ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF CONFLICTS ON CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES IN CAR
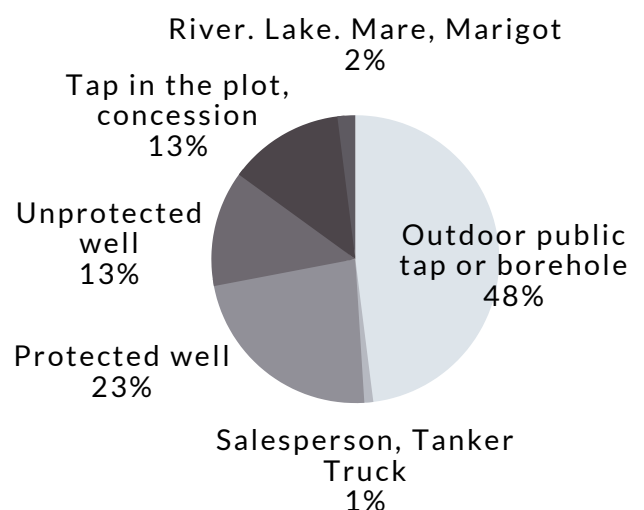
INTRODUCTION

This study assesses the impact of conflict on children and adolescents by interpreting data collected in Bambari and Bossangoa, with a particular focus on WASH service delivery systems on the one hand, and stakeholders' coping mechanisms on the other. Against a backdrop of instability and with the state struggling to establish an effective presence throughout the country, the analysis notes the deterioration caused by conflict on already precarious WASH infrastructures, and offers several recommendations for securing and sustaining WASH programming, strengthening social cohesion and enhancing the resilience of actors.

CONTEXT

The Central African Republic has a very limited level of access to safe water. In the same vein, the population's access to hygiene and sanitation services remains very low, despite several reforms in the water supply and sanitation sector (see Politique Nationale de l'Eau (PNE), November 2020). It is challenging to improve this situation against a backdrop of successive violent socio-political crises affecting WASH delivery actors and users. The violent disruptions of the last two years have affected civilian populations throughout the country. Bambari and Bossangoa have also witnessed the effects of violent conflicts between armed protagonists, especially on WASH infrastructures. In the aftermath of conflicts, survey participants have indicated that their main source of water supply are public taps and boreholes.

BOSSANGOA & BAMBARI

River. Lake. Mare, Marigot 2%
Tap in the plot, concession 13%
Unprotected well 13%
Protected well 23%
Salesperson, Tanker Truck 1%
Outdoor public tap or borehole 48%

According to respondents in Bossangoa and Bambari, UN agencies, government technical services, and faith-based organizations are most involved in implementing WASH delivery. However, results remain limited due to the security context, lack of funding, and the legacy of the most recent episodes of violence (2020-2021). The role of the state is also recognised by respondents as a stabilizing factor in the (re)establishment of WASH infrastructures.

IMPACT OF CONFLICTS

The reduction in water points creates queues around the remaining ones until late at night. This time spent in the queues could have been used for the education and/or development of the young people who are thus held there. The deterioration of the security environment creates anxiety among children and adolescents, which impacts on their relationships with others and their relationship to schooling and development. Data from surveys of children and adolescents in Bambari and Bossangoa show that they are also constrained by physical violence to bend to the will of adults, sometimes armed. This pattern is also often repeated around water points.

The pattern that emerges from the data collected through the workshops and surveys carried out in Bossangoa and Bambari is that, even if significant shortcomings existed before 2020, the WASH infrastructure has deteriorated further over the last two years. The causes of this deterioration vary according to the locality, ranging from the overuse of certain water points to the destruction of others, poor management or deterioration due to lack of technical maintenance or proper community management.

WASH implementation to address the consequences of conflict, especially for IDPs, has a dual linkage to social cohesion. On the one hand, WASH strengthens social cohesion by creating quality relationships between community members. On the other hand, if the social aspects of WASH are not addressed in advance, the delivery WASH provision can generate new tensions or rekindle existing tensions between (groups of) individuals.

WASH ACTORS AND SYSTEMS IN THE FACE OF CONFLICT DYNAMICS

We distinguish five main groups of actors involved in, or influencing, the implementation of WASH in CAR. State actors including central government relays and locally elected officials (1), user associations and local organisations (2), households (3), armed groups (4), and humanitarians (United Nations agencies, international and national NGOs) (5). According to the testimonies of participants in the various workshops with the youth, international NGOs play a major role in the implementation of WASH. Local elected officials and national NGOs were seen as having a small contribution. However, SODECA also remains a central player. WASH actors are also organized in networks and partnerships, especially within the WASH Cluster. However, there is a lack of collective mobilisation or networking among users and local associations. Relations between users (CGPE) and local government departments are almost non-existent.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key observations

- The impact of the war on WASH services is an aggravation of an existing problem;
- Access to WASH services is an important factor in social cohesion, but there is a need to remain sensitive to the social tensions, societal contradictions and conflicting factors that surround it;
- Influential actors in the WASH sector deploy differently according to their interests and capacities, but armed groups tend to play a restrictive and destructive role;
- The coping and resilience mechanisms of the local WASH system remain embryonic due to their over-reliance on international NGOs and lack of technical capacity;
- The aftermath of exposure to conflicts and its causal relationship to youth associative deficit is a major bottleneck in the resilience capacity of basic social services users in general, and WASH users in particular;
- Local authorities, broadly considered, could play a more dynamic role in terms of advocacy and local governance of WASH provision.

Main recommendations (17 recommendations, grouped into 4 headings)

- Reduce the psychosocial impact of conflict in children and adolescents before involving them in WASH implementation activities
- Strengthen and secure existing WASH infrastructure by making provisions for management and sustainability when establishing new facilities;
- Boosting social cohesion by creating the associative and civil fabric necessary to strengthen technical capacities, stimulate intergenerational integration, and information sharing;
- Involve key stakeholders more widely at local level.