



Deutsche Afrika Stiftung e.V.  
Fondation Allemande pour l'Afrique  
German Africa Foundation

## Summary

# New chances for peace in Cameroon? Women as pioneers of local conflict resolution approaches

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## Background

Cameroon has been the scene of complex violent conflicts for years. In the Anglophone North-West and South-West, separatists have been fighting for territorial independence since 2017, while armed attacks by the jihadist Boko Haram have been occurring repeatedly in the Far North since 2014. Meanwhile, violent attacks by Seleka and Balaka militias on the civilian population are on the rise in the east of the country.

Girls and women are particularly affected by the effects of the armed conflicts. Nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of this, they are involved in peace-building measures on a large scale. A shining example of this is the *1<sup>st</sup> National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon*, launched in 2021, which has succeeded in building bridges of dialogue between opposing camps and thus making an important contribution to conflict resolution in their home country. What lessons can be learnt from the successful involvement of women in the peace processes in Cameroon? What conclusions can be drawn for other conflicts in the region and beyond? And what can German feminist foreign and development policy learn from initiatives like these?

## Highlights

- Women and women-led initiatives play a central role in establishing and maintaining peace in Cameroon and beyond.
- Trust-based cooperation within the framework of the feminist foreign and development policy is a cornerstone of German support for women-led peace initiatives.
- Support for women in peacebuilding from international partners requires clear, secure and needs-based funding and must include security aspects as well as training and capacity-building

## The 1<sup>st</sup> National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon

The conflicts in Cameroon were complex and spanned all four regions, explained Sally Mboumien. In 2017, for example, the so-

## Welcome Remarks

### Dr Karamba Diaby MP

Member of the Committees on Foreign Affairs and Economic Cooperation and Development, Chairperson of the PG West Africa

### Rebecca Schamber MP

Member of the Committees on Economic Cooperation and Development, Defence as well as the Subcommittee on United Nations, International Organisation and Civilian Crisis Prevention

### Dr Henrik Maihack

Head of Africa Department, Friedrich Ebert Foundation

## Discussion

### Sally Mboumien, Esther Omam & Marthe Wandou

Representatives of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon, winner of the German Africa Award 2023

### Birgit Pickel

Head of the Africa Department at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

## Moderation

### Sabine Odhiambo

Secretary General, German Africa Foundation



called 'Anglophone' crisis, in which separatist groups are fighting for the territorial independence of the English-speaking and French-speaking regions, caused outbreaks of violence in the North-West and South-West of the country, which have continued. In addition, the civilian population was struggling with corruption, poverty and hunger. Meanwhile, in the far North and East, there are regular attacks by the jihadist Boko Haram and Seleka and Balaka militias.

Cameroonian society was characterised by patriarchal structures, which also led to power imbalances within the communities, said Mboumien. Accordingly, women were traditionally and structurally marginalised, especially at the political level and in peacebuilding. The *1st National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon* was therefore a response to the conflicts in Cameroon by women who are otherwise hardly represented in the political arena, emphasised Mboumien. The aim was to unite women from all regions and with the most diverse social backgrounds and to give them a common voice. To this end, the platform had structured itself into various committees and initiated talks to gain access to key players, such as the government, traditional and religious leaders and international organisations, and to build bridges for dialogue with and between the conflict players. In this way, the Women's Peace Platform had succeeded in being accepted by all parties to the conflict, explained Esther Omam. At the first Women Conference for Peace in 2021, a total of 1,800 women from all parts of the country had come together and formulated a so-called Appeal for Peace with concrete recommendations for action for the government, which was then presented to the government in a high-profile event. Since then, the convention had attempted to contribute to political dialogue and peacebuilding and to mediate between various parties to the conflict. According to Omam's plea, the platform's mediation successes to date would show that the systematic inclusion of women is necessary and essential for the peace process in Cameroon. Women would not only want to sit at the negotiating table, but also make their presence meaningful and effective, she added. To this end, further steps were necessary to structurally and systematically involve women in peace processes at a political level.

### **Feminist foreign and development policy as a cornerstone of cooperation**

All panellists emphasised the importance of the inclusion of women in peace negotiations. Studies had shown that peace agreements lasted longer when women were involved in the peace negotiations, said Dr Karamba Diaby. Societies with a high degree of equality were also more stable, peaceful and economically successful, added Rebecca Schamber, emphasising the necessity of the feminist foreign and development policy set out in the coalition agreement.

According to Birgit Pickel, this was based on a holistic approach in line with the so-called three or four 'Rs' to strengthen the rights, resources, representation and respect of and for women, girls and other marginalised groups at all levels. Feminist development cooperation was linked to UN Resolution 1325, which includes not only the protection of women and girls in war zones, but also the strengthening of women's participation in political processes and institutions in the management and prevention of conflicts. It was important to recognise that violent conflicts are never gender-neutral and that women and girls were usually particularly affected, added Pickel. Especially, the effects of sexualised violence on women and girls and the associated stigmatisation must be given greater consideration. Accordingly, she emphasised that projects of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) were currently being reviewed for the inclusion of gender aspects. By 2025, 93% of all new bilateral commitments should include women and girls in the agenda. In addition, the BMZ had succeeded in including the focus on improving the situation for women and girls in all existing agreements in 2023, especially during government negotiations with Cameroon. Nevertheless, it was still necessary to integrate women even more into peacebuilding projects, emphasised Pickel and called for this to be pursued further both at the level of the African Union (AU) and in regional organisations.



### **Approaches for sustainable peace work**

The Women's Peace Platform in Cameroon was based on three basic principles that set the platform apart from other peacebuilding initiatives, emphasised Marthe Wandou. These were: (1) the integration of local experiences (grassroots level) into the negotiations at national level, (2) the inclusion of different generations and, above all, young people, and (3) the impartiality and neutrality of the platform. Wandou also referred to the platform's aspiration to bring its work back to the communities and thus advocate transparency and mediation. To this end, the platform had developed ten regional strategies in Cameroon, explained Esther Omam. However, Sally Mboumien criticised the fact that it was not enough to integrate women into peacebuilding measures at national level alone. Instead, better cooperation and more dialogue were also needed at international level, said Mboumien. Especially in peacebuilding, women would need to network better worldwide - and an African Women's Agenda should be implemented at a continental level. Germany also advocated for better integration of women in peacebuilding at the level of the African Union (AU) and regional organisations, added Pickel, referring to a planned project on human rights and women in cooperation with the AU Commission as an example.

### **Starting points and perspectives for a feminist foreign and development policy to support women in peacebuilding**

Above all, women peacebuilders would like to see improved cooperation from German decision-makers in funding as well as the associated financial and personnel protection and security measures. Marthe Wandou emphasised the need to pursue a trust-based rather than a risk-based approach when it comes to financing measures. According to Sally Mboumien, it would be crucial to enable new opportunities and a kind of flexible financing for women-led peacebuilding initiatives. She criticised the fact that most of the funding was currently provided for military aid and called for more financial support for women in the field of peacebuilding (feminist funding). To achieve this, the theoretical approach of feminist foreign policy would have to be better implemented in practice and bureaucratic hurdles removed. It would also be necessary to create more clarity on funding issues and to ensure that the funding provided corresponds to the wishes and objectives of the partner organisations. With regard to this, Birgit Pickel emphasised the local ownership approach that the BMZ was already pursuing in cooperation with the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) in order to provide targeted support for local initiatives. Although she referred to the BMZ's obligation to provide accountability, she emphasised that alternative instruments would currently be examined to enable more direct funding, albeit via aid structures. She also promised support for feminist umbrella organisations, which in turn should promote grassroots organisations at regional level. However, Sally Mboumien warned that more security should not only be created around financial support, but also for women themselves. Protective measures were needed to strengthen the position of women in peacebuilding, who were often exposed to threats from various sides. It would also be necessary to support women-led organisations in the context of psychological care, such as trauma treatment or assistance following sexualised violence, demanded Marthe Wandou. International partners could make an important contribution here and promote local infrastructures and institutions as well as the training and capacity building of women. According to Sally Mboumien, the latter would also be desirable in order to create spaces for women and their political participation. Special programmes were needed to support women at a political level and to integrate the Women's Peace Platform at a political level. Marthe Wandou added that a bilateral dialogue with Germany should go even further and include topics such as good governance or climate change, as these are also triggers for crises and conflicts. Birgit Pickel emphasised that the BMZ would continue to critically review its contribution in relation to the demands made.