

CAR-DRC BORDER REGION CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

Virulent rhetoric and deeply-held prejudices among communities living along the border region between the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are just some of the challenges intensifying mistrust and heightening tensions in the Mbomou-Uélé provinces.

Once considered a single community, the Zandés, originally from South Sudan and the Mongbandi as they are called in the DRC, lived on both sides of the border, sharing the same culture and language. Conflict, weak state authority, porous borders, and the multiplication of armed groups drew massive amounts of weapons to the area, which exacerbated and intensified inter-communal tensions and opened the door to widespread lawlessness.



**COMMUNITIES
IN TRANSITION**



ONE LOCAL RESEARCHER

Soleil Kalessopo, CIT researcher, conducted a 1.5-month Conflict Sensitive Analysis (CSA) along the CAR-DRC border from August to mid-September 2019 to gather data on local conflict perceptions

TRAVELLED BY MOTORCYCLE

To Zemio, Mboki, Obo in CAR, Ango and flew to Dungu in the DRC to spend a 1 week in each location

WITH PURPOSE

Understand the conflict dynamics surrounding pastoralists

TO RESEARCH 3 COMPONENTS

Stakeholder power map, conflict assessment and communication ecosystem

Climate change and regional instability contributed to the massive influx into CAR and eventually across the border into the DRC of pastoralists in search of water and pastures for their herds. The inability of the Central African and Congolese authorities in the provinces of Haut-Mbomou (CAR) and Bas and Haut-Uélé (DRC) to secure their territory and to adequately respond to the movement of nomadic populations with effective and equitable land management policies left local communities to figure it out for themselves and pastoralists struggling to find acceptance in society.

War in Sudan, Chad, and CAR deepened cleavages between communities and forced many to flee or adapt to conflict dynamics.

Today, the most violent actors in the CAR-DRC border region have lost their political ambitions and conflict primarily revolves around the control of natural resources and the protection of commercial activity. Acute triggers of violence are mainly economic in nature. Everyone is looking to make money whether it is through the exploitation of diamond mines by armed groups, the illegal sale of animal skins by poachers, or the looting of villages by the LRA.

Under constant threat, lawful economic actors, such as those engaged in the cattle trade or agricultural production, struggle to guard themselves from being the target of those conducting illicit activities. This drives tensions and turns communities against each other, with devastating consequences. Communities align themselves with armed groups for protection at high cost to themselves.

In the Mbomou-Uélé region, alliances are made and unmade according to the self-interests of each community and the rules of the most powerful prevail.

STAKEHOLDERS ON THE CAR-DRC BORDER

Using religious or ethnic identity markers to categorize stakeholders is an over-simplification of the power dynamics at play in the CAR-DRC border region. Actors have multiple loyalties and interact along shifting allegiances based on the security and economic self-interest of the moment. The proliferation of weapons has transformed entire communities, no longer passive victims of armed conflict. An ethnicization of armed groups has also been noticed in CAR. Voluntary and involuntary collaborations to commit crimes is common in the DRC.

ARMED GROUPS

In CAR, armed groups are part of a peace process yet continue to vie for control of natural resources and territory. Their fire power over the region allows them to profit from illegal taxation and simultaneously be sought after as protectors of their own communities.

Splintered throughout the region, the LRA is fighting for survival, mixing banditry, raids, kidnappings, and looting with the exploitation of natural resources. Despite LRA attacks diminishing drastically over the past 10 years, their reputation as barbaric fighters lingers.

BANDITS

Under no one's control, bandits prey on anyone including their kinsman. Defectors from armed groups or lone actors they plague the axes in between these cities or venture across the borders to conduct criminal activity.

POACHERS

Focused on the illegal exploitation of wildlife they can be very aggressive when confronted.

INSTITUTIONS OF RESILIENCE

Civil society has little leverage over armed actors in CAR. In the DRC, strong relationships between civil society and local authorities creates powerful movements rejecting foreign intrusion into their national territory.

Religious and traditional authorities are respected and listened to by local communities. They provide balance and harmony for their people. Today, overpowered by the weapons of armed groups, many have lost their leverage.

Peace committees created by NGO have some effectiveness in lowering tensions. Their composition often determines their legitimacy.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Wields power over CSOs in the DRC where they poison the well and amplify dangerous stereotypes about pastoralists. Corruption and double standards are barely concealed. The cover of the state allows them to profit extensively from the cattle trade. In CAR, local authorities have a minimal presence.

MERCHANTS

Poor road conditions and insecurity in CAR and South Sudan has pushed lucrative commercial activities towards Kisangani, DRC and Kampala in Uganda. As merchants circulate among bandits and armed groups, traders can be well-armed and ready to protect themselves and their merchandise.

Arms dealers in M'Boki, CAR, are powerful foreigners whose weapons are sold throughout the region.

CATTLE MIGRATIONS

Pastoralists represent a multitude of tribes with diverse origins and cultures. Affected by climate change and conflict, the influx of herders seeking water and pastures for their cattle rose dramatically in the 1960s in CAR and the 2000s in the DRC. The two countries responded very differently to these population movements.

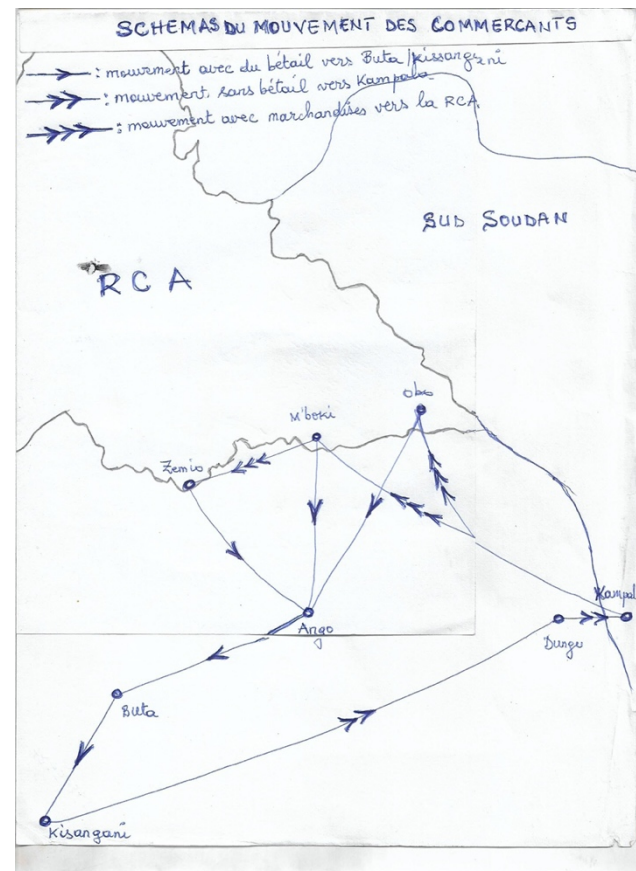
The **Central African Government** established grazing corridors and defined agricultural spaces to regiment the movement of pastoralists and prevent their encroachment on farming activity and city limits. CAR's land management system even enabled some pastoral tribes to settle into the area, taking on semi-nomadic lifestyles. War contributed to the collapse of CAR's land management system when local authorities fled to Bangui and armed groups filled the gap.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, political and economic interests, coupled with the lack of a legal framework to guide local authorities, makes the farmer-herder problem a rapidly escalating conflict in the DRC. The amalgamation of cattle herders with armed groups located in the region, coupled with language barriers and drastically different lifestyles between nomadic and sedentary communities, helped create dangerous stereotypes about the "other." By 2017, a "Mbororo Commission" was created to resolve the growing number of inter-communal incidents and attempt to put an end to the prolonged presence of pastoralists in northern DRC. The provincial authorities of Haut-Uélé set up to identify and confine herders and their livestock to be able to repatriate them to their countries of origin. As of now, little progress towards that end has been noted.

CROSS-BORDER TRADE

The presence of rebels constrains the movement of nomadic tribes. Coupled with a dry season that lasts only a few months, herders have started to settle into semi-nomadic lifestyles, making instead constant but smaller pendular movements with their herds. To avoid Anti-Balaka positions in CAR that block their movements towards Bangui, cattle herders developed alternative trading routes with Uganda via the DRC instead.

Nomadic, semi-nomadic, or sedentary, pastoralists can be further divided into two categories: cattle owners and employees. Large owners can reside outside the country and include "invisible" foreign proprietors, Chadians, Sudanese, Nigerians, but also Central Africans.



Smaller local cattle owners or shepherds left destitute from the war in CAR are hired to help graze the cattle. Sometimes, they move together with their family or the family stays behind in IDP camps or in small boroughs.

Acrimonious relationships between farmers and herders are common and compounded over time by unresolved conflicts over the killing of an animal or the trampling of a field. In the bush, pastoralists are preyed upon, kidnapped by the LRA to conduct raids on local villages in the DRC, attacked by villagers, and taxed heavily by armed groups and local authorities.

Climate refugees and victims of the conflict in CAR, Peulhs are also perpetrators of violence and active members of armed groups in CAR, bandits, and poachers. As armed groups multiplied, tribes armed themselves, and farmers began to feel increasingly overpowered and violated in their own country. To avoid being victimized, some herders put on an aggressive front, grabbing goods by force and frightening villagers, to deter anyone from attacking them. They destroy local hunting traps and kill livestock or trample fields. Shepherds can become very dangerous when it comes to protecting themselves and their animals.

Pastoralists were quickly amalgamated with those that joined armed groups in CAR, tapping into a **FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN** that rippled through communities in the DRC. Rumors of the LRA conducting joint attacks with herders continue to be widespread and amplifies this fear.

Ostracized by local communities, herders are particularly vulnerable in the Mbomou-Uélé border region and ill-equipped to seek support from local authorities or peace committees.

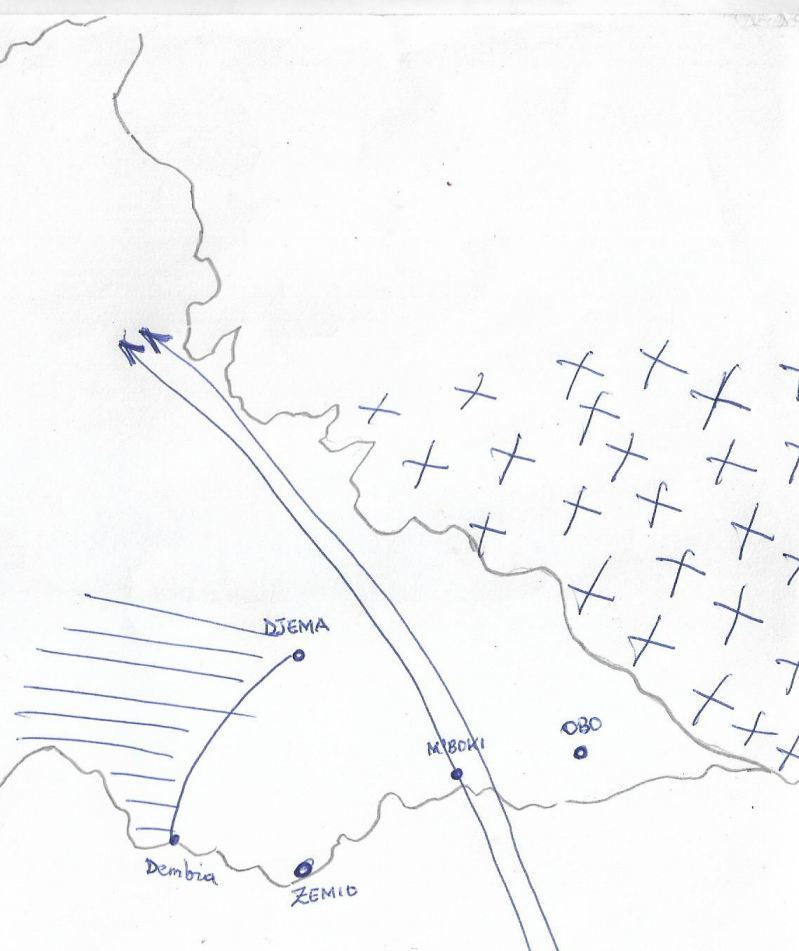
CARTE DE L'ISOLEMENT DES PEULHS

Legende :

≡ = zone occupée par les anti-balaka

××× = Territoire du Soudan du Sud
défendu par les Dinaka, très hostiles
aux peulhs.

↕ = Couloir de transhumance et de
commerce reliant le
nord de la RCA, le Tchad et
le Soudan du nord aux
régions de Mbomou et de
l'Uélé.



FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE

- REGIONAL CONFLICTS
- POROUS BORDERS
- WEAK STATE AUTHORITY
- LACK OF BASIC SERVICES
- CORRUPTION AND ABUSES BY STATE AUTHORITIES AND SECURITY FORCES
- CLIMATE CHANGE
- ARMS PROLIFERATION
- VIOLENT ARMED ACTORS
- CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BARRIERS
- DANGEROUS SPEECH AND STEREOTYPES
- LOCALIZED LAND AND RESOURCE CONFLICTS

SECURITY VACUUM: REGION STAYED FAIRLY STABLE UNTIL 2017

The presence of the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) and a U.S. military contingent deployed to fight the LRA until 2017 preserved the stability of the CAR border region. Their departure left a vacuum that was quickly filled by armed groups.

DANGEROUS SPEECH

Through powerful intra-group communication networks, revenge and hatred crosses borders, regions, and communities with destructive and dehumanizing effects on the "other." The intensity of this dangerous speech has all but closed all opportunities for farmer-herder dialogues in the Uele region of the DRC. The track-I peace process in CAR opens the space for dialogue at the local level.

TREACHEROUS RUMORS DRIVE A FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

- **Speakers:** local authorities in the DRC have harnessed the fears and grievances of civil society and youths to mobilize protests targeting herders.
- **Audience:** these ferocious campaigns have found receptive audiences in local communities.
- **Content:** perceived collaboration between the LRA and armed pastoralists fuels dehumanizing and vilifying messages portraying pastoralists as violent invaders. Attacks of Congolese refugees in CAR by armed groups travels back to their kinsmen in the DRC and drives fears of organized armed invasions from CAR into the DRC and raising inter-communal tensions.

- **Dissemination:** fear of pastoralists is spreading like brush fire throughout the region using intra-group communication mechanism centered on the chief accompanied by agents whose role is to collect and report information.



In the DRC, rumors and dangerous speech feed a TOXIC NARRATIVE often targeted at herders.

Victims as well as perpetrators of violence, pastoralists STRUGGLE TO FIND ACCEPTANCE in society.

CAR-DRC THREATS

- LRA INCURSIONS ON THE DECLINE
- CRIMINALITY AS A CONSTANT DANGER
- FARMER-HERDER CONFLICTS RISING

Improving the **RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES** in the Mbomou-Uélé border region through non-violent dialogic processes will require the following strategy:

- Reconcile the economic interests of armed and unarmed parties
- Empower local peacemakers to prevent and resolve violent incidents
- Change the inter-community narrative; and
- Strengthen the state's ability to control its territory and enforce the rule of law.

STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY OF PASTORALISTS TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS NON-VIOLENTLY

Herders are at times victims and perpetrators of violence. Their marginalization from sedentary communities have made nomads easy prey to stereotypes and discrimination contributing to their need to protect themselves. For that reason, helping pastoral tribes' capacity to interact with local authorities and villagers would help mitigate tensions along the CAR-DRC border.



ASSESS PASTORALISTS' SOCIAL STRUCTURE



TRACK THEIR MOVEMENT USING REMOTE TECHNOLOGY



TRAIN INSIDERS IN NON-VIOLENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS



PROVIDE REAL-TIME REMOTE **SUPPORT** AS INCIDENTS ARISE



ABOUT COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION (CIT)

CIT assists communities in their search for sustainable peace.

We do so by advancing the understanding of complex crisis through comprehensive conflict analysis and assessments; facilitating inclusive and sustainable conflict resolution dialogue processes; and ensuring knowledge transfer and ownership to empower local peacemakers.

For more information email us at info@communitiesintransition.com.