

Women and the Peace Process in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon: Obstacles, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

In recent years, the North-West (NW) and South-West (SW) regions of Cameroon have been the scene of permanent violence reflecting a crisis that is rooted in both the recent and distant past. This so-called “Anglophone” crisis with insurrectionary overtones has had far-reaching political, humanitarian, economic and social consequences, with women and children as the prime victims. In such a complex and difficult context, the response mechanisms of the defense and security forces (DSF) put in place to deal with this crisis have been in vain. In addition to the DSF response mechanisms and faced with the resurgence of the crisis that has reached alarming proportions, several peace processes have been initiated by the Cameroonian government with the aim of resolving this crisis, integrating key actors including women. This article examines the involvement of women in the various peace processes aimed at resolving the Anglophone Crisis in the light of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, using the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) and the Major National Dialogue as reference framework. The central argument underlying this article is that women remain an under-exploited potential in peace processes due to socio-cultural and political factors that limit their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives. The theory of gender relations and that of intersectionality are used as an analytical framework for the research. The sources used are mainly secondary: articles, reports, reviews, books etc. The article notes the low representation of women in the various peace processes, despite the ratification by Cameroon of a number of international texts and laws enshrining the involvement and participation of women in decision-making on peace and security issues.

Keywords: *Anglophone Crisis, North-West, South West, Peace Process, Women*

1. Introduction

« Les processus de paix qui incluent les femmes en qualité de témoins, de signataires, de médiatrices et /ou de négociatrice ont affiché une hausse de 20% de chances d’obtenir un accord de paix qui dure au moins deux ans. Cette probabilité augmente avec le temps, passant à 35% de chances qu’un accord de paix dure 15ans ». « Peace processes that include women as witnesses, signatories, mediators and/or negotiators have shown a 20% increase in likelihood of obtaining a peace agreement that last at least two years. This probability increases over time, rising to 35% of chances for a peace agreement to last for 15 years (UN Women; 2015). These words of Laurel Stone (from UN Women), encourage States to consider women’s participation in peace processes as an integral contribution to peace and

security. Indeed, in recent years, there has been renewed interest in the issue of women's participation in peace processes. Studies analyzing this situation show that, over the years, women have played an essential role in peace efforts in both Europe and Africa. This has been achieved through the organization of workshops and advocacy sessions to sensitize stakeholders on the needs and rights of women's organizations in peace processes. Moreover, these women's organizations have been involved in networking among themselves to strengthen their advocacy power and their ability to influence decisions taken during peace negotiations.¹ These peace efforts led to the adoption of resolution 1325² by the United Nations Security Council in 2000, which recognizes the differential impact of conflicts on women and men and urges Member States to involve women in all efforts to maintain peace and security, and to take gender into account in all areas of peacebuilding. In addition to this commendable initiative, many African countries have adopted policies and laws (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Maputo Protocol, the Constitutive Act of the African Union, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325) to promote women's participation in peace and security processes since the UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. These include Ivory Coast, Mali, and Cameroon etc. However, it is a fact that women continue to be largely excluded from peace processes, have a limited voice, are under-represented in decision-making bodies and suffer discrimination on all fronts.

Today, the crisis that has emerged in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon and described as "new threats" is rooted in a distant historical past and an actualization of a struggle for recognition. This has led to violent attacks by armed groups claiming ethnic independence and the creation of an independent Anglophone State called "Ambazonia".³ As a reminder, the Anglophone crisis has its historical origins in the birth of post-colonial Cameroon.⁴(Petricgh, 2019, P.7) and has its roots in the unresolved identity malaise in the aftermath of independence, which produced the long struggle for recognition by Anglophones (Keutcheu, 2021). It was then triggered in 2016 by a series of demands from lawyers, teachers and students, who were seeking to create a two-state federation to prevent Anglophone legal

¹Mention should be made here of countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal where women's initiatives have been commendable in restoring peace through the signing of peace agreements.

²Resolution 1325 adopted by the Security Council on October 31, 2000 in Namibia calls on the UN and Member States to take more systematic account of women's interests in peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. The key points of the Security Council resolution are as follows: increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making; integrate a gender perspective in all peacekeeping missions; appoint more women envoys and special representatives of the secretary general; support local women's organizations in their peace initiatives; involving women in peace negotiations and agreements; ensure the protection of women and girls and ensure respect for their rights; protect women and girls from gender-based violence; integrate a gender perspective into disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs for former combatants. Read Chineze J.ONYEJEKWE, « *les femmes, la guerre, la consolidation de la paix et la reconstruction in "revue internationale des sciences sociales"*, n°184 P 305.

³The name Ambazonia was created by the self-proclaimed historians of the independence movement from the former name of the outlet of the Wouri River, the "Bay of Ambas", in order to dissociate itself from both Cameroon and Nigeria. Many Anglophones prefer the historical name of southern British Cameroons, while others simply refer to the north-west and south-west regions, according to the official name of the territorial entities concerned within the Cameroonian republic. Read Cynthia Petricgh, "*le conflit anglophone au Cameroun, un dialogue sans partenaire*" IFRI Notes, ifri, October 2019, P12

⁴The term post-colonial or post-colonialism is used to describe the lingering effects of colonization in former colonized countries. However, it has been criticized by many peers, especially African historians who prefer the term post-independence.

and educational systems from being “swallowed” by their Francophone counterparts (International Crisis Group, 2022, p.1), although in reality Abwa (2015) believes that the Anglophone problem, to use his words, “*is an artificially created problem, a false debate because Cameroon is neither historically, politically nor culturally "Anglophone" and "Francophone"*”. Over the years, the crisis turned into an open armed conflict, with serious repercussions in the regions concerned and often devastating effects on women. In response to this crisis, and to restore peace in the North West and South West regions, the government of Cameroon has launched several peace processes that include women as key actors. These peace processes include the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, the NCDDR and the Major National Dialogue. This article seeks to demonstrate how the various peace processes initiated by the government of Cameroon lack inclusiveness in terms of women’s involvement, and how this lack of inclusiveness further reinforces the domination of gender relations in matters of peace and security. The fundamental questions the article seeks to address are: how are women involved in the peace processes? What are the obstacles to women's involvement in these peace processes? And what are the challenges and prospects for taking greater consideration of women in peace processes? The central argument of this article is that women remain an under-exploited potential in peace processes because of socio-cultural and political factors that limit their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

2. Theoretical and methodological Considerations

2.1 Theoretical framework of Analysis

According to Berthelot, quoted by Rabo Ali (2020, P.81), “*Il ne peut avoir en sciences sociales des constatations fructueuses sans l’élaboration d’un cadre théorique de référence*”. “*There can be no fruitful findings in social sciences without the development of a reference theoretical framework*”. In this respect, theories are sets of general statements describing real phenomena (Depelteau, 200 P 129). To do this, the researcher chooses theories that enable him to investigate, explain and better understand his object of study. To this end, the theory of gender relations and the theory of intersectionality are employed in this study.

2.1.1 The Theory of gender relations

The theory of gender relations is a feminist theory based on the Marxist conception of social relations in the sense that gender inequalities are considered as one of the manifestations of inequalities linked to the capitalist system (Gravel, 2017). According to Ruault (2017) quoted by Delphy, it was developed to demonstrate that, like social classes, the enslavement of women is indeed the product of historical and social relations and not a natural fact. The theory of gender relations aims to understand how gender differences are constructed and articulated in society. It has influenced many works on gender issues, emphasizing the importance to take social, cultural and economic factors into account in order to understand gender inequality. Recently, a large body of scholars have turn their attention to it to explain how power relations exist between men and women in society, which maintain gender inequalities (Guillaumin, 1972, Claude-Mathieu, 1991 Daune-Richard and Dévreux, 1992 Fougeyrollas-schwebel, 1995; Kergoat, 2001; Delphy, 2013). In the context of this article, this theory is relevant because peace processes must take into account gender differences and inequalities between men and women because women are more often affected differently by conflicts and may have specific needs in terms of peace and security.

2.1.2 The Theory of Intersectionality

The theory of intersectionality emerged in social science research as one of many responses to democratic and egalitarian struggles for social justice in the twentieth century, in various spheres of activity (Jihye Chun, Lipsitz & Al, 2020). However, it was popularized in the 1990s by Kimberly Crenshaw, an Afro-American feminist. It is subsequently theorized to explore how women's identity, social positioning, and experiences of inequality and violence have been structured by multiple systems of domination related to race, gender, class, and nation. (Harper and Kurtzman, 2014). Intersectionality also refers to interdisciplinary theories that aim to understand the complexities of identity and social inequalities through an integrated approach. However, it refutes the partitioning and hierarchization of the major axes of social differentiation which are the categories of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, age (Bilge, 2009). In this article, this theory is used to analyze how women in peace processes are marginalized and excluded from peace negotiations because of their gender and other intersectional affiliations, in order to develop political strategies that take account of the specific needs and experiences of women, particularly those from marginalized groups.

2.2 Methodological Considerations

For any scientific work that aims to be relevant, precise and clear, the researcher must adopt a methodological approach that allows him/her to explain the data collection tools that enable him to establish the method. In doing so, the researcher uses primary and/or secondary data to shed light on the research. In this work, interest is on secondary data: articles from scientific journals, reports from international organizations, media data, books downloaded from the internet to show the low representation of women in the peace processes launched by the government of Cameroon in the context of the Anglophone crisis. In addition, the study employs a first-hand survey from the Cameroonian women's consultation platform for the National Dialogue as part of a plea for effective implementation of the relevant recommendations from the major national dialogue and for the voice of women to be taken into account in the current peace processes.

3. The involvement of Cameroonian women in the various peace processes

The participation of women in peace processes is a reality we all have to face. While women are often the victims of armed conflict, they also become the main caregivers in conflict-affected communities. Yet, when it comes to formal decisions on peace negotiations, they are under-represented or sidelined, despite their active participation in campaigns and public mobilization for peace with the government or armed groups. This observation is somewhat misleading, as peacebuilding also takes place in the informal sphere, where women are very active and influence peace and security processes through their activism. However, what can be said about the involvement of Cameroonian women in the various peace processes in the light of the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, the NCDDR and the major national dialogue?

3.1 The National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism

From claims by lawyers and teachers against the Francophone legal and educational system, the crisis turned into a complex violent conflict, pitting Cameroon's defense forces against armed groups. To deal with the crisis, one of the government initiatives was the creation of the National Commission for Bilingualism and Multiculturalism created by Decree No. 2017/013 of January 23, 2017 and placed under the authority of the President of the Republic. This commission, chaired by former Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge, is responsible

for working to promote Bilingualism and Multiculturalism with the following related objectives: maintain peace, consolidate the unity of the country and strengthen the will and daily practice of living together of its populations (<https://cnpbm.cm/fr/2017>). Furthermore, in order to promote peace, unity, diversity and inclusion in a country characterized by great cultural and linguistic diversity, the commission is made up of 15 members, including a president and a vice-president. At this level, women are under-represented in the observations. However, it should also not be forgotten either that only four of the 15 are women, despite their participation in a community consultation organized by the commission to gather the opinions and suggestions from local communities on the level of the practice of bilingualism, multiculturalism and living together, with a view to drawing up a strategic plan for the promotion of these values (Cameroon Tribune, 2018).

3.2 The National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (NCDDR)

According to the Brahimi report published in 2000 and cited by Mandjem (2020), DDR (Disarm, Demobilize and Reintegrate) is presented as a key to building and maintaining stability and avoiding a return to violence in post-conflict contexts. In the Cameroonian context, the NCDDR is one of the key measures for ending the crisis. Created by Decree No. 2018/719 of November 30, 2018, the NCDDR reflects the State's willingness and commitment to respond favorably to the offer of peace to ex-combatants of Boko-haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West regions wishing to lay down their arms. Placed under the authority of the Prime Minister, Head of Government, the committee is responsible for receiving and disarming ex-combatants of boko-haram and armed groups in the North-West and South-West regions, collecting and storing arms and ammunition voluntarily surrendered by ex-combatants (Decree n°2018/719, 2018, P2). In terms of demobilization, the committee is responsible for setting up and managing cantonment sites for ex-combatants, supervising ex-combatants and providing multidimensional assistance to ex-combatants as part of their preparation for a return to civilian life (ibid., p2). In terms of reintegration, the committee is responsible for taking the necessary steps for the de-radicalization of ex-combatants, raising awareness and providing multidimensional assistance to communities of origin to facilitate the reintegration of ex-combatants, and helping ex-combatants to reintegrate into civilian life by organising, training and providing tools or means of production and assistance with the creation of income-generating activities (ibid., p2).

As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the DDR program, several ministries have been involved as members. the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family MINPROFF is not one of them either, however, MINPROFF represents the highest body dealing with women and security issues in Cameroon. Furthermore, women have shown that they can make a significant contribution to these projects because of their unique experiences and perspectives as victims and/or combatants of these conflicts. Nevertheless, their involvement was largely excluded.

3.3 The Major National Dialogue

Berghof Foundation (2017) defines national dialogue as a political process managed at the national level. It aims to generate consensus among a wide range of national actors in the event of a serious political crisis, post-conflict or during an important political transition. From this definition, it is not difficult to understand that faced with complex conflicts with multiple or multidimensional causes, the national dialogue must mobilize many actors. A

national dialogue therefore seems absolutely necessary for certain African countries to come together and negotiate a new social contract to bind their countries together to face the crisis they are going through. The specific case of Mali provides us with some lessons on the practice and success of national dialogue as a way out of the Malian crisis.⁵ In the Cameroonian context, the Major National Dialogue organized at the initiative of the President of the Republic from September 30 to October 04, 2019 is the result of a series of government attempts to resolve the crisis in the light of the situation which is persisting and escalating. It brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives from government, civil society, Anglophone separatist groups, diaspora organizations and other political and social actors. The discussions of this major meeting were aimed at resolving the urgent problems faced by the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Several related issues were addressed, such as the protection of human rights, decentralization, the use of official languages, and the economic integration, promotion of peace and security and conflict resolution in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. However, some observers have protested against the nature of this dialogue, both in substance and in form. This could also justify its failure⁶, since

La société camerounaise apparaît plus fracturée que jamais, les revendications identitaires prolifèrent, le concept d'autochtonie cristallise les joutes politiques et alimente les tensions communautaires, les plaidoyers en faveur d'un fédéralisme ethnique sont toujours plus audibles, et la crise est désormais le théâtre d'un sinistre affrontement entre seigneurs de guerre sanguinaires d'un côté, et forces de sécurité déchainées de l'autre (Lado et GWet, 2020). « *the cameroonian society appears more fractured than ever, identity claims are multiplying, the concept of autochtony is cristallising political contests and fuelling community tensions, the pleas for ethnic federalism are increasingly audible, and the crisis is now the scene of sinister confrontation between bloodthirsty warlords on the one hand, and unleashed security forces on the other* »

However, it is worth noting that women have acted in favor of peace in this new threat against Cameroon. Far from being exhaustive, they have made peaceful pleas in favor of secession. They have organized their own demonstrations as part of a pro-secession campaign on September 22 and October 1, 2017 in front of the UN headquarters in New York, in foreign capitals such as London, Abuja, Pretoria, Ottawa. Moreover, they have created peace networks to support women victims of conflict and give them the opportunity to participate in developing solutions. Women's groups have also played an important role in mobilizing communities to help reduce violence. They have engaged directly with the government,

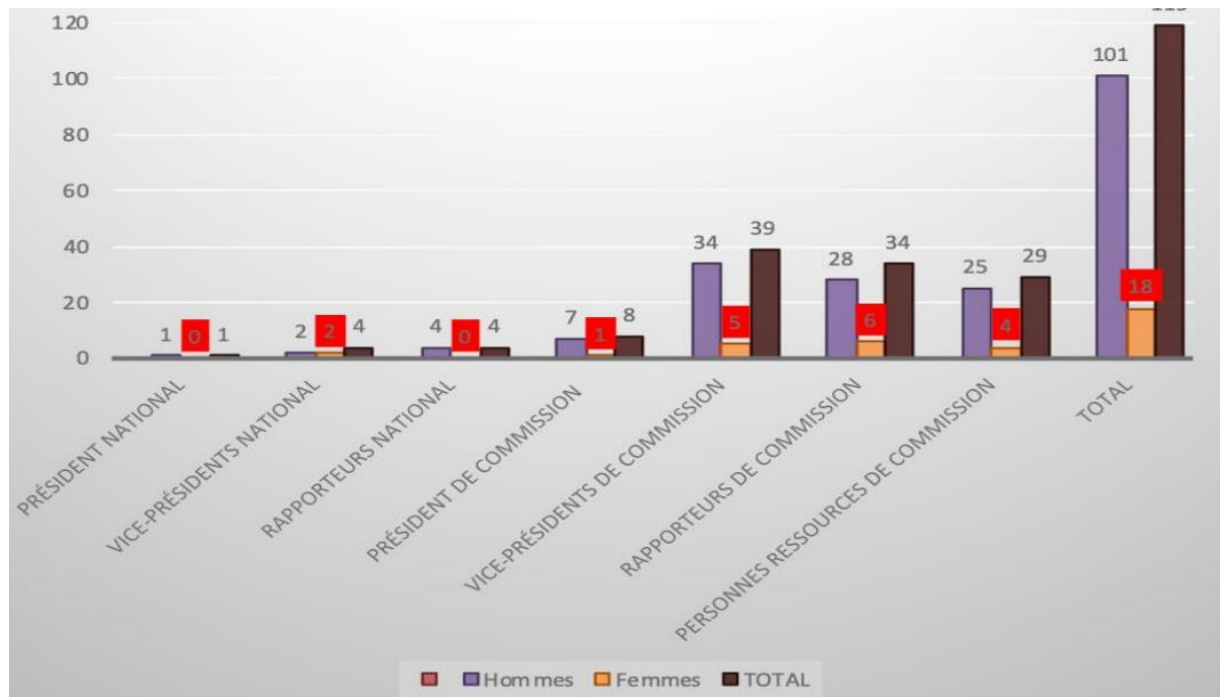
⁵With a view to resolving the crisis, Mali has drawn on its history which is full of experiences of mechanisms of social dialogue, agreement, co-management of territories, regulation, prevention and anticipation of crises related to cohabitation of the diversity of ethnic, cultural and socio-professional groups. A "social capital" and a cultural heritage have helped to maintain social links, prevent and manage conflicts. This has helped to ensure that 9 diverse populations with different customs lived together over the long term and has also encouraged the integration of different communities on the basis of complementarity which has become a social value. Read about it Sy, Ousmane, Dakouo, Ambroise and Traore, Kadari. « *Dialogue national au Mali: Leçons de la Conférence Nationale de 1991 pour le processus de sortie de crise* ». Berlin: Berghof Foundation, 2016, P 8-9.

⁶According to Sidonie Noel in her research paper for the Institute for Research and Education on Peace, the failure of the major national dialogue can be attributed to unpreparedness and exclusion from debates of the issue of the form of the State (Decentralization-federalism) and alternation in power; the impertinence of the policies of inclusive dialogues conducted since 1961 by the various regimes in order to integrate the two so-called "Anglophone" regions as a fully flesh part of Cameroon.

separatist leaders and diplomatic missions to raise awareness on civilian’s sufferings and advocate for measures to reduce it (Crisis Group, 2022, P 16 – 17).

In addition to these commendable and appreciated actions, it is worth noting that the participation of women is still very limited. Women were under-represented in the debates and discussions at this meeting. Only a small number of women were able to take part in the national dialogue sessions, mainly as observers. This can be seen in the graph below:

Graph1: The representation of women involved in the Major National Dialogue



Sources: Cameroonian Women's consultation platform for the National Dialogue, 2019

This representation, as weak as it may seem, shows the extent to which women have been involved in the various commissions set up during the major national dialogue. Yet, Cameroon has drawn up a national action plan through the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family (MINPROFF) in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions on women, peace and security.

Analysis of the statistics produced by the platform shows that, in terms of positions of responsibility, only one of the 14 women in the committee bureau heads the committee. Of the 120 people responsible for facilitating the dialogue as chairmen, vice-chairmen, rapporteurs or advisers in the various committees, 14 were women, representing a participation rate of 16.8%. More specifically, out of the 4 National Vice-Presidents posts, 02 women held the posts of 3rd and 4th Vice-Presidents; there were no women rapporteurs in the national bureau out of the existing 04; 01 woman president out of 08 committee presidents; 07 vice-president posts allocated to women out of the 41 vice-president posts; 08 women rapporteurs out of 36 posts and 04 women resource persons out of 29 resource persons.

In view of the above, women’s representation in peace processes has been largely limited, despite the important role they have played in informal peacemaking efforts. However, there

are still numerous and complex obstacles to their participation and involvement in the various peace processes.

4. The influence of socio-cultural factors: Obstacles to the representation of women in peace processes in Cameroon

The low representation of women in peace processes in Africa is due to a number of factors. Before mentioning some of them, it should be remembered that conflicts in Africa are often linked to issues of power and control of resources, and that women are marginalized in these areas. In so doing, they are excluded from political and decision-making processes because of sexism and gender stereotypes. In addition, they are perceived as less competent to deal with peace and security issues. A 2017 UN Women report on promoting women's participation in peace processes in Francophone Africa reveals that factors such as the architecture of peace processes are struggling to transform in the face of women's advancement in the society. The rigidity and lack of inclusiveness of women is also found at the level of the actors seating around the table, in many cases seeking essentially to achieve their immediate objectives, which is peace, without making any link with the broader interests of the community at large, including inclusiveness. In terms of gender terminology, a rigidity also comes in because, when women are invited to participate in peace processes, they are often represented by one of the representatives of civil society, and when they are consulted, it is only about the specific needs of women.

This situation shows that women are always marginalized in peace processes, and It is in this context that the main obstacles to women's political participation, conflict resolution and peacebuilding arise. Unfortunately, Cameroon is no exception to this reality.

4.1 The influence of socio-cultural factors

In Cameroon, according to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Cameroon Section (2018), women are excluded from almost all peace mechanisms and processes, which inevitably classifies them as victims. They face a number of obstacles when engaging in peace processes. These obstacles include socio-cultural factors. Socio-cultural factors refer here to the influences that explain the behaviors and attitudes of individuals in a particular society, such as social norms, attitudes, values, beliefs and practices. This definition was formulated by Edward Hall (1966). Indeed, Cameroonian society is, it must be said, a patriarchal society where the husband is the head of the family (Konai, 2016; p. 43). This means that women are relegated to subordinate roles, which hinder their access to and control over resources, their mobility and their right to make decisions. This is also confirmed by the words of Bugain (1988), who states that women's education leads them more in the domestic and private sphere, especially in preparing them for marriage. Any other activity they may undertake was peripheral. Moreover, the colonial state reinforced the male head of the family and ceased to be its spokesperson. This legitimizes the patriarch's desire to impose himself on his wife, and to this end becomes interlocutor and representative in all decisions. This perception, limits their ability to take on or actively participate in peace processes. Added to this is systemic discrimination, as women often face systemic discrimination and may have less power and control in their communities than men. Other characteristics include violence and insecurity. Particularly since women can be victims of sexual violence and harassment in times of conflict, which can make it difficult or dangerous for them to participate in peace processes. Given the socio-cultural obstacles mentioned above, other obstacles may be added,

namely political and economic factors.

4.2 The influence of political and economic factors

In many countries, including Cameroon, women are under-represented in both political and economic decision-making bodies. This means that they have little say when it comes to negotiating peace agreements or defining post-conflict reconstruction policies.

Politically, they are under-represented at the national and local level because they are less likely to hold leadership positions in government. It is worth looking back in history to see how Cameroonian women fought for the right to vote and economic recognition. During the colonial period, Cameroonian women began to engage in politics but their participation was limited by patriarchal social norms and the educational, economic and political barriers imposed on them by the colonial administration. Later, they organized themselves and formed associations, clubs and movements to claim their political rights (ASSOFECAM⁷, CFU⁸, and UDEFEC⁹). It was not until the early 1960s, the year of independence that women began to play a major role in the struggle for independence and nation building, with a hope for impact.¹⁰ However, their participation in political life was limited by the male-dominated political parties, which saw them as supporters or spokespersons. Ndengue (2016, p 74) explains in her article that:

Avant la loi de mai 1951 accordant le droit de vote aux mères de deux enfants, la quasi-totalité des camerounaises est donc privée du droit de vote octroyé en 1945. Leur faible taux de scolarisation ainsi que les représentations de genre qui sous-tendent l’instruction des filles freinent l’accès des femmes à des postes d’auxiliaires, sans compter que les autorités coloniales peinent à considérer les Africaines comme des citoyennes (p.74). Before the law of may 1951 granting the right to vote to mothers of two children, almost all cameroonian women were deprived of the right to vote granted in 1945. Their low school enrolment rate and the gender representations underlying girls’ education hindered women access to auxilliary positions, not to mention the fact that the colonial authorities had difficulty considering African women as citizens

Today, despite significant progress in asserting their demands for gender equality and women’s participation in the management of public affairs, the situation remains worrying.

In economic terms, women have limited access to economic resources. As has been the case in many African countries, Cameroonian women have suffered the effects of colonization, poverty and economic inequality. Indeed, during the colonial period, women were confined to traditional and subordinate roles such as production, and did not have access to economic resources such as land. Colonization therefore reinforced the idea that women were destined to be domestic workers, unable to contribute effectively to the national economy. However, the political measures taken by the Cameroonian government to improve their situation in terms of education and health have had a considerable impact, but their economic participation has been neglected. However, from the 1980s onward, the Cameroonian government began to put in place policies to promote the participation of Cameroonian women in the economy. Despite the efforts of the Cameroonian government, economic gender inequalities persist, with women often excluded from economic opportunities. This disastrous and difficult economic situation persists today. Although progress has been made in

⁷Association of Cameroonian Women

⁸Union of Cameroonian Women

⁹Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women

¹⁰Cameroonian women’s fight for the right to vote had a desired effect through the formation of the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians of Africa, which later enabled women to occupy positions of responsibility such as Minister of Women Empowerment and the Family etc.

terms of economic participation, economic inequalities between the sexes persist. These inequalities directly affect women's participation and even their involvement in peace processes, but above all in decision-making.

The question one needs to ask at this juncture is: what are the challenges and prospects for taking greater considerations of women in peace processes in Cameroon in the light of the above mentioned obstacles?

5. Challenges and prospects for taking greater consideration of women in peace processes

Women's participation in peace processes is essential to ensure sustainable and effective peace outcomes. While women are often the first victims of war, they are increasingly becoming key actors in making significant contributions to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. However, their participation in peace processes is still limited in many countries.

In Cameroon, Cameroonian women face many challenges. These include marginalization, sexual discrimination, gender stereotypes, and insufficient financial and human resources to support their participation. Women have traditionally been excluded from areas of decision-making and negotiation on issues of peace and security, as evidenced by their marginalization in the various peace processes initiated by the government of Cameroon. In addition, violence against women has recurred in the context of the armed conflict in Cameroon, making it difficult for women to participate in peace processes. The lack of financial and human resources, not to mention the limited opportunities for dialogue, have largely contributed to the exclusion of women from decision making bodies due the cultural and social context that cristallizes relations between men and women in the Cameroonian society.

In view of all these listed challenges, there are several positive prospects for promoting the participation of women in peace processes. Indeed, international UN agencies, NGOs and governments are working together to promote women's participation in peace processes. Peace agreements signed in recent years include provisions to promote gender equality and give women an important role in the implementation of peace agreements. The 2011 law on Gender Responsibility, which guarantees equitable representation of women in the political and economic spheres, is an example of significant progress in involving women in peace processes. In the case of Cameroon, it is important to highlight certain progress made in promoting the participation of women in peace processes. Among this progress, note that Cameroon adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and is using it to integrate it into its national policy. A National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325 was then developed, aiming to strengthen the participation of women in peace processes and ensure their protection in times of conflict. Cameroon's constitution promotes gender equality and guarantees women's rights. This includes their participation in decision-making processes, particularly in the areas of peace and security. This progress demonstrates the commitment at all levels to ensure greater participation of women in peace processes, recognizing their essential role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. In addition, women's organizations support survivors of sexual violence and advocate for greater participation of women in formal peace processes to ensure that their interests are taken into account. Local organizations and local associations such as Women for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), work actively to encourage and support the participation of women in peace processes in Cameroon. One example is the organization of the first national convention of women for peace in July 2021 with the aim of launching a cry, an appeal, and a hope for women victims of war but also and above all for all those who have chosen to make peace their struggle

(Nyangono, 2021).

Conclusion

Ultimately, this article shows that the participation of women in peace processes in Cameroon is essential to guarantee a lasting and inclusive peace. Unfortunately, (despite the combined efforts of all stakeholders), women still remain marginalized in these various peace processes. It is therefore important to recognize that the representation of women in peace processes is a complex and multifaceted issue, and that it is essential to work towards eliminating socio-cultural barriers and promoting the participation of women in political life and in peace initiatives. To this end, the United Nations has adopted a number of resolutions to promote the involvement of women in peace processes, underlining their important role in promoting peace and security. Several organizations have also campaigned for the involvement of women in peace processes and have worked to support and strengthen their participation. Finally, the State has adopted policies to encourage the involvement of women in peace processes. Despite all these initiatives, there are still obstacles to their involvement. All of these barriers have an impact on women's ability to become involved in peace processes and to contribute to sustainable post-conflict reconstruction. It is therefore essential to work to remove these obstacles to enable the full and equitable participation of women in peace processes in Cameroon. In the same vein, equal participation of women and men in all stages of the peace processes, from negotiation to the implementation of peace agreements is essential, as well as taking women's experiences into account in the design of peace and post-conflict reconstruction policies, particularly in terms of protection against sexual and gender-based violence. Not forgetting the promotion of women's participation in local and national institutions, including in decision-making processes on issues related to conflict and peace.

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