I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. The Central African Republic is a landlocked nation within the African continent. It is bordered by Chad in the North, Sudan in the East, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the South and Cameroon in the West. Spread over an area of 623,000 km with a population of 4.6 million inhabitants, the country enjoys favorable climatic conditions with fertile agriculture lands and large natural resources (gold, uranium, diamond and wood). The Central African Republic is divided into 14 administrative prefectures, 2 economic prefectures and one autonomous commune.

2. After decades of wars and violence, the country is at the cross-roads of transition from extended instability to a new phase of peace and nation building, and economic recovery. However, the country remains fragile. The history of violence associated with authority and the perceptions of corruption surrounding the state have created a situation where not all citizens welcome state institutions or state representatives. The overall lack of presence of the state in many rural areas has enabled the control of some areas in the north and southeast of the country by armed groups, some of which are highly organized, and some of which represent entrepreneurial efforts by groups trying to make a living in a region with few opportunities. Communities in much of CAR, and in particular in more remote areas, have not been able to defend themselves against violence: there is a lack of trust between citizens in much of CAR which has inhibited collective action and the development of a feeling of belonging to a state.
3. There are, however, significant signs of progress. In June 2009 CAR reached the completion point under the enhanced Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) which, together with the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), provided significant debt relief (59 percent of GDP). CAR has taken corrective measures to improve its fiscal performance and redress its macroeconomic framework, leading to the release of budget support disbursements from IDA (March 2012) and eventually from AfDB (June 2012) and the EU. After the global recession of 2008, economic recovery in CAR has been gaining momentum. Overall, CAR has registered a growth rate of 3.1 percent in 2011, down from 3.3 percent in 2010 but growth in 2012 and 2013 is projected at 4.1 and 4.2 percent, respectively. Average inflation has been contained to 0.7 percent in 2011 (down from the 9.3 percent observed in 2008).

4. The implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy has led to some progress in the socio-economic situation but the fundamentals of poverty have not been impacted. CAR still has one of the highest poverty rates in Sub-Saharan Africa and is far from meeting the large majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets. Some improvement has been made in primary schooling, gender equity in primary education and drinking water but CAR still lags behind the eradication of poverty and hunger, the reduction of infant mortality and access to basic health services. Besides, the absence of the State in zones with ongoing violence accentuates the disparity in access to basic social services (water, education and health services) and economic infrastructure (transport, energy) between the South and the North where basic services are inexistent, destroyed or obsolete.

5. CAR’s Human Development Indicator (HDI) value for 2011 is 0.343 in the low human development category. It positions the country at 179 out of 187 countries and territories. Its HDI of 0.343 is below the average of 0.456 for countries in the low human development group and below the average of 0.463 for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. CAR faces important development and reconstruction needs. While the total volume of aid has increased since 2006, CAR still remains a donor orphan. Its official development assistance (ODA) per capita is US$41 compared to US$91 for Sierra Leone, US$104 for Cameroon and US$186 for Liberia. Donor assistance is critical to support CAR’s efforts to maintain stability and make solid progress on the MDGs.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

6. During the long periods of political upheaval followed by civil unrest (1960-2003), the education system suffered from a reduction in the number of teachers, the destruction of infrastructure and equipment, and the absence of investments while the population grew at an average rate of 2% per year, leading to a significant increase in the demand for education. The education system is further challenged by a high number of AIDS orphans. CAR is one of the countries with very high prevalence rate; and it is more difficult to enroll orphans than other children. The HIV/AIDS phenomenon also has significant implications on the number of teachers to be recruited.

7. As the overall security and economic situation in CAR slowly improves, there have also been positive developments in the education sector. The adoption of the national education sector strategy (2008-2020) by the council of ministers in February 2008 constituted a major step forward on the policy front. The strategy covers all levels of education from pre-school to higher education and comprises three phases. The strategy aims to increase access, improve the quality of education and strengthen the management of the education system. In the area of primary education, it aims to reach universal primary education by 2020. The strategy was endorsed by the education sector
development partners in 2008 and received support from the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund for the implementation of Phase 1 (2008-2011) with a grant of US$37.8 million.

8. During Phase 1, access to primary education has experienced significant improvement. Between 2007 and 2011, gross enrollment rate increased from 70.5% to 87.2%. The learning environment also benefited from availability of more textbooks and rehabilitated classrooms. The national ratio of textbook:student is close to one textbook in each subject (reading and mathematics) per student. Classrooms are less crowded; and the system has also been strengthened with a larger number of teachers --a number of them having their teaching skills reinforced.

9. Despite these progresses, CAR still has low proportions of its children in both primary and secondary education. The average net primary enrollment was 75% of the relevant age group for Sub-Saharan Africa whereas it was about 63% in CAR. The quality of education is also very low, with only about 40% of children completing primary education, due to high repetition (23%) and drop-out rates (8.4%). The results of the “PASEC light” survey, using standardized French and mathematics tests taken by grade 5 pupils in 2006, confirmed the poor quality of education, showing CAR having the lowest level of learning achievement amongst the 10 French-speaking African countries where the same test was used.

10. The system also suffers from huge disparities in access to education across a range of dimensions --accessibility based on socio-economic standard, level of study, gender and geography--. In primary education, there are around twice as many children from the wealthiest households than from the poorest households. These disparities are even more flagrant in post-primary levels up to the point where in higher education, 85% of students are from the 20% wealthiest households. Girls enrollment and completion rate at all levels of education lag far behind the boys. At the primary level, there is a gender gap of 23 percentage points in the gross enrollment ratio and of 12 percentage point in the net enrollment ratio. Besides, gender inequalities are much more distinct in rural areas and in the poorest populations. An analysis of enrollments at the prefecture levels also highlights important geographical disparities.

11. The poor quality of primary education is, in part, a consequence of shortage of teachers, poor teacher qualifications, and a scarcity of textbooks and other learning materials. With budget constraints, civil servant teachers are recruited in far fewer numbers than the needs and the system had to adjust by creating a new teacher status as “contract teachers”, and to rely more and more on untrained community teachers recruited and paid by the families. Even though the NESS (National Education Sector Strategy) aims to eliminate the community teachers’ category by 2010 through the recruitment of the “contract teachers”, the number of community teachers has been growing and will continue to grow for the next few years. At present, the public system operates with 6,299 primary teachers of which 42% are community teachers. Simulations undertaken by the Country Status Report indicate that about 1,200 new teachers are necessary in the classroom each year in order to achieve universal primary enrollment by 2015. The system is further weakened by an unfair allocation of teachers that has little relation with the number of pupils. The incoherence observed in the allocation of teachers in primary schools is striking. The academy of Bangui has an average of 109 pupils per civil servant teacher for a national average of 199; whereas academies in the North and North-East have over 450 pupils per civil servant teacher. Disparities between school districts are even more prominent: in some districts, schooling is almost exclusively provided by community teachers.
12. Public financing of the sector is limited. The sector receives low budgetary allocation which has not increased in a commensurate manner to support the expansion of the system in need. In 2008, the budget for the education sector represented 1.4% of GDP and 13.1% of the national budget. In 2011, it was 1.1% of GDP and 13.3% of the national budget. On average, public financing of the sector in CAR is lower than in most countries in the SSA region and considerably less than in most fragile countries with comparable national income levels; it is also below the Global Partnership for Education benchmark of 20% of total government expenditures. Within a constrained budgetary situation, the priority granted to primary education has also lost ground. In 2008, public expenditure on primary education accounted for about 48.4% of total public expenditure on education, secondary education accounted for about 29% and tertiary education for 21%. In comparison, the Education Country Status Report found that in 2005, spending on primary education accounted for 49.5 percent of total public expenditures, secondary education accounted for about 27.5 percent and tertiary education for about 23 percent. Thus, over the past years the share of total public education expenditure allocated to primary education fell further below the 50 percent mark, the benchmark set by the Global Partnership for Education as a measure of the strength of government commitment to primary education.

13. In 2011, the education sector was split between three ministries and its management is, at present, under the aegis of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy, the Ministry of Technical and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

14. Education is a clear priority for the population of CAR. In a context where few problems are able to mobilize collective action and where there is limited trust of authorities, parents around CAR have gathered to put in place teachers and to ensure that children can go to school. This very unique form of social mobilization indicates that parents and communities as a whole could greatly contribute to improving the education system, both by monitoring ongoing government efforts and by helping to determine the activities of the education sector at the community level.

Relationship to CAS

15. The Government of CAR has just completed the implementation of the first generation of its Poverty Reduction Strategy Document (PRSP1) which covered the period 2008 to 2010. While the reform agenda remains unchanged, PRSP 2 (2011-2015) is directed towards more growth, resting on two principal themes: (i) consolidation of peace and security, governance, rule of law and human rights; and (ii) inclusive growth and human development. The proposed project will contribute to reaching the PRSP2 strategic priorities of sustainable and equitable growth through the development of human capital. Specifically, the project will support the priority actions set out by the PRSP 2 to consolidate the gains and provide universal education, namely: (i) expanding the school infrastructure; (ii) redeploying, recruiting and training of teachers and school supervisors; (iii) raising teacher standards and regularizing the status of community teachers; (iv) providing schools with learning materials; and (v) furthering the education of the disadvantaged children.

16. Furthermore, the proposed project responds to the comprehensive objective of the Global Partnership for Education to ensure that “more children enroll in schools and receive a better education.”

II. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s) (From PCN)
17. With Phase 1 of the National Education Sector Strategy (NESS) ending in 2011, Phase 2 plans to consolidate the gains and to pursue the goals of the NESS which consist of increasing access, improving the quality of education and strengthening the management of the system. With limited financing, the proposed project prioritizes its main support to access and education quality, with the following development objective: “In support of the implementation of Phase 2 of the NESS, the proposed project would contribute to (a) expanding educational enrollments at the primary level; and (b) improve the learning environment.”

Key Results (From PCN)
18. The key results include (i) higher new entrants in first grade, by gender; (ii) improved availability of textbooks to pupils, (iii) higher number of qualified teachers; and (iv) an effective system of teacher deployment.

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description
19. Despite an unfavorable environment, CAR is among a few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that has registered good success in its program supported by the Global Partnership for Education. This success is reflected through (i) a satisfactory execution of the first grant received under the EFA-FTI Catalytic Fund; (ii) successful mobilization of additional bilateral funds with the French Development Agency, UNICEF and the Japanese Government; and (iv) the opening up of a sector dialogue with an extensive group of development partners and the civil society.

20. The first EFA-FTI grant of US$37.8 million funded the Education Sector Development Project (PAPSE). The PAPSE contributes to the implementation of Phase 1 of the NESS and aims to improve access to better quality primary education. The main activities covered by the PAPSE include (i) school construction and rehabilitation; (ii) distribution of textbooks; (iii) teachers training and deployment, including community teachers; and (iv) system strengthening. All indicators set out to measure the PAPSE objectives have been met. Primary gross enrollment rate has reached 87.2%, surpassing the target of 79.5%. In 2011, new entrants in first grade were 115,803 students compared to a target of 110,142. The school infrastructure program has built 596 classrooms and rehabilitated 419 classrooms, contributing to lower the pupils/classroom ratio that often reached over 100 pupils per classroom. A total number of 1,353,510 textbooks in reading and mathematics have been distributed to schools, increasing remarkably the availability of textbooks at a ratio of almost 1 textbook per subject per student whereas the ratio was one book for 7 pupils on average at the project onset. School visits have shown the existence of textbooks in the schools and a larger utilization of the reading books in the classrooms. The teacher training program was implemented as planned: 365 community teachers have completed the training and 750 students-teachers are trained annually to be graduated after completion of the 2-year training program. Disbursement has reached almost 90% of the grant amount with a closing date in June 2013. As part of the GPE program, a sector review took place in May 2012 to assess progress and chart the future course of the NESS. The outcome of the review indicates that the main objectives of the NESS remain valid and confirms the achievements of the PAPSE, as indicated above. For primary education, the sector review points to the huge remaining needs in access, especially in the North-East and West of the country; the necessity to reduce repetition in order to retain children in schools for at least the first 6 years of education. The lack of qualified teachers also emerge as a critical factor.

21. The proposed project supports the implementation of Phase 2 of the NESS, with a co-financing
grant from the Global Partnership for Education (US$19.2 millions) and IDA (US$4.0 million). With satisfactory outcome of the PAPSE, the proposed project seeks to expand the PAPSE activities in order to scale up their results and development effectiveness. A few features have been added that would reinforce the overall objective: in terms of coverage, the proposed project will bring the provision of education to rural areas to reach out for poorer and more vulnerable children; in terms of interventions, the project will include some activities that would generate a system for teacher training.

A. Concept

1. Description

Component 1: Improving access to primary education

22. This component aims to increase the provision of access to primary education in rural areas with low education enrollments to reach out for children of poor households, especially girls. It consists of two main interventions: (a) a school infrastructure program and (b) distribution of school kits.

23. Subcomponent 1.1: School infrastructure program. Apart from the program financed by the PAPSE, construction and rehabilitation of schools undertaken by the Government and other development partners are relatively modest. Therefore, in spite of the outcome achieved under the PAPSE, the needs remain enormous. The 2008 C ountry Status Report projected a requirement of 3,036 new classrooms in 2015. The action plan of the NESS Phase 2 adopted by the Government for the period 2012-2015 projects the construction of 2,100 classrooms and the rehabilitation of 1,140 classrooms.

24. Using a mapping of regional priorities which will be developed and a set of criteria which will be determined through a participatory consultation process, the subcomponent will finance a school infrastructure program to include the construction and rehabilitation ranging from 800 to 1,000 classrooms. Water supply and latrines to attract and retain girls’ attendance are integral to the program. The infrastructure program will seek to complement UNICEF’s on-going program, supported by the Government of Japan for the construction of 50 schools complete with equipment and ancillary structures. The subcomponent will also support a study on a low-cost strategy in school infrastructure construction and maintenance. In the meantime, the approach applied will follow the delegation of contract management to a third party (“maîtrise d’ouvrage déléguée”) used under the PAPSE that has proved to be adequate. Community participation will be promoted; the extent of which will be determined using the recommendations of a study undertaken by UNICEF that is on-going. The implementation of the school infrastructure program will also capture the main recommendations of the technical audit financed by the PAPSE, notably (a) stronger participation of the communities in the establishment of schools, (b) the revision of the technical specifications in the bidding documents, (c) timely supervision of the works, and (d) involvement of the local enterprises in the production of bricks.

25. Subcomponent 1.2: Distribution of school kits. Despite significant increase in enrollments, the progress has not been extended evenly to rural areas, mostly at the detriment of the girls. While schools may be available for the poor, often the poor do not send their children to schools because they see the low quality of education together with the financial costs incurred as deterrents. In fact,
the ECASEB survey pointed out the financial burden of education to poor households. Parents in CAR devote considerable resources to the education of their children. While public schools are free, students are required to pay for certain fees, uniforms, school materials, transportation and food. These education-related costs are out of reach of poor households. The subcomponent will contribute to the alleviation of these costs by providing school kits to the pupils in the school districts (“circonscriptions scolaires”) in rural areas and where there is a high random factor in the allocation of material resources.

Component 2: Improving the quality of the learning environment

26. This component aims to provide a better quality learning environment to the pupils and focuses on two main interventions: (a) teacher training and deployment and (b) the distribution of free primary textbooks to all pupils in public and private schools. Pedagogical materials will also be provided to teachers.

27. Subcomponent 2.1: Teacher training and deployment. This subcomponent will respond to a situation where there is penury of teachers, poor teachers’ qualification, and an unfair allocation of the sparse teachers. The subcomponent will support:

a) Pre-service training of 750 teachers annually in the 10 regional pedagogical centers (that were built/rehabilitated under PAPSE) and the Teacher Training College (Ecole Nationale d’Instituteurs – ENI) with procedures of selection at entry and at graduation rigorously applied, including the deployment towards rural areas.

b) The training/recycling of approximately 500 community teachers with procedures of selection at entry and at graduation rigorously applied and a strategy to allow them to be part of the teaching corps.

c) The development of an in-service training system that is school-based with reinforcement of the role of school directors in the process.

d) The development of a system to promote an equitable allocation of teachers.

28. The teachers training program, supported by the PAPSE, will undergo a qualitative and procedural evaluation. The results will be used to strengthen the training activities of the subcomponent. The project will not support the payment of the graduated teachers’ salaries. Under the PAPSE, the Government has agreed to assume the salaries of the graduated teachers from October 2012 as a commitment to sustain the PAPSE investment but more importantly to demonstrate its commitment to the sector.

29. Subcomponent 2.2: Distribution of textbooks and pedagogical materials. The Country Status Report has revealed that the provision of reading textbooks in sufficient number constitutes one of the key elements of an education policy with strong cost efficiency. The subcomponent will support:

a) The review of the actual textbook policy in order to arrive at a strategy that will help the Government reduce the cost of textbook production for better coverage.

b) Development of a logistics to manage the textbook stocks and their distribution. This activity will rely on the lessons drawn from the distribution of a large volume of textbooks under the PAPSE.

c) The acquisition and distribution of reading and mathematics primary textbooks to fulfill the
increasing enrollments and to renew the stock. (The quantity of the mathematics textbooks will depend on the state of the usability of the existing stock.)

Component 3: Strengthening the management of the system

30. This component aims to initiate the development of mechanisms that will help MEPSA (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and Literacy) strengthen the management of its sub-sector. Interventions will be focused in two areas: (a) institutional capacity building, and (b) project management

31. Subcomponent 3.1: Institutional capacity building. The subcomponent will support:

a) The strengthening in capacity for system planning, programming and monitoring. Technical assistance will be provided as well as equipment that can include computers and transport means to the inspectorates and the school districts (with priority given to the units that are closest to impacting the learning environment in the classrooms).

b) The strengthening in capacity for budget planning and execution.

32. Other development partners are providing and/or will provide support to reinforce the capacity of the sector in complement to the subcomponent objective. Specifically, UNESCO and UNICEF will support the strengthening of the quality of the sector statistics and the undertaking of a round of student learning assessment (PASEC). Analytical work on teacher careers, technical education and development of lower secondary education is part of a medium-term program that the French Development Agency has committed for CAR.

33. Subcomponent 3.2: Project management. The subcomponent will support the management and coordination of project activities. Monitoring and evaluation will be part of project management and will include communication campaigns to entrench social accountability around school affairs. Technical assistance will be provided to expand knowledge on prominent topics in the sector. In addition, it will provide financing for consultants to assume the fiduciary requirements of the project as well as for computer and office equipment.

2. Social Accountability

34. This project will introduce mechanisms to encourage community participation in the education system, with the aim of increasing the quality of services provided while maintaining the education system’s role in promoting collective action. Community participation will also be an essential tool for gathering information on project interventions effectiveness.

35. A set of social accountability activities will be incorporated in the project in each participating community. Each community will be asked to identify existing parent-teacher associations or to create new ones if these do not exist. Parent-teacher associations will include individuals from all different groups in society that send their children to the schools. In some areas, these could include ethnic minorities or representatives of those that are displaced. A particular effort will be made to ensure gender balance on these committees, as well as parents who can advocate for the needs of female children.

36. Parent-teacher associations will initially be responsible for monitoring the activities planned by
the project. In particular, they will:

- Monitor the quality and speed of school construction. They will receive information on the timelines agreed by contractors and will be able to report to the project if there are delays or if the quality of construction is low;
- Monitor and guide the delivery of school kits, ensuring that these are distributed fairly and that no group in the community is left out.
- Monitor the delivery of textbooks, and if possible, find ways for these textbooks to be transferred from one student to another when a school year is completed.
- Monitor the attendance of teachers to school and provide information to the project on the quality of teaching.

37. In future projects, these parent teacher associations could take on a larger role. They could be encouraged to provide advice on making training materials more culturally relevant, to inform the content of teacher training, or the content of school kits. This project will try to build a basic capacity that can be expanded upon in later years.

38. An NGO will be selected to lead social accountability activities early on project implementation. The NGO will be selected based on its experience leading similar activities, its presence throughout CAR, and its ability to gather information from community groups and transform it into policy advice for government. If a single NGO is not present throughout CAR, NGOs will be encouraged to organize into a consortium, and to ensure that each one can learn from the activities and experience of the other.

IV. Safeguard Policies that might apply

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