



ISSN (O): 2320-5407
ISSN (P): 3107-4928

Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/22974

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/22974>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 10 January 2026
Final Accepted: 12 February 2026
Published: March 2026

Key words:-

Ambazonia, Refugees,
Anglophone, Ikom, Cameroon

Abstract

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

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Introduction:-

The Ambazonian conflict refers to the ongoing armed struggle between Anglophone separatists in the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, collectively known as "Ambazonia", and the government of the Republic of Cameroon. It is rooted in decades of marginalisation, colonial legacy, and failed constitutional integration. The immediate cause of the violence in late 2016, was the government's repressive action against peaceful protests over the imposition of French-speaking teachers and judges in Anglophone institutions. The affected regions were formerly part of British-administered Southern Cameroons, which joined the French-speaking Republic of Cameroon in a controversial 1961 plebiscite under the United Nations. Over the decades, grievances regarding political under-representation, economic neglect, and cultural suppression continued to mount, culminating in the declaration of an independent Ambazonian state on October 1, 2017, by separatist leaders. The government responded with military force, triggering a protracted insurgency that devastated communities and led to mass displacements, particularly across the Cameroon border into Nigeria. Since the escalation of the Ambazonian separatist conflict within the English-speaking regions of Cameroon in 2016, Nigeria has become a critical destination for thousands of refugees fleeing violence, insecurity, and displacement in Cameroon. Ikom, a border

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

Nigeria, a proximate neighbour to Cameroon, has found itself on the frontline of a growing humanitarian and security challenge arising from the conflict. Moreover, with her internationally recognised image of hospitality toward refugees, the sustained inflow of displaced persons has imposed considerable socio-economic pressures on host communities already grappling with limited infrastructure and public services. Nigeria's response to the infiltration has been multifaceted; balancing diplomatic caution, humanitarian commitment, and national security interests and she has largely played a receptive and cooperative role through the establishment of refugee settlements, notably in Ogoja (Adagom and Ukende camps) in Cross River State by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The presence of over 85,000 registered Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, many of whom reside in Cross River State, has led to increased demand for education, healthcare, food, housing, and employment opportunities (UNHCR 12). In Ikom and its environs, schools are overcrowded, health facilities are overstretched, and local markets are saturated, leading to rising tensions over land ownership and resource allocation, strained inter-communal relations, and a surge in living costs. Many residents report declining access to jobs and government services, while infrastructure development has stalled due to shifting priorities and lack of funds (Bassey and Etim 47).

While humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organisations have made considerable efforts to provide support, the needs far outweigh the available resources (UNHCR 15). Additionally, the conflict's protracted nature, coupled with the absence of a definitive political resolution in Cameroon, means that host communities must contend with the long-term implications of displacement, including the risk of economic stagnation and social fragmentation. This paper investigates the socioeconomic impact of the Ambazonian conflict on host communities in Ikom and its environs from 2016 to 2025. Using a mixed-methods approach that includes interviews, field observations, and analysis of humanitarian reports, it explores the interplay between forced migration and local development, with the intention of informing policymakers, humanitarian actors, and development planners on how best to support both refugees and host populations in a context of prolonged displacement.

Theoretical approach:-

The primary aim of this study is to examine the Socio-Economic Impact of the Ambazonian Conflict on Host Communities in Ikom and its environs between 2016 and 2025. This study is anchored on two interrelated theoretical perspectives: the Conflict Theory and the Human Security Framework Theory. These provide the conceptual lens for understanding the extent to which the Ambazonian conflict has produced wide-ranging socio-economic effects on Nigerian host communities in Ikom and its environs. Rooted in the works of Karl Marx, the Conflict Theory posits that society is characterised by persistent inequality and competition over scarce resources. In the context of forced migration, this theory helps explain the struggles that emerge when an influx of refugees intensifies competition for limited social and economic resources in host communities and suggests that the arrival of Cameroonian refugees in Ikom and its environs led to socio-economic tensions over employment, housing, education, health services, and land.

As the host population grapples with sudden demographic changes and economic strain, the redistribution of resources often creates social fragmentation, discrimination, and host-refugee conflict. Thus, the Conflict theory provides a critical framework for analysing the underlying structural inequalities that are either exacerbated or revealed by the presence of displaced populations. According to Coser Lewis, conflict, though often destructive, can also stimulate social change and expose the limitations of existing social systems, potentially leading to more inclusive policy development (Coser 12). First formalised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the post-Cold War era, the Human Security Framework shifts focus from state-centred security to the protection of individual lives and livelihoods and defines human security as encompassing seven interrelated dimensions. These dimensions are the "economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security" (UNDP 24). It recognises that people's security is threatened not only by military threats but also by broader issues, such as food security, health problems, and environmental degradation, and emphasises the interconnectedness of

these threats. As a way forward, the UNDP calls for a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific, and prevention-oriented approach to security.

Applied to this study, the theory provides a holistic understanding of how the Ambazonian conflict has affected not only refugees but also the human security of host populations. It also enables examination of how basic needs and services in Ikom communities have been disrupted or overstretched, including the deterioration of access to clean water, affordable food, jobs, and peaceful cohabitation, which are core components of human security and existence. The theory further emphasises the importance of resilience and community-based responses to conflict-induced displacements, encouraging policymakers to balance emergency humanitarian relief with long-term development strategies that safeguard the rights and dignity of both refugees and hosts. Both theories provide a robust, complementary theoretical foundation for this research. While Conflict Theory explains the socio-economic frictions and inequalities aggravated by refugee inflows, the Human Security Framework shifts attention to the lived experiences and well-being of affected populations. This dual lens supports a comprehensive exploration of the causes, manifestations, and potential solutions to the socioeconomic burdens imposed on Ikom and its environs due to the conflict.

Literature Review:-

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

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

Carlson Anyangwe advances a legal-historical thesis: Ambazonia's predicament is an "African-on-African," in *African-on-African Colonisation: The Ill-Fated Ambazonia-Cameroun Political Partnership*, where he argued that colonisation sustained by post-colonial boundary politics produced a chronic sovereignty dispute and detailed the extent to which legal interpretations of borders and administrative acts (plebiscites, decrees) shaped and coerced post-independence border conflicts, which in practice translates into variable border permeability such as formal closures, informal openings, and new fees that ripple through trade, transport, and livelihoods. Anyangwe's border-law angle is especially useful for Ikom's price volatility: cocoa/garri inflows, timber traffic, and market-day attendance are exquisitely sensitive to whether the border is "porous" or "sealed," which helps to interpret sudden spikes in lodging and transport demand in Ikom and its environs during crackdowns across Manyu or Meme. The argument is normatively strong but empirically thin on granular economic outcomes.

In *The Wealth of Refugees: How Displaced People Can Build Economies*, Alexander Betts reframes refugees as economic actors rather than passive burdens. Drawing on African cases, he argues that outcomes depend on the opportunity structure provided by host communities: the right to work, freedom of movement, access to finance, and the localisation of aid procurement. With these in place, displacement can thicken markets, raise host incomes, and improve services; without them, assistance becomes an enclave that bids up prices (especially housing and staples)

without productivity gains. He also offers the most actionable playbook for Ikom and its environs; if Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government ease work permissions, market-stall access, and buy locally (food, transport, building materials), cash transfers and aid, spending can circulate in Ikom, multiplying through petty trade and transport because where insecurity imposes curfews or heavy checkpoints, the same inflows mostly show up as rent and food inflation. The book's exemplars (e.g., Uganda compacts) operate in different regulatory and fiscal contexts than Nigeria's border communities. Translating the blueprint in the Nigerian context requires attention to Cross River's sub-national constraints, security coordination with the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS)/Customs, and nationwide inflation/FX shocks that confound the identification of conflict-specific effects.

Origin and Nature of the Conflict:-

The protracted Ambazonian conflict in Cameroon led to a mass displacement of people, with thousands of Cameroonian refugees seeking safety in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State. Ikom and its neighbouring communities become major host locations due to their geographic proximity and ethnic ties to the conflict regions in Cameroon. While the humanitarian dimension of the crisis received moderate attention, the socio-economic consequences on host communities, especially in rural and semi-urban settlements, have not been adequately documented or addressed. Host communities continued to face increased pressure on already overstretched resources and infrastructure. These include diverse areas. The more pressing areas were: overcrowded educational institutions, under-resourced healthcare services, and strained public utilities. In addition, the influx also led to higher demand for food, housing, and employment, thereby inflating the cost of living and triggering competition between refugees and residents.

This study investigates and exposes the lack of a comprehensive understanding and effective intervention strategies targeting the socio-economic impacts of the conflict on host communities, who have continued to face deteriorating living standards, weakening social cohesion, and deepening developmental deficits, without clear documentation and policy recommendations. It is estimated that as of 2024, the conflict has claimed thousands of lives and displaced over 750,000 people internally, with more than 85,000 refugees seeking asylum in Nigeria, many of whom are residents in Ikom and its environs (UNHCR 2023). The conflict in Cameroon is characterised by guerrilla warfare, human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, the burning of villages, school shutdowns, and the targeting of civilians by both state forces and separatist militias. The international community, including the United Nations, the African Union, and regional blocs, have called for dialogue and humanitarian intervention. However, a lasting political solution remains elusive, and the conflict's spillover into Nigerian territory has had serious humanitarian and socio-economic consequences for border communities, overstretching their infrastructure and testing Nigeria's refugee management capabilities.

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

The Anglophone population began to express dissatisfaction with political exclusion, linguistic and educational marginalisation, and economic neglect. These issues culminated in peaceful protests by Anglophone lawyers and teachers in late 2016, which were violently suppressed by Cameroon forces. In response, separatist groups declared the independence of Ambazonia, a proposed state encompassing the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, on October 1, 2017. This act triggered a violent conflict between Ambazonian armed groups and the Cameroonian military, marking the beginning of a protracted armed struggle. The consequence of the military action was the mass migration of people from the affected area, a symbol of people in distress.

Host Communities around Ikom and their Characteristics:-

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

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

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

Communal festivals and cultural events, such as the Ikom International New Yam Festival, also contributed to efforts to promote cultural inclusion and unity. It is instructive to mention that some displaced persons from Cameroon share ethnic and linguistic ties with some host communities in Nigeria. Be that as it may, inter-communal frictions have emerged, especially around identity politics, land access, and public service distribution, in places such as the Danare and Belegete communities in the Boki and Obanliku local government areas, respectively. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) report growing host fatigue and rising tensions between youths of both communities over employment and resource distribution (UNHCR 24).

Cultural and Ethnic Ties with the Ambazonian Population:-

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

Both the host communities in Ikom and the Ambazonian populations celebrate similar festivals and cultural rites, such as the New Yam Festival, traditional wrestling, and masquerade performances, thereby sharing a cultural tradition that provides a platform for cultural exchanges and community cohesion between refugees and hosts

(Essien and Eno 17). This affinity facilitates a relatively welcoming environment in Ikom and prompts host communities to provide informal support networks, including shared farming activities, community protection, and cultural participation (UNHCR 17). Despite their cultural and linguistic affinities, their coming together has not, however, completely obliterated conflicts between them.

Cross-Border Effects of the Crisis on Nigeria:-

The conflict has had significant cross-border effects on Nigeria, particularly in border communities like Ikom, Obanliku, Boki, and Etung Local Government Areas of Cross River State, as well as parts of Benue and Taraba States. It is estimated that over 85,000 Cameroonians have fled into Nigeria seeking refuge, with a substantial number settled in camps such as Adagom and Okende in Ogoja LGA. Some have informally integrated into host communities in the Ikom and Boki LGAs of Cross River State. This influx has placed enormous pressure on existing social infrastructure in areas such as healthcare, education, sanitation, and housing, often overwhelming local authorities' efforts and creating competition for limited resources. According to UNHCR, many refugees live outside camps and rely heavily on communal support systems, increasing vulnerability among both refugees and host populations (UNHCR 23), altering local economic dynamics. Ogar Osadim, a respected traditional ruler in one of the affected border communities in Ikom, described the situation as both a "moral obligation and a cultural dilemma." According to him, traditional institutions were among the first to respond when Cameroonian refugees began crossing into Nigerian territory: "We opened our lands and homes, offered shelter and food. But as the years passed, it became clear that we were ill-equipped to handle the burden alone" (Osadim, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

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

Socio-Economic Impact of the Conflict:-

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

The sudden population increase in Ikom metropolis due to this influx strained existing social infrastructures, which were already fragile before the conflict. Health facilities, for instance, have become overstretched, leading to inadequate medical care. At the same time, educational institutions continue to face overcrowding, limiting access to quality education for both host community children and refugees (Essien and Eno 18). For instance, Ali Abdullahi, a traditional medicine vendor who has lived in Ikom for over 38 years, shared insights into how the influx of refugees affected the local health ecosystem when he observed that many displaced persons could not afford conventional medical care and thus turned to herbal remedies, "People came with wounds; some fresh, some infected. Many had no money for hospital, so they came to us." (Abdullahi, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

The conflict-induced influx also increased demand for scarce jobs, worsening unemployment levels among host community youths, as many displaced persons depend on host communities for economic survival. The dire situation intensified competition in the informal labour market, driving down wages and increasing economic burden on households, which in turn deepened poverty and reduced overall community welfare. The additional demand for

goods and services pushed up prices, affecting the affordability of goods and services for host community members. Basic commodities such as food, fuel, and building materials have seen price hikes, disproportionately impacting vulnerable groups, leading to a rising cost of living that has eroded household incomes and increased economic hardship (C.R.S Economic Review 12). Ifeanyi Ewah, an onion seller at the Ikom Main Market, reported that the presence of refugees brought both challenges and unexpected benefits. On one hand, he said, “There are more buyers now. But everything is more expensive even for us who sell.” (Ewah, Oral Interview, 8/06/2025).

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

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

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

Responses to the Challenges:-

As the world is increasingly inundated with inequalities and inequities, there is a corresponding need for integration and cooperation (Odey, 2025, p. 252). In response to the multifaceted challenges arising from the conflict, various actors, including government agencies, international organisations, and local communities, have initiated a range of interventions to alleviate the socio-economic burdens on host communities. For instance, international agencies such as UNHCR, ICRC, and the Nigerian government have provided critical humanitarian aid to both displaced persons and host communities. Relief efforts by these agencies included distributing food, potable water, medical supplies, and non-food items to mitigate immediate suffering. Mobile health clinics and vaccination campaigns have been deployed to reduce disease outbreaks in overcrowded settlements and host areas. The construction and rehabilitation of schools and health facilities have also been supported through donor funding and government initiatives to increase access for both host and displaced populations (Nkafu & Enoh, 2018, p. 19).

Water and sanitation projects, including borehole drilling, have been implemented to improve public health. At the same time, revitalisation of local economies has focused on providing livelihood opportunities for both refugees and host community members. Skills acquisition training, microcredit schemes, and agricultural support programmes have been introduced to help affected persons regain economic independence, complementing the efforts of community-based organisations by facilitating market access and promoting small business development, while reducing dependency on aid (Okon & Anwana, 2021, p. 41). Recognising the potential for social tensions, peacebuilding activities have been integrated into response efforts through dialogue forums, community sensitisation campaigns, and conflict resolution training to promote coexistence and reduce host-refugee tensions (Tita and Luman 30), with local leaders and civil society organisations playing key roles in fostering reconciliation and

enhancing social cohesion. International organisations have continued to coordinate closely with Nigerian government agencies, local authorities, and community leaders to optimise the impact of interventions through platforms such as the Humanitarian Coordination Forum, established to ensure harmonised aid delivery and prevent duplication of efforts.

Summary:-

The ongoing Ambazonian conflict has significantly impacted the socioeconomic fabric of host communities in Ikom and its surrounding areas. These communities have experienced economic disruptions due to the influx of refugees and internally displaced persons, which have strained agricultural productivity, local markets, and employment opportunities. The increased population, on the other hand, has overwhelmed existing social infrastructure, including healthcare, education, housing, and water supply, leading to reduced access and quality of services. Social tensions have occasionally arisen from competition over scarce resources despite shared ethnic and cultural ties between both parties. Furthermore, the conflict has heightened vulnerabilities related to food security, health, and psychosocial well-being, posing challenges to human security in the region. Addressing these burdens requires collaborative efforts from government agencies, international organisations, and local actors to restore stability, rebuild infrastructure, and foster sustainable development for both host and displaced populations.

Conclusion:-

The Ambazonian conflict has imposed a profound socio-economic burden on the host communities in Ikom and its environs, disrupting livelihoods, straining social infrastructure, and challenging social cohesion. The influx of displaced populations has exacerbated resource scarcity, increased unemployment, and overwhelmed health and educational services, thereby deepening poverty and vulnerability among the hosts. Despite shared cultural and ethnic ties, tensions have occasionally arisen over competition for limited resources. These challenges amplify the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated interventions by government authorities, international organisations, and community stakeholders. Sustainable solutions should focus not only on immediate humanitarian relief but also on long-term development, peacebuilding, and resilience enhancement to restore stability and improve the quality of life for both host communities and displaced persons affected by the conflict.

Recommendations:-

1. The government and development partners should invest in expanding and improving healthcare facilities, schools, water supply, and housing in Ikom and its environs to accommodate both host communities and displaced populations.
2. They should also implement targeted livelihood and skill-development initiatives to boost agricultural productivity, create employment opportunities, and reduce poverty among host communities affected by the conflict.
3. Organise community-based dialogue platforms and peacebuilding activities that would foster mutual understanding and cooperation between host communities and displaced persons to prevent tensions and build lasting peace.
4. International organisations and NGOs should scale up humanitarian aid, focusing on food security, healthcare, psychosocial support, and protection services to vulnerable groups within host communities.
5. Collaborative security measures between Nigeria and Cameroon are essential to reduce cross-border violence, secure trade routes, and facilitate safe movement, benefiting both host and displaced communities.
6. Authorities should also develop inclusive policies that recognise the rights and needs of both host communities and displaced persons, ensuring equitable access to resources and services.

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