

CRD/EIFORCES INSIGHTS

TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021

Making the security challenge a success

All over the world, major sporting events attract a lot of attention. At the African level, the African Football Cup of Nations (AFCON) happens to be the Continent's major sporting event. From 9 January to 6 February 2022, Cameroon hosted 24 participating countries teams and their managers, officials from the Confederation of African Football (CAF), the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), many distinguished guests, tens of thousands of supporters, tourists, onlookers, etc... All these people joined the twenty-five million Cameroonians who had patiently and passionately prepared for this major sporting event taking place in Cameroon 50 years after the 1972 edition, when the Cameroonian national team and all Cameroonians painfully recovered from the semi-final elimination by the Red Devils of Congo.

Expected therefore by the populations and supporters of Cameroon and the whole world, the TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021 was a real challenge for the entire country in terms of organisation, prevention and security, considering the prevailing security and health context. Consequently, this event generated a lot of passion.

However, it should be noted that Cameroon was able to effectively meet the challenges imposed on her during the organisation of this important sporting event, despite the 24 January 2022 stampede at the Olembe Stadium in Yaounde, which unfortunately resulted in the loss of human lives and many injuries.

The biggest sporting event in a hostile but controlled health and security context

Cameroon, like all countries in the world, is not spared from the Covid19 pandemic which has been raging since 2020 with various consequences.

In addition, the security context remains mainly marked by the incursions of Boko Haram terrorists in the Northern Region of the country, as well as secessionist claims and attacks in the North-West and South-West Regions.

With the holding of the Total Energies African Football Cup of Nations 2021, the chaos entrepreneurs were willing to take advantage of the magnitude of the event to attempt large-scale actions with maximum impact, given the compact nature of the crowds.

Faced with all this, Cameroon government spared no effort to guarantee not only the proper holding of the AFCON, but also to ensure order and security for all, before, during and after this great continental sporting festival.

Appropriate measures to meet the challenges and risks

To ward off any contingency, Cameroon Government deployed significant means commensurate with its ambition to counter all the threats that surrounds the current global and national context. As early as May 29, 2019, an Inter-ministerial strategic planning group (GIPS) was created under the coordination of the Minister of State, Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic (SGPR), Ferdinand NGOH NGOH. In 2020, the said GIPS developed a national response plan to terrorist attacks which made the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN) responsible for conducting operations in urban areas in case of attacks (or serious disasters), while the National Gendarmerie was called upon to intervene in the front line in peri-urban areas through the Multipurpose Intervention Group of the National Gendarmerie (GPIGN).

Since then, all the public, semi-public and private institutions as well as all the national social bodies were involved in the national security plan for the TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021, with the objective of ensuring that no security detail is overlooked that could mar the smooth running of this major event. On the highest instructions of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul BIYA, Supreme Commander of the Defence and Security Forces (FDS), all the administrations in charge of security, namely the Police, the Gendarmerie and the Army, worked in total synergy to achieve the objective of maximum security for the event. Therefore, particular emphasis was placed on cities hosting the sports competition, namely Yaounde, Douala, Bafoussam, Limbe, Garoua and their surroundings.

Strengthening the operational capacities of the Defence and Security Forces in terms of deterrents

Three months before the event, particularly noticeable effervescence could be observed in the Defence and Security Forces. On 6 September 2021, Joseph Beti Assomo, Minister Delegate at the Presidency of the Republic in charge of Defence, launched the Operation " *Shield*", which included a series of anti-terrorist simulation exercises aimed at responding to possible attacks before and during the competition. Operation Shield brought together officials from the Ministry of Defence, the General Delegation for National Security and the Ministry of Territorial Administration, for a synergistic thinking on issues related to crisis management in order to establish a practical and coherent working framework in line with the regulations in force in Cameroon.

According to the Minister in charge of defence, in September 2021, Operation Shield enabled the Defence and Security Forces (DSF) to "receive instruction and training so that tomorrow's operations would only be a repetition of today's exercises ". He explained that these operations were justified on the grounds that this African football festival was "taking place in a context marked by a number of hotbeds of tension. Given this environment, Cameroon must be able to ensure security for all".

As part of Operation Shield implementation, the Ahmadou Ahidjo Omnisports stadium in Yaoundé was the scene of a hostage-taking simulation at the end of

September 2021. Police officers, gendarmes and civilian personnel involved in this life-size security exercise were able to practice coordination for hours in order to improve their operating methods. This simulation aimed more specifically at testing the capacities of the Defence and Security Forces to better prepare for mitigating the impact of a possible terrorist attack during an encounter at *TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021*. In the months thereafter, similar exercises were intensified or organised in other cities hosting some of the matches of this major African sporting event. The main target sites were stadiums, airports, hotels, hospitals, etc., with the same objective: to test the response and operational capacities of the Defence and Security Forces, especially the specialised elite units in the event of an attack. This prompted Navy Captain Samuel Sylvain NDUTUMU, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, who, as the commander of the 28 September 2021 exercise at the Ahmadou Ahidjo Omnisports Stadium in Yaounde, to remark that "*Our country is facing a number of crises, including areas of tension. It is important that we get prepared, for anything can happen. The Defence and Security Forces must be ready to intervene*".

In December 2021 precisely, the second bi-annual Conference of Regional Governors, which took place from 9 to 11 December, was appropriately themed: "Administrative authorities and security Guidelines for End-of-year Feasts and African Cup of Nations TotalEnergies 2021". Far from being a coincidence, this meeting was held a few days prior to end of year celebrations, just four weeks before the great continental football festival. Opening the meeting, the MINAT stated that: "The context is known to all. It is about the dual security of celebrations marking the Christmas holidays, the New Year 2022 and the African Cup of Nations football tournament which will take place in our country". He thereby called for everyone's mobilisation to meet this great continental challenge. During said meeting, the Regional Governors were instructed to reinforce security measures on the ground and to speed up the implementation of hygiene and sanitation measures in the cities hosting the competition and throughout the national territory.

Specifically, at the Police level, on instructions from the Delegate General for National Security, Martin MBARGA NGUELE, significant measures have been taken to ensure security for the population as well as to regulate traffic. Indeed, the number of personnel has been increased and a special mechanism put in place in the main cities hosting the competition to ensure the fluidity of traffic. In addition, the DGSN put to use the video surveillance system, with particular emphasis on the main cities of Cameroon, the competition and training stadiums, hotels, fan zones, areas of high population density such as crossroads, markets etc.

Prior to the kick-off of the competition, a number of field visits were organised in host cities by top security officials to evaluate the measures taken by local authorities to ensure security for this important sporting event, as well as for individuals and property.

Moreover, day and night patrols organised specifically or jointly with the other DSF were intensified for preventive and dissuasive actions in the various hosts cities of the

competition. In airports, railway stations, seaports and wherever necessary, the Police Forces demonstrated discretion, deterrence and readiness to deal with any eventuality to enable Cameroon to meet the security and organisational challenge of the TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021.

Furthermore, predictive policing was one of the main battle grounds of the Defence and Security Forces before, during and after the AFCON. Indeed, from 6 to 10 December 2021, a training session bringing together elements of the Military Security (SEMIL), the DGSN, the Gendarmerie and a large delegation of foreign partners, specialists in predictive and preventive policing was held in Yaounde. Beyond the capacity building of these intelligence actors, the work focused on "the role and place of the military security officer within the Defence and Security Forces in general, and in the security system of a major sporting event in particular". This training session was aimed at building the capacities of the DSF in order to prevent any attack by irredentists likely to compromise this continental sporting event.

Increased security measures following the Olembe tragedy

On 24 January 2022, during the match between the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon and the Comoros national team, a deadly stampede occurred at the south entrance of the Olembe stadium shortly before the start of the encounter, resulting in 8 deaths and several injuries.

Following this sad event, several corrective measures were taken by competent authorities under the instigation of the Head of State.

These included the densification of security forces around the stadium for all other encounters of the competition; the setting up, at a good distance, of filtering posts on all the stadium's access routes, held mainly by policemen and gendarmes under supervision by senior officers in order to avoid bottlenecks around the stadium; the opening of additional access gates to the stadium; the prohibition of ticket sales and Covid tests in the vicinity of the stadium, the addition of video surveillance cameras, the establishment of a joint staff at each competition site.

With regard to measures to facilitate traffic flow, the communication of a traffic plan on each day of the competition, as well as the opening and closing hours of the stadium, the sensitisation of users on the bypass roads to be used to avoid congestion on the main road leading to Olembe, the upkeep of road axes as well as the release lanes to allow the smooth deployment of ambulances were also implemented.

These measures rigorously and effectively implemented by the Security Forces led to the serene conduct of the rest of the competition. Indeed, no other incidents were recorded.

A COVID19 free Total Energies AFCON 2021

In terms of health, many hospitals have been built and some renovated. The technical facilities of these hospitals were modernised to bring them up to international standards. In the opinion of the Ministry of Public Health, the health system was strict before and during the African Cup of Nations. Measures were taken to ensure that Cameroonians and the many foreigners visiting the country during the AFCON have optimal health security. In this regard, the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre deployed a strategy and a subsequent mechanism.

Spectators and delegations were required a Health Pass for access to the various stadiums, which meant everyone had to be tested. As the players, their coaches and all those around them on the field (officials, referees, ball boys) had to undergo a PCR test, the spectators were subjected to antigenic tests. To this end, Cameroon and CAF made arrangements to carry out at least one million COVID 19 tests during the competition, a major challenge that was successfully met, despite the reluctance of the population to be tested or vaccinated since the start of the pandemic two years ago. To achieve this, the Ministry of Health had mobilised about 2,000 people for the purpose.

As it happens, Cameroon has largely risen to the security and organisational challenges of the TotalEnergies AFCON Cameroon 2021. Most importantly, the efforts made by the Cameroonian authorities to ensure security for this high level meeting were endorsed by the populations and praised by several top personalities. Despite the elimination of the Cameroonian national team in the semi-finals, Cameroonians, led by the President of the Republic, His Excellency Paul Biya, witnessed in an atmosphere of total celebration, the coronation of the Teranga Lions of Senegal as the new African champions, after they dominated the Pharaohs of Egypt on the evening of 6 February 2022.

Meanwhile, the Olembe incident, which put the anticipation capacities of the Security Forces to the test and the lessons learnt from it should be built on for the forthcoming events. /-

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- ❖ **General Supervisor:** Brigadier General BITOTE André Patrice, Director General of EIFORCES;
 - ❖ **Deputy General Supervisor:** Commissioner OYONO Cécile née THOM, Deputy Director General of EIFORCES;
 - ❖ **Scientific coordination:** Commissioner, Doctor PASSO SONBANG Elie, Head of Research and Documentation Centre, EIFORCES;
 - ❖ **Technical coordination:** Senior Superintendent of Police, TCHUENDEM SIMO Rosyne Arlette, Epse NOUNKOUA, Head of Research Laboratories at the Research and Documentation Centre, EIFORCES;
 - ❖ **Collaboration:**
 - Dr Eric Wilson FOFACK, Lecturer and Researcher at the University of Dschang;

- Mr. NJIFON Josué, Translation and Interpretation Service Head, EIFORCES;
- Mr NENENGA Driscole AGBORSUM, Research and Translation Assistant/CRD-EIFORCES.