

THE CENTRAL AFRICAN CRISIS AND THE PROBLEM OF CROSS-BORDER INSECURITY: THE CASE OF HOSTAGE-TAKING ON THE BORDERS OF ADAMAWA AND EASTERN CAMEROON

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Abstract: The Central African Republic is known to be one of the most unstable states in Central Africa. Indeed, this country very quickly fell into a recurring cycle of violence linked to the race for power, not only through poorly controlled democratic processes, but also through the action of omnipresent warlords. The most notable case is the 2013 crisis which forced more than 250,000 people to take refuge in Cameroon according to UNHCR figures. It should also be noted that this quasi-genocidal war is the basis for the proliferation of firearms and multifaceted armed gangs, known as “road blockers”. However, these different militias that failed to rise to power or those allied with fallen regimes, are becoming real threats for the populations, undermining all international principles regarding the integrity of borders. The question that concerns us is how the Central African crisis could turn into a real cause of insecurity for the neighboring country of Cameroon? How does this phenomenon manifest? What are its consequences and what control measures should be adopted? Several sources help us analyze this question. These are interviews, written documents and images that help us gain a better understanding of this issue. It is important to proceed with a multidisciplinary approach in order to collect divergent opinions on the phenomenon of cross-border organized crime. The various accounts collected made it possible to observe that the phenomenon of hostage-taking in Adamawa and Eastern Cameron is fueled by the socio-political crisis in the Central African Republic. This has enormous socio-economic and geopolitical consequences in Cameroon and the Central African sub-region.

Keywords: low intensity conflict, insecurity, cross-border crime, hostage taking, Cameroon, Central African Republic

Rezumat: Republica Centrafricană (RCA) este cunoscută ca fiind una dintre cele mai instabile țări din Africa. Într-adevăr, această țară de aflată demult într-un ciclu recurrent de violență legat de cursa pentru putere, procese democratice prost gestionate și acțiunile omniprezenților lideri militari. Cel mai notabil caz este criza din 2013, care a forțat peste

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250.000 de persoane să caute refugiu în Camerun, conform cifrelor UNHCR. De asemenea, trebuie menționat că acest război cu tentă genocidală este la baza proliferării armelor și a bandelor armate, cunoscute sub numele de “*road blockers*”. Cu toate acestea, aceste diverse miliiții, fie dintre cele care au încercat să ajungă la putere și nu au reușit sau cele aliate cu regimurile decăzute, constituie adevăratale amenințări pentru populații, subminând toate principiile internaționale privind respectarea integrității frontierelor. Întrebarea care ne preocupa este cum s-ar putea transforma criza din Africa Centrală într-o cauză reală de insecuritate pentru țara vecină, Camerun? Cum se manifestă acest fenomen și care sunt consecințele sale și ce măsuri ar trebui adoptate pentru a-l combate? Pentru a analiza mai bine această întrebare vom consulta mai multe tipuri surse. Acestea sunt interviuri orale, documente scrise și imagini care ne pot oferi mai multe informații în vederea adoptării unei abordări multidisciplinare. Această abordare ne va ajuta să adunăm opinii variate cu privire la infracțiunile transfrontaliere majore identificate. Cercetarea noastră ne-a condus la concluzia că fenomenul luării de ostaci din Adamawa și estul Camerunului este alimentat de criza socio-politică din Republica Centrafricană care are consecințe socioeconomice și geopolitice substanțiale pentru Camerun și subregiunea Africii Centrale.

Cuvinte cheie: conflict de joasă intensitate, insecuritate, criminalitate transfrontalieră, luare de ostaci, Camerun, Republica Centrafricană

I. Introduction

Wars have become regular in the Central African Republic since its independence in 1958 though the conflict that emerged in 2013 was the most catastrophic because it has involved confrontations with many armed groups, leading to a major humanitarian crisis not only in the country, but in the region as well¹. Since this war started in the Central African Republic (CAR), one of its particularities as witnessed in the Adamawa and Eastern-Cameroon regions, was the hostage-taking phenomenon that has become recurrent and it is affecting entire populations². Armed men coming from CAR, which shares 800 kilometers of border with Cameroon, have established themselves in villages of the Adamawa where livestock farming is highly practiced, or in the Eastern region of Cameroon, where there are minerals and forestry goods³.

¹ Jean-Arnold De Clermont, « Surmonter la crise en Centrafrique », *Etudes. Revue de Culture Contemporaine*, n° 4213 (février 2015): 7-17, <https://doi.org/10.3917/etu.4213.0007>.

² Bakary Yaya Alim and Marie Louidine Benoho Baboule, « La rémanence de l'insécurité transfrontalière aux marges territoriales du Cameroun et de la Centrafrique. Le Cameroun à l'épreuve de l'insécurité transfrontalière », in *Le Cameroun à l'épreuve de l'insécurité transfrontalière*, ed. Célestin Kaptchouang Tchejip and Frank Ebogo (Yaoundé: Monange 2023), <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04634211v1>.

³ CRTV, « Cameroun-RCA : les deux parties veulent concrétiser le tracer de leur frontière », 28 June 2024, <https://crtv.cm/2024/06/28/cameroun-rca-les-deux-parties-veulent-concretiser-le-trace-de-leur-frontiere/>.

The CAR crisis has had many repercussions on these two regions of Cameroon that are bordering the CAR. It must be said that these areas have become the place for cross-borders banditry, where armed groups take advantage of the lack of strong border control to commit crimes such as hostage-taking. Moreover, the hostage-taking phenomenon has had terrible socio-economic consequences on livestock owners, with people being forced to abandon their villages and lose their livelihood as a civilian recounted in one of the interviews conducted during this research⁴.

The situation is aggravated by the political and economic instability in the region thus making the application of sustainable solutions difficult. To better understand this phenomenon, we have examined articles and books from multidisciplinary authors and have conducted a series of interviews conducted in various localities from Cameroon, in 2018 and 2024 with twenty people, which allowed us to collect data on the hostages-taking phenomenon, its consequences, the measures taken by the government to combat it, and the challenges related to it. Due to the sensitivity of the research, the names of the people interviewed have been withheld. They belonged to various age groups (youngest was 37 years old, oldest was 72 years old) and while the majority were men, several interviewees were women as well. From a professional perspective, those interviewed were split between members of the security apparatus (police officers, gendarmes, former army officers, members of the vigilance committees and Rapid Intervention Battalions) and regular civilians (farmers, businessmen, teachers, and other regular civilians). The references to the interviews will only cite the location and date.

II. The Main Causes of Hostage Taking in the Adamawa and East Regions

Frequent conflicts in the Central African Republic have facilitated the creation of armed groups and the presence of illegal guns in the Adamawa and Eastern regions of Cameroon. This section presents the reasons for the crises affecting CAR and the weapons trafficking mechanism in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon.

II.1. The Central African Socio-Political Crisis

The 2013 crisis in CAR is difficult to understand as it was caused by many factors consisting of a mixture of sociopolitical, economic, cultural and geopolitical causes. We would argue that the major reason underpinning the crisis is connected to governmental instability since the State's institutions are fragile, incapable of keeping order, and unable to provide the basic needs to the

⁴ Interview conducted in Martap, in June 2024.

population. Additionally, the Government struggles to exert its authority on the whole country⁵. To this we can add the unsuccessful efforts to democratize the country which contributed to a rising wave of mass contestation⁶. As the democratization efforts sometimes failed, this outcome led to frequent cycles of violence and political instability.

On the sociocultural plan, we identify tribalism based on ethnical differences as another important cause. These differences were used by political and military actors to get support and justify the conflicts. Since the country's accession to independence, the various regimes of the CAR share a series of similarities: dynasty and clannism in the management of the country; poor governance; corruption; impunity; embezzlement of public funds; etc.⁷ This situation became worse when André Kolingba⁸ took power in the country in 1981. He managed the country with his family and clan, and between 1982 and 1987, there was even an amelioration of the socio-economic situation of the country. However, the subsequent successive change in regimes (Patassé, Bozizé, Samba Panza, Archange Touadera) aggravated the situation⁹.

At the economic level, we can note that poverty has always been a major cause of the war in the Central-African Republic since the difficult socio-economic situation aliments the tensions and conflicts. These factors combined with the history of political instability and international interventions have only worsened the situation in the country. The Centrafrican disorder is also due to some neighboring African countries and French inference. More than 558 779 Centrafricans found refuge in the Est of Cameroon and had to live with Cameroonians¹⁰. Last, but not least, the omnipresence of some militia in the region covering CAR, the Adamawa and Est of Cameroon contribute significantly to the weakening of the security environment.

⁵ Jocelyn Coulon, Damien Laramandy and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, « Chapitre 7. L'incapacité de l'État à imposer son autorité », in *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, ed. Jocelyn Coulon and Damien Laramandy (Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2015), 153.

⁶ Patrice Gourdin, « Centrafrique, la géopolitique d'un pays oublié », *Diploweb. La Revue Géopolitique*, mai 2013, <http://www.diploweb.com/patricegourdin,244.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ André Kolingba was born on August 12th, 1936 at Bangui and died on February 7th, 2010 at Val de Grace Paris 5^e hospital, was a general and Centrafrican political leader who led the CAR with an iron fist from 1981 to 1993. Authoritarian, he went down in 1993 after an electoral failure and a failed attempted coup. After trying many times, he was not able to regain power again.

⁹ Justin-Junior Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun : dynamique de vie et enjeux sociopolitiques (1979-2019) », Thèse de doctorat d'histoire, Université de Ngaoundéré, 2022, 87.

¹⁰ Justin-Junior Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Cameroun. Eruption social dans un pays d'accueil », *Revue Africaine de Migration et Environnement* 3, n° 2 (2019): 4.

II.2. The Proliferation of Armed Groups

The border areas between Chad, CAR, and Cameroon have become since the 1980s spaces of disorder and cross-border banditism which the states have struggled to keep under control¹¹. Thus, the proliferation of armed gangs, rebels, traffickers, and highway bandits, often called “road blockers”, has led to an increase in hostage taking followed by demands for ransoms¹². These groups exploit the porosity of the borders and cross-border coordination to conduct their criminal activities. Several armed groups are involved in the crisis in the Central African Republic and their presence coupled with the availability of small arms exacerbates the violence, as a police officer tasked with border control observed in an interview¹³. Notably, the phenomenon of hostage-taking generally targets the Fulani community, which overall has been most affected by the 2013 Central African crisis.

Among these armed groups, we can mention the *Séléka* group which means “coalition” in Sango which is a coalition of Muslim-dominated armed groups that overthrew President François Bozizé in 2013¹⁴. Besides them, there are also the anti-*Balaka*, formed of Christian militias in reaction to the *Séléka*. The anti-*Balaka*, means “anti-machetes” in Sango¹⁵ and they started, initially, as a village self-defense group whose primary goal was to fight the “road blockers”. With the proliferation of abuses committed by members of the *Séléka*, many peasants from Ouham, supported by soldiers from the regular Central African Army (FACA) close to Bozizé, fought against the *Séléka* group in Bossangoa region (Bozizé stronghold), where the ransoms for members their community were the most frequent. This initial fight of the *Balaka* resulted in dozens of deaths within both camps. The group was financed by several people, notably François Bozizé, Francis Bozizé (the son of President Bozizé), and Partice Edouard Nagaïssona (self-proclaimed general coordinator of the Anti-balakas)¹⁶.

Alongside these two major militias, there are others such as: The Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic (PFCAR) – a group from the *Séléka*; the Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (PMCAR) – another group from the *Séléka*; the group (3R) “Retour, Réclamation, Réhabilitation” – an active armed group in the CAR North-West; the Unity for

¹¹ Issa Saïbou, « La prise d’otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad: une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier », *Polis: Revue Camerounaise de Science Politique* 13, n° 1-2 (2005): 122.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Interview conducted in Garoua-Boulaï in March 2018.

¹⁴ Nounouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun », 15.

¹⁵ Gourdin, « Centrafrique, la géopolitique d’un pays oublié ».

¹⁶ Faouzi Kilembe, « Assurer la sécurité en Centrafrique, mission impossible ? », *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Cameroun / Afrique Centrale*, Octobre 2014, 15, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/11287.pdf>.

Peace in the Central African Republic (UPCAR) – an active armed group in CAR's Centre and East; the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) – a coalition formed by some of these groups in 2020¹⁷. These groups' motivations differ from one another, ranging from restoring order and protecting their communities to taking control of the economic resources and defying the government.

III. The Main Victims of Hostage-Taking and Ransom Incidents

This section identifies the main victims of the kidnappings in the Adamawa and Eastern regions of Cameroon, and presents the process of hostage taking. From the communities in this part of the country, the Fulani's are the most targeted by hostage-takers for financial reasons. Also, it should be noted that the kidnappers carry out well-planned strategies in committing their crimes.

III.1. The Fulani and Mbororo Communities: The Kidnappers' Preferred Victims

The bloodiest attacks are targeted at the communities of transhumant breeders¹⁸. The Fulanis and Mbororo communities are particularly targeted by hostage-takers in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon. The kidnappers often attack the Fulani herdsmen, who are perceived to have economic resources, including livestock, thus making them vulnerable to ransom demands. This situation has led many Fulani inhabitants to flee their villages in order to escape violence and insecurity, which, in turn, further aggravated the desertification of rural areas. The following remarks by a livestock owner illustrate this point:

“The hostage takers are interested in us due to our assets. They have information on us, about our cattle and our various movements in the region. Among us, many people are accomplices. You will see that they do not attack the Mbororo or the Fulani that are poor. They target the wealthy families of breeders or traders, knowing that the ransom will be easily paid to them in case of the abduction of a family member”¹⁹.

The Fulani communities are specifically targeted by hostage takers in Adamawa and eastern Cameroon for several reasons. Economically, the Fulani

¹⁷ Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun », 95.

¹⁸ Christian Seignobos, « Le phénomène Zarguina dans le Nord du Cameroun : Coupeurs de route et prises d'otages, la crise des sociétés pastorales mbororo », *Afrique contemporaine* 3 n° 239 (2011): 43.

¹⁹ Interview conducted in Gado Badzéré, in March 2018.

are traditionally livestock owners, thus they are considered relatively prosperous. According to one of the interviewees, the kidnappers hope to obtain ransoms in exchange for the release of hostages, knowing that Fulani families can sell cattle to pay²⁰. Similarly, it must be said that the mobility and isolation of Fulani livestock owners and herders makes the task easy for the hostage takers since these Fulani herdsmen often lead a nomadic or semi-nomadic life, moving with their herds in isolated rural areas. This makes them more vulnerable to attacks since they are often far from security centers and law enforcement.



Photo no. 1: The Governor of the Adamawa region Kildadi Taguiéké Boukar, comforting the “Mbororo” hostages freed by the BIR

Source: Esaie Meidogo Shakur, « Adamawa: Ten hostages freed », March 2024,
<https://www.cameroon-tribune.com>.

In terms of security, the marginalization and poor protection of Fulani herdsmen is one of the main causes of the kidnappings. In other words, the rural areas where the Fulani live often lacks sufficient security which enables the kidnappings perpetrated by armed groups and bandits. It should be emphasized that the kidnappers have control of the land. They often come from the same regions or know the terrain well and can easily locate and target the Fulani camps.

At the social level, there is a stereotype that the Fulani possess significant financial resources, thus making them perfect targets for the hostage takers. Combined, these factors explain why Fulani communities are particularly vulnerable to abductions in these regions.

III.2. Hostage-taking Practices

In this section we will analyze the modus operandi of the kidnappers. Hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon is a recurrent problem and the frequency of the attacks is constant, with serious consequences on the local populations. For example, some manifestations of this phenomenon cover the period between July and December 2015, during which the Adamawa region recorded 76 cases of hostage taking and 27 armed attacks.

²⁰ Interview conducted in Mandjou, in August 2024.

In another incident, in January 2018, seven people were abducted in the locality of Madjele, Ngan-Ha district. Generally, the kidnappers often use assault rifles and operate mainly at night, terrorizing the villages. They usually leave phone numbers so that the families can negotiate the release of the hostages. Plunged into uncertainty, given the security impasse and the lack of solutions to this phenomenon, the inhabitants sometimes accuse the administrative authorities and certain economic operators of complicity with the criminals, as noted by a livestock farmer in an interview²¹.

In terms of a systemic impact, it should also be mentioned that the fear of being kidnapped leads the inhabitants to flee their villages and settle in the city, thus depopulating the rural areas. Looking at these points, it is obvious that economic activities are perturbed by the kidnappings and often ruin the families who have to pay ransoms. This is the case of one of the farmers and operators in the city of Tuboro, who claims to have been bankrupt by the hostage takers. The following statements from a livestock farmer and businessman illustrate this point of view:

“My family and I had been victims of kidnappings on a regular basis. In 201[x], I was kidnapped and my family had to collect a large amount of money to get me released. A year later, it was [another relative] who was kidnapped and I had to pay a huge amount for his release. In 202[x], it was [yet another relative] who was kidnapped despite the intervention of law enforcement in the liberation process, [they were] killed by his captors. I was forced to leave the outskirts to continue to carry elsewhere, so I settled in Ngaoundéré where I carry out unprofitable activities to provide for my family”²².

These examples demonstrate the gravity of the problem and the need for continuous measures to protect local populations and restore security. As we have seen, hostage taking has many consequences, thus pushing the administrative authorities to adopt multifaceted resilience measures.

IV. The Socioeconomic Consequences and Resilience Measures of Local Populations Against the Hostage Taking Phenomenon

In addition to the loss of human lives, the phenomenon of hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon has caused and continues to cause enormous socio-economic damage and this aspect will be addressed in the following section.

²¹ Interview conducted in Ngaoundéré, in August 2024.

²² Interview conducted in Ngaoundéré, in August 2024 (different person).

IV.1. The socioeconomic consequences related to hostage taking

Hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon is a serious problem with significant socio-economic consequences. According to the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUA), between 2015 and 2019, more than 300 Mbororo and nomadic Peul were abducted and sometimes killed by kidnappers from the Central African Republic²³. The majority have regained their freedom after payments of more than 2 billion CFA francs were sent for the ransoms. However, there are also numerous losses of human life since kidnappings can end tragically, with the hostages killed if ransoms are not paid.

For fear of being murdered, thousands of herders and their families sold off their cattle to pay for their freedom or settle elsewhere. Others abandoned them in the wild. As a result, “The Djarguina” (Kidnappers in Fulfuldé) reduced the cattle herd. The consequences are countless”, as pointed out by Ahmadou Roufaye, secretary general of the Adamawa, MBOSCUA²⁴. To put things in perspective, in 2018, 150 people were abducted in the Adamawa. The most affected departments were the Vina, Faro and Déo, and Mbéré, but the Vina department was the most affected with 92 cases²⁵.

The economic consequences of this phenomenon are significant. To this end, we observe the degradation of the livestock farming sector. In other words, farmers are often targeted, which severely disrupts the local livestock-based economy. In this context, as mentioned before due the fear of kidnappings, there is an inadvertent effect that leads to the desertification of rural areas.

From a security perspective, the instability increased due to absent or inadequate security measures to address the presence of armed groups and put a stop to the frequent kidnappings. According to a retired army officer interviewed, civilians are often targeted in clashes between armed groups, resulting in loss of life and serious injury²⁶. Moreover, many people are forced to flee their homes to escape the violence, creating waves of internally displaced people and refugees. Conflicts perturb economic activities, worsening poverty and food insecurity. In these places, people do not have access to basic services as the pervasive state of insecurity makes it difficult to access health care, education and other essential services – an aspect highlighted in the account of a civilian²⁷.

²³ Jules Kouagheu, « Au Cameroun, les kidnappings d'éleveurs sèment la désolation dans l'Adamaoua », *Le Monde Afrique*, 7th March 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/03/07/au-cameroun-les-kidnappings-d-eleveurs-sement-la-desolation-dans-l-adamaoua_6072248_3212.html.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.,5.

²⁶ Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024.

²⁷ Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

To this must, we must add the psychological trauma and the impact of systemic violations of human rights since armed groups are often responsible for serious human rights violations, including abductions, rapes and summary executions. Violence and insecurity have lasting effects on the mental health of civilians, especially children. All these factors outlined create an extremely difficult environment for local populations, who must constantly navigate between dangers and uncertainties if they want to survive.

In response to these developments, the response of security forces like the Rapid Intervention Battalions (RIB) has been to intensify their efforts to recover weapons and releasing hostages, but still given how critical the situation is, it requires additional comprehensive and sustainable solutions to protect local populations.

IV.2. The Local Authorities' Resilience Strategies

Several economic development initiatives have been implemented to reinforce the control of local populations and reduce their vulnerability to kidnappings in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon, with many economic inclusion programs being developed to sustain the communities in the affected regions and improve the livelihoods of local populations. An official of the social security services interviewed argues that these programs include money transfers, vocational training and microfinance initiatives to help families diversify their sources of income and to strengthen their economic resilience²⁸. Similarly, the head of the Resilience and Welfare Office also points out that, in addition, these community development projects aim at strengthening the defense capacities of the populations. Community projects are launched to develop local infrastructure, like roads, schools, and health centers²⁹. Through them, the policymakers intend to create economic opportunities and better life conditions.

The agriculture and livestock farming sectors development projects have been affected by the abductions. According to a local farmer interviewed, initiatives set up to support farmers and herders, like improved seeds distribution systems, agricultural equipment and veterinary services aim to increase productivity and reduce the economic dependence of local populations³⁰. In terms of education, training and education programs are offered to improve the skills of youths and adults, thus enabling them to access better-paid jobs and reduce their economic vulnerability.

Para-public partnerships are also encouraged. Partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations and private organisms are established to finance and implement economic development projects. In the

²⁸ Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

²⁹ Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

³⁰ Interview conducted in Tuboro, in August 2024 (different person).

view of a teacher interviewed, these partnerships aim to maximize the impact of initiatives and ensure their sustainability³¹, demonstrating the importance of a multidimensional approach to reduce poverty and vulnerability in face of kidnappings by strengthening the economic capacities of local populations.

V. The Various Implemented Actions to Fight Against Hostage-Taking and Prevention Measures

As a response to the widespread phenomenon of hostage taking in the Adamawa and East regions, the government has conducted several security operations which were sometimes successful.

V.1. Successful Action Conducted by Synchronized Efforts of the Security Forces and Local Populations Against Hostage-Takers

There are several successful examples resulting from the coordination between security forces and community groups in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon. For example, the Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB) conducted several operations to free hostages like in March 2024, when ten hostages were released in Adamawa. Regarding the reduction of abductions, due to close collaboration between vigilance committees and security forces, a police officer interviewed noted that the number of abductions has become to decrease in some areas with joint patrols and checkpoints deterring criminals and improving security³². In fact, ten hostages that were held captives for a month, were freed on 7th March 2024 by the Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB), an elitist Cameroonian security force, that conducted a military operation in the region, as reported by the press outlet *Cameroon Tribune*.

According to this media, these victims were kidnapped in the Mbé and Nganha, sub-divisions of Adamawa and Touboro in the North³³. The kidnappers asked for a large amount of ransom in exchange of the hostages. The rescue operation was conducted around 11.A.M by the RIB 5th commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Kounaka's soldiers, in collaboration with the vigilance committee. Many abductors were neutralized and an important stockpile of guns, bullets, along with talisman and torches were taken, according to media reports³⁴.

In the same manner, joint operations have led to the release of several other hostages. For instance, in 2020, an operation of the security forces and

³¹ Interview conducted in Touboro, in August 2024 (different person).

³² Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

³³ Shakur, « Adamaoua : Dix otages libérés ».

³⁴ Ibid.

vigilance committees led to the release of several abducted livestock farmers in Adamawa. Joint efforts also led to the seizure of weapons and ammunition, reducing the armed groups' attacks. In 2021, a joint operation recovered a large stockpile of weapons in the East region.



Photo no. 2: Guns from kidnappers taken by the BIR in the Adamawa

Source: Esaie Meidogo Shakur, « Adamawa : Ten hostage freed », March 2024,

<https://www.cameroon-tribune.com>.

Another approach, as explained by a Sergeant of the Rapid Intervention Battalion in an interview, has been to promote awareness initiatives and community development projects that have strengthened trust between the local populations and security forces³⁵, and encouraged a massive participation of the population that improved the quality of cooperation.

To reduce the growing criminality, coordination actions have been set up. A gendarme argued that this coordination has contributed to an overall reduction of crimes in certain areas. Moreover, the surveillance and vigilance efforts have started to deter criminal activities and improved the daily security of residents³⁶. These successful actions show the necessity of collaborating between various local stakeholders, highlighting how coordinating efforts improve security and stability in the region.

V.2. Local Visions to Prevent Abductions in the Adamawa and East Regions

Despite the efforts made by the local authorities to repress the phenomenon of hostage-taking that prevails in these parts of the country, this issue still continues to take place and to mutate according to evolving ways of committing crimes³⁷. To prevent new kidnappings in the Adamawa and East

³⁵ From interview conducted in Bertoua, in September 2024.

³⁶ From interview conducted in Bertoua, in September 2024 (different person).

³⁷ Saïbou Issa, « La répression du grand banditisme au Cameroun : entre pragmatisme et éthique ». *Recherches Africaine*, n°3, 2004, p. 7.

regions of Cameroon, several measures have been implemented, and we will briefly present them. First, strengthening security: this involves the deployment of security forces in areas where kidnappings are recurrent. Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB) and other security units have been deployed to patrol high risk areas and checkpoints were established along the main roads to monitor suspicious movements.

Secondly, regarding the collaboration at the regional level, cross-border cooperation has been established in recent times. The Cameroonian authorities collaborate with their Central African counterparts to monitor and control the activities of cross-border armed groups and the respective security services of the two countries exchange information to anticipate and prevent kidnappings.

Thirdly, awareness campaigns and training for villagers are conducted to inform local communities of the dangers and the measures needed to protect themselves and prevent kidnappings. As a result, farmers receive training in safety techniques and measures to use in case of threats, including the way they should react when dealing with members of criminal groups. The members of the community sometimes participate in patrols together with the security forces to reinforce the security of vulnerable areas. It should be noted that according to a member of the gendarmerie interviewed, the communities play an important role in sharing information with the authorities, like providing information on armed groups' movements and their criminal activities³⁸. Many of activities outlined are designed to reinforce the coordination between security forces and community groups in Adamawa and East.

These combined actions aim at creating a safe environment for the local populations and to reduce the number of kidnapping incidents. The local population plays an important role in terms of fostering social security, mostly in the regions affected by this crisis like the Adamawa and the East of Cameroon. Notably, according to one interviewee, the local populations are becoming involved through vigilance committees which sometimes work together with the local security forces since these committees are formed to watch and alert others in case suspects are seen³⁹.

Training programs were organized for vigilance committees and security forces to ameliorate their competencies in terms of security and crisis management. An agent from the security forces remarked that these training programs permit to have a better comprehension of the issue and improve cooperation⁴⁰. Frequent meetings are held among the security forces and committees to share information, discuss the challenges encountered, and plan common actions. The meetings also allow a better communication and

³⁸ Interview conducted in Tuboro, in August 2024 (different person).

³⁹ Interview conducted in Mbarang in September 2024.

⁴⁰ Interview conducted in Batouri in August 2024.

coordination between the various groups involved in addressing the security issues impacting the region.

The security forces give material support to the vigilance committees, equipping them with communication equipment, automobiles and other relevant tools. They help these committees to efficiently conduct their activities. Meanwhile, awareness campaigns are organized to encourage cooperation and to reinforce the trust between the communities and the security forces. A member of the police in Garoua-Boulaï stressed the importance of these campaigns needed to assure everyone's security⁴¹ and ameliorate the conditions in the regions affected.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, despite the efforts to improve the coordination efforts between the various actors impacted by the crisis, there continue to be difficulties in regards to the communication and collaboration between the members involved in the efforts to stabilize the region. These difficulties can lead to a tardive response to incidents and ineffectiveness in general. Lack of trust between the local communities and security forces also has an impact on the cooperation efforts. The political and economic instability in the region, especially as concerns the Central-African Republic, continues to create new opportunities for armed groups and criminals. In this sense, a comprehensive set of measure to address the issue must be implemented in the Central African regions in order to better manage this phenomenon.

Poverty, unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities in the affected regions contribute to the rising tensions, thus making the local populations vulnerable to the recruitment efforts pursued by the armed groups. In conclusion, in light of the various challenges identified, the necessity to consolidate the competences of the security forces and vigilance committee remains a constant. Addressing the root causes of the phenomenon is paramount in order to arrive at a sustainable and lasting peace for the communities in the regions analyzed.

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⁴¹ Interview conducted in Garoua-Boulaï, in March 2018 (different person).

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Annex

Interview set based on data collected by the author in various localities from Cameroon.

Nº	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
2	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
3	Martap, Cameroon	June 2024
4	Garoua-Boulaï, Cameroon	March 2018
5	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
6	Bertoua, Cameroon	September 2024
7	Gado Badzéré, Cameroon	March 2018
8	Batouri, Cameroon	August 2024
9	Garoua-Boulaï,	March 2018
10	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
11	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
12	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
13	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024
14	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
15	Bertoua, Cameroon	September 2024
16	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
17	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024
18	Mbarang, Cameroon	September 2024
19	Mandjou, Cameroon	August 2024
20	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024