ENGAGE TO STAY AND DELIVER

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

NRC NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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AID AGENCIES, LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES ALL AGREE THAT HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR) REMAINS PROBLEMATIC. HOWEVER, PERCEPTIONS DIFFER ON THE MAIN CHALLENGES IN THIS REGARD.

Humanitarians primarily focus on their ability to deliver assistance and identify the main challenges to be external, predominantly related to insecurity and physical access. Communities, on the other hand, highlight challenges linked to their ability to access the services provided and the quality of the aid. While communities recognise the external challenges humanitarian actors face, they also point at challenges internal to their own communities and to the humanitarian sector as obstacles to accessing services.

Central Africans consulted for the study, whether from affected communities, local authorities or armed groups, all emphasise the same message: "Humanitarians, engage and listen to us. By doing so humanitarian access will improve."

Protecting civilians and ensuring their access to basic services is primarily the responsibility of the CAR government and non-state actors in control of territory. This responsibility includes facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance and ensuring the safety of aid workers. Yet, this study suggests that humanitarian actors could do more to increase access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO HUMANITARIAN AID AGENCIES

IMPROVING COMMUNICATIONS

HCT/OCHA, with the support of the wider humanitarian community, should initiate:

- an awareness raising campaign for the communities and armed actors on who does what and why, covering the roles and responsibilities of INGOs, the UN, international peacekeeping forces, etc.
- establishment of a common complaints handling mechanism, with channels for secure complaints referral, including serious protection complaints.

Aid agencies should strengthen and diversify channels for dialogue with communities in order to expand their reach and build trust.

IMPROVING PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Aid agencies should proactively pursue and sustain a strategy of acceptance, including through establishing channels of communication (direct or indirect) with armed groups at the local level.

HCT/OCHA should provide training on the operationalisation of humanitarian principles, communication and negotiation skills, conflict sensitivity, and on the do no harm obligation.

The HCT should adopt a common approach to the negotiation of access to be observed by all humanitarian actors.

IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The HCT should adopt a Code of Conduct on humanitarian assistance to minimise risks of aid diversion.

TO THE PARTIES OF THE CONFLICT

All armed actors should immediately cease attacks on civilians, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to populations in need.

TO THE POPULATION

The population of CAR should continue its efforts to support humanitarian action, engage with aid actors to improve the quality of the humanitarian assistance, and refrain from acts of sabotage or attacks that negatively affect the ability of humanitarian actors to provide assistance and access to necessary assistance for the most vulnerable.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCES

RESPECTING PRINCIPLED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

International peacekeeping armed forces should commit to regular, transparent engagement with the humanitarian community to ensure that their operations do not impact the impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian organisations.

International peacekeeping armed forces should ensure mission personnel refrain from making statements about humanitarian action or describing their actions as humanitarian.

TO INTERNATIONAL DONORS

FLEXIBLE FUNDING AND LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Humanitarian donors should prioritise the humanitarian response in CAR and provide flexible and predictable funding that allows aid organisations to adapt to a challenging logistical and security environment, and to develop the multi-year projects necessary to address issues related to reconciliation and return.

Humanitarian donors should encourage a dialogue with their humanitarian partners on how funds could be channelled in a way that would help overcome access obstacles, whether of a logistic or security related nature.

CHALLENGES TO HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

COMMON PERSPECTIVES

INSECURITY
Road blocks, shootings, robberies, killings, presence of armed groups.

PHYSICAL ACCESS
Dirt roads, broken bridges, bad weather, isolation of villages, distance to distribution points, limited transportation and communication means.

CORRUPTION
Amongst local stakeholders and humanitarians.

LIMITED FUNDING
CAR– a 'forgotten' crisis.

FEAR AMONGST HUMANITARIAN STAFF
Due to past security incidents and the context.

HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

DEPENDENCY ON IMPORTED AID ITEMS
Time-consuming and labour intensive, results in delays of between 2-6 months.

DIFFICULTIES TO RECRUIT AND MAINTAIN GOOD STAFF
CAR is a challenging context in itself, which also requires staff with operational as well as French language skills.

LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTEXT AMONGST HUMANITARIAN STAFF

Linked to the lack of experience amongst expatriate staff and the high turnover.

TOO RESTRICTIVE INTERNAL SECURITY MEASURES
On where to go and how - primarily linked to use of armed escorts, the impact of these on relations with the populations, and their availability.

TOO MUCH INTERNAL FOCUS ON UPWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY
Humanitarian actors' focus on donors and HQ reporting takes time and resources away from working to increase access.

AFFECTED POPULATION PERSPECTIVE

AID DIVERSION DUE TO BEHAVIOUR OF BOTH AID AGENCIES AND MEMBERS OF THE POPULATION
Poor targeting and weak M&E amongst aid agencies and deception about needs and deliberate misinformation amongst the affected population.

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN AID AGENCIES AND THE AFFECTED POPULATION
Aid agencies do not engage enough with the populations and populations miss out on opportunities because they are absent when decisions are made and badly organised.

LACK OF INFORMATION PROVIDED BY AID AGENCIES ABOUT DISTRIBUTION TIMES AND VENUES
People do not know when and where aid will be delivered.

INCOMPETENCE AND COMPETITION AMONGST AID AGENCIES
Aid agencies deliver poor quality projects and internal competition between agencies prevents coordination of aid delivery.

KEY FINDINGS

1 INSECURITY HAMPERS BOTH AID DELIVERY AND BENEFICIARY ACCESS TO THE ASSISTANCE PROVIDED

The majority of the people interviewed for this study told NRC they still feel unsafe, despite significant recent improvements in the security situation. The feeling of insecurity is largely associated with the presence of armed groups. The forcible detention of certain groups persists and religious minorities linked to particular ethnic groups continue to face more regular and severe persecution and physical threats. Moreover, the populations with the greatest needs face serious constraints to their freedom of movement and their ability to relocate to access the assistance they require. National and international humanitarian staff are routinely intimidated or threatened with violence. In 2014 alone 12 humanitarian workers were killed in CAR. Humanitarian field bases continue to be looted, and humanitarian convoys are routinely attacked by armed group elements and members of the general population. Convoys have also been deliberately blocked from reaching conflict-affected areas. Consequently, aid agencies are frequently forced to make difficult trade-offs between reaching communities and keeping their staff safe. Changes in the security situation frequently compel them to temporarily halt operations and relocate staff, resulting in the disruption of activities which people depend upon for their most basic needs.

" The presence of aid agencies does not bring us security. It exposes us even more to the armed groups. They believe we receive lots of things and attack us later to steal it."

Female focus group, Bangui

2 HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IS NARROWLY DEFINED AMONGST THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY AND IS HEAVILY FOCUSED ON THE ABILITY TO DELIVER ASSISTANCE

Although humanitarian access is widely accepted as including both populations' access to assistance and protection and aid agencies' access to the populations, the study reveals that humanitarians have a very "aid agency-centric" view based primarily on their ability to access populations. By contrast, the views of the communities also include their ability to access what is provided and the quality of the service. This does not necessarily mean that aid agencies completely overlook these aspects in their work. However, the study findings strongly indicate that the beneficiary perspective on access (can the intended beneficiaries make use of what is provided and is it a service worth receiving?) is not always included in the discussions and thinking around humanitarian access.

" Staff are increasingly scared. They do not want to work in certain areas because they have experienced security incidents. Fear among staff is hampering access, but as violence is becoming increasingly unpredictable, I understand that."

International NGO Head of Mission

" Aid agencies have changed the way they operate because of the insecurity. To avoid being looted or assaulted, they are forced to stop providing aid. This has a negative impact on us."

Female community members, Bombe village, Sibut

3 COMMUNITIES INCLUDE ACCESS BARRIERS CREATED BY THE COMMUNITIES AND BY HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

Populations are generally appreciative of the aid provided and recognise that its delivery is challenged by insecurity and geographical barriers. However, they also point at disorganisation, slow delivery times, unfair or poorly informed beneficiary selection processes, partiality in coverage, and the diversion of assistance as the major barriers to getting aid to where it is most needed. Most interviewees were critical of the type, quantity and quality of the aid provided, and questioned whether it goes to those who need it most. Accusations of aid diversion when, for example, aid staff retain part of the assistance for private sale or distribution to their friends or families were heard repeatedly. These criticisms were presented in all focus group discussions, regardless of the social, ethnic, gender, or religious makeup of participants. Researchers were even informed of cases where communities had rejected projects proposed by certain aid agencies. Community respondents furthermore emphasised that certain community behaviour impacts negatively on access, citing inter alia lack of engagement during targeting, aid needs deception, aid theft, and poor organisation by the communities themselves.

4 AFFECTED COMMUNITIES FEEL THEY ARE NOT BEING HEARD AND HUMANITARIANS HAVE LIMITED KNOWLEDGE ABOUT HOW THEY ARE PERCEIVED

Respondents identified a pervasive lack of communication with communities by all international actors. Many feel it is pointless to make formal complaints. Some beneficiaries interviewed seemed resigned to this situation, but a significant minority said they would resort to confrontation – including physical confrontation – with aid organisations if necessary. Only a handful of interviewees within the humanitarian community felt they were aware of how their organisations were perceived by the populations they were striving to help. The interviews appeared to show that, apart from a few exceptions, most aid agencies had not sought to understand how they were perceived by their beneficiary populations.

❝ *What prevents us from accessing [aid] is the absence of information between humanitarians and the populations."*

Female community member Bokengue village, Sibut

❝ *The last food distribution was done on February 2nd 2015 by [NGO name] but it was not very good because the food had already perished."*

Female focus group, Bangui

5 | ARMED GROUPS WANT INCREASED ENGAGEMENT WITH HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

A grievance frequently heard from Anti-Balakas or ex-Seleka militiamen is that aid agencies do not interact enough with them. They see this both as an affront and an indicator that aid agencies are somehow taking a stance against them despite claiming to be neutral and impartial. In addition, combatants lamented that they are too frequently not benefiting from aid because of their status, even though they believe they fit within the vulnerability criteria. Combined with the complaints of not being listened to by aid agencies, this contributes to a gradual build-up of misunderstanding and frustration towards aid agencies. In turn, this may lead to a violent release of these frustrations and sow the seeds of future security incidents.

❝ *Humanitarians never explain what they do or what their problems are.*”

Female community member Bangui

6 | HUMANITARIANS HIGHLIGHT ACCEPTANCE AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THEIR OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES, BUT RECOGNISE THAT THEY DO NOT INVEST ENOUGH IN BUILDING IT

While recognising the importance of acceptance to ensure humanitarian access, many respondents acknowledged that they do not devote the necessary time and resources to build and maintain acceptance. They rely too much on a passive approach, assuming that good programming will win the consent of the local population and that acceptance will automatically follow. It is important to note that while all aid workers interviewed as part of this study emphasise the importance of being accepted, only a few recalled that a good acceptance strategy is not aimed solely at the populations but, equally importantly, at 'those who control the territory'.

❝ *Yes, we accept humanitarians but their drivers should really slow down when they cross our village.*”

Male Focus Group, the village of Guen

❝ *When the population is not organised in some sort of formal group, we don't benefit as much from aid.*”

Male community member, Berberati

7 | LACK OF UNDERSTANDING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND DIALOGUE WITH COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS ON HOW THESE UNDERPIN HUMANITARIAN WORK

An approach that upholds the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, combined with an appropriate acceptance strategy, was seen by aid agency respondents as the best way to increase humanitarian access. Yet, the study found that actual understanding of these principles by humanitarian staff and their ability to implement them at field level might be lacking. This may be the case, for example, with regard to adherence to the principles of impartiality in beneficiary selection or neutrality through conflict-sensitive approaches. Similarly, the fact that only a small minority of armed actors - militiamen, local security forces and international forces - are familiar with all these principles and how they underpin humanitarian work indicates that a greater effort may be required to communicate and disseminate them.

" *Humanitarian principles ... hmmm ... like impartiality and equality? Right? The third one, I don't remember..."*

International aid agency staff

" *We have never heard of these principles, but NGOs are safe with us."*

Anti-Balaka zone commander

8 | CENTRAL AFRICANS ARE LARGELY ABLE TO DISTINGUISH HUMANITARIANS FROM MILITARY ACTORS, BUT QUESTION THEIR INDEPENDENCE AND IMPARTIALITY

Communities often distinguish military actors from civilians in terms of who has guns and military equipment and who does not. However, aid organisations are assumed to be part of the wider international effort to restore peace and stability to CAR, a project which includes military intervention. Most civilians interviewed, however, do not consider this perceived association between military and humanitarian actors as problematic. This lack of distinction is more problematic with regards to the acceptance of armed actors. Anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka armed actors interviewed for this study complained that aid organisations have failed to engage with them. As a result, humanitarian actors have failed to dispel the perception that they are associated with or, in the minds of some commanders, are spies for international military forces. This has provoked an atmosphere of mistrust of humanitarian motives which can be linked to the threats and intimidation faced daily by humanitarian staff. Interviewees also frequently expressed the belief that aid organisations favoured particular groups. For example, community sensitisation projects in majority Christian areas of the country, highlighting the right of refugees and IDPs to return, were perceived as pro-Muslim.

" *Some organisations organise distributions without taking into account that there are two different communities living on the site. This creates tensions. The problem is not political but the result of a misunderstanding."*

Congolese refugee, Berberati

9 IN SPITE OF A HIGH LEVEL OF FRUSTRATION AND SCEPTICISM, COMMUNITIES EXPRESSED A LARGE DEGREE OF WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE WITH AID ORGANISATIONS IN ORDER TO IMPROVE ACCESS

This includes information sharing, community organisation and delegation of community representatives to engage with aid organisations to improve targeting and increase the quality of the response. It also includes a willingness to enhance the physical security of aid agency personnel by providing information on security threats, hiding aid workers in danger, calling international forces to intervene in incidents, and – if necessary – by interceding directly between threatening parties and humanitarian staff.

CONCLUSION

IN ORDER FOR THIS STUDY TO CONTRIBUTE POSITIVELY TOWARDS INCREASED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN CAR THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES PRESENTED ON HUMANITARIAN ACCESS AND THE MAIN CHALLENGES INVOLVED SHOULD BE FURTHER DISCUSSED BY AID AGENCIES PRESENT IN THE COUNTRY AND USED TO ADAPT THEIR APPROACHES TO ACCESS AND DELIVER QUALITY SERVICES.

WHO DO COMMUNITIES THINK ARE VULNERABLE?

MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES:

- Widows with children
- Old people
- Displaced people
- Orphans

LESS FREQUENT RESPONSES:

- Pregnant women
- Disabled people
- Victims of violence (physical attack or house destruction)

1 INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian access in the Central African Republic (CAR) is improving along with the gradual stabilisation of the overall security situation, but challenges persist that still prevent large segments of the population from accessing aid and protection and aid agencies from reaching them.

'Humanitarian access' is defined by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) as "displacement affected population's ability to seek refuge and make use of the assistance provided." Consequently, such access encompasses: NRC's ability to reach populations with quality programmes; populations' ability to use the services provided by NRC; and populations' ability to seek refuge and obtain the assistance provided by others.

The challenges that still hamper or prevent both aid delivery and beneficiary access to the assistance provided in the country largely relate to the presence of armed groups and militias operating across the country, tensions and clashes between and within them and with international forces, and the shifting patterns of control over territory. These factors make negotiations on access and on safety guarantees both for beneficiaries and aid delivery personnel, as well as efforts to ensure respect for humanitarian principles and the non-diversion of aid, very difficult.

Security incidents involving humanitarian actors are recorded on a daily basis, both in Bangui and in the countryside. In 2014 alone, more than 12 humanitarian workers were killed. National and international humanitarian staff are often intimidated or threatened with violence, field bases are frequently broken into, and aid convoys are routinely looted by elements of armed groups/militias/the population, and/or are deliberately prevented from accessing conflict-affected areas.

Moreover, access is hampered by bad roads: only 10% of roads in CAR are paved and all roads become inaccessible during the rainy season. Almost everything required to run local operations must be imported, a problem compounded by the time, cost and weight restrictions on available air transport reserved to airlift aid workers and essential materials into the country.

As a result of the situation described above, aid agencies are frequently forced to make difficult trade-offs between reaching communities and keeping their staff safe. This means they are sometimes compelled to temporarily halt operations and relocate staff, resulting in a disruption of their activities, and depriving people of basic assistance they desperately need.

However, it should be acknowledged that humanitarian access is not only restricted by insecurity, infrastructure deficits and other external factors but also by challenges internal to humanitarian organisations. These relate *inter alia* to understanding and the operationalization of humanitarian principles, accountability vis-à-vis beneficiaries, aid agency staff practices and conduct, cultural sensitivity, and communication with actors on the ground. Perception issues are also critical and refer to how the aims, intents and practices of humanitarian actors are viewed by different stakeholders, in particularly by beneficiaries, as well as to the prevailing confusion regarding the respective mandates of humanitarian and political/military actors. Perceptions also reflect how affected populations view their own access to protection and humanitarian assistance, including related challenges and constraints and aid agency measures taken to overcome them.

While wide consensus exists on the *external* challenges affecting access, the internal

challenges to access and the way **humanitarian actors are perceived by different stakeholders – particularly by beneficiary populations – are less well known**. Discussions about internal challenges are often surrounded by suspicion and self-censorship, while those focused on perceptions are either very limited or non-existent. Above all, very little is known about how the affected populations perceive constraints affecting their access to the assistance, services and protection that aid agencies strive to provide. There is also only limited information on how aid practitioners and affected populations' perspectives in this regard might differ, and on how understanding these potential differences might generate lessons and guide approaches resulting in more crisis-affected people getting access to protection and assistance. Failure to understand these differences risks undermining this goal.

NRC commissioned this research study to better understand these challenges and the various associated dynamics and perspectives at play. In particular, the study aims to gain insight into how different stakeholders, and in particular affected populations, perceive the aims, intents and practices of humanitarian actors, and to better

understand how beneficiary populations view both their own problems of access to protection and humanitarian assistance and the measures implemented by aid agencies to overcome them. In short, the study specifically sought to:

- Identify how the aims, intents and practices of humanitarian actors are perceived by different stakeholders, including affected populations, and enhance understanding of the related influences at play;

- Identify and compare perceptions by aid practitioners and affected populations on access and related challenges;

- Provide recommendations to increase affected populations' access to assistance.

This study is based on research undertaken in CAR in March 2015. The first section presents the study methodology. This is followed by details of the study findings. A list of recommendations is then provided, addressed primarily to aid agencies, but also to the CAR authorities, as well as to the international community, in particular its military component present in the country.

2 THE RESEARCH STUDY METHODOLOGY

Through a qualitative research approach, this study set out to examine and understand the various dynamics and perspectives that influence humanitarian access. Critically, the study sought to examine these questions by incorporating the views of affected populations *as well as* those of humanitarians and other key stakeholders. This was intended to ensure a more holistic view of access issues and to better understand any key differences in the respective perceptions of the various stakeholders interviewed, which might in turn have significant implications for humanitarian operations and policy.

As a piece of qualitative research emphasising open-ended responses, the objective of the study was to *listen* rather than *count*. For example, it would have been possible to simply count the number of respondents who regarded humanitarians either positively or negatively. However, by posing open-ended questions and listening to the responses it was possible to understand not only the thinking of the interviewees in more detail, but also the influences and reasoning behind the views expressed. This enabled the researcher to both summarise the responses in terms of whether humanitarians are viewed positively or negatively, and to analyse what informed the views expressed, thus providing more clarity to potential implications for the humanitarian response.

Adopting this methodology, the study focused on six broad key questions relating to access:

❶ How are humanitarians and humanitarian agencies perceived?

❷ How is access to aid perceived and what are the internal and external challenges affecting access?

❸ What measures have been taken to address these challenges and what positive impact have they had?

❹ What role do different actors play in enabling or preventing access?

❺ How is acceptance understood and what role does it play in enabling access?

❻ How are humanitarian principles understood and what role to do they play in enabling access?

In developing the methodology, these key questions were adapted within a semi-structured, open-ended interview format. Careful consideration was given to how these questions were presented to different stakeholders and to how key words such as "access" were understood in local languages (Arabic, French, Sangho). While the open-ended question approach precluded 'right' or 'wrong' answers – only different,

subjective interpretations – it was possible to identify trends through mapping and analysis of the responses. As part of this process, field team members also factored their own 'bias' into their interpretation of what they 'heard', thus ensuring an additional layer of critical reflection on how the research conclusions were reached.

The terms "humanitarian access" and "humanitarian assistance" are not defined in international law. According to a handbook elaborated by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and Conflict Dynamics International (CDI), a narrower interpretation of the term "humanitarian assistance" may refer to activities and resources that seek to provide only goods and services essential for meeting the basic needs of persons in situations of armed conflict. For the authors, **"'humanitarian access' is understood as referring to both access by humanitarian actors to people in need of assistance and protection and access by those in need to the goods and services essential for their survival and health, in a manner consistent with core humanitarian principles."**[1] The handbook also specifies that "humanitarian access is a precondition for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance. Where the need for such assistance is sustained over a period of time, the term should encompass not only access to enable goods and services to swiftly reach the intended beneficiaries, but also the maintenance of such access for as long as the needs exist."

As stated earlier, NRC defines humanitarian access as **"displacement affected population's ability to seek refuge and make use of the assistance provided."** Consequently, access encompasses: NRC's ability to reach populations with quality programmes; the ability of these populations to use the services provided by NRC; and their ability to seek refuge and obtain the assistance provided by others.

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[1]   FDFA, ICRC, OCHA, CDI, *Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict, Handbook on the International Normative Framework,* Version 2, December 2014, p. 13.

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

THE FIELDWORK FOR THIS STUDY TOOK PLACE BETWEEN 1-22 MARCH 2015 IN FIVE MAIN LOCATIONS:

BANGUI:

PK5 (3eme arr); Mairie (3 eme arr); Site of the Eglise des Frères de castors (3eme arr); Quartier Cité N'Bembe1 (6eme arr); Quartier Kpetene1 (6eme arr); Quartier Ngaragba (7eme arr); Quartier Gbotoro (7eme arr); Gbadouna (7 eme arr); Quartier St Jean de Galabadja (8eme arr); Quartier de Bembé 1 (Bimbo 1); Quartier Sambrola (Bimbo1); site of Don Bosco, quartier Damala, commune of Begoua (Bimbo 2); Airport IDP site;

SIBUT and surrounding villages (road to Dekoa);

DEKOA and surrounding villages (road to Mala);

CARNOT and surrounding villages (road to Gadzi);

BERBERATI and surrounding villages.

These sites were selected based upon two main criteria:

❶ representative geographic, social and ethnic diversity (see further discussion of diversity criteria below) and

❷ practical considerations of accessibility. The study also took care to include areas where NRC has not been operational.

CARNOT

The populations in Carnot were affected by the conflict on two occasions: from March to April 2013, when the Seleka took control of the area and perpetrated abuses against civilians, and from January to February 2014, when the Seleka left the area and the Anti-Balaka took possession of the territory, also engaging in multiple types of abuse. Currently, there is a general improvement in the security situation, with isolated incidents of petty crime. However, the population still retains a strong sense of insecurity. Security on the roads leading to Carnot has improved, but remains volatile, with the presence of armed men affiliated with community-based vigilante and/or Anti-Balaka militias.

BERBERATI

CAR's second largest city, located in the southwest of the country around 120km from the border with Cameroon, was occupied by the Seleka for over a year before Anti-Balaka militias took control of the region early in 2014. As in many parts of CAR in recent months, Berberati has been the scene of violence and abuses against the civilian population. Although the security environment has eased somewhat in the last few months, the situation remains volatile.

Dekoa, Carnot and Berberati each have in common the presence of a Muslim '**enclave**'. These enclaves are inhabited by Muslim IDPs who cannot return home for fear of violence. Additionally, the CAR government, in order to ensure continuous diversity within the local population, has refused to allow international forces and actors to help these Muslim populations take refuge elsewhere in the country or abroad. As a result, several thousand Central African Muslims are stuck in these enclaves that are more often than not located in and around church compounds. Their movements are generally restricted to the limits of the church compound, rendering them almost entirely reliant on foreign aid to survive.

CARNOT

BERBERATI
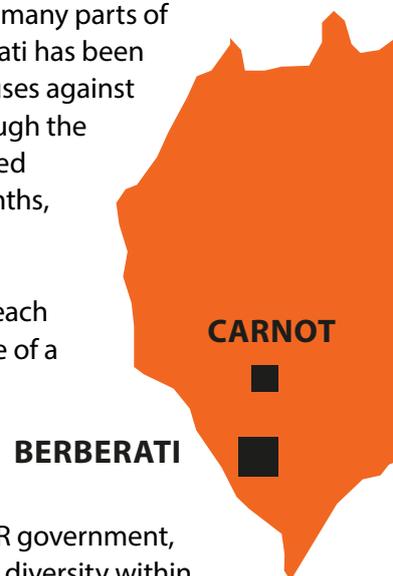
DEKOA

Since the beginning of the crisis, the Sibut-Dekoa road has been the scene of numerous clashes between elements of the ex-Seleka coalition and Anti-Balaka militias. Also, intense clashes between armed groups and between the latter and international forces have taken place on a regular basis since January 2014 following the departure from power of former Seleka leader Michel Djotodia, and the gradual reconquest of the road by Anti-Balaka elements. Civilian populations have been severely affected by the violence, with many reported abuses (summary executions, inhuman and degrading treatment, killings, looting, gender-based violence, the burning of homes and property). Between February and August 2014, following a resurgence of violence, almost all villages of the axis were emptied of their people, who had fled into the bush or to surrounding towns (mainly Sibut and Dekoa). Since August 2014, with the presence of the French army Sangaris operation force along the Sibut-Dekoa-axis and a return to calm, almost all of the population has returned home amidst a gradual recovery of socio-economic activities. Despite slight improvements, the security situation remains volatile in Dekoa. The population continues to live in a constant atmosphere of insecurity due to the presence of armed elements in certain neighbourhoods.

■ DEKOA
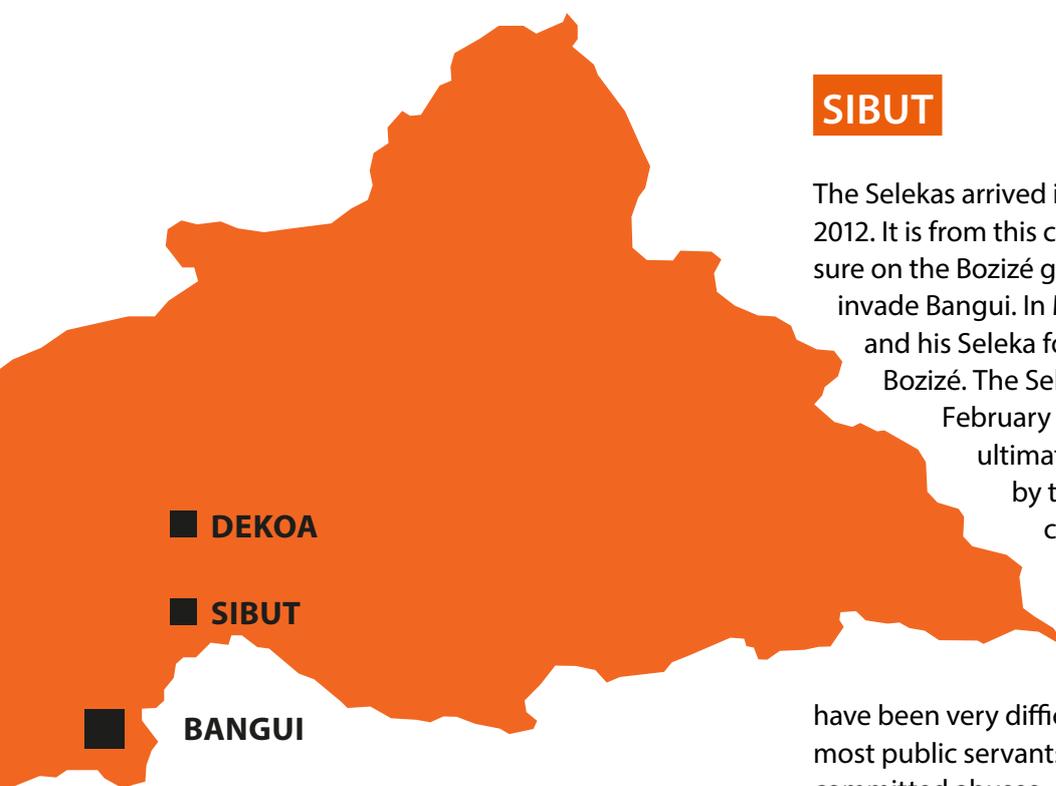
■ SIBUT

■ BANGUI

SIBUT

The Selekas arrived in Sibut on 29 December 2012. It is from this city that they exerted pressure on the Bozizé government by threatening to invade Bangui. In March 2013, Michel Djotodia and his Seleka forces left Sibut to topple Bozizé. The Selekas evacuated Sibut on 2 February 2014 in compliance with an ultimatum to leave the city issued by the Sangaris and a MISCA contingent. Half of them went to Bambari and the other half to Kaga Bandoro. During their 13 months in Sibut, life was reported to have been very difficult for the population as most public servants had left town and Selekas committed abuses.

BANGUI

CAR's capital has been the scene of intense rebel activity and destruction during decades of political upheaval. In 1966, as a result of political unrest, Bangui was labelled one of the most dangerous cities in the world. More recently, on 24 March 2013, Seleka rebels seized control of Bangui and Michel Djotodia took power after the then-President Bozizé fled. Far from restoring order, the crisis led to violent inter-communal clashes in Bangui. After repeated Seleka attacks on Christian populations, Anti-Balaka militias, probably supported by former members of the Central African armed forces, launched an assault on the CAR capital on 5 December 2013, targeting in particular the Muslim population. Seleka forces retaliated and slaughtered an estimated one thousand Christians from 6 to 8 December. In the following days, violence and reprisals between Seleka and Anti-Balaka militias led to hundreds of deaths and a massive departure of Muslim populations from Bangui.

During the research study interviews were conducted with 689 people located in CAR, 581 of whom were interviewed through 59 focus groups, with an average of 9.8 participants per group, and 108 within an individual, semi-structured framework. The study took into account the need to strike a balance between quantity (by ensuring that the data collected reflects more than just an anecdotal picture and represents a solid basis for the conclusions drawn from the analysis) and quality (by ensuring that enough time was given to adequately discuss and explore the questions being asked).

In identifying participants due consideration was given to ensure diversity of gender, age, religion and ethnicity, as well as to whether they were IDPs, members of host communities or returnees. Because of scope and scale limitations, however, it was only possible to analyse patterns of diversity in relation to gender, religion and location. A total of 289 females and 285 males participated in the focus groups. Participants mostly originated from the Mandja ethnic group in Dekoa and Sibut (though mixed with Bandas), from the Gbaya in Carnot and from the Banda in Berberati.

In Bangui, the diversity was greater and included members of the Banda, Gbaya, Goula, Mandja, Runga and Yakoma ethnic groups.

Other key stakeholders interviewed in small focus groups or individually included:

- Local institutional authorities (prefect, mayor, etc.)
- Armed groups (Anti-Balakas, ex-Selekas)[2]
- Local traditional authorities (village chiefs, elder committee members, etc.)
- Religious authorities (priests, imams)
- Traders
- International forces (MINUSCA, Sangaris, EUFOR)
- Institutional donor staff
- International and national aid workers.

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[2] We are aware that there are more armed groups operating in the CAR than the Anti-Balakas and ex-Selekas. Nonetheless, they remain by far the two major ones. Given the limited time and geographical areas of the study, it was decided to focus primarily on these two armed groups.

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LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The study was conducted over a relatively short period of time, and in a limited number of locations. Although the findings shed some light on Central Africans' perceptions of aid work, they do not aim to provide a comprehensive, nation-wide overview of their views. As such, the findings are applicable only to the selected locations.

The study was conducted as part of NRC's work on humanitarian access, funded by the UK Government and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with NRC providing the required logistical and operational support.

Two-thirds of the 108 key stakeholders interviewed individually were male. The reason for the larger number of male interviewees is that many of the key stakeholders are militiamen, international military officers, religious leaders and local leaders, positions mainly occupied by men.

In total, 23 aid workers were interviewed. Consideration was given to ensuring a relevant balance between international and local non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff and United Nations (UN) staff so as to be able to analyse them as a broad group as well as the differences between them. Consideration was also given to ensuring a diverse representation of sectors (health, protection, shelter, food security, etc.) to map their respective experiences and perspectives which can differ by sector. The study also sought to determine how long the interviewees' respective agencies had been operational in CAR, and in particular whether their presence pre-dated or came after the rebel seizure of the capital in March 2013, as that could have an impact on their experiences and on how they are perceived in the country.

The research field team was composed of an international independent consultant (the author of the present report), an international professional photographer (Jose Cendon), and 10 national NRC staff (including Didier Poutya, who played a key role in assisting the international consultant). It was guided in its work by an internal NRC reference group consisting of:

- Marit Glad, Technical Advisor - Access (NRC headquarters);

- Ilaria Allegrozzi, Protection & Advocacy Advisor (NRC CAR);

- Erin A. Weir, Protection & Advocacy Advisor (NRC CAR);

- Torill Sæterøy, Regional Protection and Advocacy Adviser (NRC headquarters);

- Dr Hannah Vaughan Lee (independent consultant).

The study methodology is the result of team work. Hannah Vaughan Lee played a key role in its design.

3 THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON THE CENTRAL AFRICAN POPULATION

Violence and fear have gripped the country, resulting in the near collapse of the state administration and a breakdown of many basic social services.

" *We are very worried for the future of our village. We scream for help and beg aid agencies to come to help us.*"

Male Focus Group, Bokobotané village, near Carnot

According to OCHA, there were 436,300 IDPs in CAR in April 2015 and 2.7 million people in need of assistance out of a population of 4.6 million, while a further 461,000 people had taken refuge in neighbouring countries.[3] Forced to flee, families have lost their homes, agricultural fields and livelihoods. Displacement has heightened food insecurity; in some locations up to 80% of people are surviving on one meal a day and are no longer able to harvest their fields.

The protection issues facing civilians are serious and affect women, men and children in different ways. **Heavily armed groups roam the country, fighting each other for control of territory, often preventing communities from accessing assistance and perpetrating acts of violence with impunity.** Reports of assassination, kidnapping, extortion and torture persist, and women

and children have been particularly vulnerable to violations, including sexual violence. Muslims have also been specifically targeted: more than 300,000 have fled the country and those who remain are trapped in enclaves, under the protection of peacekeepers, with limited freedom of movement and under constant risk of attack. Serious challenges to property rights exist after homes and agricultural fields were vacated. The total scale of protection violations and abuses is still largely unknown.

Out of school, often displaced and having experienced or witnessed armed attacks or acts of sexual violence, children suffer particularly from psychosocial distress such as fear, anxiety, depression, grief, and a deep sense of insecurity. Thousands have also been recruited into armed groups, separated from their families, or seen their homes destroyed.

Even before the upsurge in violence began in 2013, the country was ranked one of the world's poorest,[4] with over two thirds of its population living on less than a dollar a day. CAR has some of the worst global health indicators and even prior to 2013 was already one of the hardest places in the world to be a mother or a child – with the sixth highest child mortality rate and the third highest maternal mortality rate in the world.

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[3] OCHA Situation Report No. 52 (as of 14 April 2015) and UNHCR Regional Update 54, 4-17 April 2015.

[4] CAR is not just a poor country, but has experienced other cycles of conflict in recent years, especially in the north. Yet the violence and deterioration that followed the 2013 coup has dramatically altered the context.

CAR has been chronically neglected by the international community for decades. As a result, its long-term development needs have been largely ignored. Coupled with cycles of government coups and violence, this has resulted in weak institutions, governance and infrastructure. Consequently, despite the deployment to CAR of a small international humanitarian presence prior to 2013, the dire situation in the country has for years been largely regarded as a "forgotten crisis".

From December 2013 to May 2015, the CAR crisis was designated as a Level 3 (L3) emergency by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, a forum regrouping most key UN humanitarian actors and NGOs. The L3 designation, the highest level on the emergency scale, indicates that the crisis requires a system-wide mobilisation to significantly increase the response and improve the overall effectiveness of assistance. It denotes recognition not only of the scale, complexity and urgency of the crisis, but also of the capacity and reputational risks of the humanitarian system.

4 HOW ARE AID AGENCIES PERCEIVED IN CAR?

Most aid workers, whether international or national staff employed by NGOs or the UN, considered that perceptions of aid agencies among CAR population groups vary greatly and are influenced by multiple factors.

The factors singled out related *inter alia* to whether or not the population groups concerned benefited from aid and considered it of good quality; whether or not they had been offered job opportunities by aid agencies; and the extent to which a given population group had been a beneficiary of aid or otherwise exposed over time to the aid 'industry'.

A few aid workers expressed an overtly negative or positive opinion about how aid agencies in general, or their own respective organisations in particular, are perceived. Their views largely corresponded to those of the populations where interviews were conducted: some aid organisations received *quasi-systematic praise* – though none were completely free of criticism – while *quasi-systematic criticism* was levelled at a number of others, either for the purported poor quality of the aid provided or for the way its staff reportedly interacted with beneficiaries.

Interestingly, however, **only a few of the aid workers interviewed could confidently state whether the organisation they worked for was positively or negatively perceived**. It appears that, with only few exceptions, most aid agencies operating in CAR have not devoted much effort to find out what the beneficiaries think about their work. This is a matter of some concern, especially given the number of Central Africans interviewed as part of this research study who

frequently stated they are not listened to by aid workers, that their views are not taken into account in the design of aid projects, and that the aid provided does not respond to their most important needs.

According to the UNDP's latest Human Development Index (HDI), CAR's value for 2013 is 0.341 - which is in the low human development category – ranking it 185 out of the 187 countries and territories on the HDI. It is thereafter hardly surprising that most interviewees, regardless of their location, interaction with aid agencies, ethnic, gender, social or religious backgrounds, said **they are generally appreciative of the aid provided**. In expressing their gratitude, some even insisted that their thanks be conveyed in this report.

But even the most grateful of interviewees had some criticism of the aid or aid system, or both. **The most frequent negative comments related to the limited or absence of communication between aid agencies and the affected populations**. According to many interviewees, this meant that certain population groups did not for example know when aid was expected, what aid they were entitled to receive, or why the population in the adjacent neighbourhood or village was receiving aid and they none. Some interviewees also said they were unsure who to contact in case of need and that even if they did manage to get in touch with an aid agency staff member their grievances were generally not taken into consideration.

A related and frequently voiced complaint contended that **the process of identifying the

most vulnerable people was often deeply flawed. Following were some of the main criticisms in this regard:

- Aid workers and community leaders (e.g. village chiefs) give preference to their relatives;

- Persons absent on the day the identification process is carried out are not included on the aid distribution list even though they would appear to meet the vulnerability criteria;

- Persons with health issues complain that they do not receive aid provided by some agencies because they suffer from a disease not covered by the latter, or because the five-year limit on the provision of free medical aid on offer has lapsed;

- Some selected beneficiaries reported they were left empty-handed after the voucher they were given for a forthcoming aid distribution was 'not recognized by the aid agency computer'.

In the same vein, **most interviewees reported a multiplicity of issues regarding the nature or the quantity of the aid provided**: these ranged from complaints that the goods were not received in sufficient quantity or were not the right goods, to claims that they were not provided at regular enough intervals. The 'goods' mentioned were food and non-food items as well as medicines and health services.

Of particular concern were two frequently heard comments. The first related to the quality and quantity of the food distributed. Many respondents said the food aid lacked variety and that rather than eat the same meals repeatedly they preferred to sell the food in local markets and purchase other products with the proceeds.

The second frequently heard complaint concerned grain distributions: respondents repeatedly explained that the grains received were of poor quality, or were distributed before the beneficiaries had attained a basic level of food security, prompting them to eat rather than plant the grains. The ensuing absence of response to meet immediate needs created by this situation thus dealt a blow to aid agency efforts to bolster medium-term community resilience.

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Another commonly expressed grievance concerned the difficulties communities faced in planning meals with the food aid provided, especially in cases where they did not know when the next distribution was expected. Of particular concern were instances of long intervals – sometimes lasting several months – between food aid distributions, creating a situation of food insecurity for the affected populations.

Respondents living in rural towns or villages reported that the support they had received was very limited, in particular compared to that provided in larger towns or cities such as Bangui or Berberati. Indeed, the provision of aid seems to be mainly focused on 'hubs' where aid agencies have set up their field bases, in line with their tendency to respond to needs that exist immediately around them before gradually expanding operations to more rural areas. In CAR, aid agencies have nevertheless taken various steps to increase the geographic scope of their operations.

These include:
- identification of a focal point in all sub-prefectures
- training of focal points to identify those most in need
- deployment of mobile clinics to the more remote areas on a regular basis
- provision of transportation to evacuate the injured or sick to the nearest health structure

A number of existing needs are not being addressed by aid agencies. A frequently cited need by people from all walks of life, including civil servants, traders and parents, is to improve the road network. Some respondents – in particular those working in the public sector – lamented that aid agencies do not support the restoration and refurbishment of public buildings and infrastructure. Several reported they had tried to raise the subject with aid agencies, but with little success. While some understood that aid agencies do not necessarily have the capacity to perform such tasks, others disagreed with their choice of priorities.

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Interviewees affiliated with an armed group, whether Anti-Balaka or ex-Seleka, emphasised that their specific needs as (ex-)combatants were not being met. All of them asked to benefit from disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes. However, when challenged as to why they would not disarm now and return to their previous occupations they replied that they had lost everything and first needed vocational training, education, job opportunities and/or financial support to start anew. A few also demanded to be integrated in the future Central African Armed Forces (FACA).

Additionally, combatants and former fighters deplored the fact that they frequently do not benefit from aid because of their status, even though they believe they meet the vulnerability criteria. In Bangui, militiamen reported being reluctant to seek medical aid, essentially out of fear of being arrested. However, no such situation was reported in the provinces. In all these cases the absence of a DDR programme appeared to be their prime concern, even though they did not have a particularly positive recollection of the

previous DDR process carried out a few years earlier. They seem to regard DDR as just a part of the overall international peace process   one that in their view holds out the promise of material benefits.

Internally displaced persons, especially those located in Bangui or trapped in various enclaves, contended that aid agencies were not giving them sufficient support to fulfil their desire to return to their homes or seek refuge abroad. They reportedly need two kinds of support: material (money, reconstruction tools, and in particular skill-based tools) and physical security (in order to reach their homes, recover their homes from illegal occupants, and enjoy a climate of general security in their neighbourhood of origin). A number of respondents in Bangui and Dekoa complained that aid agencies had purportedly failed to respect a promise to rebuild their houses, or that the process is incomplete or taking too long.

A large majority of respondents was of the view that aid work was not monitored and evaluated enough. A good monitoring system was not however perceived as an internal or external review mechanism, but as one that implies the direct involvement of aid agency heads in operations at field level. Indeed, many respondents stated the belief that many mistakes and cases of fraud could be avoided if aid agency senior managers were directly involved in aid delivery.

Linked to this is the **reported limited trust that beneficiaries show towards the (local) staff or local partners involved in aid distributions.** Many respondents accused them of profiteering from their positions, notably by keeping a portion of the aid to be distributed; by ensuring that their relatives get the available jobs instead of the locals; by distributing goods to their relatives rather than to the most vulnerable; by ignoring the local chiefs or not engaging with the communities enough. A frequently heard example of 'proof' of these acts is that of a truck leaving a distribution site still carrying aid items even though they should have been issued to vulnerable beneficiaries during the aid delivery

operation. In the words of male IDPs in Bangui, *"not all of the food bags or the kits are being unloaded from the trucks as they are being diverted by the team who does the distribution."* Similarly, members of host communities in a village near Dekoa stated that *"food distributions don't work well here as the trucks are not being fully emptied and those who are supposed to distribute these goods to the most vulnerable sell these instead to people who haven't received any goods."*

When asked what aid agencies are really doing in CAR, most answered that their presence was primarily driven by a willingness to provide aid to the affected populations. This is reassuring given that an increasing number of public accusations have been made against aid agencies, some stating for example that they are in CAR to plunder the country's natural resources. It seems that these accusations made by certain politicians, media outlets and others have not, so far at least, had the intended effect of discrediting aid agencies. Yet, a few respondents were of the view that aid agencies get rich *"thanks to us"*, implying that without the existing crisis in CAR these organisations would not be funded. Moreover, many interviewees were keen to

accuse aid workers of misappropriating aid to enrich themselves.

Lastly, **a few respondents asserted that some aid agencies divert aid to support one group more than another.** This accusation was made particularly – but not exclusively – by people living alongside the road leading to Kaga-Bandoro, implying that the aid convoys were not stopping in their villages as aid agencies favoured Muslim communities located further north. By contrast, several Muslims denounced what they perceived as the poor response of aid agencies to the Muslim population stranded in the enclave of Yaloke, accusing them of partiality against them.

In addition to researching how aid agencies are perceived, the study also sought to understand whether populations make a distinction between aid agencies. **While most respondents and participants saw** *some* **difference between the various aid agencies, their knowledge in this regard appeared to vary greatly** and largely depended on their level of education and the extent to which they were 'exposed' to aid agencies operating in the areas where they lived.

Populations distinguished aid agencies from one another primarily based on their particular sector of activity (health, food, non-food items and, to a lesser extent, protection), rather than on the source of their funding or their respect of humanitarian principles. Respondents were usually able to identify   albeit not always correctly   the agencies operating in their area and the projects being implemented by them.

Another frequent criteria used by populations to differentiate between agencies relates to the *quality* **and quantity of the aid they provide.** Populations have strong opinions about whether or not organisations are perceived to be doing good work. However, the concept of 'good work' varies greatly: for some, it means receiving *relevant* aid while for others it means receiving *enough* aid; for yet others, it means *being heard* and having a say in the way aid is provided; and finally, for some, the main criteria are to be *respectful* and *impartial*. This last point is developed further later in this report.

The mere presence or absence of an aid agency in a given area was also seen as a way to differentiate between aid agencies insofar as *"some effectively help us, others don't,"* as one interviewee put it. Expanding on this sentiment, respondents frequently identified aid agencies by name, singling out those perceived to be doing good work from others less well appreciated.

" *NGOs are close to us while the UN is here to support the government. The UN are figurative only. They are here for the gold and diamonds. Their presence doesn't make sense, they'd better go back home."*

Male Focus Group, Bangui

The research team found that CAR **populations rarely distinguish between NGOs and UN agencies and their affiliates**. Those interviewed frequently used the term "NGO" as a synonym for "humanitarians" (*"les humanitaires"*). UN offices, programmes, funds and specialised agencies were therefore more often than not seen as NGOs. Women in Sibut for instance maintained that *"there are no differences between the United Nations agencies and NGOs, as they are all humanitarians who provide aid to the most vulnerable."* Those distinctions that were made by interviewees did not always reflect reality. For example, female respondents in Dekoa posited that *"the difference between the United Nations and the NGOs is that the United Nations bring security and NGOs bring aid through food and non-food items".*

In some cases, in particular in certain Bangui municipalities such as the 3rd district (*3eme arrondissement*), the UN was seen to be closer to the population than NGOs. Generally, however, the opposite was considered to be true for most UN agencies and their affiliates, which were seen to have little to no contact with the population. No specific distinction between faith-based and secular NGOs was noted by the study research team.

Many respondents viewed this topic from a hierarchical perspective, depicting the UN as an entity that *"funds"* the NGOs, or that is their *"boss"*. According to male respondents from a

village located near Sibut, *"the UN are powers that can't be compared to the NGOs who are in reality their subcontractors to intervene on their behalf close to the population. NGOs send their reports to the UN who have mandated them to do this field work. The difference between these two entities is that the UN are superior to the NGOs – father and son aren't equal."*

Replies to researcher questions about the UN demonstrated that the organisation, as well as its offices, programmes, funds and specialised agencies, are equated with MINUSCA and **primarily seen as an armed, mandated component of the international community**. This did not however appear to impact views about NGOs which, as stated above, many said they regard as entities funded by the UN.

" *The MINUSCA is a humanitarian military agency."*

Male Focus group, Bangui

Even though respondents showed a certain awareness of the distinction between the various aid agencies, the study clearly demonstrated that they lacked understanding of how the humanitarian aid system works. Those aware of the presence of the resident Humanitarian Coordinator in CAR referred to that person as the *"boss"* of the aid agencies; others perceived OCHA as an NGO or, on the contrary, as the one supreme organisation that *directs* the overall aid response. Only a handful could name the traditional institutional donors. When asked *"who in your view are the humanitarians",* nearly all respondents spontaneously replied *"individuals and organisations that come to help people in need".* This underscores both the perceived altruistic objective of aid but also its mainly foreign provenance. Though local informal social solidarity networks, NGOs and associations exist, the concept of 'humanitarian aid' is seen primarily as coming from abroad. This however is not perceived unfavourably, despite some negative comments heard in this regard, since **most seem grateful for the presence of foreign aid agencies**, often associating them with a potential return to peace and an improvement of their lives.

KEY TAKE AWAY...

HOW ARE AID AGENCIES PERCEIVED IN CAR?

A major finding of the study is the contrast between the strikingly little knowledge aid agency personnel have about how populations perceive their work on the one hand, and the extent to which these populations are critical of this work on the other. To be sure, populations are generally grateful for the aid provided and understand that the main reason for the presence of aid agencies in CAR is indeed to provide such assistance. Yet, these genuine expressions of appreciation are quickly clouded by a whole range of issues raised by most interviewees. These relate to criticism of the nature, quality or quantity of the aid provided, and claims that most of the aid is not being delivered to those who need it most, or that not all needs are being addressed. Concerns were also voiced about how beneficiaries are identified, with some members of the population accusing aid agencies of incompetency, or of favouring a particular group.

In light of this situation, interviewees among the population considered efforts by aid agencies to monitor and evaluate their humanitarian work insufficient, in particular given that beneficiary communities appeared from this study to have only limited trust in aid agency local staff and their local partners.

Veteran aid workers will probably not be too surprised by the above findings. Aid work across the globe is fraught with imperfections and the difficult operating environment in CAR certainly adds to the challenges. Yet, a particular worry in the CAR context is how frequently respondents lamented that they are not listened to by aid workers in respect not only of their needs and concerns but also of their ideas that are not taken into consideration. Additionally, they contend that aid workers seem to lack or not show enough empathy towards the plight of the CAR population, a claim acknowledged by a certain number of aid workers. Part of the reason may be that only limited genuine contact exists between aid workers and the communities they seek to serve. To some degree this may be attributable to the fact that the population has little understanding of the aid 'system'. For example, as mentioned earlier, communities make little distinction between NGOs and UN offices, programmes, funds and specialised agencies though they can usually distinguish aid agencies by name and sector activity, as well as by the quality and quantity of the aid they provide. However, given that the UN is seen primarily as an armed, mandated component of the international community, NGOs should be wary of being confused with that body.

These findings underscore the need for aid agencies to better communicate and engage in a stronger dialogue with the communities they seek to serve. Such dialogue should be based on a capacity and willingness to listen to and address the existing grievances of communities and to take into consideration their views. Also, given the scope of humanitarian aid operations in CAR, information sharing activities could be undertaken to explain the intricacies of the aid system before the views of ill-intentioned stakeholders vocally critical of aid agencies take hold among the population at large.

5 HOW IS SECURITY PERCEIVED?

The definition of 'being safe' (*"Que signifie, pour vous, être en sécurité?"*) varied among the Central African respondents, yet was very frequently linked to freedom of movement. Indeed, for many, being safe equates to being able to move around freely. This is particularly true for those respondents who are stranded in enclaves.

However, the scope of security is defined differently: for some, security is defined narrowly and 'being safe' is associated solely with being protected by legal and legitimate armed personnel as well as seeing the different armed groups being disarmed. For others its scope is much larger and encompasses everything from physical security to food security and freedom of choice.

> " *Aid agency staff sometimes deliberately refuse to come here under the false pretext that it is insecure."*
>
> Male community member,
> 3rd arrondissement, Bangui

The feeling of (in)security among the populations varies, although most Central African respondents feel unsafe, even if they acknowledge that the security situation has improved compared to a year ago. The feeling of insecurity is largely associated with the presence of armed groups around them, and disarmament is often requested to improve security, in particular in cities and larger towns.

A deep feeling of insecurity prevailed among aid workers interviewed for this study. Indeed, according to the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), in 2014 alone 12 aid workers were killed and 32 injured in CAR. Even though many agree that the situation is better now than it was a year ago, most argue that the current phase of stability is extremely fragile and could easily unravel.

Aid workers largely agreed that neither they nor CAR citizens are safe and stressed that the current relatively stable situation remains fragile. These views were based on the continuing presence of armed groups, the omnipresence of weapons, the perceived limited capabilities of the international peacekeeping forces, and the on-going tensions – and even hatred – between the different communities. Although mass killings have decreased compared to a year ago, bouts of violence are easily triggered and occur daily. As for their own security, aid workers expressed more concern about daily criminality than being specifically targeted themselves as humanitarians. Insufficient knowledge about criminal groups, coupled with the perceived limited control their leaders have over their members, make it very difficult for aid workers to engage them in dialogue or deal with them when their paths cross.

Most respondents said they were able to distinguish between humanitarian aid agencies and international peacekeeping forces, notably by observing whether or not they had weapons and military equipment. **However, the two**

entities were generally not seen as being independent from one another. Indeed, humanitarians were often associated with the broad international effort to restore peace and development in CAR. Furthermore, while it was generally understood that aid agencies are indeed different from the international forces, this distinction did not seem to be of much importance to many. **Some respondents were barely able to set apart aid agencies from the international military forces, differentiating them only as** *"armed humanitarians"* on the one hand and *"non-armed humanitarians"* on the other. Although not encountered often, this view was heard in rural areas as well as in Bangui. These perceptions are hardly surprising given that such confusion also exists among key military personnel. For instance, in the words of a MINUSCA officer, *"we are humanitarians under a military mandate. We do humanitarian work but with uniforms, as we too are here to help and restore peace."* This underlined even more emphatically the need for aid agencies to better communicate on who they are and what they do.

A significant minority of respondents recommended that aid agencies should request military support to secure access whenever insecurity prevented them from reaching communities, a topic further developed later in this report.

The following incident nonetheless illustrates the risks aid agencies can face when they are associated too closely with international armed forces. During interviews in Carnot, a few Anti-Balakas aggressively accused aid agencies of being "MINUSCA spies". Their assertion was based on the fact that one of their commanders had been arrested by MINUSCA during a distribution conducted by the Central African Red-Cross in November 2014. The arrest led the militiamen to conclude that the aid agency had informed MINUSCA about his presence. This single event in turn provoked much anger and suspicion but also fear of having any further interaction with aid agencies. Although anecdotal, this incident is one illustration of how the on-going misunderstanding and suspicion of aid agencies by many militiamen developed.

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Although populations rely mainly on their religious faith and local leaders for their security, the role of aid agencies in this regard should not be underestimated. Indeed, when asked whether the presence of aid agencies contributed to (improving) their security, most respondents gave an affirmative answer. **For most, in particular women, their presence was reassuring and gave them a sense of not being forgotten.** Additionally, those who defined security in wider terms, encompassing material and food security as well as legal protection and social cohesion, also asserted that the presence of aid agencies contributed to a better sense of security.

However, ***the mere presence of aid agencies was not perceived by the populations as a guarantee of security per se, but rather as an indicator that the area is safe.*** Indeed, most believe that aid agencies operate only in areas that are safe enough for them to do so. The presence of aid workers in their neighbourhood or village was therefore perceived as an indication that the security situation has improved. Linked to this is the general perception that militiamen are less likely to commit acts of violence in the presence of aid workers. However, some took an opposite view asserting that aid agencies remain highly vulnerable to attacks and that since that they are not armed to defend themselves using force ***their presence is not a guarantee of security***. Nevertheless, the presence of aid agencies generally appeared to reassure populations even though the limits of their ability to provide actual security were fully recognised.

KEY TAKE AWAY...

HOW IS SECURITY PERCEIVED?

Respondents affirmed that the conflict in the country was polarised across religious lines. By contrast, little mention was made of issues related to ethnicity.

Given that the majority of the Muslim population had either been driven out or had fled from the areas visited as part of this study, the interviews and focal group discussions held there were by and large critical of Muslims, some more openly than others. While a number of Muslim respondents also levelled criticism at Christians their overriding message was a call for the restoration of peace and social cohesion.

A definite feeling of insecurity prevailed among aid workers interviewed for this study. Most local people met also said they felt unsafe even though they acknowledged that the security situation had improved over the past year.

The general feeling of insecurity was largely associated with the presence of armed groups and many called for disarmament as the most effective way to improve security, in particular in the cities and larger towns. The assertion by some that the presence of international peacekeeping forces contributed to security was countered by a majority view that unless the armed groups are disbanded, disarmed and reintegrated, CAR populations will remain victims of violence perpetrated by actors who are largely seen as illegitimate. This emphasised the imperative need for the international community to rapidly set in motion an effective DDR process and to continue its efforts to support authorities, especially at local level.

For most, in particular women, the presence of aid agencies was reassuring and gave them a sense of not being forgotten. However, their mere presence was not perceived as a guarantee of security per se, but rather as an indicator that the area is (relatively) safe. Notwithstanding, local populations generally considered first "God" and then their local leaders as their main providers of security.

Most respondents were able to distinguish between humanitarian aid agencies and the international peacekeeping forces primarily by observing whether or not they had weapons and military equipment. However, the two were generally not seen as being independent from one another. Indeed, humanitarians were often associated with the broad international effort to restore peace and development in the CAR.

6 HOW IS ACCESS TO AID PERCEIVED?

Although humanitarian access is widely accepted to mean populations' access to aid and aid agencies' access to populations, most aid workers interviewed defined it exclusively in terms of their ability to access the populations.

For instance, an NGO Head of Mission specified it solely as *"free access to the populations, without compromising ourselves."* This finding is worrisome but not uncommon among aid agencies and has resulted in an agency-centric approach to researching and addressing access challenges. Hence the motivation for this study to include a focus on access issues from a beneficiary perspective.

This primarily 'NGO-centric' view of access may be explained both by a bias on the part of aid workers and by the fact that **populations generally view their own role in accessing aid as passive**. Indeed, populations tend to describe themselves as being on the receiving end of the aid system. For instance, host communities in Dekoa shared that *"we receive aid because aid agencies come to our area and identify our difficulties. We wouldn't receive aid otherwise."* Moreover, communities appeared to rely largely on their neighbourhood/village chiefs to organise assistance although some cases of citizens proactively contacting or meeting with aid agencies to coordinate aid-related activities were observed. There is effectively some expectation that if the agencies do not come to the community, the chiefs should go and seek them out. Women from the village of Bedambou for example explained that *"the failure of a leader to make humanitarians aware of our plight prevents us from receiving aid."*

There was general agreement among all respondents, both humanitarians and affected populations, that **the major impediments to the implementation of aid projects are *insecurity* and the *logistical challenges* of physically reaching different locations,** notably due to poor roads.

Examples of *insecurity* given by the populations included road blocks, shootings, lootings, robberies, killings, and the presence of armed groups. According to OCHA, "access incidents increased by 47 per cent in March, with serious assaults and threats against humanitarian staff. International NGOs temporarily suspended activities in Kabo Ouham Province due to attacks against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities."[5]

The most frequently cited *logistical challenges* to access certain locations were dirt roads, broken bridges, bad weather, limited transportation means, transportation costs, village isolation, distances to distribution points, schools or health structures, limited communication means and road-traffic accidents.

As shown in the following table, **populations also face a number of additional challenges to access aid that stem from their own or others' behaviours and practices**.

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[5] OCHA Situation Report No. 52 (as of 14 April 2015).

ACCORDING TO THE POPULATIONS INTERVIEWED, ACCESS TO AID IS HINDERED…

… AS A RESULT OF THE POPULATIONS' OWN BEHAVIOUR/PRACTICE

ABSENCE: Populations sometimes do not attend beneficiary identification meetings because they chose to do other things or are unable to do so for family or other reasons; or, as women from the Kotombolo 1 and 2 neighbourhoods in Dekoa confided: *"Sometimes we refuse to meet with humanitarians."*

INFORMAL ORGANISATION: A few respondents explained that aid agencies struggle to provide aid if the local community is not organised and has no representative. Example: Men from the 7th arrondissement of Berberati said that *"when the population is not organised in an association or some sort of formal group, we don't benefit as much from aid."*

LIES: Beneficiaries sometimes admitted exaggerating or even lying outright about the needs in their communities so as to receive more aid. Example: Women in the neighbourhood of Dekoa-Poste in Dekoa acknowledged that *"we provide false information to the humanitarians in the hope of benefiting more from the distributions."*

… BECAUSE OF OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS' BEHAVIOUR/PRACTICE

DISORGANISATION: Confusion and anarchy are sometimes created by some members of the community in order to attempt to profit from the situation.

WITHHOLDING OF INFORMATION: Populations regularly reported that their leaders or representatives do not share information – either mistakenly or maliciously – about present or upcoming aid activities. Example: In Bangui, male respondents from the Quartier Ngaragba, in the 7th arrondissement stated that *"our chiefs or representatives don't provide all of the information to the beneficiary population."*

DIVERSION OF AID: Neighbourhood/village chefs were accused of diverting a portion of the aid provided to their locality.

AID THEFT: Populations reported that aid is sometimes stolen, either immediately following a distribution, or later at night from households by militiamen. Such cases were particularly heard in Bangui neighbourhoods where Anti-Balakas remain powerful, but also in other locations such as Dekoa.

… BECAUSE OF AID AGENCIES' BEHAVIOUR /PRACTICE

POOR TARGETING: Populations reported poor aid agency identification of the most vulnerable, attributable either to mistakes or to malicious intent. Example: Men from Gara-Amou village near Sibut denounced the fact that aid workers *"ask for something in return before identifying the beneficiaries."*

POOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION: Many respondents felt that while mistakes in the identification of the most vulnerable are understandable, it was unforgivable that aid agencies were not more committed to ensuring that aid reaches them; some, like women from the Site de l'Eglise des Frères de Castors in Bangui lamented that *"humanitarians sometimes tell us nasty things when we ask them questions to try to understand what is happening and they never try to explain what they do or what their problems are."*

POOR COMMUNICATION: Populations frequently deplored the limited or lack of communication by aid agencies, whether regarding their activities in general or specific information such as the date of a planned distribution. Example:

Women from Bokengue village near Sibut stated *"what prevents us from accessing aid is the absence of information between the humanitarians and the populations."*

FATIGUE: Certain respondents stated they were tired of *"unfulfilled promises or multiple meetings with aid workers without concrete results"*; some decided to no longer attend such meetings, unaware that as a result they may not be informed about or receive aid in future.

DISORGANISATION: Aid activities (whether distributions or services) were considered by some to be disorganised (even *"anarchical"* according to a man from Bokengue village) to a point where some affected populations do not get the assistance they are entitled to receive.

DIVERSION OF AID: as reported earlier, staff are sometimes accused of embezzling aid for their own profit, hence depriving populations from aid entitlements. Example: Male IDPs in the Dekoa enclave deplored *"the embezzlement of goods by some aid agency staff"*.

PARTIALITY: Those in charge of identifying the most vulnerable populations (whether aid workers or recognised community

representatives) were accused of sometimes *"knowingly leaving out some beneficiaries because of their [religious] background"*. Example: Some women from the Quartier Gbotoro in Bangui's 7th arrondissement said they had not received any aid *"because we are from the Goula ethnic group which was close to the fallen regime"*.

CLIENTELISM: A number of respondents asserted that some aid agency staff do not choose the right providers in order to favour their own. Example: A man from Bangui's Quartier Ngaragba, in the 7th arrondissement accused aid workers of *"renting some vehicles from their relatives even though they knew they were in poor condition"*.

INCOMPETENCE: Aid agencies were frequently perceived as "lacking professionalism". Example: A Muslim woman from Bangui's 3rd arrondissement maintained that *"men and women should be separated when organising distributions."* This comment was heard several times, including in rural areas and by some men.

COMPETITION: Competition between aid agencies was sometimes seen as hindering access to aid. Example: IDPs in Dekoa claimed that *"some NGOs say they have covered all our*

needs, which is incorrect, but by doing so they prevent other aid agencies from operating here."

RISK AVERSION: Aid workers' reluctance to take security risks was sometimes regarded as another impediment to the implementation of aid activities. Example: Men from Bangui's 3rd arrondissement complained that *"aid agency staff sometimes deliberately refuse to come here under the false pretext that it is insecure."*

LIMITED FUNDING: The study findings showed that the population generally understood that funding constraints sometimes limited the ability of aid agencies to implement activities. Example: Women from the Don Bosco site of Begoua (Bimbo2) in Bangui explained that *"the lack of funding prevents aid agencies from reaching us."*

DELAYS: The slowness in the delivery of aid was pinpointed as another reason why populations do not always benefit from it.

> " *The last food distribution was done on the 2nd of February 2015 by [NGO name] but it wasn't very good because the food had already perished."*
>
> Female Focus group, Bangui

As seen above, populations face a large number of challenges that hinder their access to aid. Strikingly, the grievances underlying these challenges are primarily directed against aid agencies. While it was not the objective of this study to assert the veracity or falseness of each grievance, the fact that they were widely reported to the research team that conducted it **underscores a serious perceived lack of accountability of aid agencies toward their beneficiaries.** This is all the more preoccupying given that the interviewees largely complained of not being listened to enough by aid agencies, further compounding their challenges to access aid.

In addition to the previously mentioned insecurity and logistical challenges, the study findings showed that **certain behaviours of the populations themselves sometimes prevent aid agencies from reaching them.** This finding is all the more surprising since it was only mentioned *by the populations,* not by (potentially disgruntled) aid workers, armed groups or local authorities. As examples, according to respondents among the population aid agencies have faced the following challenges in Bangui, Carnot and Sibut: *"physical and verbal violence by IDPs"*; *"inappropriate behaviour by the affected community such as false testimonies, hostility etc."*; and *"unpredictable hostile behaviour by the population".* In other words, the affected populations recognise that their own behaviour may sometimes be a hindrance to aid agencies' ability or willingness to support them.

Lastly, **"governmental opposition to aid work"** was also occasionally mentioned by the populations included in the study such as those in two villages located respectively in the sub-prefectures of Carnot and Sibut. This last point was also strongly emphasised by respondents in the M'Poko IDP camp in Bangui, who explained that *"no humanitarian action is carried out without the authorisation of the government; in other words, the government can be an obstacle to the delivery of aid, so as to push IDPs to leave the site."* The notion of "government" in these cases referred to the national authorities based in Bangui rather than to the local government.

On a side note, it was at first difficult, as part of this study, to obtain answers from the populations about the *external* challenges that prevent aid agencies from reaching them. **It seems that a good portion of the populations and armed groups met had no prior thoughts about the difficulties aid agencies may have in accessing them.** For instance, they never, or only rarely, appeared to consider that aid agencies may be hampered by the difficult operating environment in CAR. Although they showed some understanding of the funding constraints faced by aid agencies, the population groups encountered nonetheless perceived them as rich organisations, which is undoubtedly true by local standards. The omnipresence of aid agency *"big white cars"* was mentioned several times, as was the suggestion that to avoid poor roads, aid agencies should *"simply"* fly in. In other words, populations have difficulties to understand the material and financial limitations of aid agencies.

By contrast, aid workers attributed their difficulties in reaching beneficiary communities to external elements, namely insecurity and logistical challenges. Acts of violence perpetrated by armed groups with a political agenda were seen as a major concern, though aid personnel asserted that something could be done to minimise these risks by engaging directly with these groups. As will be developed later, this view was confirmed by the armed groups interviewed as part of this study. Criminal violence was regarded as an even greater concern, one that left numerous aid workers with a sense of powerlessness and fear. In the words of the country director of a large NGO: *"When I have vehicles on the road, I'm worried... I know something is going to happen... we have had so many security incidents, we are very vulnerable."* This deep sense of apprehension appears to affect the entire humanitarian aid sector in CAR.

In addition to the logistical challenges mentioned earlier, **aid workers also reported difficulties related to the fact that most of the material aid required has to be imported, mainly from Cameroon, Dubai and Europe**, which effectively adds two to six months in delivery time. Rampant corruption at customs and administrative levels, combined with the limited number of traders,

high prices, tenuous transportation means and difficult road conditions, further complicate the logistical challenges of material aid procurement.

To overcome access challenges two aid workers interviewed admitted that **some of their colleagues had paid cash bribes in order to reach certain areas**, both in Bangui and in the countryside. They explained that although this practice was not approved or institutionalised by their organisation it was not strictly opposed and was therefore effectively tolerated. While paying a bribe may help a vehicle gain provisional access to a given area, it is a short-sighted practice that creates expectations on the part of the bribe takers, resulting in a potentially negative impact on all other aid agencies operating in the same area.

Aid workers seemed well aware of the external challenges they face, but **tended not to give as much consideration to others that are internal to their respective organisations**. Those interviewed were not surprised when asked to talk about these internal challenges, but only a

handful mentioned them spontaneously. Notwithstanding, the study research team prompted frequent references to these internal challenges during encounters with aid agency staff.

An internal challenge common to all the international aid agencies contacted during this study relates to human resources. **Aid agencies struggle to recruit and retain competent and experienced national or international staff.** The CAR context is perceived as being a particularly difficult one in this respect, compounded by the fact that foreign staff must be French speakers to be truly operational, a condition which proved difficult to meet even prior to the most recent crisis. A striking example of the staff recruitment and retention challenges in the CAR content is the case of a large INGO which reported that six different persons had occupied its country director position in CAR over the past twelve months. This case is not unique however: according to a well-informed NGO head: *"Country directors' average length of stay is four months. That's already better as it used to be three!"* Several

organisation heads decried the fact that international staff are recruited with limited prior experience and stay too little time in CAR. Indeed, the difficult human resource situation compels some organisations to operate without key managerial staff, and to rely on junior staff or personnel hired on short-term contracts.

In light of this, some respondents considered it paradoxical that aid agency heads, being the most experienced staff, were based in Bangui when their presence would in their view be more justified elsewhere within the country where the humanitarian needs and challenges were most acute. Several aid workers also maintained that their colleagues could be divided into two categories: those considered *"operational"*, whose prime focus was to respond to existing needs, and others regarded as *"civil servants"* who were more preoccupied with their careers than anything else and who appeared to be particularly risk-averse.

Insufficient funding for assistance projects in what is widely regarded as a 'forgotten crisis' is another reason why aid agencies are sometimes unable to access populations in need. This is not new as there has been a consistent underfunding of humanitarian needs in the CAR. Yet, transporting staff and goods across the country takes time and resources, and this aspect is further compounded by a tragic mix of high levels of poverty and low population density in the country. As a result, segments of the population affected by the conflict effectively remain out of reach despite the pro-active efforts of aid agencies to have an operational presence in most of the country's sub-prefectures. CAR effectively remains one of the least accessible countries in the world and establishing a viable, large-scale humanitarian operation there requires significant funding.

Several heads of humanitarian organisations regretted that the inexperience and frequent turnover of the international staff meant that they had only **limited understanding of the context** and of the different actors involved. This in turn leads to poor operational decisions. In Berberati, for example, respondents from the Congolese IDP community explained that *"some*

organisations do not take into account that there are two different communities living on the site: the Christian Congolese one and a Muslim one. But they organise distributions of items without taking this into consideration, so it creates tensions between the two communities. The problem is not political but the result of a misunderstanding."

Fear was sometimes mentioned as another, albeit more personal limiting factor to accessing populations, including by some humanitarian organisation heads. Many international and national staff fear for their lives, physical and psychological integrity, and the security of their goods. One head of mission stated: *"Staff are increasingly scared. They don't want to go and work in certain areas because they have experienced security incidents. Fear among staff is hampering access, but because violence has become increasingly unpredictable and random I do understand that."* Effectively, respondents seemed more concerned about random acts of violence than targeted attacks, which says a great deal about the changing dynamics and thoughts around 'risk aversion'.

Indeed, the impact of insecurity and shifting political dynamics on staff safety and operations is acute. Staff are intimidated or threatened with violence, and field bases are broken into repeatedly. Humanitarian workers have paid a heavy price, with several killed over the past two years. As a result, aid agencies are frequently forced to make difficult trade-offs between reaching communities in need or keeping humanitarian staff safe. As mentioned earlier, this often compels them to temporarily halt operations and relocate staff, resulting in a disruption of activities and thus depriving communities of basic assistance they desperately need. Some aid agency staff reported that they were afraid to return to certain areas. Only very few aid agency country directors reported being aware of this situation and those that were said they were trying to create a working environment where staff would feel comfortable to raise this issue, and where adequate support would be provided. However, they conceded that the heavy workload and high levels of stress made this difficult to achieve on a daily basis.

The existence of security measures that many considered too drastic was seen as a further internal hindrance to access. Although this point was heard across the board among aid workers, UN staff were the most outspoken in this regard. *"When we have to go to the field, we have to have three vehicles accompanied by an armed escort. Security requirements imposed by UNDSS create a burden for us,"* was how one UN staff member described this situation. Such requirements were considered by various interlocutors to be intimidating to the populations, to contribute to the confusion over the distinction between humanitarian and military entities, and difficult to organise given the limited availability of vehicles and communication means. Although all aid workers acknowledged that armed escorts can be useful, most insisted that they should be used *only as a last resort*. Interestingly, most aid workers who complained about the most stringent aspects of security measures admitted that they were generally resigned to accepting them as 'part of the system'.

Additionally, respondents complained that the threshold of acceptable risk imposed by UNDSS (which has to be followed by UN agencies but of course not by NGOs) does not correspond to operational realities on the ground, but to internal considerations including an unwillingness to be perceived as taking unacceptable risks by insurance companies. As such, the risk analysis was said to be disconnected from field realities, preventing rather than enabling operational agencies to reach conflict-affected populations.

Lastly, a number of humanitarian organisation heads affirmed that **various constraints prevented them from playing a more operational role, including the pressure to ensure accountability, primarily towards headquarters and donors, and the heavy daily workload of dealing with innumerable meetings, written reports and controlling email traffic.** Although perhaps seemingly rather trivial compared to other operational constraints referred to in this report, such administrative tasks do take up a great deal of the time, energy and focus of aid agency heads. This in turn contributes to shaping the internal dynamics and operational realities of their respective organisations.

According to one aid worker there are no access issues in CAR. While acknowledging that aid agencies and populations alike face real difficulties in the provision/reception of aid, she asserted: *"There is no widespread, deliberate will on the part of the government, armed groups or any other stakeholders to actively prevent aid agencies from reaching the affected populations."* Nevertheless, this claim has to be qualified since, for example, aid agencies are still unable to help IDPs trapped in enclaves to return home or to seek refuge across borders, in particular in Cameroon and Chad. Those IDPs have made clear that they want to be able to freely choose their fate.

The study findings showed that **populations generally understand that aid agencies do not have the capacity to respond to all the existing humanitarian needs in CAR and that they have to make a selection in order to operate within the limits of the means at their disposal.** However, only a minority appeared to realise that their government actually bear the prime responsible for meeting these needs.

While **all members of the population interviewed claimed they had been affected by the conflict and felt they were thus entitled to receive aid**, they nonetheless considered that people in the following categories should be at the top of the beneficiary list: widows with children, the elderly, displaced people, orphans, pregnant women, people with disabilities, victims of physical attacks, and people whose houses had been destroyed.

❝ *If we didn't receive goods we believe we are entitled to, then we would talk to the boss, insult him, be very angry and hit him."*

Male Focus Group, Bangui

Sometimes respondents seemed to genuinely not understand why they had not yet received any aid since in their view aid projects were being slowly but surely rolled out across the entire country. Respondents sometimes acknowledged there were more vulnerable people than them in their communities, but often did so with a sense of frustration.

This is to be linked to another major challenge that is defining the parameters of work for humanitarian organisations, as they are not structured or funded to address the chronic structural deficits that underpin every humanitarian sector in CAR. For example, people are being treated for water-borne diseases while there is no sewage system. These gaps need attention by early-recovery and development actors and are to be linked to the populations' (and other stakeholders') frustrations over not being more involved in the design of aid projects.

❝ *I would mystically bewitch those who prevented me to get my share."*

Male Focus Group, Nandobo Village

When asked what they would do if they realised during an on-going aid distribution in their area that they were not included despite their belief that they met the beneficiary criteria, interviewees reacted in the following different ways:

- **Constructive response:** populations would contact their local chief or talk to the aid agency organising the distribution; alternatively, they would hope that the goods would be spontaneously re-distributed among the community members.

- **Resignation:** populations would resign to the situation and not react, often due to a *perception that it is difficult, if not pointless, to try to formally complain or contact the aid agency.*

- **Violent response:** some admitted they would try to obtain the items forcibly by: stealing them from the community members involved in the organisation of the distribution; or by insulting and threatening to harm their chief and/or the aid agency's staff; or by actually physically confronting and attacking aid workers if necessary. Those who admitted they would resort to these violent responses were a minority, but a significant one. In other words, *threats to aid agencies from disgruntled beneficiaries are very real.*

Although several aid agencies have dedicated complaint mechanisms, it seems that far fewer people use them compared to the number of those who claim to have a legitimate reason to complain. This is likely due to the seemingly low level of public confidence in the chances of the problem being resolved, to the negative public perception of aid agencies, and to the reported limited channels of communication that exist between aid agencies and the population.

Finally, one must not forget that **the limited presence of aid organisations prior to December 2013 narrowed the initial response capacity of humanitarians in the early phase of the crisis.** Many agencies had lost vital assets due to widespread looting and most non-essential staff had left CAR following the coup d'état in early 2013.

Once CAR came under the international spotlight there was an influx of humanitarian organisations. Indeed, the number of aid agencies operating in CAR jumped from only a handful operating primarily in the north of the country prior to the 2013 crisis to more than 100 NGOs plus the UN agencies. **This huge influx of humanitarian organisations created its own set of problems**, including price increases and a 'brain drain' from public administrations to aid agencies. Being new to the country, many aid agencies consumed substantial resources and took considerable time to establish operations. The surge of humanitarian organisations also caused confusion amongst local communities as activities were duplicated or poorly communicated. Aid organisations expanded projects to try to meet needs instead of earmarking resources for accountability, monitoring and feedback mechanisms.

KEY TAKE AWAY...

A major finding of this study relates to how 'aid agency-centric' aid workers and populations perceive access issues. Although humanitarian access is widely accepted as including two components – populations' access to aid and aid agencies' access to the populations - aid workers interviewed in this study considered "humanitarian access" primarily as their ability to reach populations. On their side, populations generally view their role in accessing aid as passive and feel that have little influence over the nature and type of aid provided, even if they usually expect their community chiefs to advocate on their behalf.

Aid workers and populations both agree that the main challenges to accessing aid, namely insecurity and logistical issues, are beyond aid agencies' control. Yet, while aid workers attribute their difficulties in reaching populations primarily to these external elements, those population groups interviewed insisted that aid agencies have internal deficiencies that also impede access to aid. Indeed, it was even difficult as part of this study to obtain answers from these population groups about the external challenges that prevent aid agencies from reaching them. Moreover, a good portion of the populations and armed groups appear to never, or only rarely, take into account the constraints aid agencies face due to the difficult operating environment in CAR. As for aid agencies' internal deficiencies, populations highlighted two major issues: firstly, they accuse aid agencies of being disorganised, communicating poorly with beneficiaries, responsible for shortcomings such as slow aid delivery, flawed beneficiary selection, and being too competitive. Secondly, and perhaps more worryingly, aid workers are often perceived as being partial and dishonest, with stories of embezzled aid reported frequently. This gap in perceptions – with aid workers focusing on the external challenges and the populations more on structural, internal factors – underscores yet again the need for aid agencies to communicate better on how humanitarian operations work and on their capabilities and the constraints they face. This is particularly important given that even though Central Africans generally understand that aid agencies do not have the capacity to respond to all the existing needs in CAR they nonetheless all claim to be affected by the conflict, and as such feel entitled to receive humanitarian aid.

Unfortunately, populations across the board repeatedly deplored that their voices are not being heard by aid workers. There is a clear perception that it is difficult, if not pointless, to try to formally complain or contact an aid agency when problems arise. While some people are resigned to their situation, a significant minority admits that they would resort to violence to obtain aid if necessary. For instance, they say they would use force to try and obtain goods not distributed to them by either stealing them from community members involved in the distribution, insulting and threatening to harm their chief and/or the aid agency's staff, or by physically confronting and attacking aid workers. This clearly shows that threats to aid agency personnel from disgruntled beneficiaries are very real though such cases have fortunately not been reported frequently.

Access to aid is also influenced by the struggle aid agencies have to recruit and retain competent and experienced national and international staff. The inexperience and frequent turnover of international staff means that they often have only limited understanding of the context and of the different actors involved. This in turn can sometimes leads to poor operational decisions.

Another issue affecting access to aid sometimes mentioned during this study, including by aid agency heads, is aid workers' fear of becoming victims of violence, but very few aid agency country directors interviewed reported being aware of this situation. Those who said they were trying to create a working environment where staff would feel comfortable to raise this issue, and where adequate support would be provided. However, they acknowledged that the heavy workload and high levels of stress made this difficult to achieve on a daily basis.

Many respondents considered another hindrance to access was the existence of overly severe security measures. Some UN staff complained that the threshold of acceptable risk imposed by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) is not linked to operational realities on the ground, but to internal considerations including an unwillingness to be perceived as taking unacceptable risks by insurance companies. While it was beyond the scope of this study to ascertain the veracity of such claims, this finding nonetheless calls for an internal enquiry. Indeed, it is worth recalling that humanitarian security risk management is not only about protecting life and assets per se, but also involves ensuring this protection while delivering aid. In other words, security systems should above all aim at enabling aid workers to reach their humanitarian objectives.

Other factors hindering aid delivery include widespread corruption at customs and administrative levels and in the form of bribes, price variability, blackmail and influence peddling. This corruption undermines all humanitarian and development efforts and prevents long-term economic growth through investments, taxation, public expenditure and human development. It also risks undermining CAR's regulatory framework and the efficiency of public institutions, but also of civil society, since the search for immediate individual profit significantly influences public decision making.

Alleged "governmental opposition to aid work" was also occasionally mentioned by the populations included in the study, for instance in villages located near Carnot and Sibut but also in Bangui. The notion of "government" was in these cases used by the populations to describe the national authorities based in Bangui, in contrast to the local government. An overall strategy for return and durable solutions for displaced and returnees should be developed as soon as possible in consultation with all concerned actors (donors, aid agencies, government).

Insufficient funding for the implementation of aid projects in what is widely regarded as a 'forgotten crisis' is another factor that reduces aid agency access to conflict-affected populations. This is not new as there has been a consistent underfunding of humanitarian needs in CAR. Yet, transporting staff and goods across the country takes time and resources, and this is further compounded by a tragic mix of high levels of poverty and low population density in the country. As a result, some conflict-affected communities remain beyond the reach of aid agencies despite their determined efforts to have an operational presence in most of the country's sub-prefectures. CAR does indeed remain one of the least accessible countries in the world, and establishing a viable, large-scale humanitarian operation there requires serious financing.

7 WHAT ROLE DO THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS PLAY TO IMPROVE ACCESS?

Populations showed a clear willingness to cooperate with aid agencies in order to improve access. At the same time they strongly urged aid agencies to make a bigger effort to understand their difficulties in reaching aid, and to take them into account when planning projects.

As stated earlier, the populations consulted **appealed repeatedly to aid workers to listen to them more.** For many, this present study was the first opportunity they had been given to properly share their views. Though they had participated in surveys conducted by aid agencies in the past, they affirmed that the rigid formulation of the questions and the hurried manner in which they were presented did not allow them to fully express their views.

Another finding was that **populations interviewed showed a willingness to facilitate aid agency access to their respective areas**, notably through information sharing and improvements in the social organisation and representation of their communities. Aid workers confirmed being able to reach out to these communities whenever necessary and the positive impact this had in enabling the gathering of security-related information, especially prior to visiting the communities in question.

Additionally, despite their criticism of the perceived shortcomings of humanitarian operations, **respondents stated their almost unanimous willingness to help ensure aid workers' security**, regardless of whether or not aid agencies had raised this issue with them, as illustrated by the following comment reflecting the views of IDPs located in the Bangui's 3rd district: *"Aid workers are here to relieve our suffering so in turn we have to protect them."*

When asked how they would ensure this protection, respondents explained that they would: *"hide"* aid workers; *"we will inform them beforehand of the dangers"*; *"the community leaders will intervene to save them"*; *"we will change or hide any visible sign of the NGO"*; *"our youth will protect them"*; *"we will stand against any acts of violence perpetrated against them"*; *"we will call for the international military forces to intervene", "we will interpose ourselves", "[the attackers] would have to kill us before they harm aid workers!"*, etc. As a matter of fact, during the course of this study, an international NGO was violently attacked by armed Anti-Balaka in Begoua (north of Bangui), so the populations hid the NGO's staff and provided them with civilian clothes so they could not be identified as aid workers. This example of communities helping to ensure aid workers' security is not anecdotal as similar cases were identified during this study. However, while the ability of communities to protect aid workers is real, it is also limited and acknowledged as such by them.

Local authorities such as prefects or mayors, as well as traditional leaders such as neighbourhood/village chiefs, chefs de groupes, or religious leaders consider it unthinkable for aid agencies to operate in 'their' geographic areas of control without being included in the process. At a minimum they want to be informed about aid agency activities, and more often than not they believe they can be of great help in accessing communities as they know and represent them. **A few leaders, both institutional and traditional, complained they were all too frequently ignored by aid agencies**, and claimed that their staff usually meet them only once, at the beginning of a given project, and that the interaction usually stops there.

Local populations also emphasised the importance of including their leaders in the design and implementation of aid projects, in particular during the identification of the most vulnerable people. However, they also maintained that **the selection of beneficiaries would be more accurate if aid agencies collaborated more with institutional/traditional leaders, *as well as with elected/chosen ad hoc representatives of the populations*.** Indeed, and despite the apparent respect shown to their leaders, a significant minority also openly accused them of clientelism and the diversion of aid. Those leaders or community representatives interviewed acknowledged that they found themselves in a difficult position, some claiming they were 'caught between a rock and a hard place' as they were treated with suspicion by both their respective communities and aid agencies.

Most leaders said they felt responsible, as part of their role, to facilitate access for both their communities and aid agencies. Some stated that one aspect of this responsibility is to advocate in favour of their communities so that aid agencies provide better services. Another is to support aid agencies in the identification of the most vulnerable. In other words and as expressed by a priest in Bangui: *"Our role is to act as intermediaries, facilitators and controllers."*

Institutional/traditional leaders also affirmed their commitment to ensuring aid workers' security, notably by keeping them informed, and protecting them hand-in-hand with the formal providers of security, be they the gendarmerie, the police, the international forces or even, at times, the armed groups. This protection focused more on ensuring the physical security of aid workers rather than 'vouching' for the safety of aid agencies. Like the population groups interviewed, leaders were vocally critical of aid work but adamant in asserting that they would physically protect aid workers if they were in danger.

A grievance frequently heard from militiamen (both the Anti-Balakas and the ex-Seleka) is that aid agencies do not interact enough with them. They see it as an affront and at the same time an indicator that, somehow, aid agencies are taking a stance *against* them despite claiming to be neutral and impartial. Armed groups feel that aid agencies avoid them, not out of fear, but because they are not willing to see them as vulnerable and in need of support like the conflict-affected populations.

Coupled with the fact that militiamen complain that they are not listened to by aid agencies, this contributes to a gradual build-up misunderstanding and frustrations towards aid agencies. This in turn can lead to a violent release of these frustrations and potentially sow the seeds of future security incidents. On an anecdotal note, many of the militiamen interviewed as part of this study said that it was the first time that their views had actually been listened outside their own groups. Even though some of these interactions led to tense exchanges at times, their depth and scope appear to have helped to clarify a number of misunderstandings regarding aid agencies and as such to diffuse some of the built-up tension.

“ *We've heard of the international forces through the radio. We don't really know who they are because they never come here, but we heard that they've created some problems in certain areas where they intervene."*

Male Focus Group, Ndguiri village

In theory, OCHA should play a key role in providing operational coordination in crisis situations. This includes developing common strategies to address issues such as negotiating access. However, **OCHA in CAR was severely criticised by key stakeholders interviewed as part of this study.** In particular there appears to be a lingering confusion between OCHA's coordination role and that of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Additionally, aid workers deplored that OCHA is understaffed and at times disorganised. OCHA representatives are aware of these shortcomings and appear keen to address them. Examples of actions that have been taken is the decision to focus on three priorities – improving access; further disassociating OCHA's core activities from those of the HC; and boosting staff capacities so that they can better fulfil the role expected of them.

International peacekeeping forces present in CAR have been criticised by most stakeholders and respondents but they are also widely recognised as having a key role in the provision of security. When asked what role they can play to improve populations' access to aid and aid agency access to populations, **all military respondents said they were both keen and obliged to ensure the security of both the populations and aid agencies prior to, during and after the staging of aid operations.** Officers from the Sangaris for instance recalled: *"It's part of our mandate to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid. We do this through creating the security conditions in the field to ensure that aid can reach those in need."* Interestingly, an officer with EUFOR stated: *"We provided support any way we could, sometimes just by being there, so as to ensure aid agencies have their humanitarian space."*

According to the military respondents, this role is being achieved primarily through the sharing of security-related information with local authorities and aid agencies on a regular basis and on request; the 'securitisation' of roads or geographic areas; the provision of armed escorts; and, as a last resort, intervention and the evacuation of personnel.

The study found that military respondents have little knowledge about aid agency risk management strategies and practices. They usually are unaware of aid agency efforts to establish a comprehensive security management framework and thus are sometimes critical of - or preoccupied with - the risks taken by aid workers. This may explain why so many of them see that the provision of armed escorts represent the best manner to ensure aid agencies' security.

❝ *Armed escorts don't necessarily expose aid agencies because they are primarily at risk of criminal attacks. Once in their zone of operation, we can ensure their security over a larger perimeter, so that we are not seen with them."*

Sangaris officer

KEY TAKE AWAY...

WHAT ROLE DO KEY STAKEHOLDERS PLAY TO IMPROVE ACCESS?

Populations have shown a clear willingness to cooperate with aid agencies in order to improve access, notably through the sharing of information and the improvement of the social organisation and representation of their respective communities. Similarly, respondents almost unanimously claimed that, if need be, they are ready to ensure aid workers' security. This protection would consist of informing them of any potential danger, hiding them, interposing themselves or calling for the international military forces to intervene.

Local authorities also communicated their readiness to help populations and aid agencies alike to access aid. They generally believe they can be of great help in facilitating their access to communities as they know and represent them. One aspect of their responsibility is, according to them, to advocate in favour of the communities so that aid agencies provide better services. But a few leaders, whether institutional or traditional, complained to be all too frequently ignored by aid agencies. They considered it unthinkable that aid agencies could operate in 'their' geographic areas of control without being included in the process and also want at a minimum to be informed about aid agencies' (planned) activities. Populations agree that aid agencies should work more closely with their representatives. They maintain for instance that beneficiary selection would be more accurate if aid agencies collaborated more with both institutional and traditional leaders, but insist that the selection process should also involve elected/chosen ad hoc representatives of the populations as trust towards their leaders is relative. It is understandably difficult for aid agencies to find the right degree of involvement with the local authorities as corruption and clientelism are rife. Yet again, spending more time communicating directly with the local populations would perhaps contribute to reducing these uncertainties.

A grievance frequently heard from militiamen (Anti-Balakas or ex-Seleka) is that aid agencies do not interact enough with them. Coupled with the fact that militiamen complain they are not listened to by aid agencies, this contributes to a gradual build-up of misunderstandings and frustrations towards aid agencies. This in turn can lead to a violent release of these frustrations and as such potentially sow the seeds of future security incidents. Although having exchanges with armed groups bring additional risks to aid agencies and require a significant level of effort and focus, it appears from this study that having no (or only limited) contacts with them can bring its own set of challenges. It is recommended that regular channels of communication (direct or indirect) be opened/maintained between aid staff managers and armed groups locally. Also, aid agencies consider that militiamen (and their families) who have demonstrated a commitment to disarmament and social cohesion should be added to their beneficiary lists. In addition, aid agencies should advocate for a DDR process that includes effective reinsertion mechanisms.

OCHA could play a role in this but was severely criticised by key stakeholders interviewed as part of this study. In particular there appears to be a lingering confusion between OCHA's coordination role and that of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Additionally, aid workers deplore that OCHA is understaffed and at times disorganized. OCHA representatives are aware of these shortcomings and appear keen to address them. Given its mission to "mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors", it is hoped that their current efforts to improve access in CAR will rapidly bring results.

International forces present in CAR have been criticised by most stakeholders and respondents but they are also widely recognised as having a key role in the provision of security. When asked how they perceive their role in improving populations' and aid agencies' access to aid, all military respondents said they were both keen and obliged to ensure the security of both populations and aid agencies prior to, during and after aid operations had taken place. Military respondents appeared to have little knowledge about humanitarian risk management strategies and practices. They usually seemed unaware of aid agency efforts to put in place a comprehensive security management framework, which may explain why so many of them see armed escorts as the best manner to ensure aid agency security. Perhaps time should be devoted to educating military forces about humanitarian security risk management as a complement to existing efforts to improve civil-military coordination.

8 WHAT DOES 'ACCEPTANCE' MEAN AND WHAT IS ITS ROLE IN RELATION TO ACCESS?

Acceptance[6] is a cornerstone concept of humanitarian aid. According to the seminal manual by Van Brabant, "an acceptance strategy tries to reduce or remove threats by increasing the acceptance (the political and social 'consent') for your presence and your work in a particular context (politicians and the military call this 'winning hearts and minds').[7] "Acceptance however is not limited to sharing cups of tea: It includes developing broad-based relationships through entering in formal agreements, socialising and paying attention to the need for different interactional and negotiating styles; it also provides guidance on meetings and how to convey messages directly, as well as implicit methods of communication such as appearance and behaviour; it tackles the politics of staff hierarchies; and states how the design and implementation of the programmes can enhance or lead to a loss of acceptance."[8]

All aid workers interviewed as part of this study emphasised the importance of being accepted, but only a few recalled that a good acceptance strategy is not aimed solely at the populations but, equally importantly, at 'those who control the territory'. In the words of a UN staffer: *"You are accepted when the community knows who you are, understands why you are here, and agrees with it. It includes the populations as much as the local authorities and the armed groups."*

❝ *Aid agencies should recruit locally much more. This would help push youth away from weapons and violence."*

Local authority, Sibut

Aid workers agree that acceptance is not a given, but is something that has to be built and maintained and adapted in a fluid context. According to an Emergency officer, *"acceptance is talking with people, listening to them, understanding what the needs are, [and] implementing actions that really respond to their needs. It's the inclusion of the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of the projects."* An NGO head of mission added: *"It's about delivering relevant services to the population, in a professional and impartial manner."* A humanitarian officer recommended aid agencies to *"keep the promises made and don't make promises that cannot be kept. Be honest, transparent and fair. Also, deliver and deliver high quality programmes."*

Aid workers know all of this already. **Yet, many acknowledged there are problems in putting these precepts into practice.** As mentioned earlier in the report, the difficulties faced include *inter alia*: the quality of the human resources, lack of time, limited understanding of the context, limited funding, and time constraints. Aid workers also identified other shortcomings that include *"not speaking enough with the*

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6   Aid workers in CAR often translate "acceptance" incorrectly. It is "acceptation" in French.

7   Van Brabant, K. (2010). *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments,* London: Humanitarian Practice Network Good Practice Review 8 (Revised edition).

8   Renouf, J.S. (2011). *Understanding How the Identity of International Aid Agencies and Their Approaches to Security Are Mutually Shaped,* London School of Economics and Political Science, PhD thesis.

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populations", "adopting an aggressive posture when it's not needed, such as when NGO vehicles drive with flags and high visibility in Bangui", or *"not getting out enough from the office, not living within the populations",* or *"being drunk and having inappropriate behaviours".*

Despite the many criticisms of aid agencies expressed by the populations they overwhelmingly affirmed that they accept the presence aid agencies in their areas. For example, IDPs in Bangui said: *"Yes, aid agencies are accepted here because they are at the service of the populations. They are accepted because they bring help."* In Dekoa, one woman explained: *"Aid agencies are accepted because they are the ones that helped us after the crisis."* This however needs to be qualified given the amount of criticism of aid agencies heard throughout the study. Of course, the quality of the relationship built by aid agencies is important too, but we can infer from this study that acceptance by the populations is primarily conditional on the quality and relevance of the aid provided.

Indeed, acceptance is frequently qualified by the populations. When asked whether aid agencies are accepted in their area, the answers often started with *"Yes, but…"* regardless of the social status, gender, ethnic or religious composition of the focus groups. In Bangui for instance, female IDPs stated: *"We accept them, but aid has to been effective. Aid has to be provided transparently and followed-up."* In Dekoa, women confided that *"aid workers are welcome here, but the quality of their services is sometimes poor."* Still in Dekoa, male IDPs said: *"To be accepted, humanitarian organisations should come along with us, work closely with us, include us in the process… in other words be accountable to us."*

In a few cases populations even admitted their rejection of aid agencies. The following comment was registered for example in the PK5 area of Bangui's 3rd district: *"Yes aid agencies are accepted, but we've forbidden [name of the NGO] to work here",* reportedly because of the poor quality of the aid provided that eventually led to frustrations and tensions within the community. Undeniably, anger and impatience towards aid agencies also exist, as expressed for instance by a

community leader in Bangui: *"Aid workers, whether with international NGOs or the UN, are only profiteers who live off the backs of IDPs. They are inefficient."*

The views of armed groups and local authorities on acceptance were similar to those of the populations in the areas covered by the study. They accept the presence of aid agencies 'on the territory they control', but wish to see more and better activities. According to Anti-Balakas interviewed in Carnot, *"yes aid agencies are accepted here but they really should stop bringing people from Bangui and start recruiting locally."* Similarly, a lawyer associated with the Ministry of Justice explained: *"Aid agencies are accepted, but only partially. In certain areas, they are, in others, they aren't. This is why they are being killed by members of the armed groups."*

Many aid agencies claim acceptance as a foundation of their operational strategy in CAR. However, despite acknowledging that acceptance has to be built and maintained, **they do not necessarily invest the time and resources required to do so and rely too much on a passive approach**, assuming that good programming will win the consent of the local population and acceptance will automatically follow. In point of fact they have minimal information about how they are perceived. A more active approach, whereby aid agencies work to gain and sustain the consent of all stakeholders is necessary.

> " *Thanks to their presence, aid agencies discourage the Anti-Balakas from coming because the AB know that aid agencies' movements are being monitored afar and have powerful communication means."*

Neighbourhood leader, Carnot
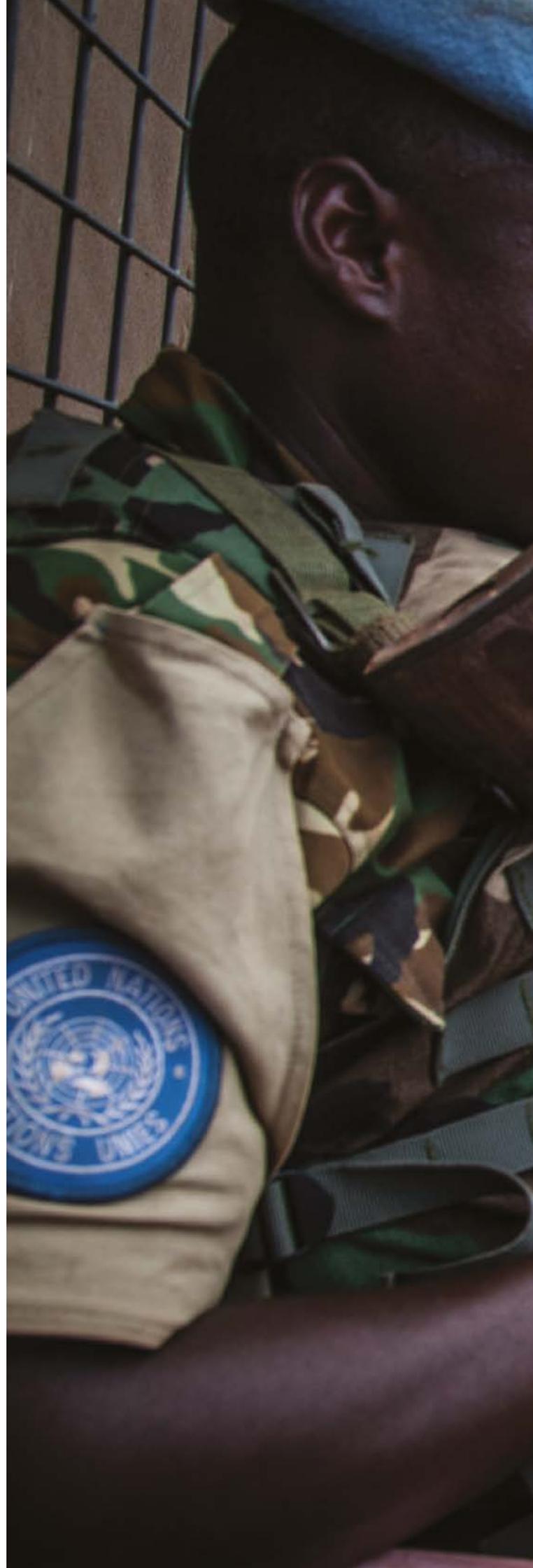
KEY TAKE AWAY...

WHAT DOES 'ACCEPTANCE' MEAN AND WHAT IS ITS ROLE IN RELATION TO ACCESS?

All aid worker respondents emphasised the importance of being accepted, but only a few recalled that a good acceptance strategy is not aimed solely at the populations but, equally importantly, at 'those who control the territory'. Also, aid workers agree that acceptance is not a given, but is something that has to be built and maintained and adapted to developments in this fluid context. Aid workers know all of this already. Yet, many acknowledge there are problems in putting these precepts into practice. As already mentioned, difficulties faced include: the quality of the human resources, time constraints, limited understanding of the context, and limited funding.

Despite the many criticisms of aid agencies expressed by the populations the latter overwhelmingly accept their presence in their areas. This however needs to be qualified given the amount of criticism of aid agencies heard throughout the study. Indeed, we can infer from this study that acceptance by the populations is primarily conditional on the quality and relevance of the aid provided, regardless of the social status, gender, ethnic or religious composition of the focus groups. A few members of the population groups interviewed even admitted their rejection of aid agencies.

The views of armed groups and local authorities on acceptance were similar to those of the general public: they accept the presence of aid agencies 'on the territory they control', but wish to see more and better activities.

A finding of this study that is both reassuring and worrying is that aid workers understand that they are not putting enough effort into developing and nurturing acceptance among the populations and local stakeholders. They also recognise shortcomings in the behaviour of some aid workers. Many aid agencies claim acceptance as a foundation of their operational strategy in CAR. However, they do not necessarily invest the time and resources required to build and maintain it and rely too much on a passive approach, assuming that good programming will win the consent of the local population and acceptance will automatically follow. Yet they have minimal information about how they are perceived. A more active approach, whereby aid agencies work to gain and sustain the consent of all stakeholders is necessary.

9 HOW ARE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES INTERPRETED, AND WHAT IS THEIR PERCEIVED ROLE TO IMPROVE ACCESS?

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief has so far been signed by 546 aid agencies. Most of the international humanitarian NGOs met as part of this study are signatories to this code. Its first four articles reaffirm what are known as the core humanitarian principles, namely the humanitarian imperative, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Three of these principles are reiterated in UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182, whereby "humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the basic humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality." Although the scope, applicability and actual application of the humanitarian principles are greatly disputed by the literature and aid agencies alike, they are generally accepted as framing 'humanitarian action' – i.e. assistance provided on the basis of these principles.

Aid workers in CAR generally agree that the respect and actual implementation of these humanitarian principles are important to ensure access to populations in the country. An NGO country director asserted: *"They are the cornerstone of access. Without them we could not work."* Similarly, aid workers with a local NGO said: *"Being impartial and neutral plays in our favour: if populations understand that we are here for everyone, they accept us."* On the same topic an NGO coordinator stated: *"The principles provide us with credibility vis-a-vis the local authorities and armed groups."*

Nonetheless, some respondents qualified the correlation between respect of humanitarian principles and improved access. The head of a well-known 'principled' humanitarian organisation said in this regard: *"Is there really a correlation between the respect of the principles and an improvement of access and acceptance? I think it is truer when it comes to those who carry weapons*

than for the population, as the former understand the importance and meaning of these principles. But populations? Not really. Their demands are more direct, brutal. The fact that they understand the principles does not guarantee better acceptance and does not necessarily lead to improved access. What counts to them is that we deliver aid." Finally, a humanitarian project officer stated: *"We need to add to the principles the concepts of 'dignity' and 'respect of the populations'; also gender-related themes and appropriation by the populations."*

As seen earlier, populations on their side also frequently mentioned the importance of ensuring that aid be provided on the sole basis of needs coupled with impartiality. Beneficiaries from all backgrounds, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion, denounced aid agencies perceived as showing favouritism towards particular people or groups. **People's views on aid work generally confirmed the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity,**

impartiality and neutrality. However, it remained unclear to what extent populations attach importance to whether or not aid agencies operating in CAR act independently and can be seen to be doing so. Indeed, populations frequently perceived aid work as part of a wider political, humanitarian and military effort in CAR, and by and large this did not appear to be viewed as a problem. This said, the study found that all stakeholders, whether international forces, the French military or national and local governments, were subject to criticism by the populations in one way or another. In light of this, the study reasserts the importance of ensuring independent humanitarian action in CAR.

" *Yes, we accept humanitarians because they are neutral – we can even see on their vehicles stickers that prohibit the carrying of weapons."*

Male Focus Group, Carnot

A striking finding of this study is that **humanitarian principles are not as well known, internalised and operationalised as claimed by many.** The answer of an international humanitarian project officer demonstrates this clearly: *"Humanitarian principles….mmm...like impartiality and equality? Right? The third one, I don't remember."* Similarly, according to two NGO national staff members, the humanitarian principles are *"antiracism, anti-tribalism, professionalism, dynamism and non-discrimination."* Worryingly, there was no correlation between those aid workers 'confused' about these principles and their youthfulness or inexperience for the study showed that even more experienced aid workers did not understand the principles well.

Linked to this is that **not every aid worker understands the implications of these principles**. As explained by the head of an organisation known for its strict emphasis on the respect of humanitarian principles: *"Before talking about these principles, we first need to apply them ourselves. Even we struggle to ensure we do so. We don't disseminate them enough as we tend to think they are known already. We can see it even internally; our national staff sometimes forget to respect them because they are under heavy pressure from their community."* Notwithstanding, these principles

are not merely hollow pronouncements but solid pointers that should frame humanitarian operations and guide them when facing ethical dilemmas.

The humanitarian principles have certainly not been circulated widely enough. Only a small minority of militiamen, local security forces or international military officers have heard of them or understand them. For instance, the commanding officer of the gendarmerie of a large city confided that *"yes, two NGOs have told me about the humanitarian principles, but I don't remember them."*

When explained what they are, **members of the armed groups usually agreed that aid agencies mostly act in a neutral and impartial manner.** An Anti-Balaka 'comzone' (zone commander) stated for example: *"Aid workers who come here come to help the populations, without distinctions. They don't show a preference for the Anti-Balaka or the Seleka."* Another Anti-Balaka 'comzone' said: *"We never heard of these principles, but NGOs are safe with us. We attacked [name of the aid agency] only because they had not distributed food to our children."* In Dekoa, several Anti-Balakas understood the rationale behind the principles but added that *"this is not a reason for NGOs to ask us to accept that [Muslims] should come back."* In other words, they were keen to interact with aid agencies, but only to hear what they wanted to hear. In Bangui, ex-Seleka 'officers' asked: *"Only two NGOs came to help us – is it because we are Selekas?"*

In all cases, militiamen from both the Anti-Balakas and the ex-Seleka built a narrative whereby they saw their role in the conflict as bound by duty. Even though they recognised that some excesses were committed, they demanded more or less explicitly that aid agencies acknowledge their *"patriotic"* role, thereby implicitly asking them to take sides, which would constitute a violation of humanitarian principles.

An unexpected finding of this study is that *a portion of the populations located in Bangui, Carnot and Dekoa, as well as in villages around these locations, did not see the use of armed escorts by aid agencies as an issue.* This is particularly true

for those who defined 'security' narrowly and for those who also stated that they feel safer with the presence of international forces. These populations do not go along with the belief held by certain others that the use of armed escorts can contribute to a further confusion regarding the distinction between aid agencies and military forces. Furthermore, they see little risk for aid agencies as a result of their use of armed escorts apart from potentially being victims of 'collateral damage' when international forces come under fire. **For them, it is incomprehensible that aid agencies would rather delay or cancel a planned activity due to insecurity than use an armed escort.**

Interestingly, **most of the militiamen interviewed also said they did not regard the use of armed escorts provided by the international military forces as an issue**, a stance which would appear to be counter-intuitive and for which no explanation was given. A purely speculative explanation could be that the militiamen either consider transient armed escorts a better option than a constant military presence in their areas, or that their stated position on this issue simply corresponds to what they thought the researchers wanted to hear. Whatever the case, this point certainly deserves further research.

Sangaris and EUFOR officers seem to have a better (albeit still limited) understanding of the humanitarian principles than their MINUSCA counterparts. While the latter struggled at times to talk about the principles, the former were more comfortable with the topic. According to an EUFOR officer, *"impartiality is very important, and so is transparency. So activities and projects being implemented on both sides of the frontline should be thoroughly explained to leaders on both sides. Rumours spread fast, so it's important to keep them regularly informed."*

All members of the international armed forces interviewed said they were not convinced that aid agencies across the board respect these principles. A Sangaris officer said: *"Neutrality? It depends on the NGO. Some, like [names of four NGOs] are, but the remainder, not really."* A MINUSCA officer claimed: *"Aid agencies say that they are impartial, but some aid workers prefer to keep the goods to give them to their relatives instead."*

While military officers stated they understood the rationale behind the humanitarian principles they expressed doubt that they are relevant to access improvement. To back this up a MINUSCA officer declared: *"Humanitarians try to be impartial and neutral, but they are still being attacked by Anti-Balakas."* Similarly, a Sangaris officer stated: *"Aid agencies' neutrality can protect them, but not always. You can negotiate access with the Selekas, but not with the Anti-Balakas, whose chain of command is much looser."*

In general, it appears that knowledge of the humanitarian principles and their operationalisation in CAR is limited. More effort should be made both by aid workers and stakeholders still present in the country to integrate these principles in their operations. Additionally, given the doubts surrounding the positive correlation between respect of these principles and improved access, further in-depth and evidence-based research should be conducted in CAR on this topic.

" *To reduce incidents, aid workers had to be escorted by MINUSCA convoys. This strategy has had a positive impact on us as it has allowed us to access humanitarian aid."*

Local authority, Guiffa village

KEY TAKE AWAY...

Aid workers in CAR generally agree that respect and actual implementation of the humanitarian principles are important to ensure access to populations in need. Populations' views on aid work confirm the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. However, it remains unclear to what extent populations attach importance to whether or not aid agencies operating in CAR act independently and can be seen to be doing so. Indeed, populations frequently view aid work as part of a wider political, humanitarian and military effort in support of CAR but generally do not view this as a problem. This said, the study found that all stakeholders, whether they are international forces, the French military, or national and local governments, have been criticised by the general public in one way or another. In light of this, the study reasserts the importance of independent humanitarian action in CAR.

A striking finding of this study showed that humanitarian principles are not as well known, internalised and operationalised as claimed by many. Linked to this is that not every aid worker understands the implications of these principles. Indeed, these principles are not hollow banalities and should frame humanitarian agency operations and guide them when facing ethical dilemmas.

The lack of dissemination of the humanitarian principles is also a concern. Only a small minority of militiamen, local security forces or international military officers have heard of them or understand them. Sangaris and EUFOR officers seem to have a better (albeit still limited) understanding of the humanitarian principles than their MINUSCA counterparts. While the latter struggled at times to talk about them, the former were more comfortable with the topic. In all cases, members of the international armed forces held the view that aid agencies across the board do not respect these principles. Also, while military officers understood the rationale behind the humanitarian principles they doubted their relevance to improve access, and cited incidents where the declared impartiality and neutrality of aid agencies had not prevented them from being attacked by militiamen.

When the principles of neutrality and impartiality were explained to them members of armed groups generally agreed that aid agencies mostly comply with these essential elements of humanitarian action. But both Anti-Balaka and ex-Seleka militiamen built a narrative whereby they saw their respective roles in the conflict as bound by duty. Even though they recognised that some excesses had been committed they demanded more or less explicitly that aid agencies acknowledge their "patriotic" role, thereby implicitly asking them to take sides, which would effectively constitute a violation of humanitarian principles. Interestingly, most of the militiamen interviewed said that they did not regard the use of armed escorts provided by the international military forces as an issue, a stance which would appear to be counter-intuitive and for which no explanation was given. A purely hypothetical explanation could be that the militiamen either consider transient armed escorts a better option than a constant military presence in their areas, or that their stated position on this issue simply corresponds to what they thought the researchers wanted to hear. Whatever the case, this point certainly deserves further research.

An unexpected finding of this study is that a portion of the populations did not see the use of armed escorts by aid agencies as an issue. It was incomprehensible to them that aid agencies would rather delay or cancel a planned activity due to the insecurity than use an armed escort. Interestingly, most militiamen interviewed in this study said they did not regard the use of armed escorts provided by the international military forces as an issue, a stance which would appear to be counter-intuitive and for which no explanation was given. A purely speculative explanation could be that the militiamen either consider transient armed escorts - to be a better option than a constant military presence in their areas, or that their stated position on this issue deliberately corresponded to what they thought the researchers wanted to hear. Whatever the case, this point certainly deserves further research.

Altogether, it appears that knowledge of humanitarian principles and their operationalisation in CAR are limited and more efforts should be made for these to be internalised, both by aid workers and the remaining stakeholders. Additionally, and given doubts surrounding the positive correlation between respect of these principles and improved access, additional in-depth and evidence-based research should be conducted in the CAR on this topic.

10 WHAT ENABLES POPULATIONS AND AID AGENCIES TO GAIN ACCESS?

Access in CAR is undoubtedly a challenging issue, both for the populations and for aid agencies. As a result, a number of practices have been established to address these challenges. As seen earlier, humanitarian organisations have a mainly 'aid agency-centric' view of access so it is not surprising that most good practices identified to improve access are primarily based on the challenges they themselves face.

> ❝ *Aid agencies have changed the way they operate because of the insecurity. Sometimes, to avoid being looted or assaulted, humanitarians are forced to stop providing aid. Their strategy is to reduce the provision of aid. Such a strategy has a negative impact on us."*

Women, Bombe village, Sibut

For aid agencies and populations alike, **reducing insecurity would greatly contribute to improving access**. While both consider the disarmament of armed groups, the neutralisation of their most militant members and an effective control of the territory by the government important in this respect, they appear to have differences regarding yet other ways to tackle insecurity. Populations interviewed as part of this study for instance strongly favour a revival of the Central

African armed forces (FACA) and have shown little concern for the use of armed escorts by aid agencies, while the latter would rather overcome insecurity issues by gaining greater acceptance in the country and by ensuring their respect of humanitarian principles. In effect, the issues of gaining greater **'acceptance' and ensuring 'respect of the humanitarian principles' top the aid workers' list of recommendations**. Despite difficulties in putting them into practice, aid agency workers all agree that they remain a cornerstone of humanitarian action, and as such play a key role in improving access. This said, and precisely because of the gap between the discourse and practice, one is left wondering whether the omnipresent references to acceptance and the humanitarian principles are not just hollow pronouncements. The study findings appear to indicate that more needs to be done across the aid sector to design and implement aid projects that reflect the need for greater acceptance and respect of humanitarian principles.

Beyond this, aid workers also mentioned the importance of *"being professional"* and **providing quality work**. In the eyes of many, being recognised as delivering services judged to be of good quality is a crucial aspect of building acceptance. Quality encompasses a wide variety of elements

but seems to include the following three main components in CAR: logical consistency in the design, implementation and monitoring of the projects undertaken; consistency and excellence of the aid provided, whether in the form of aid distributions or services; and quality of the relationship established with the populations. Unfortunately, the study revealed that the overall perception of the quality of aid agencies' work in CAR is somewhat negative, even though a handful among them received almost systematic praise.

This is perhaps why **accountability towards the conflict-affected populations and transparency** were also viewed by aid workers as critical to improving access in CAR. In line with this, a few also underscored the importance of improving **communications with the populations**. Despite general acknowledgement of this need, a feeling of powerlessness in this regard was observed among the aid workers interviewed. Indeed, given the immensity of humanitarian needs in

the CAR on the one hand and aid agencies' limited human and material resources as well as time constraints on the other, aid workers saw this as yet another challenge among all the other priorities at hand.

However, this should not prevent aid agencies from following another recommendation shared by aid workers, namely the **significance of showing respect** for the population at large – national staff, beneficiaries and other stake-holders alike. This can be linked to comments by some aid workers that the professionalization of the aid sector had its definitive benefits but had also led to less contact with the affected populations and, at a more human level, a subsequent lack of empathy towards their fate. To emphasise this point one INGO country director said: *"Humanitarians are forgetting the principle of humanism. They're ready to speak about neutrality, impartiality and independence but they don't care about humanism."* She then highlighted the need for daily, basic relations that ought to be

established between local and international staff, and between staff and beneficiaries in order to succeed in any action.

A handful of aid workers suggested that aid agencies should 'decentralise' their actions towards proactive individuals/groups that are already implementing aid projects on the ground. In particular, they should **identify and directly support initiatives that play a successful/promising role in the populations' own recovery.** An INGO child protection adviser for example told the unusual story of how the INGO has successfully helped curb the showing of violent and pornographic movies to youth in local cinemas thanks to its decision to support local collaborative initiatives.

In light of the UN structural integrated mission, aid workers also mentioned the importance of **advocating for a continuous distinction, both in discourses and practice, between humanitarian and military operations**. They generally agreed that guidelines on the use of armed escorts and the selection and implementation of quick-impact projects needed to be established and efforts to improve the understanding of both

humanitarian principles and MINUSCA's mandate undertaken.

For populations, beyond the previously stated need to improve security, **being able to communicate with (and be heard by) aid agencies was a recurrent message**. Respondents felt that if they could be more involved in the design and implementation of the aid projects their particular needs and constraints would be better taken into account, and they would be more empowered to decide for themselves what to do in relation to aid provided. Similarly, if problems arose, they felt that by being more involved they could more easily and with more confidence bring them directly to the attention of aid agency decision makers. Related to this is the frequently heard suggestion that aid agencies on their side should improve the way they inform populations about their on-going and planned activities.

This call for improved communication is related to every other suggestion to improve access and in particular the need for aid agencies to be better organised and more impartial and honest. It encompasses inter alia the frequently heard request from populations for direct access to aid

agency decision makers, notably due to their limited trust in field staff. In the words of a group of men from the Quartier Zawa in Carnot: *"NGO leaders must be directly involved in the field to reduce cases of fraud."* The proponents of these measures argue that problems of misunderstandings, slow aid delivery of aid or poor beneficiary identification would thus be more easily overcome. Also, the accusations of partiality and dishonesty could be responded to more effectively.

In addition to calling for the return of FACA, some people interviewed suggested that another way of restoring security and thus enabling access would be for **aid agencies to advocate** for militant groups to stop moving around with their weapons. As the director of a school in a village on the road to Gadzi said: *"It's thanks to humanitarians' advocacy and their presence that Anti-Balakas have stopped carrying their arms in town."*

Apart from sometimes recommending aid agencies to use armed escorts to reach them, populations interviewed also proposed, albeit rarely, that **aid agencies reduce their 'visibility'** – i.e. the presence of their logos, flags and badges. Alternatively, villagers from Nandobo proposed that *"the ICRC accompanies other NGOs to negotiate humanitarian access as the parties to the conflict know ICRC's mandate is to pick up the dead bodies and the injured and that they must not shoot when the red-cross logo is visible."*

To overcome logistical challenges populations frequently recommended that **aid agencies could 'simply' build or improve existing roads, or fly staff and goods across the country.** In one such example, men from Gara-Amou village in the Bombé2 neighbourhood located in the municipality of Goumbelé near Sibut explained: *"Aid workers have changed: they now move from village to village to assist the vulnerable. Before, everything was concentrated in a single fixed location and humanitarian logistics were not well developed. Now they are more efficient; they even restored secondary roads to have access to the vulnerable; they use armed convoys provided by the international forces to secure aid and some items are even transported by air."* Of course, this is easier said than done and most of the steps described above incur significant costs. Some respondents in rural villages commended aid agency efforts to support them even after they had escaped

violence by hiding in the forests. They added that the strategy of providing aid directly to those remaining in the forests was fruitful and should be continued.

Like populations, **militiamen, both the Anti-Balaka and the ex-Seleka, urged aid agencies to communicate better.** Many said they felt ignored, almost rejected, by aid workers, engendering a mix of misunderstanding and frustration towards aid agencies.

Furthermore, militiamen appear to scrutinise aid agency operations and are quick to condemn them if/when they see aid workers engaging in contacts with militants from other armed groups. **It is thus fundamentally important that aid agencies explain the principles and implications of neutrality and impartiality thoroughly, and are seen to implement them in practice in order to avoid misunderstandings or incidents that could impede their access and activities.**

By contrast, several officers from various international armed forces suggested exactly the opposite. For them, **aid agencies would be better off if they used armed escorts more regularly and did not follow the humanitarian principles too closely**. As one civil-military coordinator (CIMIC) officer put it: *"INGOs in particular should be more flexible and adjust their humanitarian principles… indeed, we have noticed here that some NGOs have refused to interact with actors seen by them as too politicised in the name of these principles… but they should play with these principles, and share more information with the international forces, especially in rural areas."* Although such lack of confidence in NGOs is particularly worrying given that it comes from a CIMIC officer, it underscores a misunderstanding of the humanitarian principles rather than offering arguments for their deconstruction.

" *Humanitarians should be safe as they involve everyone in their activities."*

Women, Ninguiri village, on the road to Gadzi

KEY TAKE AWAY...

WHAT ENABLES POPULATIONS AND AID AGENCIES TO GAIN ACCESS?

'Acceptance' and 'respect of humanitarian principles' top aid workers' list of recommendations. Indeed, despite aid agencies' difficulties in implementing them aid workers nonetheless unanimously agree that these aspects remain a cornerstone of humanitarian action, and as such play a key role in improving access. This said, and precisely because of the gap between the discourse and practice, one is left wondering whether the omnipresent references to acceptance and humanitarian principles have retained the resonance sought.

Also, transparency and accountability towards the affected populations were said to be critical for improving access in CAR. In line with this, a few have also underscored the importance of better communication with the populations and of showing respect. Identifying initiatives that play a successful/promising role in the populations' own recovery and supporting these was also described as necessary. Also, and in light of the UN structural integrated mission, aid workers have mentioned the importance of advocating for a continuous distinction, both in discourses and practices, between humanitarian and military operations. Last, aid workers have mentioned the importance of providing work that is judged to be of good quality. Unfortunately and even if less than a handful of aid agencies were nearly systematically praised by the populations for the quality of their work, the overall perception of aid agencies' quality of work is rather negative.

Being able to communicate with (and be heard by) aid agencies is a recurrent message stemming from the populations and other stakeholders alike, including armed groups. Linked to this is the frequently heard request to have direct access to aid agencies' decision makers, notably due to the limited trust towards field staff. This call for better communication is linked with every other suggestion to improve access and in particular the need for aid agencies to be better organised and more impartial and honest.

While disarmament of armed groups, the neutralisation of their most militant members and an effective control of the territory by the government are important for both aid agencies and populations alike to reducing insecurity and thus improving access, there appears to be differences regarding other ways to tackle insecurity. Populations for instance favour greatly a return of the Central African armed forces (FACA) and have shown little concern for the use of armed escorts by aid agencies. Aid workers in contrast would rather overcome insecurity through being accepted and respectful of the humanitarian principles. This would be wise as militiamen appear to scrutinise what aid agencies do and how they operate. They are quick to condemn them if/when they see aid workers having contacts with other armed groups than theirs. In contrast, several officers belonging to the different international armed forces have suggested exactly the opposite. For them, aid agencies would be better off if they used armed escorts more regularly and were not following the humanitarian principles too closely. This however, underscores a misunderstanding of the humanitarian principles rather than offering arguments for their deconstruction.

In all cases and while it is undoubtedly important to constantly reassert the importance of acceptance and of the humanitarian principles, it appears from this study that more needs to be done across the aid sector to live by these, i.e. to design and implement aid projects accordingly.

11 CONCLUSION

Humanitarian access in the Central African Republic is a major problem. Conflict-affected populations and aid agencies alike face challenges that limit their ability to respectively receive or deliver aid. Both aid workers and populations agree that the main obstacles to accessing aid, namely insecurity and logistical challenges, are *external* and beyond the control of aid agencies.

Yet, while aid workers attribute their access difficulties primarily to these external elements, the populations they seek to assist strongly criticise what they perceive as *internal* deficiencies of aid agencies that in their view also hinder access to aid.

Two major challenges were highlighted in respect of these perceived *internal* deficiencies. Firstly, populations accused aid agencies of being disorganised, communicating poorly with beneficiaries, and being responsible for a number of shortcomings in the implementation of aid projects, including slow delivery, identifying beneficiaries poorly, or being too competitive. Secondly, and perhaps more worryingly, aid workers were frequently perceived as being partial and dishonest, with stories of embezzled aid reported frequently. This perception gap – with aid workers focusing on the external challenges and the population giving prominence to structural, internal issues – underscores the imperative need for aid agencies to communicate better about the way they work, including their capabilities and constraints.

In all cases, it appears that aid agencies are weak at every stage of the project management cycle, from the context analysis phase to the monitoring and evaluation of the activities. For sure, a number of structural problems, such as the difficulties faced in recruiting and retaining competent staff or receiving adequate funding remain important challenges. Nonetheless, a number of measures can be taken that require 'only' a change of mindset – from improving communication, to internalising and operationalising the humanitarian principles and devoting time to *actually listen* to what Central Africans are trying to say. The good news is that even if the task ahead seems daunting, it remains easier to work on and improve internal challenges than external ones. It might only be a matter of perceptions, but when it comes to improving access, accountability and the quality of aid work, perceptions matter.

ACRONYMS

CAR	Central African Republic
CDI	Conflict Dynamics International
CWC	Communications with Communities
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
EUFOR	European Union Force
FACA	Forces armées de la Centrafrique
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HDI	Human Development Index
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MISCA	African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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