



TECHNICAL NOTE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE C.A.R.



1. Problem scenario

The CAR economy is dominated by the primary sector, which represented no less than 52.2% of GDP in 2008. Subsistence agriculture (28.5% of GDP) and stock rearing (12.5% of GDP) are the main activities in the primary sector. The forestry sector, the extractive industries (mainly diamond and gold, etc.), and cash crops (mainly coffee and cotton) make only small contributions to GDP, yet are still the main source of export income and the cash income of the rural population.

The analyses carried out clearly show that the performance of the rural sector is in general below expectations, in the light of the advantages and potential with which the country abounds. Worse still, the rural population has a very low income, lives in precarious conditions, and ends up trapped in the vicious circle of monetary and non-monetary poverty, with all the negative social and economic effects implied by this situation .

Incomes continue to fall steadily in the rural zones, the rate of school attendance is low (44%) and the rate of infant mortality is high (199 % [sic - 19.9%?] for children under 5). Life expectancy in these zones is likewise low and youth unemployment high. Thefts of harvests and stock, and armed robberies, are some signs, among others, revealing the extreme poverty of the rural zones.

The concentration of poverty among women is particularly disturbing, and is characterised by: (i) the difficulties experienced by women to access development goods and resources; (ii) low educational levels (the female illiteracy rate is 82.4 % compared with 58.9 % for men); (iii) problems with local access to decision-making processes and the fact that women are ignored in planning decisions; (iv) extended families where the head of the household is a woman are fewer than those headed by men, and are the least fortunate rural households.

2. Current situation

The rural population (2,523,000 inhabitants according to the RGPH of 2003) represents 55% of the total population of the CAR and is the largest sector of the population. The agricultural and rural sectors take up nearly 80 % of the active population and are very important in the economy of the country. The structure of the GDP reveals a traditional subsistence economy depending essentially on primary sector production (55% of GDP in 2009). The primary sector is based on agriculture (48% of GDP) which consists essentially of foodstuffs farming.

Although landlocked, the Central African Republic possesses significant advantages on the economic level, of which the foremost are: i) a large area of cultivable, fertile land, estimated at 15 million hectares of which only 0.7 are farmed, ii) a potential area for pasture and stock-droving estimated at 16 million hectares of which 9.3 millions are grazed by a herd of 3.2 million head of Tropical livestock (TLU) which are essentially nomadic, iii) a forestry potential of 3.8 million hectares of usable forest with a very wide range of fauna, iv) favourable climatic conditions with good rainfall: from 800 mm in the far north to over 1,500 mm in the south, v) a dense network of rivers and streams providing a good supply of surface water, vi) a good potential in irrigation farming of around 1.9 million hectares, vii) a large flood plain of 30,000 km² with flooding in the rainy season and which constitutes rich breeding grounds for many species of fish, viii) significant pastoral resources: 9.3 million hectares out of a total of 16 millions.

Despite the huge agricultural/ecological potential of the country, the technical/economic performance of the sector is poor. For three decades, the farming and stock-rearing sectors have recorded a feeble annual growth rate in the order of 2%, actually lower than the growth rate of the population (2.5%). Enormous room for progress is available, and all it needs is for suitable reforms to be implemented in depth.

Average per-hectare farm yields have been on the downward path since the nineteen-sixties, mainly because of





the instability caused by armed conflicts. Only small areas are under cultivation (around 1 ha on average per household). Stock production has been declining for the past twenty years, production systems are rudimentary, farming techniques are poorly handled and mineral fertilisers little used.

Agriculture turns over slowly and productivity levels are low. The outcome is that the poverty rate in the rural zones is higher (69.4%) than in the urban areas (49.6%) and a regional breakdown of poverty shows serious disparities, with very high rates in regions 3, 4, and 6 where they are in the vicinity of 78%, 71% et 66%. At national level, it should be remembered that poverty afflicts many more households of average size where household heads have a low level of education (70 to 74%) and agriculture is the main activity (72%). Even so, production is rising despite poor production levels, in the area of cotton (2,000 T in 2008 to 12,000 T in 2010), coffee 4000 T and foodstuffs production.

3. Efforts made by the Government and support from International Partners

The Government, with the support of the traditional partners (European Union, AfDB, World Bank, IFAD, OPEC) has anticipated the appearance of the Strategy for Rural Development and Food Security (SDRSA) to promote and implement a certain number of recent projects which comfortably fit into the action programmes decided upon. The following are the projects in question:

Financial partner	Area of action	Amount of funding (billion FCFA)
European Union	Micro -actions, relaunching the rural economy and activity incorporation	10.7
AfDB	Community development	6.24
	Basic infrastructures	3.0
WB and AfDB	Local development	3.4
WB	Reviving agricultural production and productivity	10.1
IFAD	Agro-pastoral development	3.8
OPEC	Basic infrastructure development	2.5
TOTAL		39.74

4. Results

Aside from the recent projects listed above for which the results are expected in the short term, the joint efforts of the Government and the Technical and Financial Partners have guaranteed:

- (i) the settlement of the arrears owed to the cotton, coffee and tobacco growers and their supply with agricultural inputs (seed, fertiliser and veterinary products, etc.) and small-scale agricultural equipment for 8,500 farming households;
- (ii) the revival of draft-animal farming with the provision of group ploughs and 400 pairs of bullocks,
- (iii) support for agricultural mechanisation by the hiring of tractors on an experimental basis to farmer groups;
- (iv) the creation of the Agricultural and Pastoral Development Fund (FDAP) and the National Pastoral and Agricultural Equipment Office (ONMAP);
- (v) the revitalisation of supervisory structures.

All these factors have contributed to the resuscitation of cotton farming (2,000 T in 2008 to 12,000 T in 2010) which gives foodstuffs farmers a boost, and which forms the essential for the food bases of the population and their



sources of income. Coffee production at the same time rose from 1,200 T to 4,000 T.

In the forestry sector, the Government has set up an inter-ministerial technical committee consisting of representatives of the ministries and the local populations to manage forestry and fauna tariffs. A transit bank account has been opened with the BEAC to manage the local municipalities' forestry taxes. The Government has also moved forward with the creation of mobile forestry produce verification and action teams, and in July 2008 appointed a number of border control inspectors.

The consequences today are that there has been a substantial reduction in forested surface area in favour of savannah, even though this loss is offset to some extent by the re-colonisation of the eastern forest block, a shrinkage rate in forestry creation from 2.5% between 1980 and 1995 to 2 % between 1995 and 2000. At the same time, the process of establishing savannah had fallen to 0.02 % in 2000.

5. Difficulties and constraints

The main difficulties and constraints holding back agricultural/forestry/pastoral/fishery development at the present time are:

- a) the precarious nature of existence in the rural zones (shortage of basic socio-economic infrastructures, isolation, etc.);
- b) the undervaluing of women in rural development;
- c) an inefficient and inadequately adapted institutional environment;
- d) poor intensification due to inadequate access to inputs and agricultural equipment on grounds of high cost, but also because of the lack of organisation of the producers and the non-availability of credit for them;
- e) poor access to markets because of a lack of transportation infrastructures (country tracks, roads), processing equipment and adequate storage facilities;
- f) lack of energy displayed by the professional organisations structured around vague economic goals;
- g) weak mobilisation of resources;
- h) a business environment unfavourable to the development of the sector.

6. Challenges and prospects

Three major challenges exist in the framework of the SDRSA:

- a) Attaining self-sufficiency and food security for the Nation;
- b) Contributing sustainably to the revival of national economic growth;
- c) Improving the living standards of the rural population.

Between now and 2015, the goals the Government has set to achieve are an average increase in agricultural activity in real terms of 6% /year (baseline: 2%) and a reduction by half in the level of food insecurity (base line: 30.2%).

To achieve this, the Government contribution to the development of the agricultural sector will probably reach 10% of the national budget.

Since the estimated funding needs between now and 2015 stand at 150.3 billion FCFA, the funding shortfall to find, on the basis of current commitments (39.7 billion FCFA), is 110.6 billion FCFA.

