance emphasize frameworks based on justice and equity that also make explicit the structures of power and discrimination that maintain the status quo. In alternative discourses, two interdependent forces are considered to perpetuate systematic inequality⁴⁸.

7.2. International Organizations

International organizations through multilateral initiatives or strength, constructively influence policies that address both shortcomings in governance and physical and structural violence in Cameroon. Adapting a multi-faceted approach, they now also promote local service delivery, particularly in health and agriculture, through capacity building. They install advisors who assist the government but also speak up if they are confronted with graft or other corrupt practices. International organizations often donate generous funding and have contributed to the preparation of several widely debated potential reform laws or programs. This can have an impact. However, the overall collaboration is limited and characterized by several internal and external conflicts and negotiations between organizations and local stakeholders. The resulting policy development may include poverty reduction and land use; it may be part of a development program that aims to enhance alternative options for youth, or it may concern local governance programs. However, partners and local civil society seem to find it very difficult to arrive at a comprehensive vision. Empowering local civil society is a novelty in the international organization's mission and may consequently mark an interesting step forward, as it aims at building local dynamics of change that may become resistant to international strategies and will, therefore, more likely be sustainable. For example, several international organizations at present support the involvement of drought-affected youth in income-generating activities.

7.3. Civil Society Groups

Civil society actors play a significant role in governance interventions aimed at the struggle to realign the structural violence and structural injustices that define daily living for many. The analysis starts by highlighting the definition, roles, and importance of civil society in any given society⁴⁹. Civil society is characterized by a plurality of value systems. Its role, in this light, is to provide a check on the state of governance, hold the government accountable, and fight against notorious abuses by state officers. Once it is granted the ability to attract resources, finance, and disseminate information, civil society is considered an advocate of human rights and social justice.

A steady increase in awareness of civil society's advocacy explains the attention that civil society organizations (CSOs) enjoy, as far as a web of partners is concerned. In the absence of the state, or when the state is unable to meet its fundamental responsibilities, CSOs step in and provide vital information, services, care, and assistance to insecure, marginalized, and vulnerable communities. In Cameroon, civil society or non-governmental organizations proliferate on the national scene. A study shows that before 1960, there were fewer than three non-governmental organizations in Cameroon. By 2004, however, over 2,500 active CSOs had registered with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization⁵⁰.

This large number is also an indication of the presence and understanding of a fairly robust and vibrant civil society sector. Intervention packages implemented by these CSOs and NGOs spark interest among international donors, ranging from the promotion of rural and human rights activism, education, and promotion of good governance, to combating corruption, poverty alleviation, and post-conflict interventions. A cross-section of strategic reviews and evaluations of various intervention packages funded by a range of sponsors and in different sectors highlights the significant role CSOs play in sustaining and amplifying interventions designed and implemented by the government and the objectives of donors. The role of civil society in some case studies where their intervention creates a change or where they create a concept or model that led the various actors to create a change in how they do their work, given that each aspect represented several dynamics occurring within the constraints of sector and context⁵¹.

8. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE THROUGH GOVERNANCE

Structural violence requires governance for its enactment and negates equitable access to basic human rights⁵². Governance presents both challenges and opportunities for erecting strategic prevention interventions. An individual cannot work to achieve social relations with communities of origin or participate in productive economic enhancement schemes if structural violence is accurately described and addressed⁵³. The following are common challenges hindering governance opportunities. Corruption deters the effective delivery and reception of governance and encourages negative relations. Politicians make use of financial, material, and attractive rewards to actively disengage staff through the inconvenience of efficient governance actors. Questions have been raised as to whether international attention to governance in Cameroon might be somewhat excessive. It might be useful, however, to explore the possibilities of joint programs such as coordinated border management to address governance⁵⁴. Today, governance is sometimes more possible in Cameroon than it was five years ago. Many stakeholders we spoke with in the Cameroonian government and civil society highlighted several successful programs and projects, which could serve as "good practices" or case studies of change. Despite the oft-mentioned limited political will and weak governance, our findings suggest the possibility of change, no matter how difficult it may be. These case studies serve to remind us that people want to promote change in the best interest of enhancing and protecting the lives of the poor in Cameroon. While these examples should remind us of what is possible, they often remind us of the conditional environments necessary for success. Good practices in governance reform might be possible under the right set of enabling criteria⁵⁵.

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

These policy recommendations argue for a comprehensive policy that addresses the root causes of structural violence rather than its symptoms. In this context, it is of the utmost importance to provide and promote regulatory means of ensuring and enhancing social justice accountability. First and foremost, all government agencies need to be made accountable through the gradual reform of regulatory functions such as parliamentary and judicial oversight, as well as the development of participatory governance to give a voice to the marginalized. In addition, an exit mechanism needs to be developed to support the most vulnerable in accessing justice and to provide alternative means of meeting their needs. International cooperation must support these reforms, rather than hinder them. Civil society organizations have an important role to play in monitoring the implementation of the government's actions across the country. This section outlines a policy that may be of use to policymakers and civil society, as well as the broader international community interested in taking immediate action.

10. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In conclusion, this research has presented results from a whole-of-government approach explaining why there is a strong connection between governance from the levels of the individual to the state and structural violence in Cameroon. This evidence complements a wealth of other research showing that governance is a major source of exploitation and social injustice in the country. Acting on this knowledge means that if people want to free themselves from the pain and suffering that comes as a result of being poor and socially marginalized, they must first address their governance. This connection between governance and structural violence is not unique to Cameroon. Rather, many other countries also face huge community-level and state-level challenges to eliminating structural violence. These findings are of interest to those engaged in different forms of governance reform, in official development assistance, and for those who are looking to improve the way they address problems of social justice and equity. As we have found in Cameroon, people working for a better world frequently consider themselves to be free from structural violence. Instead, they place structural violence on those who oppose them. For future research, they serve as a useful starting point for an in-depth examination of governance and structural processes. Building upon the findings presented here, a similar study could be replicated in other case studies to advance our understanding of governance and its relation to structural violence, as well as how to produce the needed changes to governmental conduct to remove its source. Thereafter, we could propose how findings from such case studies may be used to support the development of new paradigms that reflect the experiences of those groups living in situations of structural violence.

More broadly, the results presented in this study could pave the way for comparative research with other countries experiencing structural violence and could feed into a broader discussion regarding the values, ethics, and norms that inform the provision of equal social rights for all, both within communities and most importantly in state-level governance. The struggle for equity, social justice, and structural violence reduction must not be biased for too long on the individual rather than exhaustive analyses; thus, this research provides empowerment to those who are engaged as governments and civil society actors in the transformation of structural violence and injustice.

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