



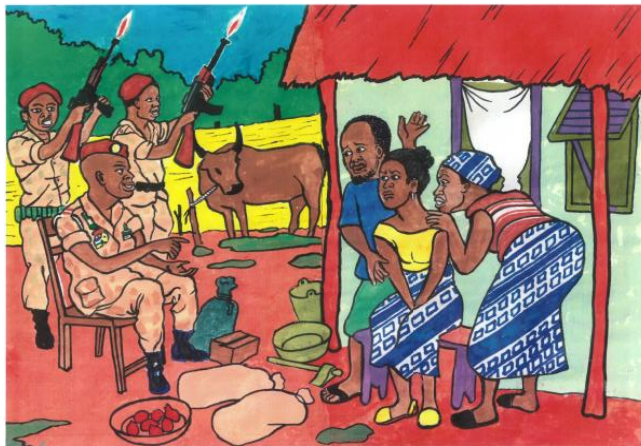
# ADDRESSING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Report on Sensitization Activities and Support to  
Small-Scale Projects

In the Central African Republic, there are a number of challenges to monitoring gender-based violence including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). There are cultural taboos to openly address violence against women and there is general lack of awareness that rape is a serious crime. Furthermore, large parts of the country are controlled by armed groups. Often the perpetrators of CRSV live among the population. There are no state authorities to report to and victims fear reprisals from perpetrators if they speak out. Even where internal security forces are present, the lack of a functioning judicial system leads to impunity for these crimes without redress for the victims. Also, in terms of service provision, in 2016 only 32 per cent of recorded victims received emergency assistance within 72 hours of the incident. For many women and girls, travelling to the next medical centre is not possible nor affordable. Thus, there is a large silence lingering over sexual violence, which is committed throughout the country.

## Sensitization Campaigns

Against this backdrop, the Conflict Related Sexual Violence Section of the United Nations Multi-dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) developed a country-wide project aiming to encourage the population to speak out against impunity, report cases of sexual and gender-based violence and seek assistance. Women's associations



*Picture 1: Image box picture depicting forced marriage to an element of an armed group*

were chosen as messengers for these campaigns and some of them were selected to benefit from specific support to income generating activities or improvements of the organization's infrastructure in order to strengthen their capacity for outreach. The CRSV Section engaged a local artist to draw a set of pictures showing scenes related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These drawings were multiplied, plasticised and assembled as so-called "boites d'images" (picture boxes), to support awareness raising among a largely illiterate rural population.

The series of fourteen pictures contains key messages on the applicable law, the importance to speak out against impunity, the effects of stigmatization, and the need to seek medical services and other assistance available to survivors of sexual violence.

In Bangui, the Network of Mayors against Sexual Violence, which was constituted with support of the CRSV Section in June 2016, took a leading role in organizing the campaign. The implication of local authorities is crucial, in particular in a context where incidents of sexual violence are often settled in a so-called friendly manner, with an arrangement between the perpetrator and the victim's family, without involvement of officials from the formal justice sector. The Mayors Network is instrumental in informing the population about the criminal aspects of sexual and gender-based violence and to speak out against such private bargains.



*Picture 2: The Mayors of Bangui's Arrondissements during the launch event of the Network of Mayors against Sexual Violence.*

In each of the eight districts of Bangui and the communities of Bimbo and Begoua, the Mayors, the *chefs de quartiers*, and local women's and youth associations were invited to discuss sexual and gender base violence, the need to raise awareness, to fight impunity and stigmatization of victims, and increase reporting of violations. After the screening of a film on conflict-related sexual violence,<sup>1</sup> and an introduction to the image box, the participants divided up into focus groups, each one led by a facilitator, to discuss and exercise the presentation of the image box.

The civil society organizations were encouraged to build on these pilot events and replicate such sensitization sessions in other settings. Three of the most engaged associations in each of the eight districts and two communes were selected to receive a sensitization kit consisting of an image box, a megaphone, an umbrella, notebooks, pens, and a backpack to store and carry the sensitization kits as well as some plastic chairs. These materials should enable the selected associations to continue sensitization and thus act as multipliers for the campaign.



*Picture 3: The Chief of the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Section launches the campaign together with the representative of the Mayor of the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Bangui*

The large sensitization campaigns in all districts of Bangui and the communities of Bimbo and Begoua to raise awareness on the need to fight impunity, fight stigma, and increase reporting of violations reached more than 600 participants. These types of campaigns were also conducted in each of the field locations of MINUSCA: Bambari, Berberati, Birao, Bria, Bossangoa, Bouar, Kaga-Bandoro, Ndele, Obo and Pauoa. Also, in each location three associations were given a kit. In total 63 women's associations throughout the country were provided the materials to multiply the sensitization activities. The Associations who received

<sup>1</sup> Film produced by DPKO entitled "Prevent-Deter-Protect," which, with the kind support of the video unit of the Public Information Section of MINUSCA, was subtitled and dubbed in Sango and French.



the sensitization kit have since carried out a large number of sensitization activities. An increase in information sharing was immediately registered after the start of the campaigns.



*Picture 4: Sensitization activity in front of the town hall of the Fourth District*



*Pictures 5, 6 and 7: Representatives of women and youth associations and some MINUSCA peacekeepers pose for a group picture during a sensitization activity in Birao, Vakaga Prefecture; discussions with the picture box.*







*Picture 8,9,10, 11: Sensitization activities in Kaga-Bandoro, Booro (Bouar AoR), Ndele and Bangui's fourth district*



*Picture 12: Distribution of sensitization kit to an association in the fourth district of Bangui, in presence of the Mayor, who is also the coordinator of the Network*



## Micro-Projects

In addition to the sensitization campaigns, the CRSV Section made funding available for field offices to strengthen the capacity of selected women's associations. Each focal point was asked to identify one or two associations, capable to implement a small-scale income generating project. The local organizations



were free to choose the activity they wanted to engage in. The main objective was to give the women means to work together and to make their association more sustainable. This programme also served to strengthen the partnership between MINUSCA and the grass root level organizations, which are crucial in establishing a communication line with the population, in particular with victims of human rights violations. These associations, whatever their area of intervention or particular objective, are often able to provide first-hand information about challenges faced by women in the family, but also within society. The interaction with the Human Rights Officers and CRSV focal points promoted a closer collaboration between the partners, also in order to improve monitoring of SGBV and CRSV in particular. Eleven field offices implemented supported the implementation of these income-generating projects in a large variety of areas: Bangui, Bouar, Bossangoa, Paoua, Kaga-Bandoro, Bambari, N'dele, Bria, Bangassou, Birao, and Obo.

*Picture 13: Mayor of the 7<sup>th</sup> district of Bangui, being interviewed by Radio Guira FM (MINUSCA) about the activities and support to associations*

## Damara, Ombella-Mpoko Prefecture, AoR of Bangui HRD team

The Association *Femmes victimes de crise de Damara* (Association of Women victims of the crisis in Damara) embarked on a project to produce handmade soap in order to generate revenue for the association



*Picture 14: The handmade soap on sale*

that will empower its members. To this end, equipment and materials were bought, and an expert in soap-making hired for a practical workshop: in 72 hours a total of 3290 pieces of soap were produced. The revenue from selling the soap is being used to finance micro-credits for the members of the association, allowing the women to improve their living conditions. An official launch of the sale of soap was chaired by the Mayor of Damara, local authorities and members of the association.

### Bouar, Nana Mambere Prefecture

Bouar reinforced the coordination and work of women's associations in Baoro, 60 km South-East of Bouar, by renovating and equipping a building that can function as Headquarters for the 23 currently active



Picture 15: Sign on the building of the Maison des Femmes in Baoro

women's associations in that town. Two rooms were also equipped as reception and consultation areas, where victims of SGBV can be received. At an evaluation meeting with 70 of the women from Baoro, it was confirmed that the building was very much visited and used. The women also explained that they multiplied sensitization activities in the localities of Baoro, Tedoua and Bayanga on SGBV, including conflict-related sexual violence, with special emphasis on early marriages.

### Bossangoa, Ouham Prefecture

In Bossangoa, some of the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence expressed the desire to come together in a society of women, victims of sexual violence, to mutually support each other and to break the silence and stigma accompanying these crimes. The *Association Solidarité des femmes de Bossangoa* was founded in February 2017. Some of the members of the association suffer from sexually transmitted diseases and are too weak for agricultural labour. They were therefore looking for other income generating activities and decided to embark on breeding goats. The small project in Bossangoa supported the *Association Solidarité des femmes de Bossangoa* by providing 30 female and 2 male goats and covering the costs of immunizations and treatment by a veterinarian for two months. The joint breeding of goats is

Picture 16: Members of the Association Solidarité des femmes de Bossangoa with some of the goats they are breeding



expected to improve the women's standard of living and to empower them as members of the association that fights to break silence and stigma around sexual violence. The outreach of the association aims at encouraging other women to speak up about violations and denounce perpetrators of sexual violence.



### Paoua, Ouham Pende Prefecture

In Paoua, the small project supported the construction of a hut for the local organisation *Fédération des Acteurs Ruraux pour le Développement de Paoua (FARDEP)*. FARDEP is present in eight locations in the Sub-Prefecture of Paoua and unites around 70 different organisations. Its main goal is to promote economic, social and cultural development by supporting the education of the rural population. The hut is dedicated to the specific function of serving as a space for members of FARDEP to plan and execute activities against gender-based and conflict-related sexual violence. The support through the small project included an initial amount of funding that FARDEP is using to issue micro-credits to survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. FARDEP was also equipped with chairs and office material.



Picture 17 and 18: Hut for FARDEP

### Kaga Bandoro, Nana Gribizi Prefecture

In Kaga Bandoro, the funding was used to support women's economic empowerment and at the same time increase their trust and engagement in the work of the Mission in monitoring CRSV. The specific interventions were aimed at creating a long-term structured and institutionalized collaboration with the local NGO *Organisation des Femmes Centrafricaines (OFCA)*, which is directly in contact with survivors of violence and with communities which are interacting with MINUSCA to report on CRVS. Financial support was provided for the rehabilitation of OFCA's restaurant, which was looted during the clashes of 12 October 2016. The restaurant constitutes the main income-generating enterprise for the NGO. Its revenues



Picture 19: Handover of materials

are used to support the work of the organization in its advocacy for prevention and combating SGBV. Eight bicycles were bought and handed over as means of transport for conducting sensitization campaigns on CRSV at community level, including on the axes outside Kaga-Bandoro. Furthermore, initial financial support was given to OFCA for the start-up a business of soap production, a project OFCA had already elaborated. More funds were provided for sewing classes for victims of SGBV.



### Ndele, Bamingui-Bangoran Prefecture



In Ndele, the building of the Women's Mutual Credit Association was renovated. The main objective is to give women in Bamingui-Bangoran a convenient building where they can meet to discuss, organize and manage their economic activities. The small project enables the women of Bamingui-Bangoran to discuss and rediscover the activities they undertook before the crisis, including agriculture and other income-generating activities that allow them to become more economically independent.

*Picture 20: Mutual Credit Building after renovation*

### Bambari, Ouaka Prefecture

In Bambari, the women's association NDOYE TI BE was supported in a project of production of handmade soap. Materials were bought and 20 women were trained on how to produce handmade soap, as well as how to sell and manage their own small soap making business.

### Bria, Haute-Kotto Prefecture



*Picture 21: Members of one of the four women's associations supported with some of the material to produce handmade soap.*

In Bria, a project to produce handmade soap for the Association *Femmes Leaders* was realised. The Association *Femmes Leaders* reunites 90 women's groups with approximately 2000 members. The project supported four women's associations to produce handmade soap, the revenue of which will contribute to the capacity of the women's associations to intervene in cases where victims of sexual and gender-based violence are in need of assistance and protection, and to undertake awareness-raising campaigns.

### Bangassou, Mbomou Prefecture

In Bangassou, the small project intended to assist and strengthen two women's associations in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. Material has been bought and safely stored, however due to the security situation following the May 2017 the small project could not yet be implemented.

## Birao, Vakaga Prefecture

In Birao, the small project supported basic means of transport by providing bicycles with pumps to women's associations to reach all of Birao and more locations in the Vakaga Prefecture with their activities



that include sensitisation campaigns on SGBV including conflict-related sexual violence. The women's associations which benefited from the support are the *Organisation des femmes centrafricaines*, *L'Association des femmes musulmanes* and the *Women's Association for Peace*.



Pictures 22 and 23: One of the bicycles and pilot sensitization event

## Obo, Haute-Mbomou Prefecture



Picture 24: Some of the sewing machines being handed over

In Obo, the project supported the breeding of livestock for 25 women from the *Organisation des Femmes Centrafricaines* and the *Plateforme des Femmes Religieuse*. The latter association also comprises members that were victims of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). In addition, 10 women from the same two associations were equipped with material and training to start a sewing and tailoring business. The project aimed at fighting the stigma and improving the difficult living conditions that some women who are survivors of conflicted-related sexual violence by the LRA.



## After Action Review – One year after

The programme of the sensitization campaigns and micro projects aimed at the dissemination of information on sexual violence as a crime, while building the trust of women's associations to interact with MINUSCA and engage in a regular information exchange. In Bangui, the campaigns conducted in all the districts coincided with the opening of the rapid intervention unit on sexual violence, the UMIRR (*Unité mixte d'intervention rapide et de repression des violences sexuelles faites aux femmes et enfants*). The Unit also profited from a one-month radio programme, which informed the public about its services and mandate. This led to a notable interest of women's associations to engage in fighting impunity and reporting on SGBV. Furthermore, based on the lists of participants in the ten sensitization events, a mapping of actors was established by the CRSV Section, indicating the location, strength and area of intervention of each association. The mapping can be used as a basis for monitoring of human rights violations, as well as for the identification of protection services and referral of victims.

The immediate impact of the micro projects was also very positive. Some field locations noted an increase of initiatives of the supported associations and a growth of information sharing. However, communication works two ways and requires both partners to get involved and retain the channels open. As it was seen, some field offices were more able than others to keep the flow of information going. This is most probably also due to the turnover of staff and the frequent reduction in activities of such associations, due to tensions and unpredictable security situations.

The medium and long-term effects of the projects were equally encouraging, despite some caveats and exceptions. Some of the projects saw a delay in their execution due to the dire security situation, which led to the fear of putting the materials exposed to criminal elements and looting attempts. Some associations preferred to safeguard the donation for a later use. In Bangassou the office decided to put the purchased materials stocked in the Mission, until a time when community life in the town gets back to normal.

Another challenging factor in the implementation of the projects is the fact that ad hoc donations often raise the expectation of the beneficiaries. The CRSV Section was always very clear about the one-time support given to the associations. It expressed its sympathy, considering the needs in this country, but pointed out that the donation was more of a token of appreciation for the efforts of the associations, rather than a vital contribution to their existence. Some beneficiaries understood this limitation, others claimed that more funding would be needed to fully make use of what was provided. Fact is that the associations were free to choose the content of their project and proposals were accepted on the basis of constituting stand-alone, comprehensive initiatives.

## Feed-back from the field in June 2018: what became of the projects?

### Damara, Ombella-Mpoko Prefecture

According to the chief of the sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs, supporting the *Femmes victimes de Damara*, the fabrication of soap continues to date, although with a slight reduction in the production. The project benefits 43 women who have a return of 20% on the sale of the soap, whereof 80% is being reinvested for the line of manufacture. A total of 811,000 CFA was earned and some of the initial raw materials are still in stock.

#### Bouar, Nana Mambere Prefecture

The two rehabilitated conference rooms of the “*Maison de la Femme de Baoro*” are very frequently used. One room provides space for counselling of victims of SGBV. The second room is used for wedding ceremonies, conferences and other events; it is also rented out for such occasions and thus generates revenues for the women’s associations. The availability of a common space for women has greatly contributed to strengthening collaboration between the Women Protection Adviser and the associations. Also, the women have become more active and confident, using the space for discussions about their rights, the challenges they encounter and opportunities for change.

#### Bossangoa, Ouham Prefecture

The women’s association which wanted to breed goats received some assistance from UNDP regarding the management of the income generating project. However, some of the animals became ill and died; others were sold and exchanged against pigs, which reproduce more often. While the small project didn’t seem to last very long, the activities and sensitization campaigns lead by the women’s associations and MINUSCA served as confidence building between all stakeholders, resulting in regular exchange of information on incidents of SGBV.

#### Paoua, Ouham Pende Prefecture

The small *Paillotte* built with the funds continues to be used for weekly meetings, where 30 beneficiaries of micro-credits teach other women in economic activities. The partnership with the women’s association has improved outreach to the population at large and lead to an increase of reports and information on incidents of CRSV.

#### Bria, Haute Kotto Prefecture

The project of soap manufacturing suffered some delays and reduction of production due to the insecurity encountered during weeks of clashes between armed groups, which also lead to the displacement of some of the beneficiaries. Some of the income was used to improve temporary shelters instead of a reinvestment in basic materials for the fabrication of soap. While the production continues on a small scale, the interaction with the women has strengthened their understanding of the need to fight impunity and denounce cases of sexual violence. The women’s associations also requested continued assistance and developed two new projects which were submitted by the Women Protection Adviser as Quick Impact Projects Proposals to Civil Affairs.

#### Obo, Haute-Mbomou Prefecture

One of the two projects supported consisted of teaching 12 women in sewing, for which Singer machines were purchased. Today these women are skilled tailors and support their families with an extra income. The second project, the breeding of goats, was slightly modified, due to security reasons. The original joint enclosure for the goats was abandoned and the animals were distributed among some of the beneficiaries, to minimize the threat of theft. Some of the goats have reproduced; and the president of the women’s association requested permission from the Mission to sell all goats in the long term, to invest the money in another income generating project. As in the other locations, the activities and campaigns have strengthened the partnership with the associations and contributed to a wider acknowledgment of the population of the problem of SGBV and the need to fight against impunity.

Bangui, July 2018