**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC**

**The reduction of poverty: a very distant objective**

Instead of diminishing, poverty has increased significantly in the Central African Republic since 1990. The disturbances, looting and destruction that accompanied the rebellion that placed General François Bozizé in the presidency ruined the already weak economy. While the Government is proposing a strategy for poverty reduction, it is unlikely that this will succeed in reducing poverty in half unless the country is able to chart an immediate and lasting change of direction towards peace and security, accompanied by an exceptionally high level of growth benefiting the poor.

A large part of the republic’s 623,000 km² is covered in forests; its soil is rich in diamonds. However this natural wealth – the country’s principal source of income – has long been exploited to fill the pockets of whoever happens to be in power and his cronies. Even though the soil is fertile – only a fifth of it is cultivated – and the climate favourable, cotton and coffee production have steadily declined in recent years. The 2004-2005 cotton harvest was 5,000 tonnes, down from 50,000 in 1998. This is partly a result of erratic support, but primarily due to a system of international commerce that tips the scales against African producers – most heavily by creating a tax havens in which multinational enterprises avoid paying taxes. This shredded an economic fabric already ripped apart by more than 20 years of gangster-like rule that emptied state coffers and devastated production.

A strategy for poverty reduction

To ameliorate this disastrous situation, the Government is attempting to implement a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) with two major goals:

- Creating wealth by strengthening human and institutional capabilities within the productive system, including those of the poorest inhabitants, through good governance and the reestablishment of security.
- Improving and expanding basic social services through a participatory approach to implementation and control/evaluation of the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The strategy has four main objectives:

- Restoration of security, consolidation of peace and prevention of conflict. The reforms this will require include reinforcement of the material and human capabilities of the Social Development Fund (SDF) as well as reform, restructuring, territorial reorganization and participatory and coordinated transformation of the security sector.
- Promotion of good governance and the rule of law through reforms that include reinforcing political and judicial governance, improving economic governance, improving local governance and gender participation and promotion.
- Reconstruction and diversification of the economy through macroeconomic stabilisation, rural development, transparent and effective administration of natural resources, promotion of tourism and crafts, and development of infrastructure that supports production.
- Development of human capital through reforms that include expansion of education, particularly primary and secondary schools; accessibility to health services; the fight against HIV/AIDS; and measures to generate employment.

**Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)**

- Births attended by skilled health personnel: 79
- Children reaching 5th grade: 59
- Survival up to 5: 83

**Gender Equity Index (GEI)**

- Economic activity: 65
- Education: 11
- Empowerment: 30

**National reports**

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Analysing poverty

The current analysis of poverty in the Central African Republic is based on two studies conducted by the Ministry of Planning on living conditions in urban and rural settings. They were carried out in 2003 with technical and financial support from the UNDP, and supplemented in 2006 with a participatory research study financed by the World Bank.

These studies identified 10 major problems: bad governance, insecurity, low income, inefficient education and training, poor health, corruption, lack of employment and the absence of opportunities, lack of drinking water, the absence of a policy for strengthening of national capabilities and environmental issues. Amongst these 10, group or individual statements of participants in every region singled out three as most pressing: poor governance, insecurity and lack of peace.

Poor conditions are prevalent throughout the country. Some neighbourhoods of Bangui, the capital city, have electricity only four days out of seven; most neighbourhoods have no access to drinking water. Faced with a sharp drop in income, many Central Africans are invading green space in cities and forested areas. With inflation rapidly eroding already meagre incomes, selling wood for fuel is often the only alternative to the more precarious, badly-paid and illicit ways of earning an income that have also proliferated. As a result, the savannah is advancing at a rate of nearly 500 meters a year on each side of the Bangui-Boal axis; it has already moved almost 30 kilometers toward the south and southwest.

Overall, the poverty rate is 73% in cities and 69% in rural areas. This deprivation is heightened by huge disparities in income and domestic expenses.

CHART 1. Progress towards achieving the MDGs between 1990 and 2003

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Incidence of poverty (%)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of children with insufficient weight (below the weight considered healthy) (%)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<th>GOAL 2. Achieve Universal Primary Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Net school enrolment rate (%)</td>
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<td>Literacy rate between 15 and 24 years (%)</td>
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<th>GOAL 3. Promote Gender Equality &amp; Empower Women</th>
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<tr>
<td>Girl/boy ratio in primary school (%)</td>
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<td>Girl/boy ratio in secondary school (%)</td>
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<th>GOAL 4. Reduce Child Mortality Below Age 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Child mortality rate (per 1000 births)</td>
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<td>Child mortality rate (per 1000 live births)</td>
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<td>Measles immunization rate (%)</td>
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<th>GOAL 5. Improve Maternal Health</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)</td>
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<td>Rate of births assisted by skilled health personnel (%)</td>
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<th>GOAL 6. Combat Hiv/AIDS, Malaria And Other Diseases</th>
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<tr>
<td>People living with AIDS (% women 15-49 years)</td>
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<td>People living with malaria (%)</td>
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<th>GOAL 7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability</th>
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<td>Area of protected land (km²)</td>
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<td>% of the population with access to an improved water source (%)</td>
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<td>% of the population with access to drinking water (%)</td>
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<td>% of the population with access to sanitation (%)</td>
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