



Beyond the Classroom: Building Peace and Social Cohesion Through Schools in Conflict-Affected Cameroon

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Evidence and recommendations for strengthening Peacebuilding Clubs, inclusive student participation, conflict prevention and social cohesion in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions.

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Strengthening school-based peacebuilding in conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest Cameroon

The ongoing crisis in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions continues to disrupt education and limit children's access to safe learning environments. UNICEF reported that approximately 41% of schools in the two regions were non-operational in 2024. Drawing on implementation experiences from the Building Bridges and Re-Connecting People project, this policy brief examines the practical challenges of sustaining school-based peacebuilding. It calls on education authorities, school administrators, civil society organizations and development partners to strengthen Peacebuilding Clubs, improve coordination, support inclusive student participation and invest in continued implementation and monitoring

Key Messages

- Peacebuilding Clubs provide practical platforms for promoting peaceful coexistence in schools.
- Student-led debates and creative activities encourage dialogue and conflict prevention.
- Inclusive activities enable learners with disabilities to participate in peacebuilding.
- Limited preparation time and school participation hindered implementation.
- Sustained institutional support is essential for effective school-based peacebuilding.

About the Briefing

This policy brief draws on the 2026 implementation experiences of the *Building Bridges and Re-connecting People* project, implemented by Green Partners Association, Lead Child Foundation (also known as Lead Child Africa), and Good Hope Charity Organization in conflict-affected communities in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions. Evidence from school-based Peacebuilding Club activities, student debates, poetry, drama and other creative presentations highlights opportunities for promoting peaceful coexistence, while implementation challenges included limited preparation time and difficulties securing school participation. The brief addresses gaps in institutional support, coordination and sustainability, targeting education authorities, school administrators, teachers, civil society organizations and development partners. It recommends strengthening Peacebuilding Clubs, supporting inclusive student participation and integrating peacebuilding into school activities to promote social cohesion.

Background and Policy Context

1. The broader context: Conflict and education in Northwest and Southwest Cameroon

Since 2016, the armed conflict in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions has disrupted education, displaced families and exposed children, teachers and communities to insecurity. School closures, boycotts, lockdowns and attacks affecting education have interrupted learning and weakened children's access to safe and supportive school environments. Internally displaced children, learners from host communities, children with disabilities and those from economically vulnerable households face particular barriers to consistent participation in education.

The scale of disruption remains substantial. UNICEF reported that 41% of schools in the Northwest and Southwest Regions were non-operational in 2024, illustrating the continuing effects of insecurity on education.¹ Displacement has compounded these challenges by interrupting children's schooling, separating them from familiar support networks and placing additional pressure on schools receiving displaced learners. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), through its Displacement Tracking Matrix, monitors displacement and humanitarian needs across Cameroon, providing evidence to guide responses for affected populations.²

Beyond access to education, prolonged insecurity affects the conditions in which children learn, interact and develop. Schools need to support not only academic learning but also respectful relationships, constructive dialogue and non-violent ways of resolving disagreements. School-based peacebuilding can create opportunities for children and young people to explore these skills and contribute to peaceful coexistence within their schools and communities.

Government education authorities, school administrators, teachers, humanitarian organisations and civil society groups all have roles in protecting education and supporting children's wellbeing. These responsibilities align with Cameroon's Education and Training Sector Strategy 2023–2030 and its commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration, which promotes the protection of education during armed conflict.³

2. The specific policy problem: Sustaining school-based peacebuilding

Despite ongoing efforts to maintain access to education, school-based peacebuilding initiatives require stronger coordination, preparation and institutional support to operate consistently. Schools affected by conflict may face disrupted timetables, limited resources, competing teaching responsibilities and uncertainty about student participation. Without adequate planning and support, peacebuilding activities risk remaining short-term project interventions rather than becoming a sustained part of school life.

These challenges were reflected in the 2026 project Building Bridges and Re-connecting People: Enhancing Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion through Learning Institutions in Conflict-Affected Communities in Cameroon,

¹ UNICEF (2025). Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report, 31 December 2024.

² International Organization for Migration (IOM). Displacement Tracking Matrix — Cameroon.

³ Government of Cameroon, Education and Training Sector Strategy 2023–2030, and Cameroon's commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration.

implemented by Green Partners Association, Lead Child Foundation (also known as Lead Child Africa), and Good Hope Charity Organization.

Through Peacebuilding Clubs, student debates, panel discussions, peace songs, poetry, spoken word, drama and creative arts, the project provided opportunities for learners to discuss conflict prevention and peaceful coexistence. Activities involving learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind also highlighted the importance of inclusive participation.

However, implementation encountered practical challenges, including limited preparation time for schools and difficulties securing participation from some schools shortly after resumption. These experiences point to a clear policy problem: schools need stronger institutional support, early coordination and adequate preparation to implement inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding activities.

The project provides practical implementation lessons, but its activities alone do not establish measurable improvements in student behavior or reductions in conflict. Further monitoring is needed to determine whether participation strengthens learners' knowledge, attitudes and conflict-resolution skills over time.

3. Policy responsibilities and the case for action now

Cameroon's Education and Training Sector Strategy 2023–2030 provides an existing framework for strengthening education access, quality and resilience. The Safe Schools Declaration also provides a basis for protecting education during armed conflict. These commitments create an opportunity to connect school-based peacebuilding with broader efforts to improve safe, inclusive learning environments.⁴

Education authorities can provide policy direction and encourage the integration of peacebuilding into relevant school programs. School administrators and teachers can allocate time for Peacebuilding Clubs, support trained matrons and patrons, and ensure that activities are accessible to learners with disabilities. Civil society organizations can provide training, materials and technical support, while development partners can invest in sustained implementation and monitoring.

Action is needed now to ensure that peacebuilding activities are not limited to isolated events or short funding cycles. Without adequate preparation, school leadership support and resources, opportunities for children to practice dialogue, cooperation and non-violent conflict resolution may remain inconsistent.

This policy brief therefore calls on education authorities, school administrators, civil society organizations and development partners to strengthen school-based Peacebuilding Clubs, improve coordination with schools, support inclusive student participation and integrate peacebuilding into regular school activities. These measures can help

⁴ Government of Cameroon, Education and Training Sector Strategy 2023–2030, and Cameroon's commitments under the Safe Schools Declaration. [Access the sector strategy.](#)

schools contribute to peaceful coexistence and social cohesion in conflict-affected communities while complementing wider efforts to protect education and address the causes of conflict.

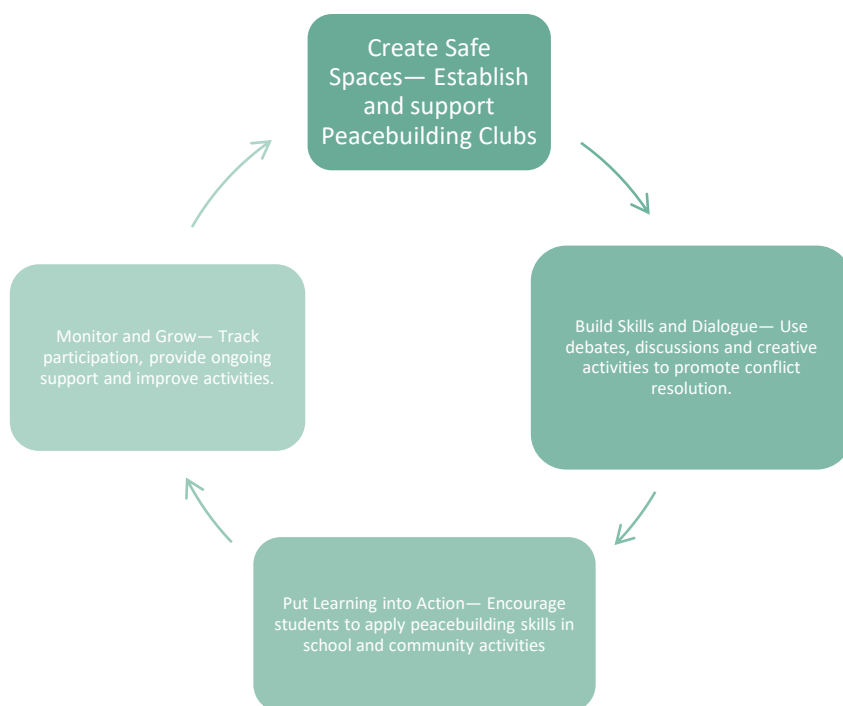
Understanding School-Based Peacebuilding

School-based peacebuilding refers to activities that help learners develop skills to prevent conflict, resolve disagreements peacefully and build positive relationships. These activities may include Peacebuilding Clubs, student debates, peer dialogue, drama, poetry, music and collaborative projects. In conflict-affected communities, they can provide structured opportunities for children to discuss peace, practice respectful communication and participate in building safer, more inclusive school environments.

In Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions, prolonged insecurity and disrupted education make these opportunities particularly important. Children may experience displacement, loss, fear and strained relationships within their communities. Schools cannot resolve the wider conflict alone, but with appropriate support, they can help learners practice cooperation, understand different perspectives and manage disagreements without violence.

The Building Bridges and Re-connecting People project applied this approach through school-based Peacebuilding Clubs and creative student activities. Debates and panel discussions encouraged learners to reflect on the causes of conflict and their role in promoting peace, while poetry, songs, drama and spoken word provided alternative ways to communicate messages of peaceful coexistence. Participation by learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind also highlighted the need for accessible and inclusive approaches.

However, establishing Peacebuilding Clubs is only the first step. For these activities to be sustained, schools need supportive leadership, trained club matrons and patrons, adequate preparation time, appropriate materials and opportunities for regular student participation. Monitoring is also necessary to determine whether activities improve learners' knowledge, attitudes and conflict-resolution skills over time.



The central policy message is that school-based peacebuilding should be treated as a sustained component of safe and inclusive education, rather than as a series of isolated events. Education authorities, school administrators civil society organizations and development partners all have a role in providing the coordination, resources and guidance needed to make this possible.

Policy Issue 1: Strengthening School-Based Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Communities

Schools Need to Go Beyond Learning to Support Peaceful Coexistence

The ongoing crisis in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest Regions has disrupted education and placed additional pressure on schools to provide safe, supportive environments. With 41% of schools reported as non-operational in the two regions in 2024, strengthening the protective and social role of functioning schools is an important policy concern.⁵

The *Building Bridges and Re-Connecting People* project addressed this need through school-based Peacebuilding Clubs and student activities, including debates, poetry, drama, music and panel discussions. These activities created opportunities for learners to discuss conflict prevention, peaceful coexistence and their role in promoting peace. However, such initiatives require consistent institutional support to move beyond individual events and become part of regular school activities.

Limited Preparation and Coordination Can Undermine Implementation

Project implementation highlighted two practical challenges: limited preparation time for participating schools and difficulties securing participation from some schools shortly after resumption. These experiences demonstrate how school calendars, competing responsibilities and insufficient advance coordination can affect the delivery of peacebuilding activities.

Education authorities and school administrators should therefore establish clear arrangements for planning and implementing Peacebuilding Club activities. Schools need sufficient notice, agreed activity schedules and support for club matrons and patrons. Civil society organizations should coordinate with school leadership early enough to ensure that activities complement teaching priorities rather than disrupt them.

Inclusive Participation Must Be Deliberate

The participation of learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind in project activities highlights the importance of including children with disabilities in peacebuilding initiatives. Participation should not depend on a learner's ability to engage in conventional debates, speeches or written exercises.

Schools and implementing organizations should adapt activities to learners' communication needs and abilities, using accessible materials, visual or creative methods, sign-language support where available, and appropriate facilitation.

⁵ UNICEF (2025). *Cameroon Humanitarian Situation Report*, 31 December 2024.

Inclusive planning helps ensure that children with different experiences and abilities have meaningful opportunities to contribute to discussions about peace.

Policy Action: Make Peacebuilding Clubs Sustainable

Peacebuilding Clubs should be supported as ongoing school-based initiatives rather than isolated project activities. Education authorities, school administrators, civil society organizations and development partners should collaborate to:

- Allocate regular time for Peacebuilding Club activities within school schedules.
- Train and support club matrons and patrons in dialogue facilitation, conflict resolution and child safeguarding.
- Provide accessible activity materials and opportunities for inclusive student participation.
- Establish simple monitoring systems to track participation, activities and changes in learners' knowledge and attitudes.

These measures would strengthen the continuity and quality of school-based peacebuilding. Their effectiveness should be assessed through documented participation, student and teacher feedback, and follow-up monitoring rather than assumed from the completion of activities alone.

POLICY ISSUE 2: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE AND MEANINGFUL STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Key finding: The project used debates, panel discussions, poetry, drama, music and creative arts to engage learners, including participation by learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind.

Analysis: These approaches offer different ways for students to express their views and engage with peacebuilding. However, participation in an activity does not automatically demonstrate meaningful inclusion or changes in attitudes. Accessibility, student feedback and opportunities for continued engagement need to be considered.

Supporting evidence: UNICEF's child-centered and inclusive education approaches emphasize access to learning opportunities for children affected by emergencies, including vulnerable learners and children with disabilities.

Policy options:

- Schools should use varied, accessible methods to involve students in peacebuilding.
- Club focal points should encourage students to contribute to decisions and activities.
- Implementing organizations should collect feedback from learners, including those with disabilities, to identify participation barriers.

“Peacebuilding activities give students opportunities to express themselves, discuss disagreements and learn to live peacefully with others.”

— Peace Club President, [Charity Comprehensive High School]

Policy Issue 3: Sustaining Peacebuilding and Measuring Results

Key finding: The project delivered school-based Peacebuilding Club activities, but further evidence is needed to establish whether these activities produced lasting changes in learners' knowledge, attitudes or behaviour.

Analysis: Activities completed and students reached are useful measures of implementation, but they do not independently demonstrate improved conflict-resolution skills or stronger social cohesion. Without follow-up monitoring, decision-makers cannot reliably determine which approaches should be continued, adapted or expanded.

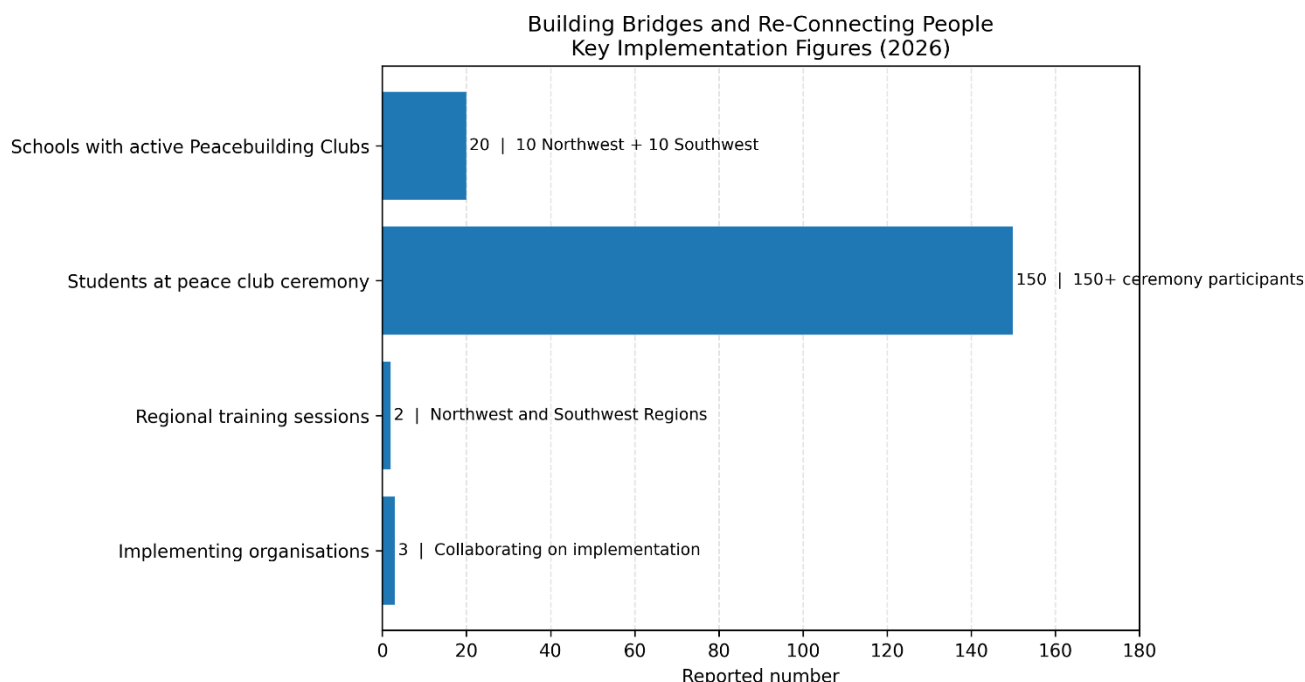
Supporting evidence: UNICEF's humanitarian education reporting demonstrates the importance of maintaining access to learning in crisis-affected settings. Project-level monitoring is needed to complement this wider evidence and assess the specific contribution of school-based peacebuilding.

Policy options:

- Establish simple monitoring tools to record activities, attendance and student participation.
- Gather baseline and follow-up feedback from students and teachers where feasible.
- Use findings to improve program design and guide future funding decisions.

Project evidence: Building Bridges and Re-Connecting People

Project component	Evidence from implementation
Peacebuilding Clubs	School-based clubs established to promote peace and social cohesion.
Student engagement	Debates, panel discussions, poetry, spoken word, peace songs and drama Arts
Inclusive participation	Activities included learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind.
School preparation	Some schools had limited time to prepare for activities.
School participation	Some schools were reluctant to participate shortly after resumption.
Implementation lesson	Earlier coordination, adequate preparation time and sustained support are needed.



Source: Project implementation records and activity reports, 2026. The 20 clubs are distributed across 10 schools in the Northwest and 10 schools in the Southwest. Ceremony participation is not the project's total reach; indicators should not be added together.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Schools in Cameroon's conflict-affected Northwest and Southwest Regions have an important role to play in promoting peaceful coexistence, constructive dialogue and social cohesion. The *Building Bridges and Re-Connecting People* project, implemented by Green Partners Association, Lead Child Foundation (also known as Lead Child Africa), and Good Hope Charity Organization, demonstrated how Peacebuilding Clubs, student debates, poetry, drama, music and other creative activities can provide learners with opportunities to discuss peace and conflict prevention.

The project also highlighted the importance of inclusive participation, including opportunities for learners from the School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind to engage in peacebuilding activities. However, limited preparation time and difficulties securing participation from some schools following resumption revealed practical barriers to implementation. These experiences point to the need for stronger coordination, early planning and sustained institutional support.

While the project provides useful implementation lessons, further monitoring is required to determine whether participation contributes to lasting improvements in learners' knowledge, attitudes and conflict-resolution skills. School-based peacebuilding should therefore be supported as an ongoing component of safe and inclusive education, rather than treated as a series of isolated project activities.

Policy Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Education Authorities and School Administrators

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- **Integrate peacebuilding into school plans:** Include Peacebuilding Club activities in school calendars and extracurricular programs to encourage continuity beyond individual projects.
 - **Improve coordination and preparation:** Engage school administrators and teachers early, agree on activity schedules in advance, and allow sufficient preparation time for participating schools.
 - **Strengthen the capacity of club focal points:** Provide practical training and ongoing support for Peacebuilding Club matrons and patrons in dialogue facilitation, peaceful conflict resolution, child safeguarding and inclusive participation.
 - **Promote inclusive learning environments:** Adapt activities and materials to enable learners with disabilities and children with different communication needs to participate meaningfully.
 - **Monitor implementation and progress:** Maintain simple records of club activities, student participation, feedback and implementation challenges to guide improvements.

2. Recommendations for Schools, Students and School Communities

- **Promote student ownership:** Involve learners in selecting peacebuilding activities, identifying issues affecting their school communities and proposing practical solutions.
- **Engage parents and caregivers:** Explain the purpose of Peacebuilding Clubs and encourage families to support students' participation.
- **Provide accessible opportunities for participation:** Use varied approaches, including dialogue, drama, music, poetry and visual or creative activities, so that learners can contribute in different ways.
- **Encourage continued engagement:** Create regular opportunities for students to practice respectful communication, cooperation and non-violent approaches to resolving disagreements.

3. Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations and Implementing Partners

- **Coordinate with schools early:** Consult school leadership and teachers before scheduling activities, taking account of academic calendars, school priorities and local security conditions.
- **Provide practical implementation support:** Equip club focal points with appropriate learning materials, facilitation guidance and safeguarding information.
- **Strengthen partnerships:** Work with education authorities, school communities, organizations of persons with disabilities and other relevant stakeholders to improve inclusion and continuity.
- **Document implementation lessons:** Record what works, the challenges encountered and the adjustments needed to strengthen future school-based peacebuilding initiatives.

4. Recommendations for Funders and Development Partners

- **Provide sustained funding:** Support regular Peacebuilding Club activities and follow-up initiatives rather than concentrating resources solely on one-off events.
- **Fund essential implementation needs:** Allocate resources for training, learning materials, coordination, accessibility and student participation.
- **Allow flexibility:** Enable implementing partners to adapt schedules and activities in response to insecurity, displacement, school closures and other disruptions.
- **Support monitoring and learning:** Fund baseline and follow-up assessments, where feasible, to examine changes in learners' knowledge, attitudes and conflict-resolution skills.

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- **Promote evidence-informed programming:** Use monitoring findings and feedback from students, teachers and school communities to guide future funding and program decisions.

Considerations for Implementation

Effective implementation will require collaboration among education authorities, school administrators, teachers, students, civil society organizations and development partners. Activities should be planned around school calendars, adapted to local security conditions and designed to accommodate learners with different needs and abilities.

Monitoring should distinguish between activities delivered, students reached and evidence of meaningful or sustained change. Regular feedback and follow-up assessments can help stakeholders identify implementation gaps, improve program quality and determine which approaches merit continuation or expansion.

By integrating peacebuilding into regular school activities and providing the coordination, resources and institutional support required, stakeholders can strengthen schools' contribution to peaceful coexistence and social cohesion in Cameroon's conflict-affected communities.

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For further information about the *Building Bridges and Re-Connecting People* project, school-based peacebuilding activities, or opportunities for collaboration, please contact the implementing organizations below.

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