

**FY15 Q1 Report: January 1<sup>st</sup> - March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015**

**Submitted: April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

**Reinforcing and Empowering Communities to Overcome the Effects of Conflict in Bambari and Surrounding Areas (RECOVER)  
 Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)**



*Training session on protection needs assessments for community counsellors in Bambari, December 29, 2014*

COUNTRY CONTACT	HEADQUARTERS CONTACT	PROJECT SUMMARY
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## 1. Executive Summary

Since December 2012, Bambari and the Ouaka region have been in a continuous state of instability, which has had dire impacts on the lives of civilians, who have experienced elevated levels of violence and widespread loss of livelihoods. The RECOVER program designed by Mercy Corps aims at mitigating the effects of conflict and reinforcing community resilience in Bambari. The current report summarizes the status and achievements of the project for the most recent quarter of the project, January through March of 2015.

As during the previous reporting period, the uncertainty that characterized Bambari and its surroundings for the past couple of months, together with the low operational capacity resulting from the complete looting of the Mercy Corps Field Office, led to very minimal achievements during the reporting period. During the quarter under review, Mercy Corps project staff and other key staff members including the Acting Head of Office, the Rabat-based Regional Security Advisor, and the Bangui-based Protection Sector Manager, undertook several visits to ensure minimal and continuous presence of Mercy Corps in target communities, while working on restoring the operational and logistical capacity of Mercy Corps on the ground.

Because the 4-month no-cost extension awarded in September of 2014 was coming to an end on January 22, 2015 with no substantial progress achieved, Mercy Corps submitted a request for an unfunded-modification of the project, to enable a potential redesign of activities to suit the new context of the intervention zone. The preliminary findings of the 10-day security assessment conducted by Mercy Corps' Security Advisor in Bambari informed significant changes around the project. USAID/OFDA has approved the requested unfunded modification of the RECOVER program until September 30, 2015.

Despite its limited operational capacity in Bambari, Mercy Corps was able, through sporadic follow-up visits of its staff and regular contributions by community-based protection networks, to carry out the following activities:

- 24 GBV outreach sessions in ten communities (out of 15), reaching approximately 2,778 people;
- The referral and treatment of 11 critical GBV cases at the Listening Center for psychosocial and medical services;
- The procurement of a significant number of dignity kits to be distributed to survivors in IDP camps and other neighborhoods of Bambari; and
- The rehabilitation assessment of the Listening Center so as to respond to standards and needs.

## 2. Program Overview

The RECOVER program was designed to respond to the mounting protection and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in northeastern Central African Republic (CAR). The Ouaka Prefecture has been particularly affected by the invasion of Séléka rebels in December 2012 and March 2013, during which time the population faced widespread insecurity and human rights abuses. The region is one of the most vulnerable prefectures in terms of food insecurity in the country<sup>1</sup> and is home to over 30% of those displaced by the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Almost everyone in Bambari and the surrounding areas has been affected by the conflict, either directly or indirectly. Many struggle to rebuild their livelihoods and cope with the psychosocial effects of having experienced or witnessed violence. Through RECOVER, Mercy Corps is building upon the foundation of its previous programming in Bambari, providing much-needed assistance in the areas of psychosocial support, GBV prevention and response, health, and economic support to internally displaced persons (IDPs). The RECOVER program is responding to the urgent needs of those affected by the Séléka takeover through protection interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> WFP, Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) in CAR, June 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Estimation of Civil Population Displacement in Zones Evaluated by the Protection Cluster in CAR, February 20, 2013

Expected Results (*following the unfunded modification*):

- 35,000 vulnerable people, including 25,000 IDPs in conflict-affected communities, will have access to protection services, including prevention and response to GBV;
- 15 communities (reaching approximately 75,000 people) will have increased capacity to prevent and mitigate the effects of conflict.

### 3. Security

As mentioned in the previous quarterly report, the growing tensions and fragmentations within the Ex-Seleka group, headquartered in Bambari, as well as within the Anti-Balaka militia, have continued to put the Ouaka region at risk of potential violence. A number of clashes continued to take place in Bambari and its surroundings for the control of natural resources and the need to affirm supremacy and recognition from both national and international key players of the conflict in the CAR.

Over the reporting quarter, a country-wide dialogue took place in Bambari and other regions of the country to inform the upcoming National Reconciliation Forum to be held in Bangui. Concurrently, a new initiative was formed in Ouaka Prefecture to address the tensions between Christian and Muslim communities. Also during the reporting period, the recently-appointed Commander in Chief of the Ex-Seleka group, backed by the Goula<sup>3</sup> faction, was relocated from Bambari towards other Northeastern towns of Bria, Ndele, and Birao, leaving the control of the town and its surroundings to the Fulani-dominated faction of the Ex-Seleka group.

Through the visit of its Regional Security Advisor, Mercy Corps carried out a thorough security assessment during the quarter, to ensure sustainability of its presence and interventions in the area. Main findings have been compiled in a comprehensive report for internal dissemination and decision making.

### 4. Performance Summary

#### Award-level Beneficiaries

Cumulative Period Targeted		Reporting Period Reached		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP	Total	IDP
35,000	25,000	2,778	0	14,352	0

Note: Mercy Corps notes that among beneficiaries reached, there are IDPs who are hosted by family members in the target communities. The total number of IDPs has been difficult to quantify, as these individuals do not self-identify as IDPs.

#### Progress to Date

<b>SECTOR #1</b> <b>Economic Recovery and Market Systems (ERMS)</b>	<i>Objective: Address the urgent socioeconomic needs of vulnerable conflict-affected populations, particularly youth and women, in order to boost economic Recovery and ease the impact of displacement</i>	
Geographic Area (s)	Bambari and surrounding areas, Ouaka Prefecture, CAR	
Cumulative Period Targeted	Total: 2,250	IDP: 200 (will depend on final targeting)
Reporting Period Reached	Total: 0	IDP: 0
Cumulative Period Reached	Total: 0	IDP: 0
<b>Subsector 1.1 New Livelihoods Development</b>		

<sup>3</sup> Ethnic tribe populating the Extreme North of CAR; the Ex-Seleka faction is composed in majority of Goulas, who backed former president Michel Djotodia.

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through new livelihoods development activities, by sex	Male	Yes	450	0	0
	Female	Yes	450	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Number of new MSEs started	N/A	Yes	900	0	0
Percentage of people, by sex, continuing in their new livelihoods by program completion	Male	Yes	80%	0	0
	Female	Yes	80%	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	Yes	\$58,800	0	0
<b>Subsector 1.2 Microfinance</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached <sup>4</sup>	Cumulative Reached
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	No	0	N/A	N/A
	Female	No	0	N/A	N/A
	Other	No	0	N/A	N/A
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	No	0	N/A	N/A
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Subsector 1.3 Livelihoods Restoration</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Value Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people assisted through livelihoods restoration activities, by sex	Male	Yes	225	0	0
	Female	Yes	225	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Percent of beneficiaries by sex reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	Male	Yes	80%	0	0
	Female	Yes	80%	0	0
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	N/A	Yes	\$28,500	0	0

**Sector I – Summary:**

<sup>4</sup> Microfinance related activities under Sector 1 have been removed due to the high security risks currently observed (as per request approved by USAID/OFDA in March 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Men would not have been excluded from the community-based microfinance groups: member composition would have been the choice of each group.

As a result of the events in Bambari since May 2014 and the continuous absence of safety and security for the implementation of the livelihoods-related activities, Mercy Corps requested the removal of activities linked to the Sector I in its unfunded modification to the agreement.

<b>SECTOR #2 PROTECTION</b>		<i>Objective: Strengthen services for conflict-affected children and assist survivors to reintegrate into their communities</i>			
Geographic Area (s)	Bambari and surrounding areas, Ouaka Prefecture, CAR				
Cumulative Period Targeted	Total: 35,000	IDP: 25,000 (approximate on IDP sites)			
Reporting Period Reached	Total: <b>3,366</b>	IDP: <b>1,708</b>			
Cumulative Period Reached	Total: <b>11,574</b>	IDP: <b>1,708</b> (started with the IDP settlements)			
<b>Subsector: Psychosocial Support Services</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of people trained in psychosocial support, by sex	Male	Yes	0	0	11
	Female	Yes	11	0	20
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Percentage of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well-being at program close, disaggregated by sex	Male	Yes	75%	0	0
	Female	Yes	75%	0	0
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
<b>Subsector: Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence</b>					
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Applicable	Cumulative Period Targeted	Reporting Period Reached	Cumulative Reached
Number of individuals benefitting from GBV services, by sex	Male	Yes	0 (will depend on cases referred)	0	1
	Female	Yes	0 (will depend on cases referred)	9	186
	Other	Yes	0	0	0
Number of people trained in GBV prevention or response, by sex	Male	Yes	7,500	1,082	5,911
	Female	Yes	7,500	1,696	8,165
	Other	Yes	0	0	0

## **Sector II – Summary:**

### **○ Psychosocial support services**

#### *Psychosocial support services network*

Over the reporting quarter, Mercy Corps renewed the voluntary agreement for all 11 community-based counselors, as a result of the new extension. Despite the number of challenges on the ground in Bambari, the network continued to conduct their normal duties, including GBV awareness campaigns, psychosocial support, and adequate referral for victims of violence within their respective vicinities.

Counselors also carried out 24 GBV and human rights awareness sessions and referred 13 extreme cases to the Listening Center, while providing other related psychosocial support and handling number of domestic violence matters with traditional and local leaders (mediation).

#### *Play therapy programming for conflict-affected children and youth*

Following the looting of the Mercy Corps office in Bambari and the loss of play-therapy materials, this activity was put on hold awaiting the availability of resources. Given the level of trauma affecting the children and youth in Bambari, Mercy Corps deemed it necessary to continue play therapy activities, and the current quarter was used to re-identify the formerly trained mentors and clubs. With the new context of Bambari since June 2014 (people fled their neighborhoods for IDP sites), coupled with the need to ensure efficiency, project management opted to reduce the number of clubs from 30 to 14.

It is worth mentioning that the re-identification process took longer than expected, as many mentors and their assistants (previously trained by Mercy Corps), were enrolled in a short-term cash for work scheme led by a French NGO, Triangle, in Bambari.

#### *Promotion of social cohesion (conflict preparedness and response)*

This activity is still on hold. The ongoing tensions have not allowed the re-assembly of the community-based religious committee of Bambari. However, Mercy Corps field agents continued to monitor the situation and maintained close contact with key stakeholders, while sensitizing concerned parties on the absolute necessity to set up a community-based social cohesion mechanism. In months to come, this activity will be transitioned to one of the Mercy Corps' EU-funded projects implemented in Bambari.

#### ○ **Prevention and response to GBV cases (Listening Center activities)**

##### *Survivors support center activities*

Given the high level of human rights abuses and regular violence against civilian populations by various armed groups in Bambari, Mercy Corps rehabilitated its existing listening center. With additional funding from a DFID-funded project in Bambari, Mercy Corps intends to provide more high quality services to survivors and victims of violence.

Meanwhile, the Listening Center have recorded a slight increase in activities during the reporting quarter; from nine cases treated in the previous quarter, as a result of the sporadic presence of Mercy Corps staff in Bambari, to 13 cases (all females) during the current reporting quarter<sup>6</sup>. Mercy Corps facilitated medical services, provided psychosocial support and in-kind assistance as applicable, and followed up regularly for all cases.

##### *GBV outreach activities*

Locations	Women	Men	Girls	Boys	Total
Borno	29	11	23	21	84
City center	306	216	187	178	887
Sabalé	21	17	24	10	72
IDP site M	52	40	47	47	186
Ouangaye	22	14	11	15	62
Madiouaka	101	42	85	45	273
IDP site S	337	44	59	23	463
Atongo	101	96	107	64	368
IDP site NDV	63	73	27	40	203
Kidjigra	48	48	46	38	180
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1080</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>2,778</b>

The network of community-based counsellors (CBCs) achieved quite a lot with regards to the context in Bambari. Given the volatility of the situation, Mercy Corps' GBV Officer regularly reviewed and advised on appropriate locations to hold GBV outreach and other community sensitization activities. Out of the 15 initial communities targeted at the start of the project, five are completely out of reach to date, as they are located five kilometers outside of Bambari town; while four vicinities allow temporary access, depending on the nature and level of threats involved. Nevertheless, the network held 24 awareness sessions within 10 vicinities of Bambari, reaching 2,778 people (see table for details).

The main topics emphasized during this quarter

<sup>6</sup> Please note that due to the uncertainty of extension of the RECOVER project, coupled with the resumption of fight in the town of Bambari current January and February 2015, the listening center was not operational for approximately 3 weeks.

included “the denial of resources as a form of violence” and “women’s rights and their place in the community.” Other forms of sensitization habitually used by the CBCs, including the door-to-door, and the targeted debates, have been stopped for the time being due to the security constraints. Mercy Corps anticipates resuming with those approaches as soon as the context permits.

There was also a joint effort between the community counselors and the existing protection committee members in carrying out mass sensitization events centered on infantile and maternal health as a right.

*Sensitization sessions at health centers of Bambari*



#### *Community-based protection committee outreach activities*

With the end of the no-cost-extension, by January 22, 2015, and the uncertainty of the extension, the project management had (temporarily) put an end to its collaboration with community-based protection committees at the end of the previous quarter (December 31, 2014). But with approval of the unfunded modification/extension in early February of 2015, Mercy Corps undertook a new identification using the performance records for each committee and individuals. As of the time of this report, nine protection committees, for a total of 28 members, have been put in place across the town and the outskirts of Bambari. New CPCs will carry out protection monitoring tasks, as initiated during the last quarter. A one-day refresher workshop was carried out by the field-based protection officer to ensure quality delivery of services. More achievements under this section will be shown as of next quarter.

## **5. Coordination**

Over this reporting quarter, Mercy Corps resumed with its usual participation in all the relevant regional sub-cluster meetings, including the protection (led by UNHCR), health (headed by the WHO) and emergency (by UNOCHA) meetings. Also, Mercy Corps attended the UNFPA-led GBV working group of Bambari. Given the critical situation of security and human rights violations in Bambari, Mercy Corps regularly attended the bi-weekly meetings held by UNDSS on civilian and military issues. It is also worth underlining the coordination that took place over the quarter in Bangui concerning the GBVIMS use for more appropriate collection and compilation of in-country GBV statistics.

## **6. Conclusion**

Despite significant challenges facing Mercy Corps in Bambari, it is working hard to address the countless needs that lie in the targeted zone of intervention. At the time this report, Mercy Corps has been efficiently working to reach a reasonable level of program and support operations, while cultivating its acceptance of its vision and goals from the communities it seeks to serve.

Over the reporting period, a number of serious tensions were noted between warring factions, communities, and/or with international actors. However, Mercy Corps' recent security evaluation mission has proposed a range of recommendations to modify program approaches in the volatile context. Mercy Corps remains confident of getting back on track at the soonest possible time so as to enable communities fully and freely access services intended for them.