

Global Protection Cluster Mission Report: Cameroon, May 2021

The Global Protection Cluster (GPC) Coordinator conducted a mission to support Cameroon's National Protection Cluster and raise awareness on the ongoing protection crises. The mission is a follow up to Global Cluster Coordinators Group training to the Intersectoral Group in Cameroon organised by OCHA in April 2021. The mission met with people affected by the crises, authorities, local organisations, INGOs and UN Agencies, Protection Cluster and Areas of Responsibility Lead Agencies, OCHA, intersectoral groups, Protection Cluster and Sectors including Areas of Responsibility, Education Cluster, humanitarian-development-peace nexus coordinator, Member States and Donor Group, Humanitarian Country Team and Humanitarian Coordinator.

Overall

The two crises in Cameroon in the far North and South West North West are characterised by breaches of international humanitarian law and major structural, pre-existing and accelerated protection risks. The current needs and risks are major and risk catastrophic acceleration.

Some 2000,000 people are under direct threat of targeting, IED attacks, child recruitment, kidnaping and detention; over 1000,000 Internally Displaced People; 500,000 children out of school with 2 out of 3 schools in crises regions attacked and closed; major spike in sexual and gender based violence, host community largely living below poverty line with scarce water and agricultural land, active obstruction and attacks on humanitarian aid; about 1000,000 youth rendered idle due to lack of education and livelihoods opportunities and at risk of being pulled into the conflicts. For context please read this short article.

Against all these needs, a very humble Humanitarian Response Plan was developed of about 250 Million USD dedicated to Cameroonians in crises. Mid-year through, about 10-15% of the resources have been secured with most of it used for programmes foundations and staffing leaving very little operational resources responding the needs and risks. Almost no action at all is conducted with the 400,000 IDPs outside the immediate proximity of the crises epicentres. Some organisations have and are shutting down.

Observations and general recommendations

Different narrative and International Humanitarian Law. The way we talk about Cameroon is working in a limited way to open political doors, increase humanitarian access, mobilise resources. We need something different. An Emergency Directors Group mission leading to high-visibility mission by the new Emergency Relief Coordinator or heads of UNICEF or UNHCR could be a start. A specific event or rallying point for Cameroon should be considered soon. We need a more robust IHL compliance advocacy regarding the conduct of hostilities and unhindered humanitarian access especially in the North West South West with all parties to the conflict. We must diversify the channels of advocacy inside Cameroon and Internationally by the European Union, Germany, France, Japan, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.

Invest in what is working. The protection response related to gender-based violence, child protection, housing land and property, documentation and awareness raising regarding explosives is ready to scale up with the right expertise in country and local partners. We should ensure resources are availed. Water, shelter, education response are needed and if done well, transformational. Moreover, the civil society and authorities in Cameroon are ready and keen to respond, we must support and learn from them and ensure that 25% of the HRP projects for 2022 are targeted towards local actors. Some 400,000 IDPs and their hosts are outside the North West South West and the Far North immediate proximity and receive no support. In these areas, we must step up protection response especially with regards to child protection and gender-based violence. The risks of human trafficking to these areas and maybe beyond Cameroon need to be evaluated and acted upon. Probably the two areas of challenges that are most influential in turning the tide are education and youth. We need to grow the investment in these areas and see traditional UNDP, UNICEF and Education Cannot Wait programmes commensurate to risks and opportunities.

Development and stabilisation action to create protective environment in the Far North. It is encouraging to see the drive behind the "nexus zones de convergences" in the far north. All existing humanitarian

services should be enabled in these zones and protection mandated organisations should get fully engaged in the design and discussions on no regret basis. This is one place where the nexus can be practically done. We should give it our best shot. We need to also start discussing solutions beyond the elusive return option. This needs the right players around the table and resources available to enable solutions. Finally, the hospitality of the receiving community is being tested by scarcity of water, land and services in general. We must step up development programmes especially in IDP sites receiving villages because it is right, it is needed and avoids growing tensions. There are protection challenges that are pre-existing and accelerated by the crisis that require further understanding and strong development investment. These include but are not limited to mental health and psychosocial support, disability inclusion, gender-based violence, child labour, documentation and trafficking in persons. We must step up understanding and collaboration around these areas with authorities, development actors and civil society. These areas constitute an important space of development-humanitarian collaboration.

The intersectoral group led by OCHA are progressing in the transition towards a solid humanitarian coordination structure. Due to the limited resources and overall development-oriented culture in the operation, there is very limited dedicated humanitarian coordination resources. This needs to change to step up analysis and integrated programming. We recommend a very light review of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle for 2022. Instead, the focus should be on operational coordination and finding linkages with development and stabilisation machinery. Ensure senior leadership of the Intersectoral group for example by the Deputy Head of Office. Strengthen access negotiation and civil military coordination.

Specific Recommendations to the Protection Cluster and Intercluster.

The National Protection Cluster is improving, having moved away from a challenging coordination period. The collaboration within the cluster is on good track and the progress regarding operational coordination, monitoring, analysis, advocacy with the donors and intentions to better engage in the nexus opportunities are commendable. Here are some agreed upon and recommended areas of focus.

- 1. Ensure basics are in place:** the cluster needs to continue building the foundations. The focus should be on the following: continue harmonising protection monitoring to get to a point of a single common part and common report (2021), continue producing regular protection analysis and align gradually with the Protection Analytical Framework (2021), harmonise referral pathway (2022), continue with regular (every 6 weeks) communication with donors and diplomats.
- 2. Strengthen the protection cluster and AORs dedicated coordination and information management staffing** in Yaoundé and the regions and drive towards gradual activation of the housing land and property and mine action areas of responsibility (2021).
- 3. Strengthen shared leadership and nationalisation of the cluster** through (i) stronger and systematic representation and capacity building to local actors (2021), (ii) ensuring we are getting closer to 25% of HRP submissions for 2022 to local actors (2021), (iii) Initiating a co-coordination of the cluster with focus on localisation and mainstreaming with the ambition of having this role filled by a national actor by 2023. (iv) Exploring leadership and advocate for programmes for the areas of: antitrafficking, MHPSS, disability inclusion and youth.
- 4. Engage strategically in the 2022 HPC.** In light of the current coordination basics in place and funding situation (i) Engage in the 2022 HNO and HRP through a very light review process of the documents at national level (the effort should not exceed a week worth of work). (ii) invest in conducting projects submission workshops with focus on national partners with the ambition of getting closer to the 25% localisation target. (iii) in collaboration with the nexus coordinator, conduct an analysis that outlines the key development programmes that are needed per region to enable protection outcomes.