

THE ROLE OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDING ORGANISATIONS IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Peace Direct, November 2015



Overview

For decades, the Central African Republic (CAR) has struggled to overcome problems of weak governance, political instability, entrenched poverty, and cycles of violent conflict. The most recent conflict that began with the seizure of power by the Seleka alliance in 2013 has resulted in over 6,000 deaths and left almost 20% of the population displaced. At the height of the crisis, United Nations officials declared a risk of genocide in CAR, and the international community mobilized to help avert mass violence in this long-neglected country. Though a measure of stability is returning to the country, a recent International Rescue Committee report highlights the urgent need for renewed focus on CAR to prevent further deterioration of the situation there and renewed violence.

In the current context, coordinated and sustained efforts to increase security and secure a more durable peace for communities across CAR are needed. The United Nations continues to mount a significant peacekeeping mission in the country, and a growing number of international organisations have begun new projects or re-started programmes in CAR to promote social cohesion and tolerance, mitigate and mediate conflicts, and strengthen the role of media and civil society through transitional processes. These efforts have proven to be important interventions through a moment of intense crisis in helping stem the violence. Still, the peacebuilding efforts in CAR remain heavily driven by international actors, with limited space for local actors – particularly local peacebuilders – to engage as leaders of change in their own society.

Peace Direct believes, and our experience over ten years affirms, that local people are best placed to find lasting solutions to the conflicts they face. This is true even in the most complex of conflict environments, such as CAR. Based on a 2014 mapping project and a series of consultations and micro-grants to local peacebuilding organisations during 2015, this report argues that local peacebuilding organisations are an under-supported sector that, with appropriate support, can make a significant contribution to security and reconciliation, as well as broader peace and stability in CAR.

Key findings

Key findings from our engagements with local peacebuilders in CAR over the past year include:

1. Local peacebuilding organisations are active in all provinces in CAR and engaged in a broad range of activities, focused most heavily on social cohesion and reconciliation. These activities have included engaging with a range of civil society actors that other internationally led interventions struggle to reach;
2. Local organisations have an impressive rootedness in their communities and a capacity to mobilise the local population for activities, as well as collaborate across organisations;
3. Local organisations have a clear sense of key principles for successful peacebuilding in their communities, the dynamics of local conflicts, and their own strengths and weaknesses;
4. Despite strong capacity to develop and implement peacebuilding activities, the lack of international or national-level support for local peacebuilding organisations has constrained their ability to work at a larger scale and has meant that their visibility to the national government and international community is low;
5. For longer-term sustainability of peacebuilding in CAR it will be vital that a strong cohort of local peacebuilding organisations are supported. A strong local peacebuilding sector, with organisations or networks capable of implementing large scale programmes and with the institutional strength to advocate for their work and engage with government, gives the greatest chance of sustainable peacebuilding gains.
6. The greatest needs and opportunities for supporting local peacebuilding organisations include additional direct funding, investments in organizational development, engagement in large-scale conflict analysis, and support for improved local approaches to monitoring and evaluation.



Methodology

This report is based on a mapping of peacebuilding organisations in Central African Republic by Peace Direct, started in 2014. Conflict and peacebuilding analyses were carried out by 26 local peacebuilding organisations in May 2015 as part of the 'Bangui Peace Exchange', organised by Peace Direct with support from the Civil Affairs department of MINUSCA ("Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies

pour la stabilisation en Centrafrique / United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic "). A series of 5 exchange meetings between a further range of peacebuilding organisations and other civil society representatives were organised across CAR in August 2015. This report is compiled based on the ideas and opinions of the local peacebuilding organisations, whilst other key stakeholders including key donors were also consulted. A full list of participating organisations is included below.

Overview of local peacebuilding organisations in CAR

Since June 2014, Peace Direct has mapped local peacebuilding organisations active across CAR, focusing on organisations who either have peacebuilding as their core focus or as a key strand of their work. (It should be noted that there is some variation in the terminology used by different organisations, with many referring to their work as 'social cohesion'. For consistency, we have used 'peacebuilding' throughout this report to cover all activities that might also be classed as 'social cohesion', 'conflict prevention' and 'reconciliation' activities).

Our mapping demonstrates that in all provinces of CAR there are active local peacebuilding organisations; furthermore, our mapping is certainly an underestimate of the true number of local organisations. The organisations are engaged in a broad range of activities, often focused on economic development but including peacebuilding as a core strand. Within peacebuilding, the strongest focus of local groups is on social cohesion and reconciliation work.

Consultations with local peacebuilding organisations from May to August 2015 have demonstrated that local organisations have considerable capacity to generate support from their local communities; indeed, the absence of support from international actors has meant that in many cases local organisations are entirely dependent on local community support for their peacebuilding activities.

This situation means that local organisations have an impressive rootedness in their communities and a capacity to mobilise for activities on a local level; in a series of local consultations supported by Peace Direct, local organisations demonstrated their capacity to collaborate across a number of organisations and organise community events with a range of stakeholders that international actors would struggle to muster. For example, one of the community consultations supported by Peace Direct and organised by DORCAS Esperance and FOCSARENA in Boguera, Lobaye, included representatives of local chiefs, women's associations, youth associations, church groups, Muslim groups, farmers groups, Peuhl groups and Malian groups. In a country where reconciliation or social cohesion activities often have to take place with only 'one' community represented, either because of displacement or because tensions are so high, these local peacebuilding organisations demonstrated their ability to bring together all communities. This ability to convene groups was mirrored with other local peacebuilding organisations that Peace Direct supported to arrange exchange programmes. Furthermore, the collaborative projects such as these capitalised on the range of different skills across different organisations. In this case, DORCAS offered experiences in the field of inter-religious dialogue and ethnic conflict. FOCSARENA provided expertise in the management of natural resources. As a local organisation,

SEWA provided important knowledge of the local context of Boganagone, as well as a strong network of local contacts.

Local peacebuilding organisations identified the key principles behind their ability to achieve success in their peacebuilding:

- Permanent neutrality
- The capacity to identify the key actors in tensions
- The involvement of community leaders
- The ability to listen and take part in dialogue with the community
- The confidence they have from their communities, as a result of years working in the communities
- Their track record in socialisation activities

Organisations also emphasised their abilities to engage with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in communities.

“The roots of traditional peace mechanisms in communities remain in place and they can be used again to achieve results”. - CPDE

However, despite the strong capacity to develop and implement peacebuilding activities, the lack of international or national-level support for local peacebuilding organisations has constrained their ability to work at a larger scale and has meant that their visibility to the national government and international community is low. Almost all groups reported that they have no direct support to implement their peacebuilding activities; at most, they received some funding as local implementing partners for international programmes. Local organisations also felt that they have insufficient opportunities to develop larger scale collaborations across regions; the Peace Exchange held in May was the first opportunity many had had to develop their own plans with other organisations from different regions. The difficulties of travel between regions is a strong contributing factor to this.

A summary of our mapping is included as Annex 2 of this report, and the full data is available online, including information on international organisations and INGO activities in CAR, at <http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/central-african-republic/>

Key priorities for local peacebuilding in CAR

In the Bangui Peace Exchange, 26 local peacebuilding organisations collaborated to develop joint plans for collaborative peacebuilding projects that could be implemented by local organisations. The process began with an analysis of the key conflicts facing CAR. The collaborative analysis identified 5 key conflicts to be addressed:

- Inter-community and ethnic conflicts
- Economic conflicts
- Military-political conflicts
- Interstate conflicts
- Social conflicts

The conflict analysis included identifying the root causes and key stakeholders in each key conflict, which became the basis for the development of collaborative interventions

based on the strengths of local organisations. Of particular note was the ability of local organisations to develop plans that were broad enough to engage with areas often seen to be beyond the remit of local civil society actors, for example the tensions between CAR and neighbouring countries. In this area, analysis of the root causes and consequences of the conflict led to the identification of opportunities for local peacebuilding groups to intervene, including building alliances with civil society groups in neighbouring countries.



A significant theme through the analysis was the clear conclusion of the peacebuilding organisations that the community level conflicts in CAR should not be seen as religiously-based conflicts, but rather as political conflicts, with consequent political solutions.

A full summary of the report on the Bangui Peace Exchange, including the collaborative conflict analysis results, is available on request from Peace Direct.

SWOT analysis of local peacebuilding organisations in CAR

The peacebuilding organisations completed an analysis of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

The strengths the groups identified were based in their rootedness in the community: their understanding of the local contexts, proximity to the local population and capacity to mobilise. The groups also identified opportunities in their alignment with the goals of the international community. Furthermore, the current time is seen as one of clear opportunity, with some improvement in the security situation easing their ability to operate and travel, and the Bangui Forum also creating a supportive environment for reconciliation work.

However, groups were honest in assessing weaknesses in their own work, recognising the need for improved capacity in areas such as psychosocial support for victims, monitoring of projects, and other technical support.

Groups also identified the lack of coordination between local civil society groups as a weakness that needs to be addressed. In part, this is due to the difficulty of travel between regions (despite some logistical support from MINUSCA), but the groups also recognised that a greater degree of collaboration between local groups could help both raise the profile of local peacebuilders and also allow work at a greater scale. A number of steps to increase collaboration between groups were identified, including supporting the mobility and transport for local groups, and support for coordination and information sharing.



Recommendations

Increase funding for the activities of local peacebuilding organisations

Peace Direct supported a range of peacebuilding events by local organisations across CAR (see map above). This was through a series of microgrants for collaborative peacebuilding activities that each involved multiple peacebuilding organisations and reached other key sectors of society, including religious leaders, representatives of armed groups and representatives of the state; details are included in annex 1. Peace Direct's experience indicates that local organisations in CAR have a high capacity to develop impressive projects and deliver inclusive peacebuilding events, including at short notice. Furthermore, a consistent concern of international donors is over the capacity of local organisations to manage and report on funding. Our experiences with a wide range of local peacebuilding organisations in CAR indicates a strong existing capacity to report (financial and narrative) on activities.

All organisations we consulted reported to us the difficulty of attracting support for their work. Funding opportunities for local organisations are extremely limited, and in many cases organisations were only able to attract any funds at all as implementers for INGOs. In these cases, organisations complained that the large majority of funds, sometimes reportedly up to 80%, would be absorbed on costs outside of CAR itself.

There are clear overlaps in the types of work of INGOs active in peacebuilding in CAR and the work of local organisations. This opens up the opportunity for collaborative projects between local and international actors. However, local peacebuilding organisations also emphasised the importance of greater control over programme development transferring to local organisations better able to represent community needs and with greater sustainability in the communities.

The peacebuilding plans developed during the exchange meetings demonstrate the capacity for large-scale collaborative peacebuilding plans between local peacebuilding organisations. The organisations demonstrate an impressive capacity to mobilise local support for their work, but without further international funding their capacity will

remain constrained. The situation is particularly acute for those groups without a presence in Bangui.

Funding needs to be developed in a way that does not undermine the local volunteer ethos of the organisations. Funding does not need to be large-scale to have immediate impacts; Peace Direct's experience (both in CAR and elsewhere) is that a more important factor is allowing flexibility and ownership to the organisations in the way the funds are invested.

Annex 3 to this report gives five options for supporting local peacebuilding in CAR, where peacebuilding organisations have developed plans for work at larger scale.

Invest in the organisational development of local peacebuilding organisations

There are many significant peacebuilding efforts in CAR, supported by the international community, notably through the Social Cohesion Working Group. These include a high number of 'Peace Committees', which offer an effective mechanism for engaging with local communities.

However, for longer-term sustainability of peacebuilding in CAR it will be vital that a strong cohort of local peacebuilding organisations are supported. A strong local peacebuilding sector, with organisations or networks capable of implementing large scale programmes and with the institutional strength to advocate for their work and engage with government, gives the greatest chance of sustainable peacebuilding gains.

Beyond funding the activities of local organisations, it is important that investment is made in the organisational capacity of local groups. Funding can be linked to the delivery of high quality work, but should include at a minimum full cost recovery for local organisations, and should ideally support the capacity development of local organisations. Almost all groups we spoke with told us of the challenges in covering their basic operating costs. In terms of capacity support, groups highlighted priorities as training in project monitoring, non-violent communication and also financial systems.

Capacity building is most effective as a process of mentorship and accompaniment. It should first use local capacity with external support as needed. Support should be long-term and not based around short-term projects.

Involve local organisations in large-scale conflict analysis

The recent 'Making Sense of Turbulent Consequences' publication by World Vision (<http://participate-mstc.net/book>) points out that local actors are frequently involved in conflict analysis exercises only on the micro-level, despite the fact that they may have much to offer to larger-scale analysis. Our consultations with local groups in CAR reinforce this finding. Local organisations had some experience in analysing conflicts in their own communities, but were not usually consulted for larger scale conflict analyses. The joint analysis of the conflicts affecting CAR developed in May indicates that there is significant analytical capacity amongst local organisations that is not being utilized.

Given the central role of conflict analyses in the development of intervention strategies, there is an opportunity to better utilise the capacities and knowledge of local organisations by increasing their involvement in these processes.

Support better M&E and research on local peacebuilding in CAR

All local groups we consulted with reported impressive achievements in their own communities. However, evidence did still tend to be anecdotal. As noted above, investment in the capacities of local organisations should include a focus on their M&E capacity. Beyond this, more efforts should be made to generate evidence of the most successful initiatives, and identify cumulative impact across peacebuilding activities. One option could be to identify locally appropriate indicators of peacebuilding success, looking at long term social and political change, and supporting the capacity of local peacebuilding organisations to track their impact on these.

About Peace Direct

We believe that local people have the power to find their own solutions to conflict. Our mission is to help them to make this happen.



Local people are the key to preventing, resolving and healing conflicts. They are the best way to break recurrent cycles of violence and make peace last. And increasingly they want to move away from depending on outside help, towards building their own futures.

We help this strategic shift, and we add value to their efforts on the ground. Firstly, we raise funds for their programmes and offer management support and advice. Secondly, we build recognition for their work, to put them in touch with those in the wider world who can assist with funds and influence. And thirdly, we promote the concept of locally led peacebuilding to the international community, so that others will adopt our approach too. For more information, visit www.peacedirect.org

For further information on Peace Direct's work in CAR, please contact Ruairi Nolan: ruairi@peacedirect.org

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Report prepared for publication by Ruairi Nolan (Peace Direct) and Martine Ekomo-Soignet.

We are also grateful to the Civil Affairs department of MINUSCA for support for the Bangui Peace Exchange event in May 2015.

Annex 1: Summary of Peace Exchange meetings organised under this programme

Six separate Peace Exchange events organised were under this grant programme. The first Bangui Peace Exchange was the main, national-level conference. A full report (in French) is available on request. The 5 other regional Peace Exchanges also have full reports compiled by the relevant peacebuilding organisations, available on request.

Central African Republic Peace Exchange, May 2015

Organised by Peace Direct with the support of MINUSCA, the Central African Peace Exchange brought together 26 local organisations from across CAR to develop a national level conflict analysis and a series of 5 collaborative locally led peacebuilding strategies.

Obo Peace Exchange

CALL, AFEB and FHAp collaborated to organise a 2 day Peace Exchange on 30-31 July 2015 for religious and community leaders. Activity focused on identifying the causes of conflict in the region, facilitating the sharing of experiences in conflict management and promoting social cohesion for sustainable peace. Participants collaborated in making recommendations for the consolidation of peace.

The peacebuilding organisations also organised a training for local media professionals and arranged a series of radio programmes on the topic of peacebuilding, which went out on local stations in French, Sango and Zande, a local language.

Bangui Regional Peace Exchange

A 2 day Peace Exchange was organised in Bangui by CPDE. This took place on 21-22 August 2015, with twenty participants from Bangui and others from nearby communities.

CPDE led a workshop training that focused on traditional mechanisms of conflict prevention and resolution, and how these can be integrated into modern peacebuilding activities. Participants included representatives of provinces, heads of districts, civil society organisations, and strong presence of youth and women representatives.

Boguera Peace Exchange

DORCAS, FOCSARENA and SEWA collaborated to organise an inter-NGO exchange and an intercommunity workshop in Boguera on 11-12 July 2015. Participants included village chiefs, representatives of religious groups (Muslim, Catholic, Protestant), Anti-Balaka representatives and representatives from youth groups. The exchanges focused on developing collaborative plans of action to promote peace and social cohesion.

A key development from the exchange was a commitment from the civil society groups to form a local-level network for future peacebuilding collaborations, to be called COPADEV Boguera (Peace Coordination and Development).

Yaloke Peace Exchange

OISEAU DE LA PAIX and GAPAFOT organised a Peace Exchanges from 20-29 August 2015 which brought together community leaders and religious leaders from Yaloke, Boyali and Damara for trainings in mediation, conflict analysis and conflict management. Participants developed plans to establish mediation committees composed of religious and community leaders.

Zemio Peace Exchange

A full day Peace Exchange was organised in the city of Zemio by Prosperite and UAOEV which brought together various community leaders from Zemio. Discussion focused on identifying the threats to peace in Zemio and the action required to consolidate peace in the city. Participants made plans to collaborate for the strengthening of inter-community reconciliation.

ANNEX 2: MAPPING OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDING ORGANISATIONS IN C.A.R.

Peace Direct has been mapping local peacebuilding organisations in CAR since 2014. The interactive mapping is available at:

<http://www.insightonconflict.org/conflicts/central-african-republic/>

The mapping is interactive and can be searched by province or by thematic area. The circles below indicate the number of groups active in each province. Each group mapped has a profile in English and French introducing their work and with contact details. The mapping also includes information on INGOs and international organisations active in Central African Republic.



ORGANISATIONS FEATURED

- Association de Radios Communautaires de Centrafrique (ARC)
- Association des Femmes Juriste de Centrafrique (AFJC)
- Association Ebe Bale Bobo (AEBB)
- Association Pour la Jeunesse de Centrafrique
- Bureau National des Femmes Musulmans de Centrafrique (BNFMC)
- CALL (Commission Autochtone de Lutte contre la LRA)
- Centre pour la promotion des droits de l'enfants (CPDDE)
- Coalition Nationale de Société Civile pour le New Deal (CNSC/New Deal)
- Commission Vérité de Bangassou
- Communion Des Oeuvres Pour La Mission (COM)
- Dorcac Espérance Pour le Développement Durable
- Femmes Hommes Action Plus (FHAP)
- Fondation Les Enfants D'Abord

- Institut Moderne de Métiers Spécialisés
- Jeunes Agents de Développement (JAD)
- Kode Ti Kwa
- Maboko Na Maboko
- Oiseau de la paix
- Organisation des Jeunes Leaders pour le Développement
- Plateforme Interconfessionnelle de la Jeunesse Centrafricaine (PIJCA)
- Réseau National des Organisations de Jeunesse en droits de l'Homme
- Synergie en Faveur des Jeunes de Centrafrique (SYFAJECA)
- Union des jeunes Musulmans de Centrafrique
- Vitalité Plus
- Ye Ti Maboko Ti Mon Si

Annex 3: Five opportunities to support local peacebuilding in CAR

1. **Support the use of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Bangui.**

Led by the organisation CPDE, a range of organisations and civil society actors in Bangui have developed a programme work based on their analysis of traditional conflict resolutions mechanisms in CAR can make a greater contribution to peacebuilding.

For more information, contact CPDE: djamoussremy@gmail.com

- ### 2. **Support a new collaboration in Lobaye.** Local peacebuilding organisations in Lobaye province were able to convene a very wide range of stakeholders, including local chiefs, women's associations, youth associations, church groups, Muslim groups, farmers groups, Peuhl groups and Malian groups. Their collaborative analysis identified the need for a new structure to support collaboration between those who want to work for peace. Therefore they have created *COLOPADEV (Comité Local Paix pour le Developpement)* to help align interventions and make them more sustainable.

For more information, contact DORCAS Esperance: dorcasesperance.cresed@gmail.com

- ### 3. **Support local media to spread messages of peace.** The organisations CALL, FHAp and AFEB were able to quickly mobilise a range of local radio stations such as *Radio Communautaire Ani-du-sa* and *Radio Communautaire ZEREDA* to undertake trainings on peacebuilding. Radio remains the primary source of news for the majority of the population in rural areas. Expanding this programme would provide an opportunity to further spread peacebuilding messages and counter rumours which can trigger conflicts.

For more information, contact CALL: callmboliabel@gmail.com

- ### 4. **Support social cohesion in Zemio.** Peacebuilding organisations in Zemio, led by Prosperite and UAOEV, identified some improvements in relations between Muslim and Christian populations in Zemio as an opportunity for further social cohesion work. The need to include a disarmament process as part of this work was also highlighted.

For more information, contact Prosperite: prosperite_rca@yahoo.fr

- ### 5. **Support local mediation committees in Ombella-M'Poko.** The organisations GAPAFOT and Oiseau de la Paix have identified religious leaders and community leaders already supporting community level dialogue. Further training from these organisations would quickly allow expansion of community mediation committees across 16 prefectures.

For more information, contact Oiseau de la Paix: fabricebirdofpeace@gmail.com

Annex 4: Organisations that participated in the Bangui Peace Exchange

For contact details for any organisation, please contact: Ruairi.nolan@peacedirect.org

Organization
AFEB
Bangui Sans Frontière
ARC
AVL
CALL
BE OKO LA NA LA
FADEC
JUPEDEC
AFJC
CPDE
DORCAS ESPERANCE
FHAP
FOCSARENA
KODE TI KWA
OCDH
OISEAU DE LA PAIX
PLATEFORME DES CONFESSIONS RELIGIEUSES DE CENTRAFRIQUE
PLATEFORME INTERCONFESSIONNELLE DE LA JEUNESSE CENTRAFRICAINE (PIJCA)
PROSPERITE
REBATISSEURS DE LA MURAILLE DE DIEU (REMOD)
UNION D'ASSISTANCE AUX ORPHELINS ET ENFANTS VULNERABLES (UAOEV)
VITALITE PLUS
FEC
Femmes Musulmanes
GAPAFOT
YAMACUIR

“Koui is a city in which people of Christian, Muslim and animist beliefs live together in harmony. When heavily armed Séléka rebel soldiers posed a threat to peace in Kouï, the Lamido intervened peacefully to address the rebels:

‘Since ancient times, Christians, animists and Muslims have lived in peace in this city. Now that you have arrived here, if you are hungry and you need to purchase beef, then take this money. But please, do not destroy the property of Christians, or animists, do not brutalise.

Do not kill **anyone here.**’

Through this intervention by the Lamido, Christians, Muslims and animists were able to continue living in peace. However, on December 5 2013, a new threat emerged in Kouï. The Anti-Balaka rebels came into open conflict with the Séléka rebels. Looting and killing took place in cities one after the other, and many people were forced to leave their homes, fearing for their lives. A heavily armed group of Anti-Balaka rebels marched through the towns of Bozoum and Bocaranga to the city of Kouï, with the aim of looting the livestock which grazed on the local farmland.

Informed of this threat, the Christians and animists of Kouï gathered together to remember how the Lamido protected them and their city when faced with the threat from Séléka rebels. Inspired by the Lamido’s wisdom, they established ‘protecting groups’ to keep the farmers and farmland safe, whilst one group was sent to meet the Anti-Balaka on the outskirts of Kouï. This group met the rebels and explained straightforwardly that they were not welcome in Kouï, and no person may enter the city who wishes to commit disorder. The Anti-Balaka were forced to turn back.”

- *Story shared by the peacebuilding organisation, Prosperite, demonstrating local capacity to resist violence.*