

Quarterly Report FY14 Q3 April – June 2014

IRTOUN “Rise Again”

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)
and
USAID / Food for Peace (FFP)



Picture 1, Meeting with community leaders at head of village house, Karou village, Ouattagouna Commune, Ansongo.

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
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1. Executive Summary

With the support of USAID’s office of foreign disaster assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace (FFP), Mercy Corps’ Irtoun program offers a package of integrated activities designed to enhance food security and economic resilience of communities recovering from the effects of conflict in Ansongo, Northern Mali. In the third quarter of FY14, the program is on track to achieving its objectives per its implementation plan. Mercy Corps continues to coordinate with local stakeholders and technical agencies of the government of Mali to ensure that the program is in line with local needs and helping to facilitate a clear path for recovery. During the reporting period, the program achieved the following:

- Distribution of 160 tons of emergency animal feed to 1,000 vulnerable agro-pastoralists during the animal lean season,
- Refresher trainings for 15 Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs) in partnership with the Ansongo livestock technical services,
- Identification of existing farmers’ and gardening associations who will participate in training and receive inputs in time for the planting season,
- Planning of Voucher for Work projects for rehabilitation of agricultural lands in communities,
- Call for proposals for micro-entrepreneurial support and reception of 150 expressions of interest for trainee/grantees in Ansongo and Bara communes.

Table 1. Award Level Beneficiaries

Total beneficiaries targeted	25,060 beneficiaries (3,580 households)
Total beneficiaries reached this quarter	9,359 beneficiaries (1,000 households)
Total cumulative number of beneficiaries reached	9,359 beneficiaries (1,000 households)

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Objective 1: Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods
Beneficiaries Targeted	24,010 beneficiaries (3,430 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	9,359 beneficiaries (1,000 households)
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	9,359 beneficiaries (1,000 households)
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks
Beneficiaries Targeted	12,250 beneficiaries (1,750 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	0
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	0 0 0

2. Program Overview

In response to an extended period of conflict and drought in northern Mali, Mercy Corps designed the Irtoun program to enhance food security and economic recovery in Ansongo, by strengthening agricultural production, helping vulnerable families protect their animal assets, and restoring livelihoods while building longer term economic resilience.

The objectives of the program are:

1. To help vulnerable households in the Ansongo circle recover productive agro-pastoral livelihoods, and
2. To allow vulnerable households to restore income-generating activities and withstand economic shocks.

Immediate food security needs are addressed through food vouchers-for-work (VfW) as well as animal feed vouchers, acknowledging the importance of livestock as a food resource among agro-pastoral households in the region. Through a market-based approach, Irtoun also focuses on the recovery of market gardening activities, including the most important cash crops of the region, and on addressing the needs of pastoralists for improved fodder and health care services for their livestock. VfW projects will support the recovery of livelihoods by helping communities to rehabilitate lands, irrigation schemes and agricultural infrastructure degraded during the conflict.

Additionally, Irtoun will assist micro-entrepreneurs affected by insecurity through business training and a small cash injection to re-start their businesses. Finally, all Irtoun beneficiaries will be encouraged to join community based village savings and loan associations (VSLA), which will act as a form of safety net to strengthen recovery efforts, allowing participants to benefit from improved financial management and credit opportunities for community driven economic growth.

By intervening and supporting in key areas of agricultural and economic livelihood development, the Irtoun program will provide essential ingredients for communities to solidify a peaceful and productive future.

3. Contextual Update

The security situation in the northern regions of Mali remains volatile, and heightened tensions culminating in armed clashes in city of Kidal in May as well as the withdrawal of the Malian army from the city of Menaka have led to an overall slowdown of the return of the displaced population. During the reporting period, Mercy Corps' programmatic activities in Ansongo were temporarily put on hold due to insecurity. Mercy Corps also observe intergroup conflicts throughout the pastoral zone of the Ansongo circle, where several armed groups (MNLA, MAA, MUJAO, HCUA) have had a presence, particularly on the Ansongo - Menaka axis. Isolated acts of banditry are recognized on both sides at the expense of poor traders and travelers.

Regarding pastoral livelihoods, a few rain showers during the reporting period refilled animal water points, but had little effect on the overall availability of fodder. Pastoralists from the Gao circle and other regions were also observed in Ansongo, putting a further strain on resources. Banditry, as mentioned above, has had an increasing impact on pastoralists as cases of animal theft have been reported.

For smallholder farmers, the situation remains precarious, as many producers have not returned to their fields due to a combination of factors including banditry and violence, lack of money, loss of assets and lack of agricultural inputs since the beginning of the crisis in 2012. Household food stores are meager, and the most vulnerable are living on credit and, in some cases, with the support of humanitarian distributions.

In all markets of the intervention area food availability remains satisfactory. Wholesale traders continuously supply the markets with various consumer products from Algeria, Bamako, Sikasso, Segou, Burkina Faso and Niger.

4. Performance Summary

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security		Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods		
Beneficiaries Targeted	24,010 beneficiaries (3,430 households)	Budget:	\$ 1,375,056	
Beneficiaries Reached	9,359 beneficiaries (1,000 households) IDP: 265 households			
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo circle; Bourra, Ouattagouna, Ansongo, Bara Communes			
Sub-Sector 1.1: Livestock				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.1.1: Number of animals benefiting from or affected by livestock activities	1,555*	2,000	2,000	June 2014
Indicator 1.1.2: Number of people benefiting from livestock activities, disaggregated by sex	Male:	3,455	4,620	June 2014
	Female:	3,545	4,739	June 2014
	Other:			June 2014
Sub-Sector 1.2 : Improving Agricultural Production				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.2.1 Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	Male:	4,146	0	
	Female:	4,254	0	
Indicator 1.2.2: Projected increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency due to distributed seed systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households ¹	N/A	6 months		
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems		Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks		
Beneficiaries Targeted	12,250 individuals (1,750 households)	Budget:	\$ 354,819	
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 0	Cumulative: 0		
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo circle; Boura, Ouattagouna, Ansongo, Bara Communes			
Sub-Sector 2.1: Livelihoods Restoration				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.1.1: Number of people assisted through livelihoods restoration activities, disaggregated by sex	Male:	6,047		
	Female:	6,203		
	Other:	0		
Indicator 2.1.2: Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	80%		
Indicator 2.1.3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	15,000 USD		
Sub-Sector 2.2 : Microfinance				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.2.1: Number of	Male:	600		

¹ The Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement tool will be used for this indicator.

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods			
people, disaggregated by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households ²	Female:	1000		
	Other:	0		
Indicator 2.2.2: Percentage of financial services accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	100%		

Sector Summary:

Sector #1: Agriculture & Food Security:

1.1 Livestock

1.1.1 Animal fodder vouchers for 1,000 vulnerable households

Over the reporting period, 1,000 fodder vouchers worth 30,000 FCFA (approximately \$60) each for essentially livestock inputs (4 bags of meal, 10 kg salt, representing a ratio for 2 months³ for 2 milking cows) were distributed in 27 selected villages of Ouattagouna, Bourra, Ansongo and Bara Communes. Beneficiary selection was conducted in coordination with program stakeholders (as reported in QR1) and selection criteria were based on vulnerability including wealth status (HEA), number of animals, HH size. Free competition among selected vendors was favorable to the beneficiaries, as prices were uniform across the three municipalities (Bara, Ansongo and Bourra) while prices in Ouattagouna slightly increased only because of its remoteness. Post distribution monitoring will be conducted in August 2014 on the effectiveness and relevance of these distributions.



Picture 4. Formation & Signature of contracts with vendors



Picture 3. Voucher distribution in Seyna Sonrhai village



Picture 2. Voucher redemption at vendor's shops

² The Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement tool will be used for this indicator.

³ From MC experience, when distributed to small ruminants, this ratio can last up to four

1.1.2 Capacity building of herders to improve fodder harvesting and storage

During the distribution of vouchers, Mercy Corps disseminated key messages on the importance of complementary feeding of livestock and on locally relevant techniques for harvesting and storing natural fodder. The objective was to help pastoralists develop strategies to plan for adequate stores of animal feed and to maintain healthy herds when natural green fodder is scarce. Throughout the Irtoun program, Mercy Corps will continue to support target agro-pastoral households to adopt techniques for fodder harvesting and storage. Awareness-raising activities and informal follow-up trainings at the village level are scheduled to begin in the next reporting quarter.

1.1.3 Training and refresher training for 30 Community Animal Health Workers

Mercy Corps conducted refresher trainings for 15 Community Animal Health Workers that were identified and initially trained in 2013⁴. Topics included the most common infectious diseases in the program area, common parasitic diseases, measures to be taken to mitigate epidemics, knowledge of veterinary pharmaceuticals and their use. The training was facilitated by the Chief of Ansongo Veterinary technical service.



Picture 5. Refresher training for CAHW in Ansongo

1.2: Improving Agricultural Production

1.2.1 Voucher for Agricultural inputs for 1,200 farmers

This activity will commence during the next quarter as per Irtoun's implementation plan.

1.2.2 Training and support to 50 agricultural/gardening groups

This activity will commence during the next quarter as per Irtoun's implementation plan.

1.2.3. Rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure – Food Vouchers for Work

- **Preparation for Voucher for Work activities and identification and selection of workers and infrastructure to rehabilitate..**

During the reporting period, Irtoun worked with communities to identify participants for the VfW activity. Selection criteria included age (>18yr), physical condition, availability, household wealth status (HEA), lack of support from other programs (such as ICRC, WFP, etc.) The Irtoun team also worked with communities to identify sites to be rehabilitated. In collaboration with the Ansongo Agricultural Technical Service and local communities, priorities were given for agricultural infrastructure to be rehabilitated (notably vegetable garden sites and dikes) in each selected community. This list was amended by village authorities during field visits of the joint project team (Mercy Corps and Chief of Agriculture). Selection criteria of sites and market gardens to rehabilitate were developed and agreed with program stakeholders including fifty local associations.

1.2.4. Revitalize 20 irrigation management committees

This activity will commence during the next quarter as per Irtoun's implementation plan.

Sector #2: Economic Recovery & Market Systems

⁴ As part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation funded Espoir pour les Eleveurs du Sahel program.

2.1: Livelihoods Restoration

2.1.1 Support to 150 micro-entrepreneurs

Over the reporting period, Irtoun made contacts with potential program partners, including the local representative of the National Employment Agency (*Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi*), the head of the local Youth Service; the President of the Local and Communal Youth Council of Ansongo, the director of SONY Radio in Ansongo, and the director of the Local Industrial and Animal Production Service (SLPIA).

All existing youth associations in all villages of Ansongo and Bara municipalities were informed about the entrepreneurship program, and the opportunity was promoted on local radio and through posters placed in each community. Volunteer focal points in each community were sensitized that the goal of the micro-entrepreneurship activity was to help recover livelihoods lost during the crisis, especially for women and youth. Focal points were responsible for collecting up to 20 expressions of interest in each village, and representatives of the national employment agency, the local youth service and the municipal youth council were also encouraged to identify candidates. These partners and the volunteer focal points will participate in the final selection of the 150 trainee/grantees for the four municipalities, with the support of the Irtoun program team.

2.2: Micro-finance

2.2.1 Establish/Strengthen 80 Village Savings and Loans Associations

- **Assessment of different groups practicing traditional village savings (tontine)**

This activity has been slightly disrupted by the Kidal events but resumed early June in Bara and Ansongo municipalities where a directory of associations practicing traditional tontine was established in each village. The main challenge encountered was resistance from some community members and authorities towards women empowerment and the belief at times in some villages that "women use money for purchases at the market to organize their tontine" and that a VSLA could negatively impact the household budget. Similarly, at the level of municipalities, some authorities believe they will be required to support revolving funds⁵. The assessment of various saving groups and associations is underway, and will highlight the effectiveness of associations and groups listed and status of funds and profitability of actions.

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

This quarter has been devoted to the baseline survey, the collection and monitoring of market prices in different municipalities.

6. Coordination

Mercy Corps continues to regularly attend and contribute to coordination meetings both in the field and in Bamako. In Gao, Mercy Corps continues engaging in OCHA coordination meetings and with other IOs/INGOs including the ICRC and ACF (ECHO's implementing partner in Ansongo for the Common Framework for Seasonal Social Safety Nets program⁶). All Irtoun activities are implemented in coordination with program stakeholders, including community leaders, local technical services, and decentralized communities, which is highly appreciated throughout Ansongo circle.

⁵ The latter comment could be politically motivated as communal elections are approaching

⁶http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mali/documents/press_corner/20140626_1_plaquette_presentation_ccfs_mali_2014_fr.pdf

Annex 1 - Irtoun Program Components

Goal: To enhance food security and economic recovery in the Ansongo district of Northern Mali.

Objective 1: Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods

Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and build economic resilience

1.1 Livestock

1.2: Improving Agricultural Production

2.1:
Livelihoods
Restoration

2.2: Micro-
finance

1.1.1
Animal
fodder
vouchers
for 1,000
vulnerable
households

1.1.2
Capacity
building of
herders to
improve
fodder
harvesting
and
storage

1.1.3
Training
and
refresher
training for
30
Community
Animal
Health
Workers

1.2.1
Voucher
for
Agricultural
inputs for
1,200
farmers

1.2.2
Training
and
support to
50
agricultural
/gardening
groups

1.2.3.
Rehabilitati
on of
agricultural
infrastructure – Food
Vouchers
for Work

1.2.4.
Revitalize
20
irrigation
managemen
t
committees

2.1.1
Support to
150 micro-
entreprene
urs

2.2.1
Establish/Stre
ngthen 80
Village
Savings and
Loans
Associations