



## **Summary Note: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP, 2004**

---

### **2004: The Central African Republic Leadership Seminar**

#### Background:

In 2004, the Central African Republic (CAR) was managed by a transitional government, with presidential elections scheduled for January 2005. To focus resources and management attention on tackling the most critical development challenges in the months ahead, the government approved a transitional results framework targeting short term outcomes for security, governance, economic management and delivery of selected social services. This framework, or matrix, served as a tool to focus priorities in the short-term and offered the opportunity for dialogue and ownership by government of a progress on reforms, monitored by benchmarks, to help CAR create the track record they needed to re-engage the donor community.

CAR's transitional government, recognizing the importance for this transition of this opportunity to demonstrate leadership at the highest level, worked with the Bank and the UN system to plan a leadership seminar aimed at strengthening alliances within and between governmental and non-governmental actors. The seminar focused in particular on highlighting doable, elements of the transitional results framework - which did not require money from donors, and on how this could foster a collective and stable environment for the pre- and post-election period. The World Bank Institute, the Bank Country Team for CAR, worked with the CAR government, BONUCA, and the UNDP as co-sponsors of this two-day event, presented in Bangui in November 2004.

#### Workshop Goals: The seminar was designed to:

1. identify and present lessons learned by leaders who have or are effectively managing transitions and engage them in priority-setting and problem-solving with a mixed group of clients (20 government and 20 non-government leaders);
2. sensitize the client (governmental and non-governmental) to the importance of the "transition results matrix" and mobilize stakeholders and existing resources around collective commitment to attain unachieved results in the short term;
3. explore and build consensus around prioritized actions to mitigate behaviors which risk to threaten the election process (elections planned for early 2005)

It is also hoped that the workshop has established the foundation for broader capacity-building activities for reform following the elections.

Approach: The seminar provided a customized combination of "capacity for results" focus, peer learning, and team building. The primary goal was to allow participants the opportunity to interact on a deep and substantive level with peer presenters in a variety of formats around both broad-ranging and more narrowly defined topics. It served as a forum for dialogue and exchange of experiences between a group of 40 senior CAR leaders from both government and non-governmental organizations, and successful reformers and experienced practitioners in other countries. This 'peer to peer' approach minimizes client resistance and anxiety, and creates an atmosphere of confidence and creativity, by building on the experience of successful change leaders from other countries that have undergone comparable transitions. Resource persons included: ex-president Buyoya from Burundi on transition and security, Brice Lejambre from the anti-corruption commission in Madagascar, and François Ouedraogo former deputy minister of mines from Burkina.

In addition to being given access to 'good practice' methods for carrying out reforms under difficult circumstances; this event allowed participants to improve their understanding of the challenges of problems faced during the transition and possible solutions used elsewhere to overcome them. Anecdotal feedback indicated that it deepened the dialog amongst government leaders and between government and other stakeholders.

Participants: To allow in-depth interaction, the seminar was limited to 40 leaders drawn from the cabinet, key transitional institutions -- the electoral commission and the National Transitional Council -- and civil society, including the media and the religious community.

Workshop Themes and Content: The seminar emerged in the context of the transitional results framework and was broadly structured to address the specific areas of the government's transitional results matrix. Within this framework, the seminar emphasized three main themes, and presentations by the three visiting leader-presenters were keyed to these topics:

- *stability and security:*
- *engagement in promoting good governance and transparent financial management*
- *management of natural resources*

Two subsidiary themes were also explicitly addressed:

- the importance of *leading by example*, and
- the importance of *communication within government and between government and other stakeholders including civil society and the international community.*

The comportment of leaders, whether within or outside government, sets the tone for others' behavior and exerts a decisive influence on the levels of trust, cooperation and respect within society. Particularly given the short-term horizon, leaders' behavior will be decisive in meeting the challenges of the transition period in CAR.

Results: This was the first time in fifteen years that representatives of political parties, labor unions, journalists, civil society, and government in CAR had sat together and worked through operational challenges. A number of participants voiced the view that the seminar generated a measurable deepening in the dialogue among diverse stakeholders in a climate where communications have been sparse and not effective for a long time and at a time when campaigning for the election is about to enter its peak period. This is reflected in a commitment to replicate the activity on their own before the elections, as well as after, with support from outside.

The peer-to-peer experience-sharing was a very effective tool for introducing controversial subjects like corruption to the debate; as facilitators, the visiting leaders were able to find the "right" questions to provoke problem-solving, and also were able to redirect accountability to the participant-leaders when they were tempted to blame donors for perceived problems.

The intense focus on the transition matrix in the working groups as well as in a formal presentation by the Minister of Finance rendering account of achievements and gaps was a strong testimony to the impact that this event had on raising the profile and familiarity with the matrix.

While preparing the seminar, it was envisaged that the working group session would result in the development and adoption of a code of conduct for the pre-election transition. While the participants did not agree on a formal "*code de conduite*", the challenging discussion were a symptom of their nascent re-engagement, and they did adopt a common declaration, mapping their commitment and engagement in the period up to and past the scheduled elections. This declaration was made public and was read to the press and members of the diplomatic corps at the closing ceremony.

Preliminary tabulation of the evaluations shows that over 95% of participants assessed the overall impact as "very important" or "important".

### ***Keys to Success***

- **Clear message to government and partners on the benefits of full government ownership of the event, as the foundation for strong partnerships with sponsors** (including UNDP, France, and BONUCA): Frequent contact with the government's technical working group ensured that government and Bank preparations proceeded in a coordinated manner, and that Bank proposals were in tune with country needs. The Bank's partnership with two prominent donors – UNDP and BONUCA, both with a strong in-country presence – was essential on both substantive and operational grounds. These agencies brought crucial contextual knowledge on similar previous events and relevant issues, provided excellent

documentation of proceedings and contact with knowledgeable resource persons, facilitated communication with senior government officials, and provided practical logistical support.

- **Broad consultation:** From the beginning, the organizing team consulted with government and prominent donors. Experience shows that the government (not the Bank) needs to lead the engagement with civil society and non-governmental actors, both upstream and through the preparation process.
- **Moving quickly to mitigate unexpected events along the way:** The timely implementation of the seminar seemed uncertain at several points in the preparation process, most notably after the resignation of the original principal counterpart and a cabinet reshuffle. This challenge clearly required the affirmation of ownership by the newly configured transitional administration, and the indicator of success was the reconfirmation and reinvigoration of the organizing team. The ability to respond quickly, by mounting a second mission to meet and engage the new counterpart and conduct additional consultations, was critical to confirming plans and refining the agenda.
- **A thorough (and early) search to recruit experienced experts from appropriate countries:** The team's work in creating a detailed long list of candidates of varied national backgrounds and areas of expertise allowed the government to choose from a field of top-flight individuals with appropriate expertise, international experience and regional profiles.
- **Dialogue with speakers well before the event:** As soon as the government made its choice of speakers, the Bank contacted the individuals to provide briefing materials and detailed terms of reference. Team videoconferences with each speaker were critical to ensuring that speaker interventions touched on the key issues in a style that participants could appreciate (i.e. by focusing on sharing of experience and lessons learned in analogous contexts, rather than on specific prescriptions for CAR). Beyond these overall considerations, each speaker was free to shape the content of his presentation. Public speaking, listening and discussion facilitation skills were all important criteria for successful speakers/resource persons.
- **An active strategy to manage media and communications:** In a country plagued by criticisms of media bias and irresponsible or unfounded coverage, engaging the media (even simply for the event itself) was a challenge. This involved ensuring that representative media outlets were invited to select events (opening, closing, and post-seminar press conference with speakers, government and Bank representatives) and provided with briefing materials helped set the stage for informed coverage. At the same time, two media representatives were invited to participate in seminar itself but were asked to respect the confidentiality of the event. In hindsight, a pre-event briefing (as a stage-setter and expectation-setter) might have been helpful to make the role of the media as constructive as possible
- **Adopting a results-based approach for the seminar:** The seminar combined insights from international experience on themes relevant to CAR with examination of very specific commitments by the country's government, in the form of the transitional results matrix. Focusing the energy and incentives of the working group sessions around the matrix helped to build awareness of and commitment to it, and gave the working groups a very concrete, substantive agenda which encouraged participation and controversy.

*This summary note was prepared by the LICUS unit in OPCS, as a companion to the "Dissemination Note on Leadership Workshops, 2001-2004" jointly issued in December 2004 by the LICUS unit and the Public Sector Governance unit in PREM. The content of this summary was reviewed by the workshop organizers responsible for the event.*

*For further information on the CAR workshop, please contact Moira Hart-Poliquin in WBI (extension 36311), or Barbry Keller in LICUS (extension 85610).*