



SNAPSHOT

Central African Republic Peace Builders in Diamond Mining Areas Poised For Action

Building the foundations for lasting peace in the Central African Republic requires the identification and training of peace building leaders in diamond mining communities



Newly appointed LCPR members receive advice on how to map out the dynamics and root causes of conflict in diamond mining communities (Photo by Dr. Zéphirin Mogba).

Southwestern Central African Republic is a lightly populated part of the country, but under the rich forests and plains lies much wealth – diamonds and gold arduously dug by hand out of alluvial deposits by thousands of artisanal and small-scale miners. The pull of diamond and gold digging has long drawn migrant workers into the area, not only from within CAR, but from other countries throughout West and Central Africa. The region has become a hotly contested place and has suffered rebel incursions affecting the country since 2013. Massacres and pillage have destroyed much of the social fabric that once held together rural and urban communities in solidarity and mutual respect. People have fled to neighboring countries and to internally displaced persons camps, especially the Muslim traders and shopkeepers so important to commercial life in diamond and gold mining areas of the southwest.

With the return of a fragile peace to the southwest, the USAID Property Rights and Artisanal Diamond Development (PRADD) II project is working closely with the Ministry of Mines and Geology and the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation to expand an approach towards peace and reconciliation. This approach has been tested successfully in the capital city of Bangui, but not yet in rural areas. The project is assisting the national reconciliation department to set up Local Committees of Peace and Reconciliation (LCPR) in the Berberati prefecture, a vast region already meeting the requirements of the Kimberley Process for commercialization and exports of diamonds.

Through the support of PRADD II, staff from the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation worked closely with the mining communities of Balégo, Yamalé, Bania, Nandobo, Wapo, and Nassolé to select 42 highly respected representatives to become promoters of peace in their communities through a transparent and democratic process.

PRADD II and the Ministry recently held a three-day long workshop in Berberati with the newly selected LCPR members to map out the types and root causes of the social cleavages that are hindering the return of stability and social cohesion in these diamond mining communities.

By coming together to share experiences and perspectives, these leaders are developing a common vision for the restoration of peace and cohesiveness that exemplified in the past how peoples of many different cultures, religions, and livelihoods were able to live together harmoniously. “We tried to do our own proper introspection,” declared Pierre W., a member of the community of Yamalé, who identified a long litany of causes of conflict, including “the lack of solidarity, intolerance, settling of old scores, discrimination, theft, jealousy, armed threats, lying, the absence of dialogue, the absence of mediation, witchcraft, political conflict, ethnic and religious conflict, poverty, lack of civic engagement, and lack of awareness.”



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Local Committees of Peace and Reconciliation awaiting the arrival of the President of the Republic Faustin-Archange Touadera for their investiture on November 15, 2017 (Photo by Régis Noguez Ndaket).

In the coming months, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Reconciliation, along with PRADD II, will provide training in conflict management and mediation to these LCPR representatives. The Director of National Reconciliation, Ms. Nafissatou Yaouhoumbi noted that, “peace building mediators often fail in their mission because they are not equipped with the proper tools. Thus, in strengthening the capacity of the LCPR members with well-defined tools, we are certain that peace building campaigns at the local level will be well accepted by the population.” In the workshop, the LCPR identified their skills training needs: mediation and the prevention of conflicts; techniques to promote community acceptance of peace building and non-violence; ways to fight discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, and gender; tools for organizing community dialogue; ways to encourage tolerance and community respect; and ways to identify projects that can build community solidarity.

The PRADD II project will assist the Ministry to bring together expertise in the Central African Republic to develop and carry out training modules for the LCPR around these themes. The path toward lasting peace is not straight forward nor without unexpected obstacles. However, much valuable experience can be drawn from the previous social cohesion initiatives of non-governmental and international peace building missions in the Central African Republic. Harnessing that knowledge and directing it towards this new pilot initiative will aid the Ministry in constructing the building blocks of a lasting peace in diamond mining areas of the country.