



HERE-Geneva
closing the gap between policy and practice

‘ **THE ROLE OF
MANDATES** ’



**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC REPORT
FROM MACRO TO MICRO**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DISCLAIMER

This report was researched and written by Marzia Montemurro and Karin Wendt of HERE-Geneva. The CAR case-study is part of HERE's broader project looking into "The role of 'mandates' in humanitarian priority setting for INGOs in situations of armed conflict". This report is but one part of the research puzzle, and as such provides elements that will help answering the broader questions of the overall study.

The authors would like to thank the range of individuals who shared their experiences and reflections in the framework of this study, as well as the focal points of the participating organisations: Pauline Chetcuti (ACF); Dominic Crowley (Concern Worldwide); Charlotte Billoir (DCA), Jérémie Labbé (ICRC), Bob Kitchen (IRC); Cecilia Roselli & Kari Eliassen (NRC); Monica Castellarnau (MSF-OCBA), and Anna Castelli (Welthungerhilfe). Particular thanks go to the team of Concern Worldwide in Bangui for providing invaluable logistical support to HERE's research team in November-December 2018. Finally, thanks also to Céline Studer and Fekadu Nigussa Geleta for research support and to Christina Samson for the report design.

This case-study would not have been possible without the generous support of the governments of Norway and Switzerland. The views presented in this paper are those of HERE-Geneva, and do not necessarily reflect the position of its donors or the organisations participating in this research project.

From Macro to Micro. HERE 'Mandates' Study Central African Republic Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND: THE ROLE OF 'MANDATES'

The research behind this report was carried out as part of HERE's broader study on "**The role of 'mandates' in humanitarian priority setting for INGOs in situations of armed conflict**". This study is based on the recognition that the majority of international non-governmental organisations that are active in humanitarian response define their purposes broadly, to include both short-term emergency response and long-term development engagement. In contrast, a small minority of organisations exclusively focus on life-saving assistance in emergency settings. In humanitarian discourse, these approaches are frequently distinguished as 'multi-' or 'single-mandate'. The Role of 'Mandates' Study has set out to investigate the appropriateness of this terminology, and the practical opportunities and limitations that would arise from different approaches. The term 'mandate' is therefore understood broadly as an organisation's goal or mission and not in its legal meaning. The study takes a look at how organisations set priorities and come to strategic choices, and how that enables them to fulfil their goals on the ground. Eight organisations are participating in the study: ACF, Concern Worldwide, DanChurchAid, IRC, MSF-Spain, NRC, Welthungerhilfe, and the ICRC. The study focuses on international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and the ICRC as one example of where discussions about tensions and opportunities between single-mandate and multi-mandate organisations have been raised. The Research Team consciously decided not to include UN agencies to limit the variables for consideration.

In order to lay part of the groundwork towards answering the broader questions of The Role of 'Mandates' Study, this report delves into some of the elements characterising the humanitarian response in the Central African Republic, from the angle of the particular experience of seven of the participating organisations. Specific conclusions with regard to the role of 'mandates' will be addressed in the final report for the overall project.

The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) has been critical for many years. The needs of the population are deeply rooted in failed governance, predatory actions by non-state armed groups, and mistrust between different communities. The context is also highly volatile, and while sudden violent flareups are a common denominator across the country, each area has its own specificities. CAR sees the signs that are characteristic of a protracted crisis: deep structural problems converge with emergency needs. In such an environment, organisations delivering humanitarian response and early recovery easily find justification for programmes and activities. But this does not tell the whole story of setting priorities to address CAR's multi-dimensional humanitarian challenges.

As part of its broader study on "The role of 'mandates' in humanitarian priority setting for international NGOs in situations of armed conflict", HERE looked at the experiences of seven INGOs in CAR. The findings from CAR will feed into the final conclusions of the overall project. The research for this study has provided valuable insights, both with regard to the specificities of the context, and the way a number of aid organisations negotiate the environment in which they operate.

Organisations start from a macro-level analysis to set their priorities in CAR. Looking at their added value, they leverage their mission(s) and strategic priorities to inform their operational decisions. How they are able to fulfil their mission is however predominantly shaped by the contextual variables they are confronted

with. Humanitarian space is constantly negotiated at the micro-level, in the different localities. Each humanitarian organisation constantly needs to strike a careful balance between its identity – purpose/mission – and the expected impact of its work on a micro-level.

How the organisations manage the challenges and tensions they are faced with on a daily basis places them closer to or further apart from their peers, informing at the same time their comparative advantages. Are they setting themselves up to manage the context? While it may be easier to identify responses that fit with each specific context, organisations may fail to recognise the value of organisational flexibility, as an enabler to respond to more pressing needs in other locations. Such flexibility demands resources, be they financial or human, but also organisational investments towards a mindset ready to adjust along shifting parameters. Those organisations that have the appropriate systems and protocols as well as the right resources are better able to respond more quickly and relatively widely.

Resource constraints linked to high operational costs and lack of specialised technical know-how affect all aid organisations equally in CAR. As a sign of how the international aid system functions, donors play a pivotal role in influencing the presence of international actors and their choice of locations. The lack of appropriate transitional and development funding complicates the picture further with humanitarian funds stretched to the limit.

Unlike other contexts where visible identities may turn humanitarian actors into targets, this case-study highlights how in CAR focus and visibility are an integral part of shaping the perceptions of all stakeholders as to an organisation's impartiality and neutrality. These humanitarian principles, while given attention in CAR, may be under pressure as the organisations are often faced with a dilemma: go where the funding requires them to go or stay where they believe the needs are still prominent even if donors drop that area.

The signing of the Global Peace Agreement in February 2019 has provided renewed hope for a political solution to the crisis in CAR. The National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan (known by its French acronym RCPCA) is the main, government-led framework for setting priorities in the country, but caution should be exercised so that humanitarian

EACH HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION CONSTANTLY NEEDS TO STRIKE A CAREFUL BALANCE BETWEEN ITS IDENTITY – PURPOSE/MISSION – AND THE EXPECTED IMPACT OF ITS WORK ON A MICRO-LEVEL.

organisations do not become a political instrument. Donors will need to be careful and recognise that what may be a strategic objective in the implementation of the RCPCA and the peace process, may be different from what humanitarian actors perceive as the most urgent needs and areas for response. A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of the various international actors in CAR and how they set their priorities and define their areas of intervention will be all the more important.

ACRONYMS

ACF	Action Contre la Faim
CAR	Central African Republic
CCO	CAR INGO Coordination Committee
DCA	DanChurchAid
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
EU	European Union
GA	General Assembly
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HERE	Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre
HQ	Headquarters
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICRC	The International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
INSO	The International NGO Safety Organisation
LRRD	Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development
MNCH	Maternal Newborn and Child Health
MHCP	Mental Health and Care Practices
MINUSCA	The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NFI	Non-Food Item
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCPCA	Plan de Relèvement et Consolidation de la Paix pour la République Centrafricaine
RR	Resident Representative
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

1 INTRODUCTION

The research carried out in the Central African Republic contributes to a broader inquiry into the decision-making processes of selected INGOs within the context of HERE's so-called Role of 'Mandates' Study. Humanitarian discourse frequently distinguishes between 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations, depending on whether they define their purposes broadly, or whether they focus exclusively on life-saving assistance in emergency settings (Wendt and Hiemstra, 2016). Nevertheless, there is a lack of evidence and common understanding of the practical opportunities and limitations that would arise from the different ways in which organisations set priorities and make strategic choices. The Role of 'Mandates' Study looks precisely into these issues. The intention of the study is not to answer the normative question of "which type of 'mandate' is best", or to find which organisations fall into which category,¹ but rather to clarify what differences there are between organisations in terms of how they go about their activities in the field.²

Following a pilot in Mali,³ the Central African Republic (CAR) was chosen as the second field case-study for the Mandates Project. CAR presents a context that is both very similar and very different to that of Mali. Similar, because of needs that are deeply rooted in failed governance, marginalised populations, growing

CAR PRESENTS A CONTEXT THAT IS BOTH VERY SIMILAR AND VERY DIFFERENT TO THAT OF MALI.

resentment among different communities, and the presence of UN integrated missions. Different, because of the specific dynamics of the conflict. The choice of CAR was also made because all participating organisations have a presence in the country, making it an ideal setting for comparative research on their approaches.

In order to lay part of the groundwork towards answering the broader questions of the Role of 'Mandates' Study, the sections below delve into some of the elements characterising the humanitarian response in CAR, from the angle of the particular experience of seven of the participating organisations.⁴ Like the report on Mali, this report does not intend to look at how organisations address emergency needs specifically, but rather to look at how they are able to work in complex settings. After an outline of the methodological approach taken for this case-study, and a reminder of the contextual elements of the current humanitarian response in CAR, this report will examine how participating organisations are responding to the external challenges to their work, what factors are enabling or hampering their programmes, and whether they display certain complementarities and if so how these can be best leveraged. The analysis will look in turn at *why* organisations decided to work in CAR, *what* activities they carry out, and *how* they carry out their work.

1 The appropriateness of the expressions 'multi-' or 'single-mandate' organisations in general, and the extent to which they pertain to the organisations participating in this study in particular, will be discussed in more detail in the final report of the study.

2 The Role of 'Mandates' Study addresses three main questions: (1) Is it helpful to talk about mandate distinctions? What does it mean? (2) In regard to humanitarian organisations' capacity to work in situations of armed conflict, what opportunities and/or limitations arise from different 'mandates'? (3) Where do these opportunities and/or limitations appear to allow for complementarity between organisations? Where do they engender competition or tensions, such as policy differences, incommensurable priorities, and different target groups? For more information, see <http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HERE-Mandates-Study-Concept-Brief-Sep-2016.pdf>

3 The report on Mali, entitled "The Limits of Labels", can be found at <http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/HERE-Role-of-Mandates-Mali-Report-2018.pdf>.

4 The eighth participating organisation – the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – is also present in CAR. However, the ICRC declined to be part of the study in CAR and is therefore not included in the analysis informing this report.

1.1 Methodological approach

In line with the overall methodology of the Role of ‘Mandates’ Study,⁵ and as piloted in the first field case-study of the Mali context (Montemurro and Wendt, 2018), a Research Team of two visited Bangui between 20 and 30 November 2018. The team carried out semi-structured interviews with an average of five members of staff from each of the organisations that participate in the study.⁶ The types of staff met with varied slightly, but tended to include the Country Director, the Director of Programmes, Programme Coordinators, and staff in charge of emergency, access, and security management. To gather a multifaceted picture of the CAR context, additional interviews were also held with representatives from non-participating organisations,⁷ UN agencies,⁸ donors,⁹ and national authorities and stakeholders.¹⁰

The questions asked of the staff of the participating organisations concerned ongoing activities at the time of the visit, but also the different staff members’ definition and understanding of the ‘mandate’ and values of their organisation, as well as what they would argue that their organisation does particularly well or less well in CAR. The Research Team was further interested in knowing in general terms for example how the humanitarian principles feature in the organisations’ decision-making, how they decide upon and prioritise activity areas in CAR, and how they characterise their relationships with donors, local and international partners, and affected populations and host communities. To seize the ways in which individual staff members frame their organisation and its work regarding some of these issues, all interviewees were also asked to complete a 2-page Perception Study (see Annex 1). Throughout the data analysis, the Research Team has borne in mind that the

findings from the Perception Study provide only a hint of the broader understanding within that organisation. To triangulate or complement the insights gathered through the interviews and the Perception Study, the Research Team has also carried out a desk-based literature review of annual reports and strategies from the seven participating organisations.

1.2 Limitations

This study focuses on the work of a few international non-governmental organisations, though there are clearly more actors – including the UN – that have a substantial influence on how humanitarian responses are carried out. Interviews with local authorities and beneficiaries may also provide with additional insights as to how aid agencies are perceived by a larger group of stakeholders. The research team was able to interview staff from one national NGO and two government representatives. Because of the limited number, however, the data collected through these interviews was not deemed representative and was only used for background information.

As regards the limitations of this study, it is also important to highlight that it is largely based on the perceptions that key interviewees have of the work of the humanitarian community in CAR in general, and of the work of their own organisation in particular, at a particular time. Due to the operational specificities of CAR, and the constraints of access to field locations with violent incidents at the time of the mission, the Research Team could not visit programmes in person to gather the views of implementing staff and affected populations. Where possible, the Research Team was instead in remote contact with field coordinators from the different organisations.

5 See the Concept Note for the project, available at <http://here-geneva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HERE-Mandates-Study-Concept-Brief-Sep-2016.pdf>.

6 The team primarily interviewed staff from ACF (4 staff members), Concern Worldwide (4 staff members), DanChurchAid (4 staff members), IRC (7 staff members), NRC (5 staff members), MSF-Spain (4 staff members), and Welthungerhilfe (6 staff members).

7 The NGO Coordinating Committee in CAR (CCO), Oxfam, INSO, ACTED, World Vision, and REACH (regarding the Rapid Response Mechanism).

8 The HC/RC, and WFP.

9 Békou, OFDA, World Bank, Switzerland, AFD, ECHO.

10 Ministry of Education, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, FNAPEEC (Parent-Teacher association).

1.3 The humanitarian context of CAR

A discussion around why and what aid agencies set out to do, as well as how they do it, can only start from a good understanding of the context. Since its independence in 1960, CAR has been characterised by instability and escalating cycles of violence. While the country initiated a democratic transition with the 2016 presidential and legislative elections, repercussions from the 2013 crisis are still evident. Though the factors behind the crisis are chiefly political and economic, violence mostly erupts along religious and ethnic fault lines (OCHA, 2018).

A mainly Muslim armed group, the Séléka, seized power in 2013, ousting then President François Bozizé. Soon after, international forces, composed mainly of French and African Union troops, forced the Séléka out of the capital Bangui. Rivalries over resource control and disagreements about strategy led to the fracturing of the Séléka movement, with different factions each controlling their own areas in the northeast (HRW, 2018). Set up in 2013 to counter the Séléka coalition, the predominantly Christian and animist armed groups known as the anti-Balaka *de facto* control the southwest of the country. The current government of President Touadéra exerts little authority beyond the capital, Bangui (see Annex 2).

Since the end of 2016, several localised conflicts have flared throughout the country. Small militia or criminal groups are responsible for much of the violence, making it difficult to negotiate peace comprehensively as many different interests and objectives are at stake (IPI et al., 2018). Outbreaks of violence are witnessed both in rural and urban areas, considerably affecting the civilian population and leading to massive displacement. More than a million people are estimated to have fled their homes both as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (>600,000) and refugees in neighbouring countries (>500,000).¹¹ This amounts to approximately one fourth of the total Central African population.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), whose mandate was

KEY EVENTS

1960	AUGUST: Central African Republic becomes independent
2003	MARCH: Rebel leader Francois Bozize seizes Bangui and declares himself president
2005	MAY: Francois Bozize wins the presidential elections
2013	MARCH: Séléka rebels seize power OCTOBER: UN Security Council approves the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force DECEMBER: France steps up its deployment of troops
2014	APRIL: MINUSCA is established
2015	MAY: The National Forum of Bangui laid a path for the peace process
2016	FEBRUARY: Faustin-Archange Touadéra wins presidential election OCTOBER: Publication of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan
2017	MAY-SEPT: Upsurge in violence JUNE: Peace agreement signed between government and 13 of 14 main armed factions NOVEMBER: UN Security Council extends MINUSCA's mandate and increases its size
2018	DECEMBER: UN Security Council renews MINUSCA's mandate expanding its support to the peace process
2019	FEBRUARY: CAR Government signs peace agreement with 14 armed groups

renewed in December 2018, has been tasked with the protection of civilians, support to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and a broader backing of the peace process (UNSC, 2018a). While MINUSCA has helped bring stability to several areas, the overall political and security situation remains challenging (UNSC, 2018b). Ongoing insecurity and logistical constraints impede humanitarian operations especially in more remote areas, making CAR one of the most inaccessible humanitarian crises (ACAPS, 2018). There were a reported 396 security incidents directly affecting humanitarian workers and assets in 2018 up from 337 in 2017 (UN, 2019).

In October 2016, the Government of CAR drew up a National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, with support from the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the World Bank Group. This so-called *Plan de Relèvement et Consolidation de la Paix pour la*

11 See <https://data2.unhcr.org/fr/situations/car>.

République Centrafricaine (RCPCA) (CAR, 2016) proposes three priority pillars: (i) promote peace, security, and reconciliation; (ii) renew the social contract between the state and the population; (iii) facilitate economic and productive sector recovery. The total needs for the implementation of the plan are estimated at 3.161 billion US dollars. At the Brussels Conference in November 2016, international partners pledged up to 2.28 billion US dollars (European Commission, 2016). However, by December 2017, only a little above 10% of that amount had been effectively disbursed (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017).

A peace facilitation process, the African Initiative, spearheaded by the African Union and the Economic Community for Central African States, is currently the primary framework for a comprehensive political solution. Other parallel initiatives are also being pursued, notably with Russia and Sudan's support. As an attempt to merge the two negotiations' tracks, the African Initiative held its meeting in Khartoum in February 2019. At the meeting, on 6 February 2019, the Government of the Central African Republic and fourteen armed groups signed a peace agreement (CAR, 2019). While this is an encouraging development and represents an opportunity for the implementation of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, serious concerns remain about the genuine commitment of many of the members of the armed groups to disarm (Security Council Report, 2019).

As of April 2019, approximately 2.9 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in CAR (OCHA, 2019). The 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) projects that USD 430.7 million are needed to support a target of 1.7 million people. Humanitarian aid dedicated to CAR peaked at USD 378 million in 2014 (68% of the requested funds that year), largely remaining below 50% between 2016 and 2018 (FTS, 2019). As of April 2019, USD 119.2 million, or 28% of the total appeal, have been received.

The humanitarian response in CAR benefits from active coordination, both among NGOs thanks to the CAR INGO Coordination Committee (CCO), and across humanitarian actors thanks to a strong UN humanitarian leadership at the time of the mission.¹² CAR's HRP currently has 139 humanitarian partners, of which 55 INGOs. These are

THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN CAR BENEFITS FROM ACTIVE COORDINATION.

somewhat spread out across the country, with an increased presence of organisations to be found close to the capital Bangui and alongside the most secure axes (OCHA, 2018, p. 17).

The geographical presence and activities of the seven INGOs at the basis of this report to a large extent reflect the broader map of aid in CAR. To place the discussion on their challenges and enablers when it comes to carrying out humanitarian aid in CAR in perspective, the next section will provide an overview of why these seven organisations decided to work in CAR, and what they do there.

¹² The appointment of a new HC/RC was announced on 21 March 2019.

2 THE WHY AND THE WHAT OF AID

It appears from the research in CAR that the participating organisations currently oscillate between two poles in terms of how they frame what they do: emergency and early recovery. Indeed, the adjective ‘humanitarian’ was often used by the interviewees simply to refer to emergency while they argued that ‘development’ is not really possible in CAR beyond early recovery activities. This framing reflects the context to some extent: areas that are deemed stable can suddenly become emergency hotspots, and what may be early recovery now can go back to emergency needs at any moment. This, in combination with the fact that the State has only a very limited control of the country, means that few stakeholders consider development projects in the traditional sense as even possible. That said, some do argue that in certain zones longer-term projects or projects more akin to development ones are feasible. Looking at the participating organisations’ overall goals, the reasons why they chose to work in the country, and what activities they chose to undertake helps better understand how they view and respond to the context.

2.1 The organisations’ rationale

With participating organisations carrying out a variety of different programmes across CAR, it is helpful to take a step back and look at the ‘why’ behind their interventions. All of the participating organisations decided to open a

presence in CAR largely with the humanitarian imperative to save lives in mind. With the exception of MSF-Spain, which came to CAR to respond to a prolonged health emergency in 1997 (MSF, 2016),¹³ the initial trigger for all of the participating organisations was to respond to basic immediate needs due to the more recent waves of violence, establishing their presence either between 2005 and 2007 (ACF, IRC and NRC) or in 2014-15 (Concern, DCA, NRC¹⁴ and WHH). In addition to responding to urgent needs flowing from the conflict, WHH from the outset identified their added value in supporting state structures and strengthening the capacities of small scale farmers as well, as “the people in that region are also rightly demanding assistance that goes beyond disaster aid” (WHH, 2014). Over time, ACF, Concern, DCA, IRC and NRC have also come to integrate approaches meant to strengthen communities’ resilience and self-reliance.

As part of the research in CAR, all interviewees were asked to complete a Perception Study, indicating where they would place their own organisation, as well as others they were familiar with, on a grid (see Annex 1). One axis of the grid ranged from more traditional humanitarian approaches to long-term development and peace-related investments, and the other axis indicated the level of independence from donor or host governments.¹⁵ Figure 1 provides the combined average results from this exercise.¹⁶

ALL OF THE PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS DECIDED TO OPEN A PRESENCE IN CAR LARGELY WITH THE HUMANITARIAN IMPERATIVE TO SAVE LIVES IN MIND.

¹³ The mortality rates in some regions at the time was up to five times the emergency threshold. There are now four sections of MSF present in CAR; in addition to the Spanish section, the Dutch section since 2005, the French section since 2006, and the Belgian section since 2007.

¹⁴ NRC closed its presence in 2010 and returned to CAR in 2014.

¹⁵ “Dependence on governments” is understood broadly in this exercise to include for example both a perceived dependence on host government strategies, and donor government funding.

¹⁶ Figure 1 only provides the self-perception circle for DCA, because staff from the other participating organisations were not familiar enough with DCA to place it on the grid.

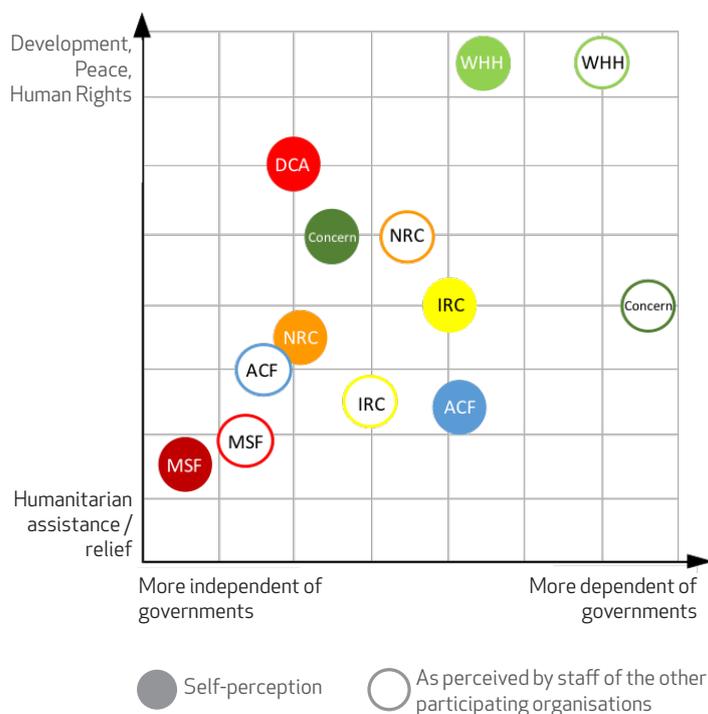


Figure 1: Combined average results of Perception Study identity exercise in Annex 1 (views in November 2018 of approx. 5-6 CAR-based staff members per organisation)

Similar to the Mali findings (Montemurro and Wendt, 2018, p. 10), it appears from the Perception Study in CAR that the ‘mandates’ of the seven participating organisations fall in a rather clear pattern, with what can appear to be ‘single-mandate’ organisations in two corners of the grid, and the rest embodying a dual ‘humanitarian-development’ goal.¹⁷ As seen in Figure 1, WHH saw itself and was seen by others as being more dependent on the expectations from the CAR government and those of donor governments. This organisation was also perceived to be working first and foremost in a development perspective. In the opposite corner of the grid, MSF was seen as having a purely humanitarian focus, and as working independently from any government. The other five organisations were found to fall in between these two ‘extremes’, reflecting the integration of different approaches. Representatives from organisations integrating both emergency and early recovery approaches notably argued that aligning with government priorities – with a focus on recovery work – does not necessarily imply losing their independence.¹⁸ Rather, it simply means not jeopardising the government’s efforts to re-establish State authority and/or to respect existing development plans.

¹⁷ Such a reading will be reviewed in light of the overall findings of the study to help answer the question whether ‘single-mandate’ and ‘multi-mandate’ organisations are helpful categorisations.

¹⁸ Arguably, the notion of independence entails different aspects: institutional and political; financial; and operational, including technical and logistical aspects. Here, independence has been understood broadly and each interviewee may frame these aspects differently. For more on independence, see Schenkenberg van Mierop, 2017.

It is clear that when the organisations set up their work in CAR, they did start from a macro-level analysis in which their particular mission and their own strategic priorities informed their operational decisions. MSF-Spain, for example, focused essentially on the need to save lives in the face of particularly high mortality and morbidity rates, and WHH highlighted from the outset that they were looking beyond disaster aid in the country. The other five organisations were also guided by their priorities at the macro-level; ACF focused on nutrition and its causes, Concern on health (MNCH, nutrition, water and sanitation) and livelihoods with a focus on food security, IRC and NRC on aiding vulnerable people displaced by the crisis, and DCA on providing mine action and livelihoods support.

Different organisations can therefore be seen to play different roles depending on their ‘entry point’, i.e. the rationale behind the activities that they are implementing. This allows for a clearer understanding of potential complementarities, but also possible tensions in cases where organisations with different rationales operate in the same area. The discussion around the ‘entry point’ is particularly relevant considering the increasing call for a humanitarian-development-peace

	Humanitarian	Development
Why	Life-saving/Respond to basic immediate needs, in the interest of the human being	Supporting sustainable service-delivery structures and strengthening capacities, in the interest of the community
What	Needs assessment/Organisational mission	Needs assessment/Organisational mission/ Government plans (RCPCA)
Whom	Most in need, without discrimination (at individual/household level)	Selected target groups as per organisational mission and/or government plans (e.g. former combatants, unemployed youth, government structures...)

Figure 2: Simplified overview of comparative organisational strategies (Source: Inspired by Bêkou Trust Fund and adapted by HERE)

nexus,¹⁹ which has become a priority for the UN humanitarian system and is therefore also featuring high on the agenda of those INGOs involved in the formal humanitarian coordination structures in CAR.²⁰ As expressed in interviews and reflected in the documentation collected for this research, the overall feeling of a majority of the participating organisations is that they are “already doing the nexus”. In this line of argument, the nexus is intended as the integration of different actions or type of work rather than of different actors. This is particularly highlighted by organisations that adopt a Linking Relief to Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) approach.²¹ Their interventions will be based on responding to the most immediate and urgent needs while simultaneously integrating strategies to enhance resilience. Figure 2 provides a simplified overview of how an organisation’s rationale translates into practice.

19 In CAR the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the New Way of Working seem to be used interchangeably. The discussions around the nexus flow from the Grand Bargain – a joint UN-INGO endeavor – which in point 10 calls for “a shared vision for outcomes [to] be developed on the basis of shared risk analysis between humanitarian, development, stabilisation and peacebuilding communities”. The New Way of Working is a UN-sponsored effort which finds its origins in the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. It aims to achieve collective outcomes over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system (OCHA, 2017).

20 The country has been a pilot for the operationalisation of the New Way of Working since 2016. The process has been mostly driven by the UN and the World Bank in CAR, though these actors recently recognised the need to include the operational experience of the INGOs into the discussions. NGOs were able to share their experiences through the CAR INGO Coordination Committee at the national workshop on the operationalisation of the nexus held in Bangui in October 2018.

21 The concept of LRRD originated in the 1980s and has continually evolved since. For a historical review of the concept as well as its implications in terms of EU funding approaches, see European Parliament, 2012.

2.2 The organisations’ programmes

What became clear from the interviews in CAR is that all the organisations decided to implement programmes largely based on what they considered to be their added value. MSF and ACF have been combining for example their regular programming with dedicated emergency teams. The four sections of MSF present in CAR work to fill “the gaps left by limited public health care facilities and a shortage of personnel and supplies”.²² MSF-Spain specifically has an emergency response team – EURECA²³ – besides its first and secondary health services programmes (MSF-OCBA, 2017, p. 107). For ACF, the added value has been in combining emergency response and so-called recovery programming with longer-term funding and support to partners (ACF, 2014). Its current strategy is articulated around three components: responding to urgent needs as a partner of the UNICEF-led Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) and through mobile teams in ACF’s sectors of intervention; supporting access to basic services in health, nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as livelihoods and trauma management; and supporting the strengthening of existing public or community structures (ACF, 2018, 2017). The medium to long term goal is to strengthen the communities’ resilience capacity while also carrying out targeted emergency interventions.

The work of IRC, NRC, and Concern has been shaped around the added value of working in

22 De facto, the four sections have together come to make up “the country’s primary health care provider. See <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/what-we-do/countries/central-african-republic>, consulted on 13 March 2019.

23 EURECA’s main objective is to have an immediate impact on the levels of morbidity and mortality of people suffering from medical emergencies due to violence and displacement (around 75% of the response) or to epidemics (around 25%).



Figure 3: Map of CAR

several sectors. Since the 2013 crisis, IRC has shifted to a multisectoral approach in support of the most vulnerable people affected by the violence. IRC's current strategy focuses on providing emergency relief, health care and psychosocial support to women survivors of violence; distributing food and creating economic opportunities to displaced people and vulnerable groups such as women and young adults; and building and supporting schools and safe spaces for children to learn and play, and building and restoring clean water sources and promoting good hygiene practices (IRC, 2015, p. 36).²⁴ While advocating for increased funding and better protection of the most vulnerable people in CAR, NRC has been building on its four core activities to support the public education system at the national, local and community levels; to assist displacement-affected people with their housing, land, and property rights; and to undertake livelihoods, shelter, and WASH activities (NRC, 2018). Concern focuses on delivering quality integrated programmes that reduce extreme poverty and respond to humanitarian needs as and when necessary, in the areas of health and nutrition, food security, and WASH. Alongside these interventions, Concern also works to reduce community level conflict and gender inequality (Concern, 2018, p.7).

²⁴ See <https://www.rescue.org/country/central-african-republic>.

Both WHH and DCA first leveraged the fact that they were each part of an alliance to start their programmes in CAR. For its part, DCA worked in strong collaboration with the Lutheran World Federation, a fellow member of ACT Alliance (DCA, 2014, p. 27). However, based on the assessed need for mine action – one of DCA's core areas of work – the organisation has since 2015 also been directly working on strengthening the resilience of communities exposed to risks caused by Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), armed violence, and extreme poverty (DCA, 2016a p. 25 and 27. See also DCA, 2016b). This is done through a combination of humanitarian mine action, social cohesion, protection, and livelihoods activities.²⁵

Finally, from the beginning, WHH set up projects with the Ministry of Agriculture, and cash for work programmes with its partner ACTED – like them a member of Alliance 2015.²⁶ Building on their initial analysis of not having any added value in implementing purely humanitarian programmes in view of the existing capacity in CAR, WHH has not only focused on the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and Cash for Work projects to support the rehabilitation of agricultural land. It has also been working together with the Ministries of Education and Agriculture to train and support small-scale farmers and improve the quality and appropriateness of available seeds.²⁷

²⁵ See <https://www.danchurchaid.org/where-we-work/car>.

²⁶ Concern is also a member of Alliance 2015.

²⁷ See <https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/our-work/projects-programmes/central-african-republic-strategies-goals/>.

ALL THE ORGANISATIONS DECIDED TO IMPLEMENT PROGRAMMES LARGELY BASED ON WHAT THEY CONSIDERED TO BE THEIR ADDED VALUE.

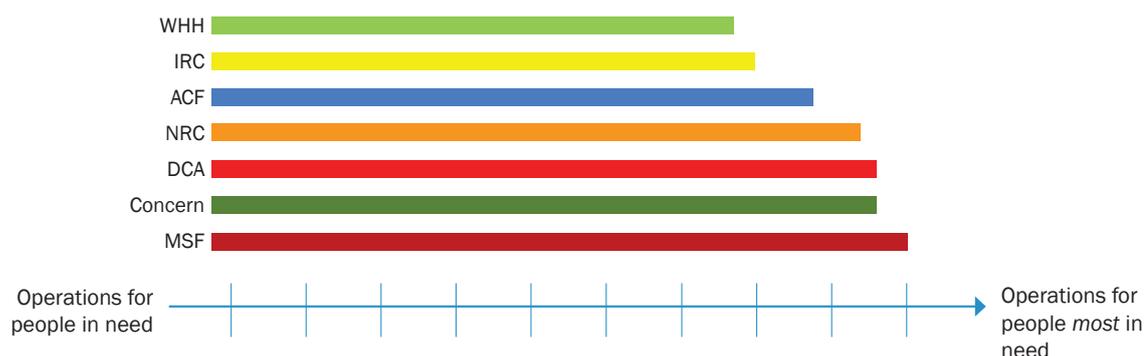


Figure 4: Combined average results of Perception Study identity exercise in Annex 1 (views in November 2018 of approx. 5-6 CAR-based staff members per organisation)

Annex 3 provides an overview of the type and geographical location of the seven participating organisations' activities in CAR. As can be seen, their programmes look quite varied as they are indeed dependent on their mission and what they perceive to be their added value, both in the country generally and in the areas where they focus. Where an organisation works in the country largely depends on what it does. Naturally, as in the case of DCA, surveys (including Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices) will inform where risk education programmes should be carried out, and there is also little space for social cohesion activities in areas where there is a full-blown conflict. Similarly, in the relatively stable prefectures of Ombella-M'Poko and Lobaye, close to Bangui, Concern works in a longer-term optic, whereas in the prefecture of Ouaka, which is characterised by more instability and blockages, the focus is on emergency assistance.

2.3 Whom to prioritise

In the context of CAR, where a large percentage of the population is in high need of assistance, it may be difficult to choose whom to prioritise. The above-mentioned Perception Study carried out in the framework of this research contained a question in regard to the way in which interviewees from different organisations perceived that their priority groups are identified, i.e. whether their organisation clearly sets out to assist those *most in need*, or it simply targets people in need. Figure 4 provides the average perceptions from the different organisations on this. Reflecting the high-need context somewhat, only small differences can

be seen, with most answers tending to "most in need".

While slight, the differences among organisations highlighted in Figure 4 can arguably be linked to the organisations' rationale in the country, as discussed above. For example, WHH whose initial added value was to work in support of Government national plans and strategies, was also the organisation that put the least emphasis on the aim of ensuring that it would target those *most in need*. On the contrary, MSF-Spain, which was the organisation that insisted most strongly on the fact that it targeted those *most in need* is the one which was placed on the opposite end of the grid in Figure 1, i.e. as having a purely humanitarian focus, and working independently from any government.

It is expected that the question of whom to prioritise will garner new attention with the recent signature of the peace accords and a renewed focus on the implementation of the RCPCA. While many of the goals of humanitarian work in CAR are to be found within the plan, the way the plan will be implemented – e.g. how target groups will be identified – will be different. Naturally, the mission of an organisation will be a determining factor for the implementation of humanitarian programmes, as will the principle of impartiality. For transition/development programming, it can be argued that taking into consideration the targets identified by the government will not exclude informing a selection on the basis of needs.

It is clear from the above that from a macro-level analysis, organisations leverage their mission(s) and strategic priorities to inform their operational decisions. The next section will discuss the challenges organisations face on a micro-level, and how they work around them.

WHERE AN ORGANISATION
WORKS IN THE COUNTRY LARGELY
DEPENDS ON WHAT IT DOES.

3 THE HOW OF AID

The operational context in CAR is influenced by a variety of different elements, each specific to the geographical lay-out of the conflict. This can explain why what may be seen as a global goal by an organisation will need to be tested against what is feasible to do in the country. Characterised by the longevity and intractability but also the mutability of its conflict (ICRC, 2016), the protracted crisis in CAR calls for organisations to rely on adaptive capabilities in their response. Knowing when to change, identifying the way in which to do so, and implementing the change by mobilising resources and adjusting to plans (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018, p. 42) allow organisations to be flexible and agile enough to respond to the various demands of a dynamic environment (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018; Thomas, 2014).

If approached individually,²⁸ how organisations manage the challenges and tensions they are faced with on a daily basis places them closer or further apart from their peers, informing at the same time their comparative advantages. Are they setting themselves up to manage the context? Based on the feedback from the seven participating organisations, it appears that some factors tend to play a clearer enabling role than others for humanitarian organisations to operate in an uncertain environment like CAR. It is about the agility and flexibility of an organisation (section 3.1), as well as their operational focus and visibility (section 3.2).

3.1 Agility and flexibility

To address humanitarian needs effectively in CAR, agility and flexibility²⁹ are key. This is not to say that they come at the expense of quality and impact. Rather, they are mutually reinforcing concepts: quality and impact can both drive and be the result of agility and flexibility. Agility and flexibility have in the past been found to be enhanced or constrained by a number of factors, including logistics and supply chain management, human resources and funding (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018). These were all factors that were highlighted also by the interviewees in CAR. In addition to these primarily resource-related elements however, it is important to consider also the notion of organisational flexibility,³⁰ understood in the framework of this research to be driven by “a culture that values learning, and an institutional infrastructure [that] assemble[s] and act[s] on lessons” (Weiss and Hoffman, 2007, p. 62). Arguably, organisational flexibility demands resources – be they financial or human – but also structural investments towards a mindset ready to adjust along shifting parameters (de Castellarnau and Stoianova, 2018, p. 56). For the humanitarian response in CAR, those organisations that have the structure and/or the appropriate systems and protocols as well as the right resources are better able to respond more quickly and relatively widely.

²⁸ As noted in the literature, “effective humanitarian responses in areas with limited or no authorities demand pooling the capacities of many agencies, yet individualized goals and financing make this highly unlikely if not impossible” (Weiss and Hoffman, 2007, p. 55).

²⁹ “Flexibility is the ease with which an organisation can change what it does and how it operates. Agile working is the ability to undertake rapid and continuous iteration” (Obrecht and Bourne, 2018, p. 43).

³⁰ While the notion of organisational flexibility is here approached from the perspective of organisations’ humanitarian capacity, it could be argued that it is equally important for all types of organisations, regardless of their orientation and areas of work.

Geographical mobility

Generally, an organisation's mission and approach will influence its ability to be more or less geographically mobile. If an organisation's approach is for example early recovery activities like promoting social cohesion, it will tend to focus on areas that are more stable and that are open to a longer-term investment. And where an organisation has for a goal to focus its activities in "hard-to-reach areas", this ambition will naturally need to be built on its emergency capacity as well, especially in CAR where hotspots can change constantly and suddenly.³¹ In this regard, it is noteworthy that even those organisations that the Research Team met with who have as a stated aim to work in areas that are particularly hard to reach highlighted that they are yet to fulfil that aim in CAR.³²

Participating organisations in CAR are often faced with a dilemma: go where the funding requires them to go or stay where they believe the needs are still prominent even if donors drop that area. Based on the interviews, the Research Team found that the tendency for organisations in CAR is to retain a presence in their 'traditional' area (i.e. where they opened their first base or where they have contributed substantial investments) and expand from there. Such a strategy is also informed by the interpretation of each organisation's mission and overall objectives in the country. Those organisations whose mission translates into multisectoral aid programmes for a variety of different populations based on a wide-ranging definition of vulnerability will find it harder to close a presence and open elsewhere as needs will still be there.

De facto, there seems to be a zero-sum game between independently defining geographical priorities and independently prioritising sectoral areas of work or type of intervention – i.e. emergency, humanitarian, early recovery, development, stabilisation, etc. Respondents argued that it is common to see organisations

31 Arguably, there are fixed regional hotspots, especially around the areas of control of the ex-Séléka groups. It mostly concerns the towns of Bangassou, Alindao, Kouango, Bambari, Bria, Kaga Bandoro, Batangafo, and North East of Ouham and North of Ouham Pende. For a visual understanding of the geographical areas of influence of the different non-state armed groups, please refer to Annex 2.

32 Linked to this notion is the concept of humanitarian access as referred to in UN GA resolution 46/182, both in terms of humanitarian actors' ability to reach populations in need and affected populations' access to assistance and services. While the impact of community-based interventions was not the object of the research in CAR, their value has been put forward as a way to address the constraints to the latter.

DE FACTO, THERE SEEMS TO BE A ZERO-SUM GAME BETWEEN INDEPENDENTLY DEFINING GEOGRAPHICAL PRIORITIES AND INDEPENDENTLY PRIORITISING SECTORAL AREAS OF WORK OR TYPE OF INTERVENTION.

adapt to the funding available and expand or change the types of programmes an organisation implements in order to stay in an area. This frequently leads to dilemmas, regarding whether or not to remain. In the case of one of the participating organisations, for example, it set up a presence in Kouango sub-prefecture in 2014 following an OCHA-led needs-assessment. Despite substantial investments, the organisation's analysis is that needs remain high especially in health and nutrition as this is an area which is difficult to access and close to many conflict hotspots. Donors are, however, gradually disengaging from the area. The organisation's approach is generally to stay for the long term. Moreover, in CAR, in order to amortise high operational costs, it is necessary to build economies of scale: the more programmes in an area, the easier it is to absorb operational costs. The more difficult, however, it also is to disengage and start elsewhere if necessary.

Timeliness of the response

Agility and flexibility are also intimately linked to an organisation's capacity to quickly scale-up as needed. While there may be a global ambition to be a strong emergency responder (with goals set at the country or macro-level), effective responses seem to be negotiated on a case by case basis at the micro-level. The timing of the response may indeed change depending on whether aid is needed in close proximity to the existing bases of humanitarian actors or not. When fighting broke out between armed groups in December 2017 in the Ouham Pendé prefecture, for example, more than 65,000 IDPs found refuge in the city of Paoua, home to 40,000 people. Interviewees from one organisation explained that as they were not present in Paoua, they had set up a country emergency team with specialists of different sectors and intervened with distribution of NFI kits and GBV support centres in Paoua from their base further west. While relying first on their own funds and later on *ad hoc* emergency funding, it took them two to three months between the peak of the crisis and

their first intervention. In contrast, another example shows how humanitarian agencies can respond much faster when they are already present in an area. In October 2018, new clashes between anti-Balaka and ex-Séléka broke out in Batangafo, in Ouham prefecture. As a result of the violence over 30,000 people were displaced and existing IDP sites were largely burnt to the ground. As highlighted in the interviews and in after-response reports (MSF, 2019; Solidarités International, 2018), after a short break in the activities to assess the security situation, humanitarian agencies that were already established there were able to respond immediately with essential services, and with a more focused humanitarian response within three weeks (Oxfam, 2018; MSF, 2019).

From the perspective of how the individual organisations manage the external constraints, the two examples above highlight two further elements that drive the timeliness of the response: (1) organisational flexibility (e.g. the extent to which an organisation's protocols and contingency plans are appropriate to the context in which they operate), and (2) the quality of an organisation's material and human resources as well as its funding. With regard to the first, interviews pointed to a need to manage organisational processes better so that 'bureaucracy' does not take over. Although humanitarian response is supposedly flexible, systems and bureaucracy have crept in. As one respondent noted, too strong a focus on the humanitarian programme cycle has meant that humanitarian actors in CAR tend not to be flexible and responsive enough, following instead each step to the letter. Using information already available, learning from mistakes and adapting accordingly was highlighted as an antidote to bureaucracy. With regard to the response in Batangafo, for example, MSF activated elements of a contingency plan the organisation had designed following previous incidents in 2017. More than 10,000 people sought shelter in the town's hospital, which MSF had been running since 2006. According to MSF's own review (MSF, 2019), the implementation of their mass casualty plan and the WASH

contingency plan facilitated a quick WASH response, and reinforced security measures and epidemiological surveillance at the hospital. Two humanitarian donors that the Research Team spoke to highlighted that they value contingency plans as an indicator of an organisation's capacity to deliver humanitarian responses in CAR. Interestingly, however, while it would indeed appear that the context in CAR requires an organisation to be constantly ready to adjust, none of the respondents from the participating organisations specifically identified having such contingency plans as an enabler for their work in the country.

A way for humanitarian donors to leverage the existing emergency capacity is the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM). Coordinated by UNICEF, who first piloted it in early 2013 as a mechanism of last resort,³³ the RRM has since become the go-to mechanism for the humanitarian country-team for multisector assessments and emergency response in NFIs/shelter and WASH in response to shocks caused by the conflict or natural disasters. According to interviews, the RRM in CAR had already reached its yearly targets by mid-2018. It has largely become the be all and end all for emergency response, something which it was never designed for, having been conceived as a mechanism of last resort if no actors are able to intervene in an area. This development is both due to a general lack of emergency capacity of other actors and because it is an integrated response instead of a sector specific one. The RRM is considered as the collective scaling-up capacity of CAR's humanitarian system.

Even for this mechanism, however, response times can reach three to four months, with a median response time of 28 days in 2017.³⁴ While intervening country-wide, in fact, the mechanism relies on operational partners to implement activities. Interviews with staff coordinating the RRM in CAR indicated that based on their experience, a timely response seems to be linked to very specific elements of an organisation's set-up: a restricted geographical area to cover, a prolonged presence in the same area, a good knowledge of the context in which they operate, and a good negotiation capacity with non-state armed groups. With three operational partners in 2018, each responsible for a different area of the country, the RRM has the ambition to

**JUST BECAUSE THERE IS AN RRM,
ORGANISATIONS SHOULD NOT
GIVE UP ON BUILDING ON THEIR
OWN EMERGENCY CAPACITY AND
LOBBYING THEIR DONORS FOR IT.**

³³ In the absence of emergency capacity on site.

³⁴ 50% of interventions have started within this timeframe (UNICEF and REACH, 2017).

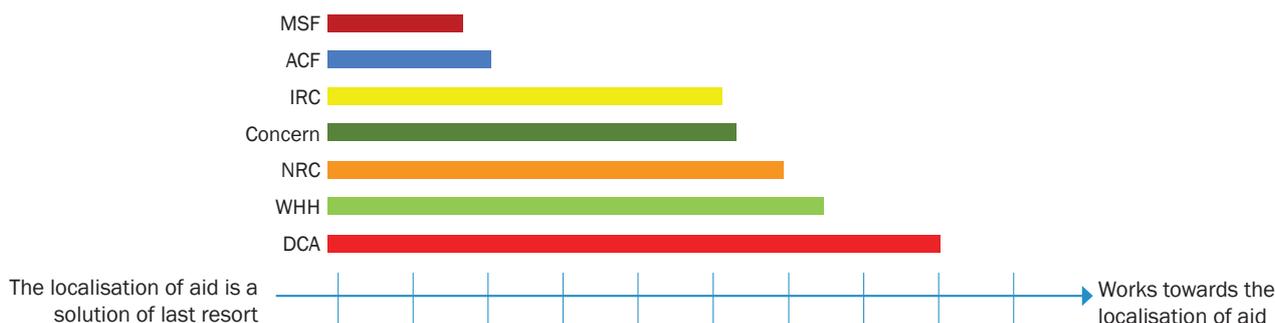


Figure 5: Combined average results of Perception Study identity exercise in Annex 1 (views in November 2018 of approx. 5-6 CAR-based staff members per organisation)

expand its operational capacity in 2019, having identified gaps in shelter and the south-eastern area of CAR (OCHA, 2018).

While the RRM (like the MSF EURECA) is seen as a valuable model to be replicated across CAR, the challenge will be to ensure that it remains a mechanism of last resort, with organisations building on their own emergency capacity. As the response to the incidents in Batangafo unfolded in November 2018, in fact, the Research Team understood that initially the RRM intervened with a standard WASH response without taking note of what already existed on site. The response proved more effective when it strengthened the capacity that was already available. Just because there is an RRM, organisations should not give up on building on their own emergency capacity and lobbying their donors for it.

Resources and know-how

The field research found that to be agile and flexible, an organisation has to have the ability to cover CAR's very high operational costs. While these costs affect all organisations equally, the interviews with development actors highlighted how longer implementation time frames allowed them to better factor in such costs.

While it is extremely difficult to have an overall view of how much operational costs account for an organisation's humanitarian budget, all respondents agreed that these tend to be exceptionally high, because of CAR's

geographical position, reliance on imported goods, and poor infrastructure. The INGO Coordination Committee in CAR attempted in 2018 to glean a better insight by developing an accurate reflection of operational costs in their entirety. Differently constructed budgets and definitions of support costs make such an overview a highly complicated undertaking, however (Development Initiatives, 2008). One attempt, a 2017 study, puts forward the average impact of support (mostly logistics) costs on the humanitarian budgets in CAR at an average of between of 30% and 50% (Picco and Vircoulon, 2017, p. 40). This means that one of the greatest challenges for humanitarian organisations there is in fact to overcome logistical constraints. An organisation's ability to manage such constraints *de facto* translates into its ability to extend its operations beyond its current reach within acceptable time frames.

From the perspective of know-how, respondents all highlighted that having the right human resources is a common challenge. The low literacy and education rates in CAR mean that there are not enough skilled workers to be hired as national staff. For some organisations promoting localisation is understood as a policy objective *per se*, while for others localisation can be simply understood as working with and along local partners. All highlighted the challenges in fulfilling both approaches, as can be seen in Figure 5. For example, generally, DCA, WHH, and NRC could be expected to be even further to the right in the graph in view of their policy support to the localisation agenda and/or their global operational approaches.

Moreover, the volatility of the context and the insecurity – both real and perceived – as well as the lack of infrastructure outside Bangui make it difficult for international agencies to attract and retain international talent in CAR.

TO BE AGILE AND FLEXIBLE, AN ORGANISATION HAS TO HAVE THE ABILITY TO COVER CAR'S VERY HIGH OPERATIONAL COSTS.

One of the donor respondents mentioned that he had interacted with four different country directors for the same organisation in the course of one year. For other organisations, the country director position had been vacant for several months. The high turnover may also contribute to a loss of institutional memory and knowledge.

Respondents from both participating and non-participating organisations highlighted how the support from the rest of the organisation was instrumental in addressing such constraints. Relying on a large international network of professionals with the right skills can help fill the gaps when vacancies open. As respondents from two participating organisations highlighted, having other country offices in neighbouring countries also allows informal exchanges on lessons learnt and collective problem-solving as well as a more holistic response following displacement patterns. Historical data analysis may also help with the loss of collective institutional knowledge and avoid gaps in addressing needs.

While the challenges confronting aid organisations in CAR are similar for all, an element that has emerged from the interviews is the advantages linked to the size of an organisation. Naturally, the bigger an organisation is, the bigger are its resources and its ability to cope with the operational challenges in CAR and to attract further resources and visibility. This in turn helps in negotiating with all the different actors. It is not only about the size of an organisation relative to the others in an area or across the country, however. It is about the support apparatus that works from outside CAR to sustain the outcomes being planned and achieved in the country.

Finally, given the importance of resource availability in a context like CAR, a recurring theme in the interviews was that of resource-sharing. Beyond the use of common services – especially as regards security and logistics, such as the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO), the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), Première Urgence's common storage facilities (Logistics Cluster, 2016), and Humanity International's logistical hub in Bambari – the participating organisations

highlighted the value of reciprocal support. Following clashes in Alindao in November 2018, for example, ACF informally provided support to MSF-Spain while it was re-establishing its own presence in the area. In doing so, they reciprocated similar support that had previously been given them, as MSF-Spain was present in Alindao at the time ACF arrived there. Whether sharing bases with other alliance members to save on costs, or sharing communication capacities to ensure common messaging, leveraging alliances and networks is a common strategy in CAR.

Funding

Given the operational constraints, donors play an important role in influencing the local presence of the organisations in CAR. Historically, CAR has been a neglected emergency among donors (Smith and Swithern, 2013). In 2010, for example, NRC had to close the programmes it had established in 2007, due to a lack of funding (NRC, 2010). The 2013 crisis put CAR in the spotlight and attracted new funding, though never to the amount humanitarian actors estimated was needed. While the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2018 was funded at approximately 50% (FTS, 2018) – an increase from 2016 and 2017 – interviewees stressed that it is not only the quantity of funding that is of paramount importance to the humanitarian response in CAR, but also the quality. Flexible funding, in the form of unearmarked and multi-year contributions, allow organisations to adapt to the everchanging humanitarian environment in the country.

Organisations with private sources of funding or flexible agreements negotiated at the HQ level with 'home-based'³⁵ institutional donors acknowledged that this helps them to cope with some of the contextual constraints and thus to be more agile and flexible. Having consistently been contributing humanitarian funding to CAR since 2015, some of the top ten institutional donors have also become aware of the need for increased flexibility. Consequently, NGOs have been able to expand the number of multi-year grants. Respondents in CAR argued that multi-year funding liberates them from unrealistically short timelines and allows them to better prepare for and deliver their programming at the right time and in the right place. While more research is necessary to conclusively establish the link

LEVERAGING ALLIANCES AND NETWORKS IS A COMMON STRATEGY IN CAR.

³⁵ E.g. Ireland for Concern, Germany for Welthungerhilfe, and Norway for NRC.

between multi-year funding and operational flexibility, humanitarian practitioners have also highlighted such a linkage elsewhere (Obrecht, 2018).³⁶ For others, such as USAID – the biggest humanitarian donor in CAR – the focus has been on funding common services (USAID, 2018) such as security services for NGOs, air travel support, road transport, on a multi-year basis. Their aim is to make costly logistics more affordable.

Finally, a great constraint for humanitarian organisations are the limited avenues for early recovery and development funding. Not all donors have both funding streams (humanitarian and development) targeting activities in CAR. The implications of such a gap is that outcomes achieved through humanitarian interventions cannot be sustained over time and that some early recovery/development work ends up encroaching on funding allocated for humanitarian work. As one respondent noted “we are a development organisation with a 60% humanitarian turnover”. Organisations that have been able to secure funding from both the humanitarian and development arm of the same donor have highlighted how this allows them to be better in sync with the evolving situation on the ground. This is also the stated aim of the EU Fund Bêkou (European Commission, n.d.). Set up in 2014, Bêkou aims to link emergency humanitarian aid with simultaneous actions gradually supporting development drivers in the medium and long-term along the LRRD approach. As one contributing donor noted, Bêkou interestingly does this by connecting the macro-level (the Ministries) with the meso- (the UN and national agencies) and micro-levels (the NGOs). While the Fund is well positioned to intervene after ECHO phases out in certain areas so as to maximise the impact of the interventions, results on the ground have been

³⁶ Linked to multi-year funding, the opposite argument can also be made, i.e. that multi-year planning “can introduce greater rigidity and limit the ability to make changes to plans as conditions change over time” (Obrecht, 2018, p. 29).

mixed. Only one example has been cited as a successful transfer from ECHO to Bêkou (Picco and Vircoulon, 2017, p. 38). One of the development donors interviewed in CAR highlighted that the challenge is to see how NGOs can tackle structural needs alongside conflict-driven ones. It requires a certain degree of risk-taking from development donors who are called to experiment with untraditional forms of support to NGOs, such as projects targeting displaced groups across Cameroon and CAR.

Generally, the research pointed to little coordination between humanitarian and early recovery/development donors. Filling this gap, an initiative to link humanitarian funding from the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) with transition funding from Bêkou was launched in south-eastern CAR in February 2019. Some coordination also seems to happen among stabilisation and development actors. Reportedly, however, the division of labour between the different financial instruments and donors to the national recovery and peacebuilding plan – a shared strategic reference for donors in CAR – has not been agreed.³⁷

3.2 Focus and visibility

In face of a complex and multi-layered operational context, humanitarian space is constantly negotiated at the micro-level, in each of the different localities. The way armed groups are structured, in fact, can change substantially across different response axes and the internal organisation of the non-state armed groups controlling the different areas can prove more or less hierarchical. An organisation’s focus³⁸ and the visibility of its actions are two elements that were frequently mentioned by interviewees as factors enabling operational outreach.

Insecurity is a significant operational constraint as evidenced by the number of incidents directly affecting humanitarian workers and assets (UN, 2019). The numbers alone, however, do not tell the whole story. Interviews confirmed that unlike some other countries, humanitarian actors are not a specific target *per se*. Being humanitarian is not a gauge of absolute protection against attacks but does not turn them into targets either. The high

³⁷ Based on interviews in Bangui. See also European Court of Auditors, 2017.

³⁸ Intended as an organisation’s strategic areas of work.

**ORGANISATIONAL FLEXIBILITY
DEMANDS RESOURCES – BE THEY
FINANCIAL OR HUMAN – BUT ALSO
STRUCTURAL INVESTMENTS
TOWARDS A MINDSET READY
TO ADJUST ALONG SHIFTING
PARAMETERS.**

number of security incidents rather provides a glimpse into the sheer lack of respect for human life in general, and the prevalence of criminal predatory practices. In a country lacking basic necessities, INGOs have a significant portion of resources and play an important economic role. For example, the sections of MSF present in CAR together make up the second largest employer in the country and it spent 57.8 mill EUR in 2017 (MSF, 2017) as opposed to the 28.2 mill EUR budget of the Ministry of Health for 2018 (EU, 2018, p. 4). Attacks on humanitarian actors can thus largely be linked to the fact that they are key economic actors in possession of valuable resources (ACF, 2018).

Generally, respondents highlighted how organisations having a health focus enjoy better acceptance because of the role they play in the provision of such an essential public service. In the absence of state health capacity in most of the country, everybody, from civilians to members of the different non-state armed groups, relies on the presence of NGOs. As demonstrated by an increase in targeted attacks on health facilities (ACF, 2018; OCHA, 2018), as always, however, acceptance is never to be taken for granted.³⁹ In CAR, it seems to be negotiated through a virtuous circle of respect for humanitarian principles and the quality and visibility of humanitarian programmes.

The principles of impartiality and neutrality are particularly relevant in a context where communities as well as non-state armed groups tend to split along religious and/or ethnic fault lines. Generally, because of active coordination both among NGOs thanks to the CAR INGO Coordination Committee (CCO), and across humanitarian actors thanks to strong UN humanitarian leadership, humanitarian principles remain high on the agenda of humanitarian actors in the country. Trainings on humanitarian principles are organised regularly by the CCO and tensions in the implementation of the principles have been brought to the attention of the UN-led coordination mechanisms in Bangui. One interviewee noted that their organisation was purposely targeting two communities with different affiliations for

³⁹ Only specific post-incident evaluation can clarify the exact elements that have led to such incidents.

IN CAR, ACCEPTANCE SEEMS TO BE NEGOTIATED THROUGH A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE OF RESPECT FOR HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND THE QUALITY AND VISIBILITY OF HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMES.

parallel and concurrent interventions, so as to maintain these communities' perception of the agency as a neutral and impartial actor. Another noted, however, the difficulty of maintaining the balance among their staff to ensure that the organisation mirrors the diversity found in the country, because of the little technical capacity available locally. All respondents highlighted how communication with communities as well as with members of the armed groups on what it means to be a humanitarian organisation is a constant but worthwhile endeavour.

As for focus, visibility is an important element of an organisation's acceptance strategy in CAR. It is about implementing high impact programmes and prioritising activities that show tangible outcomes an organisation can be more easily associated with. Building or rehabilitating a school is a good way to be visible, for example. Logos therefore become as much a shield as humanitarian principles. As opposed to other contexts, where visible identities may turn humanitarian actors into targets, respondents highlighted how in CAR visibility is an integral part of shaping the perceptions of all stakeholders as to an organisation's impartiality and neutrality. Good humanitarian space at the micro-level, however, complicates agility and flexibility. As the spectrum of non-state armed groups – including their identities, motivations, and willingness to respect IHL – can vary substantially from one response axis to another, it takes time to carry out valuable contextual analysis, to build trust and acceptance, and to influence the perception that local communities have of an organisation's impartiality and neutrality. Respondents highlighted that to do this while still remaining agile requires further resources – be they in terms of better quality or number – to invest into expanding their access to other areas. NRC's mediation project, for example, was also highlighted as helpful for all humanitarian responders when conflict broke out in Alindao in late 2018. The presence of an increased number of protection teams reportedly helped gaining the acceptance

GOOD HUMANITARIAN SPACE AT THE MICRO-LEVEL COMPLICATES AGILITY AND FLEXIBILITY.

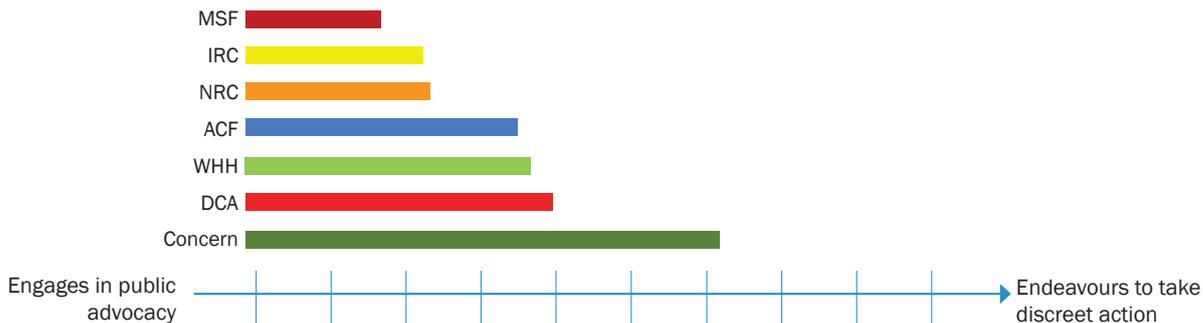


Figure 6: Combined average results of Perception Study identity exercise in Annex 1 (views in November 2018 of approx. 5-6 CAR-based staff members per organisation)

necessary to quickly move in with the response. If leveraged effectively, a humanitarian access strategy at the country level, with specific responsibilities at the global level for pushing the agenda was recognised as a definite asset.

Finally, visibility can in fact also be understood as an organisation’s ability – whether individually or collectively – to maintain the necessary level of attention on CAR globally. From an advocacy perspective, staff from two participating organisations noted the importance of the engagement of the highest institutional leadership. Staff felt that having the organisation’s highest level of leadership denounce the challenges humanitarian actors face in CAR was an opportunity to keep decision-makers engaged at the global level, while battling competing priorities. As seen in Figure 6, however, while pursuing the same aims, other organisations have instead preferred to be more discreet and support a more collective voice around risks and opportunities in CAR, whether through the INGO coordination platform in the country or as a group of like-minded organisations.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

FROM MACRO TO MICRO

This case-study is part of a broader piece of research, and the findings from CAR will feed into the final conclusions of that project. While it would be premature at this stage to highlight recommendations, the research in CAR has provided some valuable insights, both with regard to the specificities of the context, and the way a number of aid organisations negotiate the environment in which they operate.

The reason why the participating organisations are working in CAR, and the activities that they implement are first and foremost informed by their identity and added value as organisations. They think macro. How they are able to fulfil their mission is predominantly shaped by the contextual variables they are confronted with. They do micro. CAR's humanitarian needs are deeply rooted in failed governance and predatory actions by non-state armed groups, aggravated by mistrust between different communities. At the same time, the context is highly volatile and violence can flare up suddenly. While violent attacks carried out by non-state armed groups are a common denominator across the country, each area has its own specificities. Aid organisations' ability to operate in the extremely complex context of CAR is based on a constant balance between understanding the broader dynamics that affect the response in the country and managing local forces that can enable or prevent their work. In striking this balance, three issues stand out as being of particular importance:

Agility and flexibility are key, and they are linked to both institutional and contextual aspects

In view of the highly volatile context in CAR, adaptive capabilities, including organisational flexibility and agility are an asset. This demands resources – be they financial or human – but also a culture that values learning and a structure that integrates lessons learnt. While none of

the organisations approached directly acknowledged organisational flexibility as a specific enabler for their work in CAR, the research highlighted that those organisations that have the structure and/or the appropriate systems and protocols as well as the right resources to adjust to the context are better able to respond quickly and relatively widely. Anticipating risks and adapting protocols following operational reviews, for example, was shown to improve the timeliness of a response. Similarly, investing into sound contextual analyses and building an organisation's presence in CAR from the bottom up, within the parameters set by its global identity and with the support of the rest of the organisation, better enables it to fulfil its mission.

Resources disproportionally influence the aid map of CAR

To be agile and flexible, organisations need to cover CAR's very high operational costs, and they are largely dependent on material, human, and financial resources available. The landlocked geographical situation of CAR as well its human development indicators strongly influence organisational decision-making. Furthermore, participating organisations are often constrained by existing funding opportunities, limiting the scope they have to implement their strategies according to their mission and assessment of the context. Generally, the overall funding picture does not seem to match the picture of needs in CAR. The lack of appropriate funding especially for early recovery and transition programmes, where these are possible, is a hindrance to securing humanitarian outcomes. Caution should be exercised in stretching humanitarian resources too far. Development donors should also take more risks and find innovative ways to support long-term

development goals within the constraints of the context in CAR.

Impact and engagement are essential to maintaining humanitarian access

In a context where localised violence often erupts along religious and community fault lines, managing perceptions of an organisation's identity and *modus operandi* is instrumental to its acceptance and its ability to operate. Operational outreach is further enabled by the focus and visibility of an organisations' work. Because of limited public services across the country, organisations working in certain sectors – such as health – are seen to perform basic essential services. This can help with how they are perceived by the different actors in a specific area. Similarly, showing concrete outcomes – such as school buildings – can contribute to positive recognition. Such factors, however, are only effective if coupled with high-quality impact of an organisation's intervention in line with humanitarian principles and a constant engagement with local communities and armed actors over time.

Looking ahead, the signing of the Global Peace Agreement in February 2019 has provided renewed hope for a political solution to the crisis in CAR. A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities will therefore be all the more important. This research has shown that moving from a strategic analysis of its added value on a macro-level in CAR generally, each participating organisation constantly strikes a careful balance between its identity – purpose/mission – and the expected impact of its work on a micro-level. In light of this, caution should be exercised so that humanitarian organisations do not become an instrument for achieving peace. The new UN humanitarian leadership will have to play a strategic role in defending humanitarian space and balancing effectively the different aims of the UN presence in CAR as it has been the case until now. For humanitarian actors, impartiality will remain the overarching guide as to the choice of where to intervene and whom to target. As the aid response is largely shaped by institutional funding in CAR, donors will need to be careful and recognise that what may be a strategic objective in the implementation of the RCPCA and the peace process, may not be in line with humanitarian principles. While for example providing support to former

combatants will be an integral element on a road to long-lasting peace, humanitarian responses will need to be based on the basis of needs alone whether they include former combatants or not.

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7 ANNEXES

Annex 1 Perception Study Tool

Where would you place your organisation in terms of the following characteristics? ⁴⁰

The political reasons behind the suffering do not drive the humanitarian work



Establishes a political basis to guide humanitarian work

Takes discreet action, eschews public confrontation



Engages in public advocacy

Freely determines priorities



External pressures determine priorities

Operations for people *most* in need



Operations for people in need

Fully responsible for security decisions



Follows UN security decisions

Works towards the localisation of aid

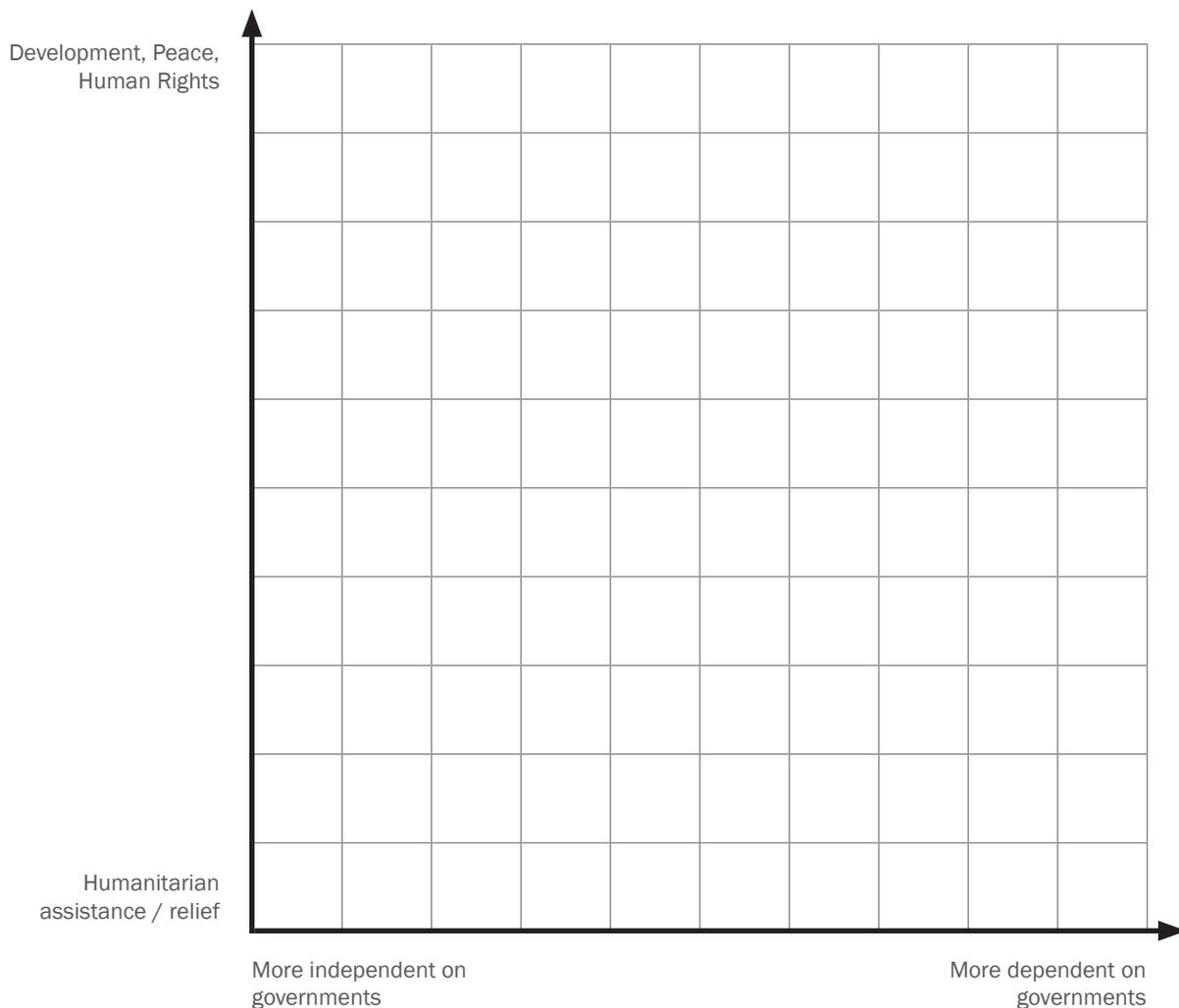


The localisation of aid is a solution of last resort

40 Interviewees in Bangui were given this Perception Study exercise in French.

If you were to place your organisation on the grid below based on your personal perception, where would you put it?

Please also add other organisations to the grid, both those which you would put closely to your own organisation, and those which you see further away. This could be for example any of the participants in the Mandates Study (ACF France, Concern Worldwide, ICRC, IRC, MSF-Spain, NRC, Welthungerhilfe), or any other organisation that you can think of.

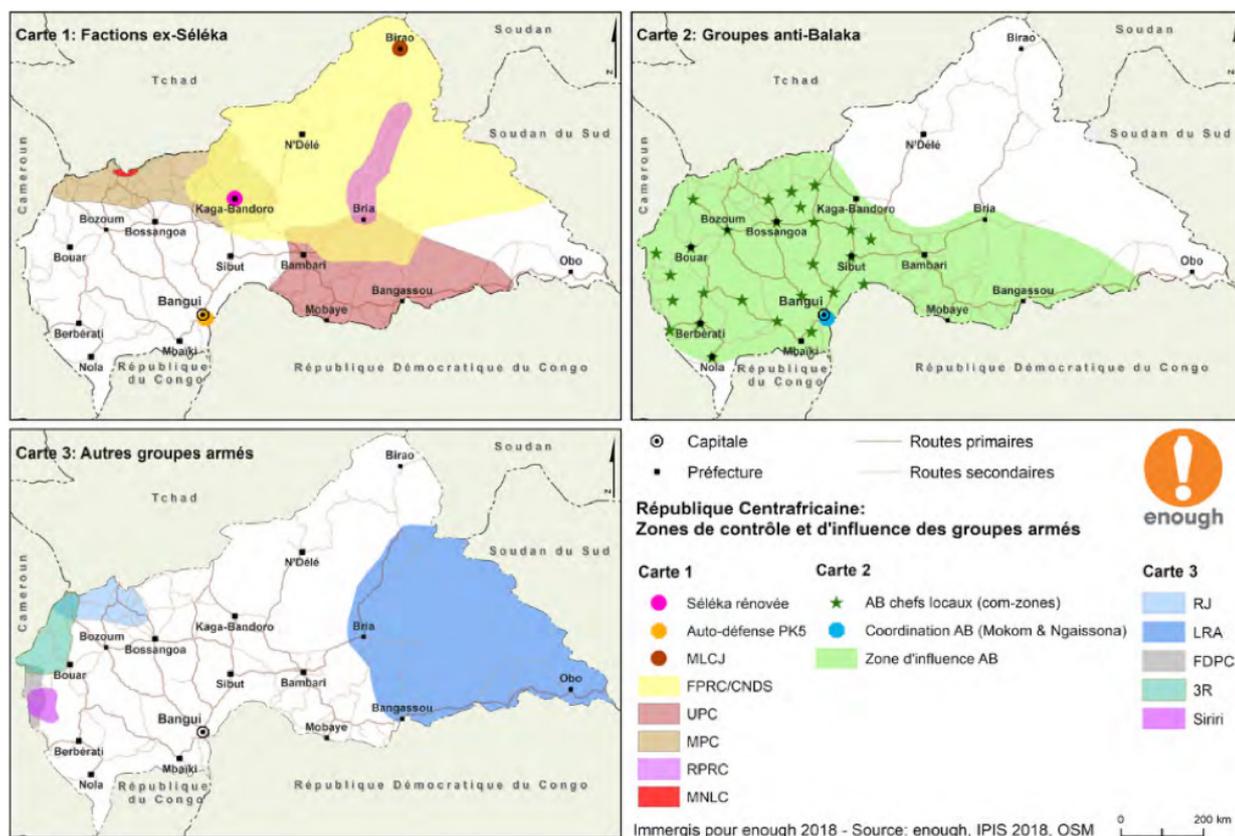


Comments?

Annex 2

Geographical areas of influence of non-state armed groups in CAR (Oct 2018)

Source: Dukhan, 2018, p. 4



Annex 3

Operations in CAR of the participating organisations (late 2018)

Overview of operations per organisation

	ACF ⁴¹	Concern ⁴²	DCA ⁴³	IRC ⁴⁴
In CAR since	2006	March 2014	2015	2006
Rationale for first entering CAR	Nutritional expertise support to the Ministry of Public Health	To provide emergency assistance to people displaced by conflict.	Mine Action response to armed violence challenges.	Population displacement and violence
Current key goal in CAR	Emergency: WASH, nutrition, health, NFI, food security, shelter	Deliver quality integrated programmes that reduce extreme poverty and respond to humanitarian needs, in the areas of health and nutrition, food security and WASH, reducing community level conflict and gender inequality.	Armed violence reduction, social cohesion, risk education, livelihoods, psychosocial support and emergency aid.	Women's protection & empowerment Economic recovery, development and food security, health, child protection
Local partners	No	No	Yes	Yes, in some cases
Staff	300 national, 35 international	114 national, 14 international	12 national, 3 international	190 national, 15 international
Budget	EUR 8,495,260 in 2017	EUR 3,505,619 in 2018	USD 2,872,279 in 2017	USD 9,500,000
Donors/Fundraising	Private donors, UNICEF, CDC, ECHO, AFD, Fonds Bêkou, CHF, OFDA, GAC, Sida.	Irish Aid (IAPF and HPP), OFDA, GAC, CHF, Europaid, private donors	UNMAS, DANIDA, CHF (via LWR)	Sida, OFDA, UNFPA, Europaid, CHF, Stichting Vluchteling, UN Trust Fund, private donors

41 <https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/missions/republique-centrafricaine/>
https://www.actioncontrelafaim.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/CASE-STUDY_RCA-HDEF-VF.pdf

42 https://doj19z5hov92o.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/media/country/car_programme_narrative_2018_rd_approval_002.pdf, <https://www.concern.net/where-we-work/africa/central-african-republic>

43 <https://www.danchurchaid.org/where-we-work/car>

44 <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/745/careexternalsap-final1.pdf>

Annex 3 continued

	MSF-Spain ⁴⁵	NRC ⁴⁶	WHH ⁴⁷
In CAR since	1997	March 2014	2014
Rationale for first entering CAR	Failing health system; people dying of treatable diseases, especially children	Rehabilitating and reopening schools	To provide provide long-term assistance to people suffering from hunger.
Current key goal in CAR	Sexual violence (focus on minors and male victims) Primary and second health care Mobile emergencies (currently hepatitis E)	To influence the international community, advocating for increased funding and better protection of the most vulnerable people. Activities include education, ICLA, livelihoods and food security, shelter and settlements, and WASH.	Enable the most vulnerable people to improve their agriculture and food security, raise their incomes and strengthen their resilience.
Local partners	No	It is an aim.	Yes
Staff	520 national, 60 international	241 national, 20 international	45 national, 11 international
Budget	EUR 10 million (+emergencies)	USD 11 million in 2017	EUR 3.2 million in 2017
Donors/Fundraising	Inditex, MSF Japan, MSF Spain, MSF Canada- MSF Argentina	UNICEF, UNHCR, ECHO, UNDP, OFDA, SDS, NMFA, Sida	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), ECHO, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

45 https://www.msf.es/sites/default/files/attachments/informe_de_misiones_ocba_2017_esp_final.pdf

46 <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/fact-sheets/2018/june/car/fact-sheet-car-q2-2018.pdf>

47 <https://www.welthungerhilfe.org/our-work/projects-programmes/central-african-republic-strategies-goals/>

Types of activities per organisation and prefecture

Source: OCHA CAR Who does What Where (3W), complemented by information provided by organisation staff

Prefecture (capital)	ACF	Concern	DCA	IRC	MSF-S	NRC	WHH
<i>Bamingui-Bangoran (Ndélé)</i>						Protection	
<i>Kémo (Sibut)</i>				Protection Health Livelihoods		WASH Food Sec.	
<i>Basse-Kotto (Mobaye)</i>	Health Nutrition WASH MHCP				Protection Health Livelihoods		
<i>Haute-Kotto (Bria)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection				
<i>Lobaye (Mbaïki)</i>		WASH Health/ Nutrition Food Sec. Livelihoods			Health	Protection	Food Sec.
<i>Mambéré-Kaddéï (Berbérati)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection			WASH Food Sec.	
<i>Mbomou (Bangassou)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection				
<i>Haut-Mbomou, (Obo)</i>							
<i>Nana-Grébizi, (Kaga Bandoro)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection	Protection Health Livelihoods		Protection	
<i>Nana-Mambéré, (Bouar)</i>	WASH Nutrition Health RRM		Mine Action Livelihoods Protection				Food Sec.
<i>Ombella-Mpoko (Bimbo)</i>	WASH Nutrition MHCP	WASH Health/ Nutrition Food Sec. Livelihoods Conflict reduction/ Gender equality/ DRR	Mine Action Livelihoods Protection		Health	Protection	Food Sec.
<i>Ouaka (Bambari)</i>		WASH Food Sec. Livelihoods	Mine Action Livelihoods Protection			Shelter Food Sec.	
<i>Ouham (Bossangoa)</i>	Food Sec. Livelihood WASH RRM				Health Nutrition	Protection	Food Sec.
<i>Ouham-Pendé (Bozoum)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection	Protection Health Livelihoods	Health	Protection	Food Sec.
<i>Sangha-Mbaéré (Nola)</i>							
<i>Vakaga (Bira)</i>			Mine Action Livelihoods Protection				



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