

# **The winners and losers in a civil war economy**

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## **Introduction**

Man has lived with various conflicts from time immemorial. War may be defined as a state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country while peace is the absence of war and structural violence. Our discussion will be based on civil wars concerning Africa in general and the ongoing conflict in the Republic of Cameroon in particular. It's very complicated when conflicts degenerate into wars because different interests come into play and sometimes the original cause of the conflict may be forgotten while the war is still going on. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the winners and losers in a civil war economy and why most civil wars last for years despite the adverse consequences.

The wars in countries like Somalia, Libya, and Cameroon have become a global threat. These "states" have governments that are unable to control the territorial integrity of their countries. This is due to the sporadic fight between governments and rebel or separatist troops despite the internal and international pressure or efforts to end the conflicts.

I believe that some of these conflicts are difficult to resolve because of the civil war economy, although this fact has nothing to do with the original causes of the conflicts. In the course of wars, some of the belligerents may derive some economic, social and political "benefits" and these advantages may propel them to shun all peace efforts. A civil war economy is a social room where the distribution of scarce resources is carried out by the use of force or with violence.

War economy generally is not just about the typical goods like weapons and drugs but also the uncontrolled export of raw materials like gold, diamond, timbers, foodstuffs, and extortion to an extent.

## **Losers in a civil war economy**

### **1. loss of life**

Life is sacred and must be protected not only by the state whose major role is to protect life and properties but by everyone in and out of the conflict zones. However, in war, people are likely to die. Some are killed intentionally like the warring parties but most of the times civilians suffer the most. While some people die, some are injured and remain handicapped throughout their lives. Sexual abuse, extrajudicial killing and torture are

common phenomena of most wars. To me, the loss of life is the greatest disadvantage of wars as seen in the Sudan, Liberia, Somalia and Cameroon.

## 2. Destruction of capital

During wars, both private and public properties are often destroyed. Some are intentionally destroyed while others may be collateral damages. In the ongoing Cameroonian conflicts, buses, hundreds of houses and dozens of schools have been burnt in daylight caught on tape. The warring parties accuse each one another of this barbarism. The destruction of these capital increase unemployment, poverty, frustration and despair as exemplified in the partial closure of CDC and Palmol in the South West region of Cameroon.

## 3. Racketeering

During wars, there is always a breakdown of security. Most rebels and even the regular government soldiers sometimes go to the wealthy business tycoons and force them to give money for their protection. If these victims refuse to give the money, their businesses or properties are usually destroyed. Some of them might even be killed. Well-to-do people are often kidnapped for ransom. The rebel fighters in the town of Muyuka in the Southwest Region of Cameroon kidnapped some catholic priests in 2018 and millions of CFA Franc were paid as ransom through a local catechist. Kidnapping is common in the conflict zones of Cameroon. The Fon of Nso and Rev. Cardinal Tumi were Kidnapped near the city of Bamenda but released a few days later due to criticism from home and abroad.

## 4. Refugees

During wars, there are three major things people can do. People may flee to other countries or safer places in the same country, stay and suffer in their areas of location or take part in the war as combatants. None of these three options is good and each has its consequence.

Fleeing a country is a difficult situation for everyone, it begins with the loss of all types of capital. One cannot flee with his house or farm. People may lose their skills and some of their qualifications may not be useful or accept in their host countries. The social relation is destroyed or left behind. Some African refugees have problems with the recognition of their certificates in Germany, some are highly qualified but are not allowed to work in their field of studies.

Neighbouring countries mostly bear the brunt of wars. There are about 500 000 Southern Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, thousands of Somalian

refugees in Kenyan and thousands of Ethiopians are fleeing to Sudan because of the Tigray conflict. The nightmare refugees and IDP face are due to wars or conflicts.

## 5. Business

Business and economic development are usually slow during wars. Some Southern Cameroonians have moved their business to the safer zones in East Cameroon. Those who prefer to stay suffer from constant attacks, fall of demand due to mass exodus of the population and increase in production cost. The cost of production of goods and services are usually high during wars.

## 6. Unemployment

Due to the destruction of businesses and insecurity during wars, unemployment is always high in the war zones although these happenings might lead to employment elsewhere as discussed in the next session of this paper.

## 7. The state- loss of revenue

While the citizens are killed and flee during wars, the state loses revenue from taxes in the conflict zones and usually spend much on defence. Critical infrastructures (electricity network, telephone, water supply, etc) are destroyed and this affects everybody in the country. Reconstruction of social amenities is a costly venture for the state and other concerned parties.

## **The beneficiary in a civil war economy**

### 1. The charismatic leaders

Some of the actors during wars have become heroes and some have risen to lead their countries as ministers and head of state. Leaders like Charles of Liberia and Museveni of Uganda come to mind. Charles Taylor was involved in the diamond business as a rebel leader during the Liberian civil war. It should be mentioned that Liberia is a diamond-rich country.

### 2. The fighters

Some fighters also benefit during wars especially if their side wins. Nevertheless, fighters make money during wars through extortion from the

population, sale of raw materials and seizure of properties. Others are recruited to join the official army like the fighters of South Sudan during the inter-Sudanese war. The separatist's leaders of South Sudan are leading the country today. Some separatist's fighters in Cameroon have become rich from extortion and ransom.

3. The middlemen that supply goods and services to the warring parties. These middlemen include arms dealers, health care providers, food suppliers and those involved in the refugee's management business. I read about a UN worker who lost her job because of the reduction of refugees and IDP in South Sudan.

It's on record that some Southern Cameroonian separatist leaders and activists in the diaspora collected funds from sympathizers through social media (GoFundMe, PayPal, Cashapp, etc.) to support the rebels at home but end up embezzling most of the money. Also, some rebel leaders on the field are said to mismanage the funds they received from supporters. In a civil war, it is difficult to have check and balances on the rebels' camps and also the governments' offices. This situation has increased corruption in the country.

#### 4. NGO

Local and international NGOs that work in conflict areas always profit in the form of budget, jobs, assignments and organizational authority. They usually take responsibility in the health, educational and nutritional sectors. A good number of NGO staffs will lose their jobs if the conflicts are resolved because their budget is based on the conflict and their duty may no longer be needed.

#### 5. Criminals

Due to the breakdown of law and order during wars, criminals usually take it as an advantage to enhance their trade. Some criminals who disguised as separatists and extorted money from the local population were caught and beaten in the Southern Cameroonian town of Bamenda by vigilant groups before they were rescued by the police.

#### 6. Government agencies

It should also be noted that government ministries and agencies that deal with the execution of wars or conflicts always have an increase in their budget. The people who receive the extra budget in form of contracts or allowances are also beneficiaries of wars.

## Conclusion

In wars, some capitals are devalued while others are overvalued. Cultural goods like education and professional qualifications lose value drastically. The only qualification that has more value in war than in peacetime is military competence (What Joseph Nye called hard power) no matter the side it comes from. Hard power is simply the ability to use force on others to follow your will. Economic capital is to a greater extent destroyed during wars.

It is but common sense to assert that those people who benefit from wars will not like the wars to come to an end. I believe this is one of the reasons why most civil wars last for years despite many attempts to resolve them. The consequences of avoidable conflicts can be seen in present day Sierra Leone where the economy and social infrastructure is in a disastrous state due to the civil war in the 90s. Cameroon would not be different if the conflict is not brought to a speedy end.