

Quarterly Report FY14 Q4 July – September 2014

IRTOUN “Rise Again”

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



Voucher for work – rehabilitation of Cindiwara, Bazi Haoussa, Ansongo Commune

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 achieve 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:

- Post-distribution monitoring of Animal Fodder Voucher distribution;
- Trainings to 231 herders on fodder harvesting techniques;
- Didactic and practical training on animal health for 15 Community Animal Health Workers in coordination with the local Veterinary Sector Chief of Ansongo;
- Selection of 50 community vegetable gardens for farmer training of best agricultural practices;
- Training of 11 associations (208 beneficiaries) on the creation and maintenance of compost pits;
- Two monthly distributions of unconditional vouchers for 1200 households in August & September (35,000 FCFA value per household).
- On-going infrastructure rehabilitation of 56 sites (in 21 villages), resulting to date in over 22 kilometers rehabilitated
- Identification of 75 projects for micro-entrepreneur support, as well as financial literacy and marketing training for 36;
- 87 VSLA established (2,206 beneficiaries) and first training meetings conducted;
- Elaboration and finalization of comprehensive program M&E plan.
- Mercy Corps has reached to date a total of 34,186 men, women, boys and girls, or 136% of initially selected beneficiaries;

136% of initially selected beneficiaries reached to date

34,186 men, women, boys and girls

87 VSLAs ESTABLISHED WITH 55% OF WOMEN

Two monthly distributions of unconditional vouchers for 1,200 households

On-going infrastructure rehabilitation of **56 sites**

Identification of 75 projects for micro-entrepreneur support

Table 1. Award Level Beneficiaries

Total beneficiaries targeted	25,060 beneficiaries (3,580 households)
Total beneficiaries reached this quarter	24,827 beneficiaries (3,442 households)
Total cumulative number of beneficiaries reached	34,186 beneficiaries (4,442 households)

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Objective 1: Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods		
Beneficiaries Targeted	24,010 (3,430 households)	men	women
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	9,133 beneficiaries (1,200 households)	1,094	106
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	18,492 beneficiaries (2,200 households)	1,891	309
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks		
Beneficiaries Targeted	12,250 beneficiaries (1,750 households)	men	women
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	15,694 beneficiaries (2,242 households)	1,012	1,230
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	15,694 beneficiaries (2,242 households)	1,012	1,230

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 being 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 support the recovery of livelihoods by helping communities to rehabilitate lands, irrigation schemes and agricultural infrastructure degraded during the conflict.

Additionally, Irtoun assists micro-entrepreneurs affected by insecurity through business training and a small cash injection to re-start their businesses. Finally, all Irtoun beneficiaries are encouraged to join community based village savings and loan associations (VSLA), which 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 is providing essential ingredients for communities to solidify a peaceful and productive future.

3. Contextual Update

During the reporting period, the overall situation in northern regions of Mali remained in a state of uncertainty despite a formal ceasefire agreed during inter-Malian peace talks held in Algiers from July 2014. The period is also marked by an increase of attacks against MINUSMA forces, mostly in Timbuktu and Kidal. The most severe security incident to date occurred in September in Gao region (Menaka - Ansongo axis) as MUJAO forces killed 9 Nigerian UN peacekeepers. Security risks for the humanitarian community have also increased in the North, with an increase of vehicle jacking in Kidal and Timbuktu regions.

The security situation remained calm in the circle of Ansongo, in spite of a few isolated cases of banditry during fairground market days. Pastoral areas remain however under the control of armed groups. This quarter also saw a massive return of Arab community in Ansongo circle and the creation of cantonment camps in the municipalities of Ouattagouna (Fafa village) and Ansongo (Monzonga), resulting from negotiations between MINUSMA (Nigerian contingent) and various local self-defense groups. Mercy Corps continue to enforce strict security protocols in Gao and Ansongo, especially for staff movement with formal authorization and close monitoring of movement in program areas.

4. Performance Summary

Table 2. 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	Reporting period: 9,133 beneficiaries (1,200 households)	Cumulative: 18,492 beneficiaries (2,200 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	N/A	2,000	8,470	September 2014
Indicator 1.1.2: Number of people benefiting from livestock activities, disaggregated by sex	Male:	490	797	September 2014
	Female:	510	203	September 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:	240	0	
	Female:	960	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	10 months	N/A	

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

Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks			
Beneficiaries Targeted	12,250 beneficiaries (1,750 households)	Budget:	\$ 354,819	
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 15,694 beneficiaries (2,242 households)	Cumulative: 15,694 beneficiaries (2,242 households)		
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo circle; Bourra, 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:	60	12	September 2014
	Female:	90	24	September 2014
Indicator 2.1.2: Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	80%	N/A	
Indicator 2.1.3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	15,000 USD	0 USD	
Sub-Sector 2.2 : Microfinance				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.2.1: Number of 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	Male:	600	848	September 2014
	Female:	1,000	1,384	September 2014
Indicator 2.2.2: Percentage of financial services accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	75%	N/A	

Sector Summary:

Sector #1: Agriculture & Food Security:

1.1 Livestock

1.1.1 Animal fodder vouchers for 1,000 vulnerable households

Monitoring program quality is an essential component to Irtoun’s strategy for adaptive management and accountability mechanisms. Mercy Corps conducted post-distribution monitoring among 300 households that received animal fodder vouchers during the last quarter. 74% of beneficiaries stated that the distribution would enable them to provide for their animals’ needs, while 23% said that they would be able to provide for their animals, but only for a short period of time. 99% of beneficiaries found the quality of items to be “good” for “very good”, and only 1% of beneficiaries

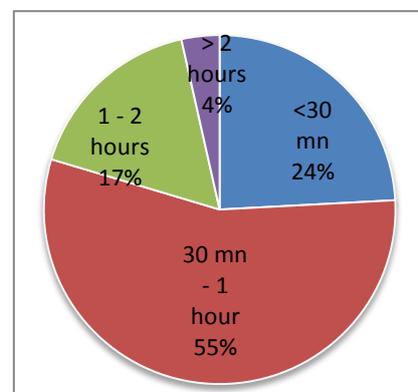


Figure 1. Total time spent per beneficiary during the distribution

stated that they would have preferred other vouchers for family food needs.

This suggests that beneficiaries were appropriately targeted and sensitized prior to the distribution. As concerns opportunity costs, 79% of beneficiaries report having spent less than an hour at the distribution site (see the pie graph), from the time they arrived to the time they traded their voucher for goods. As concerns Do No Harm and protection, 1% of beneficiaries stated that they felt threatened by non-beneficiaries when returning home from the distribution.

1.1.2 Capacity building of herders to improve fodder harvesting and storage

During the quarter, the Irtoun program held several awareness sessions and training on fodder harvesting: site preparation, required materials, grass mowing period, level of cutting, drying, storage infrastructure, and use of forage. These awareness and training session were also conducted on sites selected for VfW activities (activity 1.2.3)

Participants consisted of herders, pastoralists, representatives from women's groups, youth associations, village councils and local councils. Participants also requested Mercy Corps to continue awareness, information and training activities on fodder management throughout the entire campaign in order to better preparer communities for the lean seasons.

Table 3. Number of participants trained on fodder harvesting and storage techniques

Commune	Village	# participants		Total
		Men	Women	
Bara	Bara	16	4	20
	Tabango	16	4	20
	Total Bara	32	8	40
Ansongo	Seyna Bellah	16	4	20
	Seyna Sonrhai	16	4	20
	Total Ansongo	32	8	40
Bourra	Tassiga	16	4	20
	Kounsoum	20	4	24
	Tonditihio	19	4	23
	Total Bourra	55	12	67
Ouattagouna	Karou	17	4	21
	Ouattagouna	19	4	23
	Fafa	16	4	20
	Bentia	16	4	20
	Total Ouattagouna	68	16	84
TOTAL		187	44	231

1.1.3 Training and refresher training for 30 Community Animal Health Workers

During the reporting period, following a refresher training conducted for 15 CAHWs in June, an additional 15 CAHWs were trained in July by the Ansongo Chief Veterinary (Govt) and Mercy Corps Livestock Officer. Training topics included:

- common infectious diseases and treatment³;
- most frequent parasitic diseases in Ansongo;
- epidemic management;
- common veterinary pharmaceuticals;
- functions of CAHWs (curative and preventive, awareness, alert, management); and
- management tools (treatment book, cash book, reporting.).

³ Pasteurellosis, Anthrax, Small Ruminant Pestcontagious Bovine Pleuro Pneumonia, Foot and Mouth Disease, Sheep-pox

Mercy Corps also distributed start up kits, comprised of basic veterinary equipment and supplies, cool boxes (52L), and an admin kit.



Picture - Distribution of training certificate and cool boxes to newly trained CAHWs , Mercy Corps Office Ansongo

1.2. Improving Agricultural Production

1.2.1 Voucher for Agricultural inputs for 1,200 farmers

Prior to the start of vegetable planting year scheduled for October-November, Mercy Corps visited 80 vegetable gardens groups for sensitization of the Irtoun project and retained 50 gardens which meet the project selection criteria: site accessibility, water availability and accessibility, site protection (fence), status of local farmer association (formal or not) and availability of irrigation pumps. The size of selected gardens range from 0.25 to 12 ha with a total of 1,686 members, of which 80% are women. The main crops selected for the gardening campaign are: potatoes (20 ha), onion (5.31 ha), tomato (3.19 ha), okra (6.84 ha) and chili pepper (2.63 ha). Mercy Corps and partner AMATeVI also held awareness and refresher sessions with farmers associations on supply chain for vegetable seeds and verified beneficiary lists in all selected program locations. Specific requirements for potato seeds were assessed, as well as estimates for other crops, are presented as in the table below:

Table 4. Overall seed distribution

Seed type	surface (ha)	Quantity of seeds/ha (Kg/ha)	total quantity of seeds (Kg)
Potato	6.84	1 250.00	25 000.00
Gombo	6.84	4.00	27.36
Onion	5.31	5.00	26.50
Tomato	3.19	0.35	1.12
Chili pepper	2.63	0.40	1.05
Total	17.97		

1.2.2 Training and support to 50 agricultural/gardening groups

During this quarter Mercy Corps and partner AMATeVI have conducted trainings on the production of compost in preparation for the market garden campaign.

Table 5. Gardening Groups - Compost pits

Communes	# participants to demonstrations session	% women attending session	total # of groups	# of created groups	# of groups having dug a compost pit	# of groups with full compost pits
Bourra	114	89%	13	7	13	7
Ouattagouna	94	94%	10	4	10	4
Total	208	91%	23	11	23	11

1.2.3. Rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure – Food Vouchers for Work

During the reporting period, in order to rehabilitate communal lands for farming and grazing as well as essential irrigation infrastructure, which were degraded as a result of the crisis, as well as to contribute to improve vulnerable households' food security and recovery, Mercy Corps organized VfW activities in 21 villages of Bara, Bourra, Ansongo and Ouattagouna communes. 1,200 beneficiary households were identified among the most vulnerable community, based on the HEA methodology and vouchers have been distributed in July and August; each beneficiary households

will receive four 8,750 FCFA value vouchers over the 4 months of VfW activities. Mercy Corps initially selected 24 vendors out of 36 traders identified and signed agreements for VfW with 19 vendors. To date only 16 vendors have sold products to recipients with the value vouchers.

Communal rehabilitation work has started on all sites with a strong involvement from communities observed in each beneficiary village. The rehabilitation works undertaken so far will secure rice fields recently flooded by the rapid rise of the Niger River observed since early April, in spite of low rainfall recorded in the area.



Figure 2. Sample Value Voucher for the month of August

Table 6. Communal works as of 30 Sept 2014

Commune	# Villages	# Sites	# Workers VFW	Dimension (km)	Completed to date (km)	% completion
Bara	3	19	178	8 930	4 030	45%
Ansongo	7	15	575	18 490	10 986	59%
Bourra	7	15	197	4 700	4 185	89%
Ouattagouna	4	7	250	5 679	2 889	51%
Total	21	56	1 200	37 799	22 090	45%

The major challenge encountered to date is the addition by communities of sites to be rehabilitated on top of those initially identified by Mercy Corps and the technical departments of agriculture. The argument most often advanced is the importance that reveals the security of these lands and infrastructure in the success of the agriculture campaign and the absence of support from other actors. The strategy adopted by Mercy Corps to address this challenge as well as to promote community ownership and foster good governance is to encourage community participation in the form of contribution in tools and unpaid labor.

Table 7. Community participation and contribution

	Tools							Addition community labor contribution (not paid by the program ^o)
	Shovel	Hoe	Bags	Wheelbarrow	pickaxe	Carts	Bucket	
Bara	942	75	862	0	762	0	0	142
Ansongo	563	248	4 881	0	78	0	10	60
Bourra	510	272	350	0	231	0	0	170
Ouattagouna	218	388	1 353	40	35	34	0	50
Total	2 233	983	7 446	40	1 106	34	10	422

This strategy has proved successful as various community led initiatives, building upon communities' capacities and priorities, were observed across the project locations including: intake of equipment and tools (shovels, hoes, empty bags); in some municipalities such as Bara, farmers have brought food to the workers. In the commune of Ouattagouna, the village of Karou, local vendors provided carts to enable workers to go further in the brush pick up stones to strengthen clay dikes.

1.2.4. Revitalize 20 irrigation management committees

From 50 gardens selected for support during the vegetable campaign (activity 1.2.1 and 1.2.2) 20 gardens will receive additional support on irrigation water management. Mercy Corps will support water management committees in areas organizational capacity; management and planning of rotation for irrigation, and mobilizing resources for pumps maintenance.

Sector #2: Economic Recovery & Market Systems

2.1. Support to 150 micro-entrepreneurs

Since the announcement of this component of Irtoun project started, 365 application dossiers have been registered at the Mercy Corps office in Ansongo. Mercy Corps selected the best projects submitted in Bara and Ansongo commune with strong involvement of the Youth Service and the Ansongo National Employment Agency representative (ANPE). Application dossiers from Bourra Ouattagouna are being processed. The training of the first cohort of 36 young entrepreneurs in Bara and Ansongo took place in September and focused on family business, basic concepts of accounting (cash management, inventory, orders, etc.), taxation, and marketing, etc.

Table 8. Distribution of entrepreneurs per Commune

Commune	# received applications		# preselected applications		# selected applications		Observations
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Bara	43	20	36	11	5	9	
Ansongo	72	52	62	33	7	15	
Bourra	108	24	93	20	N/A	N/A	Ongoing selection
Ouattagouna	32	14	20	10	N/A	N/A	Ongoing selection
Total	365		285		75		

2.2. Establish/Strengthen 80 Village Savings and Loans Associations

During this quarter, with the technical support from a VSLA consultant (former Mercy Corps VSLA program officer in Niger with experience with similar OFDA funded program) Mercy Corps identified and selected 87 VSLAs with a total of 2,206 beneficiaries (1,206 women and 1,000 men). These groups are from 9 villages in the communes of Ouattagouna, Bara and Ansongo (table°9). Bourra commune was not retained (not feasible according to the analysis of value-for-money).

Table 9. Distribution of VSLAs

Communes	# villages	# potential VSLA	# total selected VSLA	# total members	# men	# women	# meetings held
Bara	2	52	18	443	162	281	3 (A,B,C)
Ansongo	4	93	39	1023	316	707	3 (A,B,C)
Bourra	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ouattagouna	3	30	30	740	522	218 ⁴	3 (A,B,C)
Total	9	175	87	2206	1,000	1206	9 (A,B,C)



Introduction to VSLA in Bentia village

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

During the reporting period, monitoring has focused on the data collection and analysis for livestock fodder post distribution monitoring, vendor selection and preparation of voucher for agricultural input component, rapid market surveys, monitoring the distribution of vouchers to 1,200 beneficiaries, monitoring the selection of 75 entrepreneur project and monitoring of activities of establishment of VSLAs. Mercy Corps has also finalized a project monitoring and evaluation plan for Irtoun, comprising of a theory of change, logical framework, as well as indicator plan and monitoring tools linked to OFDA reporting templates. (annexed).

6. Coordination

The Irtoun program continued to work closely with local authorities at the commune and department levels, notably community leaders, decentralized collectivities, local technical service agents, and private vendors. As from the onset of the program, Mercy Corps worked in close collaboration with our partner AMATeVI and technical service agents from the Ministry of Agriculture for the support to smallholder farmers and the sourcing of some seeds (e.g. potato). Mercy Corps also met with the Regional Directorate of Agriculture in Gao to present the program objectives and approach. Mercy Corps has been praised for using a participatory and inclusive approach, welcomed positively throughout the circle for facilitating the implementation of different activities.

Mercy Corps continues participating in regional coordination meetings in Gao (OCHA) and at national level, meetings organized by OCHA and the food security cluster.

⁴ Provisional, selection process is on going

Carte des sites du programme Irtoun dans le Cercle d'Ansongo, financé par OFDA septembre 2014



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