



WOMEN AND CONSOLIDATING PEACE IN THE C.A.R.

1. Problem scenario

Over the past two decades, the Central African Republic has experienced many crises and conflicts exacerbated by a highly delicate security and socio-political situation. The conflicts have affected women much more than men. Throughout the whole of the country and the conflict zones, endless cruelty has been inflicted on women and a significant proportion of them have been victims of gender-based violence, mainly of a sexual nature, with disastrous consequences - trauma, HIV infection, the stigmatisation of the victims and of the children born of rapes, not to mention being thrown out of the family home.

The CAR, like other United Nations Member States, is striving to implement Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council which is intended to ensure the participation of women in the negotiations and agreements concerning the settlement of conflicts and peace consolidation. Other United Nations Security Council Resolutions to which the CAR is a signatory place the emphasis on the need to protect women's rights during armed conflicts, to prevent sexual violence and to involve women fully in the post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction process. Particular attention is drawn to resolutions 1820 and 1888 which highlight the continual use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, and call for the immediate cessation of this type of violence.

Despite all this, the participation of Central African women in the peace consolidation, conflict resolution and security sector reform processes remains low.

2. Current situation

Despite the political and strategic frameworks which have been developed at international and national levels, Central African women continue to be faced with huge challenges on the question of their participation in the peace consolidation process and the conversion of normative instruments into actual law and concrete changes. In addition to this, the ability of women to have a real effect on the peace process is often compromised by the threat or actual experience of sexual violence based on gender (GBSV), which habitually becomes worse during and after armed conflict, and by the endless obstacles to their full participation in the political process.

The main victims in these conflicts, Central African women are neither adequately represented at the decision-making level, nor involved in peace negotiations or accords. On the occasion of the signing of the peace accords in Libreville in June 2008 and the Inclusive Political Dialogue meetings held in December 2008, the almost total absence of Central African women from the peace organisations and initiatives was noticeable. The participation of women in the steps of the Inclusive Political Dialogue was very small; of the 25 of the preparatory committee and 18 members of the monitoring committee, there was just one woman on each committee. The same applies to the Security Sector Reform process (SSR) and the DRR (Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reinsertion) steering committee where there are hardly any women. The situation is dire at all decision making levels.

3. Government efforts and support from International Partners

With the support of its partners, the Government has taken institutional measures designed to promote the participation of Central African women in the peace consolidation and decision making procedures in a general way.

The institutional measures taken include i), the passing of a law protecting women against violence, ii) the establishment of a national committee to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Beijing conference and the CEDEF which acts as a committee for the implementation of resolution 1325, iii) the development of a strategic framework for the consolidation of peace based on the PRSD and focusing on Gender, etc.

The implementation of the UN Security Council resolutions and projects within the strategic framework will create conditions which are favourable to the full participation of women in peace and security projects which is essential for sustainable human development.

4. Priority actions

In a general way, actions will concentrate on the following areas:



- the fight against gender-based and sexual violence;
- the application of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820 and 1888;
- the protection of women's rights and access to justice;
- participation in decision making.

These action areas are intended to promote the effective participation of Central African women in the peace consolidation, conflict resolution and decision making processes, to guarantee the protection of women's rights, to facilitate their access to justice and to reinforce their economic power.

5. Difficulties and constraints

The difficulties arise mainly from i) the lack of a national action plan for the implementation of resolutions 1325, 1820 and 1888, ii) the fact that women are unaware of the vital role they have to play in conflict resolution, iii) ignorance of, and indifference to, the laws protecting women, iv) the low level of input from women's civil society organisations, v) the derisory amount of money allocated. The fact that the perpetrators of acts of violence against women go unpunished remains the major constraint.

6. Challenges and prospect

Although not a direct cause of conflict *per se*, poverty, particularly that of women in the rural environment (app. 68% women) remains the major challenge contributing in a significant way weakening peace and social stability. This is exacerbated by the failure to take adequate account of gender matters in the processes under way at national level (SSR, Inclusive Political Dialogue, peace accords, etc.).

Government prospects depend on the development of a national strategy for the implementation of the laws, conventions and resolutions which have been signed at sub-regional and international levels; on the execution of a wide-ranging investigation into GBSV and on support for the reinforcement of women's economic power, which will consist of the creation of a structure responsible for women's entrepreneurship and employment, the framing of economic projects designed for women, particularly in the agricultural sector, structuring rural women into groupings, facilitating their access to the means of production and micro credit, upgrading handicrafts, and developing revenue-creating activities for female victims designed to re-incorporate them into society.