

FY13 Q2 Report: January – March 2013


Photo: A woman shows the funds she has saved at a VSLA meeting

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Immediate Protection and NFI Assistance to LRA-Affected Populations in Southeastern CAR
 Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
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1. Executive Summary

In May 2012, USAID/OFDA funded the Immediate Protection and NFI Assistance program in response to the urgent protection, psychosocial and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in the southeastern part of Mbomou Prefecture of the Central African Republic. Following the ongoing civil conflict and LRA attacks since 2008, Mercy Corps, with funding

¹ The award was originally scheduled to end on April 30, 2013, but Mercy Corps received a no-cost extension until June 30, 2013.

from USAID/OFDA, is building upon the foundation of its previous protection programming in Rafai, funded by UNICEF, and leveraging previously established community based mechanisms established under the UNICEF program to extend assistance outward to the towns of Selim, Dembia and surrounding areas. The OFDA program promotes psychosocial and support services for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), establishes activities for child protection, and provides non-food relief commodities that specifically target LRA conflict-affected populations.

The period from January 1, 2013 to March 30, 2013, is the fourth quarter of the program. Over the course of the reporting period, the project was devoted to:

- Launching the second round of youth vocational trainings
- Disseminating grants for income-generating activities (IGA) and cash transfers
- Implementing the remainder of micro-projects proposed by protection committees
- Commemorating international women's day (March 8th)
- Continuing to provide psychosocial support to LRA and GBV affected survivors
- Raising community awareness of GBV
- Beginning the second round of play therapy club activities
- Training the final VSLA for women who are internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- Finalizing the distribution of NFI kits to IDP and returnee households

2. Program Overview

Mercy Corps' Immediate Protection and NFI Assistance program is a \$522,013 program designed to support community structures in order to address protection issues and enhance the capacities of LRA-affected communities to develop positive coping mechanisms, restore assets and build economic livelihoods in the Mbomou prefecture of south-eastern CAR. The program targets a total 33,831 LRA conflict-affected persons, including 5,500 displaced persons as a result of the LRA conflict. The program has three main components: 1) psychosocial and capacity-building support to protect children and youth by building on existing community-based support mechanisms; 2) gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response to LRA-affected GBV survivors via psychosocial, health and economic support services; and 3) distribution of non-food item (NFI) kits to internally displaced persons (IDP) and returnee households in the intervention zone. The program places an emphasis on leveraging previously-established community-based mechanisms, such as child protection committees, 'Sports for Peace and Life' mentors who help educate children on HIV/AIDS and conflict negotiation, and GBV focal points who raise awareness on GBV prevention and refer survivors to the support center. The program also empowers beneficiaries to play an active role in the implementation of activities.

3. Security

This quarter was marked by major security issues that have resulted in some delays on certain activities and targets this quarter. On February 15th, the town of Mbiro (15 km west of Rafai) was attacked by members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Elements of the LRA were reported to be in Guerekindo, and seven were killed by the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA) in Dembia. In early March 2013, the Rebel Alliance named Séléka took control of a number of cities in the South of CAR. On March 24th, Séléka combatants overthrew the government of CAR, taking control of most of the country, including Bangui, prompting the president to flee. The majority of towns and cities conquered by the rebellion were looted, and much of the basic social infrastructure was destroyed. Given the uncertainty of the situation, the UN, the US Embassy, and most NGOs, including Mercy Corps, evacuated expatriate staff. Mercy Corps also evacuated staff and suspended activities.

This security situation has led to the displacement of a significant part of the population who moved into the bush, as well as some in the IDP camps in Rafai, Dembia and Guerekindo, leading to family separation and loss of assets. Children and women have been particularly

affected. However, access to the population remains very limited, and humanitarian activities remain suspended. In the IDP camps, populations are facing the risk of epidemics, and sexual violence is high. Schools, hospitals and roads are closed. The population in Mercy Corps' intervention zone lives in isolation, with very limited access to basic services and commodities as well as fields. Child protection committee members and other volunteers face difficulties fulfilling their responsibilities because of insecurity. As a result, beneficiaries do not have access to services, and many also fear continuing insecurity incidence by armed groups.

It should be noted that even prior to these recent incidents, the intervention area (Mbomou) was fragile and precarious, with high levels of violence and abduction due to the ongoing presence of the LRA. At the present moment, humanitarian needs are enormous, especially for health, response to sexual and gender based violence, and the protection of children. The main protection problems are violence against women and girls, looting and extortion, recruitment of children into armed groups, physical violence and restriction of movement.

At the time of writing of this report, a small team of core Mercy Corps staff have returned to Bangui to assess the situation and determine when activities can be resumed and how new response programs can be launched. It should also be noted that the suspension of the joint US-Uganda hunt for the LRA has put the area into a state of high uncertainty. The decision whether and when to resume the search is likely to affect the humanitarian situation in this region.

4. Performance Summary

3.1 Protection

SECTOR #1 Protection	<i>Objective: LRA-affected populations access protection services</i>		
Budget:	\$456,190.00		
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 33,831	IDPs Targeted	Total: 5,500
Beneficiaries Reached	11,035 beneficiaries (4,000 IDPs)		
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, including the towns of Rafai, Dembia and Selim.		
Sub-Sector: Child Protection			
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS
Number of people trained in child protection issues	Play Therapy Mentors : 6 (5 males, 1 female)	Play Therapy Mentors : 36	Play Therapy Mentors : 36 (7 females, 29 males)
	Child Protection Committee Members: 36 (28 males, 8 females) Total: 42 (33 males, 9 females)	Child Protection Committee Members: 100 Total: 136	Child Protection Committee Members: 92 (57 males, 35 females) Total: 128 (42 females, 86 males)
Number of and percent increase in number of mechanisms/systems to report/refer child protection issues	Play Therapy Mentors : 6 (5 males, 1 female)	Play Therapy Mentors : 36	Play Therapy Mentors : 36 (7 females, 29 males)
	Child Protection Committee Members: 36 (28 males, 8 females) Total: 42 (33 males, 9 females)	Child Protection Committee Members: 100 Total: 136	Child Protection Committee Members: 92 (57 males, 35 females) Total: 128 (42 females, 86 males)

Number and percent of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well being	0 children	855 children 75% of targeted children	To be measured at final evaluation
Number of microprojects implemented*	0 microprojects	25 microprojects	15 micro projects implemented to date
Number and percent of youth that report increased independence after vocational training*	0 youth	54 youth 90% of trained youth	29 youth to date 97 % of trained youth to date
Sub-Sector: Gender-based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response			
Number and percent of community members who can report at least two negative effects of GBV on their community	45%	70%	To be measured during final evaluation.
Number and percent of target population reporting increased access to Gender-based Violence (GBV) services	0 survivors	500 survivors 75% report increased access	328 survivors since the beginning of the program; 85 survivors this quarter 90% of survivors assisted by the center report increased access to date.
Number of males sensitized in Gender-based Violence (GBV) issues	0 males	5,000 males	To date 4,471 males are sensitized on GBV, of which 588 males including 189 boys this quarter
Number of LRA-affected GBV survivors that receive psychosocial support*	0 LRA-affected GBV survivors	500 LRA-affected GBV survivors	328 survivors since the beginning of the program; 85 survivors this quarter
Number of cases referred to partner medical centers for treatment*	0 cases referred	75 cases referred	92 cases referred to date, of which 48 cases referred this quarter
Number of women who report increased economic independence after IGA training*	0 women	60 women	45 women trained to date who report increased economic independence
Number of pilot Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) trained and provided with access to financial services *	0 VSLAs	5 VSLAs	5 VSLA groups trained since the beginning of the program composed of female IDPs in Rafai.

*Program impact indicators identified by Mercy Corps

Sector Summary

Launching the second round of youth vocational trainings: The program launched the second round of youth vocational trainings in February for 30 youth (7 girls and 23 boys) from

Dembia, Guerekindo and Selim. Participants were selected last year by the child protection committee members in collaboration with their communities. Different vocations were chosen by youth, including masonry, hairdressing, tailoring, mechanics, woodworking and small animal husbandry. Each participant received the necessary training materials in relation to their chosen vocation in order to practice different exercises required during their apprenticeships with skilled trainers. The first group has completed the training, and some of the youth are trying to form an association to begin their business. Three of the girls who trained in cooking are now selling bread in the market.

IGA and cash transfers: The training of the remaining 30 women had been planned during this period, but due to insecurity, it was not possible to reach 15 of the identified women. 15 women from Selim were trained on IGAs over the course of three days during the period. Moreover, on the day planned for distributing cash grants, Selim was attacked by Séléka, and it was not possible to carry out this activity. To date, 45 women have been trained on IGAs. Various commercial activities were chosen by women, such as selling sugar, bush meat, fish, and agricultural products.

Support to and funding of micro-projects: Fifteen micro-project proposals were received and selected by the child protection committees. All 15 micro-projects received funding in February and were implemented, and the ten remaining were supposed to be funded in March. However, these are now delayed following the insecurity events in Rafai and CAR more broadly.

Continuing to provide psychosocial support of LRA and GBV affected survivors: 85 survivors of LRA attacks, sexual violence, and gender-based violence were provided with psychosocial support via the program-supported counseling center during the quarter, which brings the total number of cases received since the beginning of the program to 328. Eight cases received during the quarter were closed, and 77 cases will continue to receive psychosocial support in the next quarter. 30 survivors benefited from dignity kits.

Raising community awareness on GBV and commemorating international women's day: 116 awareness-raising sessions were organized by GBV focal points this quarter, reaching 2,575 people (746 men, 1,137 women, 376 boys and 316 girls). International Women's Day was commemorated in Rafai on March 8th. More than 200 rural women, in partnership with Mercy Corps and local authorities, celebrated the day by marching peacefully through the city. Focus group discussions and testimonials were planned to highlight women's personal experience of violence in Mbomou and call on local authorities to recognize their rights. Mercy Corps' Protection and GBV Program held a training day for 43 local authorities (42 men and 1 woman). The aim of the day was to help participants better understand GBV issues and discuss the challenges faced in putting women's rights at the heart of community actions.

Play Therapy: The second round of play therapy club activities began this quarter with 510 youth in 17 teams. It should be noted that Kpette and Lougba teams could not restart activities because most of the population in the Agoumar camp hide in the bush fearing attacks by LRA and Séléka. According to preliminary information received from coaches, there are not enough girls enrolled in teams, as parents fear abduction of girls by LRA elements but also beliefs that girls should take care of household. On International Women's Day, a football match was organized for women over age 18. The aim was to demonstrate the benefit of sports and secure commitment to raise awareness in the community on girls' participation in play therapy sessions. At the beginning of the project, measures were taken to ensure greater participation of girls in the program. Coaches were selected to ensure gender balance and avoid sexual abuse. Training for the coaches provided tools and skills to work with all children without discrimination, and special session are provided to allow girls to feel comfortable and increase their life skills. However, we found that parents are not involved enough in the process and in sensitization, an aspect which needs to be improved upon going forward.

Creation of Village Savings and Loan Associations: This quarter, the last VSLA was put in place and trained. To date, five VSLAs are in place and have made a total of 1,322,000 XAF in loans. The first VSLA group was put in place in October 2012, and each group meets four times a month. Women have expressed surprise about their achievement in such a short time. One participant declared that she had previously been engaged in a traditional saving activity, but she had never the possibility to save and take a loan while continuing to save and get more money at the end of cycle.

Because of the insecurity in Rafai, all VSLA groups decided to no longer speak out loud the amount of money saved when counting the tally. Instead, the group makes gestures with their hands. Ten hands mean 10,000 XAF. At the time of this writing, VSLA activities are suspended, and money is kept in a secret place known only by members.

3.2 Logistics, support, and relief commodities

SECTOR #2 Logistics, support and relief commodities	<i>Objective: LRA-affected displaced and returnee households access essential NFIs</i>		
Budget:	\$65,823.00		
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 3,500	IDPs Targeted	Total: 3,500
Beneficiaries Reached	5,860 beneficiaries reached (3,150 IDPs and 2710 returnees)		
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, including the towns of Rafai, Dembia and Selim.		
Sub-Sector: Non-food Items (NFIs)			
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS
Total number of NFIs distributed, by type	0 NFIs	Refer to Annex 1 for NFIs by type	1,252 NFIs
Total USD cost of NFIs, by type	0 NFIs	Refer to Annex 1 for cost of NFIs	\$ 25,375.52 for 500 NFI
Total number of beneficiaries receiving NFIs by type, in compliance with Sphere standards	0 individuals	3,500 individuals	5,860 individuals have received a full kit of NFIs
Number of NFIs distributed, by type, to LRA-affected child and youth headed households*	0 NFIs	29 child / youth headed households	34 child / youth headed households to-date have received a full kit of NFIs (items listed in Annex 1)

*Program impact indicators identified by Mercy Corps

Sector Summary

This quarter, the program finalized the distribution of NFI kits to IDPs and returnee households in Dembia, Guerekindo, Selim, Agoumar and Rafai. 1,252 kits were distributed which is more than expected due to an additional donation by BINUCA which enabled reaching more than the 800 households planned. Out of the 1,252 household reached, 700 were IDPs and 552 were returnees.

5. Coordination

This quarter, the Program Manager held meetings with International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) to share information about community practices and plan joint activities for the common target community. As ICRC is providing mental health care and Mercy Corps is providing psychosocial support in the same population, it was decided to communicate to the

community about our activities, in order to improve coordination as well as to strengthen the referral system. Additionally, Merlin was involved in the International Woman's Day organized by Mercy Corps, with a joint sensitization held with Merlin about the health and social consequences of sexual violence.

6. No cost extension

Mercy Corps greatly appreciates OFDA's approval of the two months no-cost extension. The additional two months are needed to complete planned activities and ensure optimal results in the project as explained below:

Completion of micro project implementation: 15 micro projects have been selected, funded, and implemented. The 10 remaining projects will be funded in April, assuming the security situation permits this to take place. The month of May will be dedicated to the follow-up of the implementation of micro projects.

Completion of play therapy sessions: The second round of play therapy sessions was launched in February instead of mid-December as planned. Sessions will end in May and post activity evaluations will take place in early June.

Youth vocational training: 30 youths have attended vocational training since February. At the time of this report, activities are suspended and are planned to restart in early May. Graduation will take place in late May.

Training of 15 women on IGA: Due to security issues and limited access to Dembia, training of women will be delayed until May. Cash transfer grants will be provided at this time for all the 320 women.

Final project evaluation: The final evaluation will be done in June.