

1     **THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE AMBAZONIAN CONFLICT ON HOST**  
2     **COMMUNITIES IN IKOM AND ITS ENVIRONS, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA,**  
3     **2016-2024.**

4     **Abstract**

5     The Ambazonian conflict, rooted in historical, political, and cultural marginalisation of  
6     Anglophone Cameroonians, has led to massive displacement, forcing thousands into border  
7     communities in southeastern Nigeria, particularly the Ikom Local Government Area of Cross  
8     River State, between 2016 and 2024. This influx has placed immense socio-economic pressure  
9     on host communities, disrupting livelihoods, overstressing social infrastructure, and altering  
10    demographic patterns. Using Conflict Theory and the Human Security Framework as analytical  
11    lenses, the paper examines the socio-economic impact of the conflict on host communities in  
12    Ikom and its environs. Findings revealed both negative and positive impacts; reduced access to  
13    healthcare and education, rising food insecurity, environmental degradation, increased  
14    competition for employment and land, and social tensions despite shared cultural and ethnic ties  
15    between hosts and refugees; and on the flip side, increased trade and labour force contributions  
16    by refugees on the other hand.

17    ***Keywords:** Ambazonia, Refugees, Anglophone, Ikom, Cameroon*

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19  
20    **Introduction**

21       The Ambazonian conflict refers to the ongoing armed struggle between Anglophone  
22    separatists in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, collectively known as  
23    "Ambazonia", and the government of the Republic of Cameroon. It is rooted in decades of  
24    marginalisation, colonial legacy, and failed constitutional integration. It erupted into violence in  
25    late 2016 when peaceful protests over the imposition of French-speaking teachers and judges in  
26    Anglophone institutions were met with brutal repression by government forces. The affected  
27    regions were formerly part of British-administered Southern Cameroons, which joined the  
28    French-speaking Republic of Cameroon in a controversial 1961 plebiscite under the United  
29    Nations. Over the decades, grievances regarding political under-representation, economic  
30    neglect, and cultural suppression continued to mount, culminating in the declaration of an  
31    independent Ambazonian state on October 1, 2017, by separatist leaders. The government  
32    responded with military force, triggering a protracted insurgency that devastated communities  
33    and led to mass displacements, particularly across the Cameroon border into Nigeria.

34       Since the escalation of the Ambazonian separatist conflict within the English-speaking  
35    regions of Cameroon in 2016, Nigeria has become a critical destination for thousands of refugees  
36    fleeing violence, insecurity, and displacement in Cameroon. Ikom, a border town in Cross River

37 State, and its surrounding communities have become frontline host zones. According to Beltine  
38 Cruise Ntui, a Cameroonian refugee and cocoa farmer, the displacement uprooted his life,  
39 forcing him and others to seek refuge across the Nigerian border and described their arrival in  
40 Ikom as "initially warm, but economically tense," He further lamented access to arable land as a  
41 growing concern as both refugees and local farmers had to share the same spaces, often leading  
42 to disputes (Ntui, Oral interview, 8/06/2025).

43 Nigeria, being a next-door neighbour to Cameroon, has found itself on the frontline of a  
44 growing humanitarian and security challenge arising from the conflict. Moreover, with her  
45 internationally recognised image of hospitality toward refugees, the sustained inflow of displaced  
46 persons has imposed considerable socio-economic pressures on host communities already  
47 grappling with limited infrastructure and public services. Nigeria's response to the infiltration  
48 has been multifaceted; balancing diplomatic caution, humanitarian commitment, and national  
49 security interests and she has largely played a receptive and cooperative role through the  
50 establishment of refugee settlements, notably in Ogoja (Adagom and Ukende camps) in Cross  
51 River State by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced  
52 Persons (NCFRMI), in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
53 (UNHCR).

54 The presence of over 85,000 registered Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, many of whom  
55 reside in Cross River State, has led to increased demand for education, healthcare, food, housing,  
56 and employment opportunities (UNHCR 12). In Ikom and its environs, schools are overcrowded,  
57 health facilities are overstretched, and local markets are saturated, leading to rising tensions over  
58 land ownership and resource allocation, strained inter-communal relations, and a surge in living  
59 costs. Many residents report declining access to jobs and government services, while  
60 infrastructure development has stalled due to shifting priorities and lack of funds (Bassey and  
61 Etim 47).

62 While humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for  
63 Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organisations have made considerable efforts to  
64 provide support, the needs far outweigh the available resources (UNHCR 15). Additionally, the  
65 conflict's protracted nature, coupled with the absence of a definitive political resolution in  
66 Cameroon, means that host communities must contend with the long-term implications of  
67 displacement, including the risk of economic stagnation and social fragmentation.

68 This paper investigates the socioeconomic impact of the Ambazonian conflict on host  
69 communities in Ikom and its environs from 2016 to 2025. Using a mixed-methods approach that  
70 includes interviews, field observations, and analysis of humanitarian reports, it explores the  
71 interplay between forced migration and local development, with the intention of informing  
72 policymakers, humanitarian actors, and development planners on how best to support both  
73 refugees and host populations in a context of prolonged displacement.

## 74 **Theoretical approach**

75 The primary aim of this study is to examine the Socio-Economic Impact of the  
76 Ambazonian Conflict on Host Communities in Ikom and its environs between 2016 and 2025.  
77 This study is anchored on two interrelated theoretical perspectives: the Conflict Theory and the  
78 Human Security Framework Theory. These provide the conceptual lens for understanding the  
79 extent to which the Ambazonian conflict has produced wide-ranging socio-economic effects on  
80 Nigerian host communities in Ikom and its environs.

81 Rooted in the works of Karl Marx, the Conflict Theory posits that society is characterised by  
82 persistent inequality and competition over scarce resources. In the context of forced migration,  
83 this theory helps explain the struggles that emerge when an influx of refugees intensifies  
84 competition for limited social and economic resources in host communities and suggests that the  
85 arrival of Cameroonian refugees in Ikom and its environs may lead to tensions over employment,  
86 housing, education, health services, and land.

87 As the host population grapples with sudden demographic changes and economic strain,  
88 the redistribution of resources often creates social fragmentation, discrimination, and host-  
89 refugee conflict. The theory thus provides a critical framework for analysing the underlying  
90 structural inequalities that are either exacerbated or revealed by the presence of displaced  
91 populations. According to Coser Lewis, conflict, though often destructive, can also stimulate  
92 social change and expose the limitations of existing social systems, potentially leading to more  
93 inclusive policy development (Coser 12).

94 First formalised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the post-  
95 Cold War era, the Human Security Framework shifts focus from state-centred security to the  
96 protection of individual lives and livelihoods and defines human security as encompassing seven  
97 interrelated dimensions. These dimensions are the “economic, food, health, environmental,  
98 personal, community, and political security” (UNDP 24). It recognises that people’s security is  
99 threatened not only by military threats but also by broader issues, such as food security, health  
100 problems, and environmental degradation, and emphasises the interconnectedness of these  
101 threats. As a way forward, the UNDP calls for a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific,  
102 and prevention-oriented approach to security.

103 Applied to this study, the theory provides a holistic understanding of how the  
104 Ambazonian conflict has affected not only refugees but also the human security of host  
105 populations. It also enables examination of how basic needs and services in Ikom communities  
106 have been disrupted or overstretched, including the deterioration of access to clean water,  
107 affordable food, jobs, and peaceful cohabitation, which are core components of human security  
108 and existence. The theory further emphasises the importance of resilience and community-based  
109 responses to conflict-induced displacements, encouraging policymakers to balance emergency  
110 humanitarian relief with long-term development strategies that safeguard the rights and dignity  
111 of both refugees and hosts.

112 Both theories provide a robust, complementary theoretical foundation for this research.  
113 While Conflict Theory explains the socio-economic frictions and inequalities aggravated by  
114 refugee inflows, the Human Security Framework shifts attention to the lived experiences and  
115 well-being of affected populations. This dual lens supports a comprehensive exploration of the  
116 causes, manifestations, and potential solutions to the socioeconomic burdens imposed on Ikom  
117 and its environs due to the conflict.

## 118 **Literature Review**

119 The escalation of the Ambazonian conflict in Cameroon since 2016 generated wide-  
120 ranging socio-economic consequences that extend beyond national borders, particularly affecting  
121 host communities in Cross River State of Nigeria and Ikom and its environs, due to their  
122 proximity to the Cameroon border, which has become one of the most significant destinations for  
123 displaced persons fleeing violence. This development has prompted scholars, policymakers, and  
124 humanitarian organisations to examine the social and economic transformations arising from the  
125 influx of refugees, the pressure on local infrastructure, shifts in trade, and the reconfiguration of  
126 cultural and communal relations. A review of existing literature provides insights into the extent  
127 to which the conflict has reshaped livelihoods, security dynamics, and development trajectories  
128 within these border communities. However, the scholarship also presents varying perspectives,  
129 with some highlighting opportunities for cross-border trade and cultural integration. In contrast,  
130 others emphasise the challenges of overstretched resources, insecurity, and fragile social  
131 cohesion.

132 For instance, John W. Forje in his work, *There Was Another Country: Popular*  
133 *Resistance, Resurrection or Betrayal of a People*, offers a sweeping political history of the  
134 Anglophone crisis, locating the violence to a long-running constitutional grievances and center-  
135 periphery asymmetries and narrates the 2016 teachers'/lawyers' protests as a tipping point that  
136 triggered cycles of repression and radicalization, which in turn produced sustained population  
137 displacement rather than a one-off shock. The book's throughline is that crisis persistence is  
138 institutional, not primordial, rooted in governance arrangements that reproduce mistrust and  
139 securitisation. This helpsexplain why Ikom's socio-economic shocks arrived in waves rather than  
140 a single surge; housing demand, school enrollments, and market footfall would have climbed  
141 stepwise as conflict escalated across the border. Forje's emphasis on institutions also maps onto  
142 border governance at Mfum–Missaka (border communities) and the ad hoc rules that shaped  
143 flows of goods and people; key drivers of price and rent dynamics in Ikom, a panoramic capable  
144 of serving the host community in planning with better operational indicators.

145 Carlson Anyangwe advances a legal-historical thesis: Ambazonia's predicament is an  
146 "African-on-African," in *African-on-African Colonisation: The Ill-Fated Ambazonia-Cameroun*  
147 *Political Partnership*, where he argued that colonisation sustained by post-colonial boundary  
148 politics produced a chronic sovereignty dispute and detailed the extent to which legal  
149 interpretations of borders and administrative acts (plebiscites, decrees) shaped and coerced post-

150 independence border conflicts, which in practice translates into variable border permeability such  
151 as formal closures, informal openings, and new fees, that ripple through trade, transport, and  
152 livelihoods. Anyangwe's border-law angle is especially useful for Ikom's price volatility:  
153 cocoa/garri inflows, timber traffic, and market-day attendance are exquisitely sensitive to  
154 whether the border is "porous" or "sealed," which helps to interpret sudden spikes in lodging and  
155 transport demand in Ikom and its environs during crackdowns across Manyu or Meme. The  
156 argument is normatively strong but empirically thin on granular economic outcomes.

157         In *The Wealth of Refugees: How Displaced People Can Build Economies*, Alexander  
158 *Betts reframes refugees as economic actors rather than passive burdens.* Drawing on African  
159 cases, he argues that outcomes depend on the opportunity structure provided by host  
160 communities: the right to work, freedom of movement, access to finance, and the localisation of  
161 aid procurement. With these in place, displacement can thicken markets, raise host incomes, and  
162 improve services; without them, assistance becomes an enclave that bids up prices (especially  
163 housing and staples) without productivity gains. He also offers the most actionable playbook for  
164 Ikom and its environs; if Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government ease work  
165 permissions, market-stall access, and buy locally (food, transport, building materials), cash  
166 transfers and aid, spending can circulate in Ikom, multiplying through petty trade and transport  
167 because where insecurity imposes curfews or heavy checkpoints, the same inflows mostly show  
168 up as rent and food inflation. The book's exemplars (e.g., Uganda compacts) operate in different  
169 regulatory and fiscal contexts than Nigeria's border communities. Translating the blueprint in the  
170 Nigerian context requires attention to Cross River's sub-national constraints, security  
171 coordination with the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS)/Customs, and nationwide inflation/FX  
172 shocks that confound the identification of conflict-specific effects.

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174

## 175 **Origin and Nature of the Conflict**

176         The protracted Ambazonian conflict in Cameroon led to a mass displacement of people,  
177 with thousands of Cameroonian refugees seeking safety in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River  
178 State. Ikom and its neighbouring communities become major host locations due to their  
179 geographic proximity and ethnic ties to the conflict regions in Cameroon. While the  
180 humanitarian dimension of the crisis received moderate attention, the socio-economic  
181 consequences on host communities, especially in rural and semi-urban settlements, have not been  
182 adequately documented or addressed.

183         Host communities continued to face increased pressure on already overstretched  
184 resources and infrastructure. These include diverse areas. The more pressing areas were:  
185 overcrowded educational institutions, under-resourced healthcare services, and strained public

186 utilities. In addition, the influx also led to higher demand for food, housing, and employment,  
187 thereby inflating the cost of living and triggering competition between refugees and residents.

188 This study investigates and exposes the lack of a comprehensive understanding and  
189 effective intervention strategies targeting the socio-economic impacts of the conflict on host  
190 communities, who have continued to face deteriorating living standards, weakening social  
191 cohesion, and deepening developmental deficits, without clear documentation and policy  
192 recommendations.

193 It is estimated that as of 2024, the conflict has claimed thousands of lives and displaced  
194 over 750,000 people internally, with more than 85,000 refugees seeking asylum in Nigeria, many  
195 of whom are residents in Ikom and its environs (UNHCR 2023). The conflict in Cameroon is  
196 characterised by guerrilla warfare, human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, the burning of  
197 villages, school shutdowns, and the targeting of civilians by both state forces and separatist  
198 militias. The international community, including the United Nations, African Union, and regional  
199 blocs, have called for dialogue and humanitarian intervention. However, a lasting political  
200 solution remains elusive, and the conflict's spillover into Nigerian territory has had serious  
201 humanitarian and socio-economic consequences for border communities, overstressing their  
202 infrastructure and testing Nigeria's refugee management capabilities.

203 The root of the disagreement lies in Cameroon's complex colonial history and post-  
204 independence political evolution. The seed of discord stemmed from the colonial partitioning of  
205 German Kamerun after World War I, when the League of Nations mandated the territory to  
206 Britain and France. While the French administered the larger portion (French Cameroun), the  
207 British governed two smaller regions, the Northwest and Southwest Cameroons, as part of  
208 British Nigeria (Konings and Nyamnjoh 15). When French Cameroun gained independence in  
209 January 1960, the fate of British-administered Cameroons became a pressing issue. In a 1961  
210 United Nations plebiscite, Northwest Cameroons voted to join Nigeria, while Southwest  
211 Cameroons opted to join the newly independent Republic of Cameroon. However, the absence of  
212 a third option for full independence became a lingering grievance for many Anglophone  
213 Cameroonians (Awasom 108). Following this unification, Southern Cameroons became the West  
214 Cameroon State in a federal arrangement that promised autonomy. However, over time, the  
215 federal structure was gradually dismantled, most notably with the 1972 referendum, which  
216 replaced the federation with a unitary state, thereby centralising power in Yaoundé and  
217 marginalising the Anglophone minority (Takougang and Krieger 144).

218 The Anglophone population began to express dissatisfaction with political exclusion,  
219 linguistic and educational marginalisation, and economic neglect. These issues culminated in  
220 peaceful protests by Anglophone lawyers and teachers in late 2016, which were violently  
221 suppressed by Cameroon forces. In response, separatist groups declared the independence of  
222 Ambazonia, a proposed state encompassing the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon,  
223 on October 1, 2017. This act triggered a violent conflict between Ambazonian armed groups and

224 the Cameroonian military, marking the beginning of a protracted armed struggle. The  
225 consequence of the military action was the mass migration of people from the affected area, a  
226 symbol of people in distress.

### 227 **Host Communities Around Ikom and Their Characteristics**

228 The displaced people from Cameroon moved into some border communities between  
229 Nigeria and Cameroon. Ikom Local Government Area (LGA), situated in the central part of  
230 Cross River State, Nigeria, has served as one of the primary host regions for Cameroonian  
231 refugees fleeing the conflict since its escalation in 2016 due to its geographic proximity to the  
232 troubled Anglophone regions. Most communities in Ikom share direct and indirect borders with  
233 the Republic of Cameroon, making it one of the most accessible entry points, as the area is  
234 strategically located along the trans-African highway corridor linking Nigeria and Cameroon  
235 through Mfum, a prominent border town. The Mfum border post is a major commercial and  
236 migration route, facilitating both formal and informal cross-border movement (Adepoju 29). Its  
237 central location makes it a convenient humanitarian transit hub for international agencies such as  
238 the UNHCR and local NGOs operating refugee services in the region.

239 The area is culturally diverse, with indigenous communities including the Ejagham, Nde,  
240 Ofutop, Akparabong, Okuni, Etung, and Boki-speaking peoples, who maintain deep cross-border  
241 kinship ties with some ethnic groups in Cameroon, particularly the Ejagham, who straddle both  
242 countries. These ethno-linguistic affinities have facilitated relative cultural accommodation and  
243 easier integration for some refugees. It is also known for its agricultural economy, primarily  
244 driven by the cultivation of cocoa, plantain, yams, palm produce, and cassava, which makes the  
245 area a cocoa-producing hub in Cross River State. Though some refugees contribute labour to the  
246 agricultural sector, especially during planting and harvest seasons, the increased demand for  
247 farmland has led to competition and disputes between locals and newcomers (Okon and Anwana  
248 21).

249 Public infrastructure in the area, such as schools, healthcare centres, roads, and markets,  
250 was already under strain before the refugee influx, and the arrival of thousands of displaced  
251 persons increased the burden. Schools and primary health centres within the metropolis now face  
252 overcrowding and limited resources. In contrast, health challenges such as malaria, cholera, and  
253 maternal care deficiencies have worsened due to increased population density and lack of  
254 support facilities (UNHCR 22). Her predominantly Christian population, on the other hand (with  
255 various denominations including Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, and Evangelical Churches),  
256 have also been instrumental in offering spiritual and humanitarian support to displaced families.  
257 Religious organisations have provided temporary shelter, counselling, and food aid, helping to  
258 bridge social gaps between hosts and refugees.

259 Communal festivals and cultural events, such as the Ikom International New Yam  
260 Festival, also contributed to efforts to promote cultural inclusion and unity. It is instructive to  
261 mention that some displaced persons from Cameroon share ethnic and linguistic ties with some

262 host communities in Nigeria. Be that as it may, inter-communal frictions have emerged,  
263 especially around identity politics, land access, and public service distribution, in places such as  
264 the Danare and Belegete communities in the Boki and Obanliku local government areas,  
265 respectively. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) report growing host fatigue and rising  
266 tensions between youths of both communities over employment and resource distribution  
267 (UNHCR 24).

### 268 **Cultural and Ethnic Ties with the Ambazonian Population**

269 The host communities of Ikom and its environs share profound cultural and ethnic  
270 connections with the Ambazonian population in Cameroon's Anglophone regions, with ties that  
271 have historical roots and predate colonial border delineations. This affinity has significantly  
272 shaped the social dynamics and refugee-host interactions amid the ongoing conflict through free  
273 migration, trade, and intermarriage, thereby negating the arbitrary nature of borders, which  
274 disrupted traditional socio-political structures but did not sever familial and communal ties  
275 (Fanso 19). This historical connection has resulted in enduring social solidarity and has become  
276 critical in times of crises, such as the Ambazonian conflict. For instance, a major ethnic group  
277 within the area is Ejagham, a term used in reference to several groups, including the Ofutop,  
278 Nde, Nta, Nselle, Abanyom, Nnam, Nkome, Olulumo, Akparabong, Balep, Bendeghe-Afi, all of  
279 whom comprise the Ejagham of Ikom and the Nkim, Nkum, and Ekajuk, who also comprise the  
280 Ejagham of Ogoja (Onor 1), are also found across the border in the South-West and North-West  
281 regions of Cameroon. They form the core of the Ambazonian separatist territory who speak the  
282 Ejagham language and maintain common cultural practices on both sides of the border; an ethno-  
283 linguistic overlap that fosters a sense of shared identity and belonging, easing some aspects of  
284 refugee integration into Ikom's host communities (Nde and Ekanem 5).

285 Both the host communities in Ikom and the Ambazonian populations celebrate similar  
286 festivals and cultural rites, such as the New Yam Festival, traditional wrestling, and masquerade  
287 performances, thereby sharing a cultural tradition that provides a platform for cultural exchanges  
288 and community cohesion between refugees and hosts (Essien and Eno 17). This affinity  
289 facilitates a relatively welcoming environment in Ikom and prompts host communities to provide  
290 informal support networks, including shared farming activities, community protection, and  
291 cultural participation (UNHCR 17). Despite their cultural and linguistic affinities, their coming  
292 together has not, however, completely obliterated conflicts between them.

### 293 **Cross-Border Effects of the Crisis on Nigeria**

294 The conflict has had significant cross-border effects on Nigeria, particularly in border  
295 communities like Ikom, Obanliku, Boki, and Etung Local Government Areas of Cross River  
296 State, as well as parts of Benue and Taraba States. It is estimated that over 85,000 Cameroonians  
297 have fled into Nigeria seeking refuge, with a substantial number settled in camps such as  
298 Adagom and Okende in Ogoja LGA. Some have informally integrated into host communities in  
299 the Ikom and Boki LGAs of Cross River State. This influx has placed enormous pressure on

300 existing social infrastructure in areas such as healthcare, education, sanitation, and housing, often  
301 overwhelming local authorities' efforts and creating competition for limited resources. According  
302 to UNHCR, many refugees live outside camps and rely heavily on communal support systems,  
303 increasing vulnerability among both refugees and host populations (UNHCR 23), altering local  
304 economic dynamics. Ogar Osadim, a respected traditional ruler in one of the affected border  
305 communities in Ikom, described the situation as both a "moral obligation and a cultural  
306 dilemma." According to him, traditional institutions were among the first to respond when  
307 Cameroonian refugees began crossing into Nigerian territory: "We opened our lands and homes,  
308 offered shelter and food. But as the years passed, it became clear that we were ill-equipped to  
309 handle the burden alone" (Osadim, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

310 The prices of goods and services, such as rent, have increased significantly, particularly  
311 in semi-urban areas, driven by a disproportionate surge in demand. Agricultural border  
312 communities in Boki and Obanliku have had a fair share of land-related conflicts, as refugees  
313 seek farmland to sustain themselves. Local businesses have also experienced mixed effects: a  
314 short-term economic boost from increased demand, but also long-term strain from resource  
315 depletion and inflation (Akpan and Okon 25). The porous nature of the Cameroon-Nigeria border  
316 has enabled armed Ambazonian separatists to cross into Nigeria, sometimes using Nigerian  
317 territory as a tactical retreat zone or smuggling corridor, raising national security concerns,  
318 especially in border communities, where arms trafficking and occasional skirmishes have been  
319 reported. These have also prompted responses from Nigerian authorities through several arrests  
320 of separatist fighters and conducting joint military operations with Cameroonian forces, which  
321 have eased diplomatic tensions (International Crisis Group 10). Local communities have reported  
322 incidents of banditry and extortion by armed groups claiming to be separatist fighters.

### 323 **Socio-Economic Impact of the Conflict**

324 Despite cultural affinity, the influx of refugees has strained resources and, at times, led to  
325 disputes over land use, particularly in farming and settlement areas. This is because competition  
326 for limited land and economic opportunities has, at times, aggravated latent ethnic tensions,  
327 highlighting the limits of cultural affinity in preventing conflict under pressure (Okon and  
328 Anwana 28) with profound negative socio-economic impacts on the host communities and their  
329 environs. Agriculture, for instance, the mainstay of the area's economy, has also been severely  
330 disrupted by the influx of refugees and the ongoing conflict, as many farmers in the Belegete  
331 community abandoned their farms due to incessant attacks by the separatist fighters, leading to  
332 reduced agricultural output and food shortages. Competition over land and farming resources  
333 between refugees and the host community in the Danare community, for instance, has intensified,  
334 leading to conflicts and reduced productivity.

335 The sudden population increase in Ikom metropolis due to this influx strained existing  
336 social infrastructures, which were already fragile before the conflict. Health facilities, for  
337 instance, have become overstretched, leading to inadequate medical care. At the same time,

338 educational institutions continue to face overcrowding, limiting access to quality education for  
339 both host community children and refugees (Essien and Eno 18). For instance, Ali Abdullahi, a  
340 traditional medicine vendor who has lived in Ikom for over 38 years, shared insights into how  
341 the influx of refugees affected the local health ecosystem when he observed that many displaced  
342 persons could not afford conventional medical care and thus turned to herbal remedies, “People  
343 came with wounds; some fresh, some infected. Many had no money for hospital, so they came to  
344 us.” (Abdullahi, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

345 The conflict-induced influx also increased demand for scarce jobs, worsening  
346 unemployment levels among host community youths, as many displaced persons depend on host  
347 communities for economic survival. The dire situation intensified competition in the informal  
348 labour market, driving down wages and increasing economic burden on households, which in  
349 turn deepened poverty and reduced overall community welfare. The additional demand for goods  
350 and services pushed up prices, affecting the affordability of goods and services for host  
351 community members. Basic commodities such as food, fuel, and building materials have seen  
352 price hikes, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups, leading to a rising cost of living that  
353 has eroded household incomes and increased economic hardship (C.R.S Economic Review 12).  
354 Ifeanyi Ewah, an onion seller at the Ikom Main Market, reported that the presence of refugees  
355 brought both challenges and unexpected benefits. On one hand, he said, “There are more buyers  
356 now. But everything is more expensive even for us who sell.” (Ewah, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

357 From a security standpoint, Ahmed Sani, an officer with a federal paramilitary security  
358 agency stationed in Ikom, highlighted the evolving threats brought on by the conflict. “Initially,  
359 we were dealing with humanitarian issues. However, later, armed elements began to mix with the  
360 refugees, bringing small arms, light weapons and radical ideologies. We have intercepted young  
361 men moving with small arms. Some say they are fleeing persecution, but we cannot ignore the  
362 potential for cross-border insurgency.” (Sani, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025). Such movement of  
363 illegal weapons became easy because of the porous border between Nigeria and Cameroon,  
364 which made it difficult to regulate movement. This is in addition to inadequate surveillance  
365 technology, which further complicates security personnel's efforts at the border posts. The  
366 economic strain and resource competition in Bakassi also heightened social tensions and  
367 occasionally sparked violent clashes between host communities and refugees over fishing rights.

368 While the Ambazonian conflict has predominantly resulted in negative socio-economic  
369 consequences for host communities, some positive impacts have also emerged. For instance, it  
370 has attracted considerable attention from national and international humanitarian organisations,  
371 leading to increased aid inflows to the host communities. Organisations such as the United  
372 Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red  
373 Cross (ICRC) provided food, healthcare, and educational support, improving access to social  
374 services, especially for refugee populations (UNHCR 19). The presence of displaced persons  
375 also contributed to the expansion of local markets and commerce, driven by increased demand  
376 for goods and services, thereby stimulating small-scale trade, retail businesses, and food supply

377 chains. Some host community members (as in the case of Ikom metropolis) have benefited by  
378 offering rental accommodation, transportation services, and informal employment to the  
379 displaced populations.

380 Despite tensions, the interaction between host communities and refugees has fostered  
381 some degree of cultural exchange and social cohesion. This is because shared ethnic and  
382 linguistic ties between host communities and Ambazonian refugees have, in the past, facilitated  
383 mutual support networks and social integration efforts. It has also increased awareness of  
384 displacement and humanitarian issues among local authorities and communities, just as efforts to  
385 document the impact of the crisis have improved data collection and informed better policy  
386 responses, clearly captured in this study.

### 387 **Responses to the Challenges**

388 In response to the multifaceted challenges arising from the conflict, various actors,  
389 including government agencies, international organisations, and local communities, have  
390 initiated a range of interventions to alleviate the socio-economic burdens on host communities.  
391 For instance, international agencies such as UNHCR, ICRC, and the Nigerian government have  
392 provided critical humanitarian aid to both displaced persons and host communities. Relief efforts  
393 provided by these agencies included distribution of food, potable water, medical supplies, and  
394 non-food items to mitigate immediate suffering. Mobile health clinics and vaccination campaigns  
395 have been deployed to reduce disease outbreaks in overcrowded settlements and host areas. The  
396 construction and rehabilitation of schools and health facilities have also been supported through  
397 donor funding and government initiatives to increase access for both host and displaced  
398 populations (Nkafu & Enoh, 2018,p. 19).

399 Water and sanitation projects, including borehole drilling, have been implemented to  
400 improve public health. At the same time, revitalisation of local economies has focused on  
401 providing livelihood opportunities for both refugees and host community members. Skills  
402 acquisition training, microcredit schemes, and agricultural support programmes have been  
403 introduced to help affected persons regain economic independence, complementing the efforts of  
404 community-based organisations by facilitating market access and promoting small business  
405 development, while reducing dependency on aid (Okon & Anwana, 2021,p. 41).

406 Recognising the potential for social tensions, peacebuilding activities have been  
407 integrated into response efforts through dialogue forums, community sensitisation campaigns,  
408 and conflict resolution training to promote coexistence and reduce host-refugee tensions (Tita  
409 and Luman 30), with local leaders and civil society organisations playing key roles in fostering  
410 reconciliation and enhancing social cohesion. International organisations have continued to  
411 coordinate closely with Nigerian government agencies, local authorities, and community leaders  
412 to optimise the impact of interventions through platforms such as the Humanitarian Coordination  
413 Forum, established to ensure harmonised aid delivery and prevent duplication of efforts.

## 414 **Summary**

415 The ongoing Ambazonian conflict has significantly impacted the socioeconomic fabric of host  
416 communities in Ikom and its surrounding areas. These communities have experienced economic  
417 disruptions due to the influx of refugees and internally displaced persons, which have strained  
418 agricultural productivity, local markets, and employment opportunities. The increased  
419 population, on the other hand, has overwhelmed existing social infrastructure, including  
420 healthcare, education, housing, and water supply, leading to reduced access and quality of  
421 services.

422 Social tensions have occasionally arisen from competition over scarce resources despite  
423 shared ethnic and cultural ties between both parties. Furthermore, the conflict has heightened  
424 vulnerabilities related to food security, health, and psychosocial well-being, posing challenges to  
425 human security in the region. Addressing these burdens requires collaborative efforts from  
426 government agencies, international organisations, and local actors to restore stability, rebuild  
427 infrastructure, and foster sustainable development for both host and displaced populations.

## 428 **Conclusion**

429 The Ambazonian conflict has imposed a profound socio-economic burden on the host  
430 communities in Ikom and its environs, disrupting livelihoods, straining social infrastructure, and  
431 challenging social cohesion. The influx of displaced populations has exacerbated resource  
432 scarcity, increased unemployment, and overwhelmed health and educational services, thereby  
433 deepening poverty and vulnerability among the hosts.

434 Despite shared cultural and ethnic ties, tensions have occasionally arisen over  
435 competition for limited resources. These challenges amplify the urgent need for comprehensive  
436 and coordinated interventions by government authorities, international organisations, and  
437 community stakeholders.

438 Sustainable solutions should focus not only on immediate humanitarian relief but also on  
439 long-term development, peacebuilding, and resilience enhancement to restore stability and  
440 improve the quality of life for both host communities and displaced persons affected by the  
441 conflict.

442

## 443 **Recommendations**

- 444 i. The government and development partners should invest in expanding and improving  
445 healthcare facilities, schools, water supply, and housing in Ikom and its environs to  
446 accommodate both host communities and displaced populations.

- 447 ii. They should also implement targeted livelihood and skill-development initiatives to  
448 boost agricultural productivity, create employment opportunities, and reduce poverty  
449 among host communities affected by the conflict.
- 450 iii. Organise community-based dialogue platforms and peacebuilding activities that  
451 would foster mutual understanding and cooperation between host communities and  
452 displaced persons to prevent tensions and build lasting peace.
- 453 iv. International organisations and NGOs should scale up humanitarian aid, focusing on  
454 food security, healthcare, psychosocial support, and protection services to vulnerable  
455 groups within host communities.
- 456 v. Collaborative security measures between Nigeria and Cameroon are essential to  
457 reduce cross-border violence, secure trade routes, and facilitate safe movement,  
458 benefiting both host and displaced communities.
- 459 vi. Authorities should also develop inclusive policies that recognise the rights and needs  
460 of both host communities and displaced persons, ensuring equitable access to  
461 resources and services.

462

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