

Between Promise and Delivery: The Functional and Technical Construction of Youth Empowerment and Violent Extremism Prevention Policy in Cameroon

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800017>

Received: 10 August 2026; Accepted: 16 August 2026; Published: 25 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Cameroon has invested significantly in the formal architecture of youth empowerment and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) policy, by constructing ministries, adopting national strategies, launching programme initiatives and establishing delivery mechanisms designed and intended to turn its policy commitments on youth empowerment and the Prevention of Violent extremism into practical outcomes for young people. However, despite these efforts, the country has continued to face a prolonged Boko Haram and ISWAP insurgency in the Far North Region and an ongoing armed conflict in the Anglophone Northwest and Southwest region of Cameroon. raising important questions about the effectiveness of these policy interventions. The gap between what this policy architecture promises and what it actually delivers remains vast and deeply profound. Drawing on a social constructionist analytical framework and the cognitive policy analysis of Muller and Surel, this article examines the functional and technical dimension of Cameroon's youth empowerment and PVE policy that is its instrumental features (the specific programmes, intervention models, and tools through which the policy is operationally delivered) and its procedural features (the budget allocation systems, programme design procedures, and monitoring and evaluation arrangements through which those tools are governed and administered). The analysis demonstrates that the policy instruments are disproportionately directed towards communities and young people who are more accessible, rather than those experiencing the greatest levels of vulnerability and need. It further reveals that the procedures governing policy implementation are constrained by persistent underfunding, highly centralised decision-making, superficial forms of participation, and accountability systems that prioritise programme outputs over meaningful outcomes. Collectively, these weaknesses have produced an implementation framework that is insufficient to address the magnitude and complexity of the youth empowerment and violent extremism challenges in Cameroon. The article concludes by proposing practical recommendations aimed at strengthening the instrumental and procedural dimensions of the policy in order to achieve more effective youth empowerment and sustainable prevention of violent extremism in Cameroon.

Keywords: Youth empowerment; Violent extremism; Social construction;

INTRODUCTION

For many young people living in the communities most affected by Boko Haram violence in the Far North of Cameroon, the impact of the state's youth empowerment programmes has been limited. Their experiences suggest that these interventions have not produced meaningful improvements in their lives or addressed the challenges they face in ways that are sufficiently significant. ¹This assessment should not be interpreted as an expression of pessimism but rather as an evidence-based observation reflecting the realities documented in these conflict-affected communities, where the persistent gap between policy commitments and actual

¹Humanitarian Practice Network, "Youth Inclusion in the Lake Chad Basin: Four Key Barriers" (ODI HPN, April 2023) <https://odihpn.org/en/publication/youth-inclusion-in-the-lake-chad-basin-four-key-barriers/> accessed 28 May 2026.

outcomes has become one of the defining structural weaknesses of the country's youth governance framework.²

Cameroon has a Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education. It has a National Youth Policy, adopted in 2008, which lays out six strategic axes of youth development with admirable comprehensiveness.³ It has a Special Youth Triennial Plan, launched in 2016 with considerable political ambition.⁴ It has a National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, adopted in 2019, which formally acknowledges the structural drivers of radicalisation and calls for a development-centred preventive response.⁵ And it has, since 2025, a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, developed in explicit alignment with UN Security Council Resolution 2250.⁶

These accomplishments should not be underestimated, as they reflect decades of policy development and sustained public investment in establishing the institutional framework for youth governance in Cameroon. Nevertheless, the persistence of violent conflict, increasing social marginalisation, and the continued vulnerability of young people reveal the limitations of this policy architecture. Young people in the Far North who remain at risk of recruitment by violent extremist groups, as well as those affected by the Anglophone Crisis in the Northwest and Southwest Regions, continue to experience inadequate support and limited access to the opportunities and protections that the policy framework is intended to provide.

This article seeks to explain the reasons for this gap by examining these functional and technical dimensions of Cameroon's youth empowerment and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) policy rather than its normative commitments, which have already received considerable scholarly and policy attention.⁷ It focuses on the specific policy instruments, implementation mechanisms, and procedural arrangements through which the policy is translated into practice. Guided by a social constructionist analytical framework and the cognitive policy analysis of Muller and Surel,⁸ the article argues that the functional and technical dimension of the policy is characterised by a fundamental mismatch between the ambition of its stated objectives and the adequacy of the operational resources, institutional design, and procedural systems established to achieve them. Although constraints such as limited funding, administrative weaknesses, and inadequate international support have contributed to this situation, the article contends that the more fundamental problem lies in the cognitive assumptions, discursive constructions, and normative tensions that have shaped the policy's design from the beginning. Consequently, the operational architecture of the policy remains structurally limited in its ability to achieve the outcomes it was intended to deliver.⁹

This article is grounded in two complementary theoretical traditions. The first is the social constructionist perspective developed by Berger and Luckman, which provides the central philosophical foundation for the analysis. From this perspective, public policy is understood not as a neutral or purely technical response to social problems, but as a social construct shaped by the values, beliefs, cognitive assumptions, and power relations of those responsible for its formulation. Applied to youth empowerment and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) in Cameroon, this approach raises a critical analytical question: what assumptions about young people, peace, and violent extremism have informed the design of the policy instruments and implementation procedures? More importantly, it examines how these underlying assumptions influence the

²Oumarou Mahamane, "Boko Haram Insurgency, Youth Mobility and Better Life in the Far North Region of Cameroon (2019) 37 *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 21, 23.

³Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education of Cameroon, National Youth Policy of Cameroon (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2008) 12.

⁴Suwon Rita Beri, "Youth Empowerment in Cameroon: The Special Youth Triennial Plan" (unpublished paper, 2018) 5.

⁵Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education (MINJEC), National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Cameroon (MINJEC 2019) 5.

⁶Republic of Cameroon, National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security 2025-2030 (Government of Cameroon 2025) 6.

⁷Pierre Muller and Yves Surel, *L'Analyse des Politiques Publiques* (Montchrestien 1998) 52.

⁸Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Anchor Books 1966) 129.

⁹Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* (Pearson 2009) 25–48

extent to which those instruments and procedures are capable of effectively addressing the challenges they were intended to resolve.¹⁰

The second theoretical tradition is the cognitive policy analysis of Muller and Surel, whose concept of the *référentiel*, the cognitive and normative framework of representations of the world that every public policy carries within it that provides the specific analytical tool for examining how the foundational cognitive frameworks of Cameroon's youth empowerment and PVE policy have shaped its functional and technical dimension.¹¹ Muller and Surel distinguish the functional-technical dimension of a policy, its operational instruments, tools, and procedural arrangements from its cognitive-normative foundations, arguing that the two dimensions are always interconnected and that understanding the functional dimension requires examining how the cognitive and normative frameworks of the policy have shaped the specific operational choices that give it its practical character.¹² Applied to the Cameroonian case, this analytical approach reveals a functional-technical dimension whose design chooses which communities to prioritise, which instruments to deploy, which procedures to adopt are not neutral technical decisions but the operational expressions of specific cognitive frameworks, with specific and consequential implications for who the policy reaches and what difference it makes.¹³

Complementing this theoretical framework is Michael-lip sky's theory of street- level bureaucracy, which provides the analytical foundation for understanding how the functional and technical dimension of the policy is experienced at the most human and most daily level.

This article is organised into four main sections. Section 2 examines the instrumental features of the policy, focusing on the programmes and intervention models through which youth empowerment and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) are implemented. Section 3 analyses the procedural features of the policy, including the budgeting processes, programme design mechanisms, and monitoring systems that guide implementation. Section 4 discusses the key findings and their implications, while the final section presents the study's recommendations and concludes the analysis.

Unlike previous studies that examine youth empowerment or violent extremism separately, this article analyses the functional and technical construction of policy by integrating social constructionism with cognitive policy analysis. In doing so, it demonstrates that implementation failures originate not only from resource constraints but also from the underlying cognitive assumptions embedded within policy design.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on a qualitative, document-based policy analysis rather than original fieldwork, and its conclusions should be read within that evidentiary scope. Three categories of secondary sources were examined. The first comprises Cameroonian government and ministerial documents, including the National Youth Policy (2006, 2008), the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (2019), the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security (2025–2030), sectoral strategic plans such as PRONEC-REAMORCE, and the MINJEC Statistical Yearbook. The second comprises reports and evaluations produced by international and multilateral organisations, including the United Nations Development Programme, the International Labour Organization, the International Crisis Group, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, and the Nkafu Policy Institute. The third comprises peer-reviewed journal articles, unpublished theses, and policy briefs addressing youth empowerment, violent extremism, and public policy analysis in Cameroon and comparable contexts.

¹⁰ Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Anchor Books 1966) 45–67

¹¹ Pierre Muller, 'L'analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l'action publique' (2000) 50(2) *Revue française de science politique* 189, 193–198.

¹² Pierre Muller, 'L'analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l'action publique' (2000) 50(2) *Revue française de science politique* 189, 193–198.

¹³ Muller (n 1) 201–205

Sources were selected on the basis of three criteria: direct relevance to a MINJEC-administered youth empowerment or PVE instrument, or to the Far North or Anglophone conflict contexts in which these instruments operate; public availability in French or English; and, for empirical claims regarding programme reach, funding, or outcomes, corroboration across at least two independent sources wherever possible. Sources consisting primarily of unverified claims without institutional or academic attribution were excluded.

The analytical procedure combined qualitative thematic coding with the theoretical framework set out above. Each instrument and procedural arrangement identified in the sources was coded first by category (economic empowerment, civic education and moral formation, or community resilience and PVE-specific, for instruments; budget, programme design, or monitoring and evaluation, for procedures), and then according to the cognitive assumptions about youth, vulnerability, and violent extremism that its design appeared to embody, following Muller and Surel's concept of the *référentiel*. Patterns were then drawn across categories, in particular regarding geographic targeting, funding levels, and the distinction between policy outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

This approach carries clear limitations. Reliance on government and donor-produced documents introduces a risk of self-reporting bias, since these sources have an institutional interest in presenting programmes favourably. The article does not draw on original interviews or survey data with programme beneficiaries, and it cannot independently verify quantitative claims of programme reach made in official sources. As discussed further in section 3.3, data gaps produced by insecurity in the Far North and the Anglophone regions constrain not only the government's own monitoring systems but also the evidentiary base available to this article. The analysis presented here should therefore be read as an assessment of policy design and documented implementation patterns, rather than as an independently validated impact evaluation.

The Instrumental Features

The instrumental dimension of Cameroon's youth empowerment and PVE policy encompass the full range of programmes, projects, and intervention models through which the state attempts to translate its normative commitments into operational realities for young people.¹⁴ A review of the existing portfolio reveals three broad categories of instruments, each with its own design logic, its own target population, and its own relationship to the structural conditions that make young people vulnerable to violent extremism.¹⁵

To situate the detailed discussion that follows, Table 1 summarises the major instruments identified in the functional portfolio, together with their target populations, geographic coverage, implementing institutions, funding arrangements, and the principal strengths and limitations documented in the sources reviewed for this article.

Table 1: Overview of Major Youth Empowerment and PVE Instruments in Cameroon

Instrument	Target population	Geographic coverage	Implementing institution(s)	Funding arrangement	Strengths	Limitations
PAJER-U (Rural and Urban Youth Support Programme)	Rural and urban youth entrepreneurs and farmers	National, with urban/peri-urban concentration	MINJEC	State budget	Long-standing, institutionally established support for youth enterprise	Design assumptions favour accessible, better-resourced areas over conflict-affected communities
Special Youth Triennial Plan (2016)	Youth seeking vocational skills and entrepreneurship support	Concentrated in Centre, Littoral and West Regions	MINJEC	State budget	Reached tens of thousands with vocational training, entrepreneurship support and market linkage	Urban-market design excluded Far North and Anglophone conflict zones (e.g. Logone-et-Chari, Momo)
YouthConnekt Cameroon	Youth entrepreneurs and civic participants	National	MINJEC / UNDP	MINJEC–UNDP partnership funding	Expanded vocational training, entrepreneurship and	Subject to the same structural labour-market barriers

¹⁴ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *National Youth Policy of the Republic of Cameroon* (MINJEC 2006) 14–22

¹⁵ Suwun Rita Beri, 'Youth Participation, Nation-Building, and Development in Cameroon: Addressing Radicalism and Unemployment' (2024) 14 *Open Journal of Political Science* 215, 220–225

					participation opportunities	documented by the ILO for the region
CEMER (Civic Education and Moral Rearmament Programme)	General youth population	National; curriculum designed centrally	MINJEC	State budget (PRONEC–REAMORCE strategic plan)	Potential to build civic identity and resilience where locally credible	Centrally designed curriculum has limited cultural relevance in the Far North and low trust in Anglophone regions
National Youth Council (CNJC) and CMPJ platforms	Youth civic participants	National network of centres	MINJEC (statutory bodies)	State budget	Formal institutional channel for youth participation	Consultation often symbolic; conducted after key decisions are made, in inaccessible language/settings
Community dialogue initiatives	Communities affected by Boko Haram / ISWAP	Far North Region	MINJEC, UNDP, local civil society organisations	UNDP / Peacebuilding Fund and partner financing	Reduced inter-communal tension; community-led early-warning systems	Reach and sustainability constrained by inadequate funding and shortage of trained facilitators
DDR reintegration mechanisms	Former combatants and at-risk youth	Far North Region	Government, with international partners	Limited and not clearly specified in available sources	Component of the most PVE-relevant part of the portfolio	Among the least resourced and least developed instruments
Youth-led peacebuilding and community resilience networks	Youth and communities in conflict-affected areas	Northwest (youth mediators); Far North (resilience networks)	Youth organisations and civil society, largely outside state structures	Minimal; systematically underfunded	Most consistently reaches structurally vulnerable communities and builds credible counter-narratives	Limited institutional recognition and funding constrain scale and sustainability

Note: entries reflect the instruments and evidence discussed in the sources reviewed for this article (see section 1.1); funding figures are not disclosed with sufficient granularity in the available public sources to permit a fully quantified comparison.

Economic Empowerment Instruments

Economic empowerment instruments constitute the largest and most institutionally established category of the functional portfolio. The Rural and Urban Youth Support Programme (PAJER-U),¹⁶ the Special Youth Triennial Plan,¹⁷ and the Youth Connekt Cameroon initiative¹⁸ collectively represent the state's primary operational response to the relationship between economic marginalisation and violent extremist vulnerability which is a relationship whose empirical grounding in the Far North context is well established in the scholarly literature.¹⁹

The Special Youth Triennial Plan, launched in 2016, is the most significant of these instruments in terms of its political ambition and its initial public visibility. At its peak, it reached tens of thousands of young Cameroonians with a combination of vocational skills training, entrepreneurship support, and market linkage assistance that is generating real contributions to the economic opportunities of the young people it reached.²⁰ But the plan also illustrated, with particular clarity, the structural limitations that constrain the impact of even the most ambitiously designed economic empowerment instruments in the Cameroonian context. The programme was implemented primarily in the urban regions of the Centre, Littoral, and West, where infrastructure and economic opportunities are relatively more developed. Its design assumed the existence of

¹⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 'The National Support Programme for Rural and Urban Youth (PAJER-U) – Cameroon' (*Youth Policy Toolbox*, 12 April 2019) <https://yptoolbox.unescap.org/portfolio/the-national-support-programme-for-rural-and-urban-youth-pajer-u-cameroon/> accessed 28 May 2026.

¹⁷ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People* (ILO 2022) 12

¹⁸ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education and United Nations Development Programme, *YouthConnekt Cameroon Framework Document* (MINJEC/UNDP 2019) 4–10.

¹⁹ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People* (ILO 2022) 12.

²⁰ Nina Therese Forgewe Azwe, 'Youth Policy and the Future of Africa's Development: Exploring the Potential Contribution of ICT in the Youth Empowerment Process in Cameroon' (2016) *AMCIS 2016 Proceedings* Article 2, 1–5.

functioning markets, financial services, and supportive business environments similar to those found in cities such as Yaoundé and Douala. However, these conditions are largely absent in conflict-affected areas such as Logone-et-Chari and Momo Division, where youth economic empowerment is most needed as a long-term strategy for preventing violent extremism. As a result, the programme failed to adequately reach the communities facing the greatest levels of vulnerability and insecurity.²¹

The uneven geographical implementation of the Special Youth Triennial Plan illustrates a central proposition of Berger and Luckmann's social constructionist perspective. Policy instruments are never socially neutral; rather, they embody the assumptions and worldviews of those responsible for their design. By privileging urban entrepreneurship models over context-specific livelihood strategies suited to conflict-affected rural communities, the programme reproduced an official construction of youth vulnerability that overlooked the lived realities of young people in the Far North and the Anglophone regions. Consequently, the policy did not merely fail in implementation; its design itself reflected a socially constructed understanding of youth needs that systematically favoured administratively accessible populations over structurally vulnerable communities.

The ILO has documented the structural barriers to youth economic inclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa with particular force: the inadequacy of formal employment creation, the absence of financial services accessible to young micro-entrepreneurs, the mismatch between educational outputs and labour market demands.²² In the Cameroonian context, these structural barriers mean that economic empowerment instruments operating within an unchanged structural environment will always be limited in their ultimate impact, reaching the young people who are easiest to serve with the instruments that are easiest to deliver, while leaving unaddressed the structural economic conditions that generate vulnerability in the communities where the consequences of that vulnerability are most severe.²³

Civic Education And Moral Formation Instruments

The second category of instruments in the portfolio is the category of civic education and moral formation, this instruments, include the programmes, curricula, and institutional processes through which the state attempts to cultivate the values, civic identities, and moral orientations of young Cameroonians in ways it considers conducive to national unity, civic virtue, and resistance to violent extremism. The Civic Education and Moral Rearmament programme (CEMER),²⁴ the National Youth Council,²⁵ and the network of civic participation platforms that operate through the CMPJ²⁶ system are the primary instruments in this category.

Well-designed civic education can make a meaningful contribution to the prevention of violent extremism, and existing research on resilience consistently shows that a strong sense of civic identity and community belonging can reduce young people's vulnerability to radicalisation. However, the design and implementation of the Civic Education and Moral Rearmament Programme (CEMER) have limited its effectiveness in the communities where such interventions are most needed. Developed centrally in Yaoundé and delivered through a curriculum largely shaped by French republican civic ideals and the state's national unity narrative, the programme has struggled to resonate with the diverse social and cultural contexts of conflict-affected regions.²⁷

In the Far North, where Islamic values and community traditions form the primary basis of social identity and moral responsibility, a civic education programme centred on state political ideals has limited cultural

²¹ Nkafu Policy Institute, 'The Challenge of Youth Socio-Professional Integration in Cameroon' (*Nkafu Policy Institute*, 2023) <https://nkafu.org/the-challenge-of-youth-socio-professional-integration-in-cameroon/> accessed 28 May 2026; Beri, 'Youth Empowerment in Cameroon' (n 2) 7–9.

²² African Development Bank, *Youth Jobs, Skill and Educational Mismatches in Africa* (Working Paper No 326, AfDB 2019) 8–14.

²³ Nkafu Policy Institute, 'The Challenge of Youth Socio-Professional Integration in Cameroon' (*Nkafu Policy Institute*, 2023) <https://nkafu.org/the-challenge-of-youth-socio-professional-integration-in-cameroon/> accessed 30 July 2026

²⁴ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *National Civic Education Policy Document* (MINJEC 2012) 14–22.

²⁵ Decree No 2009/023 of 15 January 2009 to lay down the organization and functioning of the National Youth Council of Cameroon (CNJC) art 2–6

²⁶ Decree No 2010/1099/PM of 07 May 2010 on the organization and functioning of Multifunctional Youth Promotion Centres (CMPJ) art 2–5

²⁷ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram* (Africa Report N°241

relevance and credibility.²⁸ Similarly, in the Anglophone regions, where prolonged conflict has significantly weakened public trust in state institutions, CEMER is often perceived less as a genuine effort to promote civic participation than as an instrument for reinforcing a national unity narrative that many young Anglophones feel has historically excluded their experiences and aspirations.²⁹

Community Resilience And Pve-Specific Instruments

The most recent category of instruments within the policy portfolio, and the one most directly focused on the structural prevention of violent extremism, consists of community resilience-building and PVE-specific interventions. These include community dialogue initiatives, psychosocial support programmes, DDR reintegration mechanisms, and youth-led peacebuilding activities. Collectively, these interventions represent the most promising component of the operational policy framework, as recognised in the evidence-based literature on preventing violent extremism.³⁰ Despite their considerable potential, however, they remain among the least resourced and least developed elements of the overall policy portfolio.³¹

Community dialogue programmes implemented through partnerships between MINJEC, the UNDP, and local civil society organisations in the Far North have produced genuinely encouraging results where they have been most sustainably implemented: reduced inter-communal tension, strengthened relationships between community leaders and young people, and the development of community-led early warning systems that have enabled communities to identify and respond to signs of extremist recruitment before they escalated into violence.³² But the reach and the sustainability of these programmes have been severely constrained by inadequate funding, insufficient trained facilitators, and the absence of the sustained institutional commitment that genuine community resilience building requires.

The most promising and most undervalued instruments in the entire portfolio are the youth-led peacebuilding initiatives that young Cameroonians themselves have built in conflict-affected communities, the youth mediators in the Northwest who have maintained dialogue across conflict lines, the community resilience networks in the Far North that have resisted Boko Haram recruitment narratives with their own counter-narratives of belonging and purpose.³³ These initiatives operate with a fraction of the resources available to state-designed programmes, and they reach communities and achieve outcomes that those programmes built on assumptions of institutional access, cultural uniformity, and administrative stability that do not hold in conflict-affected settings, consistently fail to replicate.³⁴ Their systematic underfunding and institutional marginalisation constitute, in this article's analysis, the single most consequential missed opportunity in the entire functional dimension of the policy.

The Procedural Features

Behind every programme in the functional portfolio lies a world of administrative procedures including budget approval processes, programme design mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation systems, and inter-institutional coordination arrangements, that ultimately determine what the policy is able to achieve in practice. More than the policy's stated commitments or strategic aspirations, these procedural processes shape its day-to-day

²⁸ Antoine de Padoue Nda Sode, 'Religiosity, Local Governance and Youth Vulnerability in the Far North Region of Cameroon' (2021) 15(2) *African Security Review* 112, 118–122.

²⁹ Suwun Rita Beri, 'Youth Participation, Nation-Building, and Development in Cameroon: Addressing Radicalism and Unemployment' (2024) 14 *Open Journal of Political Science* 215, 222–226

³⁰ United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Dynamics and Incentives for Recruitment* (UNDP 2017) 12–28

³¹ United Nations Development Programme, *PBF Cameroon Intermediary Report: Building Peace and Resilience in Conflict-Affected Communities* (UNDP/PBF 2022) 14–22;

³² Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *Statistical Yearbook on Youth Promotion and Civic Integration* (MINJEC 2023) 58–64.

³³ Achaleke Christian Leke, 'Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Youth Is the Key to Peace' (*PeaceLab Blog*, 26 April 2021) <https://peacelab.blog/2021/04/camerouns-anglophone-crisis-youths-are-the-key-to-peace> accessed 30 July 2026.

³⁴ Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* (Pearson 2009) 112–124

implementation and effectiveness across different communities.³⁵ Although they often receive little attention, the procedural dimensions constitute one of the most critical elements of the policy's functional architecture, as they largely determine whether policy objectives can be translated into meaningful action.³⁶

Budget And Resource Allocation

MINJEC consistently receives one of the lowest budget allocations among government ministries in Cameroon, a financial constraint that significantly limits the implementation of youth empowerment and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) programmes. The consequences of this chronic underfunding are substantial, as they undermine the ministry's ability to deliver interventions at the scale required to achieve its policy objectives. According to the Nkafu Policy Institute, the gap between the resources allocated to MINJEC and those needed to effectively implement the National Youth Policy is not merely a funding shortfall but a structural deficit. This persistent resource gap makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to realise the policy's most ambitious goals within the existing budgetary framework.³⁷

The annual budget cycle creates a second and related procedural constraint: the inflexibility that characterises the allocation and release of funds to frontline delivery programmes. In communities affected by armed conflict, communities like those of the Far North's Mayo Sava department or the Northwest's Momo division, the conditions that determine what a programme needs to do, and how it needs to do it, change rapidly and unpredictably.³⁸ The budget cycle, with its rigid allocation categories, its multi-month approval processes for budget modifications, and its end-of-year spending pressures that reward disbursement over effectiveness, creates a procedural environment fundamentally ill-suited to the dynamic and context-sensitive demands of youth empowerment and PVE delivery in conflict-affected settings. The most acute expression of this mismatch is the persistent disproportion between the resources allocated to military and security responses to violent extremism and those allocated to the development, empowerment, and community resilience responses that the UNDP and the scholarly PVE literature consistently identify as more effective and more sustainable.³⁹

Programme Design and The Local Knowledge Deficit

The concentration of programme design authority in Yaoundé has resulted in a highly centralised decision-making process in which key decisions regarding programme priorities, content, target beneficiaries, and implementation strategies are made predominantly by officials based in the national capital rather than by those with direct knowledge of the communities the programmes are intended to serve.⁴⁰ This centralised approach has created a persistent deficit in local knowledge, limiting the responsiveness of youth empowerment and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) interventions to the realities of conflict-affected communities. As a result, it has become one of the most enduring and significant procedural weaknesses within Cameroon's youth empowerment and PVE policy architecture.⁴¹

A vocational training curriculum designed around the economic conditions and employment opportunities of Yaoundé's urban environment is unlikely to respond effectively to the livelihood realities of a young person

³⁵ Suwun Rita Beri, 'Youth Participation, Nation-Building, and Development in Cameroon: Addressing Radicalism and Unemployment' (2024) 14 *Open Journal of Political Science* 215, 222–226.

³⁶ United Nations Development Programme, *Evaluation of Institutional Support to Youth Empowerment and Peacebuilding in Cameroon* (UNDP Synthesis Report 2022) 28–34.

³⁷ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *Statistical Yearbook on Youth Promotion and Civic Integration* (MINJEC 2023) 12–1

³⁸ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), "Regional Overview Africa: July 2023 - Cameroon" (ReliefWeb, August 2023) <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/acled-regional-overview-africa-july-2023> accessed 28 May 2026.

³⁹ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram* (ICG Africa Report No 241, 16 February 2017) 3 <https://crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/cameroon/cameroon-confronting-boko-haram> accessed 28 May 2026.

⁴⁰ Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What is the Problem Represented to Be?* (Pearson 2009) 2.

⁴¹ Peter A Hall, "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain" (1993) 25(3) *Comparative Politics* 275, 279.

living in Mokolo.⁴² Similarly, a community dialogue approach developed from generic assumptions about conflict-affected settings may have limited relevance when applied to communities with distinct social structures, cultural values, and histories of inter-communal tensions, such as those found in villages within the Mayo Tsanaga Division.⁴³ In the same way, a civic education curriculum developed to promote national unity within a politically stable context may be perceived negatively in communities where relations with the state have been shaped by prolonged military interventions, experiences of arbitrary detention, and alleged violations of rights that the curriculum itself claims to promote and protect.⁴⁴

Although formal mechanisms for community consultation exist within programme design processes, available evidence indicates that these procedures often reproduce a form of symbolic participation rather than enabling genuine community involvement. Consultations are frequently conducted only after major design decisions have already been determined, often in French and within administrative environments that may be unfamiliar or inaccessible to many community members. Moreover, the absence of effective mechanisms for incorporating community perspectives into programme adaptation and revision limits the practical influence of local actors on decisions that directly affect them.⁴⁵ Consequently, participation becomes a procedural exercise rather than a meaningful process of shared ownership, producing programmes that communities may accept during their implementation but often discontinue once external support ends because they were not genuinely developed through the experiences, priorities, and agency of the people they were intended to serve.⁴⁶

The persistence of centralized programme design also challenges assumptions within mainstream policy implementation literature. While Hall's concept of policy paradigms emphasizes the role of institutional learning in policy evolution, the Cameroonian experience suggests limited evidence of such learning despite repeated implementation shortcomings. Rather than adapting programme design in response to contextual realities, administrative structures continue to reproduce centrally defined solutions whose underlying assumptions remain largely unchanged. This institutional inertia reinforces Muller's argument that policy change is constrained by dominant cognitive frameworks that shape both problem definition and acceptable policy responses.

Monitoring, Evaluation, And The Accountability Gap

For the purposes of this analysis, three levels of results are distinguished throughout, following standard usage in the monitoring and evaluation literature. Outputs are the immediate, directly countable products of an intervention, such as the number of young people trained or dialogues convened. Outcomes are the medium-term changes in behaviour, knowledge, or circumstance that outputs are intended to produce, such as improved livelihoods or strengthened civic trust. Impacts are the longer-term, higher-order changes to which a policy ultimately aspires, such as a measurable and sustained reduction in young people's vulnerability to violent extremist recruitment. As the discussion below shows, Cameroon's existing monitoring and evaluation systems are structured almost entirely around the first of these three levels.

The monitoring and evaluation framework of Cameroon's youth empowerment and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) policy faces two major and interconnected limitations. The first concerns the practical difficulty of generating reliable, comprehensive, and disaggregated data on programme implementation, outcomes, and long-term impact.⁴⁷ In the Far North Region, ongoing insecurity has weakened administrative systems and significantly constrained the ability to collect accurate information on programme performance.⁴⁸

⁴² Nkafu Policy Institute, 'The Challenge of Youth Socio-Professional Integration in Cameroon' (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2023) <https://nkafu.org/the-challenge-of-youth-socio-professional-integration-in-cameroon>

⁴³ Local Youth Corner Cameroon, *Youth-Led Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin* (LOYOC Policy Brief 2022) 4–11;

⁴⁴ Achaleke Christian Leke, 'Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Youth Is the Key to Peace' (PeaceLab Blog, 26 April 2021) <https://peacelab.blog/2021/04/camerouns-anglophone-crisis-youths-are-the-key-to-peace> accessed 30 July 2026.

⁴⁵ Sherry R Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969) 35(4) *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 216, 218–221

⁴⁶ Bacchi (n 3) 120–124.

⁴⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Evaluation of Institutional Support to Youth Empowerment and Peacebuilding in Cameroon* (UNDP Synthesis Report 2022) 28–34

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram* (Africa Report N°241, International Crisis Group 2017) 18–22

Similarly, in the Anglophone regions, the disruption of governance structures and the displacement of target populations have created substantial gaps in the population-level data required to assess whether interventions are effectively reaching the communities they are intended to support.⁴⁹

The second challenge relates to the conceptual orientation of existing monitoring and evaluation systems. Current results frameworks tend to prioritise the measurement of immediate programme outputs such as the number of young people trained, community dialogues organised, or DDR beneficiaries reintegrated, rather than assessing broader outcomes and long-term impacts.⁵⁰ While output measurement may be administratively practical, it does not adequately capture whether these interventions have achieved their fundamental objectives, including improving young people's livelihoods, strengthening their social and civic inclusion, or reducing their vulnerability to violent extremist recruitment.⁵¹ Consequently, the existing accountability framework is more effective at satisfying institutional reporting requirements than at generating the evidence necessary for meaningful policy learning, adaptation, and long-term improvement of youth empowerment and PVE interventions.⁵²

Key Findings and Their Implications

The instrumental and procedural analysis presented in sections 2 and 3 generates five key findings whose implications for the understanding and reform of youth empowerment and PVE policy in Cameroon are both theoretically significant and practically urgent.

First, the policy instruments are disproportionately directed towards communities that are easier to access rather than those experiencing the greatest levels of need.⁵³ Consequently, the young people most vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups, particularly those living in the rural and peri-urban border communities of the Far North and in displacement camps across the Anglophone regions are either inadequately served or excluded altogether from existing programmes.⁵⁴ This imbalance is not simply the result of poor implementation; rather, it reflects a fundamental weakness in the design of the policy instruments themselves. From the outset, they have not been adequately adapted to the practical realities and operational challenges of delivering services in conflict-affected and geographically inaccessible areas.⁵⁵

Second, the procedural architecture of the policy is characterised by chronic underfunding, centralised design, and inflexibility that together produce a delivery system structurally incapable of genuine responsiveness to the needs of the communities it claims to serve.⁵⁶ MINJEC's budget allocation is inadequate to the scale of its mandate. Its programme design procedures generate a local knowledge deficit that disconnects programme content from community reality. And its monitoring and evaluation systems measure what is easy to count rather than what genuinely matters while generating administrative accountability without programmatic improvement.⁵⁷ In terms of the outputs, outcomes, and impacts distinction introduced in section 3.3, the existing framework is well suited to counting outputs but poorly equipped to demonstrate the outcomes and impacts on which the policy's ultimate justification depends.

⁴⁹ Local Youth Corner Cameroon, *Youth-Led Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin* (LOYOC Policy Brief 2022) 8–12

⁵⁰ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *Statistical Yearbook on Youth Promotion and Civic Integration* (MINJEC 2023) 20–25.

⁵¹ Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* (Pearson 2009) 118–125

⁵² Pierre Muller, 'L'analyse cognitive des politiques publiques: vers une sociologie politique de l'action publique' (2000) 50(2) *Revue française de science politique* 189, 198–202

⁵³ Nkafu Policy Institute, 'The Challenge of Youth Socio-Professional Integration in Cameroon' (Nkafu Policy Institute, 2023) <https://nkafu.org/the-challenge-of-youth-socio-professional-integration-in-cameroon/> accessed 31 July 2026

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram* (Africa Report N°241, International Crisis Group 2017) 18–22

⁵⁵ Suwun Rita Beri, 'Youth Participation, Nation-Building, and Development in Cameroon: Addressing Radicalism and Unemployment' (2024) 14 *Open Journal of Political Science* 215, 220–225.

⁵⁶ Carol Bacchi, *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to be?* (Pearson 2009) 115–122.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *Statistical Yearbook on Youth Promotion and Civic Integration* (MINJEC 2023) 18–2

Third, the most impactful interventions within the policy framework are often those that receive the least financial and institutional support namely, the youth-led peacebuilding and community resilience initiatives established by young people themselves in conflict-affected communities.⁵⁸ These initiatives demonstrate that Cameroon already possesses the essential foundations of an effective community-based approach to preventing violent extremism, rooted in the local knowledge, social networks, and civic commitment of young people who have continued to promote peace despite extremely difficult circumstances. The principal challenge, therefore, is not the absence of youth capacity or commitment, but the limited institutional recognition, inadequate funding, and insufficient political support needed to enable these initiatives to expand their reach and maximise their impact.⁵⁹

Contrarily, although this article identifies significant weaknesses within Cameroon's youth empowerment architecture, it would be inaccurate to conclude that these policies have produced no positive outcomes. Programmes such as the Special Youth Triennial Plan, PAJER-U and YouthConnekt Cameroon have expanded access to vocational training, entrepreneurship support and youth participation opportunities for thousands of young people. Similarly, community resilience initiatives implemented with international partners have contributed to local peacebuilding in several conflict-affected communities. The argument advanced here is therefore not that these initiatives lack value, but rather that their overall impact remains constrained by structural and procedural weaknesses that limit their effectiveness where vulnerability is greatest.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this article lead to four key recommendations for strengthening the functional and technical dimensions of youth empowerment and PVE policy in Cameroon.

The first recommendation is the need to reorient programme implementation geographically. MINJEC and its implementing partners should prioritise the communities most affected by violent extremism and armed conflict by redirecting programme interventions towards these areas. This requires developing mobile outreach mechanisms capable of operating effectively in conflict-affected environments,⁶⁰ recruiting and training community-based personnel from the localities they serve, and designing interventions that respond to the specific social, economic, and security realities of the Far North, Northwest, and Southwest Regions,⁶¹ rather than relying on implementation models developed primarily for urban settings.

The second recommendation is to strengthen support for youth-led initiatives through sustained and meaningful investment. The Cameroonian government, together with its international development partners, should establish a dedicated and adequately funded mechanism to support youth-led peace building and community resilience programmes.⁶² Such a funding framework should be flexible, feature simplified application procedures, promote genuine ownership of projects by youth organisations, and adopt monitoring and evaluation criteria developed collaboratively with these organisations rather than being externally imposed.⁶³

The third recommendation calls for comprehensive procedural reform. The design and implementation of youth empowerment and PVE programmes should move away from a highly centralised, top-down approach

⁵⁸ United Nations Development Programme, *Evaluation of Institutional Support to Youth Empowerment and Peacebuilding in Cameroon* (UNDP Synthesis Report 2022) 32–40.

⁵⁹ Local Youth Corner Cameroon, *Youth-Led Peacebuilding and Countering Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin* (LOYOC Policy Brief 2022) 6–14

⁶⁰ Nkafu Policy Institute, 'The Challenge of Youth Socio-Professional Integration in Cameroon' (*Nkafu Policy Institute*, 2023) <https://nkafu.org/the-challenge-of-youth-socio-professional-integration-in-cameroon/> accessed 31 July 2026

⁶¹ International Crisis Group, *Cameroon: Confronting Boko Haram* (Africa Report N°241, International Crisis Group 2017) 22–26

⁶² United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (9 December 2015) UN Doc S/RES/2250 paras 1–4

⁶³ Achaleke Christian Leke, 'Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: Youth Is the Key to Peace' (*PeaceLab Blog*, 26 April 2021) <https://peacelab.blog/2021/04/cameroons-anglophone-crisis-youths-are-the-key-to-peace> accessed 31 July 2026

towards a more participatory model based on genuine community co-design.⁶⁴ This requires engaging local communities before major programme decisions are made, conducting consultations in accessible languages and appropriate community settings, establishing formal mechanisms for incorporating community feedback into programme planning and revision, and strengthening accountability by ensuring that implementing institutions are directly responsible to the communities they serve for the results they achieve.⁶⁵ Monitoring and evaluation systems should be redesigned to track outputs, outcomes, and impacts as distinct and explicitly linked levels of results, rather than collapsing this distinction into output counts alone, so that reporting can show not only what was delivered but what difference it made.

The fourth recommendation is to rebalance resource allocation in favour of development-oriented interventions. The government should make a clear and publicly accountable commitment to increasing budgetary support for MINJEC while progressively shifting counter-extremism spending from a predominantly military focus towards greater investment in development.⁶⁶ This reallocation of resources should prioritise education, youth economic empowerment, and community resilience initiatives, which have consistently been identified by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Crisis Group (ICG), and the wider academic literature as the most effective and sustainable approaches to addressing the structural drivers of violent extremism.⁶⁷

The functional and technical dimensions of youth empowerment and PVE policy in Cameroon do not represent the most fundamental level of the policy's construction. That foundation lies in the cognitive assumptions, policy narratives, and normative commitments that shape how the state understands youth issues before determining how to respond to them.⁶⁸ However, for young people living in the Far North and the Anglophone regions, the functional and technical dimension is the one that has the greatest immediate impact on their daily lives. It is through this dimension that the policy either reaches them or fails to do so, provides meaningful support or leaves their needs unmet, and contributes either to building the conditions necessary for sustainable peace or merely responds to the visible consequences of conflict without addressing its underlying causes.

Reforming this dimension is therefore far more than an administrative or technical exercise. It requires the development of a functional and implementation framework capable of responding effectively to the scale, urgency, and complexity of the challenges confronting young people in conflict-affected communities. Such reform is an essential prerequisite for achieving lasting peace, strengthening community resilience, and addressing the structural drivers of violent extremism, thereby fulfilling the commitments that Cameroon has made to its young people.⁶⁹

Ultimately, the future effectiveness of youth empowerment and PVE policy in Cameroon depends less on the adoption of additional strategies than on a fundamental transformation in how youth themselves are understood within public policy. Until policy moves from viewing young people primarily as beneficiaries of state interventions to recognizing them as co-producers of peace and development, the gap between policy promises and policy outcomes is likely to persist.

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⁶⁶ Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education, *Statistical Yearbook on Youth Promotion and Civic Integration* (MINJEC 2023) 18–25

⁶⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Dynamics and Incentives for Recruitment* (UNDP 2017) 15–32

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