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**Strengthening Opportunities and Access to Resilience (SOAR)**  
**Funded by USAID/ Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)**  
**Second Quarterly Report**  
*October 1 – December 31, 2014*



Federal Low Cost/Gombe Town – NFIs and Food Vouchers Beneficiary, widow with 7 children, displaced from (photo: Sara Murray/ Mercy Corps)

## I. Program Overview

Escalated violence in northeastern Nigeria caused by Boko Haram and the counter-insurgency continues to displace significant numbers of people, contributing to disrupted livelihoods, reduced household incomes, and an increased risk of food insecurity. Gombe state has continued to receive IDPs displaced from Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states due to the Boko Haram insurgency and attacks. The Mercy Corps team also observed that there is some movement of people who can afford to from Funakaye Local Government (under regular incursions from BH) to Gombe town or other locations<sup>1</sup>. To address the situation of displaced and vulnerable resident households and strengthen their resilience and livelihoods, the Strengthening Opportunities and Access to Resilience (SOAR) program has been designed to support basic non-food items (NFI) needs through distributing cash-based distributions, strengthening livelihoods of vulnerable families through one-time cash transfers, increasing knowledge of livestock owners, and establishing village level savings and loans groups. It is estimated that the project will benefit 93,780 individuals, out of which 56,268 are internally displaced.

## II. Quarter Executive Summary

During this quarter, the majority of activities focused on 1) non-food items distributions roll-out, 2) para-veterinarians selection and training, 3) beneficiary registration, lists verification and final mobilization. In addition, Mercy Corps has finalized baseline survey by conducting household level interviews and organised Do No Harm trainings for selected Community Volunteers, State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) representatives and Mercy Corps staff. Furthermore, during the last quarter several new team members joined Gombe operation and by the end of the December, Gombe team was almost complete.

In addition to OFDA funding, Mercy Corps secured a grant from Food for Peace (FFP), which will complement activities implemented under SOAR with food assistance, as well as contribute to the overall personnel and operational costs. FFP funded interventions will target OFDA beneficiaries and focus on the same geographical coverage, as well as adapt implementation procedures developed for OFDA project implementation. Mercy Corps believes that by providing comprehensive assistance to the targeted communities, we will be able to reach higher impact for families.

## III. Security Context, Situation Overview and Operational Summary

*Security:* The security situation has deteriorated toward the end of the reporting period, with a noticeable increase in the number of suicide bombs targeting various locations within Gombe town and repetitive rides of insurgents on communities of Funakaye Local Government. Last quarter recorded 5 suicide bomb blasts with over than 50 casualties and many injured, as well as 3 hit-and-run raids in Funakaye. The security developments affected Mercy Corps movements to Funakaye and restricted our monitoring activities in the local markets.

*Population movements:* Despite the number of security incidents in Gombe, the town is still considered relatively safe and continues to receive newly displaced families fleeing areas under control of Boko Haram or under regular attacks. The majority of families stay with host communities, either in vacated buildings or rented accommodations. The IDP camp in Gombe, previously managed

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<sup>1</sup> Precise number of displaced within Gombe State is difficult to estimate. SEMA, with the assistance from IOM, has introduced a more systematic approach to IDP registration. Their figures as of beginning of January 2015 show 25,690 individuals displaced in Gombe State. Mercy Corps thinks those numbers may be low, as the registering mechanism is still not broadly known. Community members may be skeptical of the system, particularly given that the registration attempts fall during the election schedule and the process may be easily politicized. SEMA currently has 35 full time staff and is planning to double this pending Government approval. Similarly Gombe Office of NEMA, with 22 operational staff, is requesting additional support. With increased human resources, they should be in better position to strengthen their mandatory activities.

by National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), was handed over to SEMA in December. According to SEMA records, the camp observed a decrease in the number of camp residents<sup>2</sup>, partially because the camp management encourages families to look for accommodation within host communities for security reasons.

*Markets:* Markets observed price increases for imported commodities such as , attributed to the drop of Nigerian Naira exchange rate against US Dollar (164-167 NGN/1 USD in the beginning of the quarter and 185 NGN/1 USD at the end). Otherwise price fluctuations in locally produced food and non-food commodities have not been noted this quarter.

*Operations:* Mercy Corps has fully operational office, with separate finance and support functions and dedicated program and M&E teams. The team is lead by an expatriate Program Manager, supported by a national Program Coordinator, Program Officers (3), Program Assistants (3), M&E Officer and M&E Assistants (3). As of end of December, the team accounts of 16 nationals<sup>3</sup> and 1 international staff member. All personnel and support costs are being shared between OFDA and FFP.

The following fleet has supported operation:

Vehicle Type/ Description	Form of engagement	Quantity	Source Country	Country of Manufacture
Ford Ranger, 2.5, 4x4*	Local Procurement	1	Nigeria	USA
Toyota Highlander	Procured under other grant	1	Nigeria	Japan
Toyota Corolla	Temporary Lease	1	Nigeria	Japan
Peugeot	Temporary Lease	1	Nigeria	France

\* Under OFDA grant, Mercy Corps procured two Ford Rangers. Since November 2014, we observed that pick-ups have become vehicles of choice by Boko Haram and are frequently carjacked or stolen. As a temporary measure, only one of pick-ups will be deployed to Gombe and the other one will support activities of other programs based in Abuja; instead a Toyota Highlander, procured under a DFID grant, is being used in Gombe.

*Other:* Mercy Corps actively participated in various coordination efforts at Abuja level, as well as in Gombe, including a newly established INGO Forum, OCHA and donor meetings. Bilateral communication and information sharing have been maintained with other OFDA partners as well. We are in discussion with Save the Children to cost-share a Security Officer dedicated to Gombe.

*Coordination with SEMA, NEMA and other state actors:* Mercy Corps continued regular coordination with the local authorities and the SEMA project line office in Gombe, supported by a project MoU signed in October. Contacts have been made with NEMA at the state level, as well as with the Security Agency. SEMA has expressed interest in our voucher program and rations distribution. Mercy Corps offered to organise a knowledge sharing workshop and are looking at the option of sending SEMA staff to Mercy Corps for capacity building. A MoU with SEMA for the project implementation is under partner review and should be signed in January.

In Abuja, Mercy Corps participates in various coordination efforts at Abuja level, including a newly established INGO Forum, OCHA and donors meetings. Bilateral communication and information sharing have been maintained with other FFP partners, as well. Additionally, Mercy Corps Nigeria has started discussions with Save the Children to cost-share a Security Officer, dedicated to Gombe. He/she is scheduled to begin in February.

<sup>2</sup> Camp records showed 680 individuals residing in the camp in the beginning of October and 360 towards the end of December.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that there are 16 national staff positions between FFP and OFDA projects. Mercy Corps is completing recruitment in January 2015.

*Staff Development:* Gombe staff attended the following internal and external trainings:

- VSLA Training of Trainers (October 2014): organised by Save the Children Consortium – one Project Officer participated
- Do No Harm Training (November 2014): organised by Mercy Corps, 2 Project Officers, 1 M&E Officer and 1 Program Assistant attended
- Program Management at Mercy Corps (December 2014): 1 M&E Officer and 1 Finance Officer participated
- Psychosocial First Aid (December 2014): organised by Save the Children: 1 M&E Assistant attended

#### IV. Project Performance

### SECTOR 1 Economic Recovery & Market Systems

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Vulnerable IDPs and host families re-establish livelihoods activities			
INDICATORS	TARGET	PROGRESS (Q2)	COMPLETION
Indicator 1.1a: # of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, disaggregated by sex	3,000	0	0%
Indicator 1.1b Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sectors activities	\$150,000	0	0%
Indicator 1.2a: # of people disaggregated by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to SOAR support	Individuals: 400 VSLA: 40	0	0%
Main activities planned for Quarter 2	Progress during reporting period		
<i>Livelihoods restoration</i>	<i>Livelihoods restoration</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transfer rate and disbursement modality defined</li> <li>• Beneficiary registration completed</li> <li>• Beneficiary sensitization and preparing for the transfers pay-outs</li> <li>• Transfers disbursement starts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LH transfer amount under discussion with OFDA, Mercy Corps is looking for possible solution in close cooperation with donor.</li> <li>• Beneficiary registration has been under way throughout the quarter, final selection criteria are being decided.</li> <li>• Transfers disbursement not started. The delay was to ensure proper utilization of the assistance for income generation and not for meeting basic food need. Mercy Corps decided to launch food assistance first.</li> </ul>		
<i>Microfinance</i>	<i>Microfinance</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community sensitization and mobilization process started</li> <li>• First savings and loans groups formed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start-up of the intervention delayed, will be rolled out with the livelihood transfers</li> <li>• All start-up kits for the VSLAs have been procured</li> </ul>		

#### *Livelihoods restoration*

The implementation of the activity has been purposely delayed. Food is the top priority for beneficiaries and there is no regular food assistance, so this activity will be coordinated with FFP

projects. With beneficiaries having their basic needs addressed for 9 months, the risk of channelling livelihoods transfers for purposes other than recovering income generation capacities will be reduced.

The baseline survey indicates that over 62% of the respondents will require at least the equivalent of \$200 to secure the bases of their livelihoods. However, due to the NFI assistance Mercy Corps is providing, as well as increased access to savings and loans through VSL schemes, the transfer could be reduced to \$100. However, as this doubles the budgeted amount (projected transfer value was \$50), Mercy Corps is looking for savings under the operational lines to partially cover the gap as well as looking to discuss an option of cost modification. The livelihoods first disbursements are planned for January. Beneficiary registration is ongoing and a final list of livelihoods beneficiaries will be generated from the families that already receive NFI assistance. The disbursements of physical cash are planned to be conducted through the local banks, with Mercy Corps conducting ongoing monitoring of the process. However, Mercy Corps is mindful that the distribution of physical cash may create the concerns about how the cash is being spent and where is it going, so monitoring results will adjust the modality of distribution as needed.

### **Microfinance**

Mobilization of savings groups has been delayed to launch with livelihoods transfers. The baseline indicated that savings and loans awareness exists, but lack of capital or limited access to the financial institutions restricts savings and loan access.

Procurement of VSLA start-up kits has been almost completed. Each VSLA will receive basic materials and technical support from our staff to help it to launch operations. Among the items are: money-box, registry books, voting supporting materials and basic stationary.

## **SECTOR 2: Agriculture and Food Security**

<b>OBJECTIVE 2.1: Beneficiaries have access to knowledge about herd management, animal health and nutrition</b>			
<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>TARGET</b>	<b>PROGRESS Q2</b>	<b>COMPLETION</b>
<b># of people trained on seed multiplication and crop diversification</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b># of people trained on fodder storage and animal nutrition</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>OBJECTIVE 2.2 Veterinary service providers available to vulnerable households</b>			
<b># of para-vets trained</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b># of para-vets equipped</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>
<b>Main activities planned for Quarter 2</b>	<b>Progress during reporting period</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultant for para-vets training identified</li> <li>• Knowledge gap assessment conducted</li> <li>• Trainees selected</li> <li>• Training sessions conducted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge gap assessment conducted among animal health practitioners and livestock owners</li> <li>• Two training sessions organized, targeting 51 private and public para-veterinarians (4 female)</li> <li>• Procurement of basic veterinary equipment started</li> <li>• Pre-vaccination refresher session organized by the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, targeting 110 animal health practitioners from 11 local government areas of Gombe State supported by Mercy Corps's OFDA project.</li> </ul>		

Further analysis of the sector revealed quite a high number of para-veterinarians working in all three project target LGAs, in both private and public sectors. The general feedback was that rather than

creating new positions, Mercy Corps should contribute towards strengthening capacities of existing practitioners. Two refresher training groups organised to reflect this need.

Out of 97 applicants, 26 private and 25 public sector practitioners were chosen based on geographic coverage, dedication and gender for 8 and 6 day, respectively, refresher trainings in Gombe. A knowledge gap assessment was done with 19 future trainees to ensure the training met basic needs.

The training was participatory and combined theoretical and practical sessions, including field visits to the abattoir poultry farm and pastoral community. All sessions were managed and delivered by a consultant, selected following procurement processes.

In early November, the SOAR project supported a 1-day refresher session for para-vets from all 11 local governmental areas and organised by the state level Department of Animal Health Services. The refresher session was conducted just before the government-lead vaccination campaign in Gombe state. The campaign lasted almost one month and the Department reported vaccinating a total of 674,929 animals (358,163 sheep and goats against PPR and 316,766 cattle against CBPP). Procurement of equipment for 26 private para-vets commenced in December, with planned delivery and distribution towards the end of January.

### SECTOR 3 Logistics, Support, Relief Commodities

OBJECTIVE 3.1: Beneficiaries have access to essential hygiene items and household items			
INDICATORS	TARGET	PROGRESS Q2	COMPLETION
# of Hygiene Kits Distributed	5,000	1,555 <sup>4</sup>	31%
# of New Arrival Kits Distributed	620	281	45%
Cost of Hygiene Kit/beneficiary	\$35	\$32*	
Cost of New Arrival Kit/beneficiary	\$219	\$194*	
Total # of households receiving Hygiene Kit	5,000	1,555	31%
Total # of households receiving New Arrival Kit	620	281	45%
<b>Main activities planned for Quarter 2</b>	<b>Progress during reporting period</b>		
<p><i>Relief Commodities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficiary registration completed and final beneficiary list generated</li> <li>Voucher vendors selected and agreements entered</li> <li>Beneficiaries sensitized about voucher process and informed about their rights</li> <li>Voucher distributions started</li> </ul>	<p><i>Relief Commodities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beneficiary registration is ongoing;</li> <li>Voucher vendors with shops in main markets of Gombe and Yamaltu Deba selected and contracted</li> <li>Distributions of cash vouchers for hygiene and new arrival items started with the following outcomes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hygiene kits distributed to 1,555 households in 11 communities, benefiting total 12,188 individuals</li> <li>New Arrival kits distributed to 281 households (3,115 individuals)</li> <li>Average absentee rate: 38%</li> <li>Average IDPs rate: 89%</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		

\*based on USD exchange rate toward the end of December 2014

#### **Relief Commodities**

<sup>4</sup> Few absentees from December distributions received their vouchers in January and those January figures are included under Q2 results.

*Beneficiaries:* With the participation of the community and the collected beneficiary data, (registration process has been described in previous report<sup>5</sup>) Mercy Corps selected 3,179 families across three project LGAs. The information gathered allowed us to apply the following selection criteria:

- Vouchers for Household & Bedding Items (for newly arrived families): displaced families with over 8 persons who arrived to Gombe from September onwards, as well as female or minor headed households, regardless of family size
- Vouchers for Hygiene Items: vulnerable residents and displaced families with the five or more family members, female or minor headed households (displaced and residents)

Based on the above criteria, lists for 3,179 families (762 in Yamaltu Deba, 869 in Funakaye and 1,548 in Gombe) have been generated and validated by Mercy Corps and community leaders in all targeted communities. With Funakaye being inaccessible in December due to security issues and a 38% absentee rate across Gombe and Yamaltu Deba, the final number of assisted families is as follows:

- Vouchers for Household & Bedding Items: 281 families (86 in Yamaltu Deba; 195 in Gombe)
- Vouchers for Hygiene Items: 1,555 families (534 in Yamaltu Deba; 1,021 in Gombe)

High absentee rates can be explained by the long interval between registration (end September/beginning of October) and distributions (early December) and by inaccuracies in the original registration<sup>5</sup>. The participation of religious leaders as well as representatives from IDP communities in targeting will assist in community sensitization as well as better verification of the lists.

Because of the security situation in Funakaye, we have not visited the community since beginning of December. The needs and access will be re-visited in January and final decision about the way forward made accordingly, in coordination with OFDA. For the moment we know the frequent raids of Boko Haram in Funakaye caused relocation of resident families to Gombe town.

*Vendors:* Mobilization of vendors from local markets resulted in entering contracts with 15 vendors within Gombe and Yamaltu Deba for both hygiene and household items. The initial mobilization process caused quite a few challenges, mostly because of general mistrust, due to Mercy Corps being new in the community and because voucher modality has never been implemented in Gombe before. Once the contracts were signed and first redemption payments released, the initial fear and suspicions were alleviated. We have not recorded major problems with vendor performance. There were a few reports about inflated prices, vendors not being polite towards beneficiaries or the quality of goods not meeting expected standards but once those were addressed by the monitoring team, similar problems were not seen again. As the main markets tend to be more exposed to the insurgency, for the next quarter we will be planning to activate vendors from community level markets.

*Vouchers:* Inability to find a printer to complete the voucher order in Nigeria (those who are able to print documents with security features were busy with election related printing) forced us to print vouchers in the Mercy Corps Mali office and ship to Gombe. The following vouchers have been printed:

- 10 cash vouchers of different denominations for hygiene items, valued 5,800 NGN (\$32) **per beneficiary**. The voucher value was determined based on the market prices of a sample basket composed for an average family of 7. The amount allows a family to purchase a combination of goods as proposed in the project proposal.

<sup>5</sup> The registration process serves the following activities: non-food items support (both hygiene and new arrival kits), livelihoods restoration through one-time cash transfers as well as food assistance

<sup>5</sup> As a majority of beneficiaries do not have national photo ID card, verification at the distribution site is done by asking several questions that could confirm the information recorded in the beneficiary registry. Any discrepancy between what was in the list and individual answer usually resulted in rejecting the individual or direct for further verification.

- 19 Cash vouchers of different denominations for New Arrival Items, valued at a total of 35,000 NGN (\$194) **per beneficiary**. Similarly to hygiene items, the sample basket a beneficiary can purchase remains similar to the one designed at the project proposal stage.

Within the selection of allowable goods, beneficiaries are free to select vendors, commodities and their quantities, as well as break the shopping into multiple trips.

The following chart illustrates the voucher redemption summary:

Voucher Type	Voucher Amount (NGN)	# of Benef served	Total Amount Distributed (NGN)	Total Amount Redeemed (NGN)	Balance (still in circulation) (NGN)	Balance (USD)	Av # of benef *
Hygiene Items	5,800	1,555	9,019,000	8,871,100	147,900	\$924	29
New Arrival	35,000	281	9,835,000	9,629,700	205,300	\$1,283	5.86

\* Average number of beneficiaries that have not redeemed vouchers

## V. Monitoring and Evaluation

M&E activities during the previous quarter focused on finalizing baseline survey, setting up monitoring systems and tools and beneficiary list verification and post-distribution monitoring.

*Baseline survey:* A household survey was conducted in October, interviewing 805 randomly selected families across Yamaltu Deba (273), Gombe (267) and Funakaye (265). 40% of respondents were residents and 60% displaced. The survey addressed reasons for displacement, duration of stay in current location and movement plans for the future, previous and current sources of income, livelihood opportunities as well as estimated level of capital required to resume income generation activities.

*Beneficiary lists verification:* Wherever possible, Mercy Corps did between 20 and 50% of door-to-door lists validation<sup>6</sup>. Based on the findings, final beneficiary lists have been generated and shared with target community leaders for their feedback and approval.

*Distribution and post-distribution monitoring:* Systems and tools have been developed to allow monitoring of distributions and transactions, as well as post-distribution monitoring. The following chart illustrates the number of monitoring tasks undertaken during the last quarter:

	Monitoring Activity	# of monitoring interventions	% of total benef served in Q2
1	Distribution Monitoring	10*	N/A
2	Transaction Monitoring	16**	N/A
3	Post-Distribution Monitoring	161	10%

\* Indicates the number of distribution days monitored by Mercy Corps

\*\* Number of transaction-days monitored through-out of reporting period

*Community feedback mechanism:* Complaints and questions are brought to attention through a community feedback phone line. Calls are tracked, categorized and responded to by the appropriate staff member. During last quarter, Mercy Corps recorded 13 main phone calls, not including those

<sup>6</sup> Number of households visited depended on the access, availability of necessary information that would allow to find a house, presence of beneficiary at home and comfort level of Mercy Corps staff with the particular list and process (problems with the lists would trigger more in-depth verification)

requesting things like contact information or hours of operation. Reports have included higher prices of the goods available through the voucher system, lower quality of goods, absence of vendors, issues with the registration process, etc. The hotline number is widely disseminated among beneficiaries, as well as printed on the project vendor banners.

*Monitoring Findings* (based on the post-distribution monitoring surveys)

- Beneficiaries requested to increase the number of vendors to secure more shopping options
- Some vendors did not have good selection of commodities
- Some beneficiaries shared the purchased goods with neighbors
- None of the assisted families reported receiving any prior to Mercy Corps assistance
- Larger families complained the assistance was not enough to meet their needs
- Most frequently reported beneficiary needs are: health, education and income generating activities, as well as psychological support, nutritional assistance and financial support for rent

## **VI. Challenges**

The following are the main operational challenges encountered during the previous quarter:

- Security situation affects access to program sites (Funakaye) and limits activities in the markets.
- Communities, volunteers unfamiliar with implementation processes, requiring more sensitization, mentoring and supervision from Mercy Corps side
- High absentee rate in the distributions
- Inability to find the voucher printer in Nigeria, resulted in delays with voucher delivery and distributions roll-out
- Absence of an efficient mechanism to follow arrivals or departures of displaced families makes targeting and needs tracking more difficult.

## VII. Plans for next quarter

Sector	Main activities
<b>Sector 1:</b> Agriculture and Food Security	<i>Livelihoods Recovery</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot of livelihood transfer in urban and rural settings</li> <li>• Concluding on transfer amount</li> <li>• Transfers disbursement scale-up</li> <li>• Transfer use monitoring</li> </ul> <i>VSLAs</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention start-up and forming first groups in targeted communities</li> </ul>
<b>Sector 2:</b> Agriculture and Food Security	<i>Livestock</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement and distribution of equipment to private para-vets</li> <li>• Planning for pastoralists knowledge development sessions</li> <li>• Para-vets performance monitoring</li> </ul>
<b>Sector 3:</b> Logistics, support and relief items	<i>Relief Items</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiary registration</li> <li>• Continue with distributions of vouchers for hygiene and new arrival items</li> <li>• Mobilization of additional vendors, away from main markets</li> </ul>
<b>M&amp;E</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining of monitoring systems and tools</li> <li>• Data quality monitoring</li> <li>• Consolidation of beneficiary master data base</li> </ul>
<b>Election Security Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HEAT training for Mercy Corps staff in Gombe and defensive driving training for drivers and operations</li> <li>• Activities plans reflect the possibility of freezing the movements just after the elections</li> <li>• Election preparedness planning done with all staff in Gombe and basic risk mitigation measures put in place:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Movements tracking</li> <li>○ Back-up communication system set-up (satellite phones based)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Key staff able to work from home.</li> </ul>

## VIII. Annexes

ANNEX 1: Beneficiary Stories

ANNEX 2: SEMA MoU Template

ANNEX 3: Photo Essay