

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid



# Linking Protection & Livelihoods

## Applying a Protection Lens in Bangui

20 July – 25 August 2013

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## Acronyms

Acted	Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement
CAR	Central African Republic
CdQ	Chef de Quartier
CdG	Chef de Groupe
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
FACA	Forces Armées Centrafricaines
Fr CFA	Franc de la Communauté Financière africaine
FOMAC	Force Multinationale d'Afrique Centrale
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In what is proving to be a rapidly changing environment, this research, conducted 20 July to 25 August 2013, seeks to provide a snap-shot of the humanitarian crisis in Bangui as seen through a protection lens to provide insight for adopting a protection-driven approach to humanitarian action. In broad terms the situation can be considered to be stabilizing when compared to the acute period of March and April 2013.<sup>1</sup> However, when judged on basic standards of security and protection, Bangui is far from stable. Although the Séléka took control of the state in March, many commentators point to deep fractures within the coalition which threaten to cause a re-explosion of overt violence; while rumors of groups forming to launch counter-coups against Séléka, whether from the Province or from within Bangui itself, are also rampant.<sup>2</sup> Widespread perpetrated exactions persist, albeit in a relatively more targeted manner than the blanket approach that characterized the earlier phase of the crisis in Bangui (eg: March & April).<sup>3</sup> The formal protective institutions have completely collapsed and are far from being re-established in any meaningful manner. The uncontrolled proliferation of small arms circulating in a context of total impunity has fueled opportunistic criminality by both Séléka elements and unknown actors. And as the tensions of a lawless situation persist, fractures within the social sphere are increasingly evident and worrying. As such, although the level of the anarchy seen in March & April does not continue, precarious unpredictability now characterizes the Bangui context.

The crisis is firstly described as a politically driven coup d'état. However the violence of this macro-level justification has been played out largely at the micro-level, penetrating intimately into the lives of the civilian population. The Sélékai are seen to be perpetrating a deeply personalized agenda of violence motivated by "*règlement de comptes*". The violence is characterized by individual targeting, with civilians being the almost exclusive target. The principle of distinction between armed actors and non-combatants – a keystone in humanitarian protection – is discounted and thus adds almost nothing to the potential of protecting potential civilian victims of this violence. Indeed, there is a near complete disregard of human rights and global protection norms more generally. Further to the dearth of respect of principles which assert limits to the use of violence; the institutions formally mandated to protect civilians from such a protection crisis – including the police, gendarmerie, FACA and international protection actors such as FOMAC – are either total collapsed or have proven largely impotent to protect.

Within this framing, this report explores how violence has penetrated the private sphere, providing insight into the *lived experience* of people exposed to this on-going violence, examining how those at greatest risk perceive threats and vulnerability. It also explores how the at-risk civilian population is adapting to the challenges they confront on a daily basis; as well as sketching various social attitudes & practices that under persisting stress, are contributing to disrupted social cohesion, and potentially weakening socially based coping mechanisms. It then reflects on how the protection context as a whole risks provoking further humanitarian consequences (especially economic & thus food insecurity).

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<sup>1</sup> People regularly suggest that the situation in the rural areas is worse than that seen in Bangui.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in early August the former APRD along with Auto-Defence forces were rumoured to have regrouped in Ouham-Pendé; more recently, former FACA are rumoured to be re-grouping in Bangui.

<sup>3</sup> Scaled-up violence perpetrated against the civilian populations of Boy-Rabe & Boeï during the final 2 weeks of August illustrates the continuing explosive potential of the context.

## Methodology

This research is a perceptions study. It takes a snap-shot in time, seeking to gain insight into the lived experience of people exposed to perpetrated violence. It engages with the conflict affected civilian population of Bangui, being geographically oriented through a two tiered targeting process. Some 20 'illustrative' quartiers were selected for analysis according to criteria such as estimated numbers of IDPs (either arriving or fleeing); indications of on-going exactions; association with former regime; presence of Séléka bases; reports of occupied buildings; existing barriers; and specific livelihoods (eg: fishing). Within these selected quartier, random sampling was used to collect specific quantitative data; while random sampling, chain-referral sampling,<sup>4</sup> and key informant and focus group interviews were combined with direct observation in order to collect qualitative data. A total of 1203 quantitative questionnaires<sup>5</sup> were implemented; along with some 170 individual and small-group semi-structured interviews which reached more than 510 individuals; and 12 focus group discussions, reaching some 165 individuals. Some 15% of those interviewed in this qualitative manner were considered 'Key Informants' with the remainder being considered 'civilians'.<sup>6</sup> The information collected during the assessment period was compiled and analysed, with the findings discussed in this document.

### Summary of Research Demographics & Geography

Of 1203 questionnaires completed: more than 75% of the respondents were over 25 years of age, with the remaining between 15-24 years; with some 60% of the respondents being female. Some 10% of all respondents report having had no education; 25% had had primary education; and some 65% had lycée or higher, with a total of 17% having had university level education. A total of some 20 Quartier were analysed, with some 30% of the questionnaires completed in arrondissement 4 (in quartiers: Boy-Rabe: Gbafio, Mandaba, Fouh, Cité Jean XXIII (II), Dedengue II); 20% in arrondissement 7 (Ouango: KéttéGba, Kassai (Guito5), Ngaragba); some 15% in arrondissement 3 (Muslim population in Miskine: France Ville Malimaka, Camerounais Nord, GbayaDombia); 15% Gobongo, PK12, Begoua and Yembi in arrondissement 8 & OmbellaM'poko. The remaining arrondissement each accounted for some 10% of the assessment. The qualitative research was weighted in a relatively similar manner in terms of geographic coverage.

### Objectives of this Report

This report is a constructed from a more comprehensive protection context analysis report. It seeks to provide a reference for those actors who are seeking background analysis to inform their humanitarian action project planning<sup>7</sup> in order to support both "protection mainstreaming"; as well as the adopting of a "protection-driven" approach by humanitarian actors in Bangui.<sup>8</sup> In this context, where perpetrated violence persists and all formal protective institutions are largely failing, the objective of "protection mainstreaming" is to avoid any exacerbation of the circumstances of the conflict-affected population. However, the "protection-driven" approach

<sup>4</sup> This technique consists of original respondents recommending further individuals to be interviewed.

<sup>5</sup> A questionnaire exploring priority concerns; displacement trends and issues related to civil documents was developed by the DRC protection team.

<sup>6</sup> Given a vast majority non-Muslim population, random sampling methodology primarily accessed that perspective. As such, targeted interviews with various Muslim respondents were also conducted to gain insight into the Muslim perspective.

<sup>7</sup> For example, exchange has been undertaken with ACTED & Solidarité in order to ensure that relevant protection considerations can be taken into account in Bangui-based cash distribution projects.

<sup>8</sup> A "protection-driven" approach refers to humanitarian assistance activities that are designed to address the protection concerns and consequences of an at-risk population affected by a protection crisis.

more proactively seeks to contribute to and enhance the individual capacity of the people-at-risk to manage independently within this crisis. Contributing to an enhanced auto-protection capacity comprises supporting people to avoid threats and to cope with and overcome the consequences of the protection crisis within which they find themselves.

### Summary of Popular Perceptions of the Protection Context

As opposed to analysing the political context *per se*, this research seeks to gain insight into the popular perspective of the lived experience of on-going violence and people's perceptions of the protection context as it was during the research period.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, some of those interviewed specifically characterized the on-going crisis as a coup d'état, and thus as a political crisis. From this perspective, they explained that the crisis is rooted in historic jealousies that stem from favoritism and a lack of meritocratic access to employment practiced repetitively by the various national leaders, many of whom themselves gained their seats through violent coups. As such, these people assert that 'a coup d'état is not done by the people, it is done by the elite', arguing that 'it is the political parties and politicians themselves who have caused these problems; they have no interest in the population; they all do this only for the interest of their own ethnic group; all others suffer the consequences'. As a former male civil servant explained 'the state again is holding the population hostage by force and violence; people can have no peace; I don't know why these people keep choosing violence as the means of creating change for this country; now we are again pushed backwards'. These patterns are repetitive and have caused extreme jealousies; sentiments that politicians have exploited to fuel violence.

#### Political History

The current situation in Bangui must be considered in relation to a long history of politically driven violence in CAR. As a former French colony, CAR gained its independence in 1960 with David Dacko as president. Since then, turbulent political history<sup>10</sup> saw Dacko being ousted in 1965 by a coup led by army commander Bokassa; in 1979 Bokassa was ousted by a coup led by Dacko; in 1981 Dacko was ousted by a coup led by Kolingba; in 1993 Patassé beat Kolingba and Dacko in an election to end 12 years of military rule; in 1997 soldiers staged mutinies; in 1999 Patassé was re-elected; in 2001 59 people were killed in a failed coup attempt by Kolingba against Patassé; in 2003 Patassé was ousted by a coup led by Bozizé; in 2005 Bozizé won presidential elections and was re-elected in 2011; and finally in March 2013 Bozizé was ousted in a coup launched by the Séléka<sup>11</sup> who currently control the State – although there are already numerous rumors of various armed groups forming to again challenge Séléka for this control.

Before this latest violent political crisis, it was widely noted that State authority was profoundly weak in many parts of CAR,<sup>12</sup> with the past decade characterized by increased lawlessness and armed conflict between the government and a diversity of armed groups, especially in the northern part of the country. Indeed, the "Séléka" is a coalition of these armed movements who

<sup>9</sup> Representative statements are 'quoted' throughout the document as a means of illustrating the most typical responses provided by the many individuals interviewed.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13150044> for a historic outline; accessed July 13, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> See 'Central African Republic: Avoiding Another Battle of Bangui'; ICG, Jan 2013

<sup>12</sup> Poorly controlled borders have allowed the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), originally from Uganda, to position itself in the southeast of CAR since 2008. More generally, the government's inability to control its territory allowed for various armed criminal gangs known as "zaraguina" or "coupeurs de route" to operate widely throughout the country.

united around the claim that Bozizé had failed to honour the 2007 Birao Peace Agreement and the 2008 Libreville Agreement.<sup>13</sup> As such, in late 2012 the 'Séléka' captured a number of towns in the north and centre of the country; and they entered Bangui on 24 March 2013, forcing the then-President Bozizé to flee. Michel Djotodia, as political leader, immediately suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and proclaimed himself president, while armed Séléka proceeded to commit widespread abuses against the civilian population and their properties.<sup>14</sup>

People are adamant that these crises are not caused by the people themselves, but rather are the result of manipulation of the resentments of the population by 'people on top' who willingly use violence against the people to gain personal power. This analysis begins to illustrate how those at risk perceive the macro level political crisis, how the foundation for the infiltration of violence into the micro level is established, and how the logic for deeply personalized violence is constructed. The political objectives of a few are carried out in the social & private spheres with deeply personalized agendas of violence; with civilians being the primary targets of violence.

### Who Perpetrates Armed Violence?

To the largest extent, people report exactions being perpetrated by armed men in uniform; generally referring to these perpetrators as "Séléka".<sup>15</sup> However, to the extent that they are indeed Séléka, it is unknown if these armed elements are committing individually motivated crimes or if they are under the order of more senior Chefs. Larger-scale operations are assumed to be ordered by the senior command. However, exactions such as random shooting, executions, looting, extortion, assaults & rape equally may be committed as individual-driven abuses. This is fueled by assumptions of ruptures within the Séléka alliance, and an exceptionally weak chain of command, with many of the exactions assumed to be controlled by local "commanders" for personal interest (eg: looting & extortion). Thus even if an operation is ordered by higher level command, the individual conduct of armed actors is unlikely to be under their control. Outside of that there are many reports of exactions that are clearly opportunistic for personal gain (eg: opportunistic theft, extortion, etc), occurring when Séléka elements happen to meet civilians.

Further, it is unknown to what extent the perpetrators of violent abuses, especially those committed under the cover of dark, are actual Séléka elements. Contributing to this confusion are reports that small arms are now easily available to civilians, being reportedly easily purchased in PK5 markets; Bozizé is rumored to have distributed arms to civilians; while civilians themselves are rumored to have looted the Gendarmerie/FACA gun supplies. Others suggest that some civilians have been armed directly by the Séléka. Further, although exactions are reportedly typically perpetrated by 'armed men in uniform', it is widely noted that many uniforms have been stolen (eg: from FOMAC when over-run by Séléka in Sibut & Damara).

<sup>13</sup> This includes dissident factions of both the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP) and the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR) from the east, as well as the Central African People's Democratic Front (FDPC), the Patriotic Convention for Salvation of Kodro (CPSK) and the newly created Alliance for Rebirth and Refoundation.

<sup>14</sup> For example, see Human Rights Watch Report of May 10, 2013 (last accessed July 12, 2013) <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/10/central-african-republic-rampant-abuses-after-coup>

<sup>15</sup> Throughout this document, threats are often described as perpetrated by Séléka elements because this is how they are typically reported, reflecting people's perception. However, these remain unverified allegations; the fact that other armed actors are potential perpetrators must be kept in mind throughout



Thus although most allegations indicate Séléka as the perpetrators of the exactions, these may well be 'uncontrolled' or indeed 'unknown' armed elements, including the many private individuals who are capable and motivated to take advantage of the current context of chaos and impunity. These "unknown" elements were particularly mentioned in those areas where the Séléka presence is less concentrated, with people underlining that problems especially occur at night perpetrated by 'unknown armed men'. Some note that non-Séléka elements are perpetrating exactions against the Christian population, while disguised as Séléka (ie: faux-Séléka), specifically as a means of provoking anti-Muslim sentiment among Christians.

### Perpetrated Violence

People report that during the acute period of March & April 2013, widespread and systematic violent looting was conducted house-to-house, with personal belongings being carried away in vehicles; destruction of properties especially state & civil documents; extensive shooting by armed men, with injuries and death caused by stray bullets; a settling of scores especially through forced disappearances and targeted executions; extortion and unlawful taxations; general intimidation and harassment; verbal threats to 'kill all men'; all of which contributed to large-scale forced displacement.

Perpetrated violence against the civilian population has continued since that period, with people citing a wide range of on-going protection concerns, including physical aggression, targeted assassinations, murder, theft, pillage, extortion, rape, kidnapping, interruption of schools, arbitrary arrests, with people more generally worrying about the presence of arms, gunfire, and stray bullets. Fear remains at an extreme level, with people underlining that frequent gunfire sustains this. Rumors fuel the perpetual fear as well, with stories of brutal exactions committed in March & April continuing to circulate as though they were committed yesterday.

The current dynamics of violence have shifted since March & April. Indeed there are two relatively distinct trends of violence confronting the civilian population. The first is on-going large-scale organized Séléka operations (eg: as seen during the final two weeks of August targeted against the people of Boy-Rabe and Boeing), which are particularly targeted in arrondissement 4 & 7, as these areas that are seen as the strong-hold of the former regime. In addition, a second dynamic of violence is on-going, but persists at a somewhat more moderated level, being largely individually targeted taking the form of criminal activity it is largely opportunistic and ad hoc, albeit with a high prevalence. For the most part, people point to "the Séléka" as the perpetrators of this violence and exploitation, explaining that these people are well-armed and usually in uniform.<sup>16</sup> However, so-called 'faux-Séléka', are widely mentioned, with people underlining that many people now have arms, and indeed uniforms, and thus could well be so disguised. Further, as the chain of command in Séléka is known to be weak, many exactions committed by Séléka elements are individually motivated as opposed to policy driven.

Much of these targeted exactions rely on "*indicateurs*" or people from within the community itself, who willingly point individuals out to armed actors for targeting. People describe this internal betrayal as "treason" which again reflects the fracturing of social cohesion that occurs under prolonged exposure to violence.

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<sup>16</sup>For example, as Seleka has no structural support, the armed men are forced to live off of what they can steal from the civilian population.

### Failure of Protective Institutions

The protective environment is characterized by the near total collapse of all formal protective institutions. The FACA, Police & Gendarmerie collapsed on the arrival of Séléka into Bangui and indeed, especially former FACA continue to be targets of Séléka violence, being their sworn enemies because they fought against Séléka as they made their move to topple Bozizé. Moreover, although protective institutions, including the Police and Gendarmerie are somewhat visible, they have no meaningful protective impact, with many people saying that police posts are indeed manned by Séléka, and thus 'you have to be brave to go to them'.

Further, FOMAC, the African Union supported peacekeeping force with a protection of civilians mandate, is present, although profoundly crippled. Although people report that the visibility and patrolling of FOMAC has had a calming on the criminal activities of looting, pillage and physical aggression that is perpetrated by various armed actors; they are proving to have little protective impact in the face of Séléka and the violence they continue to perpetrate against civilian targets.

In the absence of formal protective institutions, Séléka is increasingly occupying police stations, and some civilians are increasingly calling on Séléka to regulate personal disputes of the nature that the Police may have helped with in the past. Moreover, people are also using armed elements to regulate personal disputes as a means of settling old scores as well. As such Séléka is drawn into, on indeed insinuates themselves into a role of justice, without applying justice. Indeed, such efforts typically lead to distorted use of force and large fines, which in effect provide a source of income generation for the Séléka

## 2. PERCEPTIONS of THREAT

This section is concerned with the *perceptions* of violence and its perpetrators as held by the populations at risk. It is apparent that there are two relatively distinct trends of perpetrated violence that the civilian population is confronted with. The first is on-going violence perpetrated by Séléka as an organized armed group; and the second is that which is perpetrated by armed actors, including both Séléka elements and others. Although these two dynamics merge, the first is at least allegedly related to military objective (albeit in a distorted manner which largely concerns perpetrated violence against civilians); while the second largely takes the form of criminal activities. Each is potentially perpetrated by the same armed actors, but the motivation & objectives vary.<sup>17</sup>

Although the overall situation in Bangui continues to be very precarious, most people suggest that the protection situation has progressed since the acute period of March and April 2013, in which widespread looting and violence was perpetrated by armed Séléka elements, and other armed actors in a relatively blanket approach. At that time, many civilians were forced to flee the worst affected areas seeking safety in other quarters or in areas outside of the town (eg: many reportedly fled to Bimbo; their fields; the bush; or crossed the river to DR Congo).<sup>18</sup>

Today this blanket approach of organized violence perpetrated by Séléka is reduced being particularly targeted in arrondissement 4 & 7. As such, the rest of the population is at relatively less risk of exposure to such violence— thus the indication of at least a moderate calming of the

<sup>17</sup> Closely associated with these two forms of violence, and equally impacting on the conflict context is the potentially explosive dynamics that have emerged in relation to Christian/Muslim tensions; and more precisely, the intra-communal tensions that emerge as a result of 'betrayals' from within the community.

<sup>18</sup> See below for a detailed discussion of the displacement trends observed in Bangui during this crisis

protection context overall. Nevertheless, those who note a calming, systematically underline the unpredictability that persists throughout Bangui, rather pointing to the above noted dynamics of criminality as the more typical type of violence they are now exposed to.

In any case, even if a certain number of people note a moderate calming, all underline that the city and the country more generally are far from having achieved peace.<sup>19</sup> Even in far less volatile zones such as Castor or Kpeténé, people underlined that 'we do not have peace yet; we have no guarantees; people are mal at ease; we don't know what is yet to come; we are going in an unknown direction; the future remains unknown; our country is in danger; when you awake in the morning, you just have to thank god'. Capturing this lack of confidence, a Chef de Quartier (CdQ) in a more affected area explained that 'as long as the Séléka continue to circulate, we just have to be prepared for anything'.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, much of the population remains in a highly distressed mental state, with fear and uncertainty mutually fueling each other and dramatically coloring people's perceptions of the protection environment. People repeatedly talk of events that took place in March and April as though they were very current. Particularly brutal incidents are repeatedly recycled, perpetually provoking extreme anxiety. Generally, people equally point to the visibility of guns and regular gunfire as a further provoking factor. More tangibly, the various forms of perpetrated violence that people refer to included physical aggression, assassinations, murder, theft, pillage, extortion, rape, kidnapping, interruption of schools, arbitrary arrests, with people more generally worrying about the presence of arms, gunfire, and stray bullets. The concerns developed below are those which were most widely and consistently reported, with various illustrative case examples being cited.<sup>21</sup>

### Geographic Mapping of Violence

Many people argue that the violence perpetrated by Séléka is motivated in equal parts, both at the political level and the very micro level, by both material interests (eg: looting & extortion) and a "*règlement de comptes*" or a 'settling of scores'; with violence by Séléka, both blanket operations, as well as targeted exactions being largely targeted against the civilian population, and being personalized. On this basis, although the arrival of Séléka into Bangui saw widespread violence and looting, certain areas were hit particularly hard. These same areas, including especially arrondissement 4 & 7 continue to be some of the worst affected areas today, because they are seen to be associated with the former regime and Bozizé more personally. For example, he was born in quartier Gbafio; he has a family home in quartier Cité Jean XXIII; a large proportion of the population in these zones are ethnic Gbaya,<sup>22</sup> the same as Bozizé. As such, these areas are assumed to have been favored by the Bozizé regime. Indeed, in this line, some of these areas house a large proportion of high and mid-level civil servants who are visibly economically "better-off". Furthermore, fairly well founded rumors suggest that Bozizé distributed arms to these arrondissement prior to Séléka's arrival.

<sup>19</sup> Although many people interviewed in Bangui expressed concern for their own safety, security and well-being, many indicated that the circumstances for most people in the Province are notably worse than what is being experienced in Bangui.

<sup>20</sup> The final 2 weeks of August saw Séléka escalating their violent operations against the civilian populations in Boy-Rabe & Boeing, causing massive forced displacement, albeit for short periods.

<sup>21</sup> Allegations cited in this chapter are used to illustrate perceptions of threat however these allegations have not been rigorously triangulated and must thus be considered with this in mind.

<sup>22</sup> National ethnic groups: Gbaya 33%, Banda 27%, Mandjia 13%, Sara 10%, Mboum 7%, M'Baka 4%, Yakoma 4%, other 2% (see: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>)

Quartiers under especially intensive pressure for these reasons include: Boy-Rabe, Fouh, & Cité Jean XXIII (arrondissement 4); and Ouango, Ngaragba, and Kassai (arrondissement 7); and Boeing. In these areas, people report that Séléka troops have implemented regular house-to-house searches for arms,<sup>23</sup> allegedly engaging in systematic looting during such procedures. People say that these men arrive in large numbers shooting in the air and generally menacing the population – often causing short-term displacement. Furthermore, there are many allegations of continued targeted exactions against civil servants who are believed to have been particularly close to Bozizé. Former FACA and Presidential Guard are particularly targeted for theft of uniforms and arms and alleged executions because ‘these ones fought against the Séléka; they are now the sworn enemies of Séléka’. More generally, those civil servants who are better-off are more generically at risk of targeted looting.

The localities of Begoua & PK12, as well as Gobongo (in arrondissement 8),<sup>24</sup> being located at the northern entrance of the city, were the first areas hit by the Séléka troops arriving from Damara in March. Moreover, PK12 is particularly important because of ‘formal’ traffic control barrier established there. In addition to providing a means of controlling population movements, through extortion this barrier is described as serving as an important source of income for those manning the barrier, with people saying ‘they just take this money for their own pockets’. Similar trends are described at the PK9 barrier in Bimbo. Both PK12 & PK9 have large Séléka bases.

### Séléka Bases

The rate of protection incidents is escalated when the civilian population is forced into interface with armed actors. Thus, the presence of Séléka bases is a critical factor that pulls violence into the private sphere. Fearing the proximity of Séléka, many say ‘the situation is dangerous because the “military” are nearby’. Individualized exactions are reportedly especially high in the vicinity of Séléka bases. The armed men are described as patrolling freely, taking advantage of the environment of near total impunity, regularly committing both small and large-scale opportunistic abuses against civilians as they encounter them (described further below); with people explaining that ‘they will steal anything; they can also just arrest you like that; they can assault you or kill someone for no reason’.

Séléka bases have been established at each of the control points at PK12 & PK9; as well as in select former FACA bases (eg: Kassai); various public building (eg: fire station houses an important Séléka base) and some schools, including Lycée Boganda, a large school complex next to Boy-Rabe. Indeed, people report that Boy-Rabe is under exaggerated pressure because large numbers of armed Séléka repeatedly arrive en masse from the nearby Boganda base, regularly intimidating and terrorizing the civilian population. The people of quartier Mandaba claim to be exceptionally at risk because their quartier borders on this school-cum-Séléka-base, with the CdQ explaining that youth of other quartiers provoke the Séléka, while the population of Mandaba suffer the consequences because they are located nearest to this base.

### Random gunfire & stray bullets

One of the most widely and consistently articulated fears is that of stray bullets, with people explaining that armed actors regularly fire their guns in the air in order to intimidate the population. There are many reports of injuries, and indeed deaths as a result of stray bullets.

<sup>23</sup> This is reportedly implemented under the guise of “disarmament”.

<sup>24</sup> A CdQ specifically explained that although Gobongo has been under significant pressure since the arrival of the Séléka into Bangui, they do not suffer the same level of exactions as seen in arrondissement 4 & 7 because they are not as closely associated with the old regime.

When visiting Quartier Fouh 6, the CdQ explained that just that day a pregnant woman had gone into labour after she was struck by a stray bullet into her hip. More generally, people repeatedly explained that the frequent sound of gun-fire perpetuates the high levels of anxiety and fear among the population.

## Other Exactions

It is repeatedly noted that civil servants associated with the former regime continue to be at risk of being targeted by the Séléka. This risk is particularly high for individual politicians seen to have been particularly close to Bozizé. Although many such individuals have been forced to flee the country, a good number report trying to remain discrete within their own community, with people explaining that although they are known there, they cannot be identified to an external eye. However, this auto-protective strategy of those at risk of being singled out potentially for summary execution is undermined by the practice of ‘doitage’ by “indicateurs”.

### “Indicateurs”

“Indicateurs” are widely described as people from within the local community who willingly identify and point out certain individuals or households of interest to the Séléka. Described differently in each area, they include youth needing to make some money; people having a grudge against another; former Séléka who have been demobilized and re-integrated into the community, although retaining close ties with the armed actors; or other civilians who are considered to be close to the Séléka (especially Muslims according to Christians). These “indicateurs” are suspected of pointing out houses where people of interest live (eg: former FACA or other civil servants; or known supporters of Bozizé); or equally, identifying the households that are well resourced with materials for looting. Many say these “indicateurs” watch what people buy, identifying who has money and what people have inside their houses; informing the Séléka of their observations; and getting some small payment in return. These “indicateurs” are sometimes known within the community but are said to be protected by the Séléka and therefore cannot be addressed; while others say they stay some distance away from the incidents and thus remain unknown (even if suspected) by the community themselves. It is important to note that these “indicateurs” have had a significant impact on economic security, with people being afraid to spend and liquid cash they may have for fear of being indicated for looting – this has contributed to a severe choking of local level cash flow which has had widespread implications on household level food security, especially for low-income earners

## Looting

Clearly one of the primary motives of armed actors in Bangui (including both Séléka and other armed actors), is looting. In the initial phase of the crisis (ie: March & April), the armed actors reportedly adopted a blanket approach to looting, especially in the so-called “pro-Bozizé” areas. Since then the looting strategy has been refined to selective targeting, relying on the use of “indicateurs” from within the local communities. Well-resourced households are at especially high risk due to this targeted strategy. However opportunistic petty-theft is repeatedly reported by civilians who are forced into interface with armed men as they circulate within communities.

### Night-time Looting

The more generic and presumably individually motivated looting is especially committed under the cover of dark, with people explaining that they have drastically reduced night-time movements, widely adopting a self-imposed curfew of 20:00 as a strategy to avoid confronting armed actors after dark. People describe escalated risks of individualized petty harassment, abuse, assault, and theft including armed actors stealing telephones; supplies from kiosks; and food from petty traders on the side of the road (eg: as they pass by). Random ‘taxes’ are also



reportedly more widely extorted, with people explaining that 'the Séléka can just demand 2000 CFA from anyone as they walk by', adding that 'they point their guns if you hesitate'. The rate of such incidents is said to be proportional to the number of armed Séléka moving around in the area, however, it is particularly these night-time exactions that are speculated to also involve other armed actors.

### Barriers & "Taxes"

Problems of extortion and illegal taxes are especially problematic in areas near Séléka bases (eg: Lycée Boganda; Kassai base; etc), especially when informal barriers or check-points spontaneously emerge next to these bases. The people of Boy-Rabe report trying by all means to avoid the "ad hoc check-point" at Lycée Boganda after 16:00, explaining that the demands for money become more threatening; the armed men become more unpredictable; and the risk of being refused passage or arbitrarily arrested increase after that time.

In Ouango Séléka extortion is particularly strong in relation to livelihood activities associated with the river (eg: fishing; cross-river/border commercial activities with neighboring DRC, etc). The river/border access is controlled by armed actors who charge as much as 2000 CFA for those carrying a sack of manioc. Even household activities such as collecting water and clothes washing have reportedly been disrupted by the presence of armed actors along the river banks.

Threats take on a distinct dynamic at Séléka-controlled "formal" barriers (eg: PK12-Begoua; & PK9-Bimbo). Although many report that the conduct of the armed Séléka manning these barriers has improved since their arrival in March, people remain extremely weary of these established check-points. The environment at these barriers is often chaotic and is perceived by most civilians as highly unpredictable.

Although it is often necessary for people to cross these barriers in order to conduct their normal economic activities (eg: commerce, agricultural activities, etc), people describe various strategies that have emerged to minimize exposure to the risks associated with them. For example, when the context is more volatile, people try to avoid the barriers all together (ie: they don't go to their fields). Again, according to reports that the behavior of those manning barriers becoming far worse after dark, people say they try to avoid all barriers after 17:00 hours. For example, a group of woman cultivators in PK 9 reported spending the night in the bush behind the barrier after arriving back from the field later than planned – deciding that this was safer than trying to cross the barrier. Indeed some women cultivators reported that they try to be across that barrier by 13:00 to be sure to avoid the problems that typically emerge later in the day. This in effect cuts some four hours from their typical work-day in the field.<sup>25</sup>

Generally, it is reported that people are free to cross these barriers by foot if they are carrying nothing. If someone is carrying a sac but is on foot, the fees vary between 500-1500 CFA 'depending on who you find there'. Reportedly, youth with push carts are typically hit much harder, while attempts to cross in a vehicle will cost between 2000-5000 CFA per passenger. Indeed travellers are said to face exceptional pressure, with their bags being searched 'for arms'. Theft is reportedly systematic, as is potentially deadly violence if items linking the person to the old regime are found. For example, numerous people in Bimbo reported an incident of 15 people having been killed at the PK9 barrier in mid-July after clothing with the image of Bozizé was discovered in the baggage of a passenger.

<sup>25</sup> Although the PK9 barrier is actually located at a bridge, the community of Bimbo explained that they can equally cross the river as they have in the past on local pirogues, paying some 25 CFA, and thus completely avoiding the barrier if need be.

## Kidnapping for Ransom, Arbitrary Arrests, Detention, Disappearances & Fines

People talk of many different fears relating to arbitrary 'capturing' of people. These processes have multiple motivations, but it is often associated with income generation for the Séléka, often causing serious blows for the population. People explain that families able to pay a ransom demand were particularly targeted. The tendency today has shifted more towards arbitrary arrests with very large fines being demanded to obtain the arrested person's release.

A deeply regrettable form of kidnapping for ransom involved armed Séléka trapping large groups of children within their schools, demanding individual ransom payments from the parents for the release of each child being held. The various kidnappings associated with schools have instilled a profound fear and contributed to limited return of children to their studies. As such, the restoration of normalcy for children is deeply constrained. Many adults noted quite some concern over the fact that their children are not able to continue their studies; while youth themselves are very angry at having their education interrupted.

## Sexual Violence

As usual, it is very difficult to gain an accurate impression of the prevalence of conflict related sexual violence. Some survivors of such violence spontaneously reported their experiences and the consequences they have suffered following this initial trauma.

Through their SGBV activities in Bangui, Mercy Corps indicated an increase in reported SGBV cases in April and May 2013, while noting that reporting trends for June again approached pre-crisis patterns.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, many people referred to "rape" as a concern. However, the vast majority of references made, were to cases reported on the radio. Of the some 300 quantitative questionnaires completed with IDPs & host families, 4 individuals cited rape as their reason for fleeing. Some CdQ vaguely allude to SGBV, but they explain that 'these women are not willing to report these exactions openly for fear of being stigmatized'.

Various community leaders cited very few specific cases, which indeed included 2 very young Muslim female victims; and one woman who was raped in her field with the CdQ of Yembi bringing her to the health centre and referring her to the "femme jurists". Further, some few cases were cited second-hand, with adequate detail to suggest that they were more than simply repeated rumors.<sup>27</sup>

It is also important to note that, in terms of perception, the population doesn't see SGBV only as a problem of perpetrated violence and the use of force. Some women argued that 'the problem is also on the side of the young girls who search for these Séléka men to "force" them into sexual relations so they can gain some money'. This description alludes to both the economic difficulties that force people into negative coping mechanisms; as well as some of the less than empathetic social perceptions of victims of sexual exploitation, violence, and rape.

<sup>26</sup> Discussions with Mercy Corps, August 12, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> During this period of research, 3 cases of rape were reported by the victims themselves; 1 case was reported by a CdQ involved in bringing a victim for medical care; and a Muslim women's leader reported 2 cases of young Muslim female victims. All of these cases had occurred 2 or more months earlier.

### 3. FRACTURING COMMUNITIES

One of the most grave of the many social consequences of the current crisis is the extreme fracturing between the Muslim and Christian populations. According to the 2003 census, the Muslim population represented 10% of the total population of CAR, although current estimates are closer to some 15%.<sup>28</sup> Although this percentage is likely higher in the capital given the concentration of trade, the Muslim population is nevertheless a small minority. As such, they widely speak of historic discrimination prior to the current situation; describing marginalization from public services, social mistreatment and harassment. In Miskine, a group of Muslim women explained that the police used to come regularly to their houses to arrest their husbands and they would have to pay to have them released. A young Muslim man in Gbaya Dombia explained that when a Muslim sought administrative services at the City Hall 'once they noted you have a Muslim name, they would delay until you paid them extra to do their work for you'. Some said 'we were considered a different race' explaining that 'when you are a minority, there is no one to protect you'. However, in the current circumstances, many Muslims suggest that 'now things are improving', explaining that 'the administration now works for us'. The group of women in Miskine said that their husbands are now better off because the police harassment has stopped.

A Muslim man from PK12: said that during the Bozizé era, Muslims were limited in their economic activities, especially as cattle keepers. He explained that the government forced them to relocate their traditional meat market located at PK13, to PK45 which resulted in increased transport costs. When they tried to move the market to PK22, Bozizé allegedly 'sent the military to destroy the new market place, using fire arms, killing 2 people and injuring 4 others, all Muslims'. He said Muslims asked the government to investigate this incident, but this was never done, saying 'this left Muslims feeling angry, but we could do nothing'.

This man further claimed that cattle keepers, who for the most part are Muslims, were targets of extortion, explaining that the police and gendarme systematically demanded extra payments along transport routes, suggesting that he himself had lost some 11 million CFA due to this. He also underlined tensions between cattle keepers and agriculturalists, saying 'they treated us with no respect; by the time of the departure of Bozizé, some 121 cows had been slaughtered by Christian agriculturalists in the fields; they had arms but Muslims were unarmed; and whenever there was an incident, the Muslim had nowhere to go to complain'.

He described Muslims as 'a mistreated and exploited minority' saying that 'the arrival of Séléka is a divine answer to Muslim prayers; the cattle and meat market have now been returned to PK13; and we now pay no extra fees along the way'. He further explained that new standards have been established, explaining that 'if one of our cattle is killed by a Christian, he will have to pay; I will not be left with nothing like in the time of Bozizé'. As such, he is confident that now his business will function much better.

For the future, he asserted that 'the situation is now much better', explaining that 'this situation will last long, at least for 50 years, because this is the length of time the Christians have had in power; they have mistreated us; we are also Central Africans, we are also children of this country because we were born here; we also have the right to rule this country; it was our obligation to bring about a better government'.

<sup>28</sup> See for example <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ct.html>



When asked what Christians might think about the new political situation, he said 'they are positive about it', explaining that 'the Christians did not like it in the beginning because they were not used to Muslim rule, but they have accepted it now; Christians who have fled have nothing to be afraid of; they remain in the bush, but they will return with time when it becomes obvious to them that there is nothing to fear'.

At the same time, the majority Christian population indicates that from their perspective the Muslim/Christian relations were very fine before this crisis, saying that 'we lived in symbiosis; there were no tensions; everyone was accepted; we were together'. In the current context, many Christians express a sense of being deeply threatened by what they refer to as "Muslim domination", with many asserting that the intention of the current movement is to "Islamize" the country and enslave the Christian population. The vast majority of Christians asked about the Muslim/Christian relations say the Muslims of CAR have changed their behaviour, explaining that 'these brothers took a different option; they have adopted a different manner; things are not good between us now; now fear reigns'. Many non-Muslims suggest that 'the problem is that now the Muslims command the country; they are now always right'; 'the Muslims now have the power; they now control the country; they think they are superior now; we cannot be at ease with this; we fear them now'; 'the Muslims control the country now; others are discouraged'; 'the Muslims have changed mentally; they have grown with confidence; they are now arrogant; we think they have a bad heart'. Many claim that 'even a young boy can now assault & threaten you, saying he will come with his gun'; 'they have no respect; we now have no relations; we can have no collaboration'. Indeed, some aggressively assert that 'now we are enemies'.

### Non-Distinction

A Muslim Hausa woman explained that the Muslim population in CAR comprises a diversity of ethnic groups. As such, the Muslims themselves explain that especially those who are not close to the Séléka have also suffered a lot, having been targeted and looted, as well as being the targets of those close to Séléka who are taking the opportunity to settle personal scores. It is also somewhat more discretely explained that Muslim merchants have had large sums extorted from them by Séléka as a kind of 'protection fee'; those who agree to pay are not attacked – with the demands for payments reportedly being on-going. As such, some non-Muslims recognize that some Muslims have been badly very affected by this conflict; while others equally note that not all Muslims support the actions of the Séléka.

But for the most part, non-Muslims make little or no distinction among civilian Muslims and the armed actors. Indeed, in the popular discourse of non-Muslims, the terms "Muslim" and "Séléka" are often used interchangeably, with many saying 'we cannot make a distinction at this time'.

Although some refer to foreign Muslims coming into the country from the outside, bringing this violence to them; it is equally asserted that 'the Muslims here welcomed these foreigners'. People argue that 'the Muslims from Chad, Sudan and CAR are now together; and the Séléka are their parents'. Although some said that the Muslims of Bangui are the ones who funded this coup, others suggest that 'the Séléka has intoxicated the Muslims of this country'. But the general conclusion is that 'they are now all together', with some saying that Muslims have joined Séléka because 'they all want to be together so they can control the country'. As one man explained, even if it is his brother who was Islamized, he must now approach this brother with caution 'because they are all together; they are all against the Christians'. All nuances are lost.

Many assert that Muslims have not been targeted by the violence, claiming that 'their houses are not affected' arguing that 'they are untouchable; if you speak Arabic, you will be safe now'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, many non-Muslims presume Muslim civilians are complicit in the on-going violence, if not direct perpetrators themselves. Especially men assert that 'the Muslims have taken up arms; we know they have these arms in their houses; they all have arms and we have none; we are at risk because of this'. Following this, some women claimed that 'you cannot have a problem with a Muslim woman now, because she can call her husband and he might come with a gun'. More generally, people say that 'you must avoid problems with the Muslims, because they can just call the Séléka; the Séléka are their parents'.

This presumed arming and collaboration of the civilian Muslims with the Séléka is a particularly problematic element. Non-Muslims explain that 'we see them together with the Séléka, so we think they are together'. Indeed, armed men in uniform are often very visibly engaging amicably with civilians in Muslim majority quarters (eg: Miskine & Gbaya Dombia). In these areas, men in civilian clothing, especially tunics, are sometimes very visibly armed. This blurring/merging of civilians with armed actors contributes heavily to the perception that 'the Muslims collaborate with Séléka', fueling the conclusions of many non-Muslims that 'it is the Muslims who are fighting against us now'.

Some Muslims are also very worried about this blurring. An insightful Muslim woman explained, 'even though these problems originate with the politicians, it is the will of our men to follow their lead; it is their will to collaborate that has exacerbated the implications of political misdeeds at the social level'. She argues that 'men are always too willing to follow the rhythm of the politicians while the women suffer the most' arguing that 'it is women who can make a change'.

### Sentiments of Revenge

As a result of the popular interpretation of these Muslim/Christian dynamics, an alarmingly widespread reference to anticipated revenge has emerged in Bangui. Many Christians, both men and women, explain that they cannot accept how they have been treated, with many explaining that 'people have lost a lot; this has been very personalized; the Muslims have done a lot of very bad things against the Christians; we cannot accept this; we cannot pardon them'. The deeply personalized nature of the violence, with armed actors' systematic targeting of civilians has caused profound sentiments, with some saying that 'this violence has marked the people; many were victims, their parents have been killed, everything has been stolen'.

These very strong feelings of victimization combine with the above reconceptualising of "Muslims" as a monolith - which makes each and every individual Muslim equally responsible for the actions of the few who have actually perpetuated the violence against Christian civilians. This has led many Christians to say things like 'those who have been direct victims, they want to do the same thing back to the Muslims'. Others explained that 'we have been targeted; we now have many bad memories; the Muslims have looted the Christians; we are now waiting for another occasion; we are waiting for the time of revenge'. Others said that 'because the Muslims have done these bad things, we must revenge; there will be heavy vengeance against the Muslims; there is a lot of hatred now; people have a strong desire for vengeance; we will attack them when it is our turn'.

Especially male respondents explained that 'for now we will hold this anger in our hearts; but these feelings are strong; the hatred is there; people now have very bad memories; there is

<sup>29</sup> This of course is not accurate. Although proportionally, Muslim owned premises have been less affected, there are many reports of Muslims homes and businesses affected, and individuals victimized.

much animosity now; it will be difficult to forget; we are rather the time to revenge for the things that have been done against us'.

waiting for

Three 50 year old Christian men in Ouango:

When asked about Muslim/Christian relations, these men laughed cynically, explaining that 'this is like a match; they have had their turn; we must return; we cannot let this go; we must take our turn. Another added that 'it is absolutely certain that we cannot leave it like this; RFI tells us that 40,000 of our people have been killed; these ideas are now entered into our heads, it will be like this'. When asked how many more people, including children will die in this revenge, these men were sure that 'no, no it will not be our children who die, it will be the others - pointing to nearby houses they said 'these ones are Arabs, they will be killed; our neighbours who are Arabs will be killed; our own children will have no problem'. When asked if there is a difference between people carrying arms and those who are here as civilians trying to live their lives; or even if children should be targets of such violence, the men explained that 'the ones carrying guns are their parents; so they are all responsible; just like my children are responsible for me'.

When asked if it is possible to avoid this, they explained that 'no, there is no way to avoid this; it must be like this; it is the Muslims who control the country now; we are their slaves; we cannot leave it like this; we cannot accept this; we need the regime to change; but if we wait 18 months, we will all be dead; people should help us, like they did in Mali; why are they not helping us here; we have to do all of this ourselves; otherwise we don't see how this can end; where are the French; they must take their responsibility; they are our parents; they caused these problems; we want liberty; we want the freedom to move and return to our activities; we want our children to go to school; we want the Chadians and Sudanese to leave this country.

Of course, the more fundamental claim is that 'this country is for Christians and not for Muslims'. A widely expressed sentiment by non-Muslims is that the foreigners must be forced to leave the country. This particularly means the Sudanese and the Chadian. However, the more typical assertion is that 'all Muslims must leave this country', with all nuancing being lost. Some assert that 'the Christians are the majority; we will chase all the Muslims away'.

Some say that this will be achieved through elections. Indeed, given the massive Christian majority, elections are obviously likely to produce a non-Muslim leader. But many say that 'revenge will come with a change of regime', meaning that the moment of the elections could actually trigger operationalization of these sentiments of revenge. Indeed, some men particularly calmly explained that 'people have only the spirit of revenge in their hearts now; with a change of President, we will attack all the Muslims remaining in the country'. Even a group of young male students, despite being quite reflective, concluded that 'we now have only the spirit of vengeance in our hearts, we just wait for the opportunity; we will kill Muslims in revenge for what they are doing to us now'.

Notably, women generally have very different views on how the future should & will play out. Few women speak of outright physical revenge. Although a good number of women also said that 'the Muslims must leave the country', few overtly favour violence, arguing that this will only perpetuate the suffering. Indeed, many Christian women underlined that as Christians they must not foster such violence; while some Christian men explained that after they revenge against these people, they can just go to the church and ask for God's forgiveness, explaining that 'he will give it, because he understands'.

Although many men argue that there is no alternative but to physically revenge these events, when pushed a bit, quite a significant number of non-Muslim respondents accepted that not all

Muslims in Bangui support the targeting of exactions against civilians. Some agreed that especially those who have had some education could understand, thus agreeing that there is a possibility to restore some understanding between the two communities, with some explaining that 'although all Muslims have been "contaminated" by these foreigners, if the foreigners are chased away, we might be able to rebuild relations with the ones who remain'. However, these Christians nevertheless asserted that 'the request for dialogue must come from the Muslim population themselves; they must make the first step; the Christians are now afraid; we are traumatized; it is the Muslims who have changed their behaviour towards us; it is they who mistreat old friends and neighbours; we cannot make the first step' they are the ones who have the responsibility to make the first step'.

#### 4. AUTO-PROTECTION

This section on auto-protection explores the actions that the at-risk community themselves have taken in efforts to address the imminent threats they confront within this protection crisis.

##### Chef de Quartier

The role of the Chef de Quartier (CdQ) in relation to protection is typically described as promoting peace and reconciliation within their quartier. Normally, CdQ work as part of a system, managing local level disputes and referring the progressively more complex cases to the Mayor, Police and/or Gendarmerie. In the current context, due to the failure of the formal protective institutions, they are obviously extremely handicapped; they are forced to deal with everything themselves. Despite being mandated to work at the micro level and on small-scale social discord, they are now required to manage the fall-out of national level political discord. Not surprisingly, they are profoundly ill-equipped to cope with the problems caused by the armed actors who continue to menace them and their populations. Many despondently admit that in the face of the problems caused by the armed actors 'we are able to do nothing.'

However, although they are profoundly constrained, the CdQ play a critical role in both social and security management in the given context. Indeed, the burden weighing on the shoulders of some CdQ is impressive. For example, the CdQ of KétéGba 1 explained that people are constantly watching his reaction in order to determine their own; saying that if he stays put, they have the confidence to do the same. The CdQ of Mandaba was assaulted by armed Séléka and verbally threatened by very senior Séléka officials because he refused to reveal the location of a former Bozizé aid who was alleged to be living in his quartier. The CdQ in Cité Jean XXIII was arrested by the Séléka and held and beaten for 2 days; being released only after FOMAC intervened – he believes he would not have returned without that intention, and he continues to be closely monitored by the Séléka. The incident that triggered this problem was the killing of 3 Séléka by local youth. Under such pressure, these community leaders worry about their limitations to manage the challenges they confront – especially when the armed actors do not respect them. When asked who they can call in a crisis situation, these leaders desperately note that 'we are on our own; who will come; there is no one to help us'.

##### Chef de Quartier as Protectors?

In these desperate times, much of the population is looking to anyone for help; and often their expectations are quite unrealistic.

Quartier Galabadja: the Chef de Quartier (CdQ) explained that in early July, during a night-time incident of theft of a private house in his quartier, the victim called him by phone and begged him to come to help. In an interview, the 'victim' himself reported being very disappointed in the

CdQ because he did not come to their aid, suggesting that he thought the CdQ might be complicit with the thieves. At the same time, the CdQ explained that as he is unarmed, if he had gone to the location to try to intervene, he would surely have been risking his life.

Indeed, some people assert that 'it is now the role of the CdQ to protect us', with a notable number of people reporting disappointment with the performance of their CdQ at this time. According to 1203 people asked in the quantitative assessment, some 70% said that before March, the capacity of the CdQ to regulate conflicts was good, while another 20% said it was moderately good. Less than 20% agreed that this capacity was good (and another 15% said it was moderate) after March.

### Negotiations

In efforts to manage the circumstances of their various quartier, some CdQ have initiated direct dialogue with various actors controlling violence in their zones. For example, the CdQ of Gobongo III explained that following the killing of a local youth by the Séléka in June tensions were dramatically escalated in the area, with the community becoming very tense and the rate of exactions by the Séléka scaled up. These untenable circumstances pushed the CdQ/CdG to call for a meeting with the Minister of National Security (at Hotel Ledger). They reported the killing and complained about the mal-treatment of the population, incessant gunfire and reckless driving; they asked for better control of the armed men; and demanded greater respect for the population in general. The CdQ explained that the Minister was relatively responsive to their requests, adding that 'here we don't have any arms, so we don't have problems like those in Arrondissement 4'.

In a separate effort, the Mayor of Arrondissement 8 explained that the civil authorities had a meeting with the 2 "Generals" based at the Séléka PK12 base, explaining that 'they listened well, took note, and said they would look into the problems' but she thought there was little change as a result of the discussion. However the population actually reported a calming of the severity and rate of exactions perpetrated by Séléka following those meetings.

At the same time, as a means of enhancing their sense of independent influence, the quartiers of Arrondissement 4 have entered into direct dialogue with the French troops and are developing a "Protection of Civilians" strategy as a counter-measure against the continued and intensive threats against the local population, perpetrated by Séléka. Although the CdQ say they are aware that the French cannot engage directly with the armed Séléka, most said they felt positive about the fact that the French took the time to discuss with them.

Indeed, others mentioned some bewilderment, that although the FOMAC more generally may be seen to pass through their quartier, they seldom (or never) stop to discuss with the population or their leaders. The CdQ expressed a strong interest to open a channel of dialogue, with FOMAC, explaining that they often have information and suggestions; as well as having an interest in what FOMAC is planning in terms of their protection of civilians mandate.

### Confrontation

Of course there are limitations in terms of the victim confronting the armed perpetrator of violence. Especially men repeatedly underlined that 'we are un-armed, you cannot resist against a gun'. Nevertheless, it is very evident that the level of frustration is growing among the population, and despite the odds, many are increasingly thinking in terms of confrontation out of desperation. The following outlines a range of practices the community has reported engaging



with as a means of taking a stand against the perpetrators of violence – despite the dramatically unequal power dynamics.

### Casserole

Especially women quite animatedly explain the “casserole” is a recently emerged measure of solidarity within the community. If someone is under physical threat they shout and cry for help; (or some blow a whistle). When people in the nearby houses hear these cries, they begin clanging the casserole lids to make as much noise as possible. People explain that the whole quartier can join in making a very strong noise, which they say can chase the perpetrators away. In some cases this has been successful; but in others, it has caused the armed actors to fire into the air, further intimidating the population. In one case, a CdQ was threatened with violence if his population continued with this effort.

In Fouh a young man explained that the quartier did this casserole-clangng systematically for 3 days straight between 16:00-17:00 in order to draw attention to their dire circumstances. They hoped that the radios would hear of their campaign and begin reporting their plight in order to draw some help their way. They said that some local radio stations, as well as RFI reported the effort, but they had not seen a change in the help they were receiving

### Manifestation

Although it is clear that such a strategy comes with high risks of retaliation, some quartiers, especially those in Boy-Rabe have resorted to public manifestation against the brutality of Séléka. The CdQ of Mandaba explained that when General Moussa and the Minister of National Security came to assault and threaten him, the population came into the streets en mass; they began burning tires, and shouting and clanging of casserole in protest against the mistreatment of their CdQ. People shrugged their shoulders when asked about the risks of violent retaliation, saying ‘we have nothing to lose; what else can we possibly do?’

At the same time, in quartier Guito5 (Kassai) people explained that they would like to manifest against the mistreatment and intimidation by the Séléka, but fear of the likely retaliation prevents this. People explained that ‘we have tried walks for peace, but the Séléka arrived with men shooting in the air; people are very afraid of stray bullets; people fear getting hurt, the risks are just too high at this time’.

### Throwing Rocks

In relation to the above incident in Mandaba, people explained that ‘they have guns; we have no guns to defend ourselves, but we cannot just accept all of this; we will throw rocks against them; we will fight with our hands; people have had enough’. A CdQ of Fouh 4 & his wife equally asserted that soon people of their quartier would start throwing rocks at the armed actors who continue to menace them, underlining that ‘people have had enough of their intimidation; people are getting frustrated and this could be a dangerous mix’.

A week later, Séléka was back in these quartier in far larger force menacing the population again, forcing the population into strategies of avoidance (ie: flight) rather than confrontation. One week following that, the Séléka had barricaded the area and bombarded the civilian population with heavy artillery over a 2 day period – with next to no protection response by the FOMAC, despite their protection of civilians mandate, people were yet again forced to flee.

### Violent Confrontation

In Cité Jean XXIII a group of youth reportedly violently confronted 6 armed men in uniform who were trying to steal a private vehicle from their quartier. Three of the 6 men fled, but the youth

killed the remaining 3, allegedly by hand with stones. In retaliation, the CdQ was arrested, and beaten and has since been under intense surveillance by Séléka and fears the risk of assassination. Alternatively, there are many rumors of civilians having arms, and that some are thinking of adopting a violent response if they are attacked by Séléka. However, in fact nothing in this line was noted during the research period.

More recently, large displaced populations occupied the airport, demanding that Djotodia leave his post and all Muslims leave the country, demonstrating an increasingly aggressive manner. This begins to reveal that the civilian population is on the edge; en mass violent reactions are a very real potential if the patterns of on-going violent oppression and intimidation continue and they remain completely exposed with no protection efforts. People are increasingly asserting that they are fed up, underling repeatedly that now they have nothing to lose.

### Avoidance

Although the role of the CdQ is constrained vis-à-vis problems perpetrated by the armed actors, they nevertheless play a very important role in advising their populations on how to navigate within the persistently high-risk environment. As the general population explained, 'they are always well-armed when they come here; there is nothing we can do but cry for help; but we know that no one will come'. As such, the following are some of the auto-protective avoidance strategies that people talk about at the quartier level.

### Maintaining Calm

Many CdQ explained that it is their role in these times to reassure their people and calm them as quickly as possible in the case of incidents, in order to ensure these incidents do not escalate into even worse circumstances. The CdQ of Mandaba (assaulted publicly by the Séléka) explained that after this incident, he went quickly to the public radio and called for calm among his people in order to avoid an escalation of violence. People widely agreed that 'you must always stay quiet, if you open your mouth to complain, immediately the arms are present'.

### Reduced Movements

Before, people could move as they wanted, they could circulate freely; now we are not free; you can be beaten, shot, or killed if you come back late; we have no rights; we cannot walk late; they will demand where you were; you must give them your ID; they will demand money; they will steal your telephone just like that'.

Given the threats, reduced movements is a key strategy that people have adopted. People largely describe a self-imposed curfew of 19:00 or 20:00, which is described as having significant implications on livelihood activities that rely on movement at night including petty trade, restaurants & bars, taxi driving and night-time fishing.

The implications have also strongly impacted on agriculture, with people having periodically reduced their movements to the fields as a means of avoiding having to leave the safety of their homes; in order to avoid the risk of confronting armed actors either on the way to & from the field and/or in the field. Also as discussed above, people are particularly motivated to avoid checkpoints & barriers (whether formal or informal). If they have to cross them, they ensure they do so in the early afternoon, stating that the armed men at the check-points become increasingly dangerous after dark. Theft of materials either from their fields directly, while they are in transport, or indeed from their households or in the market if they sell their product is repeatedly highlighted as a problem.

Avoidance through reduced movements has other implications as well, with women explaining that, in the current context, if your child falls sick in the night, you simply cannot take the risk to bring him to the hospital due to the insecurity; you must wait for daylight, explaining that 'you just have to treat the child with whatever you might have in the house'.

Equally, many people explained that they refuse to send their children to school because of the fear of the kids being trapped/kidnapped by the Séléka. As such, to a large extent, children remain out of school, staying close to home in case sudden security threats materialize.

### Flight & Displacement

Displacement has been adopted as a central avoidance strategy during this crisis, with a number of different displacement strategies being evident in the city. The longer-term displacement typically concerns people arriving to Bangui from the Province, with many of these people having arrived months before the crisis actually touched Bangui. Most report waiting for improved security in their place of origin before they'll think of returning.

Alternatively, the most notable displacement of people from within Bangui took place during the very acute phase of the crisis in March & April. Most displacement took place from Yembi, PK12/Begoua, and Gobongo as the localities first touched with the arrival of the Séléka; and of course from Boy-Rabe, Fouh (arr. 4) and Ouango (arr. 7) as these areas were quickly under targeted pressure by the Séléka as "pro-Bozizé" zones. These people fled to less affected areas including quartiers of Kpeténé, Pétévo, Ngongonon, and Combattant; as well as nearby locations such as Bimbo, the bush, their fields, and across the river to DR Congo.

For the most part, these people say they returned to their places of origin within a few days to a few weeks of their original displacement. However, some continue to be displaced today. Although many people reported having been displaced but having returned, of the 1203 random people questioned in the quantitative part of this assessment, some 25% of respondents were currently concerned with displacement (either as IDPs or hosts). Of those still displaced, the vast majority reported general insecurity as the cause for their displacement, with people mentioning fear, gunfire, stray bullets, looting and general threats as a part of that; while some 10% specifically cited fears of being targeted; and 3% citing occupied houses as the cause for flight (when asked). For the most part, Chef de Quartier are vague about displacement trends in their quartier, explaining that IDPs are generally very discrete, because for many, displacement is their manner of hiding from / avoiding on-going threats.

Of the IDPs interviewed, about half are long term IDPs from the province; while the others were either from within Bangui or the immediate surrounding area (eg: Ombella M'poko). Almost half of the IDPs originating from within Bangui come from the 4<sup>th</sup> arrondissement; with another 10-15% from each of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. For the most part, these IDPs intend to remain where they are until a stabilizing of the city is evident.

A Single woman with 5 children displaced to Fouh 4 had rented a house and explained that she would stay there until things calmed down in PK12, from where she was coming. She explained that the concentration of armed Séléka, constant gunfire, and the regular recurrence of exactions is what leads her to decide to stay in the rented house in Fouh.

The CdQ of Gobongo II reported that a small number of households had recently relocated and installed themselves next to the newly established FOMAC base in his quartier.



Of those people still displaced, some 60% are hosted and indeed report being largely reliant on their hosts for food; while some 27% are in their own houses and 13% are renting, with 30% of these independent IDPs managing their food independently, while others indicate relying to some degree on contributions from others. Some 50% of those still displaced say they intended to return to their place of origin, while ¼ said they did not ever expect to do so; while the final ¼ were undecided. Of those planning to return, the vast majority could not say when this would be, with the vast majority indicating that this is dependent on the security situation.

However, today, there is yet another pattern of internal displacement that is very evident in Bangui. People in areas that continue to be under intensive exposure to perpetrated violence have adopted a very dynamic form of displacement consisting of very punctual movements; with people moving from one quartier to another according to the immediate dynamics of violence. Once the acute situation from which they are fleeing has stabilized, they return again, often within hours or days and often enough to looting and lost resources.

Finally, many resort to displacement as a means of hiding. People explain that particularly former Ministerial persons of the Bozizé government and some former FACA have fled the country. However, a number of FACA and less senior government personnel have adopted displacement strategies within Bangui, moving from one location to the next as required according to the shifting dynamics of violence and the feasibility to remain safely in hiding. One of the greatest risks for these people is that of being pointed out by “*indicateurs*” to the Séléka.

## 5. PERCEPTIONS OF VULNERABILITY

### Who is most Vulnerable?

Within this context of on-going violence there are a range of perceptions of vulnerability. Both men and women consistently agreed that young men are particularly vulnerable however there are a range of different reasons for this. People generally assert that ‘the Séléka is focusing on men; they are targeting young men to avoid the risk of a counter-rebellion, explaining that ‘they don’t want the youth to function against them’. Many explain that in the early days after Séléka had gained control of Bangui, some youths killed a member of Séléka, and in retaliation, the Séléka leaders announced plans to go door-to-door and kill all Christian men. In fear, many of the men of Bangui fled to surrounding areas. Although this displacement was very short, a lingering fear of this threat influences people’s perceptions of Séléka and their intentions.

### Targeting of Men

In terms of targeted violence, people underline that those associated with the former regime are at risk of targeted assassination, whether due to their position in the government, or due to their ethnic background (especially Gbaya), or due to the role they played before – as in the case of FACA. Equally, those who are well positioned with material goods are at severe risk of being pointed out and targeted for theft. Others note that those who stay in the churches are brave, with wide claims that Séléka has targeted churches although their motives for doing so are presumed to be multi-factored. At the same time, women explain that ‘it is not the women that the Séléka target; it is the men; they will kill men faster than they will kill women; they leave women as the weak sex’. They emphasize that, as such, women are typically able to move more freely than men, especially during the day time.

## Youth

Restricted freedom of movement is a critical consequence of insecurity. Many note that it is especially male youth who are most affected because they are typically the most mobile and active in the evening. A curfew of 20:00 hours, even if self-imposed, has wide implications for these men,<sup>30</sup> limiting their typical livelihood and leisure activities. Many say it is the youth who find it the most difficult to accept the limitations necessary to avoid threats. Indeed, agitation and boiling resentment against the Séléka (and indeed Muslims in general) is particularly visible among the male youth.

## Women & Economic Adaptation

Women cite the difficulties they face, noting that many stem from the limitations imposed on their men. In the past, men often had salaried work, whether through a job, day-wages, or artisanal work. Today most of these opportunities are interrupted/discontinued. Indeed, those households which relied on a salary and who have been laid off from guardian or cleaner type jobs (ie: low-end incomes), are in dire straits because they now have few alternatives.

The burden of 'taking up the slack' and ensuring the basic household needs are met, now falls largely on women. The particularly vulnerable are those who lack access to a field and the means to scale up cultivation as a means of ensuring household-level food security. Although agricultural activities have been restricted through various causes, many people nevertheless explain that it is the food that they can collect from their fields that now sustains them. As such, those who have the possibility to do so have increased their agricultural and petty trade efforts to fill the resultant household level economic gaps.

However, especially female petty-traders, whether in the market or on the side of the road, are at perpetual risk of harassment, exploitation and 'bullying' by the armed men, who reportedly regularly take what they want, when they want with no payment to these women. Further, those low-end petty-traders who deal in low-scale stock and small-scale profit who have lost either their stock and/or their money (sometimes repeatedly) when being forced to flee from perpetrated violence (frequently seen in Boy-Rabe) are now in very difficult times.

Petty-traders in general, as well as artisanal traders are also economically vulnerable due to the fact that the community is facing disrupted cash flow, with people explaining that products are available for sale, but people lack the cash to buy them, whether food or otherwise.

## Children

Everyone agrees that children are at exceptional risk in this context. The fact that it is too dangerous for them to go to school is repeatedly underlined. In the earlier months, the fear was due to kidnapping or trapping children for ransom payments. Now people explain that armed Séléka can come into the school, and if the smaller kids see them, they could become scared and cry, causing unpredictable problems. Moreover, people talk of fear for their children vis-à-vis the reckless driving of Séléka, saying that it is difficult to make a small child understand these dangers. Others explain that 'kids are curious, they approach armed men without realizing the dangers; they don't understand well enough to know to avoid such threats'.

<sup>30</sup> An estimated 15% of the population is under five years; 23% between the age of 10-19 years; and a total of some 45% are under 18 years of age (see: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car_statistics.html))

In quartier Gbaya-Dombia, the CdQ explained that a group of Séléka rented a large house with many doorways and 'in order to secure the house, they planted anti-personnel mines at the un-used entrances'. Children playing in the area detonated one of these mines, with 1 child being killed and 3 requiring extensive hospitalization. The affected children were all Christian, but reportedly, the Séléka offered some support to the family who lost their child.

Regarding the psychological impact, people underline that gunfire continues to provoke fear, with people explaining that 'if the children hear this noise, they come running home to hide inside'. If it occurs at night, reportedly few children sleep through it. At the same time, some worry that the facts of the current context are being integrated into the play of children, with them making the sounds of gunfire and shouting 'Séléka, Séléka', when a fast vehicle goes by; some children apparently claim that 'it is the Séléka that has given us holidays from school'. Some explain that children have lost their joy when they are playing. And of course, many underline the implications of interrupted education for the youth, with many stating that 'these ones are our future; our future depends on their well-being and their education'.

Finally, the typical social categories of the aged, those living with physical or mental constraints, people living with illnesses including HIV, families with large numbers of children, and families with limited productive capacity are all very vulnerable in this context.

### Civil Documents

Civil documents are identified as an important concern for the population of Bangui. A 2011 assessment indicates that country wide, some 40% of births fail to be registered,<sup>31</sup> although UNICEF more specifically reports a rate of some 78% of registration of urban births.<sup>32</sup> With a failure to register the birth of a child, that child fails to have a birth certificate and indeed is by national legislation seen as 'illegal'.

More specific to the recent events, many people noted that the loss of civil documents has been an important consequence of the crisis. Indeed, of 1203 people asked in the quantitative part of this evaluation, 245 individuals (20.4%) reported having no birth certificates, while 757 individuals (62.9%) reported having no identity card.<sup>33</sup> Of these 1002 people, 489 individuals (49%) said they had never had them; while 460 (46%) said they lost them during the current crisis. For those who had lost their documents during the crisis, pillage was the first cause accounting for 43% of losses; with theft accounting for some 21%; confiscation accounting for 8%; and tearing up accounting for some 4%. Other causes, especially including frantic flight accounted for a quarter of the losses.

People underlined a limited capacity to replace such missing documents, with many saying that now, with Séléka, all such processes are blocked. Indeed, the administrative system itself has been profoundly crippled during the crisis due to severe looting and destruction of properties. People are particularly disturbed by the extreme "anti-state" destruction, emphasizing Séléka's targeting of state buildings, with the systematic looting and destruction of documents and records, which has left both civil authorities and civilians stunned. The City Council in Bangui, Begoua, and Bimbo were each particularly targeted, with the vast majority of government records being destroyed. All administrative systems have been reduced to manual efforts.

<sup>31</sup> Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples – MICS couplée avec la sérologie, VIH, RCA, 2010; ICASEES; Pg 220

<sup>32</sup> See: [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car\\_statistics.html#104](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car_statistics.html#104) (last accessed Aug 13, 2013)

<sup>33</sup> At the same time, some 7% report having a passport; and 51% reported having an electoral card.

For the most part people noted that without these civil documents, they are very limited. More than 60% of those without these documents indicated that the National ID card is essential for ensuring freedom of movement; while some 50% underlined the importance of birth-certificates for accessing education. A range of other purposes that relate to identity verification were also listed. Thus, the absence of these documents is seen as a critical vulnerability factor.

## 6. IMPACT OF CRISIS - ON LIVES & LIVELIHOODS

### Education, Youth, & Children

Armed violence carried out in association with schools has had profound consequences for children and their right to education. Although for the most part, schools are indeed open, many people report that their children have not returned to school, largely due to the fears of insecurity. Reportedly classes that used to have as many as 100 or more students, now have as few as 10-15 kids each day. Students said that armed Séléka elements sometimes pass through the schools, causing fear among the students. The older students expressed concern that in such cases, 'the younger children could become afraid and if they start shouting, we don't know what the Séléka will do'.

They explain the importance of the completion of their studies for their future; many are very resentful of the fact that these opportunities have been taken away from them. Although many adults noted quite some concern over the fact that their children are not able to continue their studies; the youth themselves are very angry at having their education interrupted, with many youth defining peace as 'the opportunity to re-start their education'. Further, as two youth noted 'it is easy to destroy, it is not so easy to rebuild; we are being pushed backwards now; we will take years to recover from this destruction, we the youth will suffer these consequences into our future'. Indeed, many underlined that it is particularly the youth who will bear the consequences of today's problems in the future; and their education is critical to building a better future.

### Trauma & Fear

The psychological impact of sustained exposure to imminent violent threat is significant for the at-risk population, with people explaining that 'we are always afraid; we can't know what the future will be; maybe they will come tomorrow; they have no morality, we cannot count on them to be reasonable; they have no sense of humanity'.

Many people emphasize the impact of the stress & anxiety and its cumulative effects, with one man explaining that 'we are in the shit and people are very traumatized; thinking about these problems is now causing illness'. However, psychological distress is systematically perpetuated with some of the most gruesome incidents being re-articulated many times over. With the rumor mill working at full force, and being fed by continual radio reports of the latest incidents, anxiety remains acute. When asked to describe the current situation many merge past and present traumas; people are often unable to distinguish between incidents that occurred during the very acute period of March & April and more recently. Further, people recite incidents as though they are personal experiences, even if they only heard of them on the radio. All this contributes to creating a blurred intensity; all of which perpetuates the individual experience of fear.

As such, it is no coincidence that one of the most concrete indicators used to gauge the daily state of security is the frequency of gunfire. Equally, the typical personal indicator is 'the ability to sleep peacefully', with many explaining for example, that 'people are suffering morally; we are

not tranquil; we cannot rest; we have many bad memories; today, if you sleep you are always waiting for the menace to arrive', saying that 'if you wake in the morning you have to thank God'.

This factor of fear sits at the heart of how people adapt to their changing environment: the more acute the sense of fear, the higher the motivation to avoid potential threats, and the more extreme the measures taken to avoid risk. This fear-driven avoidance reflex manifests most visibly as reduced movements, with people for example avoiding to go to their fields and/or reducing the time they spend there. This avoidance reflex is critical in limiting the capacity of the affected population to restore the normalcy of their lives as the dynamics of violence allow. In a state of fear, people will always error on the side of caution in their analysis of the environment.

### Impact on Livelihoods

#### An overview of Livelihoods

The following is a brief sketch of the livelihoods people rely upon in Bangui. All have been impacted during this crisis.

*Cultivation:* An estimated 50-60% of the population is involved in cultivation activities ranging from kitchen garden activities to full-scale crops. The product is either for household consumption or for sale in the market. Access to land during this period has been critical in determining the adaptive capacity of a household.

*Animal Keepers:* 20-30% of the population have animals

*Salaried Work:* 25-40% of the population are associated with paid wages, including civil servants; people employed by private businesses and NGOs (eg: cleaners, gardeners, etc); daily wage work; contracted artisanal work, etc. Waged employment has been heavily impacted during this period, causing a dramatic reduction of cash flow in the environment

*Commerce:* Especially women are involved in low-end petty trade, which has been dramatically constrained because of reduced freedom of movement, reduced cash in circulation, and theft of products. Male youth are also active in petty-trade, but typically of less essential items.

Salaried Work includes a diversity of directly paid incomes ranging from civil servants to daily wages. Reportedly, civil servant salaries have continued to be paid, albeit irregularly. Salaries of lower level civil servants such as teachers are reportedly less reliable. Those who relied on salaries from private enterprises and NGOs (many of whom have either downsized or closed), have largely been laid-off. Particularly unskilled labourers such as guards and cleaners, representing a large portion of the salaried income in low-income households, have experienced a dramatic rupture in the household economic means. And it is especially these households who lack a diversity of income sources and thus are harder hit.

Salaried incomes were largely the domain of men. Further, men take up a diversity of artisanal and trade activities such as tailoring, masonry and carpentry, as well as fishing, taxi driving, etc. The fact that men are particularly targeted by the armed actors has deeply constrained their freedom of movement, especially after dark. Specific activities such as fishing, taxi driving, and petty-trade, which used to take place at night, have been dramatically reduced due to limited night-time movement. The productivity of trades-people has been constrained with demands for their services and products greatly reduced because of the lack of cash circulating, thus reducing their independent means to re-invest in their trade. This contributes to further destabilizing of household economic security and further choking the local system of cash flow.

In the past, cultivation was generally an important and flexible component of the typical household economy, being practiced in a flexible manner, more or less in relation to other



economic opportunities. Indeed, women typically complimented the livelihood efforts of men with cultivation and small-trade. Today, many households have been forced to revert to cultivation as other livelihood options are collapsing. Those who lack land and thus don't have cultivation as an option are worse off. However more generally, cultivation as a livelihood option itself is limited to varying degrees due to the poor security context and the cost and availability of productive assets. [In less at risk areas, people report a normalization of movement to fields].

Theft & Extortion in relation to both cultivation and small-trade is a critical aspect of the current security context. With armed men roaming freely in an environment of impunity, they simply take what they want; when they want. They menace traders with threats of violence, and they extort money as it suits them. Larger-scale Séléka attacks trigger repeated flight of traders, who are often forced to simply leave some of their materials, causing repeated losses. This has had a devastating impact, with small-end traders, especially women trading on the side of the road with very few products, simply not having the material flexibility to recover from these repeated resource blows. These individuals, who also typically lack economic alternatives (eg: with no land for cultivation), are being pushed deeper into desperate economic circumstances.

Reduced freedom of movement has widespread implications on the lives and livelihoods of people affected by the on-going violence in Bangui. Fear is a critical aspect. Even though the rate of exactions against the civilian population have reduced since the very acute period of March and April, continuing targeted exactions and very persistent rumours of such incidents sustain a very high level of anxiety among the population. People recite past protection incidents as though they are current; or incidents that took place in other quarters as though they took place locally. This animates the individual experience of fear, and this fear permeates all other experiences and drives planning. With this, people are unable to push themselves to take the risks required to restore normal activities as the situation begins to calm and allows for expanded activities. This fear-based reticence causes a significant delay in the resumption of activities in relation to what the evolution of the protection context might allow.

Accentuating this is the fact that the current context is characterized by unpredictability. In any context, it would take significant courage to proactively expand one's independent activities after such events experienced in Bangui. But the persisting and unpredictable risks of ad hoc confrontation with armed men, demands for money, stray bullets, extortion, etc are crippling. Following some 5 months of exposure to these threats, people are unwilling to push on the edges. Thus, most people remain cautious, relying heavily on avoidance strategies, as opposed to action that might bring them directly into confrontation with the threats in their environment.

## Social Attitudes & Practices

Risk and trauma are not only perpetuated by threats of armed actors; detrimental social attitudes and practices can also contribute. Many people point to jealousy as a central factor in the current conflict, saying that it is what drives the personalization of the violence seen today. People explain that jealousy infiltrates much of social dynamics of CAR in general, with a general intention of keeping all 'equalized at the base' being widely explained. In this, if someone is seen to be making progress, others are often interested to pull that one back down to equality at the bottom. Some suggest that this stems from rampant corruption in CAR, and thus the assumption that if someone is progressing, it is because he has somehow cheated.

Echoes of this notion of jealousy can be seen in the above described dynamics behind the Muslims/Christians fracturing, which is one of the most profound and detrimental social dynamics resulting from the conflict, threatening to have significant implication on the well-being of the community in the future.

Many households comprising of inter-religious marriages are under increasing internal stress. A Christian woman married to a Muslim man explained that as she listens to the radio news and is horrified by the increasing numbers of Christians killed in the on-going violence, her husband responds positively to such reports, saying that it is good that these Christians are being killed. She is now concerned for the survival of her marriage.

The presence of "*indicateurs*" as members of the community who actively expose individuals in hiding for targeted attacks by Séléka, which is also said to be motivated by jealousy, also has the negative impact of forcing people to become deeply suspicious of their neighbours.

#### Who Helps Whom?

The views held by Christians and Muslims interviewed in this research varies on the question of social responsibility and the obligation to help others in need, even if you yourself have little. The Muslim tendency is described as one of helping the others and sharing scarce resources, at least within the family; while the Christians most typically suggest that no one person is more vulnerable than the next one, saying everyone is equally at risk in this context of on-going violence. As such, the answer from Christians to the question of who might help whom if people are in dire straits is almost systematically 'no one', with people asserting that 'with unemployment, no one can help you; in times like this, people need to rely on themselves'.

These divisive attitudes and practices undermine confidence in the notion of community-cohesion. A vague understanding of 'vulnerability' and derisive snickers over the idea of helping 'those in need' all weaken elements that might draw a community together. The sense of solidarity is quite constrained, along with the reflex of empathy. People tend not to reflect on the hardships of another, but rather on the consequences that that experience might cause for themselves. For example, if my sister has a problem, I don't think about her suffering, but rather about the additional burden this causes for me. As such, the social safety-nets are few and those that exist are generally quite weak and unreliable, being stretched to their limits in these difficult times.

## 7. The FUTURE – Popular Recommendations

Many people explained that 'the people of CAR do not like war; we do not like violence', with many repeating 'we just want peace to return'. People are worry about the future, asking 'how can we think of a future at this time when there is no peace; we worry that there will be no change; who knows what might come', with many saying 'all of this must stop; we just wish for peace; with peace the future is good; without peace we cannot think of a future'.

### Defining Peace

One of the first indicators of peace for the civilian population is the absence of gunfire, with many noting that constant gunfire provokes high levels of anxiety and fear. At the same time, many people conceptualized peace in terms of psychological impact, saying that 'with peace we will not hear gunfire; people can feel at ease; we can sleep peacefully'. Beyond that, peace is defined in terms of security and a restored freedom to move and to take up normal activities, especially employment & schooling.

A group of women in Boy-Rabe explained that 'peace is when we hear no gunfire, when we can walk freely in the streets, when cash circulates normally, people regain their salaries, when we

can restart our commerce, when we can look after our children and the kids can go back to school; with this we would be moving in a good direction	properly
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More specific indicators depended on the perspective of the given respondents. For example, especially some of the elder people spoke of great concern for the children (although they may well have been referring to adult children); with these people underlining that 'we want peace for our children; we worry about what kind of future they will have with this violence'. Especially petty-traders conceptualized peace in terms of freedom of movement, especially in the evening as this is essential to their capacity to work again. They also underlined the need for peace which would allow people to re-engage commercially and thus restore the normal circulation of cash, especially at the micro-level. Those with salaried jobs conceptualize peace as conditions that would allow for their former employees to restore normal activities and rehire their full contingent of staff.

In those areas that are not under continuing heavy threat (eg: Quartier Castor), some people are optimistic, with the CdQ asserting for example that 'we believe everything will finish; the state will become civilized, and well policed; we can return to the way it was before'. However, many people particularly note the duration of this crisis, noting that although this is not the first time that they have experienced such events, the past events were resolved far more quickly. As such, people's confidence in the future has been shaken, and is further weakened as the violence persists. Indeed, some worry that the current situation may last, saying 'we worry that there is no solution; this situation may continue', with others saying 'who knows what will come'?

### Creating Change

When asked about what is necessary to begin to create a change in Bangui (and indeed in the country context), those with a national level analysis underline the importance of making people aware of the current reality, arguing that on-going efforts to hide the severity of the current reality risks provoking potentially explosive social dynamics. In this, people particularly point to the current discourse of the President, who claims that the country is at peace, and all is calm.

This view is reinforced at the micro level, with people saying that the President has denied the bad behaviour of the Séléka troops, suggesting that he himself knows of everything that the armed men do, but he does nothing to stop this. Some go so far as saying that 'he himself is afraid of these people, he cannot control them'. Some say that 'if the president could change his discourse, this could have a strong impact', suggesting that 'for the President to gain credibility among the population, he must take measures to draw all the people together; he must change his language to one of reconciliation; he must show good intent'. Finally they explain that 'with an apology, people could begin to forget the humiliations they have suffered'.

Disarmament is systematically called for as the first step towards recovery, with people widely stating that small arms have penetrated deeply into the private sphere (see section on small arms). However, people are rather confused about how this is currently planned to be done or indeed how it could be done. People have little confidence in the current ad hoc disarmament procedures of FOMAC, fearing that these mechanisms will push the resistant armed elements deeper into the quarters, into the bush, and back into the Province where they will cause even more chaos and trauma for the civilian population. This is exacerbated by current Séléka operations targeting civilians being described as disarmament operations. People are left asking just who is going to disarm the Séléka— as perpetrated threats by armed Séléka persist, people remain apprehensive repeatedly emphasizing 'we are not armed, we cannot resist their guns'.



Related to this, many underline that the 'foreigners' must be returned to their countries of origin. Some informed observers speculate that Séléka troops comprise as much as 80% foreigners, especially from Chad and Sudan, with especially the senior ranks being filled with 'personnel who speak neither French nor Sango' and who are thus assumed to be foreigners. Indeed, quite a number of people said that they want their old military to function again.<sup>34</sup>

### Elections

Especially Christian respondents point to the elections as the critical mechanism of change, implicitly assuming such a change will produce a non-Muslim leadership. Many Christians assert that 'the regime must be changed' arguing that 'we want to be in our own country; we don't want these foreigners'. Some Christians equally assert that 18 months for the planned elections is too far away, saying that they will remain under imminent threat of violence as long as the Djotodia regime remains in place, claiming that it is exactly the current regime that is now causing the problems. People say that 'we do not want a President that does bad things against the population; we want a good President'. However when asked about who this 'good President' might be, people said things like 'we pray to God to give us this good person' clearly having no concrete ideas of who might be capable of guiding the CAR out of the dire circumstances it faces at this time. It also has to be restated that, many see the elections themselves as the potential trigger for potentially bloody revenge of Christians against Muslims.

### Intra-Communal Dialogue & Reconciliation

There are only limited ideas on how change will be created on the political front, most of which relies on God delivering the good person that can direct the country out of the current dire straits. However, people have far more concrete ideas concerning the question of social discord and especially the fracturing between the Muslim and Christian populations and the worries of an anticipated violent revenge in the near future. A significant proportion of the Christian population, especially men, state that 'there is nothing to be done but revenge against all the bad things that have been done by Muslims against Christians'. However, there is an important proportion, especially among women, who have offered ideas on how these tensions could be managed in order to avoid a second wave of potentially very deadly violence in CAR.

When asked how the sentiments of revenge could be managed, the most systematic answer was "sensibilization" and to a lesser extent "dialogue". There is some debate concerning the appropriate timing of such efforts, with some arguing that the Muslim/Christian fracture is extremely explosive and thus cannot be left unaddressed. Others argued that exactly because it is so explosive, it must be left alone for now, with people explaining that 'people are too hot now; their hearts are now hot; with some calming they will be able to discuss together; but now people cannot talk, the trauma is too fresh; people are very upset'. From the other side, people argue that if these issues are left, 'they will become very grave very quickly; rapid resolution can be achieved now if people make the effort; even though it will be difficult'. Some strongly noted that 'people are very afraid of what will happen if these sentiments are not addressed'.

People talked of sensibilization, as an approach that is somewhat less confrontational than direct inter-communal dialogue, suggesting that this is critical at this time. However, even seemingly well informed individuals struggled to articulate the key messages for such

<sup>34</sup>This also raises questions regarding the feasibility of Security Sector Reform. Many former FACA remain in hiding. And although FACA may not have been the best trained force in the region, it is widely assumed that these individuals are far better trained than the current Séléka troops. Nevertheless, the future relationship between these two bodies remains unclear.

sensibilization. Many talked about reiterating past traumas and demanding for apologies (all of which are likely to be very provocative in the current context). It is evident that people need to be prompted to think about ideas of peace, reconciliation, solidarity and social cohesion. With some prompting, people suggested that 'we need to make friends among the population'; or as an elder intellectual who very emotionally spoke of the profound harm and destruction politicians have caused for the civilian population, passionately underlining that 'violence always perpetuates more violence; we must stop this violence; we must not have problems among ourselves the people'. Others reiterated the idea that 'people must stay calm; we must not rely on violence as a solution'. As a wise old woman explained, 'it is not through anger that we will understand', underlining that it is especially the women who can understand each other.

Many people identified the need for "a change of language" as important in this process. As mentioned, some focus on the need for the political actors to adapt their language and manner of communicating, which currently is seen as intentionally provocative and thus perpetuating division. Many underline the power of apologies, saying that the lack of "pardon" makes the Christians angry; if the leaders could now apologize for the damages done, this would help' with some explaining that 'if they ask for a pardon, we will give it to them; then we will be able to find solutions'. But at the same time, others say that 'with this regime, we don't wait for that'.

More generally, people point to the need for their leaders to facilitate any process of recovery, underlining a particular emphasis on the importance for religious leaders to step forward now.

A joint 'reconciliation' process is being spearheaded by the Catholic, Protestant & Muslim leaders. The basic process, that has already been implemented in various cities in the province, comprises a multi-tiered dialogue process in which religious leaders are firstly brought together to understand the local context and the protection incidents that have taken place there; the second level is the bringing together of community leaders to enumerate these incidents and compare the different perspectives of each of the three groupings (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim) and somehow reconcile the contradictions between these views; and the final step brings the larger community together to repeat the process, with these religious leaders guiding the process and managing the tensions, with each one repeatedly promoting the spirit of peace, reconciliation, openness, forgiveness and cooperation among their followers, pointing out that both the Bible and the Koran demand such sentiments. The religious leaders implementing this process note it is a difficult process, and the risks of provoking violence are imminent at this time, as the 'anger in people's hearts is strong'. However, they equally argue that this anger is on the edge of triggering violence if it is unaddressed.<sup>35</sup> It is notable that the religious leaders spearheading this process are each very well spoken, passionate individuals, seemingly capable of leading such a complex and sensitive undertaking.

It was noted, that the Christian and Muslim leaders spearheading this community-based social-cohesion effort have submitted multiple requests to the President to meet their committee, although he has reportedly refused, presuming a preference to provoke divisions between communities as opposed to facilitating unity, citing the "divide & rule" strategy.

### Individual Responsibility

People are deeply worried about the very real risk of violent revenge, with even mixed marriage households being torn apart at this time. Many are convinced that there is no way to avoid the

<sup>35</sup> Dialogue with the Catholic Archbishop, August 14, 2013

inevitable vengeance, explaining that 'the spirit of revenge has entered into our hearts; we are only waiting for the time to kill to revenge for what has been done to us'. Although the proportion of the population who holds this attitude is unknown (and should certainly not be under-estimated), some underlined the urgent need for efforts to prevent even more committing themselves to this point of view.

An important portion of the population, even if not the majority, holds the view that 'revenge is not good; we don't want this suffering to continue'. In relation to this, an important number of people talk of the importance of promoting the notion of individual responsibility as a means of altering how individuals conceptualize the current crisis. As a female Chef de Quartier explained, 'we must master ourselves to avoid bigger problems in the future; it is not a good thing for people to think of violence as the solution'. A male teacher explained 'we want these tensions to be reduced; people must take conscience of themselves and act in a good manner; people must leave these bad attitudes'.

### The Role of NGOs

People note that NGOs can play an important role in this process, with people pointing to their neutrality and lack of self-interest in the stakes of the current crisis as added value. Many people were particularly appreciative of the NGO effort during this evaluation, explaining that the NGO presence gives people 'hope that they are not forgotten; NGOs give the impression that others are concerned about us'. People explained that 'you give us hope when you listen to our stories; otherwise people are losing their hope'. More concretely, people suggest positive activities that bring people together such as arts and cultural activities, such as theatre events that can help to promote positive ideas in the minds of people who are now suffering.

Many people underlined the value of having foreigners come and discuss these issues with them, enabling them to gain courage and confidence and the strength to keep going. Many suggest that they feel deeply abandoned and have little hope for the future. Such discussions were said to help them psychologically. Indeed, the openness with which people describe their circumstances, analysis of the situation, and the expectations of the future suggests a dire need for an emotional outlet and an opportunity to discuss these issues.

At the same time, people equally note that NGOs do not carry the same degree of influence over individual action as the above mentioned civil and religious leaders, and thus have limitation in managing the consequences if a dialogue process was to suddenly become volatile.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The protection context of Bangui is very dynamic, rapidly changing and characterized by unpredictability which in itself is proving to be crippling for the population. This unpredictability is repeatedly emphasized by incidental provocation and perpetrated violence, sometimes accentuated by large-scale attacks against civilians as is seen most recently in Boy-Rabe & Boeing. The complex dynamics of violence sustain an exaggerated state of fear among the population, with their vulnerability being nakedly accentuated. Their fear seriously undermines people's confidence & thus, their capacity to begin to restore 'normal activities' – fearing that at any moment this will be again destroyed.

The protection context throughout Bangui varies significantly. However, the protection threats confronting the civilian population can be broadly defined along four main lines, including: organized violence perpetrated by Séléka that is at least allegedly related to so-called military

objectives; the less organized but sometimes very intensive violence that has more of a criminal character, which comprises individuals or small groups of armed actors taking advantage of the environment of impunity; threats that may emerge as a result of community fracturing; and finally the secondary humanitarian consequences of this persisting protection crisis, including food insecurity, economic insecurity more broadly, eroded health circumstances, interrupted education and so on.

Individual vulnerability or susceptibility to these different threats also varies, with the Bozizé-associated populations of arrondissement 4&7 generally being most vulnerable to continuing Séléka operations. It is also widely reported that, although such operations target civilian populations as a whole, men are particularly worried about being singled out. And it is at this point at which so-called "military" objectives blur with criminality. People widely report that looting is systematic in the above operations, while smaller-scale targeted pillage also continues, making those who are better-off particularly vulnerable (although many not-so-well-off households report being repeatedly looted. Indeed, most individually targeted exactions are reportedly typically combined with theft. And although this pillage and theft maybe in some cases is secondary; in others, it is apparently purely opportunistic (ie: unplanned) and motivated by self-interest, as seen when armed men patrolling at the very local level extort and steal from female petty-traders; or simply demand cash from those they happen to encounter.

At the same time, armed violence is increasingly entwined into the private sphere in ever more complex ways – and the consequences, beyond the obvious damage, cause ever more complex social consequences, eroding confidence, trust, and cohesion among the civil population themselves. Many people talk of "indicateurs" as betrayers of local trust. Further, with the "Muslim overtones" of the Séléka movement, all Muslims are now seen by the non-Muslim majority population as complicit, together with the Séléka, and thus culpable for the suffering of the non-Muslims. This interpretation of the complex dynamics currently fuels ever growing negative sentiments among the non-Muslim civilians, who vow 'vengeance against the Muslims who have done these bad things to the Christian population'. Thus stopping the perpetration of violence by armed actors at this time is only part of the challenge. Immediately following, is the challenge of healing the consequent social and individual traumas as well; without which, CAR remains at risk of falling into yet another wave of bloody personalized violence.

Indeed, the *persistence* of this protection crisis is exactly due to the inability to stop the perpetration of violence - in the absence of a national security apparatus; the near total failure of international actors to address this glaring protection gap; and a resultant environment of total impunity. Some talk of the emergent national protective institutions, but indeed civilians are afraid of these shadow institutions, fearing that they are manned by Séléka and thus pose more of a threat than a protection opportunity. At the same time, despite President Hollande describing CAR as undergoing a process of "*Somali-zation*", a concrete plan and action to better ensure the basic rights to protection of the civilian population are absent. Indeed, the scaling-up of Séléka violence in the final weeks of August saw little international reaction, with FOMAC being all but proven to be impotent in the face of Séléka violence -who indeed at the same time seemed to be gaining confidence in their blatant defiance of FOMAC.

Of course such a context is very dynamic, and as bizarre, ad hoc, and chaotic as the Bangui environment is, there are indications of a normalization emerging, with popular discourse revealing increased reference to the Séléka as "the authorities" or "the military"; with some individuals (presumably those who are less reflective) actually calling armed Séléka elements to help manage private issues. Although in some cases, this is clearly an opportunity to settle old scores, in others it reflects sincere assumptions that the Séléka are indeed their new authorities,

progressively filling the gaping security vacuum – the irony and seemingly obvious dearth of capacity/will on the part of Séléka to do so in any sincerely or legitimately protective manner seems to be missed by at least some civilians.

However, an even more profound ‘normalization’ is the emergent attitude of observers that presumes that the level of on-going violence is now ‘normal’ for this environment, and thus somehow tolerable, (which of course quickly equates with acceptable). Indeed, the very brutal reality is that the civilian population of Bangui can currently rely on nothing but the “auto-protective” means they can independently generate. The responsibility to protect has been almost exclusively pushed into the hands of the same people who are at risk in this protection crisis. The desperate inadequacy of “auto-protection” mechanisms as a substitute for formal protection institutions is repeatedly underlined by the mantra-like statement of people at risk that ‘we are unarmed; there is nothing we can do; we cannot resist against a gun’.

Obviously, displacement and/or reduced movements are the most widely practiced auto-protection mechanisms. When compounded with direct impacts (eg: targeted violence has killed male heads of households; looting causes a loss of liquid resources and productive assets; loss of salaried positions due to lay-offs cause restricted cash flow; etc). these protective mechanisms potentially seriously undermine the independent capacities of those at risk to meet their basic survival needs (ie: those beyond the concern of physical security). Food security, access to health care, and access to education are all severely undermined in this context; with these so-called secondary risks threatening to become primary concerns in themselves.

Closely related to this is the worrying factor of social fracturing which is increasingly evident within this pressurized environment. The obvious fracture line is that between the Muslims and the Christians, along with the many examples of intense personal betrayal between individuals within communities. These realities severely stress existing social cohesion, despite the fact that social cohesion is the critical foundation necessary for auto-protection mechanisms. It facilitates effective information exchange as an early warning mechanism; generosity is required among those who are called upon to house those forced to flee violence; solidarity is required to ensure that those who are at greatest risk of being targeted can be hidden among the population; empathy is required to ensure that those who are most vulnerable can be supported by the greater whole. Auto-protection, although limited, is the critical alternative that people at risk rely on today. As such, erosion of social cohesion may well be one of the most severe blows to the potential independent protective capacity. Eroded social cohesion will drastically reduce the independent protective capacity of the population. As such, many people have called for help from the NGO community to reverse the trends of community fracturing that are increasingly evident; working to proactively preserve social cohesion.

It must also be noted that “confrontation” is an auto-protection strategy that threatens to emerge more strongly in the very near future – as was illustrated by the recent occupying of the international airport by people forced to flee their homes following Séléka attacks (Aug 27-29, 2013). French troops responsible for securing the airport eventually resorted to tear-gas as a means of dispersing angry crowds who were demanding that Djotodia leave his post and all foreign Séléka leave the country. People are severely frustrated, feeling profoundly abandoned, with little left to lose. Despite ridiculously unfavorable odds, confrontation is looking ever more like an appealing option for a desperate population – with yet another wave of violence being the likely consequence.

Protection driven humanitarian activities typically study the various aspects of the dire circumstances of the at-risk population, either from the causative perspective of the resultant

consequences, and seek to enhance the capacity of the affected population to navigate more effectively within the given protection crisis. In this case, given that auto-protection is largely the single protective option the population has, supporting their independent capacity to avoid, cope-with or over-come the imminent threats and consequences in their environment [ie: what this report has sought to outline] is critical to a “protection-driven” approach to humanitarian action.

- END -