



THE BOXES OF RESILIENCE IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR CONSOLIDATING RESILIENCE IN A PARTICIPATORY AND INTEGRATED MANNER

WWW.NDC-CLUSTER.NET/GOOD-PRACTICES

WWW.TRANSPARENCY-PARTNERSHIP.NET/GOOD-PRACTICE-DATABASE

LAST UPDATED: 09/2019

ACTION AREA: Adaptation

FOCUS AREA: Strategising

COUNTRY: Central African Republic

SECTORS

INVOLVED: Agriculture

TIMEFRAME: 2014-2016

CASE SUMMARY: The concept of 'Boxes of Resilience' centres on agro-pastoral communities and aims to integrate financial, social and productive activities to enhance local resilience to climate change (FAO, 2016b). The main objective of the programme implemented between 2014 and 2016 in the Central African Republic was to enable rural communities (more specifically farmers and women's associations) to make full use of their existing capacities and to have different options at hand to adapt to and better respond to risks associated with climate change. Agricultural resilience is especially vital in the Central African Republic, as more than 75 % of its population is dependent on this sector for food and income.

In this context, the approach seeks to empower communities to become resilient to climate change through a number of activities, including: Training farmers in a participatory manner on improving their agro-pastoral practices; forming community groups to create micro-finance systems to accumulate and save capital in a sustainable manner; setting up awareness-trainings and meetings to discuss important community issues (such as health and gender equality) and foster social cohesion in that regard (FAO, 2016a).

This case study constitutes a good practice for multiple reasons. The Boxes of Resilience approach has addressed adaptation from multiple angles, reaching from improved agricultural practices to enhancing communal financial systems to ensure resilience to climate change-induced income shocks. Bringing together various stakeholders in this endeavour has fostered social cohesion, sustainable development benefits and inter-sectoral collaboration. In addition, the approach was innovative in nature, as it enhanced the community understanding of adaptation as a multi-layered issue and opportunity.





BACKGROUND: ————— Between 2013 and 2015, the Central African Republic (CAR) went through a major violent conflict that has affected almost its entire territory and population. A coup d'état compounded with the structural problems that have affected the country's development for three decades (including a legacy of colonialism, a dysfunctional educational system, weak governance and lack of investments) resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis (FAO, 2016a). In this context, hundreds of thousand people were displaced, human rights seriously violated and most public and private infrastructures looted and destroyed (ibid). Since 2015 the situation has been improving gradually. The presidential and legislative elections in 2016 brought the political turmoil to an end and the country started to embark on the long path of reconstruction. Much of the country remains, however, politically unstable and insecure (World Bank, 2018).

In addition to political tensions, the CAR is highly exposed to climate hazards (drought, floods, water and wind erosion, extreme temperatures, high winds, bush fires, subsidence of soils, seasonal shifts). These hazards have multiple adverse socio-economic impacts on the country (MEEDD, 2013), undermining the country's social cohesion, stability and sustainable development. The CAR has a warm and humid equatorial climate with a rainy and a dry season. Precipitation varies between 800 mm in the northern part of the country and 1600 mm in the South. Annual temperatures vary annually between 15°C in the South and 38°C in the North (Central African Republic, 2015). Future scenarios suggest an increase in temperature of 1.4 to 2.2°C in the case of low greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In a high GHG emissions scenario, they indicate an increase of 1.8 to 2.7°C (ibid).

By ratifying the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in March 1995 and the Kyoto Protocol in March 2008 (UNFCCC, n.a.), the CAR reaffirmed its commitment to the international community in the face of new environmental challenges. The country seeks to reduce its emissions by 5% compared to the business as usual (BAU) reference scenario (i.e. 5,498.3 kilotons Carbon dioxide equivalent (kt CO₂e) avoided) by 2030 and 25% (i.e. 33,076.1 kt CO₂e) by 2050, conditional upon international support (Central African Republic, 2015). Five sectors have been identified as most vulnerable to climate change: Agriculture, forestry, water resources, energy and health. The country is furthermore especially vulnerable to natural disasters. Its agro-silvo-pastoral regions are threatened by a drop in precipitation, soil degradation, bush fires, drought, water dystrophy and seasonal diseases (NEPADCA, 2014).

In this context, the CAR launched the Boxes of Resilience programme. The overarching goal of the Boxes of Resilience approach is to allow communities in rural areas to make better use of their existing capacities in various areas and ways. In the CAR, the goal was to empower rural smallholders to better manage climate-related risks and seize local opportunities. Through improving farming techniques, financial capacities and governance structures at the community level, the programme sought to strengthen community resilience in the wake of climate change and with a view to address other, interrelated and structural socio-economic issues. The programme was initiated through a partnership between the CAR through its Ministry of Agriculture and national and international NGOs.

ACTIVITIES: ————— Adopting an integrated approach, the Boxes of Resilience programme combines three interconnected technical, financial and social components to promote resilience. These components serve to achieve various goals and cover a range of activities.

1. THE TECHNICAL COMPONENT focused on helping communities to manage their natural resources in a sustainable manner, reduce disaster risks, adapt to the effects of climate change and improve the management of agricultural ecosystems through conservation, processing and marketing of products. To achieve these goals, the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach was adopted. FFS is a training to find and promote innovative agro-pastoral approaches within a specific context. The approach relies on indigenous knowledge and applies an experiential learning technique. Over the course of one cropping season, the group compares two plots – one follows conventional methods, the other applies techniques that are considered to be best practice. Throughout this experiment, different aspects are compared, for example by taking samples of weeds or by measuring the development of the plants. Departing from a top-down approach, the farmers are to decide which approach works best for them through discussions (FAO, n.a.). The trainings have been organised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Each of their facilitators has worked with four to five groups (each comprising 20 to 30 members). The goal was to build and strengthen capacities of producer groups with regards to a selection of their choice from the following topics (FAO, 2016a):

- Animal production and health
- Post-harvest conservation
- Fish-farming
- School gardens
- Producing quality-seeds
- Cereal production and market gardening

2. THE FINANCIAL COMPONENT sought to promote community credit and savings initiatives. More specifically, the 'Village Savings and Credit Associations' (AVEC, for its French acronym) methodology was adopted. It works according to the following principle: A group of 15-25 community members save money together. In a second step, they create small loans from the money that was saved. An agreed-upon share of the profits from the savings and loan is then distributed to the contributing members in proportion to the amount that was saved by each member. This financial method is managed by the members themselves. In addition, AVEC provides a contribution to a solidarity fund which can be tapped by its members in the case of illness or other emergencies (FAO, 2016a). The goal of the financial component was to familiarise community members with financial matters before they were confronted with larger financial institutions. Also, these solutions are often the only ones available in rural areas where access to financial services remains limited.

3. THE SOCIAL COMPONENT aimed to strengthen cohesion between community groups struggling to rebuild their lives after traumatic experiences such as displacement, food crises or conflicts. The component also aimed to raise awareness on a range of subjects between members or neighbouring communities, covering inter alia: health, hygiene and sanitation, child protection, violence based on gender and women empowerment (FAO, 2016a). Bringing together members from AVEC, FFS and other members of the community, specific training and awareness-raising sessions were organised through meetings, focus groups or advisory and mediation activities. The aforementioned activities allowed members to discuss common problems and share enriching experiences. To ensure that all of the above components are implemented and enhance their interconnectedness, some groups have put in place a system of conditionality to access AVEC. These conditions include, inter alia: engagement in an activity that is profitable for all members of the community, the creditworthiness of a beneficiary of a credit, or the progressive repayment within a maximum of three months (ibid).



THE BOXES OF RESILIENCE IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC: A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH FOR CONSOLIDATING RESILIENCE IN A PARTICIPATORY AND INTEGRATED MANNER

INSTITUTIONS

- INVOLVED:** —————
- **GOVERNMENT AGENCIES:** Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Social Action, Central African Agricultural Development Agency (ACDA), National Livestock Development Agency (ANDE)
 - **IMPLEMENTING PARTNER:** Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)
 - **INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS:** UNWOMEN, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, United Nations Capital Development Fund, World Food Programme, ONG Cooperazione Internazionale, Catholic Relief Services, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council and Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
 - **OTHER INSTITUTIONS:** Private sector

COOPERATION WITH: ——— Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)

FINANCE: ————— FAO has mobilised around USD 10 million to realise the Boxes of Resilience approach (FAO, 2014). Among the largest donors counted the European Union through the Bekou Fund, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the World Bank, the Japanese Government, the Italian Government, and the French Embassy (FAO, 2016a).

- IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES:** —
- **WIDE REACH AND CONTINUATION OF A PROVEN APPROACH:** During the 2014-2016 period, nearly 2,500 groups of farmers, representing 45,000 rural households, received support from the Boxes of Resilience approach in 10 of the 16 prefectures of the CAR. The approach has been successfully implemented in other African countries, including Uganda, Mali, Chad, and Malawi (FAO, 2016b). Following the implementation of the approach from 2014 to 2016, 40 further Boxes of Resilience were built and strengthened over the course of the years 2017 - 2019 (FAO, 2019).
 - **DIVERSIFICATION OF LIVELIHOODS AND INCOME SOURCES:** Through the approach, the accumulation of physical (seed and food reserves) and financial (savings, contingency funds) assets was supported - this in turn helps target communities to better manage crises. FAO combined cash transfers with small processing equipment distributions, as well as support for quality seed production and support to school canteens and vegetable gardens. These activities have enabled affected households to build up food and seed stocks. Diversification and asset and income accumulation are also reflected at the social level through member linkages and knowledge sharing which are key elements of social inclusion and thus resilience at the community level.
 - **EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:** The strengthening of producer groups and women's associations contributed to the empowerment of women. Already six months after its implementation, a higher participation of women in decision-making at the household level, and improved public speaking skills could be observed. The Boxes of Resilience approach included reactivating micro-enterprises affected by the crisis and women's leadership. The majority of the beneficiaries (67%) of the credits were women. Women were present in more than 79% of the micro-finance management structures (FAO, 2016a).
 - **BETTER KNOWLEDGE OF AGRICULTURAL TECHNIQUES, INCREASED YIELDS AND INCREASED SAVINGS CAPACITY:** The strengthening of technical, financial and social capacities of the target groups prepared the grounds for (i) easier access to micro-credit services in rural areas and an increase in the purchasing power of communities; (ii) a stronger capacity to generate savings in the order of USD 280 per group/year; (iii) an increase in agricultural yields and improved knowledge of agricultural practices (inter alia on the use of bio pesticides) (FAO, 2016a).

• **STRENGTHENING OF THE SOCIAL COHESION AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN THE BENEFICIARY COMMUNITIES:** Through the participation of groups in the rehabilitation of community social infrastructures (such as roads and wells) and the establishment of a social assistance service the social bonds between beneficiaries could be strengthened (FAO, 2016a). For example, one community invested funds from their AVEC for the construction of a community well so that the entire village could have access to drinking water (ibid). Beyond the technical and financial aspects, the approach strengthened producer groups and women's associations on an institutional level.

• **CONSOLIDATION OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT, COMMITMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** Through the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, the participating community members chose how to go about adapting their agricultural practices, which increased their buy-in into the chosen activities and their spirit of entrepreneurship.

WHY IS IT

GOOD PRACTICE: ————— The boxes-of-resilience approach qualifies as a good practice due to the following criteria:

• **INNOVATION:** Through adopting the Boxes of Resilience approach, target groups were not only trained on improving their agricultural practices in order to better adapt to a changing climate. They were also sensitised for associated issues, such as the importance of effective financial and social structures. This innovative approach helps to bring about an improved understanding of the notion of resilience, combining short-term humanitarian assistance with medium- and long-term sustainable development.

• **INTER-SECTORAL COOPERATION:** The multi-dimensional approach stimulated stakeholder collaboration and coordination in the application of good agricultural, nutritional, environmental, economic and social practices. As a result, the different community stakeholders were better aware of the multiple inputs that are needed to achieve climate-resilient development and displayed an increased understanding of the different roles needed to that end.

• **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT BENEFITS:** The approach created substantial economic, social and environmental co-benefits. It contributed to reducing poverty by stimulating job creation and increasing the level of income: Loans if used, for example, for small processing equipment, helped members to generate additional income. The financial support provided by the programme was also instrumental in improving access to health, education and food. The combination of the three dimensions has demonstrated its multiplier effect on agricultural and pastoral household livelihoods through the accumulation and diversification of household and community income, knowledge and assets.

• **ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS:** The general objective of CAR set out in its INDC is to pursue a path of sustainable development and become resilient to the adverse effects of climate change in the sectors of food security and agriculture, among others (Central African Republic, 2015). Hence, the Boxes of Resilience approach contributes to addressing this key country objective while taking into account national circumstances.

SUCCESS FACTORS: ————— • **THE CONDITIONALITY SYSTEM:** The conditionality system has proven to be a key element for sustainability and the promotion of good agricultural and environmental practices. It was a motivational mechanism that allowed access to credits and loans only if good technical or social practices are applied. Experience shows that after a project end, groups continue to meet and promote these good practices that enhance their resilience.



- **DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY MICRO-FINANCE:** The promotion of the AVEC methodology allowed the community members to access micro-credits and create income-generating opportunities. These savings and lending initiatives allowed members to invest in their own activities – thus enhancing ownership – and increase their understanding of financial flows and structures.
- **DISCUSSION AND POPULARISATION OF IMPORTANT COMMUNAL ISSUES:** Through awareness raising sessions, it became possible to discuss issues of great salience with the community, including health-related matters (such as Malaria or HIV/AIDS), hygiene, sanitation, or child protection. This advisory support has enabled households in vulnerable situations to better prepare themselves to deal with these issues through increasing knowledge and awareness and to bring about important social and behavioural changes.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS / CHALLENGES: _____

WHAT WERE THE MAIN BARRIERS / CHALLENGES TO DELIVERY?

INFORMATIONAL:

Some difficulties were noted in applying the fundamentals of the Farmer Field School approach. Although documented, the FAO standards risk being simplified and readjusted according to the specific working methods of each partner. This can give an ill-defined image of the Boxes of Resilience approach, which may then lose credibility.

In addition to the first informational barrier, the necessary training time and the high turnover of expatriates made it difficult to align the methodologies for the different components. Moreover, the methodology of the social component still lacks guidelines and tools defined by the FAO.

INSTITUTIONAL:

Several partner organisations mentioned the delay in signing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with FAO. This has delayed the planned activities according to the crop calendar.

HOW WERE THESE BARRIERS / CHALLENGES OVERCOME?

Community ownership of the standards and methodology has been strengthened through a certification process. This has reduced the risk of deviating from the approach.

The FFS approach was adapted by the experts/trainers who developed a curriculum allowing rapid deployment in order to reduce the time needed for training. A social pillar methodology specific to the Boxes of Resilience has been defined.

Awareness raising and better organisation of stakeholders have helped to ensure that activities are in line with the agricultural calendar.

LESSONS LEARNED: _____

- **ADOPT AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO RESILIENCE-BUILDING AND ADAPTATION:** Through the adoption of an integrated and holistic approach focused on agro-pastoral communities, the root causes of vulnerability of the poorest households can be addressed and their resilience to potential shocks can be strengthened. In addition, regardless of the rainy season, the measures described above have given households the opportunity to accumulate and protect a variety of financial and other assets on a regular basis throughout the year.

- **CREATE FLEXIBLE SYSTEMS:** The open and flexible FFS system that can be steered towards the needs of target groups has proven to promote sustainable and climate-smart agriculture. Rural financial management and the application of good practices have reduced vulnerability and improved food security at household and community levels.

HOW TO REPLICATE

THIS PRACTICE: ————— To ensure the replicability of this approach, it is important to:

- **INTEGRATE THE 'BOXES OF RESILIENCE' APPROACH INTO REGIONAL INITIATIVES WORKING FOR RESILIENCE:** In the case of the CRA, the programme was integrated into the work of other initiatives such as the Global Alliance for Resilience (AGIR) and the Great Green Wall in the Sahel and West Africa; the IGAD Initiative for Drought Resilience and Sustainability (IDDRSI); support for resilience in the Horn of Africa (SHARE); and support for strengthened efforts against hunger and undernutrition in young children in different countries. Through the incorporation of the 'Boxes of resilience' approach into these programmes, a multi-faceted notion of resilience can be disseminated across other contexts.
- **ADAPT THE 'BOXES OF RESILIENCE' APPROACH TO LOCAL PRIORITIES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS:** In order to ensure the success and sustainability of the 'Boxes of Resilience' approach, it is essential to take into account the specificities of the regional or local context. This secures that the contextual intricacies – for example working with a war-torn community that is still grappling with past conflicts – are well-understood and not neglected in the course of implementing the approach.

CONTACT FOR

ENQUIRIES: ————— · Frederique Matras, Knowledge Management and Capacity Development Specialist; Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience KORE Facilitator, FAO, Frederique.Matras@fao.org

· Alexis Bonte, Regional Resilience Coordinator for the Africa region and Representative a.i. RDC, FAO, alexis.bonte@fao.org

FURTHER KEY

RESOURCES: ————— · FAO (2014). Building resilience in the Central African Republic. Available at : <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4378e.pdf>

· FAO (2016a). Les caisses de résilience en République centrafricaine (The boxes of resilience in the Central African Republic). Available at : <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6244f.pdf%20>

· FAO (2016b). Les caisses de résilience (The boxes of resilience). Available at : <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5869f.pdf>

WEBSITE: ————— · FAO on CAR: <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/index/en/?iso3=caf>

CASE STUDY AUTHORS: — · Dethie Soumare Ndiaye and Amy Gueye (Centre de Suivi Ecologique)
· Helen Burmeister (adelphi)

CASE STUDY

CONTRIBUTORS: ————— · Khady Yama Sarr Fall and Rokhaya Fall (Centre de Suivi Ecologique)
· Interviewees: Frederique Matras and Alexis Bonte, (FAO)

EDITED BY: ————— Nikolas Scherer and Helen Burmeister (adelphi)



- REFERENCES:**
- Central African Republic (2015). Intended Nationally Determined Contribution. Available at: https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Central%20African%20Republic/1/CPDN_R%C3%A9publique%20Centrafricaine_EN.pdf
 - FAO (2015). L'évaluation du programme de résilience de la FAO en République Centrafricaine (Evaluation of the FAO Resilience Programme in the Central African Republic). Available at : <http://www.fao.org/3/a-bd474f.pdf%20>
 - FAO (2016c). KORE - Knowledge Sharing Platform on Resilience. Caisses de résilience (Boxes of resilience). Available at : www.fao.org/in-action/kore/webinar-archive/webinar-details/en/c/458052/
 - FAO (2016d). Consolider la résilience à l'insécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest, Foire aux savoirs Ouagadougou, Recueil de bonnes pratiques (Strengthening Resilience to Food and Nutrition Insecurity in the Sahel and West Africa, Ouagadougou Knowledge Fair, Compendium of Good Practices).
 - FAO (2017). Programme d'appui à la résilience en République centrafricaine (Resilience Support Programme in the Central African Republic).
 - FAO (n.a.). Farmer field school approach. Available at : <http://www.fao.org/agriculture/ippm/programme/ffs-approach/en/>
 - FAO (2019). Points forts du projet: Assistance agricole d'urgence en appui à la résilience des communautés vulnérables affectées par les crises en République centrafricaine (27/07/2017 - 26/01/2019) (Project Highlights: Emergency Agricultural Assistance in Support of the Resilience of Vulnerable Communities Affected by Crises in the Central African Republic (27/07/2017 - 26/01/2019). Available at : <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OSRO%20CAF%20705%20BEL%20Fiche.pdf>
 - MEEDD (2013). Deuxième Communication Nationale de la République Centrafricaine sous la Convention-Cadre des Nations Unies sur les Changements Climatiques (Second National Communication of the Central African Republic under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). Available at: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cafn2.pdf>
 - NEPADCA (2014). Changement Climatique : Afrique et République Centrafricaine (Climate Change: Africa and Central African Republic). Available at: <https://nepadca.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/changement-climatique-afrique-et-republique-centrafricaine/>
 - UNFCCC (n.a.). Central African Republic. Available at: https://unfccc.int/tools_xml/country_CF.html
 - World Bank (2018). The World Bank in Central African Republic. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/centralafricanrepublic/overview>

IMPRINT GPD

PUBLISHED BY:

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme – UNDP)

REGISTERED OFFICES:

Bonn and Eschborn

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
+49 6196 79-3330
klaus.wenzel@giz.de

WEBSITES:

<https://www.transparency-partnership.net/good-practice-database>
<https://www.ndc-cluster.net/good-practices>

This product is being published by GIZ in cooperation with UNDP under the framework of the Partnership on Transparency in the Paris Agreement and the NDC Support Cluster. The analysis has been funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) under its International Climate Initiative (IKI), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Commission (EC).

