

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has commissioned through the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) an evaluation of the PBF portfolio in the Central African Republic (CAR) from 2014 through 2018/2019. CAR has been on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) since 2008. Considering the importance of CAR for the PBF and that it had not conducted any evaluations in the country since 2012, the scope of this evaluation covers the PBF portfolio of 14 projects, representing a total budget of USD 42.3 million, disbursed in two phases: 2014-2016 and 2016-2018/19. The purpose of this evaluation is to analyze the results, their impact on peacebuilding, as well as the governance and supervision mechanisms established by the PBF. To this end, the PBF has contracted a team of consultants consisting of a team leader, a peacebuilding expert, and a national expert who undertook this evaluation from July to November 2019.

### Context

In the course of its history, CAR has experienced several coups d'Etat<sup>1</sup> and went through a first civil war from 2003 to 2007. At the end of 2012, a second civil war broke out triggered by the Séléka<sup>2</sup> movement, a coalition of rebel groups from the North of the country, which took power under Michel Djotodia, who proclaimed himself President in March 2013. The Government of the Séléka coalition was never able to impose its rule across the country and ended up resigning in January 2014, leaving behind dysfunctional institutions, a drained treasury and a divided country. A transition government was appointed in January 2014 to lead the country back to peace and organize democratic elections in 2015. In September 2014, the African Union peacekeeping mission (MISCA – Mission Internationale de Soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite Africaine) was replaced by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic, or MINUSCA (Mission Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Centrafricaine), initially deploying 10,000 soldiers and 1,800 police officers.<sup>3</sup>

MINUSCA deployed in a highly unstable context, marked by high interreligious and intercommunity tensions incited by anti-Balaka self-defense and ex-Séléka groups controlling certain regions of the country. The transitional government had little capacity, limited authority and no operational military nor internal security forces (ISF). The country was able to hold free elections thanks to significant international assistance, bringing to power President Faustin Archange and a new government in February 2016. Since then, the situation has remained unstable, and the Government has struggled to establish its authority in large parts of the country controlled by armed groups. Despite gradual achievements, the country continues to experience sporadic fighting and violent incidents as well as human rights violations.

**On 6 February 2019, the CAR Government signed a peace agreement with 14 armed groups,** which was facilitated by the African Union, the Sudanese Government, the United Nations and the Russian Government. The Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Central African Republic (APPR) seems promising since it has been signed by most of the armed groups and brought

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<sup>1</sup> The country experienced coups or changes of government by force in 1965, 1979, 1081, 1993, 2003, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Séléka means “coalition” in Sango, the vernacular language in CAR.

<sup>3</sup> Security Council Resolution 2149. Available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2149>, accessed on 7 August 2019.

together all international stakeholders around one document.<sup>4</sup> Despite this positive development, the country continues to suffer from the consequences of years of conflict marked by a fragile socioeconomic situation, a substantial part of its population being either displaced (463,000 in June 2019) or refugees in neighboring countries (605,000), and 2.9 million people in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>5</sup>.

## **PBF engagements in CAR**

The **PBF has been funding peacebuilding activities in CAR since 2007** with a **total budget of USD 100 million**<sup>6</sup>, of which USD 33.7 million was spent prior to the 2013 crisis. During the transition period from 2014 to 2016, the PBF invested USD 21.0 million. Between 2016 and 2019, the PBF allocated USD 22.3 million, with some of the projects still underway. A total of **USD 42.3 million** was invested during the **period under review**.

The projects of the **first phase targeted urgent needs** such as establishing basic security in Bangui and in the accessible areas of the country, while supporting a transition government with little capacity to organize free and transparent elections. The Bangui Forum of May 2015 was a key milestone that brought together all stakeholders and the population around the organization of the elections, which were held in December 2015 and February 2016. The **second phase of projects** from 2017 to 2018/2019 took place in the context of a **newly elected government**, which was expected to establish its authority and redeploy its agents throughout a country largely controlled by armed groups. With support from international donors (World Bank, European Union, United Nations) and pledges of over USD 2 billion in assistance, the new government defined its priorities in the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for Central African Republic (Plan National de Relèvement et de Consolidation de la Paix pour la République Centrafricaine or RCPCA), adopted during a conference in Brussels in November 2016.<sup>7</sup>

The **PBF funded 14 projects from 2014 to 2018/19** – 13 of which were dedicated to peacebuilding activities and one to the coordination of the projects through the PBF secretariat in Bangui (staff and operations). Among the four priority areas indicated in the “PBF Business Plan for 2014-2016”, the projects financed in CAR focus mainly on priorities 1, 2 and 4, as shown below.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council (UNSC). *Midterm report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic extended pursuant to Security Council resolution 2454 (2019)*. S/2019/608. 30 July 2019.

Available at <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/608>, accessed 7 August 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). *Humanitarian Bulletin-Central African Republic*, July 2019.

Available at :

<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/05.08.2019%20OCHA%20RCA%20Bulletin%20humanitaire%20juillet%202019%20-%20VF.pdf>, accessed on 5 August 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Figure and other financial data pertaining to the CAR portfolio provided by PBSO on 11 December 2019.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission. *€2.06 billion to support the Central African Republic at Brussels conference*. Brussels, 17 November 2016. Available at [https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-3804\\_en.htm](https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-3804_en.htm), accessed 22 August 2019.

<sup>8</sup> PBSO. *UN Peacebuilding Fund Business Plan: 2014-2016*. New York. 2014, p. 6.

Priority 1: Responding to imminent threats to the peace process, support implementation of peace agreements and political dialogue

- IRF 78 Strengthening of the human rights monitoring and reporting capacity in CAR
- IRF 90 Support for the return of ex-Séléka to their communities
- IRF 103 Support national reconciliation and dialogue for a sustainable peace in CAR
- IRF 187 Support to mediation and dialogue for a durable peace in CAR

Priority 2: Strengthening national capacities to promote coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution

- IRF 128 Community violence reduction in CAR (Paoua)
- IRF 130 Support the electoral cycle (security for peaceful elections)
- IRF 183 Promote women’s political participation and leadership in peacebuilding
- IRF 185 Community violence reduction in CAR (Bambari)

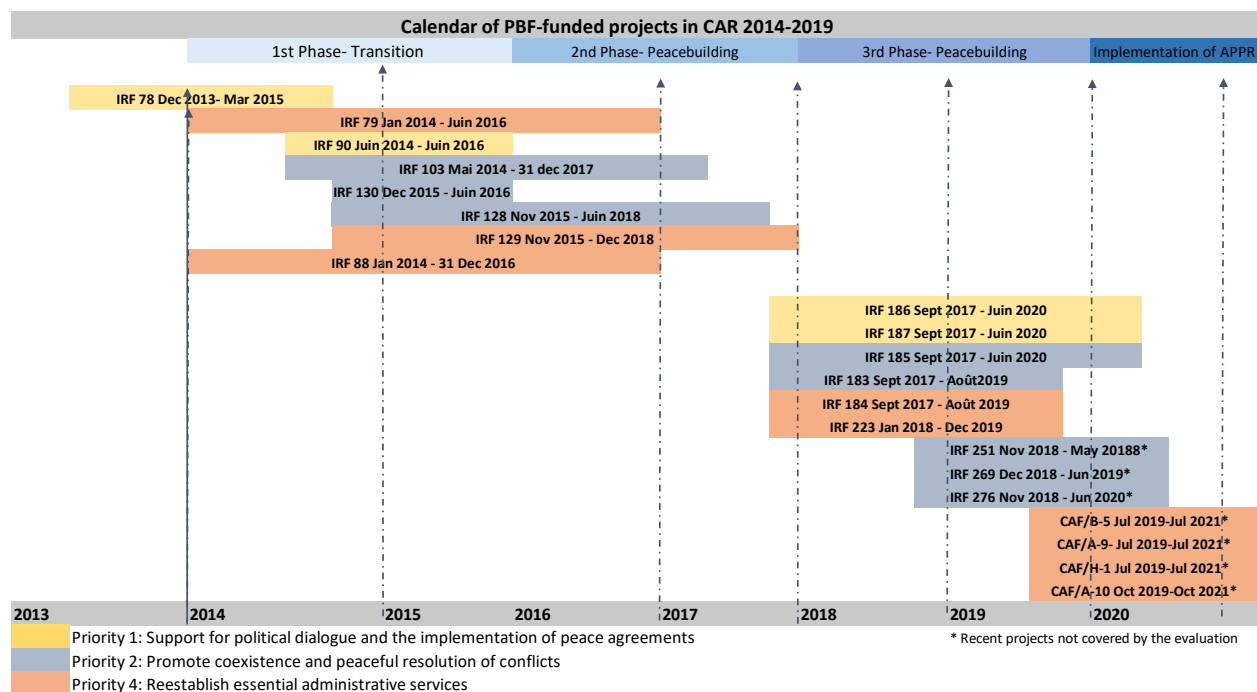
Priority 3: Supporting efforts to revitalize the economy and generate immediate peace dividends for the population

- No project was funded under this priority area however some results of the communal violence reduction projects included income-generating activities

Priority 4: Re-establishing essential state administrative services and related human resources and technical capacities

- IRF 79 Emergency rehabilitation of police and gendarmerie stations in Bangui
- IRF 88 Support to payment of police and gendarmerie salaries in CAR
- IRF 129 Support to the redeployment of state authority and socioeconomic revitalization of communities
- IRF 184 Restoration of state authority and socio-economic recovery in Bambari
- IRF 186 Support for the renewal of the Interior Security Forces
- (IRF 223 Support monitoring and evaluation of PBF projects implementation in CAR)

Projects were implemented according to the following calendar:



Due to the **volatile context and the absence of a clear peacebuilding strategic plan** in CAR, **all 14 projects** evaluated were financed through the **Immediate Response Facility (IRF)**. Projects were therefore limited to a duration of 18 months and a USD 3 million ceiling, except for the project on the payment of salaries of the internal security forces, which benefited from a budgetary exception to cover all ISF salary needs.

**Seven United Nations agencies were implementing partners** for the 14 projects, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP – 10 projects); the International Organization for Migration (IOM – 3 projects); the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO – 1 project); UN-Women (1 project), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA – 1 project) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR – 1 project). UNDP (9 projects), IOM (3 projects), UN-Women and OHCHR were primary implementing partners, i.e. project “leads”, whereas other agencies were partners for specific results of various projects. Most of these projects were implemented in close collaboration with one or several government ministries or national civil society organizations.

## **Methodology and limits of the analysis**

Based on the terms of reference prepared by PBSO management, this evaluation intends to better understand **two essential dimensions** of the portfolio: a) its **effectiveness and impact on peacebuilding** in CAR; and b) the **effectiveness of the management, oversight, and coordination** structures. Each dimension was evaluated according to the development evaluation criteria of the Development Aid Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which include relevance, effectiveness, impact, efficiency and sustainability. The projects were also analyzed with respect to integrating and achieving gender principles and the specific needs of women and girls.

The evaluation team conducted a **document review followed by a three-week field mission (25 August-18 September 2019) in CAR** (Bangui, Bambari and Paoua) during which they **conducted 98 semi-structured interviews** with 127 individuals (29 women and 98 men) and **nine group discussions** involving 113 individuals (17 women, 96 men). The data collected was triangulated between the three sources of information as much as possible. To draw conclusions and formulate the recommendations presented in this report, the evaluation relied on five key analytical methods, including a test of each project’s theories of change, an assessment of the project implementation process, and inquiry of the “most significant change” generated by projects for the beneficiaries, as well as an analysis of the trajectories of change and the cause and effect mechanisms to finally assess the specific contribution of each project to peacebuilding in CAR.

Even though the data collected is rich and varied, the evaluation team faced some challenges which affected the availability of data and might have had an influence on the findings. For example, there were significant **variations in terms of the quantity and richness of information available** for each the 13 operational projects; some projects were well documented (for example IRF 128, IRF 185, or IRF 129) while others only had basic documents and very few key informants who could be tracked down (IRF 78, IRF 90). The evaluation team **could not access detailed budget information** for any of the projects, which therefore limited the possibility of an in-depth analysis of the efficiency of projects. Furthermore, **some projects were still being implemented**, hence making an evaluation of

their ultimate impact impossible. Finally, the **composition and availability of some key informants** may have favored some perspectives versus others, with a larger representation (74%) of United Nations staff, RUNOs, and local partners (government and civil society) than projects beneficiaries (26%) among key informants. Finally, only a small percentage of women were interviewed with 30 out of 128 key informants being female (23%).

## Evaluation findings

The following sections present an overview of findings for each of the evaluation criteria with respect to the project management and oversight mechanisms.

### Relevance of PBF projects in CAR

In general, the **PBF projects in CAR were relevant to the context, the needs of the moment, and the priorities of the UN and the CAR Government.** However, there were **certain weaknesses in terms of the strategic fit of certain projects, the coherence of project activities** for several projects, and with respect to the **geographic targeting.**

The context of the PBF interventions in CAR from 2014 to 2019 was very volatile and changed a lot from one funding phase to another and even from one year to the next. PBF projects from 2014 to 2017 took place during a time marked by a precarious calm punctuated by intercommunal violence in Bangui, the rule of armed groups in most parts of the country, a depleted economy and a humanitarian crisis covering most of the country. In this context, the projects were mainly reacting to urgent needs of the moment, therefore limiting their potential for building longer term peace. The stabilization of the situation in Bangui and the organization of elections in 2015 were key priorities during this phase.

**Projects funded after mid-2014 were well aligned with the priorities identified by a PBC and PBSO mission in March 2014 and with priorities laid out in Security Council resolution 2149** of 10 April 2014, which created MINUSCA and provided details on its mandate and priority areas.

Peacebuilding priorities were more clearly defined during the 2017-2018/19 period, not only by the annual resolutions authorizing the MINUSCA mandate, but also by the CAR Government's strategic priorities outlined in the RCPCA and the United Nations' priorities described in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

### General strategy

According to the PBF's guidelines, its funding should support projects enabling the United Nations to "be more strategic and coherent in responding quickly peacebuilding needs". **PBF funding has generally contributed to increasing the capacity of both the United Nations system and MINUSCA** by enabling them to engage strategically in peacebuilding activities in CAR through tangible support to political dialogue and reconciliations efforts since 2014. For example, PBF resources, in particular through the mediation and political dialogue projects (IRF 103 and IRF 187), funded meetings, mediation activities and travel to various regions of the country to seek a political agreement between the Central African Government and armed groups. Some projects did, however, address urgent needs rather than follow a long-term strategy, such as the ones on human rights monitoring (IRF 87), rehabilitating police stations and gendarmerie offices in Bangui (IRF 79) and

supporting the return of ex-Séléka to their communities (IRF 90). Even though the project supporting election security was of short duration, it was well aligned with the international community's assistance strategy for transparent and peaceful elections and can therefore be considered strategic. Investments in restoring state authority (RESA) (IRF 129, IRF 184) also contributed to mid-range strategic objectives to reestablish state authority throughout the country. The project to promote women's political participation and leadership (IRF 183) addressed more general structural needs rather than acute peacebuilding needs, even though it may contribute to greater consideration of women's interests in the long term.

### **Innovation and risk taking**

The PBF proved to be **innovative and risk taking, bringing together the United Nations system with other donors such as the European Union and the World Bank** in the following interventions:

- **Security Sector Reform**, particularly to reinforce the ISF, and more specifically to pay the salaries (IRF 88) and retirement benefits of police and gendarmerie officers (IRF 186). The United Nations is not supposed to substitute for the state in paying government officials' salaries, however the PBF seized an opportunity to break a deadlock between the government and security forces that had led to demonstrations and impeded the functioning of the state. According to one key informant, PBF funding of ISF salaries in CAR paved the way for other United Nations programmes to pay state agents' salaries in other countries, for example those of health workers in Western African countries affected by Ebola in 2015/2016.
- **Political dialogue**, including mediation and negotiations leading to the signature of the peace agreement, and, more recently, its implementation (IRF 103 and IRF 187). The IRF 103 project first contributed to strengthening the basis for a larger dialogue across the country to inform the Bangui Forum in May 2015. The PBF then supported the international efforts to bring together the multiple attempts at mediation in the Central African conflict under the aegis of the African Union (AU) since July 2017.
- **Community violence reduction (CVR) projects**. PBF engagement in CVR programmes through the pilot project implemented by IOM in Paoua (IRF 128) and the subsequent CVR project in Bambari (IRF 185) exemplified the ability to take an innovative approach, adapt it to the CAR context, and make it an essential complement to the security- and military-driven DDR programmes. CVR thus became a critical tool for peacebuilding for the United Nations and other international donors in CAR.

### **Needs of the Government**

All PBF **projects were developed following discussions with CAR Government** representatives. The second phase projects (2017-2018/2019) **were aligned with the Government priorities** as defined in the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for CAR. Although project priorities and Government priorities were globally well synchronized, some Government representatives argued that **some projects components were imposed on them**, therefore limiting their ability to influence specific activities. At the same time, some RUNO officials felt that involvement of and **support by the relevant government ministries was not always consistent** despite prior agreement on the activities to be carried out.

## **Needs of the population**

The **participation of civil society or beneficiary representatives** in project design was overall very **limited**. Some key informants from civil society indicated that PBF funding often did not address the population's immediate needs. For example, one-month cash-for-work projects for ex-combatants or income generating activities (IGAs) for a very limited number of beneficiaries in the communities targeted by the CVR project in Paoua (IRF 127), were considered insufficient by their beneficiaries to make a difference or have a medium or long-term effect. Some representatives of women's organizations considered the project on women's political participation (IRF 187) to be addressing the needs of only a small minority of women among the urban elites who are interested in political participation but not necessarily the needs of the vast majority of women in the country.

## **Root causes and key drivers of conflict**

The takeover of government in March 2013 by the Séléka coalition composed of mostly Muslim rebel groups from the north of the country exacerbated longtime latent regional, interethnic and interreligious tensions in the country. According to the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for CAR and other analyses at the time, root causes of the armed conflict in CAR include:

- The control of power by a small elite and the absence of a functioning social contract between state and society;
- A divided society and lack of social cohesion;
- Weak state institutions that are unable to ensure security or provide essential social services and a functioning judiciary;
- Widespread insecurity, impunity and occasional eruptions of violence;
- A generally traumatized population with many parts of the population under constant stress;
- Conflicts between herders and farmers and a lack of management structures of seasonal cattle migration (transhumance);
- Actors from neighboring countries pursuing their interests in CAR;
- Insufficiently regulated exploitation of natural resources; and
- Easy availability and trafficking of firearms.

The two projects targeting reconciliation and political dialogue (IRF 103 and IRF 187) addressed the root causes of the conflict most directly, in particular a sense of exclusion in some parts of the country and the lack of an inclusive peace agreement. Similarly, the projects aimed at reforming and strengthening the ISF (especially IRF 186), by addressing insufficient state capacity to guarantee security and public order, have contributed to increasing the Central African state's capacity to protect its population in the future. The projects supporting the reestablishment and redeployment of the public administration (IRF 129 and IRF 184), although focused more on the logistics and material aspects of the deployment of civil servants, tackled some root causes of state weakness. The CVR projects in Paoua (IRF 127) and Bambari (IRF 185) provided temporary solutions by providing short-term employment opportunities for ex-combatants who were not eligible to the formal DDR programme, while contributing to limiting the availability of firearms and local conflict resolution. Some key drivers of conflict were either insufficiently tackled, such as interreligious and intercommunity tensions, or not addressed at all, such as cross-border or transhumance tensions.

## Effectiveness and impact

According to the performance framework defined by the PBF secretariat in Bangui, most projects did achieve their main targeted results. The performance framework was aligned with the pillars of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan for CAR and the UNDAF Plus objectives. Some of the most significant results highlighted by key informants include:

- **Support for a national dialogue (IRF 103)** led to the Bangui Forum and the elections at the end of 2015/early 2016. The project organized 101 consultations at the local, prefectural and national levels involving almost 16,000 people and contributed to the participation of 350 delegates from the prefectures at the Bangui Forum. In addition, the project **IRF 187** contributed to a dialogue with armed groups through the mediation of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) Secretariat to record their grievances to inform the discussions that led to the signing of the APPR in February 2019.
- Projects to **strengthen internal security forces** provided police officers and gendarmes in Bangui with concrete support, including the rehabilitation of seven police stations and three gendarmerie offices in Bangui (IRF 79), the payment of four months of salaries to 3,564 ISF members (IRF 88) and of retirement benefits for approximately 350 police and gendarmerie officers, in addition to training expenses for 500 new recruits along with educational and management support for both the police and gendarmerie training institutes (IRF 186).
- **The projects supporting the restoration of state authority** (IRF 127 and IRF 184) have allowed the reconstruction of numerous administrative and ISF buildings as well as schools and a youth education center in Bambari. The projects trained 16 prefects (local state representatives) and 71 deputy-prefects to better manage their redeployment and provided travel expenses, logistics assistance and office equipment.
- The project to **promote women's political participation and leadership** (IRF 183) produced **mixed results**. It supported the Ministry for the Promotion of Women in developing an implementing decree for the law on gender parity, a bill on sexual harassment, and several texts on establishing a national observatory of gender parity. The project provided leadership training to more than 1,000 women across the country and contributed to the revision of the electoral code from the point of view of women. The project also organized consultations with grassroots women's organizations in the regions to gather and share their expectations with the African Initiative mediators and Government negotiators in the process leading to the signature of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR. Two women were invited to travel to Khartoum, though they were not allowed to be part of the negotiations.
- Finally, the **CVR projects in Paoua (IRF 128) and Bambari (IRF 185)** delivered tangible results for the population. The Paoua project created temporary jobs (cash-for-work) for one month for 7,000 beneficiaries, including 4,750 former members of local self-defense groups and 2,320 vulnerable community members. The project implemented 33 infrastructure rehabilitation projects, including the rehabilitation of roads, bridges, schools, markets, and administrative buildings. Approximately 1,000 beneficiaries received assistance to start income-generating activities and boosted the Paoua community radio transmitter to extend its reach from 20 to 70 kilometers. The CVR project in Bambari provided cash-for-work employment to 2,003 former members of armed groups and youth at risk and funded seven infrastructure projects in the city of Bambari (rehabilitation of roads, the municipal stadium, a youth center) and the rehabilitation of 11 major roads in rural zones. The beneficiaries also



received professional training, including literacy courses and IGA kits in 17 different types of professional activities.

Several projects faced challenges with respect to the implementation of their activities and did not achieve all the targeted results. These challenges were mainly due to the following factors:

- **A lack of coherence within projects combining several activities and objectives, which were implemented by different implementing partners and** whose logic and contribution to peacebuilding were not always clearly defined. For example, several projects implemented IGA or cash-for-work activities (for example IRF 129 and IRF 183) without linking those activities clearly to the main project objective. The lack of coherence prevented the projects from maximizing their impact on peace dynamics and the non-achievement of some objectives raised questions regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of funds used.
- **Projects were not always based on a detailed conflict analysis** specific to each area of implementation and the targeted beneficiaries. Many project documents reprised analyses from the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan or provided general contextual analyses specific to the sector, such as the analysis of the women's rights situation in CAR for IRF 183. However, they lacked analyses of localized conflict and peacebuilding dynamics in the areas of intervention and were thus unable to identify the desired changes and understand how to achieve them through the proposed activities.
- **The theories of change and the results frameworks – the definition of objectives and results, indicators to measure results, and the means of monitoring and evaluation –** were sometimes **not sufficiently detailed or** well-defined to measure the desired change in local dynamics. The CVR project in Paoua (IRF 127) was the only project that collected and analyzed data to measure the impact of its activities.
- **The security situation and changing political context made it difficult for certain projects** to achieve the targeted results. For example, the project to support the redeployment of the territorial administration (ARAT-IRF 129) had to switch intervention sites during implementation. The project supporting the return of ex-Séléka to their communities (IRF 90) was unable to implement many activities due to a volatile political context.
- **The 18-month maximum duration of IRF projects was not always sufficient** to achieve concrete results, especially for projects operating in a challenging security context and those aiming to achieve institutional change (for example projects IRF 129 and IRF 184).
- **The geographic targeting** of interventions was often determined in light of the current situation and the security context rather than according to strategic considerations. The question of whether **spreading out activities** across the country is the best strategy to ensure a clear impact **or** whether their **concentration** in a few areas would be more effective was raised several times by key informants and remains a strategic question for the PBF to explore for future projects. More recent projects (since 2018) have started to recalibrate the portfolio to address areas of intervention that had not been considered before and to invest in regions which had so far been neglected.

## **Impact and catalytic effects**

Measuring the impact of the 2014-2018/19 PBF projects and its entire portfolio proved to be challenging. Based on interviews and the document review, there was no joint definition between the PBF, RUNOs, and MINUSCA of the expected peacebuilding impact in CAR. Generally, the impact of

peacebuilding efforts should be measured by a decrease in violence and armed groups activity in the country. The ACLED database of violent incidents shows that there were recurrent cycles of more or less intense armed group activity in CAR until the end of 2018 and a decrease of violence since the signature of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in CAR in February 2019.<sup>9</sup> Several informants suggested that, considering the volatility and complexity of the context and the somewhat modest investments compared to the actual needs, it might be too ambitious to expect a real impact of PBF investments in CAR. Instead, some have suggested to think about whether PBF projects show “**beginnings of impact**” – in other words, the way these projects have contributed to larger peacebuilding dynamics through a positive contribution to security, peace or reconciliation. This interpretation of the concept of impact seems to match the PBF’ ambition to **catalyze peace dynamics** by intervening in “crucial areas to starting, unblocking or accelerating specific components of...peacebuilding processes.”<sup>10</sup>

Most of the projects contained activities and aspects that at least had the potential to be catalytic and to generate “beginnings of impact”. The **project for reconciliation and political dialogue (IRF 103)** provided critical support to expand the national dialogue and ensure the participation of delegates from all prefectures at the Bangui Forum of May 2015. The Republican Pact adopted at the end of the Forum provided guidance for negotiations between the Government and armed groups in 2018 and 2019 leading to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in February 2019. The signature of the agreement following project **IRF 187 supporting the African Union and ECCAS mediation efforts** also constituted a baseline for ongoing peacebuilding efforts (in 2019). The project especially contributed to the demobilization and reintegration of armed groups into society through DDR, the special mixed security units made up of government and rebel forces (Unités Spéciales Mixtes de Sécurité – USMS, and the inclusion (although contested) of armed group representatives in the national Government. Investments to **rebuild the ISF (IRF 79, IRF 88 and IRF 186)**, particularly through the payment of retirement benefits of police and gendarmerie officers (IRF 186) helped open up the security forces corps to new influences by removing ISF agents who had reached the age of retirement and often developed poor working habits potentially leading to abuses of authority or other human rights violations. Their retirement made room for a new, better trained and supervised generation of ISF elements to take over and by supporting the hiring and training of 500 new ISF recruits, the IRF 186 project put the ISF in a position to play a positive role in law enforcement in the future. Although not successful, the project for the **return of ex-Séléka to the communities (IRF 90)** had the potential to removing an obstacle to peace in the form of the continued presence of numerous Séléka combatants in Bangui, which could have destabilized the transition Government.

Other projects also targeted situational blockages of peace dynamics. The **CVR pilot project in Paoua (IRF 128)** played a key role in getting CVR accepted as an essential complement to DDR in light of the informal nature of many armed groups in CAR. The two investments in **Bambari (CVR IRF 185; RESA IRF 184)** did not unblock a critical process, but signaled to national and international stakeholders that the United Nations was to invest significant resources in peacebuilding in and the reconstruction of Bambari. The project on **increasing women’s political participation (IRF 183)** addressed a structural problem, but can be seen as having given an additional boost to laws promoting women’s participation in public life with a future impact on women’s conditions in CAR.

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<sup>9</sup> The NGO ACLED collects data on conflict and violence across the globe and has developed a database of all incidents reported in CAR since 1997. They sometimes also provide data analysis. See Giovanni Zanelotti. *Increasing Political Violence in the Central African Republic*. ACLED. 8 June 2018. Available at [acleddata.com/2018/06/08/increasing-political-violence-in-the-central-african-republic/](http://acleddata.com/2018/06/08/increasing-political-violence-in-the-central-african-republic/), accessed on 10 November 2019.

<sup>10</sup> PBF. *Guidelines on application and use of funds*. April 2014, p. 8.

With respect to **financial catalytic effects**, other donors have acknowledged that PBF investments can indicate that a specific intervention area is receiving greater attention and, as such, are always welcome. Despite the absence of a formal donor mapping, most PBF-funded initiatives were coordinated with other donors or sources of funding (for example the Government) to co-finance activities. A real catalytic effect, where the PBF initiates funding a certain activity or project to motivate other donors to do the same, was less frequent. The most obvious cases of financial catalytic effects included the following projects:

- The payment of **four months of salaries of the ISF** (police officers and gendarmes) (IRF 88) in collaboration with the World Bank, which covered the salaries of other civil servants;
- The **CVR projects in Paoua and Bambari** (IRF 127 and IRF 185) implemented by IOM led to a USD 17 million funding from the European Union and a USD 4.5 million investment by the Korean Cooperation to implement a CVR in other parts of the country reaching a total of 12,000 beneficiaries.
- The **project to increase women’s political participation** (IRF 183) allowed the national NGO REFAMP (Network of Women Parliamentarians), a local implementing partner, to receive additional funds from other donors.

#### **Case study: CVR project in Paoua (2016-2018)**

The evaluation team conducted an in-depth analysis of the CVR project in Paoua (IRF 128), implemented by IOM between January 2016 and June 2018, which can be considered as an **exemplary project** within the PBF portfolio in CAR since it was well designed and implemented by a dedicated project team who worked in close collaboration with local partners. It achieved most of the targeted results, established a monitoring system to collect relevant data, and conducted a detailed evaluation to measure its results and impact. Some **interesting lessons can be learned** from the project, specifically that a **RUNO’s community-based activities and interventions by MINUSCA and the CAR security forces** need to be **closely coordinated to ensure success** of the PBF-funded activities and that **local partners with access to local networks** of influence play a **key role in mediating local conflicts**.

#### **Sustainability**

Despite being included in most project documents, an exit strategy was not always well defined for all projects and communication with stakeholders about exit arrangements and the national ownership of project results should be reinforced. Some interlocutors stressed that the short 18-month period covered by PBF projects makes national ownership and the sustainability of results difficult to achieve. However, several interlocutors highlighted that since the PBF does support numerous similar projects or those with similar objectives, which can generate a cumulative effect for the targeted results and therefore reinforce sustainability from one project to another. It is far from guaranteed that preliminary impacts’ are sustainable, though, and there is no significant change in the security situation yet across the country, so Government ownership of projects and results needs be reinforced further.

#### **Gender issues**

The evaluation noted that **gender markers in the documents and project reports did not always reflect the actual inclusion of gender consideration during project implementation**. Most projects, such as those supporting the ISF (IRF 79, IRF 88 and IRF 186), did not include a gender marker, even though the evaluation team noted that the RUNOs tried to include gender issues in the recruitment policy of most projects, but not necessarily in other activities, such as the reconstruction or

rehabilitation of public buildings. It was difficult to properly assess gender issues since most monitoring reports did not disaggregate the indicators by sex and it was not possible to really use and analyze the data collected by the RUNOs and reported to the PBF secretariat to improve future projects activities. Two projects specifically focused on gender issues: the project on increasing women's political participation (IRF 183) and the one on mediation and reconciliation (IRF 187). When gender disaggregated data was available, some results lacked clarity and baseline data for the evaluation team to draw clear conclusions. New PBF guidelines on gender were developed in 2019, after the end of the period evaluated here, and new projects should take them into consideration and be more diligent in defining and monitoring gender disaggregated project indicators.

## **PBF-PBSO organizational structure and project management**

**PBF management and supervision structure:** The PBF secretariat in Bangui was established in 2016 and is physically located within MINUSCA headquarters since it is under the supervision of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who oversees the coordination of the United Nations system in the country. However, the PBF secretariat administratively depends on UNDP. This constellation creates some confusion among PBF collaborators and partners, who are unsure whether the PBF secretariat is part of MINUSCA or UNDP, or a separate entity. This confusion among collaborators seems to be the price to pay for a certain proximity with MINUSCA. The current configuration appears to respond to the PBF's needs, even though it creates some barriers for a closer relationship with Central African Government partners.

**Decision making:** Funding decisions for specific projects were taken after informal consultations involving the PBSO leadership in New York, the PBF secretariat in CAR, MINUSCA, potential RUNOs and the Central African Government. Most RUNOs commended the PBF secretariat, PBSO and the DSRSG leadership for the close collaboration, fast and, despite the informal nature of the process, effective decision-making. Nevertheless, the turnaround times given to RUNOs for developing concept notes and project proposals were criticized as too short to allow for high-quality proposals based on thorough and context-specific analyses and needs assessments of targeted beneficiaries. These short turnaround times to develop a proposal may explain why many projects had to adjust their interventions after their start date. Some interlocutors also suggested that consultations may have been, from the beginning, too focused on the same actors and did not consider the entire spectrum of possible interventions or all the expertise available within the UN country team (UNCT). Others criticized that the PBF agenda and "New York's interests" seemed to be dominating the selection of project at the expense of local interests. Government representatives, in particular, often felt insufficiently consulted.

**RUNO selection and capacity:** UNDP was the main implementing partner and, by far, the recipient of the majority of PBF funds, since it was involved in 10 projects out of 14 and the lead partners on nine of them. IOM was the project lead on three projects (IRF 90, IRF 128 and IRF 185). UN-Women (IRF 183) and OHCHR (IRF 78) were the only other United Nations agencies to manage a PBF project during the period under review. Other agencies received financing as implementing partners of the primary recipients, including ILO, FAO and UNFPA. As indicated, the selection of RUNOs happened after informal consultations once priority areas were decided upon, in consultation with the MINUSCA, UNCT, agencies and Government representatives. Since most selected interventions were in the areas of governance and SSR, UNDP was the most frequently selected RUNO due to its mandate and expertise. Some key informants criticized the apparent preference for UNDP as an implementing agency and the selection process, which seemed to lack transparency and was not competitive.

According to these informants, it would have been preferable if a wider range of agencies had received PBF funds. Other interlocutors criticized the overall limits imposed by the PBF on the types of organizations that could potentially become implementing partners, excluding particularly national and international NGOs.<sup>11</sup>

**Project management and monitoring:** Although most projects were more or less well managed by the RUNOs, especially considering the difficult operating environment, some management and supervision aspects could still be improved. This includes certain administrative procedures that caused delays in the implementation of projects as well as the monitoring of implementation quality and results. Some interlocutors greatly appreciated the quick turnaround times with respect to PBF proposals and projects with respect to feedback on project proposals, funding decisions, and the disbursement of funds, which all have significantly improved since 2014. The PBF secretariat and PBSO have been collaborative and flexible even during project implementation, always ready to consider adjustments and find solutions if project components could not be implemented as planned in light of the context. The flexibility of the PBF in adjusting projects could, at the same time, be seen as a weakness since it might indicate that theories of change and results framework were not specific enough, which would have an impact on the projects' overall quality. In addition, despite PBF/PBSO's quick decision-making with respect to approving new projects, project start-up was significantly delayed for some projects. These delays were mainly due to the RUNOs not being as fast and flexible as the PBF/PBSO. Many projects started late due to slow procedures to hire the appropriate staff and internal approval processes (for example IRF 129 and IRF 183).

Although RUNOs have significant technical and management capacities, most of them showed weaknesses with respect to analysis and implementation quality. Many project proposals lack explicit and context-specific conflict analyses, monitoring and evaluation frameworks are insufficiently detailed, and indicators are vague. IOM, the implementing partner for the CVR projects, is the only agency with a system of regular quantitative and qualitative data collection and corresponding analyses. Some project participants and local authorities have criticized the lack of quality monitoring of project deliverables, especially with respect to the infrastructure built as part of some projects as well as material and good provided (for examples as part of the projects ARAT (IRF 129) and CVR in Bambari (IRF 185)). The PBF secretariat's capacity to conduct quality and closely monitoring implementation quality is also limited. It would be recommended that the PBF secretariat and RUNOs improve their monitoring capacity for these relatively large investments and put in place monitoring systems that allow for regular monitoring and quality control.

**Efficiency:** Since the evaluation team was unable to access detailed financial reports, it was unable to conduct a detailed evaluation of the efficient use of funds and the quality of financial management. Despite the limited information available, certain weaknesses were noted regarding budget planning, financial planning, and the tracking of expenditures, especially with respect to the sometimes important gaps between budgeted amounts per category and actual amounts spent. The frequent no-cost extensions (NCE) granted to the RUNOs could indicate that the financial management was not very efficient. The near-routine granting of six-month NCEs for most of the projects seems to be, at least, highly inefficient since each NCE requires administrative efforts by the PBF and RUNOs as implementing partners have to redo their budgets and financial planning every six months (18 months, 24 months, 30 months, etc.), develop new activity and implementation plans and re-budget according to new deadlines.

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<sup>11</sup> PBF procedures have since been revised to allow for NGOs as implementing partners.

### **Coordination between agencies and with MINUSCA:**

Several UN key informants consider the strategic alignment and collaboration between the PBF/PBSO, MINUSCA and UN agencies as a model compared to other countries where the PBF is also active. The communication and collaboration were good, especially at the Mission and PBSO leadership levels, as well as between PBSO leadership and key UN agencies. The DSRSG/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator position is critical to promoting and using PBF funding in the spirit of “Delivering as One” and bringing together the expertise and capacities within the United Nations system. Despite this understanding at the leadership level, there were sometimes tensions between agencies and MINUSCA. Agency representatives feel that the Mission usually receives most of the attention and resources. It is not always easy for the agencies to collaborate with MINUSCA considering MINUSCA’s mandate and that its work follows a different logic. MINUSCA mainly intervenes at the political level while RUNOs focus on implementing projects and achieving concrete results. Project and budget management procedures are also different between MINUSCA and the agencies, which often makes closer collaboration difficult. Despite these obstacles, collaboration between the PBF, RUNOs, and MINUSCA around efforts to reform the internal security forces (in particular IRF 186) was seen as exemplary, as was coordination between the UN actors and other international donors and the CAR Government.

### **Coordination with the Government:**

The PBF did not set up a Joint Steering Committee (JSC), which is jointly managed by the United Nations and the host country Government to decide on PBF projects and supervise their implementation, during the period under review. Instead, PBF/PBSO officials decided in 2014 that it would be preferable, given the context, to focus on strategic considerations and to avoid multiplying coordination structures and risk being overwhelmed with coordination issues. The CAR transition government also still lacked legitimacy in 2014, which prompted the PBF to opt for an ad-hoc approach to coordination to allow for quick and flexible decision-making. The coordination framework for international intervention suggested by the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan in 2016 never worked as originally planned nor was the RCPCA adopted as a key guiding document by all CAR government ministries. Beyond the coordination structures of the RCPCA there are numerous coordination mechanisms by intervention area, such as in the security sector (for example DDR). Individual projects do not have formal joint steering committees either, although some RUNOs have sectorial steering committees bringing together all their projects in a specific technical area.

CAR Government representatives do not necessarily share the PBF’s view that formal coordination mechanisms lack effectiveness. Despite expressing their gratitude toward PBF investments, Government officials criticized the lack of formal coordination of international projects in certain areas, not only by the PBF but also by the implementing partners. Some government officials complained about being often only superficially consulted on new international projects while being in no position to refuse new funding considering the enormous needs of the country.

The PBF also applied its informal coordination approach to its implementing partners and other project stakeholders. Although informality gives the PBF secretariat with a lot of flexibility by managing all relations with partners and stakeholders bilaterally, there are also downsides, including limited information sharing between partners and a lack of coherence between projects. At times certain activities within one and the same project are implemented independently from one another instead of capitalizing on each partners’ expertise and contribution to a joint approach (for example IRF 187).

**Coordination with civil society:** Central African civil society organizations have been grateful for PBF support but have complained about not being sufficiently consulted or engaged in project design. National NGOs were rarely involved in project design in a substantial way. Some PBF and RUNO officials have acknowledged that the short deadlines assigned to project proposal development did not allow for more than one or two meetings with local organizations. Several local organizations involved in project implementation were only contacted by the RUNOs once the projects had been approved, and they mainly played a service provider role for already determined activities instead of being real programming partners. However, the RUNOs consider the local civil society as fragmented with capacities that are often too weak to allow for a substantive collaboration. Some examples show however that local organizations can play a fundamental role in the success of interventions when they are properly selected and substantially involved in the project implementation. It was the case for the interreligious NGO CASAL in Paoua which played a key role in the CVR project.

## Conclusions

PBF-financed projects in CAR from 2014 to 2018/2019 were for the most part strategic, addressing the needs of the moment and the priorities of the CAR Government, the United Nations and the international community. Some projects were more strategic than others, particularly the various investments in reforming the IFS, the political dialogue and mediation projects and the CVR projects. These projects tackled some key drivers of conflict, while leaving others to be considered in the future. The specific needs and interests of the population and civil society, especially of women were not always fully taken into account and need to be given greater weight in the future.

Some projects did not achieve their full potential and could have produced more conclusive results if they had been based on in-depth conflict analyses and more detailed and coherent project designs. Significant improvements should be made to project design, particularly by including specific theories of change and defining clear expected results and detailed indicators. The PBF's timely decision-making on investments and the quick approval of project proposals was often overshadowed by lengthy administrative procedures within RUNOs, which at times created significant delays in project start-up.

## Recommendations

### *Relevance*

To ensure maximum **relevance** of its projects in CAR, the PBF should consider the following points:

- **Continue wide and frequent consultations** with all key actors prior to deciding on new investments and **remain ready to act and be prepared to seize investment opportunities** in key areas to support positive peacebuilding dynamics in CAR.
- **Consider the relevance of each project component and activity** to ensure they are coherent and that all activities directly contribute to the ultimate objective of the project.
- **Consult with the targeted populations and with civil society more regularly** and in a more meaningful way to ensure their interests are taken into account and to avoid that projects respond exclusively to the needs of elites.
- **Reflect about geographic targeting** with respect to the following aspects:
  - Think about **what the most strategic zones for PBF investments are** and **how to avoid** that project interventions simply **displace conflict from one area to another**.
  - **Reflect** upon the benefits of an **investment** strategy that **spreads out projects across the country vs. a strategy that focuses investments in a few areas**.

- Conduct a mapping exercise to understand how donors' investments in local communities are spread out across the country and how they interact with investments at the national level.

To continue addressing conflict drivers, the PBF will have to **take into account the following aspects in future projects:**

- Support the **executive committee and prefectural committees of the RCPCA** to consolidate the current progress and reinforce the population's trust in the peace agreement and in sustainable peace.
- Strengthen **public knowledge of the results generated by the Peace Agreement** via local radios in Sango and French throughout the entire country and not only in peaceful areas.
- Think of making larger investments in **managing interreligious and inter-ethnic tensions** and national reconciliation.
- Continue to finance **SSR** by supporting its integration under one authority for better governance and coordination and the deployment of ISF and possibly even FACA who play a key role in guaranteeing the population's safety.
- Keep on funding projects on **transhumance**, which remains an important driver of local and intercommunal conflict.
- Reflect upon and initiate (or continue) discussions with other donors on ways to support the **preparation and organization** of the December 2020 elections.
- Continue funding **support to women's participation** in peacebuilding with a focus on women in rural areas and their needs.
- Support projects that are **dedicated to youth organizations** to strengthen their long-term capacities in the areas of mediation and dialogue to contribute to local peace agreements.
- Consider providing **stronger support to the functioning and capacity building of key civil society actors**, for example community radios and their national networks or certain women organizations.
- Align activities and **projects with the Sustainable Development Goals** and conduct an analysis to better understand which results fall under the security, peace and development nexus.

*The PBF should consider the following activities implemented during 2014-2018/19:*

- Conduct in-depth **studies on programming approaches that are often used but whose contribution to peacebuilding is not fully understood**, especially the numerous **cash-for-work** activities and **income-generating activities**.
- **Review or stop projects on the rehabilitation or construction of buildings or state infrastructure** if they can be funded by other donors.

*Effectiveness and impact*

To **reinforce project effectiveness and impact**, several actions should be considered to improve the quality of project designs and monitoring systems:

- Conduct **detailed and frequent conflict analyses** and apply a conflict-sensitive approach.
- Develop **detailed and specific theories of change** indicating the cause and effect between activities and desired outcomes.
- **Improve the quality of indicators**, especially in terms of desired outcomes and monitoring systems to collect relevant data and measure achievements toward reaching the final objectives.



- **Revise and improve the performance framework of the PBF portfolio** with additional details and clear results for each pillar.
- **Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation capacity** of the PBF secretariat to collect more relevant data and support RUNOs and local partners in developing indicators that are relevant to peacebuilding and gender-sensitive.
- Reflect upon whether **short deadlines to submit concept notes and project proposals are counterproductive** and prevent the development of high-quality project designs.
- Consider the possibility **for the PBF to produce clearer guidelines on conceptualizing peacebuilding “impact”**.
- Reconsider **what available data would allow to measure the impact of projects and of all the interventions** on peacebuilding in CAR as the current data from the Harvard Humanitarian initiative is too aggregated with respect to the PBF projects’ needs.

#### *Gender*

- **Apply 2019 PBF guidelines on gender** and gender markers.
- **Reinforce the gender approach of projects and RUNOs’ capacity** for gender-focused programmes and indicators.
- **Integrate gender-sensitive indicators** in results frameworks.
- **Analyze monitoring data** of different projects collected by the RUNOs **for good practices and lessons learned** with respect to gender sensitive programming.

#### *Sustainability*

- **Include explicit exit strategies** in each project.
- **Improve ownership** of results and objectives by the government and local partners.

#### *Project management and coordination*

- **Select implementing organizations according to their technical expertise and capacity.**
- Together with the RUNOs, **investigate the causes of the delays in starting up certain projects and how they could be reduced.**
- **Promote closer coordination and monitoring by the RUNOs with local service providers** to improve the quality of outputs and outcomes.
- **Strengthen the technical capacity of the PBF secretariat for monitoring** in order to support the RUNOs in developing appropriate results frameworks and collect relevant data.
- **Communicate** regularly project **results, findings, and lessons learned** from project evaluations to RUNOs and other partners.
- **Reassess the reporting system and report format** given to RUNOs and NUNOs by the PBF to ensure that all necessary information is collected without creating too heavy a workload.
- **Examine** whether the **quasi-routine granting of no-cost extensions for most of the projects is necessary** and what **consequences this practice may have** on project implementation and the efficiency of funds used.
- PBSO should examine the effectiveness of coordination efforts and assess if a Joint Steering Committee could be established and would be beneficial.