A close-up photograph of two young women in the Central African Republic. The woman on the left is wearing a colorful headscarf and looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The woman on the right is smiling broadly, showing her teeth. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor setting.

TACKLING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

**INSIGHTS FROM THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY
BAROMETER**

SECURITY & JUSTICE

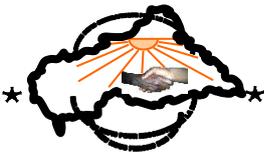
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC - SEPTEMBER 2020

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAR	Central African Republic
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CVJRR	Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCC	Special Criminal Court
(S)GBV	(Sexual and) Gender-Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Context

The Central African Republic has known instability for decades. After the country gained independence from France in 1960, its governance has been characterized by authoritarian and military regimes in a perpetual fight for resources. For the last 30 years, the country has been stuck in a cycle of violence. The last crisis, starting in 2012, developed into a sectarian conflict, perpetrated along religious lines between the Muslim Séléka faction, and the Anti-Balaka groups, composed of Christian fighters.

Humanitarian aid interventions, development organizations, and the UN Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA) aim to support peace and state-building in CAR. To that end, a peace agreement was signed in February 2019 between the State and the 14 main armed groups. However, its implementation has been compromised by the disregard of its provisions by the armed groups, and the lack of capacity of the Central African armed forces. The inability to enforce the peace deal has led to further deterioration of trust within the State. Controlling about 70% of the territory of the Central African Republic, armed groups constrain efforts to provide humanitarian aid and basic services such as health, security and justice and education to the population, pushing the country's citizens, already disenfranchised by decades of fighting, further into fragility. This creates a situation of extreme insecurity for many people in CAR, especially women are often victim of (S)GBV or CRSV. CAR is under the scrutiny of the UNSG Special Representative on Conflict-related sexual violence, since NGOs have identified the use of rape and other forms of (S)GBV as a major issue in CAR. The office aims to:

Strengthening the capacity of national institutions is critical to ensuring accountability for past crimes and for prevention and deterrence of future crimes. Conflict and post-conflict situations are characterized by severe dysfunction, particularly of the legal system. Often there is a lack of adequate national capacity and expertise to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators, leading to widespread impunity for acts of CRSV.¹

In 2018 and 2019, Cordaid conducted a survey on women, peace and security to evaluate the safety conditions in which women live and highlight the need to integrate a gender perspective into peace and state building in CAR. The WPS Barometer aims to identify women's perspectives on security and bring up their key recommendations for change. We have been able to underline the context in which recourse to this type of violence is happening and identify possible remedies to this scourge. We place prevention and care of (S)GBV survivors at the heart of our actions

"Too often, the sexual abusers and rapists go unpunished. But now, we start frightening them."
Chimène Endjizekane, Women Lawyers Association in CAR²

Combat stigma and the normalization of (S)GBV

Throughout the WPS Barometer process, it has become clear that stigma and local gender norms are strong drivers of (S)GBV and obstacles for the meaningful empowerment of women and girls. The intensity and duration of the conflict have significantly increased recourse to violence against women and girls, thereby leading to a normalization of sexual and gender-based violence in everyday life. We urge the international community to mainstream the problem of stigma across the whole peacebuilding architecture and make the analysis of gender dynamics, power-relations and local norms hard criteria for need assessments, monitoring mechanisms, and evaluations. CAR is a complex country where ethnic, sectarian and geographical differences go hand in hand with different forms of stigma. Therefore, we argue strongly in favor of locally owned interventions that foster the ownership and leadership of local women's organizations.

¹ <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/about-us/about-the-office/>

² Women Lawyers fight back", Frank van Lierde [available at : <https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/women-lawyers-fight-back-we-are-frightening-the-sexual-abusers/>]

Provide Psychosocial support for survivors of (S)GBV

From the WPS Barometer process, it has become clear that the situations of (in)security women in CAR experienced, have a major psychological impact as well. This indicates that an important aspect of care for survivors of (S)GBV is the psychosocial support for survivors, aiming at dealing with the trauma's and mental health issues they suffer from. In the participatory analysis, participants emphasized the need for psychological assistance. Cordaid focusses on establishing listening centers (*'centres d'écoute'*) for survivors of (S)GBV, thereby acknowledging the need for psychosocial support as well. Conflict and subsequent CRSV or (S)GBV have a major psychosocial impact and we urge that responses include, besides other practical and legal care, psychosocial support. However, this is not sufficient, and more support is needed to increase psychosocial support for survivors of (S)GBV.

"Since they tortured and murdered my daughter, I live in pain and loneliness, so much that I barely realize what is happening around me."

Participant from Bangui, 6e

Fight against impunity

For the victims of the crisis, the fight against impunity is crucial in CAR to restore the Rule of Law. The population is tired of the repeated amnesty laws which benefit perpetrators of atrocities, sought to enhance the possibility for a stable peace agreement. The continuous recourse to amnesties to stop the fighting and to bring armed groups to the negotiation table further facilitates impunity in CAR. There is a consensus that amnesty laws are one of the main problems of the widespread impunity. Although the government does acknowledge this, this often does not lead to the prosecution of the main perpetrators.

The last peace agreement signed in February 2019 does not mention an amnesty. However, it is likely that investigation and trials against perpetrators/members of armed groups will be symbolic or won't concern the most important warlords. Nonetheless, it is one of the main challenges of the Special Criminal Court, a hybrid tribunal (embedded in both international and central African legal systems) which will deal with the mass atrocities and grave violations of human rights perpetrated on the Central African territory. It is obvious that the court will not be able to deal with all the cases, there are simply too many of them, without even considering the political aspects of such investigations. The thirst for justice that this court cannot fully satisfy will be completed by the setup of a truth and reconciliation commission (CVJRR) whose role will be to bring justice, to allow the discussion and redefinition of norms within the society, especially regarding (Sexual) and Gender-based violence and the place of women in the society. Reparations (collective and individual) can be awarded by the court, but above all recognition for the victims of the crisis is needed. We also emphasize the need of legal options for survivors of (S)GBV, for example by supporting the SCC to take up/consider cases of (S)GBV.

"Rapists need to be punished to frighten potential others."

Participant from Bambari

Protect civic space and strengthen the social contract

Civil society in CAR is under pressure. Since a major part of the country is under control of different armed groups, targeting civilians, there is an absence of the rule of law and major human rights violations remain unpunished. This impunity is only enhanced by widespread corruption. If abusers are convicted, they are often released soon after the conviction due to corruption. This creates a vicious circle of violence, fear, silence and impunity. This results in the many challenges for CSOs within such an unstable situation, for

example the lack of mobility and difficulties with regard to financing.³ CSOs in CAR are under pressure by this impunity and corruption. The government is not able to create safe spaces for CSOs to work in and this is often the very reason CSOs are endangered in their existence. Furthermore, the limited existing civic space is mostly occupied by pro-government activists, leaving little space to critical opposition. Therefore, we urge that the government is held accountable and that violence and corruption is targeted and to restore the justice system and the rule of law, leaving more space for civil society engagement.

“Ms. Endjizekane and her community centre, just as the network of women lawyers, reach out to people in the most remote villages. At the same time, they hold governments accountable, share findings and work on common agendas for justice. Slowly but surely they bridge divides and restore trust.”

Flora Kwizera, Security & Justice Coordinator for Cordaid in CAR

Link livelihood support to awareness-raising as part of peacebuilding efforts

The WPS Barometer shows clearly that there is a strong linkage between prevailing traditions, a lack of economic opportunities and different forms of (S)GBV. The specific way in which harmful traditions are translated into daily practices is not simply determined by local gender norms. Instead, they are partly a reflection of prevailing poverty and closely linked to a lack of stable livelihoods. Forced marriage, for example, is a harmful coping strategy that cannot simply be overcome through awareness-raising alone but requires initiatives that tackle underlying root causes as well. We strongly advocate for an integrated approach that combines livelihood support with awareness-raising about harmful practices. Only if cultural practices and economic needs are linked, can the risk of (S)GBV be mitigated effectively.

Enhance capabilities of local security providers (like FACA - Central African Armed Forces)

To combat (S)GBV and enhance the security of civilians and specifically of women, many participants in the WPS Barometer process identified the FACA as important actors in security provision. However, the WPS barometer process in CAR also clearly reveals how there are conflicting views regarding security actors like MINUSCA and FACA. Many participants identify mistrust regarding MINUSCA, and some therefore favour FACA over MINUSCA, considering the latter's inaction during several fighting. In some cases, troops have been accused of perpetrating sexual violence towards the civilian population, who can only be sanctioned by the mission itself. This further feeds the distrust and contributes to favouring national security providers. By enhancing the capabilities of local security providers, a greater presence on a local level can be ensured. From the WPS Barometer, it stems that many participants prefer a bottom-up/local oriented approach in which local security actors are trained to fight (S)GBV and other forms of violence to strengthen the security of communities.

“During the fighting in Bangui, with my family, we were trying to reach PK12 to hide. My sister got shot on the way there. I couldn't bear it, so I fainted. She was buried in my absence. I can't cope with this tragic death and I accuse the government of not protecting its population”

Participant from Bangassou.

³ Changing civic space synthesis by Cordaid

THE WPS BAROMETER

With the Barometer on Women, Peace and Security, we aim to adopt a bottom-up approach to security and peace that is in line with the priorities of women who are most exposed to the realities of (S)GBV and conflict-related violence.

Why the Barometer?

Women in CAR are powerful agents in coping with insecurity and contributing to peace. But their situation shows insufficient improvement as many security initiatives are based on incomplete analyses. Macro indicators focusing on state security, for example, do not measure the daily situation and quality of life at the community level. Involving women and basing our work on their priorities leads to more effective programmes. Therefore, the Barometer aims to:

- Bridge the information gap between (inter)national policymakers and local women and men
- Produce a robust way of measuring and documenting the security needs and concerns of local women
- Provide contextualised information and contacts for local women, organisations, and policymakers
- Equip women to share their perspectives on daily peace and security issues in their community

Sustainable peace in CAR can only be achieved if all groups in society are meaningfully involved in peacebuilding, security and conflict prevention. But because of unequal power relations, most women have limited access to political participation, resources, and information. We believe that women's perspectives need to be taken up in all stages of decision-making and represented in all spheres of power.

When women are empowered and enabled to communicate their collective concerns, they are in a stronger position to find new ways to address conflict and insecurity. Coalitions of local women can forge connections with other actors such as the peace movement, the development sector, and the (in)formal governance and security sector, as well as the military and the police. The Barometer helps women to become acknowledged as stakeholders in peace and security processes.

“Countries with more gender equality have better economic growth; peace agreements that include women are more durable; and parliaments with more women enact more legislation on key social issues such as health, education, anti-discrimination and child support. The evidence is clear: equality for women means progress for all”

Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

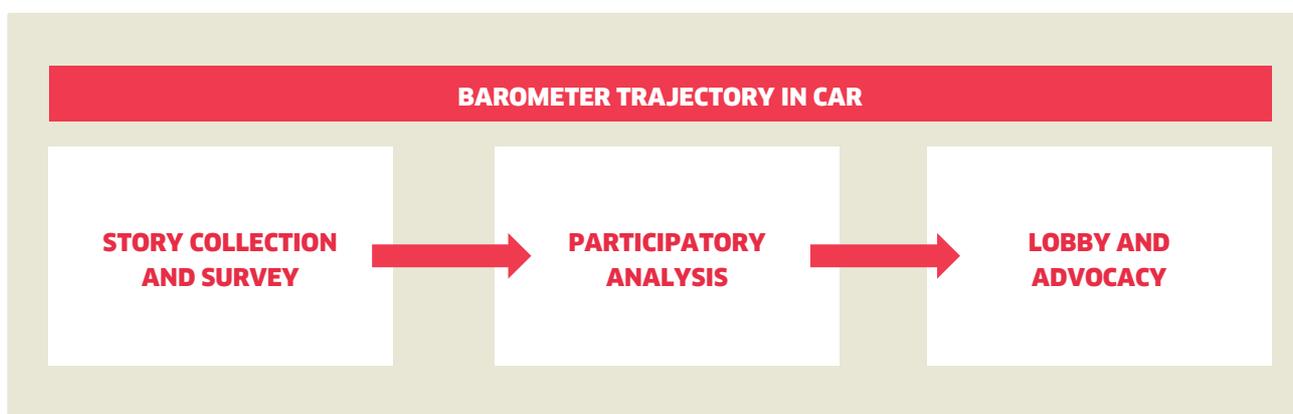
The Barometer approach is based on a standardized process yet remains flexible enough to consider the particular realities in CAR. Every step is informed by the core idea of giving women the power to define what security means for them and what their priorities are. Throughout the Barometer trajectory, local women are involved to ensure that the data are meaningfully interpreted and appropriately translated into an evidence-based lobby and advocacy strategy. By doing so, the Barometer complements existing statistics with nuanced information from the ground.

The steps of the Barometer process

STORY COLLECTION. With the Barometer, women express their unique concerns by sharing a story about a security incident they experienced. The story is accompanied by a survey that allows diving deeper into the circumstances of the shared story. While some sections of the survey are standardized allowing us to compare results across countries and time, we added a number of unique questions to better grasp the complex situation in CAR and to align our efforts to the mandate of our local partner organizations. The data are digitally collected using tablets and secured by the cloud services of CommCare. Our local partners, trained in gender-sensitive interviewing techniques, have interviewed 217 participants in 8 different locations.

PARTICIPATORY ANALYSIS. After a preliminary analysis, the results are brought back to the communities to discuss the outcomes and make sense of the results. By combining women's individual perspectives and translating them into a collective view, the data become a meaningful instrument to advocate for women's empowerment and rights. Consultations take place in all communities and are based on mixed dialogues between men and women as well as on women-only discussions where sensitive issues can be shared in a safe space. We ensure that important stakeholders, such as community leaders or local police representatives, are included in these activities to foster accountability and meaningful participation.

LOBBY AND ADVOCACY. The collective security concerns and priorities are consolidated into a multi-level advocacy strategy aiming to advance women's rights, their meaningful participation in peace processes and their security on the community level. By bringing local perceptions into national and global forums, women are gaining a voice that can shape the policy discourse and security-related development cooperation. This helps to close the gap between (inter)national policymakers and women affected by fragility and conflict. We act as a facilitator to ensure access to relevant decision-making bodies, in close cooperation with our local partner organizations.



DATA QUALITY

Collecting reliable data in fragile contexts is difficult. With restricted access to remote communities and stigma on sexual violence, retrieving and understanding the daily realities of insecurity is a challenge. By working together with our local partners, we are able to collect in-depth narratives and include communities at all stages of the research process to ensure that the right conclusions are drawn. Through an intersectional approach, the research ensures that the different needs and challenges across societal groups are taken into account.

Beyond gender

A diverse data set is necessary to challenge simplified representations of women’s daily security situations. All too often, women are seen as a homogenous group leading to inefficient interventions or culturally insensitive initiatives that can put specific groups at higher risk. By gathering stories and quantitative data from different age groups, from rural as well as urban locations, from people with different ethnic and migratory backgrounds and from women with disabilities, the WPS Barometer is able to grasp the complexity and diversity of women’s realities in the Central African Republic. This allows us to go beyond simplified images of women as victims and to indicate how the gendered impact of conflict plays out on the local level.

During the holidays, my mother’s sister told me to come with her to the field with her husband’s brother. When we got there, we worked for a while. One day, my aunt went to get some water. As soon as she left, her husband’s brother grabbed me and raped in the bush. I screamed but there was no one to save me. I ran away. After that I could not walk. When my aunt got back, she could not see me, so she started calling me. As I could not stand up, I answered from the bush. She got angry and I started telling her what happened. She put me on the motorbike and brought me to her home. When we got there, her husband did not believe us. He started quarrelling with her. She had to pick up her things and now we are together at my grandfather. The man who raped me did not come home.

Participant from Bangui – 7eme arrondissement

Our local partner organizations were trained to conduct gender-sensitive qualitative interviews and visited numerous communities to collect stories and surveys of 217 participants. While the focus lies on story collection, the survey data complements the results with semi-quantitative and quantitative data. Moreover, the quality of the results stems from the participatory analysis on the community level where our local partners re-visited the communities to discuss the preliminary results and discuss with women effective entry points for improving the daily security situation. Throughout the process, the power to define security lies in the hands of those women who are affected by conflict and fragility on a daily basis.

» INTERVIEWEES BY AGE AND LOCATION

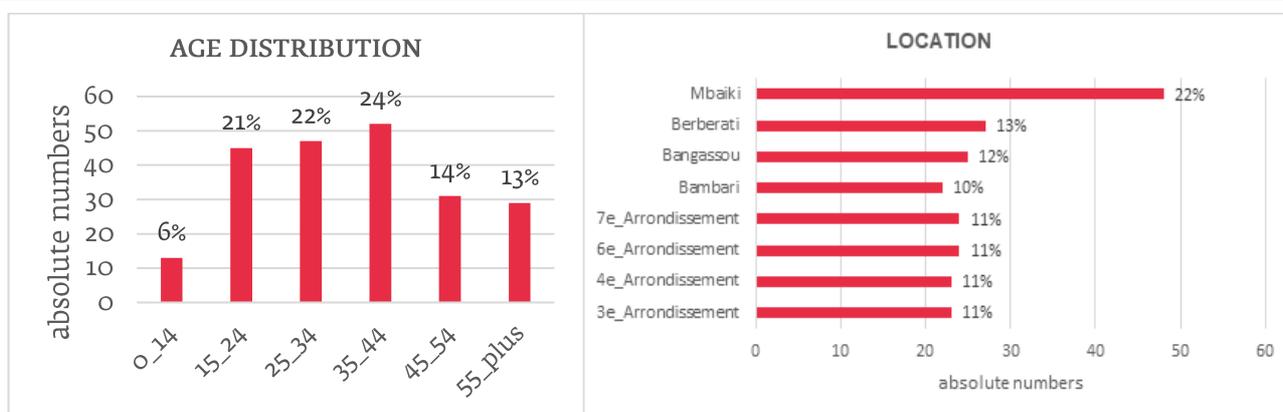


Figure 1: -The graphs depicts age and location of the interviewees.

Problem and solutions at a glance

The following table summarizes those issues that have become evident throughout the WPS Barometer process and remain relevant to all communities. The indicated solutions are mainly based on the participatory analysis at the community level. While it is important to gain an overview of the most prevailing grievances, any solution needs to be grounded in the local context.

» IDENTIFIED PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS BY INTERVIEWEES		
Topic	Problem	Suggested solutions
Justice / Impunity	Impunity for sexual and gender-based violence perpetrators, due to the lack of a proper judicial system and the normalization of these crimes	Enhance access to justice through legal aid and orientation towards a paralegal to assist survivors into judicial proceedings.
Trauma / psychological effects of (S)GBV	(S)GBV victims are in need of not only legal aid/support, health care support and livelihood support, it is also of crucial importance to acknowledge the psychosocial effects, which are paramount, stemming from the Barometer	To ensure that psychosocial support becomes inherently part of responses to (S)GBV. To raise awareness about these psychosocial effects as well, both on national level and international level Ensure psychosocial care for both men and women, all people affected by the conflict, to enhance the security situations within the community and domestic sphere
	Within households or on community level, the psychosocial effect on men and boys (or other family members) might affect the security situations of women as well	
Rights	Unequal land rights increase uneven power relations	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the importance of equal rights and the benefits this can have for the whole community.
	A lack of equality between men and women regarding informal justice mechanisms	
Stigma	Stigma leads to impunity of perpetrators, self-blame of victims, social isolation and an increase of risk for further (S)GBV	Awareness-raising for women and men likewise.
Education	In the Barometer process, education is mentioned as one of the underlying causes of insecurity for women in CAR	Strengthening education opportunities and services for women in CAR to access
Marriage	Early and forced marriage, negatively impacting education	Combination of awareness-raising and livelihood programming which decreases the incentives of economically motivated marriages
	Polygamy, negatively impacting the living standard of the whole family	
	Denial of resource and abandonment	
Political participation	A lack of meaningful participation of women on the local level due to traditional norms and harmful attitudes	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the importance of political participation and the benefits it can bear for the whole community.
Security actors	Misbehaviour and (S)GBV by various security actors, including armed groups, police, MINUSCA and the FACA.	Training of security actors through results-based financing and other mechanisms
Health	No access to health services in regard to SRHR and beyond	Provision of quality health services independently of gender, race or social class
Forced migration	Displacement detaches women and girls from community-based safety nets and increases reliance on the external protection	Well-informed and voluntary resettlement in combination with livelihood and education support to allow communities to rebuild and overcome gender inequality

Awareness	Limited access to education for girls; this compromises their self-esteem and their ability to speak out	In strong collaboration with community leaders, raising awareness about the positive impact of education for the whole community. Provision of quality education.
	A lack of awareness about rights, resulting in the normalization of domestic and gender-based violence	

Comment: These issues were mentioned frequently across the whole sample and omit crucial differences among the different communities



The writing on the wall is very clear: "We want peace!", "Yes to freedom of expression", "Break the silence: say no to sexual harassment". © Mickael Franci/Cordaid

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Since December 2012, the Central African Republic has experienced painful events due to armed conflicts. This situation has led to the destabilization of the country, both economically, politically, administratively and socially. Around 80% of CAR territory is under the rule of armed groups. Gender-based violence - including rape, physical violence- has been perpetrated by members of armed groups. These violations have resulted in many victims of CRSV, and especially women live in insecurity every day. Other forms of violence, including denial of resources, forced marriage, psychological violence, are daily reality for women in CAR as well. These forms of violence manifest more in the domestic sphere. While it seems plausible to make a distinction between (S)GBV/CRSV committed by armed groups and (S)GBV in the domestic sphere, this distinction does not reflect the reality of (in)security of women in CAR. The WPS Barometer shows how the conflict situation in CAR has impacted/instigated domestic violence significantly. Thus, the conflict situation, and thereby Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, and (S)GBV in domestic spheres are inherently interconnected. **The violence embedded within the conflict perpetuates an increase in violence within household contexts, thereby conflict has a direct impact on domestic violence.** Survivors of (S)GBV in CAR face multifaceted insecurity issues, and these women need multifaceted support to improve their situations and make their voices heard.

CRSV, (S)GBV and impunity

From the beginning of the crisis in the Central African Republic in late 2012 onwards, women are often targeted by armed groups. Within the conflict in CAR, two major armed groups fought each other, with on the one hand the Séléka faction, and on the other hand the Anti-Balaka faction. Besides these 2 major groups, other armed groups are part of the conflict as well, creating an extremely volatile and unstable situation. The government lacks power and capacity to protect its population from this extreme insecurity.

The clash between these armed groups leads to a major increase of/recourse to the use of violence against civilians. Many women have become victim of CRSV in the form of physical violence or sexual violence. According to the UN Secretary General, “Armed groups have consistently, and with flagrant impunity, used sexual violence as a tactic of war in the Central African Republic”.⁴ Furthermore, the violence between the armed groups in CAR provided for many IDPs, with many people trying to flee from the violence. This in turn provided for more insecurity. The Barometer indicated that many cases of CRSV occurred whilst people were already fleeing a specific region, on their way to find security elsewhere. Furthermore, situations of extreme vulnerability occur on the way to remote areas like farming land. This is another circumstance in which survivors often find themselves in situations of extreme insecurity in relation to CRSV.

» TYPES OF VIOLENCE



Figure 2: This graph depicts the different forms of violence experienced by interviewees.

The graph above indicates that 23 percent of the participants of the WPS Barometer process encountered incidents of sexual violence. The graphs below show the experience of security and insecurity arranged by different localities.

» PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTION OF SECURITY

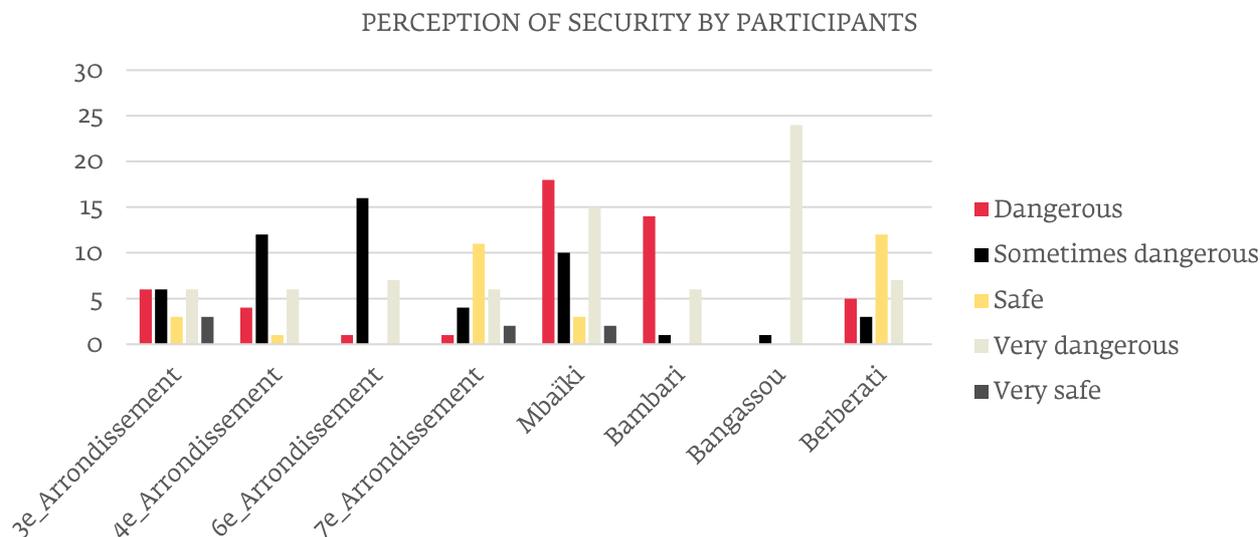


Figure 3: This graph shows how interviewees perceive their security situation in the area they live in.

CRSV/(S)GBV and other forms of violence

From the stories the participants shared, it appears that certain areas are more affected by CRSV, such as Bangassou, whilst in other regions, notably Mbaïki and Berberati, domestic violence is the main security issue encountered by women. What seems to be obvious in the graph below needs to be nuanced by the

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/report/s-2019-280/Annual-report-2018.pdf>

context in which the story collection took place. The stories collected in Bangassou refer to a wave of armed-group violence in 2017, when other localities, such as Mbaïki and Berberati, under almost full government control, had less been affected by armed groups violence during that period, hence showing a lower number of CRSV, whereas domestic violence is equally part of women’s reality of (in)security. In the areas where different armed groups clashed, the perception of insecurity is much higher, as is the case in Bangassou. The main regions in which women experience a degree of insecurity coincide with the region where the most cases of CRSV occur, for example in and around Bangassou, an area widely in the hands of armed groups.

This also seems to indicate that domestic violence is perceived differently with regard to insecurity compared to armed groups violence. From the data collected, it became clear that denial of resources, for example, is mainly a domestic issue and that overall the domestic context seems to overshadow the war-related context. In this context it is important to emphasize however that research indicates that violence related to conflict also increases domestic violence.⁵ This means that domestic violence cannot be seen as entirely separate from conflict related violence. More broadly, conflict situations (also during the aftermath) often lead to an increase in domestic violence as well, due to unrest in society and the subsequent impact on the domestic sphere. Thus, even though the graphs seems to show differences between forms of violence, it is important to note that the two major forms of violence (domestic and conflict-related) are intertwined and that (S)GBV is present in different ways, providing for multiple interrelated forms of insecurity for women in CAR.

» LOCALITIES AND VIOLENCE

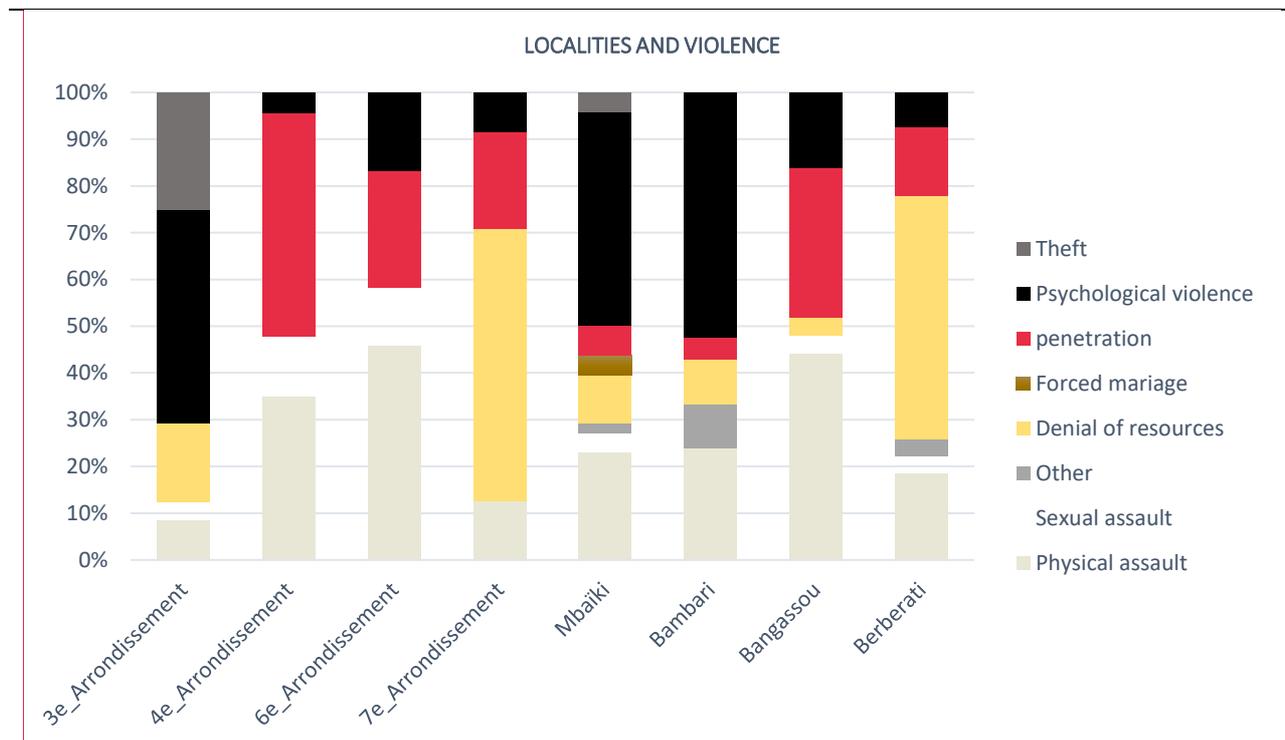


Figure 4: This graph shows the crimes committed according to location.

Silencing by stigma

Although a peace agreement was signed, the security situation continues to be highly volatile. (S)GBV/CRSV remains an excessive problem. CRSV is often silenced by stigma, harmful gender norms and impunity. We urge that prevention and care of (S)GBV survivors are at the heart of our actions. Although the WPS Barometer has documented 217 stories of women’s insecurity and (S)GBV, most stories go undocumented because of the stigma that surrounds the subject of (S)GBV. The stigma surrounding (S)GBV serves the perpetrators, since they know this act of violence affects the situation of women in their community and family as well, besides the direct impact of the violence. Often, women are abandoned when it comes out

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5898300/> ; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953613001494> ;

that they are victims of (S)GBV.⁶ Therefore, a culture of silence exists, which prevents survivors to receive the aid and support they need. We urge that this culture of silence must be broken in order for survivors of (S)GBV to receive the support and care they need.

The two graphs below show the daily experienced insecurity of women in CAR, and the ability they experience to make their own decisions regarding their security situations. These graphs indicate how women in CAR experience little ability to cope with situations of insecurity. From the WPS Barometer, it stems that insecurity for many participants does not only consist of physical safety. Rather, economic hardship, psychological violence and abandonment are all facets that shape women’s perception and experience of insecurity. This comes down to security in the broadest sense, human security. Therefore, responses aimed at improving the security of women need to focus on all the different aspects that women in the WPS Barometer identified as impacting their security situation. From the WPS Barometer, it also becomes clear that most participants experience that they have little ability to cope with their daily level of insecurity. Almost 75% of the participants indicated that they were only a little bit or not at all able to cope with their situation of insecurity.

» **LEVEL OF DAILY INSECURITY (AT ALL LOCATIONS)**

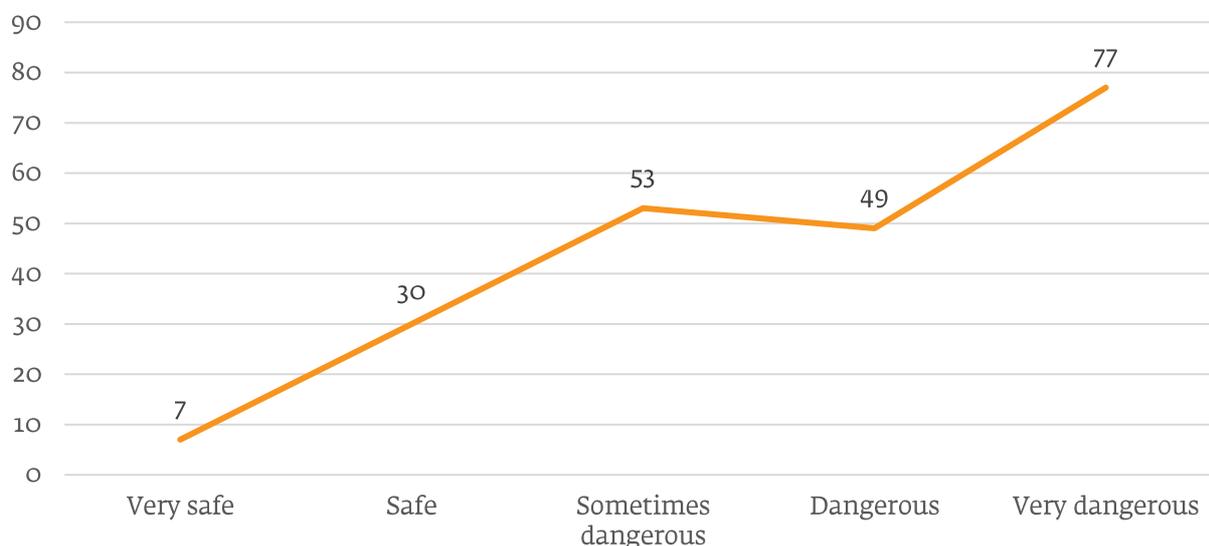


Figure 5: This graph shows the perception of daily insecurity according to interviewees.

⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/645637/SV_Workshop_Report_-_CAR.pdf

Conflicting perception of security providers

From the below graphs, it stems that participants of the WPS Barometer identified both husband, young men, women and Séléka as important threats to security. This coincides with the overall analysis, resulting from the WPS Barometer, that both CRSV and domestic violence are prevalent forms of (S)GBV in CAR. This also indicates that men are not the only actors that need to be addressed/taken into account when combating (S)GBV, since other women like for example a mother in law, family members or other wives can also threaten the security of women.

Some actors, like husbands, mothers and MINUSCA are mentioned as both security providers and threats. This means it is important to enhance the capabilities of these actors so that they can become providers of security.

In terms of security providers, local authorities, community leaders and community organizations are often mentioned as positive actors. These actors' capacities and capabilities need to be enhanced, in order to combat violence against women from within communities. This thus means that many participants emphasize the need for a bottom-up approach in which their security concerns are addressed from a community level.

I was living in Bangassou and was selling alcohol. After the entry of the Anti-Balaka, I continued my activities and my neighbor was a Lebanese man. One day, a group of Anti-Balaka came to loot the Lebanese man's shop. A few days later, another group arrived at my house, and accused me of having taken and kept some of the effects of the Lebanese. I said no but the agitated group who also had weapons forced me into my room, tore my clothes, slapped me and threw me into bed and sexually penetrated me for 5 minutes. I couldn't do anything, I was helpless and they had weapons. Since then, I feel so devalued that sometimes I think about suicide. Sometimes I stay awake nights without sleep. I am troubled.

Story of participant from Bangassou

» CONFLICTING PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY ACTORS

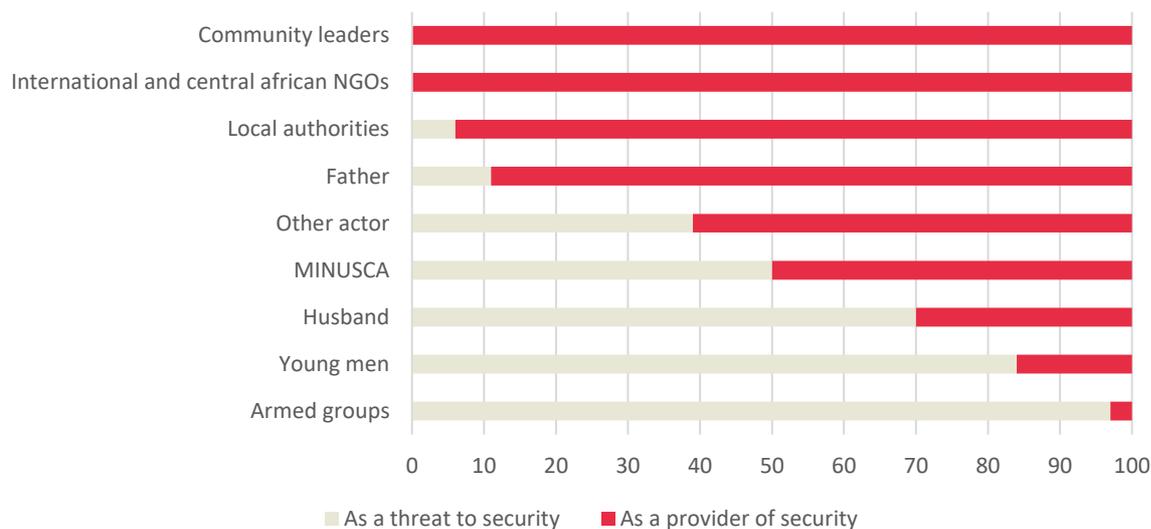


Figure 6: This chart depicts how each type of actor is perceived by interviewees.

Holistic responses

From the participatory analysis in the WPS Barometer, it stems that potential responses to (S)GBV and the support of survivors of (S)GBV need to be holistic, encompassing different root causes of insecurity for women and (S)GBV. For example, many survivors emphasize the need for education and livelihood support in combating (S)GBV and increasing security for women. Many participants also emphasized the need to strengthen the capacity of local security forces, the police and FACA, and to coordinate between different security providers. Furthermore, medical support and the reconstruction of devastated infrastructure are mentioned as possible solutions to enhance the security situations of women. This means that an approach

to enhance the security of women needs to consider multiple different aspects, like legal, medical, psychosocial care and attention for the root causes of insecurity by addressing livelihood situations.



18% of interviewees reported being denied resources by their partner or the father of their children. This hampers their ability to sustain their family and pay school fees, constricting access to education. © Elorry Mahou / Cordaid

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

The WPS Barometer outcomes clearly indicate that insecurity does not come from war-related actors alone. 59% of violence incidents take place at home. The husband/man is one of the actors most often mentioned in the stories. This shows that, besides widespread sexual (CRSV) and physical violence committed by armed groups, violence within communities and within the domestic sphere is highly prevalent in the Central African Republic as well. This form of violence is tricky, since it is often unreported and therefore often goes unnoticed. Besides, stigma surrounding the issue of (S)GBV results in a culture of silence surrounding the issue of domestic violence, while the WPS Barometer indicates that this is a pervasive form of insecurity for women in CAR. It is important to distinguish between domestic violence and violence committed by armed groups because the two forms of (S)GBV require a different response.

Stigma and harmful gender norms

The WPS Barometer underlines the common role that the husband plays in situations of insecurity for women in CAR.

Stigma and patriarchal gender roles in Central African society lead to silence about the husband's role in insecurity. This silence complicates victim's access to medical, legal, and psychosocial support and makes life even more difficult for these women. Consequently, in most cases of domestic violence, women have no option to talk about their situations, let alone receive the support they need. The stigma and harmful gender

norms only exacerbate the insecure situations of women and result in a double burden for women: suffering from both violence itself, and an inability to access pathways to recourse.

This figure show how the incidence of (S)GBV instigates a vicious circle, from which it is difficult to escape. Without addressing the needs and insecurities of survivors of (S)GBV, women’s vulnerability and insecurity will remain and possibly worsen.

Conflict situations and domestic violence

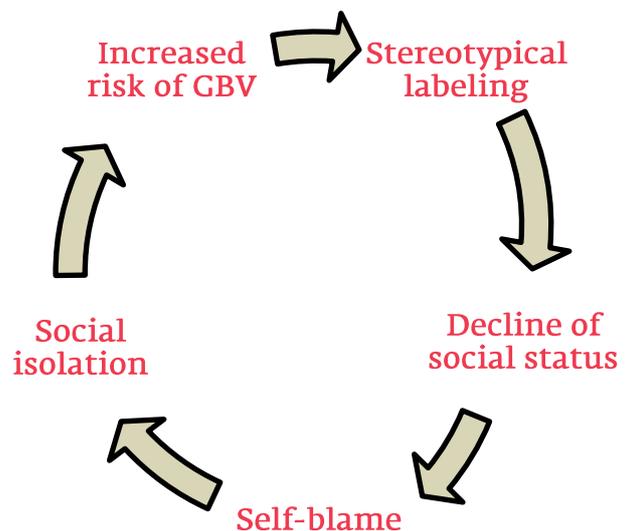
The WPS Barometer indicates that domestic violence is the most prevailing form of (S)GBV, and the biggest source of insecurity for women’s daily reality. Thus, although the peak of armed violence in CAR occurred during the conflict in 2012-2014/2015, this does not mean that the security situation of women improved much since then. Research also shows that there is a correlation between conflict situation and domestic violence.⁷ Therefore, we urge that psychosocial care is of great importance, not only for survivors of (S)GBV but also for people suffering from trauma due to the conflict. Responses to conflict situations need to be sensitive to psychological effects on all stakeholders in the situation in CAR.

“The first thing that needs to be set straight is that conflict related sexual violence is not only about violations committed by armed parties engaged in war. It goes much further than that. The armed conflict raised levels of sexual violence in the cities, in the streets and above all inside the homes. It’s hidden. Men and boys who have been living in close connection with weapons and killing and rape, now live with their families. But they can’t cope with their trauma’s and frustrations. They take drugs. They beat and rape their wives, even their children.”

Ms. Endjizekane, member of the Women Lawyers⁸

Transforming gender norms through livelihood support

The WPS Barometer elucidates another significant observation with regard to (S)GBV. While (S)GBV is often related to rape, sexual harassment or physical abuse, many women face psychological, social or economic abuse as well. An example is the denial of resources, which often occurs within the domestic or community sphere. Women are denied access to medical care or education, which is complicated by the fact that a culture of silence prevents women from talking about these issues of insecurity. The WPS Barometer stories show that many cases involve abandonment, a situation in which the husband has left the wife and children. In these situations, women experience economic hardship and do not know how to support their families. 46 stories relate to abandonment and its consequent psychosocial and economic hardship. Physical insecurity and livelihood insecurity go hand in hand, so response/programme to target (S)GBV and to help survivors need to address economic circumstances or livelihood support as well.



⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5898300/>

⁸ 'Women Lawyers fight back', Frank von Lierde <https://www.cordaid.org/en/news/women-lawyers-fight-back-we-are-frightening-the-sexual-abusers/>

My spouse married me when I was at my parents. He paid the dot and brought me to his house. We were together for 2 years, with a child and he took a good care of me. But he has this flaw that when he goes to work, he comes home very late. He hits me every time I want to speak. When he comes home late, he is always drunk and if I don't open the door when he knocks, he hits me. In March 2018, the child got ill. I called my husband and he started shouting at me. I suffered with my kid. He finally got home at 1 am, drunk. He got in the house and beat me so much he broke my arm. He said he had bought me to my parents. They've put a plaster on my arm. Reason why I am here at the women lawyers so you can make him change.

Story of participant from Berberati.

It is notable that in some parts of the country domestic violence is more prevalent, whereas conflict-related violence is more widespread elsewhere. However, simply indicating the differences in prevalence and location of domestic and conflict-related violence doesn't take into account the interlinkages between those types of violence for women. Instead, responses to (S)GBV in CAR need to acknowledge the interconnectedness between the two. We urge the international community to adopt a holistic approach to (S)GBV, ensuring that all dimensions of redress are taken into account within development aid frameworks.

Supporting providers of security

During the participatory analysis, the participants, including local authorities and police in addition to the interviewees stressed the lack of security forces in large areas of the country, thus leaving almost 80% of the territory in the hands of the armed groups. They emphasized the need to increase the capacity of security & justice providers to protect civilians and the importance to strengthen the cooperation between local CSOs and providers of security,

One recurring reproach addressed to the international community is the maintain of the embargo on weapons. Representatives of the local police and some of our partners called for a lift of the embargo on weapons as a direct solution to fight armed groups. Cordaid actually lobbied against the lift, fearing the inevitable consequence of armed groups being more equipped and hence more powerful. A progressive lift following the MINUSCA's progress in stabilising the territory is perceived as safer by the international community, considering that in spite of the progress made since the end of the 2013 events, the situation remains highly volatile. .

Capacity strengthening should not consist only of more guns or people. Because the WPS Barometer showed a conflicted perception of security actors, themselves sometimes being perpetrators of (S)GBV, Cordaid believes that reinforcing sensitization on gender norms and (S)GBV amongst security providers is a key point in order to ensure security of civilians. Therefore, we urge all stakeholders to reinforce awareness raising and capacity strengthening among all security providers, including the MINUSCA, local and national police officers and the Central African military.

I've lived 10 years together with my husband. We've had three kids. We didn't have problems at first but for a couple years, he's gone with a woman. I don't know where. He has not sent money for our children. A while ago, he settled in his brother's house, which is literally next to mine. After he arrived, he asked me to leave the house with the kids. When I said no, he took a pike and started destroying the house. I had to take him to the Women Lawyers where he engaged himself to give 100000 FCFA⁹, but he never did. Now, I'm asking for him to support me financially with the children.

Story of participant from Bangui – 7eme arrondissement

⁹ (About 150€)

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

In many conflict situations, care and support for survivors of conflict tend to be focussed on more practical solutions, like medical, legal and economic support. However, conflict situations also have a major psychological effect on people. CRSV, as indicated in this report, has been widespread and used as a means of war. Survivors of CRSV are often, besides the direct physical effect, heavily affected emotionally and psychologically. The traumas boys and young men carry with them when they return to their communities and domestic life directly affect the (in)security of women. In the WPS Barometer process, many participants identified psychosocial support as a vital component of a response or solution to (S)GBV, in order to cope with the consequences of insecurity

“I would like to have psychological assistance.”

WPS Barometer participant from Lobaye

» IMPROVING THE SECURITY OF WOMEN

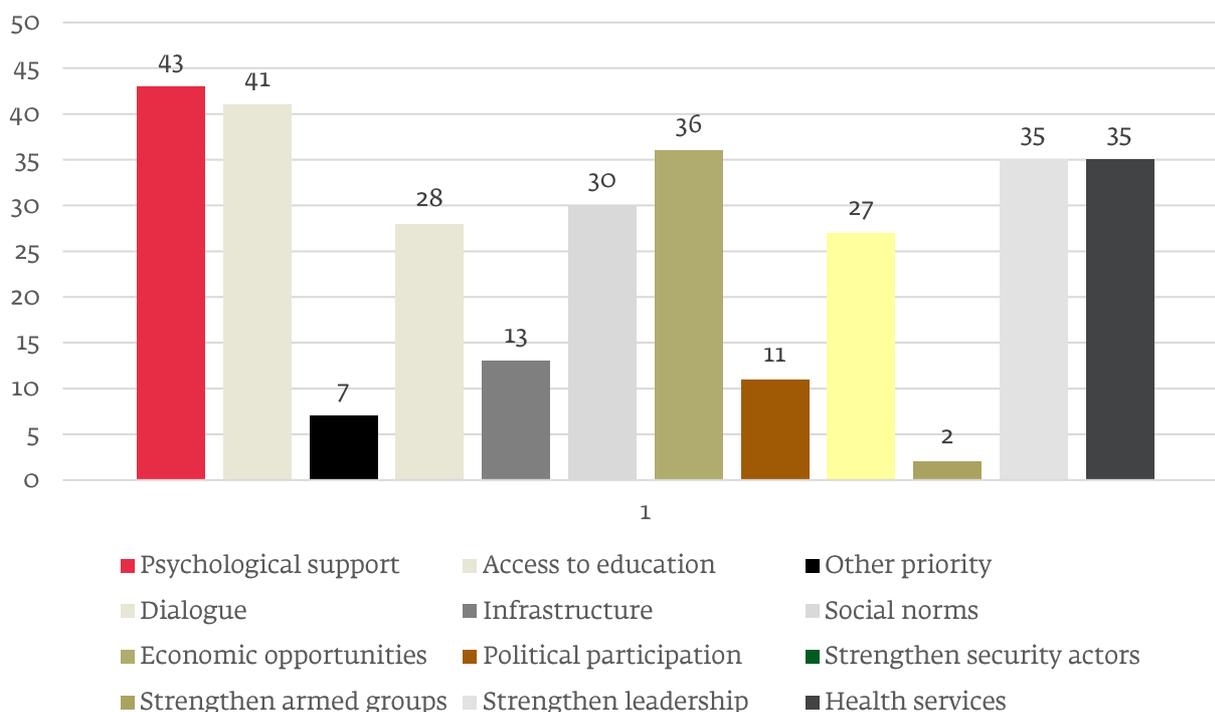


Figure 7: The interviewees were asked to identify their priorities to improve their security situation.

The participatory analysis and the WPS Barometer process demonstrate that mental health experts are mostly absent within response programmes to combat (S)GBV in CAR. The graph above/below indicates that 43 participants stressed the importance of psychological support in improving the security situation of women. Furthermore, from the participatory analysis it also follows that many participants consider psychosocial care as being paramount for enhancing the security needs of women in CAR. Therefore, we urge the international community to enhance and strengthen existing responses to survivors of (S)GBV with psychosocial support.

"[...] I am very saddened and traumatized because of the death of my child, the ingratitude of the Séléka, the sexual rape and the loss of all my belongings."

WPS Barometer participant from Bangassou

The conflict situation in CAR resulted in many people developing traumas. The WPS Barometer indicates that many survivors of (S)GBV need psychosocial care, beside the medical, legal and practical support we encourage above. The WPS Barometer also shows domestic violence as major form of insecurity for many participants. Domestic violence is often the result of conflict-related trauma that men (like husbands) suffer from, caused by the exposure to extreme violence, CRSV and the use of weapons. Research suggests that these traumas are a major contributor to domestic violence, both during conflict as well as in the post-conflict stage¹⁰. Unresolved traumas increase the likelihood of aggression and violence against family members, placing a major burden on women and girls especially. Because of this combination, women tend to bear a double burden of insecurity, threatened by outbreaks of violence from armed groups adding to normalized domestic violence, which is often even increased during the tensions in society. Therefore, psychosocial care needs to encompass all people burdened by the conflict situation, both women and men, in order to enhance and improve the security situation in CAR. We urge that DDR programmes in CAR include a psychosocial support focus, which needs to be gender-transformative to reduce the likelihood of domestic and community violence when fighters return home.

Since 2016, Cordaid has supported the setup of 2 *centres d'écoute* (listening centres) in Bangui and Berberati, run by implementing partners, to deliver legal, practical and psychosocial support to survivors of gender-based violence. These centres are examples of integrating psychosocial care when supporting survivors of (S)GBV. It is of the utmost importance to take into account the psychological effects of the crisis situation in CAR when supporting survivors of (S)GBV. We urge increased support and attention for the psychosocial effects of conflict. We emphasize the need for the recognition of psychosocial support as key factor for victims to become survivors.

¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6293353/pdf/hhr-20-123.pdf>;
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5898300/pdf/bmjgh-2017-000668.pdf>



A psychosocial support worker and a survivor in a listening center run by the Women Lawyers Association. © Mickael Franci/ Cordaid

MINUSCA

In 2014, the UNSC adopted resolution 2149, which established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). This peacekeeping mission aims to protect civilians of CAR and to support processes of transitions in CAR.¹¹ Resolution 2149 emphasizes the urgency to approach gender as a ‘cross-cutting issue’, underlining the importance of including a gender perspective in responses to the conflict situation in CAR. The WPS Barometer shows that MINUSCA is a crucial actor with regard to women’s security situations, with 25 of the participants identifying MINUSCA as a guarantor of security for women in communities. However, 6 times MINUSCA was identified as a negative actor with regard to the security situation of women. The negative perceptions show that MINUSCA must also be held accountable for sexual violence, which is too rarely the case in the current structure of the mission. This feeds distrust and anger towards MINUSCA troops and prevents the UN mission from accomplishing its mission. Accountability is not only a national issue; it also involves international actors.

(S)GBV as a clear priority

In resolution 2149, (S)GBV is mentioned as a clear concern in the situation of CAR, and the resolution urges all the parties to the conflict to renounce (S)GBV as a weapon of war. As the WPS Barometer stories indicate, (S)GBV is a significant issue with regard to women’s experience of (in)security. Although MINUSCA in the resolutions renounces (S)GBV, the security situations of women continue to be difficult and volatile. Therefore, we urge that MINUSCA identifies the prevention of (S)GBV (and the care of survivors) as a clear priority.

¹¹ <https://minusca.unmissions.org/en/about>

Well-informed relocation of IDPs

In CAR, around 660.000 people are IDPs. These IDPs mostly fled violence committed by different armed groups.¹² Many live in refugee camps, where the living situation is difficult. Furthermore, these camps subject people to increased insecurity, especially with regard to women and girls, due to overpopulation and precarious living conditions. The Barometer stories illustrate that internal displacement is an underlying cause for insecurity, with women and girls in these situations especially vulnerable to (S)GBV and CRSV to incorporate a gendered approach towards the support and relocation of IDPs, taking into account the specific gendered needs and insecurities of men and women.

Transitional mechanisms: Special Criminal Court/CVJRR

The inability of the state to fulfil its judicial prerogative has led to an overwhelming situation of impunity spreading throughout the country. Justice is largely absent, and the rare cases that reach the courts require the survivors to have the financial means to do so. The population frequently turns to traditional and customary forms of justice to settle conflicts, such as religious, district and/or community leaders, showing just how much the State and the population are disconnected. To help fighting impunity, the aforementioned [listening centres](#) contain a legal aid section, managed by the Women Lawyer Association (AFJC). After a victim reports a crime to the centre, they are directed towards a paralegal to assist them in the judicial procedure.

[...] On May 1, 2018, during the event where a priest was killed, it started again to shoot in all directions; we fled and went to live in the neighbourhood ... at my grandfather's house who is suffering from tension sickness. Some time later, he died, the funeral place is made at my aunt's house who lives in the neighbourhood ... While we were sleeping in the place of mourning, one very early morning around four o'clock, I told my mother that I went back and I was going to take a change of clothes at home. On the way, a young man came out of nowhere in front of me and asked me where I was coming back from at that hour; I answered that I was coming back from the mortuary, while I was answering in this way, three other men who were with him arrived, two of whom grabbed my hands; another one started to search me, took the money and the telephone that I had on me; then they started to talk because some wanted to let me go but others did not. They took me to an unfinished house where it was very dark, in the grass not far from where they arrested me, and I began to cry because I already knew what was going to happen. They pushed me to the and two grabbed my hands against the ground, a third blocked my mouth with his hands so that they wouldn't hear me scream, he took off the loincloth I was wearing and penetrated me; the fourth who disagreed left, then they tied my hands behind my back and the other two also passed by. After abusing me, they left me in this state; I cried a lot before getting up, I waited for the day to dawn and I returned to my mortuary place.

Story of participant from Bangui – Geme arrondissement

¹² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/central-african-republic>



In December 2019, thanks to the dedication of our partners, the Parliament adopted the **legal aid** bill, after months of lobby and advocacy. The bill is intended to financially assist survivors of (S)GBV during their legal proceedings against perpetrators. Our next challenge will be to ensure the meaningful enforcement of the bill.

Two important institutions to fight impunity are the **Special Criminal Court (SCC)** and the **Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission (CVJRR)**. The first mechanism to fight impunity is the SCC, which was established with a mandate to handle cases of grave violations of human rights and breaches of International Humanitarian Law that were perpetrated since 2003.¹³ Working alongside the SCC, the CVJRR will play a crucial role in engendering a feeling of justice and starting a dialogue among the population on the redefinition of norms and values of Central African society as well as the restoration of the Rule of Law. Cordaid has worked with its partners to include three representatives of Civil Society Organisations within the pilot committee which will appoint the members of the CVJRR. The three CSOs include an organisation of survivors (platform of victims of the crisis) as well as an organisation working on (S)GBV.

It is of great importance to ensure that the SCC and CVJRR target (S)GBV as part of their mandate. These mechanisms could provide an important step in the fight against impunity and to ensure justice for all survivors of (S)GBV.

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/24/central-african-republic-new-court-should-step-effort>

CIVIC SPACE AND PARTICIPATION

Civil society in CAR is under pressure. Since a major part of the country is under control of armed groups, targeting civilians, there is an absence of the rule of law, while major human rights violations remain unpunished. This impunity is only enhanced by widespread corruption. If abusers are convicted, they are often released soon after the conviction due to corruption. This creates a vicious circle of violence, fear, silence and impunity. This results in an unstable situation in which CSOs face a range of challenges, including lack of mobility and difficulties with regard to financing.¹⁴ We urge all stakeholders to address the endemic issues of violence and corruption to restore the social contract and the rule of law.

The graphs on female decision-making power indicate that both on national and local level, participants of the WPS Barometer process experience that their opinions are heard but not taken into consideration. They experience little power with regard to decision-making and political participation. Both on local and national level, almost 50% of the women feel heard but neglected. Only around 10% of the women feel heard and considered, meaning that 90% of the women feel that their opinions are rarely taken into account. We urge that both on a local and national level, women need to participate in decision-making and political processes, to ensure that priorities of women, and their local realities, are taken into account.

» EXTENT TO WHICH WOMEN'S OPINIONS ARE CONSIDERED

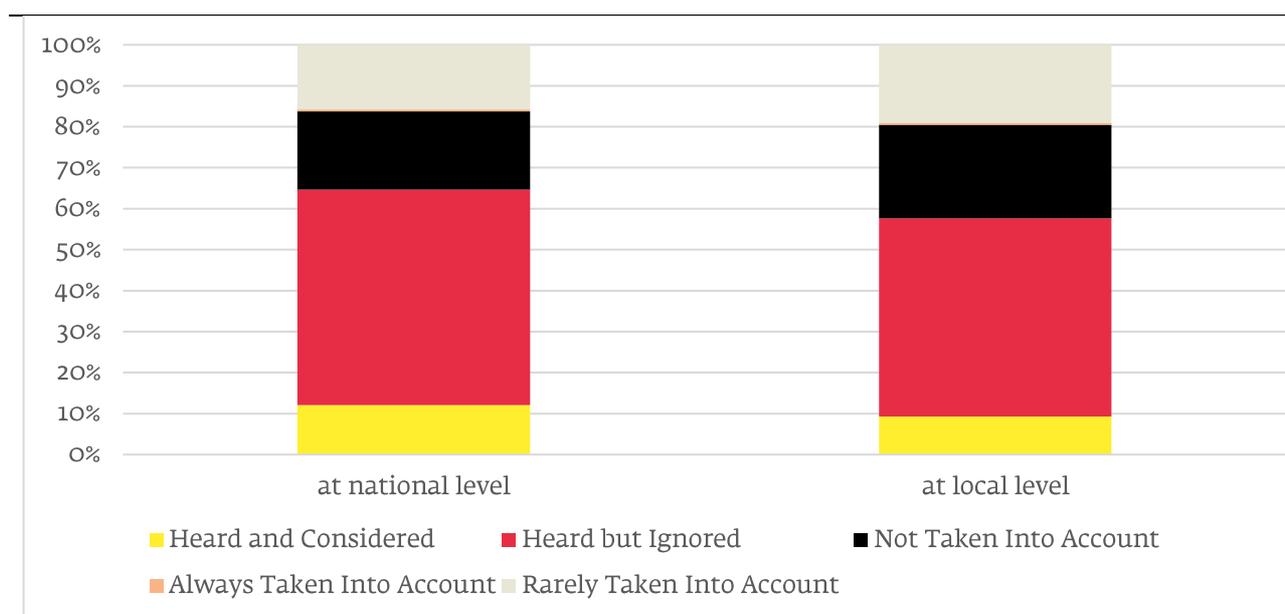


Figure 8: The chart shows how the interviewees perceive women's space and participation in decision-making.

Protect civic space

In CAR, the space left for CSOs to operate in is challenged in many ways. First and foremost, most of the territory is controlled by armed groups, leading to high insecurity and limiting CSOs in conducting activities. CSOs face different threats by the armed groups, such as the closure of their centres or kidnapping of their members in exchange for ransom.

Rights to protest, freedom of association and political assembly are in theory guaranteed by CAR's Constitution, however, due to the widespread anarchy across the territory, these rights are rarely upheld. The core issue is therefore not the absence of laws, but the lack of implementation and enforcement of these protections, especially due to the very limited capacity of the State.

¹⁴ Changing civic space synthesis by Cordaid

These fundamental rights are also challenged because of the sensitivity of the topics and themes brought up by CSOs, especially when protesting against restrictive measures set up by the Government. This tends to lead to self-censorship from CSOs. For now, the civic space seems to be largely occupied by a pro-government movement, leaving little space for critical opposition led by civil society. In 2019, the government refused the organisation of several events, in particular the commemoration of the victims of the Central African crisis on May 11th, as one aim of this event was to denounce the inaction of the government in dealing with the needs of the victims, and its inability to defeat the armed groups and to establish control over the territory.

Finally, CSOs also face a lack of funding and capacity, which INGOs like Cordaid aim to bridge. Constant capacity strengthening, through stable funding and regular trainings of our local partners, is a key part of the strategy to enlarge civic space.

The different waves of conflict washing over CAR have led to major distrust between citizens and the State. While armed groups are now the major threats for civilians, the decades of authoritarian and military regimes built that climate of defiance and fully disconnected the population from its representatives. Large parts of the territory are under the control of armed groups. Major violations of human rights remain unpunished. This lack of justice is completed by rampant corruption, nurturing a vicious circle of violence, fear, silence and impunity. Due to the power imbalances between central authorities and armed groups, the State is unable to provide basic services, such as healthcare and education, thus unable to restore the trust and to be perceived as a caretaker by the population. The population is more likely to turn to national and international NGOs to fulfil their basic needs.

Shrinking civic space and breach of the social contract impacts everyone and further marginalizes groups that are already often withheld from political participation. Thus, women that are already excluded from public space are further marginalized due to harmful gender norms. We urge the government for plurality and inclusivity in decision-making structures. The problem of marginalization is applicable to women and women's groups but also more widely to marginalized groups in general.

Power and participation

The WPS Barometer, and specifically the participatory analysis, show that participants perceive the strengthening of the capacities of female leaders in various sectors as an important step in fighting (S)GBV. This means that the participation of women in decision-making processes helps in the fight against (S)GBV. However, the Barometer also indicates that most women on both local and national level feel that their opinions are neglected. Concentrating efforts on women empowerment through inclusive policies will meaningfully increase their participation into the public and political spheres. Education is key in this process to enable women to hold public office positions. The upcoming presidential elections in December 2020 show that women are still minimally represented amongst candidates.

Although meaningful participation is of crucial importance for enhancing security, it is also clear from the WPS Barometer process that men and boys need to be included in the process of women's empowerment. Many security incidents are rooted in unequal power relations, like denial of resources and forced marriage. This means that in order to overcome insecurity of women, both women and men need to be involved. Therefore, programs on WPS in CAR need to target men and boys as well as women and girls, to change attitudes and to create space for women to participate meaningfully.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that women should, more than ever, be at the heart of peace and state building strategies.

Among the interviewees, each reports an incident of insecurity. They ask for improved safety and for a real change to allow women to take up the roles they should have within political and public spheres. Participating women underlined the vicious circle of harmful gender norms which prevent achievement of sustainable peace, and the guaranteeing basic right to dignity and justice.

They have expressed their need for psychosocial support to heal from the wounds they suffered. Recognition of the crimes perpetrated during the fighting on the basis of gender must be achieved at all levels of governance, with a strong emphasis on fighting impunity for these crimes in the Central African Republic, with the assistance of the judicial and non-judicial bodies created to do so. Deepening the never-ending need for awareness-raising on (S)GBV amongst communities, authorities, aid workers, security providers and all actors within the society is crucial, as well as strengthening their capacity to protect and provide basic services to the population.

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ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid works to end poverty and exclusion. We do this in the world's most fragile and conflict-affected areas as well as in the Netherlands. We engage communities to rebuild trust and resilience and increase people's self-reliance.

Our professionals provide humanitarian assistance and create opportunities to improve security, health care and education and stimulate inclusive economic growth. We are supported by nearly 300,000 private donors in the Netherlands and by a worldwide partner network. Cordaid is a founding member of Caritas Internationalis and CIDSE.

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