

BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

Electoral promises one year after the political transition in Central African Republic

Overview: Oxfam's position on implementation of electoral promises in Central African Republic

On March 30, 2016, the inauguration of Professor Faustin Archange TOUADERA as the new President of Central African Republic after three years of political transition gave rise to much hope. The return to normality in this country devastated by three years of crises constituted the premise of the electoral promises around the restoration of peace, stability and reconciliation in Central African Republic.

A year later, it is clear that this dynamic seems to be under threat, with the wave of violence that has once again crossed the country since October 2016. By March 2017, 60% of the territory is still under the control of non-state armed groups and promises made to the millions of Central Africans who were hungry, displaced, wounded and abused seem to have vanished in uncertainty.¹ The efforts made by the new constitutional authorities will not change current trends if they are not sustained and do not receive real financial and technical support from the international community.

1 CONTEXT

Since October 2016, armed groups have clashed again but under different affiliations. Alliances between armed groups have been recomposed, leading to new coalitions and new dynamics on an ethnic basis. The initial dynamics between the anti-balaka groups and the ex-seleka fed into clashes between the UPC group (mainly composed of Fulanis) and a broad coalition joining the anti-balaka groups to three of the ex-seleka factions (FPRC, RPRC and MPC). At the same time, the north-west remains under the control of the self-defence groups and the anti-balaka militias who confront the 3R group (return, claim and rehabilitation) created in 2016. Clashes over the last six months have caused the displacement of about 100,000 people.²

This has plunged the country back into chronic instability only four months after the donors' conference in Brussels where the international community had promised to finance the Plan of Reconstruction and Consolidation of the Peace in CAR (RCPCA)³ with €2bn. However, this funding has been only slowly disbursed by donors, just as the humanitarian response plan has been only 5.4% funded since the beginning of the year.⁴

The new President had made solemn commitments, promising to restore peace and security. Thanks to the government-led social cohesion efforts, the displacement curve had dropped by about 8.42%, or around 6,000 people returned per month. This represented a fall from 421,223 displaced in February 2016 to about 385,750 in August 2016. But today, the change in this dynamic is worrying. Between August 2016 and February 2017 the number of displaced persons rose back up to 402,240.⁵ This 4% represents 2,708 new displaced persons per month.

The signature on 5 November 2016 of the presidential decree marking the adoption of the Plan of Reconstruction and Consolidation of the Peace in CAR (RCPCA) is a clear sign of the President's commitment around three major pillars:

- supporting peace, security and reconciliation,
- renewing the social contract between the state and society,
- and ensuring economic recovery and revitalization of the productive sectors.

But the lack of a long-term strategy and transformative laws renders this plan fragile and undermines the confidence and the social bond born of electoral promises. Similarly, weak funding to address the root causes of the crisis hinders stability consolidation and economic recovery and could lead to social frustration and a further deterioration in the situation.

2 PEACE, SECURITY AND RECONCILIATION REMAIN FRAGILE

a) Political dialogue with armed groups should lead to the signing of a legally binding agreement adopted by the National Assembly.

The dialogue initiated with all the leaders of around 14 armed groups for the restoration of security and disarmament about a year ago has contributed to a relative lull. Moreover, the African initiative for peace in CAR, undertaken by the African Union at its last summit in Addis Ababa in January 2017, allowed the last armed groups to join the DDRR Advisory Committee. The accession or withdrawal of these armed groups to the ongoing dialogue outside a well-defined and binding legal framework makes the process fragile. It is therefore urgent that a strategy and a national law for DDRR⁶ (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation) be adopted and ratified by the National Assembly.

This new legal framework must clarify the contradictions that prevent a clear and transparent peace process. Today, there are about 70,000 elements claiming to be ex-combatants, and yet the government estimates that its future DDRR programme involves only 7,000 ex-combatants (including 1,500 children associated with armed groups, 500 foreign mercenaries and 1000 ex-FACA) and spread over a period of 39 months.⁷ There is a risk that these contradictions will lead to frustration

b) National reconciliation and the fight against impunity require a multi-year strategy and legal framework that will promote the sustainability and constitutionality of stabilization processes.

Apart from a law establishing the Special Criminal Court and the recent appointment of its prosecutor, there are no viable national strategies to fight against impunity, to reform the judicial sector or to redeploy the state's authority. A large part of the territory remains marked by the absence of the state, and several officials have still not regained their posts. The tangible progress in this direction still does not respond to a strategy with transformative laws and reforms, but rather to occasional and fragile actions. However, in Bangui the level of violence has been greatly reduced by the redeployment of state's authority and the will of the new authorities to rebuild social cohesion. But this dynamic has still not been followed in the rest of the country. As such, spontaneous returns of several hundred refugees or displaced persons have encountered community resistance, and violent incidents have sometimes been encouraged by local authorities.

At the same time, beyond one-off actions such as the creation and establishment of peace and reconciliation committees in the eight districts of Bangui, no law or strategy on reparations or truth-telling has yet been implemented. The National Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission has not yet been established, although it is planned. Thus, where social cohesion had resumed, violence reappeared because no national strategy for reconciliation had been adopted to consolidate the achievements of the electoral process. In the face of many current challenges, national reconciliation needs to be placed more prominently in government priorities.

3 DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

The adoption of a legal and policy framework for displaced persons and refugees is urgent.

One in five Central Africans remain displaced or are refugees, and 58% of Central African refugees are children.⁸ Returned persons are denied access to the conditions of security and dignity required. The government's efforts to facilitate the return of the 28,000 displaced people at Bangui airport can be nuanced by the massive and continuous displacement of thousands of other people in the centre, east and north of the country. Although Central African Republic ratified the Kampala Convention for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in 2010, this has not been ratified in domestic legislation, nor does a national strategy for durable solutions for displaced persons and refugees yet exist. There are, however, many difficulties related to housing, land and goods. It is therefore clear that the returns currently observed are outside a legally protective framework. In order to renew the social contract, the state must be able to provide the population with basic social and essential services such as access to drinking water, health and education.

4 ECONOMIC RECOVERY, AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

The strategy of securing the territory must take into account the areas of agricultural production to facilitate economic recovery.

The government has promoted the revival of cotton growing in Bambari and its efforts have also led to the resumption of diamond exports in areas conforming to the Kimberly process. But it still does not include food crops. Around 60% of the population of Central African Republic depend on agriculture. Due to insecurity and the lack of access to land, about 37% did not cultivate in 2016⁹ and about half of the population (48%) is food insecure.¹⁰

Ouham Pende and Ouham were recognized before the crisis as the grain granaries of the country and had commercial links with Chad and Cameroon. Today agricultural activities are slow to resume. According to Oxfam assessments in March 2016 and February 2017 respectively, in the sub-prefecture of Batangafo in Ouham and Paoua in Ouham Pende, 80% of the populations in the targeted villages reported that their goods have been looted or stolen. Similarly, the largest decline in production in recent years has been recorded – of the order of 80% – the main reasons being insecurity and the lack of agricultural inputs. This large decline in production and insecurity reduced the opportunities for labour (daily agricultural and non-agricultural labour, selling of gathering products, market gardening, etc.) of all households, especially poor households, who depended mainly on these sources of work to ensure their access to basic food products. Thus promises made about economic recovery and agricultural production cannot be realistic if insecurity persists in strategic areas of production.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Over the last year, the Central African Republic has made progress in security. The risk of partition that was hovering over the country in November 2015 has been dispelled since the election of new authorities who have worked for the continuity of political dialogue and the restoration of state authority. However, the solutions which were proposed are at present still very fragile because it is still early days. Several national strategies are being developed but are very urgent in the current context. If urgent long-term measures are not adopted immediately, the risk of returning to square one is permanent.

Notes

1 CAR remains the only country in the world where half of the population owes its survival to humanitarian aid. Only 35% have access to drinking water and 27% to sanitation services. By 2016, 56% of health infrastructures were still managed by humanitarian actors.

2 OCHA,

http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA_RCA_Communique%CC%81_de_presse_Yaounde%CC%81_16_MARS_2017.pdf

3 Oxfam (2016) 'Brussels donor funds pledged for CAR need to be released immediately',

<https://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/reactions/brussels-donor-funds-pledged-car-need-be-released-immediately>, 18 November 2016

4 Financial Tracking System, <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/43/summary/2017>, 28/03/2017

5 Réponse Régionale à la crise des Réfugiés en République centrafricaine,

<http://data.unhcr.org/car/country.php?id=38>, consulté le 23/03/2017

6 OCHA, CAR : Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017,

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/rca_ocha_2017_hno_narrative_detaillee.pdf, p. 5

7 Colonel Noël Bienvenu Selesson, <https://minusca.unmissions.org/des-avancees-enregistr%C3%A9es-dans-le-programme-ddrr-en-centrafrique>

8 Akinkunmi Akingbade (2016) 'These 5 African countries have the highest number of child refugees in the world', <http://venturesafrica.com/these-5-african-countries-have-the-highest-number-of-child-refugees-in-the-world/>, September 15, 2016

9 PAM, Enquête Nationale sur la Sécurité Alimentaire (ENSA) République Centrafricaine,

<http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp290682.pdf>, Decembre 2016, p. 24

10 Ibid.

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Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International March 2017.

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