

Education Insecurity in the Central African Republic: Case study of the rebel-held city Ndélé

Research Brief – August 2018

The GIGA-IAA research project on education in conflict-affected countries, financed by the Knowledge Platform Security & Rule of Law's Knowledge Management Fund, sets out to understand how education is organised in areas with limited state presence. The project seeks to decipher which actors intervene in the educative sector and how they impact the learning processes. This research brief presents the key findings of six weeks of fieldwork in the Central African Republic in July and August 2018. We – Dr Tim Glawion (GIGA-Hamburg) and Anne-Clémence Le Noan (LearnSpace Paris) – spoke to a wide array of people in the capital and in Ndélé, ranging from the education minister to rebel leaders as well as teachers, students and parents.

The ongoing conflict in the Central African Republic (CAR) is rooted in unequal access to economic opportunities, public goods, and security and justice. Predominantly Muslim areas have been particularly marginalised by the capital-based elites who run the state. Surprisingly, however, in Ndélé, a rebel-held, predominantly Muslim town in the country's north-east, high school examination (baccalaureate) success rates were five times higher than the national average in 2017. Our qualitative research showed the factors that explain Ndélé's relative success, but also important dynamics that put the story into perspective.

Political good will, local self-government and educative innovation

Under the leadership of its minister, Professor Moukadas Noure, the **Ministry of Education reformed how the baccalaureate would be corrected**, which has undermined the formerly rampant cheating and corruption. This led to protests by students and their parents who had failed under the new system. However, this reform gave a more realistic appreciation of real education levels across the country and Ndélé surprisingly came out on top of the ranking.

During the crisis years, a rebel group immediately took undisputed control of Ndélé and had favourable opinions towards public education. **Students of Ndélé were able to continue their education all-year round throughout the crisis**, giving them a clear advantage over their peers living in regions where frequent fighting interrupted schooling, often for many months a year.

Teachers, parents and students made use of this relative calm to **organise schooling as well as they could**. For example, the education inspection promoted regular teaching staff in Ndélé to higher administrative positions to convince them to stay and continue teaching even during the crisis years. These teachers managed to finish their schooling activities well on time, and spent a full two months focussing on preparing students for the baccalaureate exam.

Limited state capacity, dangers of conflict and student absence

Nevertheless, serious deficiencies persist. While ongoing **reform endeavours of the Ministry of Education are laudable, much remains to be done**. Corruption remains rampant at all other stages of education apart from the bac examination. Additionally, teachers affected to Ndélé (and other peripheries) seldom take up their posts because they believe the region is too far from Bangui (the nation's capital), underdeveloped, unsafe, and they face no sanctions for refusing to go.

On a local level, the rebel group in control of Ndélé has created relative calm in recent years, but **armed group control remains a problem for education**. Some students intimidate their teachers by accessing arms or affiliating with the rebel group. Furthermore, heavy fighting between rebel factions in Ndélé at the exact same time as the 2018 baccalaureate distressed students' writing process. Those students who do receive their baccalaureate in Ndélé believe the sole university in the capital is hostile terrain for them as Muslims from a rebel-held town. Their limited access to higher education will bar them from filling top positions in the state, further marginalising the region.

Armed groups also pose a seemingly easy alternative to arduous education in pursuit of economic and social status. This adds another layer to an already immense level of **student absenteeism**. However, poverty remains the main driver as many students have to work on the side and miss most of their weekly classes, which partly explains the extraordinary rates of repetition – more than two-thirds of the students in each year fail to graduate to the next year. Girls drop out particularly often as they face difficulty funding education and are harassed by students and teachers.

Recommendations

- To the Government of the Central African Republic:
 - Incentivise the taking up of distant posts through travel and monthly remoteness allowances and enforce sanctions on teachers absent from their duty station.
 - Pay contractual teachers monthly wages to discourage corruption at school level.
- To the Government, with the aid of entrepreneurs:
 - Innovate new ways to decentralise access to salaries (e.g., mobile money).
 - Diversify secondary education by creating a technical high school in the north-east.
- To the Government, with the aid of UN Peacekeepers (MINUSCA):
 - Create a safe corridor between PK5 and the University of Bangui to protect people from the northeast seeking higher education.
 - Grant merit-based stipends to study abroad for students from the provinces.
- To local education authorities, with the aid of their international partners:
 - Continue strengthening the quality of primary education by training volunteer teachers (maîtres-parents).
 - Continue specialised training exercises for the baccalaureate.
 - Create a zero-tolerance policy for corruption and harassment at the Ndélé Lycée to reduce repetition and drop-out rates.
- To local authorities:
 - Continue ensuring calm and security in the city.
 - Enable the return of state administration (including the still-absent finance department responsible for funding public schools).