



ARMED VIOLENCE REDUCTION ASSESSMENT

Central African Republic

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Executive Summary

Central African Republic has experienced an increase in armed violence starting with the Seleka rebellion leading up to the coup d'état in March this year and continuing thereafter. Armed violence has been committed by armed groups including the Seleka, self-defence groups such as the Anti-Balaka and certain communities such as nomadic pastoralists. Recently however there is an emerging worrying trend of increasing violence between ethnic and religious communities that has not been the case in the past even during past coup d'états.

The government has not demonstrated the capacity or the will to extend security and rule of law outside of Bangui and barely has maintained control of the capital. There is a total lack of government in most areas and armed groups uncontrolled by their leaders are committing abuses against the civilian population. Weapons caches were looted during the coup d'état and more weapons have entered the country during the rebellion.

Due to these factors armed violence reduction should be a priority in C.A.R. with projects supporting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) to neutralize armed actors and provide them with skills to earn a living, security sector reform (SSR) to rebuild the army, police and gendarmerie to effectively cover the entire country and Community Safety to build resilience and cohesion at the grassroots level and stop the ripping of social fabric before it becomes a larger conflict.

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The coup d'état that brought Michel Djotodia to power in March 2013 was different from past coup d'états in Central African Republic (C.A.R.) as it brought to power the first Muslim president who is not representative of the majority Christian population and that it touched the vast majority of the country destroying towns, villages and the economy unlike in past coups where power changed but civilians remained largely untouched. Since the coup d'état Central African Republic has been plagued by insecurity and armed violence. The Seleka rebels that brought Djotodia to power have not been disarmed nor integrated formally into a national army. In September Djotodia declared that the Seleka was dissolved but did not put forward any plan for managing their transition. Seleka fighters remain scattered throughout the country following loose chains of command and committing abuses against the civilian population including pillaging, torture and assassinations. At the same time nomadic pastoralist groups feeling supported by the government have taken the opportunity to seek revenge for old wrongs by burning and destroying villages and fields. In order to defend themselves self-defence groups have formed in villages and towns made up of youth armed with homemade weapons. These groups have been joined by former soldiers who are well armed in attacking Muslim populations. Inter and intracommunal ties are being severed as suspicion and mistrust increases.

During the crisis leading to the coup d'état weapons depots were looted, soldiers, police and gendarmerie abandoned their posts and local authorities fled. At the current time there is little government control outside of the capital.

Methodology

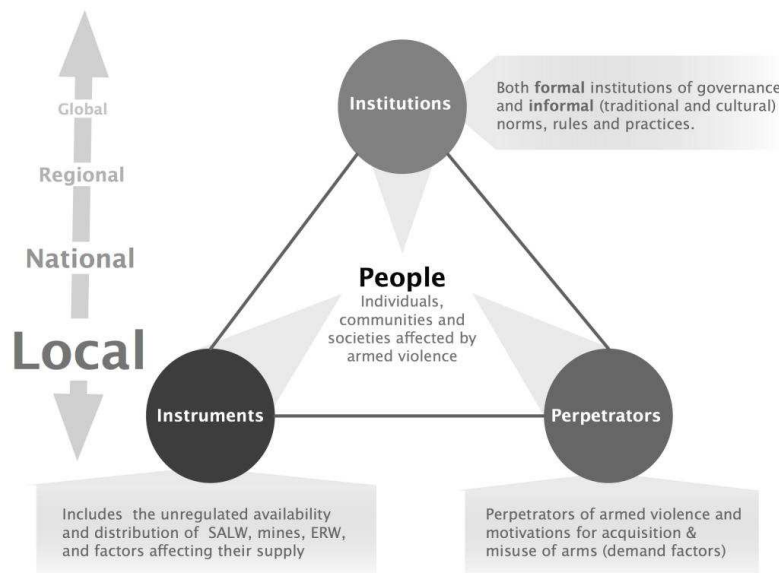
This assessment was conducted over the period of September 9th to October 11th, 2013 and was carried out in Bangui, Ouham-Pende and Ouham prefectures. The assessment included semi-structured interviews with local authorities, security providers, national and international organisations as well as semi-structured focus group discussions with selected groups of participants to touch all levels of society. In total 24 focus groups were held including local leaders (quarter and group chiefs), displaced populations, religious leaders, market women, moto-taxi drivers, shopkeepers, agricultural and pastoral groups and included both men and women and youth of all communities. In addition informal meetings were held with various communities, particularly amongst displaced populations.

This assessment is based mainly on community perceptions of violence and community identified security needs and was conducted using the armed violence reduction lens as a base of analysis. The AVR lens identifies three areas that must be addressed in order to reduce armed violence- instruments, actors and institutions, which all have an effect



on people. This assessment has aimed to understand identify the dynamics in these four areas in order to develop of recommendations to guide AVR programming.

a list



Objective of the Research

The objective of this assessment was to analyse the situation of armed-violence in Central African Republic in order to determine needs and opportunities for armed-violence reduction programming and inform the development of new activities. More specifically the assessment aimed to determine opportunities and needs for Mine Action and AVR programming, map potential stakeholders, partners and donors and determine potential risks to the programme.

Part One: Instruments

Due to the sudden change in the security situation in the country just prior to and during this evaluation it was not possible to ask too many sensitive questions to all actors about the presence and distribution of firearms. Therefore this section acts as an overview but further research over a longer period of time and during a period of more stability would be needed to accurately map the presence and movement of firearms in the country.

Explosive Remnants of War Analysis

Contamination of explosive remnants of war (ERW) is low in assessed areas (Ouham, Ouham-Pende and Bangui). There were few reported incidents of accidents related to ERWs in these areas. In Ouham-Pende most reported accidents occurred many years ago from previous conflicts. In Ouham however there have been more recently reported accidents, possibly because the area has seen greater conflict recently (in the weeks before this assessment took place). Most accidents reported were of children playing in towns that discovered abandoned grenades and played with them. In some cases older children attempted to get rid of the ERWs, in one case by detonating the grenade in an unoccupied field. One case was reported where Seleka fighters had buried munitions in an abandoned village and when women returned and made a fire for cooking the munitions exploded causing no injuries.

It is possible that in areas that have seen greater fighting recently that there is a higher risk of contamination however overall the risk is very low. Most cases reported were in towns or villages as opposed to fields or roads. Targeted ERW risk education could be considered in affected areas though it would need to be determined who has the ability to safely removed ERW if they are reported by community members as there is currently no capacity in most of the country.

Then Central African Republic acceded to the Ottawa Treaty on November 8th, 2002.

Small Arms and Light Weapons Analysis

Before the coup d'état in late 2012 there was not a culture of weapons ownership in CAR. Many people in the countryside do have homemade hunting rifles that were used only for hunting purposes. The exception to this was the northeast of the country that has close ties with Chad and Sudan where there is a greater culture of weapons ownership and therefore a greater presence of Kalashnikovs. In the southeast of the country the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is present and armed. As well it is the perception of many people interviewed that storekeepers, who are generally Muslims and often seen as foreigners mainly from Chad, are armed with Kalashnikovs in order to defend their shops from burglars. However, there is concern that these arms once owned for defensive purposes are being used for offensive purposes.

With the arrival of the Seleka leading up to the coup d'état more weapons entered the country. It seems likely that these weapons came from Chad and Sudan and not from sources farther away. In the past weapons also came from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. As stated by one interviewee, "when neighbouring countries do not have confidence in the government of CAR they arm the rebels." During the coup d'état all of the national weapons armouries were looted adding to the proliferation.

More weapons will be sold as the Seleka starts to disband and many members return to civilian employment and as former FACA (Forces Armées de la Centrafrique) members decide to sell their weapons in order to earn some money. Therefore, the presence of weapons, particularly in Bangui, is likely increasing. Buying a weapon is not expensive and would not involve a large mobilization of resources. It is estimated that a Kalashnikov costs around \$50.

Part Two: Institutions

Perceptions of Security Institutions

Following the coup d'état by the Seleka rebels causing ongoing outbreaks of violence, particularly in May and June as well as late August and September, national authorities have ceased to exist in most places outside of Bangui. In Paoua and Batangafo local authorities such as the mayor were threatened and fled. Subprefectoral leaders also fled after the government fell along with the judiciary. The police and gendarmerie in many places have not returned and are not functioning. In Paoua the Police Commissioner had just returned and was working with auxiliary police forces until the regular police can return.

In some areas new authorities are in place, either by claiming power themselves (such as the mayor of Batangafo) or by the Seleka putting them in place (such as the sub-prefect and council of Bouca). Those who have been put in place are largely seen to support the Seleka and therefore do not receive widespread support from all community members. In the case of the Bouca authorities put in place on September 28th, the sous-prefect chosen is a Christian from Bouca and served in the government in the past so he is well respected in the area and therefore may gain some more legitimacy however many Christians in Bouca feel that the new council are not free to do their work as they are under control of the Seleka and that they will just act as a figurehead without any real power and that they are not official representatives as they were not appointed in Bangui.

The military authorities (as the Seleka are described by the population) are seen by the majority of the population as the main cause of armed-violence. They are directly involved in pillaging, assassinations and other crimes against the population. Certain local authorities also have taken part in abuses against the population, for example the self-proclaimed mayor of Batangafo who has been linked to the murders of villagers and destruction of certain villages in Batangafo sous-prefecture. Currently therefore it is impossible to say that the authorities are able, willing or have the capacity to stop armed violence.

Many people reported that the Seleka work in collaboration with local Muslim populations, particularly the nomadic Mbarara. For example, in the past the Mbarara paid higher taxes and fines while transporting their herds through the country and they also faced stiffer punishments for allowing their cattle to destroy farmers' fields. Now however many people reported that the Mbarara have made statements such as, "it is our turn now," and allow their cattle to destroy farmers crops with impunity as the Seleka are Muslims and many are also Chadians so they will not face repercussions. As well some people have pointed out that the Seleka do not come from the areas where they are stationed so have no way of knowing who is rich or has assets to steal. They feel that it is the Muslim community, particularly the Chadian community that is informing the Seleka of who owns what in order to target their pillaging. In the villages of Ouham-Pende and Ouham many villagers report that it is the Mbarara who have burnt down and destroyed their villages in retaliation to settle old scores that locals believed had been settled years ago. They do this with impunity from the Seleka who are responsible for providing security.

In certain areas the Seleka is working to improve relationships with the community, for example by having respected Generals come to speak to the community to reassure them, in Paoua by officially supporting a mediation committee to raise complaints from the population, and in Bouca by putting in place provisional sub-prefectural authorities to be responsible for civil administration. These efforts have to varying degrees improved the security situation mainly by demonstrating to the population that the Seleka is at least trying to be in control of its men.

The authority held by traditional leaders, such as chefs de quartier and chefs de group, is being undermined as they hold little power over the Seleka. Prior to the coup d'état people went to their chief to resolve any conflicts and if the conflict was too large for the chief he went to the judiciary. However now that the judiciary is not functioning and the chiefs are not as respected there are few authorities to resolve conflicts. In some areas people go to the Seleka to resolve their conflicts as they are the only authorities on the ground however the judgements given by the Seleka are often very harsh, including beatings, torture and death or demands for high fines to be paid that are much higher than the fine normally ascribed to the crime. In some cases it has been reported that the plaintiff is required to pay the fine if the guilty party is not able to. Because of this most people prefer not to go to the Seleka to settle their problems unless they are trying to settle old scores and want to punish someone who did them wrong in the past. People complain that since many of the Seleka do not speak French of Sango it is impossible to communicate with them properly in order to solve problems.

"The community is trying to mobilise and sensitise everyone against this malaria [of insecurity and hatred between communities]. Anytime there are problems in town the

mayor brings all sides together to mediate, as does the delegate of the Chadian community.”¹

In Batangafo people have said that the mayor has told them he is there to solve their problems but he is actually two-faced on one side supporting the community while on the other not standing up to the Seleka or resolving their problems and in some cases making their problems worse.

While the population recognises that chiefs, followed by the judiciary should be responsible for resolving conflicts they view the police, gendarmerie and army as being responsible for providing their security. While the functioning of these institutions was problematic before the coup d'état they are no longer functioning at all in most areas outside of Bangui.

The government and security providers

“Since the events in March at least twenty people in my family have been killed. My husband was tied up, tortured, thrown in the river and died. So my daughter and I, I widow, came here. This violence was done by the army.”²

At a national level the president does not seem willing or able to resolve security problems in the country. This may be due to a variety of reasons including the fact that it is against their interests to secure the country as it would limit their ability to exploit trafficking of natural resources like diamonds and that they do not believe that they will be able to hold power for long so they hope to take as much profit as possible during the time they are able to hold on to power. As many Seleka are not from Central African Republic they do not have an interest in the security of citizens or development of the country. On the other hand, they also are not experienced and do not have the skills and ability to control the country, in particular the disparate groups of Seleka fighters spread out over the territory.

There are several government ministries responsible for providing security. The Ministry of Defence is responsible for the army and the gendarmerie, the Ministry of Finance is responsible for the customs agents, the Minister of Public Security, under the Minister of the Interior is responsible for the police and the Minister of Water, Forests, Hunting, Fishing and Tourism is responsible for the Water & Forests agents who patrol protected land. All ministries are severely lacking in capacity and material assets to be able to complete their mandates, particularly outside of Bangui where the state is barely present.

¹Focus group participant Batangafo. September 24th, 2013.

²Muslim focus group participant in Batangafo. September 24th, 2013.

In the past the armed forces were, as described by one interviewee a “regional army and not a national army” as former presidents surrounded themselves with soldiers from their same ethnic group or home village. This continues to be true of the Seleka who represent the Muslim populations of the northeast of the country. Having such a regional army does not gain the trust of the population.

Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration

A DDR campaign was started in 2008 and conducted in Bangui and the northwest of the country but it was never successfully completed and never reached the northeast where most of the arms were to be found and were the Seleka originated from.

Currently the government is implementing a forced disarmament in Bangui however this process seems to be aimed more at responding to international criticism and pressure to do something about the degrading security conditions rather than to implement a real and well-planned disarmament process. For the moment the government, supported by regional FOMAC troops, are disarming certain groups of Seleka fighters in the city. The weapons are apparently being stored by the Seleka government, which poses a problem however; the amount of weapons being collected is rather small. There is no demobilisation or reintegration provided for disarmed elements, only the removal of arms. A voluntary disarmament was carried out in August and September where Seleka members could hand over their weapons. Equally, the president declared on September 13th that the Seleka was dissolved and no longer exists however no plan was shared for how this would be carried out in practice. The Seleka currently operate as the army both within Bangui and especially outside, indeed it seems that the news that the Seleka was disbanded has not reached all areas outside of Bangui as while in Bangui they are now generally referred to as the ex-Seleka, outside they are still referred to as the Seleka and still maintain the same authority as before. It is unclear what this declaration will mean and it may cause further conflict if Seleka members do not feel they are given what they are owed.

A government ministry for DDR has recently been put in place and the Minister took up his post in August but does not have the capacity it needs to function properly. There is also a National Disarmament Committee that has existed since 2006 making it difficult to know what structure international organisations should partner with. These structures, if properly capacitated, should play a key role in the disarmament and reintegration of former combatants.

A serious DDR campaign must be conducted quickly throughout the country in order to resolve the issue of the Seleka and other armed actors in the country. The DDR must include a comprehensive disarmament of armed combatants (Seleka, anti-balaka, and others) as well as a civilian disarmament. A plan must be put in place for the

demobilisation and reintegration of Seleka and other armed actors, as many will be expecting positions in the armed forces. A plan must also be made for former FACA members. Foreign fighters must be repatriated. The DDR needs to be complimented with a large scale security sector reform to restructure the army including both former FACA and Seleka members, rebuild infrastructure that was destroyed, and redeploy police and gendarmes outside of the capital.

Firearms and the Law

Firearm ownership is illegal according to Central African law No. 8 “On arms and munitions in Central African Republic,” that was created in 2008 however this law was never passed by the national assembly. In practice it seems that this law has not been enforced.

Reporting, Monitoring and Responding To Armed Violence

A complete mapping of institutions monitoring armed violence was not completed however it is known that hospitals supported by MSF (and possibly state-run hospitals as well) take note of admissions who are victims of armed violence. As well the Protection Cluster is currently building a database of protection cases nationwide that contains victims of armed violence but is not an exhaustive source for mapping armed violence.

Given the current state in the country it is impossible to single out particular groups or areas of victims who are systematically denied assistance. Currently most victims of armed violence have very little recourse to medical, legal or other protection from the state or other actors due to lack of resources and the lack of infrastructure in the country making most areas outside of Bangui very remote.

Part Three: Perpetrators

“The main cause of the violence is the change in regime. Since the problems have lasted more than six months this is not a real change in regime, they just came here to kill us.”³

Seleka

³Focus group participant Batangafo. September 26th, 2013.

The Seleka have been the primary perpetrators of armed violence in Bangui and also outside. This is largely seen as being due to the fact that they have not been paid and therefore are taking for themselves whatever they can by force. This is exacerbated by the fact that many Seleka members are foreigners and therefore are not interested in long-term solutions or joining the national army. They are interested in taking as much as possible for themselves before going home. The Seleka have been reported to work in collaboration with local Muslim populations, mainly the Mbarara or those from Chad whereby the Mbarara or Chadians point out who is rich or owns a vehicle or oxen in order for them to be stolen. It is also reported that Muslim inhabitants go to the Seleka to settle old scores or to re-try old crimes where they felt that they were overly punished. This leads to exactions by the Seleka against households or whole communities such as burning down villages, torture and killings. Many respondents complained that the Seleka do not speak Sango or French and therefore communication is almost impossible with them leaving people frustrated. Many Seleka members do not understand local customs or acceptable punishments for certain crimes as they do not come from the area.

Many youth make up the Seleka some of whom are foreigners while many are local and known to the communities where they are based. Youth join the Seleka often with the hopes of quickly being able to integrate the regular army and take home regular paycheck or benefit from a DDR campaign. These days they have seen that there will be no quick solution to the situation and some have been waiting months for the hope of an army pay check so many are starting to abandon their posts and return home to take care of their families and earn money in other ways, for example returning to their farms. It will be difficult however for Seleka who have committed abuses in their own villages and towns to reintegrate and they will likely seek to start again in a new part of the country where they are unknown. It should be understood that the desire to join armed groups by youth as well as older men is more of a profession as people try their hand at the best way to earn money. If the opportunity presents itself they will try their luck and hope for an army salary or DDR package however if it does not work out they will return home until the next armed group comes along.

Mbarara

The Mbarara are nomadic pastoralists who generally come from Chad. During parts of the year they migrate with their cattle through parts of Central African Republic. In the past there have been problems between nomadic pastoralists and sedentary agriculturalists when cows destroy the fields of the agriculturalists. Before, visiting the local village chief usually solved these problems by deciding on a price to pay to compensate the farmer. When Mbarara move their cattle they must pay per head when crossing the border or through land controlled by different people. In the past the taxes that they paid were very high. Now that the president is a Muslim many report that the Mbarara feel it is, "their time," and they do not face punishment for allowing their cattle

to destroy farmers' fields. At the same time they are generally armed and have attacked villages to settle old scores, burning houses and killing. Residents of one abandoned village said they believed their village was targeted by an Mbarara attack because some years ago they refused to allow Mbarara to camp nearby. Many have also reported thinking that the Mbarara aid the Seleka in their attacks as the Mbarara know the villages and paths between them and therefore guide the Seleka.

Anti-balaka and Siriri

The Anti-Balaka and Siriri are two groups that at some times overlap and blend into each other. The Anti-Balaka, or anti-machetes, are so named because they believe that they are invincible against machete cuts. They are self-defence groups made up of local residents, generally young men, who are generally armed with homemade hunting rifles or machetes and defend their villages from attacks by Seleka or Mbarara. These groups have to some extent always existed even prior to the current crisis. Now however there are reports of Anti-balaka offensively attacking Muslim neighbourhoods or Seleka, which is where they start to blur with the Siriri. The Siriri are assumed to be a group of trained soldiers, the former FACA, who are armed with Kalashnikovs and are a professional fighting force. They have been attacking Muslim neighbourhoods in certain towns, such as Bouca, as well as the Seleka, mainly in the north of the country. It is unknown what their goal is, if they are planning another coup d'état or are trying to suppress the Seleka and it is equally unknown who is supporting or funding them. We do not know how many Anti-Balaka members or groups there are nor how many Siriri there are. Whereas youth join the Seleka with the hopes of one day getting a regular army salary or being able to get money by pillaging, youth join the Anti-Balaka in order to defend their village or get vengeance for the loss of family members or property. Community members do not necessarily support the anti-Balaka, "now [that the anti-balaka are here] we have double the problem, we get more attacks, so people are afraid to form self-defence groups."⁴

FOMAC

The FOMAC are a Central African regional peacekeeping force made up of soldiers from Gabon, Congo, Chad and Cameroon who are mandated with protecting civilians. In the area surveyed they are present in Bangui, Paoua and soon to be deployed to Bouca. There have been varying evaluations of the FOMAC mission; prior to the current degradation of the security situation at the end of September many civilians felt that they were at best unproductive and ineffective. However in certain areas following the events in August and September people have started to appreciate the FOMAC and

⁴Focus group participants in Paoua. September 18, 2013.

credit them with a return to calm. The Chadian soldiers are exception to this as they are widely seen as supporting the Seleka and at best ignoring their actions and at worse taking part in pillaging and violence. Almost unanimously people from non-Chadian communities have asked for the removal of the Chadian soldiers as well as a strengthening of the FOMAC.

Part Four: People

In the current situation all people are vulnerable to armed violence. Attacks by Seleka and Mbarara affect all in the neighbourhoods and villages that are targeted. Muslim communities are attacked by Anti-Balaka and other armed groups. Most people interviewed stated that young men are the most vulnerable as they are viewed as possible armed actors or members of self-defence groups such as the Anti-Balaka and therefore receive harsher treatment by the Seleka. Many women stated that they were worried when their sons and brothers went out, as they were not sure if they would return home. Many respondents also stated that women were more vulnerable of sexual assault and rape.

“Before we had pretty good relations with Muslims. Now if you walk around you see Muslims and Christians are all apart. Christians are scared. It is not all Muslims, not those who have been with us for a long time, only the new arrivals. The Imam told them not to act that way [violent, spreading intolerance] but they reacted meanly so he has refused to lead prayers.”⁵

Conflict dynamics have been oversimplified and there is a need for nuanced understanding of relationships between people and groups. The roots of the conflict between communities now are based on past patronage and repression of governments and perceptions of who is and who is not Central African. Many Muslim communities have suffered the same attacks as Christian communities just as many Christian communities have not been attacked at all. Certain Muslim communities, such as the Hausa, Mbororo and “converted” Muslims are considered to be Central African and have faced more violence at the hands of the Seleka and other armed actors. Chadian and Sudanese communities and Mbarara pastoralists are considered foreigners and have been spared most violence by the Seleka. This is an overview of relationships between people that differs based on the geographical location however it is important to keep in mind that the Seleka is a political movement that did not have religious intentions from the beginning and that discussions about classifications of victims and perpetrators cannot be easily separated into distinct categories. The risk that is apparent now is the ripping of social fabric connecting all communities and within

⁵Focus group participant in Batangafo. September 26th, 2013.

communities themselves unlike during past crises in the country. Participants within the Christian community pointed out that they have social cohesion problems within their community. “Start in your own neighbourhood, respect the people that you live with and solve your own problems before taking them to Seleka. It is us who bring our problems to Seleka who can cause death and resentment. Avoid betraying your neighbour for nothing,” said one focus group participant about Christians going to the Seleka to seek swift and often violent or extreme punishment against other Christians.⁶

“Chadians are shopkeepers, before when they came to C.A.R. [with wares to sell] they paid higher taxes and that caused frustration, now they are venging themselves.”⁷

Conflict over patronage and benefits from the government is becoming more and more an interreligious conflict that risks destabilising the country and possibly eventually the region. “Last year everyone cohabitated, worked, played together but since the arrival of the Seleka there is division. Seleka steal from people so people think that all Muslims are the same and will steal from you.”⁸ “Before Christians used to keep money with Muslims but since the events in Bouca the Muslims have pulled back and created distance out of fear.”⁹ During the interviews only a very small minority of respondents expressed extreme views such as, “all Muslims should leave Central African Republic¹⁰”, or, “it will be very difficult between Christians and Muslims unless God intervenes to have reconciliation¹¹.”

Most people have identified the same needs in order to restore peace and security in their communities. They have asked for a fast and effective disarmament of armed groups as well as civilians, the replacement of the Seleka by a regularised army, and the presence of a neutral international force to provide security. They have also asked for a quick return of legitimate local authorities (mayors, sub-prefects, prefects) and security providers (police, gendarmerie, justice system). Many respondents asked for involvement of the international community to solve the crisis and for the international community to advocate at the national and international level for a solution.

Recommendations

Armed violence reduction programming would be suitable for Central African Republic however it must be adapted to the volatile conditions in country that are likely to

⁶Focus group participant in Batangafo. September 30th, 2013.

⁷Focus group participant in Batangafo. September 26th, 2013.

⁸Focus group participant in Batangafo. September 30th, 2013.

⁹Focus group participant in Batangafo. September 30th, 2013.

¹⁰Focus group participant in Bouca. September 28th, 2013.

¹¹Focus group participant in Paoua. September 13th, 2013.



continue to evolve and change in the months that follow. This
however should not put off starting certain activities as soon as
possible, in fact it is recommended that certain activities be started quickly in order to
attempt to stop the breaking of social cohesion in the country and improving
community safety to act as a buffer against possible future stresses.

Emergency Response

There is urgent need for emergency response activities in Ouham and Ouham-Pende to respond to the events that have taken place since the end of August. There is likely need in other areas as well however they were not assessed during this research. Hundreds of homes have been destroyed and families have lost all possessions. Displaced people are living with host families, particularly in Ouham-Pende, who cannot support them or are sleeping in fields exposed to the elements. In the longer term food insecurity is a serious threat as most people are not able to access their fields and fire or nomadic pastoralists have destroyed many fields. No armed-violence reduction programme will be successful if the basic needs of the population are not met first.

Cross-cutting Issues

Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitivity

All projects and activities, no matter what sector, should only be started after completing a Do No Harm assessment of possible effects on the community. As well, all programmes should be planned with conflict sensitivity in mind. As has been witnessed in several communities the emergency response activities of international organisations has increased the violence amongst local populations, within the same community (for example amongst Christians) as well as between communities (for example between Christians and Muslims). With increases in emergency activities foreseeable in the future, as well as likely increases in need due to displacement as well as the lack of actors and resources available to respond it is likely that this type of violence will increase in the future. In order to reduce violence, including armed violence, it is therefore imperative that all activities be guided by Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity assessments.

Grassroots Participation and Local Authorities

Given the current lack of presence of government authorities in most parts of the countries, including Prefects, Sous-Prefects, security providers (police, gendarmerie) and justice institutions particular attention should be paid to working at the grassroots level directly with community leaders including village chiefs, group and neighbourhood chefs

(chefs de quartier). This will help to rebuild their authority, which has been diminished that will in turn provide for greater cohesion and recourse for the population in case of conflicts. A solid community-level base of authority will then be empowered to work with authorities at the municipal, sous-prefecture and prefecture level once they are in place. All activities, regardless of sector, should be conducted through local community-level authorities in order to re-build their authority in the community.

At the present time working with authorities at the municipal, sous-prefecture and prefecture level is questionable in many areas as many officials have named themselves and have not been chosen by communities or the government in Bangui and therefore do not have broad-based support by all community members nor the legitimacy required to fulfil their posts. Certain authorities may be polarizing elements between communities, for example the Mayor of Batangafo. While it is important to maintain communication and contact with all authorities including civil and military authorities to ensure security and ability to conduct activities, care should be taken so that international actors are not seen as legitimizing the rule of illegitimate leaders or as taking sides and working only with certain parts of the community.

Once official leaders are put in place officially by the government in Bangui support should be provided to them quickly in order to ensure they can complete their functions. Support can include material support to rebuild and refurbish offices that were destroyed during conflict as well as capacity building support.

Support to DDR Activities

In order to assure a successful, voluntary DDR campaign it is recommended that sensitisations be conducted in all communities where the DDR will take place in order for communities to understand what is DDR, how the process will be conducted and what they can expect to receive from the process. At the same time, sensitisation on the risks of possessing arms (including firearms and munitions) should be conducted to motivate community members to voluntarily disarm. As has been the experience of DRC-DDG in other countries, community disarmament done through sensitisation of community members to the risks of arms has a high rate of success and should be encouraged. Community members may be more likely to handover stockpiles and arms once they realize the danger of keeping these items in their homes and communities. Sensitisations should be carried out by individuals who maintain a strong presence in the community over time in order to build trust with the community and should be conducted in a participatory fashion that is entertaining and easily comprehensible by community members and does not threaten community members.

Support to SSR Activities

There is a great need for rehabilitation of construction of security sector infrastructure including police and gendarmerie posts and offices as well as safe storage locations for police, gendarme and military weapons including armouries and safe storage rooms. In coordination with other actors including the government and African Union in order to ensure a uniformed approach support should be given to ensure the timely reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure to help ensure the better functioning of state security providers. Support in terms of transportation (vehicles, motorbikes) and training in such topics as Firearm Safety, Human Rights, International Humanitarian Principles, and gender sensitivity should also be considered for all state security providers.

ERW Related Activities

There is no great need for ERW related activities at this time however depending on the evolution of the conflict in the country perhaps in the future there may be more need for such activities. Future activities may include collection and disposal of ERW and training national counterparts in ERW disposal.

Currently, there may be some need for ERW risk education in areas more greatly affected by conflict (l'Ouham particularly Bossangoa, Bouca and Batangafo sous-prefectures and perhaps in Ouham-Pende). A mobile team of facilitators can be trained and put in place in order to be called in to either provide sensitisation directly to communities at risk or to provide Training of Trainers for staff of other NGOs, either national or international working in zones at risk. It must first be identified who is responsible for clearance of dangerous objects should any be discovered by community members so that they can be informed of who to contact. This may be FOMAC (where present), the gendarmerie, the police or perhaps the military in the future.

Community Safety

Given the volatile security situation Community Safety activities should be started cautiously in well-targeted communities and areas. It may be premature to begin Community Safety activities in areas still experiencing heightened insecurity and regular attacks and in locations where the majority of the population has not yet returned from displacement in the bush or elsewhere. However, in communities with relative calm and security the start of Community Safety activities could help to protect against insecurity in the future. Therefore, Community Safety activities are recommended to be started slowly and increase in geographical area as the security situation permits.

Income Generation and AVR

NGOs should emphasize as much as possible income-generating activities in the months to come to help communities devastated by conflict to get back on their feet and be able to support themselves. Income generating activities can be seen as one of the most important activities to help reduce armed violence as they will give youth worthwhile employment and activity to discourage them from taking up arms in order to be able to feed their families and fill their spare time as well as creating a space for communities to work together. For example, having as a prerequisite that Muslim and Christian women participate together in the same groups and committees in order to create a social space to encourage cooperating and interaction that has been cut off due to the current situation. This will need to be done with care as in certain communities it may be too early to start immediately with such types of activities however whenever possible it should be encouraged. Many beneficiaries stated that they no longer have the space to dialogue and interact with others and by creating this type of space in a safe way where all participants gain an incentive for participating (income generation) NGOs can help rebuild inter-communal relationships.

Social Cohesion and Conflict Management

There is a very large gap in social cohesion activities in CAR with very few actors currently conducting these types of programmes despite the fact that they are of the utmost importance and are becoming more and more necessary following recent events.

In Ouham-Pende beneficiaries appreciated past social cohesion and conflict resolution activities conducted by Premier Urgence using sensitisations and dramas to pass messages and asked for this type of activity to be re-launched. Sensitisation on social cohesion, conflict management and resolution should be conducted as widely as possible using local drama groups, songs and visual displays that can be easily understood by all community members. Messages can be transmitted by local radio stations where available and played in local social gathering areas (bars, dancing clubs, etc.) to reach a wide audience. Large sensitisation campaigns can be held for example on International Peace Day to mobilize communities for dramas, songs, sensitisations as well as recreational activities.

Also in Ouham-Pende the mediation committee put in place by General Alkatim Mahamat should be supported in its activities, as it seems to be well respected by

community members. Support can include transport, training and payment of remunerations to committee members to allow them to better conduct their work in Paoua as well as surrounding villages. The existence of such committees in other areas should be explored and if they are deemed legitimate supported by outside actors. While a similar type committee exists in Batangafo that was also put in place, the legitimacy of this committee by local populations should be carefully be evaluated before any support is given to it as based on research for this paper it seems to not enjoy wide support or legitimacy by local populations. Where mediation committees are lacking, they can be put in place or other relevant institutions can be supported to provide mediation for communities. Beneficiaries voiced their desire strongly to have NGOs play a mediation role between them and the security forces and building, training and supporting local mediation committees could help to foster local ownership of such activities.

Opportunities for diverse communities to share social spaces and partake in joint activities should be created as much as possible. In addition to income generation activities mentioned above joint recreational activities should be explored, for example sports teams and tournaments and community mobilisation events. Activities where the community gains a benefit (money, recreation) while interacting with others should be sought.

Community radio stations should be supported where they exist and created where they do not and local journalists trained and supported. For example, the community radio station in Paoua should be re-launched with care to ensure sustainability and ensure that those selected to run the station and be journalists are responsible individuals. Community members identified that having a functioning radio station would allow them to sensitize others as well as share news. Community radio stations and properly supported journalists can cut down on the fear caused by rumours by providing factual reporting of current events in the country and community. They can also be used to sensitize communities on such topics as social cohesion, conflict resolution, as well as roles and responsibilities for security providers (for example the role of the judiciary) through radio dramas. It is imperative that proper training and support be provided to journalists before broadcasting to ensure that they report balanced, factual stories.

Early Warning and Conflict Mapping

There is currently little data on armed violence in the country, particularly in an easy to access and organized format. As well there is very little sharing from outside Bangui to the city and rumours and misinformation are commonplace. Setting up an conflict early warning system or conflict mapping system could be interesting especially during this time in order to track cases of armed violence and other abuses, in order to get detailed



information from outside of Bangui to the capital in order to interventions and emergency responses more quickly. It can be used to map conflict to predict trends. This type of activity could be set up on a program such as Ushahidi where information is sent to a website by SMS. Violence monitors could be trained and provided with a phone in key locations to send in information as it arises. Since most areas of the country have network problems relying on mobile phones and SMS will not provide the most reliable source of information but could be backed up with radios in areas where they are available or community radios and HF could be installed for government or medical use and shared with the early warning project. As a last resort reports could be sent by road or flight with NGO partners to a head office in Bangui to be entered into the system manually.

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