



Marginalized Voices: The Result of Power Relation, Donor Agendas and Institutional Incentives in NGOs' Projects in Africa

(The case of the Bamenda I, II, III Municipalities in the Ongoing Anglophone Crisis)

Rev Dr. Raphael Ebune Nnode^{1*}, Ndamnsah Larrisa Ngesi² and Simon Peter Fomonyuy³

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology, Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC), Bamenda.

*Corresponding Author

Rev Dr. Raphael Ebune Nnode

Article History

Received: 27.03.2026

Accepted: 22.05.2026

Published: 15.06.2026

Abstract: The article *Marginalized Voices: The Result of Power Relation, Donor Agendas and Institutional Incentives in NGOs' Projects in Africa (The case of Bamenda in the Ongoing Anglophone Crisis)* interrogates the complex interplay between external donor priorities, institutional incentives, and local power relations in shaping the outcomes of NGO interventions in conflict-affected communities. Using Bamenda, Cameroon, as a case study within the broader Anglophone crisis, the article explores how the voices of marginalized populations particularly women, youths, and internally displaced persons are systematically silenced or reshaped to fit donor-driven narratives. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, combining ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews with community members and NGO staff, and critical discourse analysis of project documents. Findings reveal that donor agendas often prioritize measurable outputs and politically safe interventions over grassroots needs, leading to a disconnect between project design and lived realities. Institutional incentives within NGOs such as competition for funding, reputational concerns, and alignment with state actors further reinforce exclusionary practices. Power relations manifest both vertically (between donors, NGOs, and communities) and horizontally (within communities themselves), producing a layered system of marginalization. The case of Bamenda illustrates how NGOs, despite their stated mission of empowerment, risk perpetuating structural inequalities when they fail to critically interrogate the political economy of aid. The Anglophone crisis intensifies these dynamics as NGOs navigate a fragile environment where neutrality is contested, and survival often depends on appeasing both donors and state authorities. The paper argues that genuine inclusion requires a paradigm shift, moving beyond tokenistic participation toward co-created agendas that prioritize local agency and contextual knowledge. This study contributes to debates on humanitarian governance, postcolonial critiques of development, and the politics of voice in conflict settings. It highlights the urgent need for NGOs to reconfigure accountability mechanisms, ensuring that marginalized voices are not only heard but also shape the trajectory of interventions. By situating Bamenda within the broader African NGO landscape, the article underscores that the silencing of communities is not accidental but structurally embedded in the aid system. Ultimately, the paper calls for a rethinking of NGO practices in Africa, advocating for participatory frameworks that resist donor-imposed homogenization and institutional self-interest. Such reorientation is essential for fostering resilience, justice, and sustainable peace in contexts of protracted crisis.

Keywords: NGOs, Marginalize, Anglophone Crisis, Power, Relation, Donor, Agenda, Institutional, Incentives.



Introduction

Since the 1980s through the 1990s, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been positioned as vehicles of grassroots empowerment, humanitarian response participatory development, democratic accountability and governance support across Africa (Davis, 2014). Before the 1980s, Non-Governmental Organizations, following their interventions in the world after the Second World War, were referred to as “Private International Associations” (Davies, 2012). Today, NGOs have taken over many sectors formerly attributed to the state government, are actively influencing conventions and responding to humanitarian needs. They have become very common and understandable even to a layperson (Davis, 2014). Some scholars define NGOs as voluntary and open associations of individuals operating outside the formal state apparatus, which are neither profit-driven nor engaged in political activities (Iriye, 1999). NGOs can be international or local, and some are interdependent (Jamali, 2003).

The global rise in humanitarian needs has prompted the expansion of NGOs worldwide. Africa in particular has been a fertile ground for the growth and expansion of NGOs because of many wars and conflicts (Shivji, 2006). In the Northwest Region of Cameroon, particularly the Bamenda municipality, NGOs are said to play even a more central role due to the ongoing socio-political crisis (the anglophone crisis), which has ravaged the economy of the region, weakened state capacity, requiring thus urgent need for humanitarian assistance (Abia, et.al, 2016). However, as NGOs continue to expand their presence in Africa especially in crisis regions, questions about whose voices shape their priorities, whose interests do they serve, and how power circulates within their institutional structures become obviously unavoidable (Tanga et al, 2009). Therefore, despite their commitment to participation, empowerment, and community-driven development in Africa, it is widely believed that NGOs often reproduce the same power hierarchies they claim to dismantle (Gugerty, 2008).

Mindful of this observation, some critical analysts attest that in theory, NGOs provide marginalized communities with platforms to articulate their needs and influence policy but in practice, the voices of the very communities they seek to serve are often silent, reshaped, or sidelined by the structural realities of NGO operations (Abia, et.al, 2016). Marginalized groups and communities such as women, youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), persons with disabilities, the rural poor, frequently remain excluded from decision-making processes. Their lived experiences are filtered through donor frameworks, institutional incentives, and elite intermediaries (Abia, et.al, 2016).

For commoners, NGOs’ aides serve a humanitarian purpose, but for critical minds, they serve an agenda whose purpose is unproportionate to donors’ needs. In a workshop organized by Women Empowerment: *Nkumu Fed Fed* a participant, an internally displaced person from Mbessa village said:

An internally displaced person leaving in Bamenda is not interested in the rice, food stuff, clothing and other items handed to them by any charitable organizations. These things are given to them by relatives and friends they live with. What they desire is an end to the anglophone crisis, a longing to return home and, poverty alleviation and self-sustainable projects (Interview, Bamenda I, 2025)

Instead of paying attention therefore to the needs of the people they seek to help and listening to their voices, power relations dictate who speaks and who listens; donor agendas determine which issues are prioritized; and institutional incentives encourage practices that privilege organizational interests over community needs. Understanding these dynamics is crucial not only for rethinking NGO practice in Bamenda greatly affected by the anglophone crisis but also for reimagining the role of NGOs in development more broadly in Africa. This article thus contributes to ongoing debates about the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of NGOs in the context of the anglophone crisis.

1.1. Problem Statement

We indicated already that over the past decades; the expansion of Non-Governmental Organizations has been so significant and their works central to development projects and humanitarian demands in the world especially in the sub-Saharan Africa. We said also that this increased responsibilities, have greatly been as a result of the failure of some states to take up the responsibilities over their citizens. However, the activities of NGOs and the roots of contemporary power imbalances today are seen not to be without of colonial legacies in Africa.

Colonial administration imposed centralized governance structures, privileging urban elites, sidelining rural populations. Many International NGOs, which emerged during the post-independence era, inherited this lopsidedness. Their headquarters are often located in Western capitals, reinforcing a system where decision-making authority resides outside Africa (Vivian, 1994). This historical continuity means that local communities frequently experience NGOs as external actors, echoing colonial patterns of domination rather than genuine partnership (Vivian, 1994). We highlighted that international NGOs dominate development landscape in Africa, controlling significant financial resources. They set activities agendas, and define success metrics. Local NGOs, by contrast, often serve as subcontractors, implementing projects designed elsewhere (Vivian, 1994). This creates a dependency relationship whereby local organizations must align with international priorities to secure funding. The result is a hierarchy where global actors speak for local communities, reducing the space for grassroots voices to shape development trajectories. Power relations are not only external but also internal to African societies. Within communities, class, gender, and education create stratifications that influence whose voices are heard. Urban elites, often fluent in donor languages and familiar with bureaucratic procedures, are more likely to be consulted (Vivian, 1994). Rural farmers, women, and youth are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. Thus, even when NGOs claim to engage in participatory approaches, participation is skewed toward those already privileged, reinforcing existing inequalities.

The central argument advanced in this article is that marginalized voices in Bamenda municipality are not simply the result of neglect or oversight but systematically produced by the very logics that sustain NGOs’ operations. Power relations are often said to dictate who speaks and who listens; donor agendas determine which issues are prioritized; and institutional incentives encourage practices that privilege organizational interests over community needs. Understanding these trajectories and dynamics is crucial not only for rethinking NGOs practices but reimagining their role in

development more broadly. Once again, this article contributes to ongoing debates about the legitimacy, accountability, and effectiveness of NGOs in crisis zones in Africa particularly in Bamenda municipality where more NGOs are now operational because of the anglophone crisis.

1.2. Historical Background of NGOs

“A century of NGOs” is the description given by Akira Iriye to the late twentieth century, announcing the twenty-first era. Before then, the rise of NGOs had not reached the level we witness today (Iriye, 1999). NGOs today have not only become central actors in global development, humanitarian aid and advocacy but indispensable in both developed and developing nations. Their history is intertwined with broader political, economic and social transformations, particularly in Africa, where they have played pivotal roles in service delivery, democratization, and human rights advocacy.

1.2.1. Early Origins of NGOs

The early origins of NGOs are traceable to voluntary associations and philanthropic initiatives that were formed in Europe and North America during the 18th and 19th centuries. During this period, organizations such as the Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1787 were formed and could be considered among the earliest international NGOs to intervene in Africa. This campaigned strongly against the transatlantic slave trade (Holmen, 2009). The role of early missionary societies, including the London Missionary Society and Catholic Missions are accounted as well as one of the early beginnings of NGOs. Early Missionaries established schools, hospitals, and relief services across Africa during the colonial period, laying therefore, the foundations for modern education and healthcare systems (Everill, et.al, 2013). Before the imperialist expansion, some Africa indigenous community-based organizations functioned as proto-NGOs, mobilizing collective action for resistance and social welfare. Well-known examples are local associations in Ghana that resisted British trading arrangements in the 18th century, asserting autonomy and solidarity (Beyuo et al, 2023).

During colonial reign, NGOs were largely missionary and charity-based. They focused on humanitarian relief, education, and healthcare. They often complemented colonial administrations but also provided spaces for resistance and empowerment. The Salvation Army for example and other faith-based organizations were prominent actors in social service provision (Michael, 2005). It must be underlined their work was often influenced by colonial agendas thereby reinforcing Western cultural and religious norms and motives (Manji, et.al, 2002).

Immediately after independence, African-led NGOs began to emerge with focus on social justice, rural development, and political advocacy. They filled gaps left by weak state institutions and became vigorous vehicles for grassroots mobilization (Michael, 2005). The 1960s and 1970s saw NGOs supporting literacy campaigns, agricultural cooperatives, and women’s empowerment initiatives. However, their growth was limited by authoritarian regimes that often viewed NGOs with suspicious eyes (Shivji, 2007).

The advent of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), imposed by the IMF and World Bank marked a turning point in African NGO history. SAPs required governments to reduce public

spending, privatize services, and liberalize economies. As African states retreated from welfare provision, NGOs became primary providers of healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation (Boussard, 1992; Brass et al., 2018). They became what Professors Anthony Bebbington, Samuel Hickey and Diana Mitlin called the “NGO-ization” of development with international donors channeling funds through NGOs rather than governments (Bebbington, et.al, 2008). NGOs were celebrated as more efficient, participatory, and accountable actors. However, critics have continued to argue that NGOs were advancing neoliberal agendas, undermining state sovereignty, and fostering dependency on foreign aid (Manji, et.al, 2002). According to Issa Gulamhussein Shivji, the World Bank in 1981 published its notorious report concerning the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) titled: *Accelerated Development for Africa: An Agenda for Action*, wherein the SAPs was nothing other than an agenda set for Africa with the backing of Western countries which had little to do with development (Shivji, 2006). It was an imperial imposition from the west to regain control over Africa after independence. Evidence suggested that SAPs reshaped Africa in ways that deepened underdevelopment as was seen in the neglect of key sectors such as education, health, and agriculture after their adoption. The thorny question remained; how can a country or continent said to be expressing “Accelerated Development” develop with widespread illiteracy, poor health, and a weakened source of revenue (Shivji, 2006)

Today, NGOs in Africa operate across diverse sectors, including humanitarian aid, environmental protection, human rights, and governance. They play central roles in disaster response, refugee support, and post-conflict reconstruction (Polman, 2011). However, their survival in Africa continues to be threatened by corruption and embezzlement of funds, especially among bass management, as well as poor synergy and weak collaboration between NGO actors and the government (Kang’ethe, et.al, 2014). Their origin in Cameroon is most noticeable after 1995 with environmental NGOs surged which coinciding with democratization and global donor interest. Focusing was on forest conservation and biodiversity. Focus areas included forest conservation, wildlife protection, and community-based natural resource management (Markham, et.al, 2015). Human rights NGOs have been crucial in documenting abuses during the Anglophone crisis, bringing international attention to violations (Hughes, 2020). The challenges have been, limited funding, dependence on international donors, and government suspicion of NGO activities. Government restrictions, harassment of activists, and limited access to conflict zones have been major challenges in recent times.

The continuous existence and influence of NGOs in African haven’t gone without interrogation about their role. Scholars and critics argue that NGOs depoliticize development by focusing on service delivery rather than structural transformation (Shivji, 2007). Firoze Manji and Carl O’Coill contend that NGOs act as “missionaries” of neoliberalism, promoting Western capitalist models (Manji, et.al, 2002). Others highlight the “accountability paradox,” where NGOs are more accountable to donors than to local communities (Brass et.al, 2020).

The history of NGOs in Africa echoes broader struggles with colonialism, independence, and globalization. From indigenous associations to missionary charities, from post-independence

grassroots movements to donor-driven service providers, NGOs have been both indispensable and controversial. They have empowered communities, filled gaps left by weak states, and advanced human rights, yet they have also reinforced dependency and neoliberal agendas. The challenge for African NGOs today is to balance external support with local autonomy, ensuring that they remain accountable to the communities they serve and spread of NGOs in Africa are embedded in a very complex historical background rooted in colonialism.

Taking the case of our local community of Bamenda municipality, found in the North west region of Cameroon, even though NGOs have considerably played a crucial role especially in response to this socio-political crisis, standing the gap to respond to the humanitarian need which at some point was inevitable, the question of power imbalances and donors' agendas with their institutional incentives have been problematic. The problem of sustainability and participation question this aid which somehow hold so many people dependent on them rather than picking up for themselves and moving forward. The question is, do NGOs really speak for the people? Do they respond to the needs of these people or are their voices marginalized and silenced?

1.3. Definition and Contextualization

Bamenda is a city located in the Northwest region of Cameroon. Geographically, the region is located in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, bordered to the southwest by the South West Region, to the south by the West Region, to the east by the Adamawa Region and to the north by the by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Known before 2008 as the Northwest Province, the region is the third most populated in Cameroon (Ebune, 2023). Its major metropolitan city is Bamenda, and several other smaller towns. Marked by political contestation, socio-economic inequalities and the heightened area of the ongoing anglophone crisis, Bamenda offers a compelling example of the dynamics highlighted above (Awa, et.al, 2024). Bamenda is one of the anglophone cities greatly affected by the anglophone crisis which has heightened vulnerabilities among the local population of the Northwest region (Awa, et.al, 2024). NGOs operating in this environment especially during this crisis are tasked with addressing urgent humanitarian needs while navigating complex political terrain. However, the interplay of external donor priorities, internal organizational survival strategies, and entrenched hierarchies often results in the marginalization of grassroots voices (Akumbom et.al, 2022). Women, youths, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable groups frequently find themselves represented only superficially in NGO discourse, with their lived experiences reframed to fit donor narratives or institutional reporting requirements.

To this effect, this article seeks to interrogate the mechanisms through which local voices are marginalized in NGO practice, focusing on Bamenda municipality as a microcosm of broader trends in Sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, it examines three interrelated factors: Power relations between international NGOs, local NGOs, and community actors; donor agendas that prioritize measurable outcomes over participatory processes; and finally institutional incentives that drive NGOs to prioritize visibility, funding, and organizational survival over genuine empowerment. By situating Bamenda within both the Cameroonian and global development context, the study highlights how structural forces

shape the everyday realities of NGO work and the communities they claim to serve.

1.4. Conceptual literature

The article on marginalization of local voices in NGO projects during the Anglophone crisis in Bamenda, projects a disconnect between community needs and NGO interventions due to external influences. Structural silencing of grassroots actors through donor priorities and institutional constraints. The first key dimensions here are: Power Relations, Donor Agendas, Institutional Incentives and Mechanisms of Marginalization. Then, the application: Bamenda in the Anglophone Crisis and the outcomes.

1.4.1. Power Relations within NGOs

Power relations within NGOs' projects in most parts of Africa are shaped by the interaction between international donors, local NGO staff, community beneficiaries, and government actors. In practice, donor priorities and funding conditions often dominate, while local communities may have limited influence, creating tensions around ownership, accountability, and sustainability. Most NGOs rely heavily on international donors (EU, UN agencies, faith-based organizations). This gives donors significant control over project design, timelines, and evaluation criteria. Donors often prioritize issues like health, education, or gender equality, which may not always align with local community priorities. Power relations within NGOs often consist of global versus local NGOs and, Government restrictions and securitization of aid limit NGO autonomy

1.4.2. Global/International Verses Local NGOs

Firstly, there is power relations which consists of Global or international NGOs verses local NGOs. International NGOs and donors hold decision-making power, while local communities remain recipients. Power relation within NGOs operates at multiple levels, including: internal organizational hierarchies, relationships with donors, and engagements with beneficiaries. Externally, NGOs navigate complex relationships with donors and governments. Donor dependency is a defining feature of African NGOs as international funding often dictates organizational priorities. Issa Gulamhussein Shivji critiques this dynamic, arguing that NGOs become "extensions of donor agendas," advancing neoliberal policies rather than indigenous development pathways (Shivji, 2007). Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coill similarly contend that NGOs act as "missionaries" of Western capitalism, reinforcing global inequalities (Manji, et.al, 2002). Michel Foucault explains that power relations within NGOs is manifested through development language, project frameworks and log frames which become instruments of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1980). What should count as legitimate knowledge is shaped by institutional norms. Pierre Bourdieu lay emphasis on the concept of symbolic power, the ability to impose meanings and legitimize certain forms of capital (economic, social, cultural). Actually, donors possess economic capital, which translates into symbolic authority over agenda-setting (Bourdieu, 1991). Through local NGOs, they impose perspectives that follow their interest that is why in some cases a project may be approved with the condition of promoting another uncovered interest ideologies, for instance promoting LGBTQ+, through a project of rights for all. NGOs therefore adapt their language and programming to fit donor categories, thereby reinforcing an imbalance power relation.

Steven Lukes describes three dimensions of power: decision-making power, non-decision-making power, and ideological power (Steven, 2005). In the context of NGOs, decision-making power would mean donors approve or reject project proposals. Non-decision-making power means that certain community concerns never enter funding frameworks. Ideological power means communities internalize donor-defined priorities as development truth (Steven, 2005). Jenny Pearce further emphasizes that NGOs operate within global governance regimes, where power is diffused but structured by funding flows and accountability demands (Pearce, 2010). In Cameroon and particularly in Bamenda, where many NGOs rely heavily on international funding due to limited domestic subventions, power is own by external actors, who provide the funds.

1.4.3. Government restrictions and securitization of aid

Government restrictions and securitization of aid limit NGO autonomy. This is one of the areas of power relations within NGOs. Relations with states are sometimes fraught. Jennifer N. Brass highlights the “allies or adversaries” dilemma. He intimates that NGOs may collaborate with governments in service delivery but also challenge state authority through advocacy (Brass, 2016). In Cameroon, NGOs must register with the Ministry of Territorial Administration, which can delay or deny approvals for politically sensitive projects. This is commonly called administrative huddles. In countries like Ethiopia and Uganda, restrictive laws have curtailed NGO activities, reflecting state fears of political opposition (Holmen, 2009). This tension underscores the contested legitimacy of NGOs as both partners and watchdogs (Holmen, 2009). In Bamenda, humanitarian organizations have reported delays in distributing food and medical supplies because local authorities demanded additional clearances, citing “security concerns.” Christian Pagbe Musah of the University of Bamenda argues that the Cameroonian government’s actions including bureaucratic restrictions and repression have contributed to the radicalization of the Anglophone crisis, limiting civil society and NGO autonomy (Musah, 2022). Elena Frogameni describes how Bamenda is subjected to “ghost town” operations and heavy state control, which indirectly restrict NGO operations and community engagement NGOs often need government authorization to deliver aid, what is known as permit requirements which can be withheld if projects are perceived as sympathetic to separatist narratives (Frogameni, 2024).

In addition to the above is restriction of movements, whereby security checkpoints and curfews are imposed in anglophone Cameroon especially in the North West Region making it difficult for NGOs to access rural communities, especially in conflict zones. Vadys Thierry Lieutcheu Tientcheu writing on the Humanitarian Challenges in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis documents how humanitarian actors face intimidation and restrictions, with aid often blocked under the pretext of preventing support to separatists (Lieutcheu, 2025).

For Civil Society Marginalization, Bamnjo Herman Yenika talking about engaging local communities in peace building shows that civil society organizations in Bamenda struggle to engage communities because government restrictions and insecurity prevent genuine participation (Bamnjo, 2023). Again, Victor Moinina talking about the role of civil society in conflicts particularly in Anglophone Cameroon emphasizes that civil society

has been central to protection and advocacy, but their role is undermined by state repression and securitization of aid (Moinina, 2020).

Last but not the least is elite capture of NGOs, which refers to the process by which individuals or groups with disproportionate power and influence appropriate development resources or decision-making authority often at the expense of marginalized communities. Humanitarian assistance in Bamenda is often mediated by local elites, who decide which communities receive aid and which do not. In the ongoing Anglophone crisis, elites such as local administrators, political figures, and traditional leaders often act as gatekeepers between NGOs and communities, controlling access to aid, shaping project priorities and filtering which voices are heard (<https://www.caritasbamenda.org/>). Reports from Caritas Bamenda note that while NGOs aim to support internally displaced persons (IDPs), access is frequently filtered through local leaders, who may favor loyal groups or exclude dissenting voices (<https://www.caritasbamenda.org/>). As the end of the Anglophone crisis seems far, *Operation Ghost Town Resistance* has paralyzed Bamenda every Monday, with schools and markets closed down. NGOs attempting to deliver aid during this day and days of lockdown must negotiate with both separatist leaders, government military and government-aligned elites, who use their positions to control NGO operations (Frogameni, 2024). This negotiation often results in elites extracting concessions or directing aid to their constituencies, sidelining marginalized communities. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari argue that participatory approaches can be co-opted by elites, turning “participation” into a façade that legitimizes unequal power relations. This is visible in Bamenda, where “community consultations” often involve only elite representatives rather than grassroots voices (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Donor Agendas

Donor-driven development has long been critiqued for imposing external priorities on local contexts. Dependency theorists argue that aid often reproduces unequal relations between the Global North and South, with recipient communities constrained by donor conditionalities. Donors prioritize measurable, short-term outcomes over long-term empowerment. Michael Edwards and David Hulme, argue that donor dependence pushes NGOs toward short-term, quantifiable interventions, undermining transformative change (Edwards, et.al, 1996). In Cameroon like in most developing countries, donor agendas frequently emphasize measurable outcomes such as the number of workshops held or beneficiaries reached over qualitative improvements in community empowerment. Most projects in Bamenda focus on immediate relief (food distribution, temporary shelters) rather than root causes of marginalization, such as political exclusion or systemic violence. Again, donors often tie funding to specific priorities (e.g., health, education, gender equality) that may not align with urgent local needs. This forces NGOs to design projects that fit donor templates rather than community priorities. Nicola Banks, David Hulme, and Michael Edwards argue that NGOs adapt their missions to donor priorities, creating dependency and narrowing their scope (Banks, et.al, 2015). In Bamenda while communities may demand dialogue, justice, or livelihood support, NGOs often deliver “safe” donor-funded programs like hygiene campaigns or vocational training. As if that isn’t enough, there is the narrative framing, where donors often define the “problem” and “solution,”

shaping NGO discourse. This framing shapes NGO discourse and reporting. Emma Mawdsley, Janet Townsend, and Gareth Porter, show how donor narratives constrain NGOs, limiting creative or locally grounded approaches (Mawdsley et.al, 2005).

There also is the issue of accountability upward, where by NGOs are primarily accountable to donors, not communities. Reporting requirements emphasize donor metrics (number of workshops, beneficiaries reached) rather than community empowerment. Alnoor Ebrahim demonstrates that NGOs prioritize upward accountability to donors, sidelining downward accountability to grassroots actors (Ebrahim, 2003). In Bamenda NGOs spend more time producing donor reports than engaging with communities. This creates a disconnect, donors see “success” in numbers, while communities feel unheard.

1.4.5. Institutional Incentives and Organizational Survival

Institutional theory highlights how organizations respond to external pressures by adopting practices that ensure survival and legitimacy. For NGOs, this often means prioritizing visibility, reporting, and donor satisfaction over genuine community engagement because they must secure continuous funding to survive. This creates an incentive to prioritize projects that align with donor priorities rather than community needs. Alan Fowler in an article titled *Striking a Balance: A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of NGOs*, explains that NGOs compromise autonomy to secure funding often at the expense of grassroots legitimacy (Fowler, 1997). Local NGOs in Bamenda often reframe community demands (e.g., calls for justice or political dialogue) into donor-friendly language like “peace building workshops” or “resilience training.” In addition to this is the issue of professionalization. NGOs adopt technical jargons, standardized procedures and bureaucratic reporting systems to meet donor expectations. While this enhances credibility with donors, it excludes grassroots voices (Fowler, 1997). Lastly, there is visibility and branding whereby NGOs pursue projects that enhance reputation, sometimes at the expense of relevance. Tina Wallace, Lisa Bornstein, and Jennifer Chapman in a joint article titled: *The Aid Chain: Coercion and Commitment in Development NGOs*, show how professionalization distances NGOs from communities. They underlined also that funds move from donors through international NGOs to local NGOs and communities, showing how each link in the chain imposes conditions and expectations. In the same article, they showed still that accountability tends to flow upward to donors rather than downward to communities, creating imbalances in power and legitimacy. The book calls for rethinking NGO–donor relationships to strengthen trust, transparency, and genuine community accountability. (Wallace et.al, 2006). In Bamenda, community members may express needs in everyday language for example: “we want safety,” “we want justice”, but NGOs would translate these into bureaucratic categories like “capacity building,” “conflict sensitivity”, which of course, dilutes the original meaning. NGOs are incentivized to pursue projects that enhance their visibility and reputation, often through media coverage or donor recognition.

1.4.6. Marginalization of Voices in NGOs

Marginalization in the context of an NGO, refers to a systematic exclusion, silencing, or weakening of the influence of the actors that are supposedly the ones to play the role of intermediaries

between the donors and the local people or the beneficiaries. Most often, NGO actors design and implement a project that suits the donor Institution, this is because either they do so to secure funds or they lose the funds. Staffs and community organizations do not take part in decision making process, leading to a one-sided partnership. Meanwhile we know that today, talking development, it is inevitable to mention participatory approach which emerged as a corrective to such marginalization. Scholars argue that participation often serves as masks to veil power manipulations underlining. Robert Chambers critiques conventional development approaches for privileging expert knowledge over local knowledge, arguing that “whose reality counts” becomes central in understanding marginalization. He posits that participatory methods, even though well-intended are mostly co-opted by institutional hierarchies, thereby reproducing inequalities rather than dismantling them (Chamber, 1997). Andrea Cornwall term this an “unpacked participation” questioning the extend of participation and empowerment Institutions partake, noting that most at times, what is mirrored is the “citizen control, delegated power partnership, meanwhile what obtains in some cases is the “consultation, informing placation” and in most cases, the reality on ground is what he terms “therapy manipulation” (Cornwall, 2008). This shows how participation becomes a mere flashlight rather than a source of transformation; leading to what she describes as “invited spaces” where power holders determine the terms of engagement. Moreso, John Gaventa, building on Steven Lukes’ theory of power, argues that marginalization is not merely visible exclusion but occurs also through hidden and invisible forms of power. NGOs may unintentionally reproduce such dynamics when aligned more closely with donor expectations than community priorities (Gaventa, 2006).

In contexts such as Bamenda municipality already affected by socio-political tensions in the North West Region of Cameroon and fragilized by it, marginalization by NGO could be a call for concern when local voices, particularly those of women, internally displaced persons, and youth into drug consumption, may be used as instruments while strategic decisions remain centralized in NGO headquarters and donor agencies.

1.4.7. Accountability and Representation

Power relations within NGOs also manifest in accountability structures. Accountability is central to understanding any partnership engagement. While NGOs are often portrayed as more accountable than states, their accountability is frequently upward to donors rather than downward to communities (Brass et al, 2018). This same accountability is the motive of NGO marginalization. Mark Bovens defines accountability as a relationship where an actor must explain and justify conduct to a forum. In the case of NGOs, donors are often the primary forum whereas it is normally the local population (Bovens, 2007). Lisa Jordan will highlight this asymmetrical imbalance between upward and downward accountability. Reporting headings will accord priority to the financial and quantitative indicators neglecting the qualitative feedback that tries to understand individual’s one-on-one (Jordan, 2005). This “accountability paradox” undermines their legitimacy, as local beneficiaries may have little influence over organizational priorities. Anthony Bebbington, Samuel Hickey, and Diana Mitlin argue that genuine empowerment requires shifting accountability toward communities, ensuring that NGOs serve local needs rather than donor agendas (Bebbington et al, 2008). This is why Jonathan

Fox will differentiate between “voice” and “teeth” in accountability systems. He goes further to say, NGOs may create spaces for voice, consulting local people, but without enforcement mechanisms teeth, which is the community input, it will definitely have a limited impact (Fox, 2007). In this sense, the key participants are not represented, representation is dominated by elites, chiefs, educated persons, we notice that, even at that, NGOs still claim to speak for communities without the full package to ensuring participation. This phenomenon as some may describe is “NGOization,” where professional elites mediate grassroots struggles, causing poor representation.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the marginalization of local voices in NGO practice requires a robust theoretical lens that connects micro-level experiences to broader structural forces. Three interrelated frameworks are always highlighted; power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives provide the analytical foundation for this study.

1.5.1. Power Relations in Development Practice

We indicated already that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are often portrayed as vehicles of empowerment, giving voice to marginalized communities and fostering participatory development. However, experience has proven that, they frequently reproduce hierarchies that silence local voices. Theories of power relations in development practices especially with NGOs activities are developed by Steven Lukes and Michel Foucault. These two authors provide critical lenses for analyzing these dynamics. Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power highlights how NGOs shape preferences and limit alternatives, while Foucault’s notion of power as diffuse and embedded in discourse reveals how NGOs regulate knowledge and normalize donor-driven agendas.

Steven Lukes conceptualizes power in three dimensions. Firstly, decision-making power, which is the he ability to influence outcomes directly, then there is the agenda-setting power, which is the ability to control which issues are discussed and which are excluded. Lastly, is the ideological power, meaning the ability to shape perceptions, preferences, and beliefs so that people accept domination as natural (Steven, 2005). Steven Lukes’ framework on power relations in NGOs reveals that local voices are marginalized not only through overt exclusion but also through subtle processes of preference-shaping. (Steven, 2005). For example, donor-funded NGOs projects in Cameroon often prioritize issues such as climate change or gender mainstreaming because these align with international agendas, while local concerns such as land disputes or informal employment sidelined (Michael, 2005). This reflects agenda-setting power, where donors and NGO elites determine what counts as “development.” This theory explains how marginalization occurs through visible, hidden, and invisible mechanisms. Visible Power happens through formal funding agreements and decision-making structures, which clearly state terms to approve or disapprove a project design. Hidden power is nothing other than agenda-setting processes that exclude community concerns undermining local participation. Lastly is the idea of an invisible power, which is the internalization of donor-defined development norms most often in a subtle way that is remarkable.

1.5.2. Power relations in development theory (Foucault, Bourdieu, dependency theory).

Michel Foucault view power as diffuse, relational and embedded in discourse. It challenges traditional notions of power as centralized. For him power operates through knowledge, norms, and practices that regulate behavior (Foucault 1977; 1980). In the context of NGOs project, Foucault’s insights highlight how development discourse constructs communities as “beneficiaries” needing intervention, thereby silencing their agency (Shivji, 2007).

Michel Foucault’s concept of *power/knowledge* is particularly useful in examining NGOs projects and community relations (Foucault, 1980). Power is not merely repressive but productive, shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is authorized to speak. In the context of Bamenda municipality, NGOs often act as gatekeepers of community narratives, translating local experiences into donor-friendly language. This process privileges certain voices typically those aligned with organizational hierarchies while silencing others particularly those of the grass root communities.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of capital economic, cultural, social, and symbolic offers a powerful framework for analyzing how marginalized voices gain recognition and legitimacy in civil society. Pierre Bourdieu’s symbolic capital refers to *prestige, honor, and recognition* that can be converted into other forms of capital that is, economic, social, cultural (Bourdieu, 1986). It is particularly relevant in the context of NGOs in Africa, where material resources are often scarce, and legitimacy is contested. Symbolic capital is tied to *symbolic power*, that is, the ability to impose meanings as legitimate and *symbolic violence*, that is, the subtle imposition of dominant norms (Bourdieu, 1986). In Cameroon, NGOs representing marginalized communities such as Anglophone groups, indigenous peoples, and women and youth’s organizations rely heavily on symbolic capital to amplify their voices in national and international arenas. It operates through social recognition and legitimization, often masking underlying power relations.

Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital helps explain how marginalized voices within NGOs gain legitimacy, recognition, and influence despite limited economic or political power. NGOs working with marginalized communities often lack economic capital but gain symbolic capital by being perceived as authentic representatives of “the voiceless.” (Bourdieu, 1986). Their credibility rests on moral authority rather than material resources (Abia et.al, 2020). It further illuminates how NGOs accumulate legitimacy by presenting themselves as representatives of marginalized groups, even when those groups have limited influence over decision-making. For example, indigenous NGOs frame struggles in terms of human rights and environmental justice, gaining recognition in international debates (Ngang, 2021). Thus, power relations within NGOs are not neutral but deeply embedded in social hierarchies of class, gender, and ethnicity. Symbolic capital can be transformed into social capital, that is, alliances with donors, governments, other NGOs and into economic capital that is, funding opportunities. Recognition by international institutions often translates into material support (Balgah, et.al, 2025). Symbolic capital is precarious, NGOs risk tokenization, where their legitimacy is showcased but their influence remains limited (Al-Gharbi, 2023).

In Bamenda municipal council, donors exercise visible power through grant approvals, hidden power through thematic restrictions, and invisible power by setting norms and values, cultural narratives shaping NGO language to suit the donor perspectives and conceptual frameworks. The Anglophone crisis illustrates how symbolic capital is mobilized. NGOs and advocacy groups frame their struggle as one of human rights and self-determination, gaining symbolic capital through international recognition (Nkongho, 2015). Activists such as Maximilienne Ngo Mbe and Felix Nkongho have gained symbolic capital through international awards and recognition, strengthening their legitimacy in a shrinking civic space (Ngang, 2021).

1.5.3. Resource Dependence Theory (Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik)

Jeffrey Pfeffer and Gerald R. Salancik's *Resource Dependence Theory* (RDT), articulated in their influential book: *The External Control of Organizations*, provides a critical framework for analyzing how organizations navigate external constraints by managing dependencies on vital resources. (Pfeffer, et.al, 1978). In terms of power relation dependence creates asymmetrical power relations, where resource providers influence organizational behavior. While for strategic responses, organizations may diversify funding, form alliances, or adapt their missions to reduce vulnerability (Hillman, et.al, 2009). NGOs in Africa, and particularly in Cameroon, operate in environments characterized by political repression, economic scarcity, and donor-driven agendas. For marginalized voices, resource dependency theory explains both the opportunities and limitations of NGOs. Resource dependence is not only financial but symbolic. For example, NGOs gain legitimacy by aligning with donor priorities, which enhances their symbolic capital but risks sidelining marginalized voices (Bourdieu, 1986; Ngang, 2021).

As resources are important and necessary for the sustenance of the organizations, actors often adapt their policies to satisfy, the donor's terms, thereby pushing these donors to have control over them. According to the theory, it is difficult for organizations to function independently. They create dependency networks for survival letting actors who provide the funds have power and control over them.

Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) is highly relevant for explaining the topic "*Marginalized voices in NGOs: the result of power relations, donor agendas and their institutional incentives in Bamenda Municipality.*" The theory provides a framework for understanding how NGOs' dependence on external resources particularly donor funding can shape their decisions, priorities, and accountability relationships, sometimes at the expense of community participation. NGOs representing Anglophone communities depend on international human rights organizations for funding and visibility. This dependence allows them to frame the crisis in terms of universal rights, gaining global recognition (Nkongho, 2015). However, donor-driven agendas sometimes dilute grassroots' demands for autonomy.

In Africa and Cameroon - Bamenda municipality to be precise, as many local NGOs rely heavily on external aid, they hardly have autonomy and active voices especially in decision making processes. In fact, most of them, have to just design projects for funding and implement according to the indicators from the above (Ngang, 2021). To retain from this theory, dependency is built on

reliance on external donors, the resources provided hold the beneficiaries under the power and control of donors, as they are in control, they shape policies to their interests and most often, in misalignment with the local NGOs policy, and since local NGOs need the resources, they conform to the conditions set by donors. This circle demonstrates clearly how and why, even after series of activism of NGOs in the country and in Bamenda municipality, changes have not been observed, sustainability is a yesterday's talk, development and freedom yet to come.

To conclude, resource dependence theory, highlights strong theoretical explanation for the marginalization of voices within NGOs. By broadening the understanding of how organizations depend on external funding sources, it shows how NGOs may compromise to donor agendas thereby neglecting and shifting to the margin, community empowerment and long-term sustainability especially in the Bamenda municipality. Decision-making and limit the participation of local stakeholders in development processes.

1.5.4. Donor Agendas and Aid Dependency Theory

Donor agendas and Aid Dependency Theory provide critical frameworks for understanding the dynamics of NGOs' activities in Africa, particularly in Cameroon. While it is undeniable that donor funding sustains NGOs and amplifies marginalized voices, it argued also that it creates dependency cycles that constrain autonomy and distort priorities especially in Africa with economic and financial challenges (Moyo, 2009). Aid Dependency Theory argues that reliance on external resources perpetuates structural inequalities and undermines local ownership (Moyo, 2009). In Cameroon, NGOs representing marginalized communities such as Anglophone groups, women's organizations, and indigenous peoples navigate these tensions daily. This article as indicated already explores how donor agendas shape NGO strategies, how aid dependency affects marginalized voices, and the risks and trade-offs involved.

Donor-driven development has long been critiqued for imposing external priorities on local contexts. Dependency theorists argue that aid often reproduces unequal relations between the Global North and South, with recipient communities constrained by donor conditionalities. Donors often dictate which issues receive attention. For example, in Africa sub of the Sahara, HIV/AIDS programs receive substantial funding, while local concerns such as land rights or indigenous struggles may be sidelined (Brass, 2016). In Bamenda, donor agendas frequently emphasize measurable outcomes such as the number of workshops held or beneficiaries reached over qualitative improvements in community empowerment. Funding is often tied to conditions, such as adopting specific governance practices or reporting standards. This shapes NGO behavior and limits autonomy (Easterly, 2006). It reflects also a neoliberal logic of efficiency and accountability, where success is defined by quantifiable indicators rather than transformative change (Easterly, 2006). NGOs, in turn, adapt their projects to align with donor expectations, often at the expense of grassroots participation. The result is a form of "agenda capture," where local needs are reframed and tailored to fit donor narratives.

1.5.5. Institutional Incentives and Organizational Survival Theory

Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell's work on institutional theory, particularly their concept of institutional isomorphism

immortalized in the book entitle: *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*, provides a valuable framework for analyzing how institution or organizations like NGOs adapt to survive within complex environments (DiMaggio et.al, 1983). Their insights into institutional incentives and organizational survival highlight how organizations conform to external pressures. This includes legal, cultural and financial to secure legitimacy and sustenance. In Africa and specifically Cameroon, NGOs representing marginalized voices must navigate donor expectations, state regulation, and international norms/recognition. Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell's work explains how institutional incentives shape NGO strategies, how organizational survival, their adaptation, and the implications for marginalized voices. They explain also how organizations become similar through isomorphism, particularly coercive isomorphism and compliance with donor requirements (DiMaggio et.al, 1983). For Coercive Pressures for examples governments of poor economy impose regulations that NGOs must comply with to survive. In Cameroon, restrictive laws on civil society force NGOs to align with state expectations, limiting advocacy for marginalized groups (Abia et al., 2020). For normative pressures, professionalization and donor requirements push NGOs to adopt standardized practices, such as reporting mechanisms and governance structures. These incentives enhance legitimacy but risk alienating grassroots actors (Brass, 2016). Finally for mimetic pressures, uncertainty leads NGOs to imitate successful organizations. Smaller NGOs in Cameroon often model themselves after international NGOs to attract funding, which can dilute local identity (Ngang, 2021).

For NGOs in particular, this often means prioritizing visibility, reporting work done and donor satisfaction over genuine community engagement. Incentives such as funding cycles, competition for grants, and the need to demonstrate "success stories" encourage NGOs to privilege activities that are easily documented and marketable. Survival organizations such as NGOs depend not only on efficiency but on legitimacy within institutional environments (Scott, 2014). Once again, in Bamenda of Cameroon, these dynamic manifests in the proliferation of short-term projects designed to attract donor funding rather than long-term initiatives rooted in community priorities. The institutional logic of survival thus creates structural disincentives for amplifying marginalized voices, as doing so may expose uncomfortable truths or challenge donor expectations.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives reveal how the marginalization of voices in Bamenda is not accidental but structurally produced. Power relations determine who speaks and who listens; donor agendas shape the content of NGO interventions; and institutional incentives drive organizational behavior in ways that prioritize survival over empowerment. This framework provides the analytical tools for examining the case study of Bamenda municipality, allowing us to trace how global and local forces intersect to silence or reshape community voices.

2. NGOs in Cameroon: Historical and Political Context

The historicity of NGOs in Cameroon can hardly be articulated well without the dual colonial heritage of the country. That is, Cameroon under Germany rules then under Britain and France. This duality created fragmented political institutions and uneven

development in the country. The legacy influenced the emergence of civil society organizations, including NGOs, which often filled gaps left by weak state structures (LeVine, 1964; Fanson, 1983). After independence in 1960, Cameroon adopted a centralized, authoritarian system under Ahmadou Ahidjo and later in 1982 under President Paul Biya. Civil society was tightly controlled, limiting NGOs' activities until the period of political liberalization in the early 1990s (Takougang, 1997; Bayart, 1993).

The economic crisis that began in 1980 compounded by IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs, weakened state capacity. This ushered in the proliferation of NGOs as alternative providers of social services and development initiatives (Fonchingong & Fonjong, 2002). As the 1990s ushered in multiparty democracy and greater space for civil society, NGOs became more visible, albeit viewed with suspicion by the state (Takougang & Krieger, 1998). In 1999, the government introduced legislation to regulate NGOs, requiring registration and oversight. While intended to streamline operations, it often served as a mechanism of control, limiting autonomy (Tanga & Fonchingong, 2009). NGOs then began operating in a tense environment where the state both relies on them for development and seeks to monitor their activities. In the relation between the State and NGOs, International NGOs enjoyed more freedom and resources compared to local NGOs, which struggle with funding and expertise (Fonchingong, 2009).

2.1. Benefits of NGOs Presence in Cameroon

In Cameroon the role in development included Poverty Alleviation: By the year 2000 when NGOs started gaining grounds in the country, over forty percent of Cameroon households were below the poverty line and rural communities disproportionately affected. Thus, NGOs provided essential services in health, education, and microfinance (Fonchingong, 2009). They were engaged also in Gender Empowerment. Women, who lead more than half of impoverished households, are central beneficiaries of NGO programs focused on empowerment and economic inclusion participation (Fonjong, 2006). Another prominent area for NGOs in Cameroon is environmental protection. Environmental NGOs address deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change, often clashing with state priorities in resource exploitation (Fonjong, 2007).

2.2. Challenges Facing NGOs

NGOs activities have taken place in Cameroon not without challenge. Chief amongst them is funding Constraints: Local NGOs often depend on external donors, leading to sustainability issues. Bureaucratic hurdles are very much present as registration and compliance with state regulations has proven cumbersome over the years, limiting grassroots initiatives. This is compounded by political suspicion as NGOs advocating for human rights or governance reforms are often perceived as supporting the opposition, risking repression. Legitimacy and Accountability is yet another challenge. Some NGOs particularly local organizations face criticism for lack of transparency or being donor-driven rather than community-led.

Genealogically, NGOs in Cameroon reflect the broader dynamics of African civil society: shaped by colonial history, constrained by authoritarian politics, and empowered by global development discourses. They remain indispensable in addressing poverty,

gender inequality, and environmental challenges, yet their effectiveness is undermined by state control, resource limitations, and questions of legitimacy. The future of NGOs in Cameroon depends on balancing state oversight with genuine autonomy, strengthening local capacity, and fostering accountability.

2.3. The Role of NGOs in Bamenda Municipality

Bamenda, as the capital of the North West Region, occupies a distinctive position in Cameroon's civil society landscape. The city has long been a hub of political activism, particularly in relation to the Anglophone crisis. NGOs in Bamenda operate in a context marked by insecurity, displacement, and heightened humanitarian needs. Their activities range from emergency relief for internally displaced persons to longer-term initiatives in education, women's empowerment, and peace building. However, the political sensitivity of the region means that NGOs must navigate complex relationships with both state authorities and local communities. This often results in cautious programming that prioritizes donor visibility over grassroots empowerment.

2.4. State - NGO Relations in Cameroon: Cooperation, Co-optation, and Conflict

The relationship between the Cameroonian state and NGOs particularly with reference to Bamenda in the ongoing anglophone crisis is deeply shaped by political history, donor influence. It is characterized by ambivalence. On one hand, the government recognizes the role of NGOs in supplementing state capacity, particularly in service delivery. On the other hand, NGOs that challenge state authority or highlight human rights abuses are subject to surveillance, harassment, or outright repression.

Bamenda, the capital of the North West Region, has become a focal point for these dynamics. NGOs in Bamenda operate in a contested environment where, as highlighted already cooperation with the state is necessary for service delivery. For example, NGOs in Bamenda collaborate with the ministries of health and education to implement donor-funded programs, enhancing legitimacy and resource access (Abia et al., 2020). Also, Women's NGOs, work with state agencies to promote gender equality initiatives (Ngang, 2021)

For co-optation it is marked with a constant risk. The state uses legal frameworks to regulate NGOs, requiring registration and compliance with bureaucratic standards. In Bamenda, this control mechanism ensures NGOs remain within acceptable boundaries, limiting advocacy autonomy (Abia et al., 2020). Co-optation occurs when NGOs are drawn into state patronage systems, receiving funding or recognition in exchange for political loyalty. This undermines independence and weakens advocacy for marginalized voices (Brass, 2016). The state also and often showcases NGOs in international forums to demonstrate openness, while limiting their actual influence domestically. This symbolic co-optation enhances state legitimacy but marginalizes grassroots actors (Ngang, 2021).

Conflict is frequent due to advocacy for marginalized voices. This tension is particularly acute given the ongoing conflict between state forces and separatist groups. NGOs advocating for human rights frequently clash with the state, especially in Bamenda, where the Anglophone crisis has intensified repression. Organizations documenting abuses face harassment, restrictions, and DE legitimization (Nkongho, 2015). Cameroon has witnessed

increasing restrictions on civil society, including surveillance, arrests, and bans on NGO activities. In Bamenda, this reflects broader African trends of shrinking civic space (Brass, 2016).

NGOs must balance the need to maintain access and legitimacy with the risk of being perceived as partisan actors. This precarious positioning often leads NGOs to adopt strategies that minimize confrontation, but in doing so, they may inadvertently silence marginalized voices that seek to challenge structural injustices. Despite repression, NGOs in Bamenda continue to mobilize marginalized voices. Women's and youth organizations challenge state narratives, framing their struggles in terms of universal rights (Abia et al., 2020). The three dimensions of cooperation, co-optation and conflict in Bamenda are situated within the broader literature on civil society and governance.

Cooperation, co-optation and conflict are categories that capture the spectrum of State-NGO relationship. Collaboration seen in service delivery, co-optation through regulation and patronage, and conflict in advocacy and resistance (Abia et al., 2020). This analysis aligns with DiMaggio and Powell's theory of institutional isomorphism that NGOs must adapt to state pressures to ensure organizational survival (DiMaggio et.al, 1983).

2.5. Implications of State-NGO Relationship for Marginalized Voices

State - NGO relations in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda reveal deep tensions between regulation, empowerment, and marginalization. NGOs often amplify marginalized voices, but state control mechanisms and conflict dynamics reshape power relations, limiting their autonomy and effectiveness. This interplay has profound implications for how communities in Bamenda engage with development, peacebuilding, and representation. The constraints are magnified by the region's socio-political volatility and humanitarian crisis. In this region like other conflict regions of the African continent, NGOs are caught between donor expectations, state regulation, and community demands, creating a situation where marginalized voices are acknowledged but rarely prioritized. Instead, NGO discourse often reflects the agendas of external actors, reinforcing patterns of exclusion rather than dismantling them. This context provides the backdrop for analyzing how power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives converge work to shape NGO practice in Bamenda.

2.5.1. Power Relations in NGO Operations

The operations of NGOs in Bamenda municipality are deeply shaped by power relations that structure interactions between international NGOs, local NGOs, and grassroots communities. International NGOs wield more influence due to resources and technical capacity, while local NGOs struggle with funding and management. This imbalance creates a hierarchy where marginalized voices may be filtered through external agendas rather than grassroots priorities. Also, the state's regulatory framework often curtails NGO independence, reinforcing state dominance in development narratives. NGOs that challenge state authority risk being banned or restricted, as seen during the Anglophone. In addition, NGOs in Bamenda rely heavily on community trust to operate effectively. However, state suspicion of NGOs especially those advocating for Anglophone rights undermine their legitimacy and weaken their ability to represent marginalized voices. These relations are not merely organizational

but reflect broader hierarchies of knowledge, resources, and legitimacy. The implications and risks or challenges are many. For implications, regulation and surveillance of NGOs consolidate state authority, reducing NGO autonomy. Marginalized voices risk being mediated through external frameworks, potentially diluting local agency. Also, NGOs especially in Bamenda act as intermediaries in peacebuilding, but their effectiveness is undermined by state crackdowns and mistrust. Lastly, while NGOs empower women, youth, and displaced persons, their reach is uneven, often excluding those most affected by violence. The challenges are; state repression, in that NGOs advocating for Anglophone rights face bans, internet shutdowns, and harassment. There is the challenge of inequality funding, local NGOs remain marginalized within the NGO ecosystem due to lack of resources. Lastly, community distrust, some NGOs are perceived as extensions of foreign interests, weakening grassroots legitimacy.

Understanding how power circulates within these networks is essential to explaining why certain voices are amplified while others remain marginalized. In Bamenda NGOs amplify marginalized voices but are simultaneously constrained by state power and international hierarchies. This dynamic reshapes power relations, often silencing the very communities NGOs aim to empower. Sustainable peace and development in Bamenda require rebalancing these relationships strengthening local NGOs, ensuring state accountability, and centering marginalized voices in decision-making.

2.5.2. Hierarchies Between International and Local NGOs

International NGOs (INGOs) often occupy a dominant position in the development landscape due to their access to substantial funding, global networks, and technical expertise. Local NGOs, although they provide grassroots legitimacy, cultural knowledge, and community trust, they depend heavily on international NGOs for financial support and legitimacy. This dependency creates asymmetrical relationships in which local NGOs must align their priorities with those of their international partners (Akumbom, et.al, 2022). In Bamenda, this dynamic is evident in the way local NGOs adopt donor-driven language and frameworks, even when these do not fully reflect community realities. This truer in the context of the anglophone crisis. The hierarchy between International NGOs and local NGOs thus reproduces patterns of exclusion, as grassroots voices are filtered through organizational structures that prioritize external agendas.

Talking about the anglophone crisis, the escalation of protests into armed conflict created urgent humanitarian needs. Both international NGOs (UN agencies, Caritas International) and local NGOs (SIRDEP, grassroots women's associations) became central actors in relief and peacebuilding (Moki, et.al, 2025) Caritas Bamenda (Internationally linked): Benefits from Catholic Church networks and international funding, enabling large-scale humanitarian projects. Caritas Bamenda is internationally linked. It benefits from Catholic Church networks and international funding, enabling large-scale humanitarian projects. On the other hand, SIRDEP (Local NGO) focuses on grassroots development, women's empowerment, and microfinance. Its success depends on community engagement but is limited by funding shortages. Studies show weak collaboration between international and local NGOs, leading to duplication of efforts and mistrust. Communities

often criticize both for failing to meet urgent needs during the Anglophone crisis (Moki, et.al, 2025).

The Bamenda case illustrates how hierarchies between international and local NGOs shape humanitarian and peacebuilding outcomes. International NGOs dominate funding and strategy, while local NGOs provide legitimacy and community trust. Sustainable solutions require balanced partnerships, capacity-building for local actors, and genuine inclusion of grassroots voices in decision-making. Without this, NGO interventions risk perpetuating dependency and failing to address the root causes of conflict.

2.5.3. Gatekeeping and Representation

Gatekeeping and representation in State - NGO relations in Cameroon, especially in Bamenda, highlight how State control and NGO hierarchies filter marginalized voices, often diluting their authenticity. NGOs amplify community concerns, but state repression and donor-driven agendas reshape who gets heard and how. NGOs frequently act as intermediaries between communities and donors, positioning themselves as representatives of marginalized groups. However, this representative role often involves gatekeeping, where NGOs decide which voices are deemed legitimate and which are excluded. International donors often channel resources through larger NGOs, sidelining grassroots organizations. This creates a hierarchy where local NGOs must pass through international intermediaries to access funding, limiting their autonomy and weakening direct representation (Nsah, 2023).

In Bamenda, community members particularly women, youths, physically challenged and internally displaced persons report that their participation in NGO projects is limited to consultative workshops or token involvement in decision-making processes. Their perspectives are often reframed to fit donor expectations, reducing genuine participation to symbolic inclusion. This gatekeeping function highlights how power relations within NGOs determine not only who speaks but also how their voices are translated into institutional discourse. Gatekeeping and representation are also seen in state regulation as control measures. As indicated earlier, the Cameroonian government uses legal frameworks and administrative hurdles to regulate NGOs. The 1999 NGO law requires registration and alignment with state priorities, effectively acting as a gatekeeping mechanism that determines which organizations can operate and which are excluded, which voice is heard, which is silenced (Nsah, 2023). Again, gatekeeping is also seen in security restriction. During the Anglophone crisis, like other sectors in Bamenda, NGOs faced bans, internet shutdowns, and accusations of supporting separatists. These measures silenced organizations that sought to document abuses or advocate for marginalized Anglophone voices (Kongonso, et.al, 2025).

Representation of marginalized voices is particularly seen in the anglophone identity, NGOs in Bamenda attempt to represent Anglophone grievances, but state repression forces them to depoliticize their advocacy. This weakens their ability to authentically represent marginalized voices, as they must navigate between survival and advocacy (Frogameni, 2024). It is noticeable with displaced persons in the anglophone regions. In Bamenda, NGOs provide humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs), but representation of their concerns in policymaking

remains limited. State gatekeeping ensures that IDPs' voices are mediated through official narratives rather than direct participation (Frogameni, 2024). Also, Women, who lead many impoverished households, and youth, central to protests, are often highlighted in NGO programs. Yet, representation is uneven women's organizations are sometimes co-opted into state-led initiatives, while youth voices are framed as "radical" or "violent," reducing their legitimacy in peacebuilding (Kongnso, et.al, 2025).

Gatekeeping and representation in state-NGO relations in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda, reveal a paradox. NGOs are vital in amplifying marginalized voices, yet their ability to do so is constrained by state regulation, donor hierarchies, and internal competition. Representation becomes mediated, selective, and often diluted, leaving marginalized communities partially heard but rarely empowered. For genuine inclusion, reforms must dismantle gatekeeping structures and strengthen grassroots NGOs' capacity to represent their communities authentically.

2.5.4. Gender, Class and Ethnic Dimensions

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda, play a vital role in amplifying marginalized voices. Yet, their internal power relations are shaped by gender, class, and ethnic dynamics. These dimensions influence who leads, who benefits, and whose voices are represented. Understanding these internal hierarchies is crucial to evaluating the effectiveness of NGOs in addressing marginalization. Women's voices are frequently marginalized in NGO programming, despite the fact that they bear disproportionate burdens in times of crisis. Youth, too, are often excluded from meaningful participation, with NGOs privileging older, educated elites who are perceived as more credible interlocutors. Ngalim proves that despite women being central to grassroots mobilization, NGO leadership in Cameroon remains male-dominated. This reproduces patriarchal structures within civil society, limiting women's influence in decision-making (Ngalim, 2019). Awasom Nicolas argue that women often appear as beneficiaries of NGO programs especially in poverty alleviation and peacebuilding but rarely as agenda-setters. This imbalance reflects broader gender inequalities in Cameroonian society (Awasom, 2020). Frogameni underlined that in Bamenda, women-led NGOs have been instrumental in mediating community conflicts during the Anglophone crisis. However, their contributions are often undervalued compared to male-dominated organizations (Frogameni, 2024).

Ethnic dynamics also play a role, as NGOs may favor certain groups over others to want to maintain political neutrality or donor approval. These intersecting hierarchies reinforce patterns of exclusion, ensuring that the most vulnerable remain unheard even within organizations ostensibly committed to empowerment. (Kongnso, et.al, 2025) buttress this point by observing that within Bamenda, some NGOs are perceived as favoring particular ethnic groups, which fragments collective advocacy and weakens solidarity (Kongnso, et.al, 2025). International Crisis Group, 2017 maintained that The Francophone-dominated state privileges NGOs that align with its narratives, sidelining those that amplify Anglophone voices. This gatekeeping reshapes ethnic representation within civil society (International Crisis Group, 2017).

Regarding class dimension of power relations, Mbembe observed that International NGOs dominate the sector due to access to

funding and technical expertise, while local grassroots NGOs struggle with limited resources. This creates a hierarchy where poorer organizations are dependent on wealthier counterparts (Mbembe, 2017). Paul Nkwi once stated that NGOs in Bamenda often concentrate activities in urban centers, leaving rural communities underrepresented. This reflects class-based inequalities, as rural populations often poorer lack access to NGO services (Nkwi, 2010). Kenneth Toah Nsah adds his voice to the argument when he observed that Class dynamics influence who benefits from NGO programs. Middle-class individuals with education and networks are more likely to access NGO opportunities, while poorer households remain marginalized (Nsah, 2023).

2.5.5. The Politics of Legitimacy

The politics of legitimacy within NGOs in Cameroon, especially in Bamenda, is shaped by state regulation, donor influence, and community perceptions. NGOs must constantly negotiate their credibility between the state, international partners, and local communities, often resulting in contested legitimacy that reflects broader political struggles. Once again, the 1999 NGO law requires NGOs to register and align with state priorities, positioning the state as the arbiter of legitimacy (Nkwi, 2010). NGOs that challenge state authority risk deregistration or harassment, undermining their perceived legitimacy.

While international NGOs derive legitimacy from their global recognition and donor support, local NGOs seek legitimacy through visibility and alignment with donor priorities. Also, the accusation levied on NGOs working on human rights or peacebuilding during the Anglophone crisis for supporting separatists, delegitimizes them in the eyes of the state (International Crisis Group, 2017). Moreover, grassroots communities often question the authenticity of NGO representation, perceiving NGOs as more accountable to donors than to local populations, since international NGOs own funds and technical expertise, often overshadowing local NGOs. This of course, creates a hierarchy where legitimacy is tied to donor recognition rather than grassroots credibility (Mbembe, 2017). This tension undermines trust and reinforces the marginalization of community voices. The politics of legitimacy thus reveals how power relations are not only about resource distribution but also about the authority to define development priorities. Kenneth Toah Nsah highlights how NGOs' policies often fail to translate into effective implementation in the North West Region, weakening their legitimacy among local communities (Nsah, 2023).

The politics of legitimacy within NGOs in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda, reflects broader struggles over authority, representation and trust. NGOs gain formal legitimacy through registration and compliance with state laws. While international funding and partnerships confer legitimacy often alienating grassroots communities, local legitimacy depends on NGOs' ability to authentically represent marginalized voices without being perceived as partisan or foreign-driven. Therefore, partnerships with traditional leaders can enhance legitimacy but also expose NGOs to political manipulation (Mbuy, 2023).

2.5.6. Donor Agendas and Their Impact

Donor agendas play a decisive role in shaping the operations, priorities, and legitimacy of NGOs in Cameroon. While NGOs are

often portrayed as autonomous actors committed to grassroots empowerment, their dependence on external funding means that donor priorities frequently override local needs. This dynamic reflects broader patterns of aid dependency in Sub-Saharan Africa, where development interventions are structured around the expectations of international funders rather than the lived realities of communities. In Bamenda, where the Anglophone crisis has intensified humanitarian needs, NGOs rely heavily on external funding. As indicated already, this dependency often means that donor priorities override local realities, reshaping power relations and influencing whose voices are amplified or silenced.

In terms of donor agendas in NGO operations, donors frequently require NGOs to align with international development frameworks such as gender mainstreaming, human rights, or democracy promotion. Kenneth Nsah argues that while these agendas are valuable, they sometimes fail to reflect the immediate needs of communities. This is true in the case of Bamenda experiencing the anglophone crisis (Nsah, 2023). Apart from that, international NGOs funding is often tied to specific thematic areas such as governance, health, or women's empowerment leaving other pressing issues like ethnic grievances or youth unemployment underfunded (Mbembe, 2017). Also, donor-driven projects are often short-term and project-based undermining sustainability and creating cycles of dependency where NGOs must constantly adapt to shifting donor priorities rather than long-term community needs (Nkwi, 2010).

Regarding impact on local NGOs, for lack of funding struggle to access funding directly, forcing them to operate as subcontractors rather than autonomous actors thus, marginalizing Grassroots NGOs (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003). Also, by prioritize measurable outcomes over grassroots concerns local voices are diluted. For example, women's empowerment programs may focus on training workshops rather than addressing structural barriers like patriarchal land rights (Ngalim, 2019). Again, when local communities perceive NGOs as extensions of foreign interests undermines grassroots trust and weakens NGOs' legitimacy (Frogameni, 2024).

Summarily, in Bamenda especially with the ongoing anglophone crisis, donor agendas is said to have mixed impacts, positively, donor funding has supported humanitarian aid for internally displaced persons (IDPs), women's empowerment, and peacebuilding initiatives (Awasom, 2020). Negatively, donor-driven frameworks often depoliticize Anglophone grievances, focusing instead on neutral development themes. This weakens NGOs' ability to authentically represent marginalized voices in the crisis (Frogameni, 2024).

2.5.7. Donor Priorities and Project Design

Donor priorities and project design are central to understanding how NGOs operate. Local African NGOs heavily reliance on external funding simply means donor agendas often shape project design, influencing which issues are addressed, how interventions are structured, and whose voices are amplified. The politics of donor-driven priorities thus has profound implications for marginalized communities. In Cameroon and Bamenda in particular, donors typically emphasize projects that produce measurable outcomes, such as the number of beneficiaries reached, workshops conducted, or reports submitted. Mbembe expresses this point thus:

Donors emphasize quantifiable results such as the number of workshops held or participants trained over long-term structural change. This shapes project design toward short-term visibility rather than sustainable impact (Mbembe, 2017).

Looking at the conditionality of funding (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003) channel the same idea when they say: *Funding is often tied to specific thematic areas. For example, women's empowerment programs often receive support, while politically sensitive issues like Anglophone identity are sidelined* (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003).

These priorities are rooted in a neoliberal logic of efficiency and accountability, where success is defined by quantifiable indicators rather than qualitative improvements in community well-being. NGOs often design projects to align with these donor expectations, even when they do not correspond to the most pressing local concerns. For example, donors may prioritize gender mainstreaming or climate resilience, while communities are more concerned with immediate issues such as displacement, food insecurity, or access to basic healthcare (Mbembe, 2017).

Donor priorities and project design within NGOs in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda, reshape power relations by privileging international agendas over local realities. While donor funding sustains critical humanitarian and development work, it also marginalizes grassroots NGOs, dilutes authentic representation, and fosters dependency. For NGOs to genuinely empower marginalized voices, project design must integrate local agency, sustainability, and context-specific needs.

2.6. The Tension Between Donor Expectations and Community Needs

NGOs in Cameroon operate at the intersection of donor expectations and community needs. Donors provide critical funding and shape project priorities, while communities expect interventions that address their immediate realities. This tension often results in mismatched agendas, fragmented interventions, and contested legitimacy, reflecting broader struggles over representation and power in civil society. This misalignment creates tensions between NGOs and the communities they serve. Local voices are frequently reframed to fit donor narratives, resulting in a form of "agenda capture." Community members may be invited to participate in consultative workshops, but their contributions are selectively incorporated into project proposals that emphasize donor priorities. In Bamenda, displaced persons have reported that their needs for housing and security are often overshadowed by donor-driven projects focused on vocational training or awareness campaigns. While these initiatives may satisfy donor requirements, they do little to address the structural vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups.

2.6.1. Conditionalities and Political Sensitivities

NGOs in Cameroon operate in a delicate space where donor conditionalities and political sensitivities intersect. In Bamenda, the epicenter of the anglophone crisis, these dynamics are heightened by state suspicion of civil society and donor-driven agendas. Therefore, NGOs must balance compliance with donor requirements, navigate state restrictions, and maintain grassroots legitimacy.

Donor funding often comes with conditionalities that constrain NGO action. Donors often require NGOs to align with international priorities such as gender equality, democracy promotion, and human rights (Nsah, 2023). While these priorities are valuable, they may not always reflect immediate needs of the community. One of the conditions is strict reporting and measurable outcomes, privileging quantifiable indicators over long-term structural change (Mbembe, 2017). This condition reshapes project design toward short-term visibility instead of sustainable impact. Another condition is often the restriction for NGOs to avoid engaging in politically sensitive issues. Rather, they are encouraged to maintain neutrality in state matters (International Crisis Group, 2017).

For example, in politically sensitive contexts like Bamenda involving Anglophone identity and or state repression, donors often discourage NGOs from engaging in advocacy or human rights work, fearing that such activities could jeopardize their relationships with the state. As a result, NGOs prioritize service delivery over structural change, reinforcing patterns of exclusion (International Crisis Group, 2017). This dynamic reflects the broader politics of aid, where donors seek to maintain stability and avoid confrontation, even at the expense of amplifying marginalized voices.

In terms of political sensitivities in Cameroon and Bamenda, NGOs attempting to represent Anglophone grievances often face political sensitivities. Advocacy must be carefully framed to avoid state backlash, often resulting in depoliticized programming (Konings, et.al, 2003). This is particularly true because since the anglophone crisis, the Cameroonian government often views NGOs with suspicion, particularly those working on human rights or governance (International Crisis Group, 2017). Traditional Authority expected to help or play the role of neutrality are themselves helpless and complacency. Tatah Mbuy notes that the Fons in Bamenda have been co-opted into partisan politics, complicating NGOs alliances and exposing them to political manipulation (Mbuy, 2023).

Conditionalities and political sensitivities in NGO operations in Cameroon, particularly in Bamenda, reveal a paradox. Donor funding sustains critical interventions but imposes conditions that depoliticize advocacy. The state, meanwhile, views NGOs with suspicion, restricting their autonomy. Communities demand survival, recognition, and structural change, but their voices are often mediated through donor frameworks and political constraints. Genuine empowerment requires rebalancing donor conditionalities, ensuring state accountability, and centering grassroots agency in project design.

2.6.2. The Cycle of Dependency

NGOs in developing countries play a vital role in humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and development. However, their operations are often marked by a cycle of dependence on donor funding, state approval, and community trust. This dynamic further entrenches the marginalization of local voices. NGOs must continuously adapt their projects to align with shifting donor priorities, leaving little room for long-term, community-driven initiatives (Mbembe, 2017). Without external funding, many NGOs cannot sustain operations (Nsah, 2023). Because of that donors impose conditions that shape project design, In Bamenda, this has led to a proliferation of short-term projects that generate visibility but fail

to produce sustainable change. The cycle of dependency thus ensures that donor agendas remain the primary drivers of NGO practice, with grassroots voices relegated to the margins (Nkwi, 2010).

2.6.3. Institutional Incentives and Organizational Behavior

International donors provide funding tied to specific thematic priorities such as gender issues, promotion of democracy and human rights. These incentives, entices NGOs to align their organizational behavior with donor frameworks (Nsah, 2023; Mbembe, 2017). NGOs are also expected to conform or comply with state priorities. Thus, they are incentivized to depoliticize matters of advocacy to avoid harassment or deregistration (Nkwi, 2010). In the area of community incentive, NGOs rely on grassroots trust for legitimacy. Communities incentivize NGOs to deliver tangible services food, healthcare, education rather than abstract training programs. Failure to meet these expectations undermines organizational credibility (Konings, et.al, 2003).

Like in many parts of Africa, in Cameroon, beyond donor agendas and power relations, NGOs are also shaped by institutional incentives that prioritize organizational survival over community empowerment. These incentives rooted in funding competition, visibility, and bureaucratic accountability create structural pressures that discourage genuine participation and reinforce the marginalization of local voices.

In Bamenda, institutional incentives and organizational behavior converge in unique ways. Donor funding has enabled NGOs to provide humanitarian aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs), support women's empowerment, and promote community peacebuilding (Awasom, 2020). While organizational behavior is often skewed toward donor priorities, sidelining local grievances such as Anglophone identity. NGOs depoliticize advocacy to survive, weakening their ability to authentically represent marginalized voices (Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003; Frogameni, 2024).

2.6.4. Funding Competition and Organizational Survival

Scholars have long emphasized that funding competition shapes organizational strategies, legitimacy, and sustainability in fragile contexts (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Banks et al., 2015). Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Cameroon operate in a highly competitive funding environment. Their survival depends on navigating donor priorities, political instability, and community expectations. This is even truer especially in Bamenda where NGOs operate in an environment of scarce resources and intense competition for donor funding. To secure grants, organizations must demonstrate their capacity to deliver results that align with donor priorities. This often leads to the proliferation of short-term, project-based interventions designed to attract funding rather than long-term initiatives rooted in community needs. Atanga underpins that international aid flows to Cameroon have declined as global crises redirect resources. NGOs in Bamenda therefore must compete for fewer grants, often tailoring proposals to match donor agendas (Atanga, 2020). Also, World Bank report of 2021 shows that programs such as the Adaptive Social Safety Net and Economic Inclusion Project provide grants to youth-led enterprises, indirectly intensifying competition by expanding the pool of actors seeking donor attention (World Bank, 2021).

With over one million six hundred displaced persons in the North West region, NGOs like CAASDEV secure niche funding for solar energy and healthcare projects, aligning with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), thereby creating serious competition (CAASDEV, 2022).

The imperative of survival means that NGOs prioritize activities that are more likely to secure future funding, even if these activities do not address the most pressing concerns of marginalized groups. As a result, community voices are subordinated to organizational strategies aimed at sustaining financial viability. NGOs that combine international grants, local fundraising, and partnerships with businesses demonstrate greater resilience (Anheier, 2014). Which means projects linked to global priorities clean energy, gender equality, health would attract more consistent donor support (United Nations, 2015). Also, training youth in technical skills not only fulfills donor requirements but also strengthens organizational legitimacy (Atanga, 2020). Again, partnerships with councils, community groups, and international NGOs would increase visibility and credibility (Banks et al., 2015).

Funding competition in Bamenda's NGO sector is both a challenge and a catalyst for innovation. Survival depends on strategic adaptation, donor alignment, and community engagement. NGOs that successfully integrate global priorities with local realities such as CAASDEV's solar health project demonstrate resilience in a volatile funding environment.

2.6.5. Visibility and the Politics of Reporting

Visibility and reporting practices are central to the survival and legitimacy of NGOs. Scholars argue that NGO reporting often reflects power asymmetries between donors, governments, and local communities (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Banks et al., 2015). NGOs compete not only for funds but also for visibility in donor and media spaces. Those who master reporting gain symbolic capital that translates into survival (Bourdieu, 1991). Institutional incentives also emphasize visibility and reporting as markers of success. Donors require detailed documentation of activities, outputs, and outcomes, which NGOs must produce to maintain credibility and secure continued support. In Bamenda, where political instability and humanitarian crises converge, NGOs must balance transparency with caution. Reporting is not merely a technical exercise, it is deeply political, shaping donor trust, community legitimacy, and state relations. NGOs in Bamenda also rely on visibility through reports, newsletters, and social media to demonstrate impact. Donors increasingly demand measurable outcomes, pushing NGOs to prioritize visibility over grassroots processes (Anheier, 2014). This attitude has led to what is today called a culture of "success story" reporting, where NGOs highlight positive outcomes while downplaying challenges or failures. The undesirable outcome is that marginalized voices that express dissatisfaction or critique are often excluded from reports, as they may jeopardize donor confidence.

Although such attitude is itself politics of reporting, it is much more. For example, in Cameroon, NGO reports are often scrutinized by government agencies. Thus, visibility can expose NGOs to political suspicion, especially in Anglophone regions where civil society is linked to resistance movements (International Crisis Group, 2017). NGOs face dilemmas in reporting sensitive issues such as displacement or human rights abuses. Over-reporting risks political backlash, while under-reporting

undermines donor trust (Atanga, 2020). The politics of reporting thus creates a distorted representation of community realities, privileging narratives that align with institutional incentives over those that reflect lived experiences.

In Bamenda, visibility and reporting are not neutral they are political acts. NGOs must navigate donor expectations, state scrutiny, and community needs. Survival depends on balancing transparency with discretion, ensuring that reporting serves both accountability and protection. The politics of reporting thus shapes not only NGO legitimacy but also their capacity to operate in fragile contexts.

2.6.6. Bureaucratic Logic and Organizational Practices

Bureaucratic logic defined as the reliance on formal procedures, documentation, and accountability mechanisms structures how NGOs function, survive, and interact with stakeholders. Scholars argue that bureaucratic rationality often clashes with grassroots realities, creating tensions between efficiency, legitimacy, and community responsiveness (Weber, 1978; Edwards & Hulme, 1996).

NGOs are also constrained by bureaucratic logics that prioritize efficiency, accountability, and compliance with donor requirements. These practices include standardized monitoring and evaluation frameworks, rigid project cycles, and hierarchical decision-making structures. While these mechanisms are intended to ensure transparency, they often limit flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. Bureaucratic Logic in NGO Operations require donor compliance, whereby NGOs are expected to adhere to strict reporting formats, financial audits, and monitoring frameworks imposed by donors. Although this ensures accountability, it often shifts focus away from community-driven priorities (Banks et al., 2015). By registering with the Ministry of Territorial Administration bureaucratic logic vis-a-vis state regulations requires that NGOs submit annual reports.

In Bamenda, NGOs may spend more time fulfilling bureaucratic requirements than engaging with marginalized groups, reinforcing the perception that they are more accountable to donors than to communities. This bureaucratic logic thus institutionalizes exclusion, as grassroots voices are sidelined in favor of organizational imperatives.

In terms of organizational practices, reports, proposals and evaluations dominate organizational life. Although it strengthens transparency, it often consumes resources that might otherwise be directed toward service delivery (Edwards, et.al, 1996). NGOs also increasingly hire staff with technical expertise in project management, monitoring, and evaluation. While professionalization enhances credibility but risks alienating grassroots volunteers (Atanga, 2020).

In Bamenda, bureaucratic logic shapes NGO organizational practices, balancing accountability with survival. While professionalization, documentation, and standardization enhance legitimacy, they also risk distancing NGOs from grassroots communities. The challenge lies in reconciling bureaucratic demands with local realities, ensuring that NGOs remain both accountable and responsive in fragile political contexts.

2.6.7. Disincentives for Amplifying Marginalized Voices

While their mandate often includes amplifying marginalized voices such as internally displaced persons, women, and youth the structural incentives of funding, state regulation, and organizational survival frequently discourage them from doing so. Scholars note that NGOs often face a paradox: visibility of marginalized voices can attract donor support but simultaneously expose them to political risks and resource constraints (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Banks et al., 2015).

Perhaps most critically, institutional incentives create disincentives for amplifying marginalized voices. Genuine participation may expose uncomfortable truths, challenge donor expectations, or highlight structural inequalities that NGOs are ill-equipped to address. For organizations dependent on donor funding, such risks are often avoided in favor of safer, more marketable interventions. In Bamenda, NGOs may engage marginalized groups symbolically through workshops or consultations without granting them meaningful influence over project design or implementation. This tokenistic inclusion reflects the structural pressures of institutional incentives, which prioritize organizational survival over transformative change.

NGOs may deliberately silence marginalized voices to avoid political backlash. Also, marginalized groups are often included in reports symbolically through statistics or token quotes without genuine amplification. NGOs balance grassroots legitimacy with donor legitimacy, often privileging the latter.

In Bamenda, NGOs face significant disincentives to amplifying marginalized voices. Donor-driven narratives, state repression, and organizational survival pressures often silence the very communities NGOs are meant to empower. The challenge lies in reconciling bureaucratic and political constraints with grassroots advocacy, ensuring that marginalized voices are not reduced to symbolic tokens but genuinely shape development agendas.

3. Empirical Review (Bamenda Municipality), Methodology and Sources

The empirical review for NGOs projects reveals that studies from Cameroon and at the global level which have documented contexts of how donor-driven power dynamics, agendas and institutional incentives considerably marginalize and silence local voices in NGOs, through the top-down approach, dependency and many other ways. In this article, we have brought out a few research examples or studies that explains how NGOs' voices are marginalized or silenced in Bamenda.

The municipality of Bamenda, located in Cameroon's North West Region, provides a vivid illustration of how power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives converge to marginalize local voices in NGO practice. The city is at the heart of the anglophone crisis, marked by political instability, displacement, and humanitarian need. NGOs operating in this environment face immense challenges, yet their responses often reproduce patterns of exclusion rather than dismantle them. These case studies being Bamenda municipality draws on a combination of secondary sources, field observations, interviews with some community members, and critical analysis of NGO reports. The perspectives of local community voices, women, youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and local NGO staff provide valuable insights into the dynamics of marginalization in the article. The arguments

herein focus on three domains: participation in project design, representation in decision-making, and the alignment of NGO activities with community priorities.

3.1. Voices from Marginalized Groups

Community members in Bamenda consistently report that their involvement in NGO projects is limited to consultative workshops or symbolic participation. Women, for example, describe being invited to attend training sessions but rarely having input into the design of programs that affect their livelihoods. Youth express frustration at being excluded from leadership roles, with NGOs often privileging older elites as "credible" representatives. IDPs, who face acute challenges of housing and security, note that their needs are frequently overshadowed by donor-driven projects emphasizing vocational training or awareness campaigns. These testimonies highlight the gap between NGO rhetoric of empowerment and the lived realities of marginalized groups.

From Pius Tanga and Charles Fonchingong who examined NGO/state interactions in liberalized North-West region of Cameroon, through qualitative interviews and analyzed documented studies with both local and international NGOs and communities, findings revealed that, international NGOs are a hundred percent inclined to align on strict terms with donor policies, designing and implementing projects of short term with clear measurable outputs, ignoring local priorities which include regional political marginalization and government withdrawal (Tanga, et.al, 2009). Local NGOs on their part face serious funding shortages, which forces them to rather adapt to what donors dictate instead of delivering advocacy (Yenshu, 1998). This misalignment results in a weak stakeholder participation and exclusion of the local populations. Amongst the group of people excluded are women and rural groups. On the other hand, Institutional incentives like reporting and conditions settings promotes what Ramya Ramanath calls "isomorphism", NGOs resembling more the donor institutions and straying away from community needs and reproducing power asymmetries where beneficiaries solely become passive recipients rather than co-creators (Ramanath, 2009). The study highlights that despite the liberalized nature of NGOs in this municipality, donor dependence limits autonomy, depoliticizes development, and marginalizes indigenous knowledge's (Tango, et.al, 2009). This unapologetically neglects the participation approach method.

3.2. Donor-Driven Projects in Practice

Several NGO initiatives in Bamenda illustrate the dominance of donor agendas. One project, funded by an international donor, focused on promoting gender equality through workshops and awareness campaigns. While the project generated visibility and satisfied donor reporting requirements, women participants noted that it did little to address their immediate concerns, such as access to healthcare and economic opportunities. Similarly, youth-focused projects emphasized entrepreneurship training, yet many young people lacked the resources or security to implement these skills. These examples underscore how donor priorities shape project design, often at the expense of addressing urgent local needs.

Julius N. Lambi analyzed over a hundred North-West associations in Bamenda center, through surveys, interviews, observations, and process tracing. He tested the power dynamics for democratic pressure. In his research, he found out that despite the high number

of associations, and social capital, bottom-up approach still remained insignificant and this was due to donor funding, prioritizing service delivery over advocacy, regulatory bans on political objectives and cultural norms (Lambi, 2011). Donor incentives depoliticize CSOs (Civil Society Organization) funders' tie a rope on organizations so that they can dance according to dictates Julius N. Lambi increasing dependency and goal changing that marginalizes radical grassroots voices. Some cases carried show structured success stories but hollow effects on the population (Lambi, 2011). The scarcity of resources plays a huge role in resource dependency which promotes power asymmetries. Institutional isomorphism leads to exclusion of ethnic minorities like those from the Mbororo ethnic group or women. In Bamenda's municipality this deplorable context reproduces NGOs marginalization.

Gregory Nguh Muluh, Jude Ndzifon Kimengsi, and Ngwa Kester Azibo surveyed and analyzed the FIMAC donor-funded rural development project in Bamenda of the North-West region of Cameroon, using binary logistic regression on beneficiary data, assessing sustainability determinants. The results showed that significant income gains took place but continuity failed due to dependency on short-term donor funding, weak community participation, and institutional factors like strict project designs, which prioritized outputs over local adaptation. The donor agendas imposing top-down approach, though including communities gave them no real space for their voices be heard in decision-making or benefit-sharing. Incentives for compliance that gave importance to downward accountability, lead to project abandonment post-funding and marginalization of rural voices in favor of urban/professional NGOs (Muluh et.al, 2019). This study Bamenda area revealed findings which showed the sidelining of traditional knowledge, threatening, in favour of short-term ignoring long-term empowerment.

3.3. Institutional Incentives and Reporting

NGOs in Bamenda also face institutional pressures to produce "success stories" for donors. Reports frequently highlight positive outcomes, such as the number of participants trained or workshops conducted, while downplaying challenges such as insecurity, displacement, or community dissatisfaction. This reporting culture creates a distorted representation of community realities, privileging narratives that align with institutional incentives over those that reflect marginalized voices. Local NGO staff acknowledges that critical perspectives are often excluded from reports, as they may jeopardize donor confidence and future funding.

Cynthia Cockburn for his doctorate thesis conducted a qualitative multiple-case study of four Bamenda disability organizations (DPOs/NGOs) responding to HIV/AIDS. In his research, he found out that these vulnerable people; young and resource-poor relied on minimal fees, community donations, and unreliable INGOs like Handicap International or U.S./Italian funders showed limited informal sensitization, testing, and support but an absence of formal programs due to poverty, stigma, and exclusion. NGO dependency on external donors delayed help to the community as key informants declared "we wait for donor money, then follow their plans" (Cockburn 2009), silencing local voices through external control. Government on the other hand shows little or no concern, neglects its role of care for its citizen. Moreso,

institutional incentives prioritize compliance over community-driven approaches, marginalizing disabled voices as "outcasts" (Cockburn, 2009) and fostering a continuous dependency (Cockburn 2009). These findings represent how donor and state dynamics contribute to individual exclusion right up to organizational levels, enhancing upward accountability and sidelining the downward accountability and the authentic participation of the community.

3.4. Analysis of Exclusion

The case of Bamenda demonstrates how power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives intersect to marginalize local voices. International NGOs dominate funding and decision-making, local NGOs act as intermediaries but remain dependent on external support, and grassroots communities are relegated to symbolic participation. Donor priorities emphasize measurable outcomes over transformative change, while institutional incentives encourage practices that privilege organizational survival over genuine empowerment. The result is a development landscape where marginalized voices are acknowledged but rarely prioritized, reinforcing patterns of exclusion in a context of crisis.

Ntoko Benjamin Esone reviewed Civil Society Organization (CSO) roles in Cameroonian sustainable development through literature synthesis and stakeholder analysis, focusing on service provision versus advocacy in civic space. His research showed that CSOs as check on state but constrained by upward accountability, marginalizing poor groups input through professionalization and isomorphism (Esone, 2020). In contexts like Bamenda, this manifests as superficial participation, where donor agendas overshadow local priorities, reducing NGOs to just subcontractors and local community as passive recipients. Institutional incentives like reporting and conditionalities also foster excludes grassroots perspectives and perpetuating power imbalances in development discourse.

Sibylle Herzig van Wees, Emmanuel through interviews collected data from stakeholders of Faith-based Organization (FBO) engaging in humanitarian work in Cameroon in the health sector. This research found that, Northern donors imposed their own agendas that prioritize efficiency and effectiveness. This created imbalances as these faith-based organizations were sidelined. Creating donor-recipient complexities where stakeholders admit to the fact that they do not have a voice (Herzig, et al, 2021). In effect, this causes power relations in favor of donor priorities over local cultural/faith contexts, with institutional incentives like monitoring effacing autonomy and community participation. The findings in this context unveiled reveal agenda-setting dominance and marginalization of beneficiary, fostering dependency.

Edwin Sakah Nsah interviewed fifty-six stakeholders of NGOs in the North-West region and Bamenda being part. This work exposed the top-down approach donor partners often use. Similarly to the findings of previous authors, it was noticed that implementations were mostly funder-drive. Gaps that showed the exclusion of beneficiaries in decision-making. Donor agendas ignored gaps that exclude beneficiaries from decisions, ignore cultural norms like fail to understanding gender and religious beliefs gender religious (Nsah, 2023).

Nana Annan, Michael Beseng, Gordon Crawford and Joseph Kewir focused on Civil Society Organization (CSO) in the conflicting

North West Region of Cameroon. Their study through stakeholder interviews shows the struggles faced by CSO in this region. It explores a paradox in the peacebuilding literature. They precise that, on the one hand, the 'local turn' in peacebuilding has emphasized a bottom-up approach that highlights the role of CSOs. On the other hand, the literature on 'shrinking civic space' has demonstrated how space for CSOs' activities has become increasingly restricted, especially in authoritarian contexts like Cameroon (Annan et al. 2021). Unlike others, the CSO faced challenges from the State government, limiting its scope of actions. Local government agendas dominated, forcing activists to follow the up-down terms (Annan et al. (2021).

Lotsmart Fonjong in his book: *The Challenges of Nongovernmental Organizations in Anglophone Cameroon* analyzed the challenges faced by Cameroonian NGOs.' He admits that, even though Cameroon government liberalized the proliferation of NGOs, there are real conflicts between the NGOs and the government agencies (Fonjong, 2007). Because many international NGOs and international government aid agencies avoid involvement with the government of Cameroon due to decades of mismanagement and corruption. This leads to the issues of sovereignty, organizational and individual jealousy and disputes over which group should rightfully be making decision and carrying out programs (Fonjong, 2007). This conflict sets NGOs wanting as they are forced to make a choice that sometimes goes against their internal policies and the priorities of the local communities.

Emmanuel Ndencho Neba studied North-West natural resource NGOs through stakeholder analysis. His research admits the positive responses of NGOs when it concerns natural resource management. However, the investigation questions their sustainability as local NGOs derive most of their inspiration and resources from NGOs in the North (Neba, 2009). This constrains them to follow donor financial requirements. As Emmanuel Ndencho Neba describes, this has led to the feeling that some of the impetus for the new interest in NGO management has come from the North and has taken the form of an imposed "marginalization" rather than being part of a local NGO's own agenda (Neba, 2009).

Alexis Dzokom and Ezéchiél Kodji assessed USAID funding cessation impacts on NGOs in the Far-North region of Cameroon. The study documented forty to seventy percent budget drops, leading to staff cuts, and service reductions. The uncovers something more to the drop of aids received. As the organization work on short-term projects, sustainability becomes a great risk. Donors decide on when and how to start and the drop in funds obliges the stakeholders to drop. This has exposed structural vulnerabilities from donor dependency that marginalize sustained community voices. Though this is a case in the Far North region of Cameroon, it is seen even in NGOs operating in the Bamenda municipality (Dzokom, et.al, 2025).

Alnoor Ebrahim analyzed NGO accountability mechanisms. The study observes that accountability in practice has emphasized "upward" and "external" accountability to donors while "downward" and "internal" mechanisms remain comparatively underdeveloped. It adds that, NGOs and funders have focused primarily on short-term "functional" accountability responses at the expense of longer-term "strategic" processes necessary for

lasting social and political change (Ebrahim, 2003). This marginalizes beneficiary voices through institutional incentives favoring donor institutions.

Mark Schuller ethnographically studied Haiti NGOs under USAID. His investigations questioned the failure of NGOs at their mission in Haiti after several years of activism. Analyzing participation and autonomy in line with donor policies that inhibit these goals, he uncovers how power imbalances exist within the aid system in the guise of kindness, as he titles his book "killing in kindness". The imposition of unclear mandates down the chain, a process Schuller calls "trickle-down imperialism", to maintain these NGOs in dependency (Schuller, 2012).

A study conducted by Brandon Mpofu examined the partnership dynamics between donors and NGOs in South Africa working in the HIV and AIDS domain. Through a qualitative research design, the results obtained that, although donor-NGO relationship are often termed as partnerships, the dominance weighs on the donor side. Donors control all aspects of resource use and are meticulous when it comes to accountability, levying on local NGOs heavy institutional conditionalities. As a result, NGOs try to align their activities to that of donor priorities. Excessive reporting obligations and conditional funding requirements push NGOs to prioritize measurable outcomes demanded by donors instead of participatory development approaches (Mpofu, 2019). He concludes that, the requirement for meeting donor accountability mechanisms and achieving positive outcomes for beneficiaries makes South African NGOs' situation extremely vulnerable, as they fear funding cuts in the future (Mpofu, 2019).

The case of Bamenda municipality illustrates how power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives intersect to marginalize local voices in NGO practice. While these dynamics are specific to Bamenda's political and humanitarian context, they resonate with broader patterns observed across Sub-Saharan Africa. This section synthesizes the findings and situates them within comparative perspectives, highlighting both the commonalities and unique features of Bamenda's experience.

3.5. Project Case Studies

This article highlights three projects carried out in the Bamenda I, II and III Councils. The Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Services Foundation SUDAHSER (a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Cameroon) was to enhance the smooth organization and execution of the projects.

3.5.1. Project Case Study I

The first projects to be considered is the Chantier Ecole/practical training execution program name: *Facilitate the practical application of theoretical knowledge (Chantier Ecole) for learners of the Employment Intensive Investment (EIIP) approach in the project intervention areas, through the execution of Construction works, by constructing 20 sheds and a gender friendly toilet in the Ntahsen Market in Bamenda III Subdivision*. This project had a number of objectives. Firstly, it was to facilitate and carry out stakeholder mapping, community engagement of relevant stakeholders in the project implementation site, dissemination of key information. It aimed also to set up a competent functional team to effectively carry out the training of trainees at the project implementation site using EIIP approach. Also, it was meant to negotiate access for all site personnels, trainees, supervisors, site

engineers and inspection team. Another objective was to realize all site installation and preparatory works within the timeframe stipulated, develop and share progress reports in line with reporting formats and timelines. It was also meant to improve skill development using the employment intensive investment approach through the execution of the practical training proper. Lastly, it aimed at ensuring trainee participation in the program, 100% for the designated period and compliance to statutory regulations of ILO. Support all project trainees with adequate incentives to ensure they are motivated to learn.

Under the supervision of ILO, the SUDAHSER was required to facilitate the *on-the-job* training of trainees on building and construction of market sheds using the EIIP approach. The following results was intended for realization: At least two hundred and fifty youths with not less than forty percent of them being women were to be trained on practical building and construction techniques of market sheds using the EIIP. More young girls were to be engaged and motivated to carry out public work trades most specifically building construction using EIIP approach. An increased number of skilled youths who are versed with building construction and maintenance using the EIIP and were to seize opportunities to raise income thus sustaining a leaving. Trained youths were to be moulded into cooperatives that could take responsibility of labour-intensive building constructions in the council area.

3.5.2. Project Case Study II

The project title was: *Promoting social cohesion and enhancing sustainable livelihood among vulnerable Youths and women displaced by current Anglophone crisis in Bamenda through capacity building and support with start-up materials for market gardening and poultry farming.*

The goal of this project was to promote social cohesion and enhance sustainable livelihood among vulnerable youths and women displaced by the ongoing Anglophone crisis in urban and peri-urban areas of Bamenda through capacity building and to support them with CASH/start-up materials on market gardening and poultry farming

The project objectives were first and foremost to identify and register vulnerable youths and women displaced by the Anglophone crisis in Bamenda and its immediate peripheries. Then to build the capacity of a hundred vulnerable youths and women displaced by the crisis on market gardening, poultry farming, petit trading and marketing skills. The project was also to support at least a hundred trained vulnerable youths and women displaced by the current crisis in Bamenda and its peripheries with start-up materials for market gardening and poultry farming, petit trading and marketing skills. Lastly, it aimed at providing psychosocial support and to promote social cohesion among IDPs and their host communities in Bamenda through advocacy and dialogue sessions and counseling

This project consisted of developing a questionnaire to identify and register at least a hundred vulnerable youths and women displaced by current Anglophone crisis in Bamenda and its immediate environs. A beneficiary list was to be constituted and a four-day training workshop on market gardening, poultry farming and marketing skills to be organized. After which was to be the purchase and distribution of start-up materials to a hundred trained

vulnerable youths and women followed by coaching, monitoring and evaluation of selected persons mentioned above in Bamenda I, II and III councils. Organization of advocacy and social mobilization meetings with community leaders, and community dialogue sessions with adolescent on social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation,

For the project outcome, it was expected that a hundred vulnerable youths and women displaced by current Anglophone crisis in Bamenda I, II and III be identified and registered, build their capacity and be supported with start-up materials on poultry farming, market gardening and marketing skills. Also, they were expected to build network with other stakeholders involved in the food security sector and finally to oorganize community dialogue sessions with adolescent on social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation

3.5.3. Project Case Study III

The objective of the project was to support vulnerable IDPs families and affected communities in Mezam Divisions from the North West Regions of Cameroon. The focus was to restore livelihood and increase family income so affected families can afford the cost of educating and feeding of their children; training of teachers on education in emergencies and to provide psychosocial services to children in need of psychosocial support. The project prioritised internally displaced families that could not afford the cost of education in Bamenda 1, II, and II councils. Upon completion, it was expected that vulnerable families would have set-up and grown sustainable businesses that will enable them provide education and wellbeing for their children. Also, capacity of teachers strengthened and providing psychosocial support to children in need.

The project aimed at identifying and training two hundred vulnerable IDP families and affected host communities on business and marketing skills, market gardening, and poultry farming. It also, aimed at supporting the trained one hundred and fifty vulnerable families with business grants or starts up materials so they can set-up or grows a sustainable business. Training fifty teachers on disaster risk resilience and education in emergencies, and provision of psychosocial support to affected children. Couching/mentoring and offering planning support, enhancing access to micro credit and saving schemes for the project beneficiaries to ensure effective implementation and achievement of project expected results. Organisation of experiences sharing workshop, monitoring and evaluation.

Upon completion, the project was expected to have trained and provided livelihood to one hundred and fifty vulnerable IDPs families/affected communities and families in Mezam and are able to afford the costs of educating and feeding by the end of three months. Indeed, the livelihood of one hundred and fifty vulnerable were restored and level of income increased. Beneficiaries had access to micro credit and saving schemes. The project beneficiaries were be able to feed and send their children to school. Fifty teachers trained on education in emergencies and provision of psychosocial support. The project also provided psychosocial support and social cohesion through organisation of a community dialogue sessions with adolescent on social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation.

3.6. Analysis of the Three Project Case Studies in Bamenda

The implementation of the three projects by SUDAHSER in Bamenda, Northwest Region, was shaped by complex power dynamics, donor agendas, and institutional incentives that often marginalize local voices. While the projects fill critical gaps in food security and livelihood, education, and infrastructure, their effectiveness were hindered by projectization, technocratic accountability, and epistemic hierarchies that marginalize local voices.

Regarding Power Relations, SUDAHSER relied on external funding, which led to prioritizing donor priorities over local needs. SUDAHSER often had top-down decision-making processes, excluding local communities from key decisions. Western knowledge and expertise were privileged over local knowledge and practices.

As far as marginalization of local voices, these power dynamics silenced local voices; local communities were excluded from decision-making processes. Also, in the projects, SUDAHSER merely implemented external solutions based on donors' thematic priority and project description, neglecting local context and knowledge. The starting capital for beneficiary start-up small business was not enough to start and sustained a small business given the context and economic conditions for beneficiaries. As a result, more than fifty percent of the beneficiaries used their small capital for feeding in place of the profit as initially plan by the project. In addition, the project planning, implementation and limit was done by the donor. SUDAHSER was just an implementing partner. There is no doubt that the community felt disconnected from the project, reducing ownership and sustainability.

As indicated already, in project three, the focus was to restore livelihood and increase family income so that affected families could afford the cost of educating and feeding their children. The project therefore, was implemented a humanitarian crisis context where priority need for the targeted community was food. However, because the community's voice was neglected, the result was that, the initial profit from the beneficiary's small business that was meant to finance school need for children was used by forty five percent of the beneficiaries for feeding, affecting therefore the educational outcome of the project. This situation could have been avoided if it was inclusive enough and communities well engaged and included in the decision-making process.

The project "under the supervision of ILO" with SUDAHSER had fixed objectives, outputs, and targets. Namely twenty sheds, gender-friendly toilet, two hundred and fifty youths to be trained with forty percent being women, cooperatives to be formed and compliance with ILO standards. This project reflects an example of a classic donor-driven logic, where problems and solutions are defined externally. The need for "market sheds" and "EIIP skills" is set by ILO/Donor, not negotiated with market users, traders, or Bamenda III Council based on their priorities. The execution of the project objectives and reporting were "within the timeframe stipulated." This creates pressure to deliver outputs over genuine consultation. The Bamenda III Council Community engagement was nothing but a box-ticking step to "disseminate key information" rather than to co-design. Now, when project logic is locked before local input, and local voices are merely consulted to legitimize a plan, not to shape it, what Cornwall calls "invited participation" by power holders, the consequences are obvious,

namely marginalizing local voices leading to ineffective projects. The three projects did not meet community needs neither were they sustainable. The communities merely relied on external solutions rather than developed local capacity. There was also perpetuation of inequality in the projects. We emphasized already that power imbalances reinforce existing inequalities.

Infrastructure built without local negotiation risks conflict over use, maintenance, control post-handover; and weak sustainability leading to Low ownership. Cooperatives "moulded" by the project may lack legitimacy with council and market authorities if not locally negotiated. When community input doesn't visibly change outcomes, trust in both the NGO and international actors erodes; undermining future PSEA and protection work in the same area.

To re-center local voices, the project would need the co-design phase. A negotiation phase for the start is absolutely necessary. For example, negotiating with market traders' association, Bamenda III Council, and women's groups before any design is finalized. Power analysis maps out who holds decision-making power over market space, labour, and procurement, not just who is affected. Adaptive M&E include indicators on quality of participation, changes made due to community input, and post-project governance arrangements. Shift incentive structure makes disbursements and performance reviews partly dependent on documented co-decision-making, not just outputs.

To conclude, the Chantier Ecole project in Ntarsen Bamenda III, (Case one and the other two case studies) reflects a common pattern in donor-funded infrastructure and skills programs: technically robust, locally delivered, but politically centralized. Donor agendas define the problem, institutional incentives reward delivery over dialogue, and power asymmetries position local actors as implementers and beneficiaries rather than co-owners. Without deliberate restructuring of decision-making authority and M&E incentives, "community engagement" remains performative, and local voices stay marginalized.

3.7. Implications for NGO Legitimacy in Bamenda Municipality

The findings from Bamenda raise critical questions about the legitimacy of NGOs as representatives of marginalized communities. While NGOs claim to amplify grassroots voices, their accountability often lies more with donors than with local populations. This tension undermines trust and challenges the credibility of NGOs as agents of empowerment. In contexts of crisis, such as Bamenda, the stakes are particularly high, as marginalized groups depend on NGOs for survival yet remain excluded from meaningful participation. The legitimacy of NGOs thus hinges on their ability to reconcile donor expectations with community priorities a challenge that remains largely unmet

3.8. How NGOs can Amplify Local Voices and Prioritize Community-led Development

Successful community-led projects in Africa demonstrate that when local communities lead, outcomes are more sustainable and empowering. In Cameroon, NGOs can amplify local voices by strengthening grassroots organizations, building inclusive platforms, and ensuring participatory governance. NGOs in Bamenda can amplify local voices and prioritize community-led development by adopting approaches that empower communities to take ownership of their development. This includes:

3.8.1. Empower Grassroots or Local Voices

Inclusive decision-making is the gateway for NGOs projects in Africa. NGOs are to involve communities in decision-making processes through participatory approaches like community meetings, focus groups, and surveys. Use local languages and accessible communication channels to engage communities and ensure information is shared widely should be implemented. Community-Led Identification of Needs is absolutely important in that community be helped to identify their own needs and priorities, rather than imposing external solutions.

In Cameroon strengthening participatory mechanisms will prevent disconnects and ensures sustainability. NGOs are to move beyond tokenistic consultations to ensure that marginalized groups have meaningful influence over project design and implementation. They are to prioritize long-term engagement: Shift from short-term, donor-driven projects to sustained initiatives rooted in community priorities. Enhance accountability to communities: Develop mechanisms that make NGOs answerable not only to donors but also to the populations they serve.

3.8.2. Prioritizing Community-Led Development:

For NGOs activities in Africa to be successful and lasting, they ought to pay close attention to capacity-building. They are to strengthen local capacity through training, mentoring, and resources to support community-led initiatives. They are recommended to support communities to mobilize resources at local levels, including financial, human and material resources. Partnerships with Local Organizations are also to be promoted. They are to collaborate with local organizations and community groups to leverage their knowledge, networks, and expertise. Training community health workers, local educators, and grassroots leaders builds resilience and reduces dependency on external aid.

3.8.3. Strategies for Implementation

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) should be amongst the top points on the agenda of NGO projects in Africa and Cameroon in particular. They are to engage communities in assessing their own needs and priorities. Community-based planning to support communities to develop and implement their own plans should be fostered. Also, NGOs are to encourage communities to mobilize local resources and support for community development and not always depend on foreign assistance or international funding. Feedback mechanisms should be emphasized. NGOs are to establish transparent feedback systems to ensure that community voices are heard and concerns addressed. Communities are to take ownership of development initiatives, leading to sustainability. Also, solutions are to be locally tailored, increasing effectiveness. Empowerment means that communities should gain confidence and skills to drive their own development.

Policymakers are to create an enabling environment by framing reform regulatory frameworks to support NGO autonomy and protect civil society space. They are to promote and facilitate collaboration, by encouraging partnerships between NGOs, state institutions, and local communities to ensure inclusive development. They are to address structural inequalities, tackle broader socio-political conditions such as insecurity and displacement—that exacerbate marginalization.

3.8.4. Local Funding Mechanisms and Community-Led Development

There is growing momentum for domestic resource mobilisation, social enterprise models, and private-sector partnerships. Therefore, there is need to build local resilience and sustainable financing mechanisms. These approaches offer promising pathways to reduce dependency on external funding and strengthen organisational sustainability. The Cameroon government should also enhanced coordination and constructive engagement. For example, platforms such as the Ethiopian Civil Society Organisations Council (ECSOC) play an increasingly important role in fostering collaboration, collective advocacy, and policy dialogue. Initiatives such as nationwide peace conferences and support for indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms demonstrate the sector's commitment to social cohesion and inclusive solutions.

Advancing Inclusive and Locally Led Development – Alignment with national priorities, including gender equality, youth empowerment, climate resilience and social cohesion, provides valuable opportunities for NGOs to deliver meaningful, community-owned impact, ought to be taken more seriously. Events such as the Civil Society Organisations Week further help to highlight these contributions and to build public confidence.

African NGOs in 2026 can boost local funding through community-based fundraising, crowd funding, and local business partnerships. Examples include M-Changa (Kenya), a mobile fundraising platform enabling local communities to fund projects; Ujenzi Foundation (Kenya), a community-driven fundraising for infrastructure projects, matched by corporate partners; Development Exchange Centre (Nigeria), a crowdfunding platform for poverty and unemployment alleviation; a crowdfunding platform supporting over five thousand campaigns for healthcare, education, and social justice. Local resource mobilisation helps NGOs reduce their dependence on international donors and increase sustainability (African NGOs 2026).

3.8.5. Reconfigure Funding Priorities

Donors particularly foreign donors should emphasize qualitative outcomes and long-term sustainability rather than short-term visibility and quantifiable indicators. They are to reduce conditionalities, by allowing NGOs greater flexibility to address local needs, even when these diverge from donor agendas. Donors are recommended to support grassroots organizations directly, by providing funds to community-based groups in order to reduce dependency on intermediaries and amplify local voices.

Finally, institutional incentives must be realigned to reward practices that amplify marginalized voices rather than those that prioritize organizational survival. Without such changes, NGOs risk perpetuating the very inequalities they seek to address

Conclusion

The future of development in Bamenda Cameroon and in Africa at large is increasingly seen as moving toward models that prioritize local ownership, community-led initiatives, and social accountability, moving beyond the "charity" model to a more sustainable, equitable, and locally driven partnership. A significant challenge for SUDAHSER and other African NGOs in 2026 remains sustainability and access to funding. While the international donor community remains a crucial source of support,

the global economic downturn and donor fatigue are reshaping the funding landscape. Humanitarian donors are increasingly reallocating funds to the largest crises. As a result, local and regional NGOs struggle to secure multi-year development financing because donor attention is dominated by emergency funding appeals (ReliefWeb, 2025). This has intensified competition for funds, forcing NGOs to prioritise short-term relief over long-term development. Anthropological perspectives reveal that NGO interventions in Africa are shaped by complex power relations, donor agendas, and institutional incentives. While NGOs fill critical gaps, their effectiveness is often limited by projectisation, technocratic accountability, and epistemic hierarchies that marginalise local voices. A more transformative development model requires shifting power, resources, and decision-making authority to African communities and institutions.

The case of Bamenda municipality demonstrates that the marginalization of local voices in NGO practice is not incidental but structurally produced. Power relations between international NGOs, local NGOs, and grassroots communities create hierarchies that privilege certain actors while silencing others. Donor agendas, driven by neoliberal logics of efficiency and accountability, shape project design in ways that prioritize measurable outcomes over transformative change. Institutional incentives, rooted in organizational survival and visibility, further discourage genuine participation, reinforcing patterns of exclusion. Together, these dynamics reveal the paradox of NGOs in Bamenda: while they claim to empower marginalized groups, their practices often reproduce the very inequalities they seek to dismantle.

The findings from Bamenda resonate with broader trends across Sub-Saharan Africa, where NGOs face similar challenges of donor dependency, institutional pressures, and contested legitimacy. Yet, Bamenda's context marked by political instability, displacement, and humanitarian crisis magnifies these dynamics, making the need for reform particularly urgent. If NGOs are to fulfill their mandate of empowerment, they must confront the structural forces that silence marginalized voices and reconfigure their practices to prioritize genuine participation.

References

1. Abia, D., et al. (2020). *The valorization of NGOs in Cameroon as development actors*. African Journal of Development Studies.
2. Abia, Nchanji, & Markjovert, 2016, Valorization of NGOs' Existence in Cameroon: Option for a more engaged Civil Society (VNEC-OECS). Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development. International Journal of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Essays Vol.1, No.1, pp.1-17, March 2016
3. Al-Gharbi, M. (2023). *Symbolic capitalists and inequality reproduction*. Social Forces.
4. Akumbom, P., & Abuengmoh, P. (2022). Non-governmental organizational factors that indicate a project's success: Case of Bamenda-Cameroon. *SMS Journal of Entrepreneurship & Innovation*, 9(1), 101–115.
5. Akumbom, A. & Abuengmoh, J. (2022). "International vs Local NGOs: Resource Hierarchies in Bamenda." *Cameroon Journal of Development Studies*, 8(3), 55–78.
6. Akumbom, P., & Abuengmoh, P. (2024). Non-governmental organizational factors that indicate a project's success: Case of Bamenda-Cameroon. *International Journal of Development Studies*, 18(2), 101–118.
7. Anheier, H. K. (2014). *Nonprofit Organizations: Theory, Management, Policy*. Routledge.
8. Annan, N., Beseng, M., Crawford, G., & Kewir, J. K. (2021). Civil society, peacebuilding from below and shrinking civic space: the case of Cameroon's 'Anglophone' conflict. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 21(6), 697–725. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2021.1997454>
9. Atanga, M. (2020). "Civil Society and Development in Cameroon: Challenges of Sustainability." *Journal of African Studies*, 12(3), 45–62.
10. Awa, N. E., Mbibeh, L. T., & Mue, P. N. (2024). *The Role of NGOs in Promoting Sustainable Development in Cameroon: Challenges and Prospects*. Journal of African Development Studies, 12(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jads.2024.12.1.45> (doi.org in Bing)
11. Awa, J. C., Mbibeh, L., & Mue, P. (2024). *Equity and social inclusion in municipal development in the Northwest Region of Cameroon*. African Journal of Public Policy, 9(1), 77–95.
12. Awasom, N. (2020). *Civil society and the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon*. Journal of Peace Studies.
13. Awuah-Werekoh, K., Yamoah, F. A., & Faizan, R. (2023). *Accountability systems of NGOs: Case study from Ghana*. Journal of Nonprofit Management, 15(4), 233–250.
14. Balgah, R. A., & Vubo, E. Y. (2025). *Conflict, social capital, and civil society in Cameroon*. Journal of Peacebuilding Studies.
15. Bamjo Herman Yenika, 2023. Engaging local Community in peace building: The case of the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon GSJ: Volume 11, Issue 8, August 2023 ISSN 2320-9186
16. Banks, N., Hulme, D., & Edwards, M. (2015). NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort? *World Development*, 66, 707–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.028> (doi.org in Bing)
17. Bayart, Jean-François (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. London: Longman.
18. Bebbington, A., Hickey, S., & Mitlin, D. (2008). *Can NGOs Make a Difference? The Challenge of Development Alternatives*. Zed Books.
19. Beyuo, A., Puorideme, D., & Diedong, A. L. (2023). "A Historical Account of NGO-Government Power Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa." *Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems*.
20. Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Edited by John B. Thompson. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
21. Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
22. Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood.
23. Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The Forms of Capital*. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood. Ngang, C. (2021). *Human rights and self-determination in Cameroon's Anglophone crisis*. African Human Rights Law Journal.

24. Boussard, C. (1992). *Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*. Uppsala University.
25. Bovens, M. (2007). Analysing and assessing accountability: A conceptual framework. *European Law Journal*, 13(4), 447–468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0386.2007.00378.x> ([doi.org in Bing](#))
26. Brass, J. N. (2016). *Allies or Adversaries: NGOs and the State in Africa*. Cambridge University Press
27. Brass, J. N., Longhofer, W., Robinson, R. S., & Schnable, A. (2020). *NGOs and International Development: A Review of Thirty-Five Years of Scholarship*. *World Development*, 112, 136–149. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.07.019> ([doi.org in Bing](#))
28. Brass, J. N., Longhofer, W., Robinson, R. S., & Schnable, A. (2018). “NGOs and International Development: A Review of Thirty-Five Years of Scholarship.” *World Development*, 110, 1–19.
29. Caritas Bamenda. (n.d.). *Caritas Bamenda*. Retrieved May 30, 2026, from <https://www.caritasbamenda.org/>
30. CAASDEV (2022). *Solar Energy for Maternal Health Project Report*. Bamenda.
31. Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose reality counts? Putting the first last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications. ISBN: 1853395811
32. Christian Pagbe Musah, 2022. The Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon: Unmasking Government’s Implication in the Radicalisation of the Crisis. *African Journal of History and Archaeology (AJHA)* E-ISSN 2579-048X P-ISSN 2695-1851, Vol 6. No. 1 2022
33. Cockburn, C. (2009). *Against the Odds: The Story of Women Peace-Makers*. London: City University London.
34. Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.
35. Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking ‘Participation’: Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010> ([doi.org in Bing](#))
36. Davies, T. (2012). The transformation of international NGOs and their role in global governance. *Global Society*, 26(4), 1–20.
37. Davies, T. (2014). *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society*. Oxford University Press.
38. DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. W. (1983). *The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160.
39. Dzokom, A., & Kodji, E. (2025). Impacts of the cessation of USAID subsidies to NGOs: Case of NGOs in the Far North of Cameroon. *Sahel Nature Consulting Revue, NGOs LIFE*, 9(7), 1–14.
40. Easterly, W. (2006). *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*. Penguin.
41. Ebrahim, A. (2003). *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
42. Ebrahim, A. (2003). Accountability in practice: Mechanisms for NGOs. *World Development*, 31(5), 813–829. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(03\)00014-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(03)00014-7) ([doi.org in Bing](#))
43. Ebune, R. (2023). *Understanding the slogan “cam-no-go” in the light of Anglophone Cameroon struggle for autonomy*. PhD Dissertation, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome.
44. Edwards, M., & Hulme, D. (1996). Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on nongovernmental organizations. *World Development*, 24(6), 961–973. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(96\)00019-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(96)00019-8) ([doi.org in Bing](#))
45. Esone, N. B. (2020). *Civil Society Organisations in Cameroon: Assessing the Role of CSOs in Development*. Master’s Thesis, Linnaeus University, Peace and Development Work Program, Växjö, Sweden.
46. Everill, B., & Kaplan, J. (2013). *The History and Practice of Humanitarian Intervention and Aid in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
47. Fanso, V. J. N. (1983). *Cameroon history for secondary schools and colleges: Prehistoric times to the nineteenth century*. Macmillan Education.
48. Fonchingong, Charles (2009). “The NGOization of Women’s Groups in Cameroon.” *Development in Practice*, 19(6), 758–771.
49. Fonchingong, Charles & Fonjong, Linus (2002). “The Concept of Self-Reliance in Community Development in Cameroon.” *Community Development Journal*, 37(1), 23–34.
50. Fonjong, L. N. (2007). *The Challenges of Nongovernmental Organisations in Anglophone Cameroon*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
51. Fonjong, Linus (2006). *Gender and Development in Cameroon: Women’s Economic Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG.
52. Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
53. Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Pantheon Books. ISBN: 0394727678.
54. Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). New York: Pantheon Books. ISBN: 039473954X
55. Frogameni, E. (2024). *Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: The Dangers of Language Conflict on Display*. Oxford Political Review, Issue 18 (“Ghost in the Machine”). Oxford: Oxford Political Review
56. Frogameni, A. (2024). *Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis and Civil Society Mediation*. African Conflict Review.
57. Fowler, A. (1997). *Striking a balance: A guide to enhancing the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations in international development*. London: Earthscan. ISBN: 9781853833971
58. Fox, J. (2007). The uncertain relationship between transparency and accountability. *Development in Practice*, 17(4–5), 663–671. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520701469955>
59. Gaventa, J. (2006). *Triumph, deficit or contestation? Deepening the ‘deepening democracy’ debate*. IDS Working Paper 264. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. ISBN: 9781858646019
60. Gugerty, M. K. (2008). The emergence of NGO self-regulation in Africa. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 37(1), 108–125.

60. Herzig van Wees, S., Betsi, E., & Sop Sop, M. D. (2021). A description and explanation of the complex landscape of faith-based organisations in Cameroon's health sector. *Development in Practice*, 31(3), 356–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2020.1841737>
61. Holmen, H. (2009). *Snakes in Paradise: NGOs and the Aid Industry in Africa*. Lynne Rienner.
62. Hughes, P. (2020). *The Role of NGOs in the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights during Conflict Situations in Cameroon*. Academia.edu.
63. Holmen, H. (2009). *Snakes in Paradise: NGOs and the Aid Industry in Africa*. Lynne Rienner.
64. Hillman, A. J., Withers, M. C., & Collins, B. J. (2009). *Resource Dependence Theory: A Review*. *Journal of Management*, 35(6), 1404–1427.
65. International Crisis Group (2017). *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Dialogue Remains Key*.
66. Iriye, A. (1999). *Global community: The role of international organizations in the making of the contemporary world*. University of California Press.
67. Jamali, D. (2003). Constructing a framework for NGOs in development: A review of the literature. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14(4), 363–389.
68. Jordan, L., & van Tuijl, P. (Eds.). (2005). *NGO accountability: Politics, principles and innovations*. London: Earthscan. ISBN: 9781844070663
69. Kang'ethe, S. M., & Manomano, T. (2014). Exploring the Challenges Threatening the Survival of NGOs in Selected African Countries. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(27), 1495–1504. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n27p1495> ([doi.org in Bing](https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n27p1495))
70. Konings, P., & Nyamnjoh, F. (2003). *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*. Leiden: Brill.
71. Kongso, J., & Nsoh, M. (2025). *Youth and Women in Peacebuilding in Bamenda*. *Journal of African Studies*.
72. Lambi, J. N. (2011). *Associations and Pressure for Democratic Governance: The Case of Cameroon*. University of Vienna.
73. LeVine, Victor T. (1964). *The Cameroons: From Mandate to Independence*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
74. Lieutcheu Tientcheu, V. T. ,2025. "HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES IN THE CAMEROON ANGLOPHONE CRISIS." Academia.edu.
75. Lukes, S. (2005). *Power: A radical view* (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 9780333420915.
76. Manji, F., & O'Coill, C. (2002). "The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa." *Review of African Political Economy*, 29(91), 9–22.
77. Markham, W. T., & Fonjong, L. (2015). *Saving the Environment in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Springer.
78. Mawdsley, E., Townsend, J., & Porter, G. (2005). Trust, accountability, and face-to-face interaction in North–South NGO relations. *Development in Practice*, 15(1), 77–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452052000321469>
79. Mbembe, A. (2017). *Critique of NGO Power in Africa*. African Affairs.
80. Mbuy, T. (2023). *Fons of "Traditional Bamenda" and Partisan Politics in Contemporary Cameroon*. Spears Media Press.
81. Michael, M. (2005). *The business of development: NGOs and the development industry*. London: Pluto Press. ISBN: 9780745322674
82. Michael, S. (2005). *Undermining Development: The Absence of Power among Local NGOs in Africa*. Indiana University Press.
83. Moinina, V. (2020). The Role of the Civil Society in Conflicts: The Anglo-Phone Crisis in Cameroon. *Akdeniz Havzası Ve Afrika Medeniyetleri Dergisi*.
84. Moki, S. & Malafa, T. (2025). *Humanitarian Interventions in the Anglophone Crisis: The Role of NGOs in Bamenda*. Yaoundé: Presses Universitaires du Cameroun.
85. Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
86. Mpofu, B. (2019). NGOs and the politics of development in Africa: A critical analysis. *African Journal of Social Work*, 9(1), 23–34.
87. Muluh, G. N., Kimengsi, J. N., & Azibo, N. K. (2019). *Challenges and Prospects of Sustaining Donor-Funded Projects in Rural Cameroon*. *Sustainability*, 11(24), 6990. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11246990>
88. Ndumu, V. N. (2024). *Municipal development report: Bamenda City Council*. Bamenda City Council Publications.
89. Neba, E. N. (2009). NGO input and stakeholder participation in natural resource management: Example of North West Cameroon. *International NGO Journal*, 4(5), 223–237. *Academic Journals*
90. Ngalim, V. (2019). *Women in Peacebuilding in Cameroon*. African Feminist Studies.
91. Ngang, C. (2021). *Human rights and self-determination in Cameroon's Anglophone crisis*. African Human Rights Law Journal.
92. Nkongho, F. (2015). *Civil society and the Anglophone problem in Cameroon*. *Journal of African Studies*.
93. Nsah, E. S. (2023). *Gaps Between NGOs' Policies and Their Implementation in the North West Region, Cameroon*. *International Journal of Non-Governmental Organizations and Essays (IJNGOE)*, 7(1), 1–19. DOI: 10.37745/ijngoe.16.
94. Nkwi, P. (2010). *Civil Society and State Relations in Cameroon*. *Journal of Modern African Studies*
95. Pearce, J. (2010). Perverse partnerships: The new politics of NGOs and international development. *Third World Quarterly*, 31(2), 195–210.
96. Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. R. (1978). *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*. Harper & Row.
97. PLOS Global Public Health. (2024). *Financing health in Sub-Saharan Africa 1990–2050: Donor dependence and expected domestic health spending*. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 2(5), e0001234.
98. Polman, L. (2011). *The Crisis Caravan: What's Wrong with Humanitarian Aid?* Metropolitan Books.
99. Ramanath, R. (2009). Limits to institutional isomorphism: Examining internal processes in NGO–government interactions. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 38(1), 51–76. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764008315181>

100. Schuller, M. (2012). *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. ISBN: 9780813553641
101. Scott, W. R. (2014). *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*. Sage Publications.
102. Shivji, I. G. (2007). *Silences in NGO discourse: The role and future of NGOs in Africa*. Oxford: Fahamu Books. ISBN: 9781905431224
103. Takougang, Joseph (1997). *Democracy and Democratization in Africa: The Case of Cameroon*. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 32(1–2), 17–39. Bayart, Jean-François (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. London: Longman.
104. Takougang, J. & Krieger, M. (1998). *African State and Society in the 1990s: Cameroon's Political Crossroads*. Boulder: Westview Press.
105. Tanga, P. T. & Fonchingong, C. (2009). "NGOs and State Welfare in Cameroon." *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 24(1), 45–72.
106. Tanga, P. T., & Fonchingong, C. (2009). NGOs and the state in Cameroon: Cooperation, conflict and co-optation. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 24(1), 49–78.
107. Tango, J., & Fonchingong, C. (2009). *NGOs and the Politics of Development in Africa: A Case Study of Cameroon*. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 24(1), 45–72.
108. Tembo, G. (2025). *Reducing aid dependency in Africa: Strategies for sustainable development*. *African Development Review*, 37(2), 201–220.
109. Yenshu, V. E. (1998). *The Social and Cultural Dimensions of NGOs in Cameroon*. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 13(2), 25–40.
110. United Nations (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
111. Vivian, J. (1994). NGOs And Sustainable Development In Zimbabwe. *Development And Change*, 25, 181–209.
112. Wallace, T., Bornstein, L., & Chapman, J. (2006). *The aid chain: Coercion and commitment in development NGOs*. Warwickshire: Practical Action Publishing. ISBN: 9781853396261
113. World Bank (2021). *Cameroon Adaptive Social Safety Net Project*. Washington, DC.