

Rejuvenated Agricultural Extension¹ for Sustainable Peace: Action Needed Now for Food Security and Stability in the Central African Republic (CAR)

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Conflict is a key factor for food insecurity in Africa. From 2005 to 2018, the number of undernourished people in conflict-afflicted countries in Sub-Saharan Africa went from 108.2 million to 131.6 million. In 2018, 75 percent of people who experienced a high level of food insecurity in Africa lived in countries affected by conflict.¹

Plagued with six years of conflict, the Central African Republic's (CAR) situation stands out from other conflict-afflicted countries on the continent. The protracted crisis started when the Seleka, a coalition of five predominantly Muslim rebel movements, seized power in March 2013. Their brutal and bloody rule instigated a movement of resistance by a largely Christian militia called Anti-Balaka. The gunmen were particularly virulent against rural civilians. They attacked villages, destroyed or stole agricultural assets and food, killed farmers and herders, and forced many others to flee.² The conflict has displaced 26 percent of the population, decreased food production by a factor of 65 percent,³ and plunged 45 percent of the population into food insecurity.⁴ For the last five years, the Global Hunger Index annual report has identified CAR as the hungriest country in the world. It will take many years for the country to recover its food production capacity. Yet, there is still hope.

Agro-Pastoral Liaison Services as a Tool for Lasting Peace

In February 2019, CAR's government and 14 armed groups signed an agreement in Khartoum, Sudan. However, previous peace processes in CAR have not lasted. For the Khartoum agreement to avoid the same fate, CAR's government and the international community need to take measures to prevent relapse into conflict.⁵ Agriculture, and extension services, in particular, should play a central role in those measures. Agricultural extension services have proven to be an effective tool in post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. Their benefits have included enhanced agricultural productivity and food production, improved agricultural livelihoods,

¹ In this paper, I propose a new terminology for "agricultural extension," that is "Agro-Pastoral Liaison Service" (APLS). The rationale is that APLS seems more aligned with usage among African and other readers who separate "herders" from "farmers."

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and reintegration of displaced people and ex-combatants.⁶ Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Uganda are among the post-conflict countries that have demonstrated the effectiveness of agricultural extension.⁷

Policy Options and Recommendations

The following agricultural extension or APLS-focused recommendations and options are offered as a way of mitigating the food insecurity while also contributing to peacebuilding in CAR.

1. For the Government of the Central African Republic and International Partners

a. Prioritize agricultural development as a vehicle for post-conflict economic rehabilitation:

Agriculture contributed to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding in many conflict-afflicted countries. In Africa, it helped in improving food security, enhancing rural livelihood, absorbing ex-combatants, and reintegrating returning internally displaced peoples—all critical elements of the peacebuilding process. The lull in conflict provided by the Khartoum agreement offers a unique opportunity to bring about real transformation in CAR by developing a comprehensive and long-term agricultural development plan.

b. Adopt and implement a recovery plan that reinforces the transition from emergency interventions toward development interventions: Most of the programs implemented in CAR center on emergency interventions with very few interventions addressing long-term sustainable development. The U.S. stands as the largest donor to the humanitarian response in CAR with close to USD\$124 million allocated to humanitarian aid in 2007 and in 2008. Moreover, out of the USD\$34 million given to the country as bilateral aid in 2018, USD\$18 million was in the form of food aid.⁸ While emergency measures are important, CAR's government and its partners should put more resources and efforts towards revitalizing the largely neglected rural areas by focusing on grassroots (rural) impact-driven development plans and interventions.

c. Create a conducive environment for agricultural and food production revival by reinforcing and accelerating Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): The presence of armed groups in the rural areas constitutes a serious hindrance to agricultural activities. These groups are mostly engaged in illegal minerals exploitation and trade. With the numerous attacks and atrocities against civilian populations, they simply exacerbate insecurity for the rural population. The government and the international community should build on the ongoing peace deal and speed up DDR, including through their absorption into the agricultural sector.

2. For the Government of the Central African Republic

a. Design and implement a coherent extension policy to spearhead genuine agricultural and rural development as part of post-conflict reconstruction: The post-conflict context brims with issues that require adequate measures to bring about desirable transformation. Development agencies and institutions stress the pivotal role of extension services in unlocking the potential of agriculture for food security, rural livelihoods, farm profitability, and promoting social cohesion. Extension constitutes a valuable tool for peacebuilding at the grassroots level.⁹ CAR's government should reinforce peace and development in the country by adopting an effective extension policy that reflects decentralization, grassroots orientation and participation, land reforms, and rural banking and financing.

b. Create a joint structure to coordinate extension services and work with all domestic stakeholders engaged in post-conflict reconstruction:

Post-conflict situations usually engage a variety of actors spanning the local, regional, national, and international spheres. Therefore, working in synergy is critical to the success of any effort. CAR's government should consider establishing a joint structure to allow the government and its partners to plan, finance, and implement more effectively. In particular, the coordinating institution should network with farmers' organizations so that their views and needs are at the center of all decision-making.

c. Provide more resources for agricultural development: Increase the budget for the agricultural and rural development sector to 10 percent as requested by The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods. This is critical to promoting prosperity and peace among rural communities.

For an in-depth analysis on the role of agricultural extension services for peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, see the accompanying Africa Program Research Paper No. 25 by Paterne Mombe.

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