



UNV Programme Officer Moubarakou Salami along with the Deputy Mayor and Priest Jule leading a sensitization workshop about the Special Criminal Court for members of the community and representatives of human rights NGOs in Berberati, Central African Republic. (UNV, 2017)

## Supporting the Special Criminal Court in Central African Republic

In August 2016, the Central African Government and the UN system signed off on a five-year joint project to support the creation of a Special Criminal Court, the overall objective of which is to contribute to fighting against impunity, mending the rule of law and social cohesion and supporting the process of national reconciliation. UNV's support to the Special Criminal Court represents a component of this joint project focused on outreach activities that ensure the involvement of Central African Republic's population, especially those particularly affected by the crimes falling under the Court's jurisdiction. UNV leads activities that target the local communities, including youth and women, and aim to sensitize on the role, mandate and functioning of the Court.

In 2014, national authorities in CAR decided to establish a Special Criminal Court (SCC) to investigate and prosecute serious human rights violations, including crimes against humanity and war crimes. The law on the creation of the Court was promulgated on the 3 June 2015. It demonstrated strong political willingness to end impunity and the importance of equality, justice and freedom in achieving sustainable peace.

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UNV's approach allows for a better inclusion of women, the Muslim community and the populations of the 15 other regions outside Bangui. The members of the project's steering committee (Central African Republic's government, UNDP, MINUSCA, UNWOMEN, Special Prosecutor and magistrates) unanimously agreed to let the implementation of outreach activities to Civil Society Organizations and Volunteers associations. They recognized that volunteers are closest to the population, being at the heart of capacity building efforts through peer to peer learning and being local persons who can speak directly in Songo language and built a sense of accountability and a permanent human capital among the population.

Since July 2017, more than 500 persons in 8 different regions of the country have been reached out including 100 women and youth leaders, local volunteers, internal displaced persons and person living with disabilities.

These activities represent an important space in which population can be informed and can freely discuss and express their opinions, concerns and fears about the Court and its ongoing judicial processes. The sensitization sessions bring together layers, magistrates and local communities of the most remoted areas to allow them to reach the information.

UN Volunteers work directly with local civil society organizations to reinforce their comprehension and their capacities to participate in the judicial process. Through the mobilization of civil society, UN Volunteers contribute to bridge the Court's work on the ground, ensuring equal access to justice and strong collaboration with local communities and victims.

This specific approach has been positively perceived by the local population for whom access to information and to justice is a priority.

“ In general, the population perceives the Special Criminal Court positively because it responds to a real need for peace. There is a need for peace that must go through justice. The people want justice to be done through trials and in this sense the Court rises the expectations of the population. —Priest Jule, Catholic University of Bangui

Local population develop high expectations on the Court's work. The work carried out by the UN Volunteers is highly appreciated by local population because it allows to clarify the legal limits and the challenges that the Court is facing. This is a positive impact of sensitization, particularly important to mitigate expectations among local populations and to assure access to a clear information.

Sensitization activities also target Journalists who are stakeholders in the process and main actor in outreach and information diffusion. The special prosecutor M. Toussaint Muntazini Mikimapa chaired these activities to explain the Special Criminal Court mandate, challenges and objectives to participants. During his speech, M. Muntazini Mikimapa underlined the importance of sensitization activity which allow inclusive and equitable access to justice for the entire population:

“ The challenges and expectations about the SCC are immense, but with the support of civil society, the work of the Special Criminal Court will be possible.

“Awareness-raising is fundamental to disseminate the correct message on the Court's functioning, to set up a bottom-up harvest and to give access to the Central African Republic's citizens of the most remote areas in Special Criminal Court's work. Awareness is fundamental to the functioning of the Special Criminal Court because it allows us to reach out to the population and resemble CSOs, Associations, journalists and victims around the same

goal,” stated M. Toussaint Muntazini Mikimapa, Special Prosecutor for the Court.

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