



## An Agro-Pastoral Liaison Service<sup>1</sup>: Is That the Missing Ingredient for Securing the Central African Republic's Fragile Peace?

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Intra-state conflicts continue to capture more and more attention and cause growing concern in the world today. These conflicts increasingly constitute obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because they hamper development and worsen hunger. Moreover, knowing how to address these conflicts and how to avoid countries relapsing into conflict remain unsolved riddles.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, recent studies seem to indicate that “investment in agriculture is a post-conflict necessity”<sup>2</sup> given that rural populations are victimized disproportionately by both conflict and hunger.

### The Central African Republic: A History of Chronic Political Instability

CAR has been plagued with political instability and recurrent crises since its independence in 1960.<sup>3</sup> Starting with the 1979 overthrow of emperor Bokassa, the country has never experienced a decade without a

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<sup>1</sup> 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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major political and governance-related upheaval. Bad governance has caused or worsened administrative weaknesses, resulted in rampant poverty and hunger, and exacerbated rural marginalization. All these lie at the root of CAR's turmoil which has thwarted attempts at building peace. While there have been many attempts to forge peace, none have been successful. This is because almost all of the peace deals, including the 2019 peace agreement negotiated in Khartoum, focus on and favor elites (politicians, rebels, or militia groups' leaders) and former combatants. The rural populations that bear the heaviest burden of the conflicts are often ignored. The latest crisis is the worst. It began in December 2012 when a coalition of five rebel movements known as the Seleka launched an armed insurgency and seized power in 2013. Their brutal and bloody rule instigated a movement of resistance by a largely Christian militia called Anti-Balaka. Eventually, the violent crisis degenerated into inter-communal violence along religious lines.

With the intervention of the international community, a transition was put in place and general elections were organized, leading to the adoption of a new constitution and the inauguration of a new president, Faustin Archange Touadera, in March 2016. Sadly, this was quickly followed by retrogression. There was soon a re-emergence of the armed groups that had never been disarmed. They resumed fighting and plunged the country back into conflict. Although they control three-quarters of the territory, respected observers note that these non-state fighters display "no clear military, political or ideological objective"<sup>4</sup> and are mostly engaged in the illegal trade of the natural resources of the country.<sup>5</sup>

In 2019, the latest big step forward was taken. With the support of the international community, the African Union-led a mediation effort which resulted in the signature of a peace agreement between the government and 14 armed groups in Khartoum, Sudan. While this was a promising step forward, celebration would be premature. Research has repeatedly revealed that peace in all post-conflict settings remains very fragile. When inadequately or partially addressed, conflicts tend to revert and, in fact, many civil wars are post-conflict relapses.<sup>6</sup> So far, this seems to be true for CAR, as various peace deals have failed to yield the sustainable peace that the people of CAR deserve and yearn for. Thus the question, what is the missing ingredient to sustainable peace in CAR?

## The Conflict Trap

This much seems to be true of CAR: for the most part, peace agreements in CAR have been elitist peacebuilding instruments. They are top-down peacebuilding measures that have proven to be insufficient, although necessary. They have failed to reach out steadily and comprehensively to the largest group of victims who are predominantly rural populations. In short, the peace agreements have failed to tackle the crises and their drivers from the grassroots level.

Peacebuilding implies reducing the risk of conflict relapse, on the one hand, and laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development, on the other hand. In post-conflict settings, it requires that particular attention is given to the drivers of violence, especially those exacerbated by the conflict. In the case of CAR, the impact of the conflict on food security is unmistakable. CAR's latest war has devastated agriculture and the rural population with special ferocity. During the conflict, rebel gunmen attacked and destroyed villages and barns. They looted food stocks, crops, and livestock, destroyed or stole farm tools, and killed non-combatants, including farmers and herders. Populations were forced to seek shelter in the bush, in camps for internally displaced persons, or in refugee camps.<sup>7</sup> A recent report shows that the protracted crisis has displaced 26 percent of CAR's population while another 45 percent is now food insecure.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the value of food production for CAR's rural economy dropped by a factor of 65 percent. Malnourishment in the general population jumped from 36 percent in 2010 to an alarming 60 percent in 2016. The five most recent editions of the Global Hunger Index have indicated that CAR has been the hungriest country in the world.<sup>9</sup> The 2018 report also stressed that the hunger level in the country is extremely alarming.<sup>10</sup>

Given that more than 70 percent of CAR's population relies on subsistence farming, the devastation of agriculture carries ominous development and security implications. Young rural males—and even females—are the ones most likely to join future violent rebellions if their deprivation remains unaddressed in the peacebuilding process.<sup>11</sup>

To avert war's return then, CAR and its partners must heed the insight of De Syosa and Gleditsch: "Improving conditions facing the agricultural sector...is especially vital for peace and prosperity and sustainable development in the long term. Peace and development must be built from the ground up. Addressing the problems facing agriculture and the rural communities should be foremost within strategies that seek to bring about prosperity and peace."<sup>12</sup> Put differently, underdeveloped agriculture contributes to hunger, poverty and, in the long run, instability.<sup>13</sup>

## **An Agro-Pastoral Liaison Service and its Transforming Role in Post-Conflict Settings**

Creating conditions for a lasting peace in CAR requires, therefore, true rejuvenation of agriculture. It is reported that a 10 percent increase in yields reduces the poverty rate by 7 percent in Africa, while a 1 percent increase in per capita agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) impacts poverty reduction by a factor of five.<sup>14</sup>

Agricultural extension or APLS holds significant promise for the needed transformation in CAR. The envisioned liaison service (extension), as discussed here, goes beyond the traditional concept of technology transfer through a top-down approach. Rather, it is a two-way learning process in which agro-pastoralists and the liaison service officers (extension agents) combine their practical wisdom to discern the best way to tackle the problem.

As the World Bank enumerates, extension systems "facilitate the access of farmers, their organizations, and other value chain and market actors to knowledge, information, and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agribusiness, and other relevant institutions; and assist them to develop their own technical, organizational, and management skills and practices as well as improving the management of their agricultural activities."<sup>15</sup>

The effectiveness of APLS in unlocking the potential of agriculture and promoting conducive conditions for social cohesion in post-conflict settings has already been demonstrated in some countries including Uganda, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and others beyond Africa.

## **Extension System in the Central African Republic**

The history of extension in CAR has been full of twists and turns, and in itself helps to explain the underperformance of agriculture in the country. Agricultural extension was introduced in CAR during the colonial period and was largely used during the early years of independence. However, inadequate land reforms in the 1970s provoked a crisis in the rural and agricultural sectors weakening APLS work. An interruption of funding in 1998 led to the inability of the institutions to deliver extension services in CAR. In

2008, a rehabilitation program was turned into an emergency food aid program. From this time, agricultural production started to decline, reversing all the progress made.<sup>16</sup>

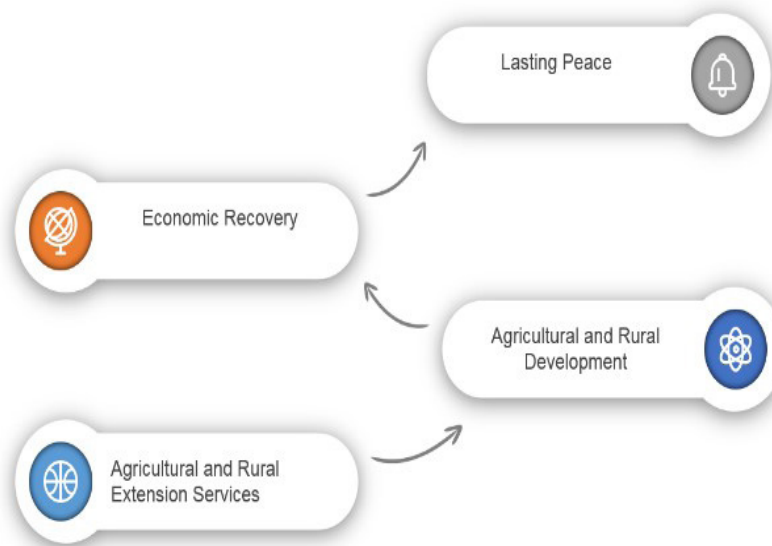
Funding from the World Bank in 2013 helped to create the two leading national institutions in charge of extension services in agriculture and livestock. An accord signed in June 2019 between CAR's government and the World Bank to finance agriculture rehabilitation and development could create conditions for the rejuvenation of extension services in the five targeted prefectures. In its National Plan for Recovery and Peace Consolidation 2017-2021, CAR's government identified the revitalization and development of productive sectors (agriculture, livestock, mining, and forestry) as one of the key strategic areas.<sup>17</sup> Yet, while agricultural professional training for the youth—which is an equally important intervention for economic recovery—has received the full financial support of some European partners, such is not yet the case for agricultural extension.

In short, public agricultural extension in CAR has never received consistent and bold support or the proper coordination to deliver its services efficiently and effectively. Besides the government, other private and non-governmental organizations, including the University of Bangui, have been involved in providing extension services. An interview with Dr. Innocent Zinga, a member of the university's team, reveals that agricultural extension has helped improve the productivity and livelihood of many farmers but that the delivery of services is limited by the availability of funds. Despite successful outcomes, many pilot projects launched by the university have not been scaled up due to a lack of funding.

## Extensions Model for Sustainable Peace and Food Security

When organized and deployed adequately, extension services have had beneficial and stimulating impacts on agricultural development, which in turn induces economic recovery and lasting peace. An extension is incontestably a priority, a major lever to contribute to agricultural development in post-conflict settings like CAR. CAR's government, its partners, and institutions devoted to peacebuilding should take bold actions to rejuvenate and redeploy an agro-pastoral liaison service.

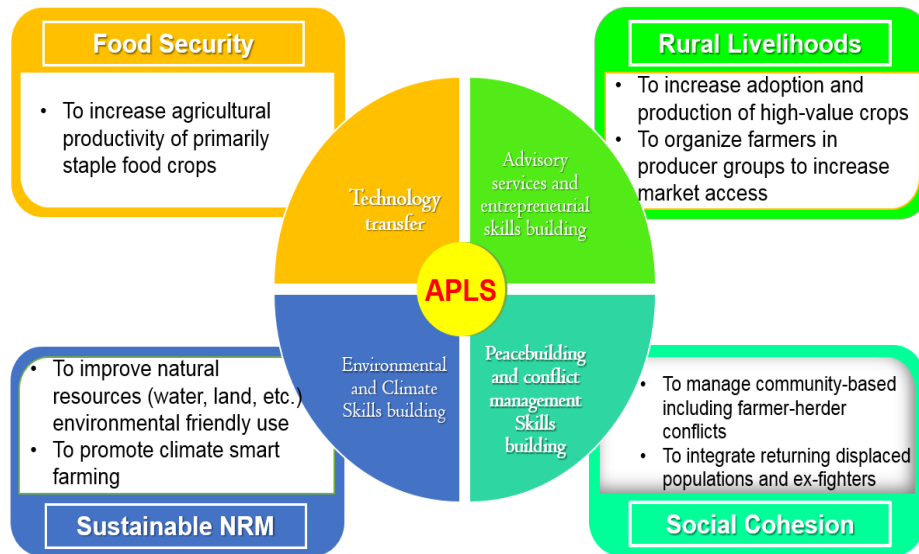
**Figure 1: Chain Effects of Agricultural Extension on Lasting Peace**



This paper proposes APLS as an essential component of the Khartoum peace deal in order to help sustain peace in CAR beyond the decade's cycle. To accomplish this goal, APLS may need to focus on the goals of 1) food security; 2) poverty reduction and rural livelihoods; 3) sustainable natural resources management (NRM); and, 4) social cohesion.<sup>18</sup>

(Source: Paterne Mombe, 2019)

**Figure 2: Key Extension Services According to Post-Conflict CAR Needs**



(Source: Paterne Mombe, Adapted from Swanson and Rajalahti (2010):7)

The rejuvenated APLS should be geared to serve the needs of subsistence farmers and herders, women, self-help groups of farmers, rural populations, returning displaced populations, and demobilized ex-combatants whether familiar or new to the agro-pastoral sector. Based on the objectives mentioned above, the following interventions are the key components of post-conflict extension strategy in CAR.

1. **APLS for food security:** The strategy should consist of transferring new technologies or techniques to help farmers improve the yields of staple food crops.
2. **APLS for rural livelihoods:** The strategy should target and empower farmers to grow cash crops in order to increase household incomes.
3. **APLS for sustainable natural resource management:** The strategy should entrust farmers with skills for efficient use and proper monitoring of natural resources like water or soil (against erosion and degradation), as well as provide training on climate-smart farming.
4. **APLS for social cohesion:** Extension agents should be entrusted with peacebuilding skills to promote social cohesion among returning populations, ex-combatants, farmers, herders, and rural populations in order to ameliorate potential conflict.

In order to be effective, APLS should be rural and farmer-centered, pluralistic, decentralized, and participatory,<sup>19</sup> market-oriented,<sup>20</sup> and linked with supportive land access and rural credit policies.<sup>21</sup> In addition, APLS should be holistic and embrace cross-cutting issues related to conflict management, climate change, etc.<sup>22</sup>

APLS has proved effective in enhancing rural productivity, income, and social cohesion in post-conflict settings in Africa and beyond. It is indubitably a grassroots peacebuilding tool for sustainable peace in fragile settings like CAR that deserves greater attention and support.



For an in-depth analysis on the role of agricultural extension services for peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, see the accompanying Africa Program Policy Brief No. 19 by Paterne Mombe.

*Paterne Mombe was a Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding Scholar from August to November 2019. He is a doctoral student at Tangaza University College in Kenya.*

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Cover image: Tomato farmers from USAID’s Tanzania Agriculture Productivity Program in Tanzania. Photo courtesy of USAID via Flickr Commons.

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