BREAKING THE VICIOUS CYCLE BETWEEN HUNGER & CONFLICT IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
An Action against Hunger case study
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There is a general consensus that hunger and conflict reinforce each other: conflicts are one of the main causes of severe food insecurity and a lack of investment, or inadequate investments, in food security for the populations concerned also creates conditions conducive to the outbreak or spread of a conflict. The alarming resurgence of hunger in the world, in particular the risk of famine, is unfortunately aligned with the rise in conflicts. Action against Hunger realises that it is impossible to effectively fight hunger without also tackling the key elements of the hunger and conflict cycle. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417, adopted on 24 May 2018,1 recognises the link between conflict and hunger and establishes the issue of food insecurity - including famine, fostered by armed conflicts - as a threat to international peace and security. The Security Council asks to be promptly informed when a risk of famine and widespread food insecurity appears in a context of armed conflict. Ultimately, it demands compliance with international humanitarian law and underscores the need to guarantee unconditional humanitarian access. To break this cycle, action must be taken at different levels: interventions to fight hunger must be conflict-sensitive to prevent an escalation of violence in countries in protracted crises; in conflict areas, security measures must minimise the negative consequences they may have on food security for the populations concerned; and generally speaking, hunger must become a “red line” for the international community in the conduct of hostilities. Moreover, in a world where protracted crises are becoming the norm, all aid actors must ensure that they deal with the hunger and conflict cycle as a whole and that they tackle it head-on using the Nexus approach, focusing primarily on prevention while at the same time providing emergency and development assistance. To illustrate this cycle and offer concrete, contextualised solutions, Action against Hunger has carried out case studies, including this one on the Central African Republic. Central Africa presents key elements of the hunger and conflict cycle, and this study identifies which ones need to be addressed first to break the cycle. As this study is not meant to be exhaustive, it does not address all the elements of the cycle, such as population displacements (caused by conflicts and/or food insecurity) or climate change. It focuses on three key factors identified during Action against Hunger’s analysis, namely: the context of chronic violence that is weakening the state and the population; the neglect of the agropastoral sector, which is the source of a deterioration of the security and food crisis; and the restriction of humanitarian space, which reduces the population’s access to basic services. These three factors are of course not independent of one another; they should be considered correlated and dealt with simultaneously.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For several decades, the Central African Republic has been plunged into a protracted crisis marked by regular peaks of violence and a critical deterioration of basic social services and economic structures. Hunger fuels conflict and conflict fuels hunger: this is the vicious cycle resulting from the collapse of the country's structures and the breakdown of its social bonds. The example of agricultural deterioration as one of the vectors of food insecurity, but also of the security problems, is especially relevant in the Central African Republic.

Nearly one out of every two Central Africans is affected by food insecurity. The deterioration of agriculture has led to the abandonment of cash crops and the marginalisation of small-scale farming. This situation, combined with the effects of cycles of violence, has reached a critical point causing smallholder farmers to be pulled into the conflict.

The effective control of the state is limited essentially to Bangui, and 80% of the territory is now controlled by various armed groups. These group extort the population and embezzle agricultural production. Agriculture receives no support from public services, and the country lacks the resources to get out of an economy of survival, leading the population to adopt negative coping strategies that only exacerbate their food insecurity. With its current types of intervention, humanitarian aid in the Central African Republic is unable to address the structural foundations of the crisis. The international community's priority is treating the high mortality rate of vulnerable groups caused by a lack of access to food and healthcare. The humanitarian space is restricted by violence and attacks of armed groups does not allow the international aid system to respond adequately to this multidimensional crisis, especially since the Humanitarian Response Plan is largely underfunded. It is therefore essential to ensure that any response to break the cycle of hunger and conflict simultaneously addresses the issues of food insecurity, decapitalisation and the orientation towards a wartime economy.

The link between humanitarian assistance, recovery and development aid is crucial in a context such as that of the Central African Republic. Beyond survival, it is imperative for households to be able to recapitalise, to engage in income-generating activity to secure their socio-economic environment and increase their resilience.
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 2.1 million people living in the Central African Republic, nearly 50% of the total population, are currently affected by food insecurity. This is particularly striking in a country where agriculture, pastoralism and agropastoralism are the main livelihoods for 75% of the population. The chronic nature of the violence aggravates the fragility of neglected agriculture and exacerbates nutritional insecurity.

The 188th and last country on the human development index scale, the Central African Republic is experiencing a protracted crisis that has continued to worsen over the past few decades and that has been marked by waves of unparalleled violence over the past five years. The country is mired in a complex political crisis with an extremely deteriorated humanitarian situation and a security vacuum, permitting all humanly possible violence and predatory behaviour.

The consequences of this on the social and economic fabric of the country have been disastrous. The peaks of violence in 2013 and 2014 have pushed the country to breaking point. Since 2016, sporadic violence has transformed into a conflict that has been spreading to the northwestern, central and southeastern parts of the country.

The level of violence is very high and neither the government nor MINUSCA has been able to contain it long-term. The combination of structural fragility and a conflict with ethnic, political and economic origins has heightened the population’s vulnerability. Trauma and survival mechanisms persist over time and negatively impact on economic recovery initiatives and the population’s food security.

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This study includes an analysis of the humanitarian intervention context, including political, economic and security aspects, and is based on a review of the main reports and research literature on the Central African context. Interviews were conducted at the Paris headquarters of Action against Hunger with all the actors involved in the technical and operational monitoring of the programmes carried out in the country by the organisation. Other interviews were conducted with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations, academics and French researchers at the CNRS and at Cleres. Two field visits allowed us to compare the hypotheses under consideration with the contextual realities and the experiences of the national and international actors encountered on site. Interviews with focus groups and victims of the conflict were held in an intervention area of Action against Hunger to exchange thoughts on the theme of hunger and conflict and to discuss the impacts experienced by the population.

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I. CHRONIC VIOLENCE WEAKENS THE STATE AND THE POPULATION
1/A CONTEXT OF EXTREME FRAGILITY

The OECD Fragility framework

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s framework defines fragility as "the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes including violence, the breakdown of institutions, displacement, humanitarian crises and other emergencies." The multidimensional nature of fragility is measured by combining risk factors and means of adaptation, which takes into account both a state’s current exposure and its ability to handle probable future exposure.9

The current crisis in the Central African Republic is marked by chronic violence that has been ongoing for over 15 years.10 During which time the driving forces of violence have not disappeared.11 The successive conflicts have led to a disruption in people’s livelihoods and a profound destabilisation of the country’s institutions, rendering the population unable to cope with the crisis. The country is immersed in a protracted crisis that is difficult to address.12 Today, the scope of the humanitarian needs exceeds even the levels reached in 2013,13 and 2.5 million people are now in need of aid;14 1.6 million of them experiencing acute food insecurity.15 As the 2017 State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report published by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) stresses, "simple correlations show higher levels of chronic and acute food insecurity and undernutrition in countries affected by conflict."16

Since 2013, we have seen a rising number of perpetrators of violence, as well as an ongoing reconfiguration of these perpetrators due to alliances and splits. This has led to an intensification of insecurity and an increase in the ability of groups to carry out attacks.18 In 2017, the presence of international forces in the country dropped significantly: the French operation Sangaris, operating since December 2013 in Bangui and along the main roads between the east and west, officially withdrew on 31 October 2016. American Special Forces and the Ugandan contingent of the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) left in April and May 2017, respectively.19 It is estimated that 80% of the country is now in the hands of armed groups and out of the state’s control. The Central African Republic is thus considered to be an extremely fragile State, especially in its political dimension, in spite of the 2016 election of President Touadéra, whose government has not known how or been able to meet the population’s expectations. The formation of “defence” militias is on the rise and is encouraged by the prevailing context of impunity, which increases and perpetuates the population’s vulnerability.

This context discourages donors from investing in the country over the long term, which in turn prevents humanitarian workers from addressing the structural aspects of the crisis. Donors responding to crises are virtually the sole actors providing aid, and only in a discontinuous way, which is usually short-term. This brings with it two major problems: the aid comes only occasionally and is incomplete, since it is not followed by more sustainable programmes; and it maintains the population’s vulnerability and dependence on aid via emergency actions in low conflicts areas that actually have a greater need for development assistance (such as Bangui, Bouar or Bossangoa).20

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9 The OECD’s new fragility framework includes five areas (economic, environmental, political, societal and security-related) and assesses each of them according to the scope of the humanitarian needs exceeded in 2013, and 2.5 million people are now in need of aid.
12 The 2018 State of Food Insecurity in the World report defines situations of protracted crisis as “characterized by recurrent natural disasters and/or conflict, longevity of food crises, breakdown of livelihoods and insufficient institutional capacity to react to the crises.” Three criteria are used to establish whether a country is in a protracted crisis: 1) the duration of the crisis, 2) the flows of humanitarian aid received by the country and 3) the country’s situation in economic and food-security terms.
14 OCHA (November 2017), Aperçu des besoins humanitaires 2018 – République centrafricaine.
18 This is what happened with the alliance contracted at the end of 2016 between the former Seleka and anti-Balaka groups which, rather than calming the clashes, increased their ability to perpetrate attacks. See ACAPS(2018), Humanitarian Overview : an analysis of key crises into 2016, Available at: https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/acaps-humanitarian-overview-analysis_of_key_crisis_into_2016.pdf (accessed in April 2018)
20 Interview conducted with the Action against Hunger mission in the Central African Republic, May 2018.
2/VIOLENCE EXACERBATES VULNERABILITIES

The FAO underscores the fact that "hunger and undernutrition are significantly worse where conflicts are prolonged and institutional capacities weak."21 Violence has increased population displacements and eight of the country’s 16 prefectures were in a Crisis (IPC phase 3) in terms of food insecurity in 2017.22 Today, one out of every four Central Africans is displaced, either within or outside the country. The intersectoral needs of populations of refugees or displaced persons, like those of the host populations, are high, and food insecurity is particularly problematic. According to the UN, 693,932 people are displaced,23 a 72% increase compared to the number of internally displaced persons last year. Many people stay only a few kilometres away from their original home but are unable to move back completely since a large part of the population moves around in response to the whereabouts of armed groups. Others, for reasons of safety, are forced to stay shut away in an enclave or a single neighbourhood. The number of refugees has also risen: there are now 545,873 in neighbouring countries, or 20% more than at the beginning of last year.24

The nutrition surveys carried out in the field by Nutrition Cluster partners25 reveal concerning rates of acute malnutrition. At the five sites for internally displaced persons of the Obo-subprefecture (Haut-Mbomou), an August 2017 nutrition survey indicated a prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) above the emergency threshold of 2% defined by the WHO, among both boys (4.8% [2.9–9.6; CI 95%]) and girls (4.3% [2.1–8.7; CI 95%]). The populations that have fled the conflicts face a number of other obstacles, such as limited access to healthcare services, a lack of drinking water (less than 30% of the population has access to potable water) and epidemics such as measles or, as in July 2016, cholera.26 Action against Hunger carried out 16 rapid nutrition surveys between April 2016 and May 2018 in seven prefectures, including two in the Niem-Yelewa municipality (Bouar, Nana-Mambéré), in 2016 and 2018. A November 2016 survey deemed the alert level to be "low" (with a GAM prevalence of 3.1% [1.6–6.0; CI 95%] and SAM of 1.0% [1.0–4.4; CI 95%]),27 but a second survey was carried out in February 2018 to evaluate the situation after the violence of 2017, armed groups having confronted each other in the Niem municipality.28 Its results revealed more troubling rates: the prevalence of GAM and SAM, according to the WHZ, is still acceptable (GAM of 7.6% [5.1–11.3; CI 95%] and SAM of 1.9% [0.8–4.3; CI 95%]), assessments carried out using mid-upper arm circumference presented a higher prevalence, close to the alert threshold, with a GAM of 9.2% [6.4–12.9; CI 95%] and a SAM of 2.7% [1.4–5.1; CI 95%]. The situation must be closely monitored to ensure that the municipality does not experience an emergency. Although it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of the nutrition situation of the country as a whole (the last nationwide survey was conducted in 2014), all the data point to a worsening of the situation and underscores the need for fast, concerted action.

"BEFORE THE CONFLICT, WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE SEVERAL MEALS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS IN THE FAMILY. TODAY WE MAKE A SINGLE MEAL AND WE ALL EAT FROM THE SAME DISH."

DISCUSSION GROUP, BOSSANGOA, DECEMBER 2017

3/CRIMINAL PRACTICES WORSEN FOOD INSECURITY

The conflict in the Central African Republic is part of a complex regional dynamic from which armed groups profit greatly.29 The regionalisation of the conflict gives both regional actors and various armed groups chances to appropriate the country’s natural resources, which triggers conflicts over the control of areas and resources and maintains the groups' existence. Controlling transport routes and setting up roadblocks are significant parts of this economy of predation, 2014, 2018).

24 Ibid.
25 A cluster is a group of humanitarian organisations formed in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action in order to coordinate humanitarian operations in such a way that shortages are covered and overlap is reduced. 26 Nutrition Cluster (2018), Plan opérationnel du Cluster Nutrition en République Centrafricaine, Janvier - December 2018. Available at: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/plan_operationnel_du_cluster_nutrition_2018.pdf (accessed in April 2018)
in which illegal taxation, protection in return for payment, the confiscation of goods, pillaging and racketeering are tactics regularly used by arms-bearers. The International Peace Information Service (IPIS) estimates that armed groups earn over 6 million euros per year in taxes on the main economic circuits under their control. This economy of predation prevents rural producers, livestock breeders and tradespeople from making profits and therefore from expanding. Armed conflicts are dividing the country and security conditions are hindering the mobility of herders, thereby compromising seasonal nomadic pastoralism and reducing access to livestock markets. And, in a country where 75% of the population depends on agriculture, pastoralism and agropastoralism to live, the impact on food systems is especially significant, the effects being felt throughout the entire food value chain – production, harvest, processing, transport, funding and marketing.

The insecurity has led to a total upheaval in the geography of livestock breeding: while pastoralists were initially scattered across the country, three-fourths of them are now concentrated in the eastern half under the control, and alleged protection, of the ex-Séléka. “Armed conflicts have disconnected the networks in the northwestern part of the Central African Republic from those of southern Chad and also from the rest of the Central African Republic, while reducing trade relations inside the region.” Selling cattle is becoming problematic since trade routes have been cut off and traditional markets are no longer functioning. In areas with a high concentration of cattle, there is an abundant supply, but tradespeople rarely manage to go there. When they do, the large number of intermediaries leads to a price that is too high for consumers. In remote villages, the difficult access, excessive price and absence of purchasing power among the population generally lead to a scarcity or even total absence of this product from households’ diets, even though beef was once part of their usual diet. This has a major impact on the population’s nutritional security.

Prevalence of cassava crops: a negative coping mechanism that contributes to food insecurity

Population displacement in the Central African Republic inevitably brings about an increase in the land devoted to cassava crops. This plant is easier to grow than others since it can be planted and harvested all year round, does not require fertile soil and does not need to be stored in granaries as grains do. Cassava plays a significant role in both the economy of households and the merchant economy: sales of this crop allow households to generate cash to buy basic goods or crop seeds for the new planting season when a population returns to its village, which has usually been pillaged and burned.

However, although it ensures the survival of the population, cassava has very little nutritional value in terms of protein and minerals, in particular when compared to sorghum, which was more commonly grown before the cycles of violence began and insecurity rose. Conflicts tend to force individuals and households to adopt negative coping mechanisms that compromise their food security and, over time, their nutrition. The increase at national level of cassava cultures, to the detriment of other food crops, is an example of this.

In 2018, Action against Hunger identified the typical profile of a household displaced to Boguila, which “consumes manioc around five times a week, accompanied by a sauce made from vegetables or leafy vegetables... This worrisome food imbalance is a reality for around 90% of all displaced households.”

“OUR GRANARIES HAVE BEEN PILLAGED, WE STILL PRODUCE A FEW CROPS LIKE PEANUTS AND SESAME, BUT WE GROW MANIOC IN MUCH GREATER VOLUMES. IT’S AN EASY CROP THAT ISN’T HARD TO HIDE.”

DISCUSSION GROUP, BOSSANGOA, DECEMBER 2017

31 Ibid.
32 OCHA (November 2017), Aperçu des besoins humanitaires 2018 - République centrafricaine.
34 Ibid., p. 19.
36 In areas with a high concentration of cattle, there is an abundant supply, but tradespeople rarely manage to go there. When they do, the large number of intermediaries leads to a price that is too high for consumers. In remote villages, the difficult access, excessive price and absence of purchasing power among the population generally lead to a scarcity or even total absence of this product from households’ diets, even though beef was once part of their usual diet. This has a major impact on the population’s nutritional security.
37 Example taken from an interview with the Action Against Hunger mission in Bossanga, May 2018.
38 See Marc Dufumier and Benoit Lalau (April 2016), Vers quel développement agricole en République centrafricaine ? Réflexions et propositions, CLERSE - Lille 1 B Partenaires, projet de recherche - Document de travail n° 1, p. 4 et p. 11.
II. NEGLECT OF THE AGROPASTORAL SECTOR IS AGGRAVATING THE SECURITY AND FOOD CRISIS
THE DETERIORATION OF AGRICULTURE WEAKENS THE RURAL WORLD

The Central African household economy is based mainly on the agricultural sector, comprising subsistence farming, livestock breeding, hunting, fishing and the use of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Around 75% of the working population is involved in agriculture and livestock rearing, which contribute to over half the GDP. However, for more than 30 years now, these sectors have experienced growth of only 2% even though the country has over 15 million hectares of arable land. Only 5% of this land is cultivated each year.

Under colonial administration, the agricultural policies adopted were systematically oriented to the benefit of an elite who favoured export crops and industries under the auspices of major concessionary companies that were "more concerned with immediate profit than with long-term investments." Rural populations were displaced and "villages were grouped along main roads without consideration for the location of the best agricultural land." The goal was both to facilitate requisitions of labour for the farms and to achieve better control over operations linked to export crops and products. Thanks to the technical and financial support provided for cash crops, small-scale farmers could partly benefit from the system in place by using part of their dividends to finance their food plots. But the country was insufficiently competitive given its underdeveloped infrastructures and roads, resulting in the export networks malfunctioning. The structural adjustment plans adopted in the 1980s led to the virtual disappearance of technical support for agriculture and a significant reduction in cultivated areas due to a lack of profits. Household economies gradually became unbalanced, the drop in cash crops having repercussions on farmers' capacity to invest in other crops. And yet, the government kept its public politics oriented towards mass imports of food products and did not support the farming of these local food crops. The marginalisation of rural populations has had heavy social and economic consequences, leading among other things to the disappearance of education in rural areas, of access to primary care, and of secondary roads.

The public authorities developed rural development strategies, but these strategies are not implemented due to a lack of funding and of monitoring. For example, the government promoted the use of animal traction in the 1960s but the lack of investments and support quickly limited the deployment of this farming technique. The country is facing the same situation today: agricultural development programmes once again promote animal traction agriculture but without implementing a monitoring body to ensure programme effectiveness. This technique nevertheless has the advantage of integrating agriculture and livestock, and of allowing both an increase in cropland and a better yield while strengthening agropastoralists' capacity for resilience. Moreover, the Agence Centrafricaine de Développement Agricole (ACDA or Central African Agricultural Development Agency) in charge of training and supervising farmers, stopped its operations between 1998 and 2011, it has since resumed its activity but its staff and resources are insufficient. There is also no real bank specialised in credits for the agricultural and rural sector since the liquidation of the Banque de Crédit Agricole et de Développement (BCAD) in 1987.

Over the past few years, this political disinterest has been combined with the effects of the cycles of violence. Farmers' cattle are coveted both by highway robbers and by armed groups, either to sell or consume. In 1997, 94% of the prefectures with oxen were located in the northwest (Ouham, Ouham-Pendé) and 6% in the central-eastern part (Ouaka, Kémo, Nana-Gribizi). Since this time, most of these regions have been in crisis. Thereby, in the region of Bossangoa (Ouham), a study on economic recovery underscores that "since 2012, agriculture involving animal traction has seldom been practiced, the resources of households and groups being insufficient to purchase pairs of oxen and equipment." Virtually all of the cattle owners in their sample reported having their cattle stolen. This phenomenon has been widely observed in the Central African Republic since the 2012 crisis and it increases the population's vulnerability, particularly in terms of food insecurity. In 2015, only 10% of farmers had equipment for agriculture with animal traction while in the wooded savannah lands of central africa, 40% in Chad and 25% in Cameroon did.

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44 Ibid.
46 Ministry of Agriculture and of Rural Development (April 2011), Stratégie de développement rural, de l’agriculture et de la sécurité alimentaire (SDRASA) 2011-2015, p. 25
47 Ibid.
49 Action against Hunger translation: Hervé Hutin and Meunier Frédéric (September 2015), Redressement économique rapide ou résurgence du conflit, op.cit., p. 27.
51 Hervé Hutin and Meunier Frédéric (September 2015), Redressement économique rapide ou résurgence du conflit, op.cit., p. 21.
2/ CONFLICTS OVER LAND USE RENEW TENSIONS BETWEEN PASTORALISTS AND FARMERS

Some 90% of the livestock breeders (of mostly cattle herds) are Mbororo Fulani who arrived in the Central African Republic in the early 1920s from Cameroon and Chad. Transhumant Fulani herders add to this number seasonally. At first, sedentary Central African farmers, practicing extensive agriculture, did not oppose the movement of livestock breeders through the bush, far from their croplands. However, the increase in cattle (today there are nearly 4 million) led to tensions between farmers and pastoralists who compete for the use of land resources. The Central African agricultural system, made up mostly of small-scale farms, is based on a slash-and-burn approach. This technique leaves farmers no choice but to practice itinerant farming, since bush fires lead to a rapid loss of soil fertility and deteriorate natural resources. Plots of land are therefore used in a chaotic way, spreading out into the bush and encroaching upon grazing lands.

For the past 20 years, nomadic pastoralist practices and the slash-and-burn method have been a source of recurrent and seasonal conflicts due, on the one hand, to the fires lit by farmers on fallow land and, on the other, to the destruction caused by cattle that are not penned up in more remote fields. These tensions have been part of traditional conflicts that sometimes arise between farmers and herders in Central Africa, within a reasonably functioning consensual system of conflict resolution.

Since the 2012 crisis a new scale of conflicts have arisen, occasionally becoming outright "rural guerrilla warfare." Relations between Central African pastoralists and farmers have deteriorated following the 2013 crisis, with the breeders, mainly Peuhl and Muslims, being considered accomplices of the ex-Seleka, also of Muslim faith. Séleka’s takeover in March 2013 was an upheaval of the Central African political paradigm. For the first time since independence, a force from Muslim populations of the northern and eastern parts of the country seized power. The ensuing clash between Séleka and the anti-Balaka created strong community tensions and fractured the cohesion of agropastoral communities. In some regions, as the crisis caused pastoralists to flee, farmers seized the most fertile lands. The return of pastoralists has led to land disputes that reignite conflicts. The arming of both groups has made these clashes more deadly.

"THEY HOLD SHEPHERDS FOR RANSOM, STEAL MANY ANIMALS AND SELL THEM. WITH THE MONEY FROM THE SALE, THEY BUY PICK-UPS AND TAXI MOTOBIKES. ONCE THEIR VEHICLE BREAKS DOWN, THEY BEGIN AGAIN. MOST OF THE TAXI MOTOBIKES YOU SEE ARE OWNED BY YOUNG PEOPLE FROM THE ARMED GROUPS OR MILITIAS." AGROPASTORAL COMMUNITIES

52 FAO (2018), République centrafricaine. Stratégie d’appui à la résilience - Renforcement des moyens d’existence agropastoraux (2018-2023), Rome, FAO.
55 Interview conducted with Action against Hunger’s mission in the Central African Republic, May 2018.
An intensification of conflicts over land use in Batangafo since the 2013 crisis

The violence has brought about a drastic reduction of land in some regions (shrinking from 4 hectares on average before the crisis to 0.5 hectares today\(^6^6\) in Ouham-Pendé), and an increase in food insecurity. The conflicts have also led to a modification in seasonal nomadic pastoralist movements, which was the cause for renewed confrontations between cross-border nomadic herders, coming from Chad or Sudan and heavily armed, and sedentary villages. "The reduction in mobility, such as that experienced by livestock breeders in Batangafo, blocks their access to pastoral resources that are necessary for the animals' survival. This situation may contribute to the increase in retaliation, such as that from Fulani herders in Batangafo who intentionally destroy fields and set fire to huts as they are trapped by anti-Balaka."\(^5^7\)

In Kambakota, the fields are regularly destroyed by cattle herds belonging to armed Central African and cross-border seasonal nomadic pastoralists. This practice is "similar to a war strategy aimed at suffocating or weakening those considered to be enemies."\(^5^6\) In Batangafo and around Bambari, the frequent attacks and acts of arson in villages by armed herders have caused populations to flee to displacement camps.\(^5^9\)

3/THE WARTIME ECONOMY CONTRIBUTES TO THE SPREAD OF CONFLICTS

The absence of agricultural development is "one of the main roots of the contemporary security crisis"\(^6^0\) according to researchers M. Dufumier and B. Lallau. It is mainly the abandonment of support for small-scale farmers, since the structural adjustment plans of the 1980s, that "have marginalised them and gradually dragged them into the current conflict."\(^6^1\) The enlistment of farmers, animal herders and agropastoralists into armed groups happens indirectly when they go to work in the mines, which are run by the armed groups and are sources of funding for them, or directly, when they become an active member of a militia.

It is not uncommon for farmers to try to diversify their activities\(^6^2\), with many turning to diamond or gold mining, or even to crime, in order to survive; it is the increase in this phenomenon that is significant in the Central African Republic. The absence of prospects for young people in rural areas, in terms of both livelihoods and job opportunities, is a key element of the cycle of conflicts\(^6^3\), especially since, following the state's disinvestment, farming has become increasingly less attractive. The archaic farming techniques make the work difficult, largely ungratifying and unprofitable. Farmers are increasingly turning to the mines and participating in the country's illegal economy, which makes them even more vulnerable.

In the mid-1990s, many young people in rural areas joined armed groups, "preferring to join the looters than remain on the side of the looted."\(^6^4\) Often poor and young, urban and rural alike, robbed pastoralists or dispossessed merchants, these militiamen see armed groups as a "normal way of making do"\(^6^5\), and are recruited for their youth and malleability.

Finally, this wartime economy is exacerbated by the impunity these groups enjoy throughout the country, a situation that tends to normalise violence. This climate poses an obstacle to any possibility of development, and farmers try not to challenge the status quo out of fear of arousing envy or being illegally taxed or even robbed. The cohesion of economic actors is also compromised, as it can be seen in the virtual absence of structuring and organisation of producers, these being essential for the development of a sector.

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59 Ibid.
61 Ibid., p. 7.
63 Benoît Lallau, Lise Archambaud, Perrine Benoist-Laisus (February 2016), Observatoire des crises et résiliences en République Centrafricaine. Eléments de cadrage théorique et méthodologique, CLERSE - Lille 1 & Partenaires, projet de recherche - Document de travail n°2, p. 3.
III. RESTRICTION OF THE HUMANITARIAN SPACE REDUCES ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES
1/ INCREASING TARGETED ATTACKS JEOPARDISE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

The Central African populations are largely dependent on humanitarian aid and their access to aid is a key factor to consider to understand the increase in their increased vulnerability.

We have seen a disturbing reduction in the humanitarian space in many parts of the country (Batangafo, Kaga-Bandoro, Bangassou, Zemio, Bria, etc.) with a deterioration of the security situation and of road infrastructures throughout the entire country. This drastically hinders the population’s access to aid. Since the 2013 crisis, and even since the one in 2003, basic services and in particular the healthcare system have collapsed. Existing services have neither the structures nor the skilled staff necessary to provide the healthcare services the population needs, so they turn to NGO programmes. Over 48% of the population (2,497,000 people) are in need of healthcare at a time when half the drinking water distribution points and over 30% of the wells and sanitation facilities have been in a state of disrepair since the beginning of the crisis. As for access to healthcare, since humanitarian workers are the only ones providing care free of charge during programmes, they are often the only ones the people go to.

There is also the problem of the country’s infrastructure, as the roads have never been maintained by the Central African government. Only 2.5% of the roads are paved, which becomes problematic in the rainy season when most roads become unusable.

It is also common for armed groups to intentionally cut off access to main roads. The closure of roads forces humanitarian workers to use air freight, which increases operational costs and reduces the aid provided to the people affected, therefore further increasing their vulnerability. This is taking place at a time when the humanitarian community is facing the increasing challenge of under-funding. The Humanitarian Response Plan estimates humanitarian assistance needs at $515.6 million for 2018. As of early June, only 16.4% had been funded. The figures from the past several years show chronic underfunding since 2015: only 36% of the plan was funded in 2016, and 41% in 2017.

Like the civilian population, humanitarian organisations are the targets of the extreme violence that is spreading across the country in a climate of total impunity. The Central African Republic is one of the world’s most dangerous countries for humanitarian workers. Since 2014, the UN has counted 2,978 security-related incidents with humanitarian consequences and 417 security-related incidents aimed specifically at humanitarian workers that led to the death of 20 of them. In 2017 alone, 16 humanitarian workers were killed, 23 wounded and three kidnapped. The incidents have been multiplying in 2018: 49 incidents, mainly thefts (71%) and assault (12%), affected the NGOs in the first two months of the year. The multiple spikes in violence have also forced humanitarian workers to temporarily suspend their operations and relocate their teams on several occasions.

We have seen in particular a growing disregard for the neutrality of healthcare structures. Armed groups launch attacks and make incursions into healthcare facilities to prevent access to care for people suspected of belonging to opposing groups or suspected of stealing.

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66 CCORCA, (October 2017) “Humanitarian NGOs move their teams from Bocaranga following massive exodus of civilian population”. Available at: https://ccorca.org/communique-de-presse-ong-humanitaires-relocalisent-leurs-equippes-de-bocaranga-rca-suite-a-l’exode-massif-de-population-civile/ (accessed in April 2018)

67 23% of the 1,010 healthcare structures in the country are partially or totally destroyed, 24% are partially or completely non-functional (lacking an energy source and/or potable water, staff leaving for more secure locations, etc.) and, according to Action against Hunger, 58% function only because of support from humanitarian organisations. 68 Health Cluster, Plan Opérationnel du Groupe de Responsabilité Sectorielle « Cluster » Santé en République Centrafricaine, Année 2018.

69 OCHA (November 2017), Aperçu des besoins humanitaires 2018.

70 Ibid.


72 Ibid.


74 OCHA (November 2017), Aperçu des besoins humanitaires 2018.


76 Ibid.
In September 2017, due to the unprecedented level of violence against humanitarian workers, 28,000 people were deprived of humanitarian aid in Batangafo.\(^7\) Attacks with automatic weapons and rocket launchers against humanitarian infrastructures (five civilians killed, 13 wounded) showed that humanitarian workers and medical facilities are now direct targets. As a result, the vast majority of international NGOs in the area were urgently evacuated, depriving the local community of humanitarian aid. The partial halting of humanitarian activities in the city of Kabo in December 2017 directly or indirectly affected around 100,000 people.\(^8\) This deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers has not abated in 2018. In March of the same year, the base of an NGO in Bangassou was looted. This attack caused a temporary suspension in the operations of 28 health facilities and the relocation of some staff members to Bangui.\(^9\)

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ISSUES OF PERCEPTION AFFECT THE WORK OF HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

A number of the incidents against humanitarian workers can be partly attributed to the perception of the sector as a significant economic actor. In Bossangoa, the mere presence of many international organisations in 2015 in the sub-prefecture (six United Nations agencies, MINUSCA and around nine international NGOs) provided a significant financial contribution through the salaries of the local employees (over 400 people) and generated important economic activities. Taking into account the annual average per capita income of the Central African Republic, this contribution to the Bossangoa economy represented 20% of household income. Like with other Central African economic sectors, this situation makes the humanitarian staff and structures frequent and regular targets of social, administrative and criminal attack.

The population’s lack of awareness of the distinction between humanitarian actors and other parties (parties in the conflict, international forces, governmental forces, etc.) is critical for humanitarian access. The incidents that took place in May 2018 in Bangui, in the PK5 district, demonstrate this. Following an operation carried out by the MINUSCA to arrest the head of an armed militia, young militiamen set up roadblocks that limited the flow of vehicles, including humanitarian vehicles. It is not uncommon for non-governmental humanitarian organisations to be mistaken for the MINUSCA’s peacekeeping mission, which is increasingly seen as a party to the conflict, and directly targeted as such. Rumours and political stances against humanitarian aid contribute to the negative perception of humanitarian actors and therefore increase the risk of violence against them. Some armed groups also deliberately prevent certain populations from accessing humanitarian aid, often on religious grounds.

It is therefore crucial to guarantee unconditional humanitarian access, to uphold International Humanitarian Law and to strengthen the acceptance and the protection of humanitarian workers so that the Central African population can benefit from the aid that it absolutely needs.

“...I drew what scared me... Weapons, bombs, the army, the United Nations, the French flag, soldiers and helicopters.”

Emard, testifying about wrong perception by the population, in particular the youngest generation, of the different actors in place.

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80 A 309 USD. See Aho Guilbert (2006), Pour une stratégie de croissance pro-pauvre et au service du développement humain, PNUP.
81 Hervé Hutin et Meunier Frédéric (September 2015), Redressement économique rapide ou résurgence du conflit, op.cit., p. 60.
83 Since 1998, the country has received 13 peace-maintenance missions. The latest to date, in September 2014, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), has just had its mandate renewed for a period of one year by Resolution 2387.
RECOMMENDATIONS
This case study has shown that hunger in the Central African Republic is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive response addressing all aspects of the crisis. If we want to resolve the structural issues, concerted action must be taken by all actors at all levels. The following recommendations offer concrete actions aimed at breaking the cycle of hunger and conflict, to strengthen the populations’ resilience. Action against Hunger has identified three “entry points”: inclusive rural development (this must become a priority in the Central African Republic), the impacts of the conflict (the link between hunger and conflict must be prioritised in the political, diplomatic and humanitarian response), and humanitarian access (unconditional access must be guaranteed).

1/MAKING INCLUSIVE RURAL DEVELOPMENT A PRIORITY IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

To the Central African government

- Rethink rural, agricultural and pastoral development modalities in the Central African Republic to promote inclusive and social development and encourage complementarity between livelihoods. To this end, we deem essential to:
  - Promote an agri-ecological transition through support for production and dissemination of best practices. This method of food production is the most effective at meeting the population’s economic, social and environmental needs and at responding to the challenges of climate change. In this regard, the ACDA could make this one of its main missions and receive funding and staff accordingly.
  - Introduce a social safety net aimed at guaranteeing livelihoods and strengthening the resilience of agricultural and pastoral populations during hunger seasons.
  - Encourage the creation of a system of farming loans, credits and micro-credits to facilitate rural investment.
  - Implement a rural development policy aimed at facilitating access to markets for the most vulnerable agropastoral populations (including the construction and repair of rural roads) and at opening up isolated areas.
  - To reflect the reality of the range of livelihoods, prioritise the support to family farming and seasonal nomadic herders in pastoral and agricultural development policies.
  - Promote and spread potential complementarities of practices among farmers and pastoralists to reduce tensions, restore soils and promote a sustainable approach to the management of natural resources.
  - As a general rule, all of these measures must be accompanied by a pro-active strategy aimed at giving social and economic value to agropastoral practices and professions, throughout the entire food chain in the country, in order to limit the financial attractiveness of criminal practices.
  - Increase the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in compliance with the Malabo commitments (10% of the national budget must be dedicated to agriculture).
To donors and to the United Nations

- Provide the Central African government with a technical and financial support for the implementation of an inclusive and sustainable agricultural development as described above. Special attention must be paid to developing and introducing a system of monitoring and accountability, taking into consideration the impact rural development programmes may have on the underlying factors of the conflict.

- Maximise the positive impact of their intervention, in the sectors of agriculture, livestock rearing and rural development, on the underlying causes of the conflict. To this end, we deem it essential for any new country strategy to 1) be based on an ex-ante analysis of the conflict’s underlying causes, 2) include specific objectives aimed at maximising its impact on the identified causes and 3) have monitoring indicators based on its social impact.

- Adopt a “do no harm” approach in the agricultural investments and promote conflict-sensitive projects.

- Encourage and support the structuring of a rural organisation network, defending the rights and needs of Central African farmers and agropastoralists.

To NGOs and other civil society actors

- Integrate measures targeting social cohesion into the agricultural and pastoral programmes.

- Advocate for the needs and rights of the most vulnerable farmers and herders in donor and government policies.

- Support and strengthen the capacity of the agricultural and pastoral civil society in an effort to increase their rights and develop their autonomy.
2/PRIORITYING THE LINK BETWEEN HUNGER AND CONFLICT IN THE POLITICAL, DIPLOMATIC AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

**To the Central African government**

- Ensure that social cohesion policies prioritise efforts to end predation on economic and agricultural resources.
- Continue working to end impunity, in particular through the implementation of the Plan National de Consolidation de la Paix et de Relèvement (RCPCA or National Peace Consolidation and Recovery Plan).

**To States, donors and the United Nations**

- Keep the Central African Republic's situation on the diplomatic agenda and make finding a political solution to the conflict a priority of the Security Council, in collaboration with the African Union, and in connection with newly adopted tools such as the new Roadmap for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, adopted in Libreville in July 2017.
- Ensure, as part of the implementation of the Security Council’s Resolution 2417, that information on food insecurity and hunger are used as early-warning indicators of the escalation or exacerbation of conflicts.
- Renew efforts to obtain full funding of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan.
- Organise a new donors’ conference and prioritise a coordinated and multifaceted funding approach.
- Strengthen the implementation of the Békou Trust Fund to allow rapid and transparent disbursement of funds, and ensure continuity in emergency and recovery funding through the planning of 2 to 5 year strategies.

**To NGOs and other civil society actors**

- Promote and participate in the development of local actors, in particular in organisational terms, and strengthen the capacities of their staff.
- Ensure that emergency programmes are designed to include development activities promoting the populations' resilience in partnership with local actors and development actors.
- Increase the response in transition areas, simultaneously with emergency programmes, to prevent them from falling into violence.
- Ensure that recovery and development programmes take into account the potential emergency needs created by the rapid deterioration of a context.
- Increase actions promoting social cohesion, in particular by facilitating intercommunity discussions and activities aimed at increasing women’s autonomy.
3/ENSURING UNCONDITIONAL HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

To arms-bearers: governmental armed forces, MINUSCA and non-governmental armed groups

- Develop understanding of and compliance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality.
- Actively promote the distinction between humanitarian action and political and military objectives.
- Increase training in international law, in particular human rights and international humanitarian law, to ensure full compliance.
- Guarantee unconditional access for the population to basic services and for humanitarian organisations to the populations.
- Respect humanitarian workers and structures, in accordance with Security Council Resolutions 217584 and 2286.85

To NGOs and other civil society actors

- Increase awareness-raising and information sharing to explain the principles and methods of NGO intervention.
- Ensure compliance with humanitarian principles when conducting their missions.
- Raise the awareness of the population and local authorities of the respective mandates of the various actors and other stakeholders.
- Encourage and support the involvement of local decision-makers in messages promoting social cohesion in order to facilitate access for all to basic services.


ANNEXES

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Action against Hunger has been operating in the Central African Republic since 2006, currently with a team of around 300 employees. Its actions have responded to the country’s changing context, simultaneously implementing emergency, early-recovery and development programmes depending on the areas and needs. The projects are developed in both urban and rural contexts, for both indigenous populations and displaced persons. In order to address the complexity of the humanitarian issues, Action against Hunger’s teams have prioritised an integrated approach providing a multisector response, in the organisation’s areas of expertise, namely treatment for malnutrition, mother-infant-child healthcare, mental health and psycho-social support, food security and livelihoods as well as access to water and hygiene practices.

Action against Hunger has international and national staff assigned to its four bases in the country: Basse Kotto, Bangui and surrounding areas (in Ombella M’Poko), Nana Mambéré and Ouham. Emergency response teams can also be deployed throughout the country.

Over the long and medium term, Action against Hunger intends to carry out actions aimed at strengthening resilience capacities and initiatives targeting the recurrent acute crises while continuing to respond to emergency situations.