



Submitted: December 14th, 2015

The Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project (SERAP)

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

PROJECT SUMMARY

Award No: AID-OFDA-G-13-00093

Start Date: June 15, 2013

End Date: September 14, 2015

Report Date: December 14th, 2015

Total Award: USD \$1,510,927

I. Executive Summary

The Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project (SERAP) began in June 2013 to respond to the mounting protection and relief needs of conflict-affected communities in Southeastern Central African Republic (CAR). The goal of the program was to increase food security, enhance community resilience and strengthen the protective environment via community-based mechanisms for children, women and men affected by conflict in the Mbomou prefecture, including survivors, escapees and host communities. The program implemented activities in the sectors of protection, economic recovery and market systems, agriculture and food security, and humanitarian coordination and information management.

Over the course of the SERAP program, the following results were accomplished:

- 1,323 survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and survivors of LRA violence accessed protection response services: psychosocial care, medical references, or socioeconomic support;
- 232 protection committee members (156 men and 76 women) were trained in protection and GBV in the community and conducted awareness-raising sessions on GBV and child protection;
- 51 community counselors (9 men and 42 women) were trained to provide psychosocial support to survivors in their respective communities;
- 54 play therapy coaches (44 men and 10 women) were trained to implement play therapy activities using sports for development curriculum;
- 2,670 children and youth (1,460 boys and 1,210 girls) participated in these play therapy sessions twice a week;
- 2,010 members (1,709 women and 301 men) participated in 86 Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), saving a total of 31,262 USD and disbursing 9,354 USD in credit;
- 2,500 members (1,670 women and 830 men) of 100 food security groups benefitted from agricultural inputs valued at 75 USD each; and,
- 176 representatives from food security groups (108 men and 68 women) were trained on agricultural techniques, livestock, and fish farming, and went on to support their food security groups.

II. Program Overview

The goal of the SERAP program was to increase food security, enhance community resilience and strengthen the protective environment via community-based mechanisms for children, women and men affected by conflict. The program responded to the needs of communities affected by violence perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Séléka rebel groups. The program built upon the foundation of past successful protection programs in Rafai, Bangassou and surrounding areas. Through SERAP, Mercy Corps provided urgently needed support to LRA conflict-affected survivors and other vulnerable communities through interventions in child protection, agriculture, food security, and socio-economic support, as well as humanitarian coordination and information management. Mercy Corps also built the capacity of other organizations to respond to protection needs.

Expected results for both phases of the SERAP program included:

- 53,381 vulnerable people, including 6,000 IDPs in LRA-affected communities, will continue to have access to protection services, including prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV);
- 7,500 vulnerable people, including 4,000 IDPs in LRA-affected communities, will have restored assets in order to promote livelihoods and economic recovery;
- 4,500 vulnerable people, including 2,500 IDPs in LRA-affected communities, will have improved agriculture livelihoods and income generation opportunities; and
- Surveillance information will be collected to provide timely and rigorous early warning and vulnerability information on emerging and evolving crises situations for 93,457 people living in the Mbomou prefecture, including 10,000 IDPs.

In September 2014 Mercy Corps was granted a cost modification to extend the Southeast Economic Recovery and Protection Project activities until September 2015 with similar objectives but also to specifically address needs brought about by continued conflict throughout the country.

III. Security

The security situation in Mbomou Prefecture remained more stable than in other parts of the country throughout much of the program, particularly during the second phase of SERAP. However, in early October 2013, led by Colonel Abdallah, the Séléka perpetrated attacks on the civilian population, leading to many deaths and instilling fear throughout the community. Colonel Abdallah was arrested by the central forces in mid-October, leading to an improved climate of security in the Mbomou zone. Over 100 MISCA (The African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic) were stationed in Bangassou and the program team witnessed a general calm in the area beginning in mid-October 2013.

However, as a result of attacks in August 2013 (reported in FY13 Q4) affecting two of Mercy Corps' vehicles, Mercy Corps' standard operating procedures were revised significantly for the entire operating area of Mbomou. Vehicle movements were limited to a 5km radius around Bangassou and Rafai and activities were redirected to be implemented within the radius. Mercy Corps was able to carry out many activities outside of that area thanks to the continued participation of our protection committees, community counselors, and local partners and community leaders. Security assessments in October 2014 reflecting improved security allowed Mercy Corps to lift this restriction, allowing staff to focus on outreach and service provision in surrounding rural areas.

During the program's implementation, the security situation in Bangui remained tense and uncertain, which had an impact on flight schedules to the southeast, restricting Mercy Corps' ability to move staff and resources into the field.

Over the course of the second half of the program, criminal and militia activity on the roads between Bangui and Bangassou posed mounting significant logistical and security problems. Many items needed to implement activities - e.g. fuel, construction materials for rehabilitation of the listening center or for reparations of the Mercy Corps offices, etc. – were to be transported via road transportation. In September 2014, a clearly marked NGO truck traveling to deliver materials on the road to Bangassou was attacked and pillaged in a nearby prefecture. Given the travelling distances required for items to arrive in both Bangassou and Rafai, Mercy Corps decided prioritized convoy travel with other NGO trucks. Such logistical

and security concerns, however, delayed the delivery of crucial materials and the functioning of the SERAP, especially in Rafai.

Finally, during the fiscal year 2015 quarter 4 reporting period, two Mercy Corps vehicles were leaving Rafai for Bangassou following the closure of the base in Rafai when they were stopped by a group of youths who had put up a roadblock. After several hours and the theft of the staff's personal belongings, MINUSCA intervened to allow the humanitarian vehicles to pass.

IV. Performance Summary

Award-level Beneficiaries

Cumulative Period Targeted		Cumulative Period Reached	
Total	IDP	Total	IDP
93,457	10,000	94,474	12,119

Sector-level Beneficiaries

SECTOR #1 PROTECTION	<i>Objective:</i> LRA-affected populations have continued access to protection services	
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in the towns of Rafai, Agoumar, Selim, Dembia, Geurekindo and surrounding villages	
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 93,457	IDP : 3,000
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 94,474	IDP: 12,119

SECTOR #2 Economic Recovery and Market Systems	<i>Objective:</i> Livelihood assets of LRA-affected IDP and host households are restored in order to meet household needs	
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in Bangassou town	
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 3,500	IDP: 2,000
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 5,838	IDP: 2,112

SECTOR #3 Agriculture and Food Security	<i>Objective:</i> Agricultural livelihoods and income generation opportunities are strengthened for LRA-affected IDP and host households	
Geographic Area (s)	Mbomou Prefecture in Southeastern CAR, with particular focus in Bangassou town	
Beneficiaries Targeted	Total: 2,500 direct; 12,500 indirect	IDP: 1,000 direct; 5,000 indirect
Beneficiaries Reached (Cumulative)	Total: 4,500 direct ; 22,500 indirect	IDP: 3,434 direct ; 17,170

Table 1: Results phase 1 of the SERAP program (prior to cost modification)

SECTOR 1 : PROTECTION				
Subsector: Child Protection				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value targeted	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people trained in child protection, disaggregated by sex	Male	5,662	18,397	Target achieved at 269% Data provided by protection committees ; many duplications
	Female	8,493	19,613	
	Other	NA	NA	
Percentage of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well-being at program close, disaggregated by sex.	Boys	75%	93% (EVAMIPA)	Target achieved at 124% Results from the midterm evaluation carried out in August of 2014
	Girls	75%	88%(EVAMIPA)	
	Other	NA		
Subsector : Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of individuals benefitting from GBV services, by sex	Male	3,500	27,861	Target achieved at 908% rapportés Data provided by program beneficiaries (counselors, committees, etc.). Data not confirmed and many duplications.
	Female	3,500	35,698	
	Other	NA	NA	
Number of people trained in GBV prevention or response, by sex	Male	20	107	Target achieved at 388% 143 people (community counselors, local authorities and health focal points) were trained on GBV.
	Female	15	36	
	Other	NA	NA	
Subsector : Psychosocial Support Services				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people trained in psychosocial support services, by sex	Male	0	0	Target achieved at 190% 40 people were trained on psychosocial services.
	Female	21	40	
	Other	NA	NA	

SECTOR 2 : Economic Recovery and Market Systems**Subsector : Livelihoods Restoration**

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex	Male	1,470	1,489	Target achieved at 114% 3,974 people were supported in VSLA and training from the Resilience II program. 3,500 people were beneficiaries of cash transfers
	Female	2,030	2,505	
	Other	NA	NA	
Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	75%	N/A	Not measured from first phase – see below.
Total USD amount channeled into the program area through livelihoods restoration activities	N/A	\$19.6 /beneficiary (\$68600 total)	\$19.6 /beneficiary (\$68600 total)	

Subsector: Microfinance

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	189	189	Target not achieved 450 people benefitted from VSLA trainings that were not functional
	Female	261	261	
	Other	NA	NA	
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	75% of groups	0	Target not achieved No functioning VSLA groups
Total USD amount channelled into the program area through subsector activities	N/A	\$2,160	0	NA

Subsector: New Livelihoods Development

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people assisted through new livelihoods development, by sex	Male	240	269	This includes support provided to Resilience groups (small grants and training) and vocational training provided to 260 youth.
	Female	240	341	
Number of new MSEs started	n/a			Not measured
Percentage of people, by sex, continuing in their new livelihoods by program completion	Male	75%	86%	
	Female	75%	86%	
Total USD amount channelled into the program area through sub-sector activities.	n/a	\$2,000	\$2,000	A total of \$2,000 was distributed to 24 resilience groups to support their selected IGAs.

SECTOR 3: Agriculture and Food Security**Subsector : Improving Agricultural Production**

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	Male	1,000	1,160	More women than men in the associations
	Female	1,000	840	
	Other	NA	NA	
Projected increase in the number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed system activities/ agricultural input for beneficiary households.	N/A	2 months		Not included in indicator measurement

SECTOR 4 : Humanitarian Coordination and Information Management

Subsector: Information Management

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations utilizing information management services	N/A	24	8	
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations directly contributing to information products	N/A	25	9	
Number of products made available by information management services that are accessed by clients	N/A	12	6	

Table 1: Results phase II of the SERAP program (post cost modification)

SECTOR #1 : PROTECTION

Subsector: Child Protection

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people trained in child protection, disaggregated by sex	Male	40,000	33,374	Target achieved at 85% 72,638 beneficiaries trained/sensitized on child protection (though this likely includes duplicates)
	Female	45,000	39,264	
	Other	NA	NA	
Percentage of targeted children reporting an improvement in their sense of safety and well-being at program close, disaggregated by sex.	Boys	75%	64%	Result estimated at 64% Estimation made at the time of the September 2015 final evaluation. Much influenced by the departure of Mercy Corps from the zone.
	Girls	75%	64%	
	Other	NA	NA	

Subsector: Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of individuals benefitting from GBV services, by sex	Male	45,000	46,133	Target achieved at 93% 94,474 people benefitted from GBV services. The total of individuals reached through activities including mass sensitizations.
	Female	57,000	48,341	
	Other	NA	NA	
Number of people trained in GBV prevention or response, by sex	Male	80	50	Targets achieved at 82% 718 people were trained on the prevention and response to GBV.
	Female	800	668	
	Other (children)	190	156	

Subsector: Psychosocial Support Services				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people trained in psychosocial support services, by sex	Male	0	9	Target achieved at 118% 123 people (and also a few community animators from the PPEC program) were trained on psychosocial services.
	Female	104	114	
	Other	NA	NA	
SECTOR#2: ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND MARKET SYSTEMS				
Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people assisted through livelihood restoration activities, by sex	Male	1,470	1,886	Target achieved at 167% The 50 other VSLA formed in Rafai (not planned at the beginning of the program) explain the extra beneficiaries served.
	Female	2,030	3,952	
	Other	NA	N/A	
Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	75%	86%	
Total USD amount channelled into the program area through livelihoods restoration activities	N/A	\$19.6 /beneficiary (\$68,600 total)	0	Target not achieved The second planned transfer for livelihoods restoration did not take place.
Subsector: Microfinance				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people, by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support	Male	189	254	Target achieved at 428% In addition to the 18 groups targeted, the program trained 50 functional groups in Rafai.
	Female	261	1,671	
	Other	NA	N/A	
Percentage of financial service accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	75%	100%	Target achieved at 133% All the groups put in place by SERAP 2 are functioning well.
Total USD amount channelled into the program area through subsector activities	N/A	2,160	35,693	Target achieved at 1,652% The surplus of VSLA in Rafai explains the increase in this indicator. All the VSLA are making regular contributions to their groups.
SECTOR #3: AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY				
INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex.	Male	1250	2,500	Target achieved at 100% 100 groups benefitted from agricultural inputs.
	Female	1250		
	Other	NA	NA	
Projected increase in the number of months of food self-sufficiency due to seed system activities/ agricultural input for beneficiary households.	N/A	2 months	-	Data not measured.

SECTOR #4: HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

INDICATORS	Disaggregated	Cumulative value target	Cumulative Reached	Comments
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations utilizing information management services	N/A	24	8	Not continued in second year of program.
Number and percentage of humanitarian organizations directly contributing to information products	N/A	25	9	Not continued in second year of program.
Number of products made available by information management services that are accessed by clients	N/A	12	6	Not continued in second year of program.

Sector: Protection

The SERAP program responded to the protection needs of communities affected by the violence perpetrated by the LRA and the Séléka. The primary objective of this sector was that LRA-affected populations have continued access to protection services. Interventions were carried out in three sub-sectors, including child protection, prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), and psychosocial support. The program's approach to protection included both connecting survivors of violence to basic services like psychological and medical support and reinforcing community-based systems to respond to the needs of survivors.

The SERAP program began with meetings with local authorities and beneficiaries, with the latter being advertised through notices published in public places. These meetings informed participants on the program objectives and the types of beneficiaries per activity, defined selection criteria, and identified stakeholders for the implementation of the program. The sections below outline interventions subsequently carried out throughout the program in the protection sector, particularly in the child protection and GBV subsectors.

Subsectors: Child Protection and Psychosocial Support Services

Central African children who live in the LRA and Séléka conflict-affected areas targeted by SERAP have faced a risk of severe human rights abuses and violations, but also specific protection needs due to ongoing insecurity and violence. Many have suffered trauma after witnessing extreme levels of violence such as the killing of family members, rape and other sexual violence, and the looting and burning of their homes. Moreover, the LRA has been notorious for terrorizing communities and abducting children. The child protection and psychosocial support services sub-sectors responded to the needs of these children by reinforcing community-based mechanisms to offer services that included the identification and monitoring of protection needs, referrals of children who have experienced harm, exploitation or abuse in need of care and assistance to appropriate services, tracking of child rights violations, reunification of separated children and family members, and psychosocial and mentoring support for conflict-affected children. The program built on previous work by Mercy Corps with community focal points and protection committees, and implemented play therapy activities to create a safe space for children.

Work with Community Focal Points and Protection Committees: Central to the SERAP program's approach was its work to establish community-based mechanisms to help refer children to psychosocial services and raised community awareness of protection issues. From the beginning of the program, protection committee members (many from committees established through previous interventions) received refresher trainings on protection issues including child protection, child rights, GBV prevention and response, and referral pathways. Mercy Corps also trained community leaders on the local justice system, consequences of child rape and referral systems, and trained medical professionals on intake and medical treatment of survivors of sexual violence. Community focal points (both community leaders and medical professionals) were established to take leadership on protection issues in their communities. Some trainings for committee members, local leaders, and medical professionals were carried out in partnership with *Médecins Sans Frontières-Belgium's* public health outreach team. In September 2014, MSF-Belgium gave a presentation to protection committee members on basic public health information and services provided at an MSF-supported hospital in Bangassou.

The committee members and focal points were responsible for conducting awareness-raising activities in their communities and for actively connecting children, men and women to psychosocial support systems in their region. Awareness-raising activities typically included a combination of speeches, discussion groups, and theater and dance activities. Topics covered included child protection, women's rights, human rights, GBV, children's rights and gender considerations. Throughout the program, committee members and focal points, in collaboration with Mercy Corps and community counselors trained under the GBV subsector, held awareness-raising activities with 268,681 community members (125,765 men, 142,916 women).

In addition to offering frequent training for committee members and focal points, Mercy Corps helped organize regular coordination meetings to seek feedback about protection issues in the community and to trouble shoot any issues encountered in the field. Through these coordination meetings, Mercy Corps was able to better plan activities that met the needs of the communities. The meetings were well-attended and typically lasted half a day with some counselors/focal points traveling from up to 35 kilometers away to attend. By the end of the program, 232 protection committee members (156 men and 76 women) from 53 committees were taking part in coordination meetings. Mercy Corps also invited local authorities to these meetings to reinforce their level of collaboration with committee members.

« I learned many things about peace, equality between boys and girls, citizenship, participation, children's rights, and how to protect myself from HIV/AIDs. I met new friends from other communities and ethnic groups, and today I know more about how to live peacefully with others. » - a 16 year old displaced boy in the Play Therapy club « Pigeon

Rafai »

Play therapy: Play therapy activities were implemented by Mercy Corps with the goal of creating a "safe space" where children in the target region who had been affected by violence perpetrated by the LRA. The activities worked with children who had been reached by a previous OFDA-funded activity. As a part of their involvement in the groups, children were able to play, learn, socialize, build skills, and establish relationships with trained community mentors based on respect and trust. Play activities included participation in sports such as football (soccer), tennis, basketball and dance. Young people also developed skills in sexual

health communication much more about the mode of transmission and prevention of HIV / AIDS and STDs, participation and psychosocial support linked to different forms of violence. Throughout the program, 54 play therapy coaches (44 men and 10 women) were trained to implement play therapy activities according to the Sport for Development Curriculum, which was developed under a previous OFDA-funded program. Play therapy activities ultimately reached 2,670 youth aged 8-17 years old (1,460 boys and 1,210 girls), who participated in sessions twice a week. Following these play therapy sessions, 98% of boys and 93% of girls claimed that their improved sense of security and well-being by participating in these activities.



Youth play therapy session, Rafai



Play therapy group meets in the evening - 2013

Subsector: Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence

Listening Centers: Sexual abuse and rape are common during armed conflict and have been reported by victims of the LRA conflict in CAR. In CAR, gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread, and women and young girls in particular are frequently subject to physical, sexual, and psychological harm and suffering. Funding through the SERAP program enabled Mercy Corps to maintain its Listening Centers in Rafai and Bangassou, which provided holistic psychosocial services to 1,323 survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and survivors of LRA violence over the course of the program. These services included psychosocial counseling, referral for medical care to partner health facilities, (and if necessary covering the cost of medical care), connection with legal services, and access to our resilience and livelihood programming.

During the program, the most common types of cases received at the two Listening Centers were psychological and emotional abuse cases. Many of these cases took place between family members, often between intimate partners. Cases of emotional and physical aggression were also common, and frequently included denial of resources (food, clothes, forceful removal from a shared household) upon women informing their partners of a pregnancy. In response to the prevalence of cases of emotional and physical aggression between intimate partners, psychosocial agents from the Listening Centers organized trainings for couples on conflict mediation. These couples then went on to conduct awareness-raising activities in their communities.

In addition to responding to the needs of couples for training on conflict mediation, agents from the Listening Centers used information collected on visitors to the centers to target training for community members on GBV. For example, across both of our southeast offices,

Mercy Corps witnessed a spike in the incidents of child rape (aged 4-14) from April to June 2014. Mercy Corps heard that it was becoming more frequent in the peripheral areas of both Bangassou and Rafai, and that often parents were taking their children to the traditional justice systems for resolution; this usually resulted in an exchange of money and nothing further. In response, Mercy Corps sought to educate the local leadership, who make up the traditional justice system, on the incidents and consequences of child rape and on the referral system and the importance of seeking medical attention. Mercy Corps held training in March of 2014 for 56 village chiefs (including only one woman). Themes covered were gender based violence, child rights, the referral system, the 72-hour delay, and the importance of seeking psychosocial and medical assistance, especially concerning child victims of rape.

A training session in March of 2015 targeted social groups at high risk of GBV such as sex workers and women accused of sorcery, educating them on GBV, providing individual psychosocial sessions, and referring them to Mercy Corps' social reintegration programs. Midway through the program, Mercy Corps also recruited male psychosocial agents to meet the needs of male survivors of sexual violence.

Outreach Activities: In addition to providing services to survivors at its Listening Centers, Mercy Corps sought to improve overall community awareness of GBV, and to improve services available to GBV survivors in the target region. Community counselors trained by Mercy Corps participated in many of the same training and awareness-raising activities as the protection committees (who were also involved in raising awareness about GBV), and organized events on specific topics, such as one event targeted towards improving couples' awareness of domestic GBV.



Community counselor speaks about GBV during an awareness-raising session in Bangassou

Early in the program, above and beyond the normal awareness raising activities conducted by community counselors and protection committees, Mercy Corps organized several major activities, in both Rafai and Bangassou for the *16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence*, between November 25 and December 10, 2013. These activities included mass sensitizations through dialogue and theater, debates among community leaders over the effects of GBV on the community, and a kick-off march in each location. The community counselors and protection committees worked together to create skits showing the harms

of domestic violence and the importance of sending girls to school. In the town of Rafai over 300 community members took part in the march to kick off the 16 Days and over 1100 people were reached in mass sensitization activities throughout Rafai over the period of the campaign. In Bangassou over 2,000 people were educated over the course of the 16 Days campaign. The themes covered included the effects of GBV on the community, reproductive health and family planning, HIV/AIDS and human rights.

Mercy Corps also worked throughout the program to increase the Listening Centers' collaboration with community medical service providers in the area. These informal partnerships helped community counselors and protection committee members to communicate more complete service provision information to local populations. Mercy Corps' partnership with MSF Belgium (mentioned above) brought MSF health promoters to

the Listening Centers to participate in activities. Mercy Corps was also able to expand the geographic reach of medical referral points through its work with medical personnel.

Resilience Groups: To complement services provided to survivors of violence through the Listening Centers, Mercy Corps created community “resilience groups” to assist with the reintegration of youth, women, and men victimized by the LRA or recovering from other violence. The groups helped survivors to recover from their experiences by providing a safe space where they could receive increased access to basic financial services via savings and loans activities, life-skills awareness, and income-generating activities (IGA). Mercy Corps worked both with resilience groups that were pre-existing from previous activities and new groups formed through the SERAP program. 36 resilience groups were initially created in Rafai and Bangassou, with an average of 20 members per group, and the groups were trained on the resilience group curriculum, which covered topics related to literacy, life skills and financial literacy. The resilience group training cycle lasted 2 months and comprised 16 sessions. Each group was trained by focal points trained by Mercy Corps, and each group had a peer educator and an assistant. Training for the resilience groups on life skills covered topics such as essential family practices, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention, protection and GBV awareness, creating a business plan, basic budgeting and microenterprise development.

Sector: Economic Recovery and Market Systems

The main objective of the Economic Recovery and Market Systems sector was to “enhance community protection and resilience mechanisms through innovative community based socio-economic programming.” Three subsectors under this sector included Livelihoods Restoration, Microfinance, and New Livelihoods Development. Both resilience group members (primarily made up of beneficiaries of the Listening Centers) and the wider community (including IDPs) benefitted from cash transfers under the Livelihoods Restoration subsector. Resilience group members were the primary beneficiaries of activities under the Microfinance and New Livelihoods Development subsectors, which included village savings and loan associations (VSLA) training, and assistance establishing vocational and income-generation activities. In total, 86 resilience groups received training related to livelihoods recovery, microfinance and new livelihoods.

Subsector: Livelihoods Restoration

Activities under the livelihoods restoration subsector centered on the distribution of cash to vulnerable IDP and host family households with the goal of enabling these groups to re-establish their productive assets and resume livelihoods.

At the beginning of the program, in August 2013, an Emergency Market Mapping Analysis (EMMA) was conducted in Bagassou to guide livelihoods restoration activities and identify solutions to the major disruptions preventing households from restoring their livelihoods. The EMMA was supported using complementary funds from UNICEF. Results from the EMMA were cross-checked with a market analysis carried out by program staff to identify potential opportunities in the area and to determine how the program would impact the local economy.

Prior to the distribution of cash transfers, a committee of residents, IDPs and local authorities was created to facilitate communication with beneficiaries on selection criteria and benefits, to organize and arrange community meetings, and to help solve and respond to beneficiary complaints.

In the first phase of SERAP, livelihood restoration activities began November 7th and continued through December 27th, 2013. Mercy Corps distributed cash directly to 1,245 men and 2,275 women for livelihoods restoration, at the rate of \$19.20 per person. This amount was determined based on the results from the EMMA. A total of 31,680,000 XAF, or \$67,837, was distributed to the 3,520 beneficiary households. Mercy Corps used the hand-to-hand direct distribution method to transfer the cash as it was considered appropriate to the context, fast and because it minimized risk to beneficiaries as well as to Mercy Corps staff. The payment mechanism was discussed and pre-approved by recipients before transactions were made. The cash transfer was convenient both because it delivered cash directly into the hands of beneficiaries and allowed an injection of cash into the local economy. In the absence of financial institutions in Bangassou and Rafai, mobile technology or any other method of cash-transfer, this remained the only one way to transfer cash grants to selected beneficiaries in order to restart their previous or begin new livelihoods activities.

Subsector: Microfinance

Under the microfinance subsector, resilience group members' access to basic financial services was improved via participation in VSLAs. Training on VSLA was directed towards adult men and women's resilience groups, and was included in the wider resilience training offered to these groups at the beginning of the program. Resilience groups completed their VSLA training in January and February of 2014. Further training was held for additional resilience groups throughout the program. By the end of the program, 2,010 members (1,709 women and 301 men) participated in 86 VSLA, saving a total of 31,262 USD and disbursing a total of 9,354 USD in credit.

« I'm a widowed mother of 12 and president of the VSLA « BATA INDOU. » Since joining this group my life has changed. I already received 2 loans from my group and have paid them back. With the small loans, I started a small business – making and selling doughnuts at the school. With my profits I've been able to pay the school fees for my youngest children and my grandchildren. »

-VSLA member, Bangassou

Subsector: New Livelihoods Development

Prior to the start of the SERAP program, members of 36 resilience groups participated in 2-3 month vocational or IGA training. The SERAP program built upon this training, providing further training on technical skills and operational support to ensure that the groups could become self-sustaining and maintain participation in and contributions to VSLA groups.

During their initial resilience group training, youth groups including 260 participants participated in a one-month vocational training on sewing, furniture making and masonry. All participants selected the appropriate trainers and the vocational activities they wished to pursue. Later, a wider resilience group IGA training was held, which reached 480 adult male and female resilience group members. A total of 24 resilience groups in Bangassou and Rafai received 1 million CFA (\$2,000) to undertake new livelihood activities during the first part of the program. Additional training was held for resilience groups during the second part of the program.

Throughout the program, Mercy Corps continuously monitored beneficiaries' progress with their IGAs and provided support where necessary. Program beneficiaries implemented IGAs

in areas including trading meat products, selling smoked fish, producing and selling items including clothes, bricks and furniture and service provision such as mechanics.

The final program evaluation, conducted in September 2015, found that of resilience groups supported by SERAP, approximately 86% reported that their livelihood activities were continuing at the time of evaluation. Beneficiaries reported that SERAP helped them build technical skills and skills in business management that contributed to the success of their activities.

Sector: Agriculture and Food Security

Assessments by Mercy Corps prior to the start of the SERAP program and analysis by the Food Security Cluster revealed that IDP households and other community members in Mbomou Prefecture were at high risk for food insecurity. The objective of the Agriculture and Food Security subsector was that “agricultural livelihoods and income generation opportunities are strengthened for LRA-affected IDP and host households.” Mercy Corps had previously implemented activities in livelihoods restoration and agricultural inputs on a relief and recovery basis. During SERAP, Mercy Corps shifted its focus to early recovery, providing farmer groups with agricultural inputs and training on improved agricultural techniques.

Training and agricultural toolkits for IDPs: During the first phase of the project, Mercy Corps trained 500 farmers from 26 farmers’ groups, most living in the IDP camp of Tokoyo in Bangassou town. Priorities for the first training were identified after participatory discussions with beneficiaries, and training sessions covered topics related to soil fertilization techniques, regional plant diseases, crop storage and good governance with regards to negotiating selling prices. The trainings were facilitated by agricultural agronomists from the Agriculture Ministry extension agency located in Bangassou with support from Mercy Corps agronomists. A later phase of the training for the same group covered agricultural techniques for the planting and harvest of peanuts, corn, rice, zucchini, and cassava. Eight hectares of land were given to the farmer groups by the Bangassou municipality to begin farming, and were split up among the groups.



IDP famers receive agricultural tools in Bangassou

Activities for this sector during the program’s first phase were completed during the program’s fourth quarter. The final activity for phase I of SERAP was a distribution of agricultural tools to the households displaced by the LRA from Rafai and Nzacko, currently living in Bangassou that had participated in agricultural training through the program. With the help of the Bangassou Displaced Persons committee, a partner of the local Central

African Red Cross, Mercy Corps organized a kit distribution at the organization’s base in Bangassou. Using beneficiary lists selected with the support of the Bangassou Displaced Persons committee, 2,940 tools in total were distributed. Each of the 420 kits contained a

watering can (420), two shovels (840), a hoe (420), two rakes (840) and an axe (420). The kits were given to the heads of households, which included 140 men and 280 women.

Agricultural inputs fairs: During the second phase of the SERAP program, beneficiaries for agricultural groups were selected following a household vulnerability study with the support of the state organization ACDA (Central African Agricultural Development Agency) and ANDE (National Economic Development Agency). Due to the fact that the state actor’s presence was limited to Bangassou, the agricultural component was only carried out in this locality. Criteria for the vulnerability study were validated by a wide range of stakeholders, and explained to the target community with sessions conducted by the program’s outreach teams in the city of Bangassou and 40 km around the three roads leading out of Bangassou. Households selected through the vulnerability study had to meet the following criteria: LRA survivor, IDP, returnee, vulnerable person, or IDP host family.

Following the vulnerability study and selection of beneficiaries, 2,500 recipients of agricultural inputs vouchers received vouchers worth 75 USD each. The identity of each recipient was verified by other community members in a codified process.



Mercy Corps conducted extensive training on best agricultural practices for the 2,500 beneficiaries identified during the last reporting period at the agricultural fair. These included practices such as diversified intercropping, line planting, and better tillage. These trainings aimed to increase production and meet emergency food and nutrition needs at household level.



Peanut harvest, Bangassou

Distribution of seeds: Lastly, Mercy Corps identified over a dozen different types of seeds to be distributed amongst beneficiaries in the Bangassou region. We procured a majority of seed types from the FAO, which offers certified seeds, though corn and bean seeds procured locally (which could not be purchased from FAO) are being tested to ensure adequate germination rates.

Following the distribution of seeds and agricultural equipment (hoes, shovels, wheelbarrows etc.) through vouchers in the last reporting period, the 50

agricultural beneficiary groups (of 25 persons each) underwent training to plant 50 community fields. Each group planted ¼ hectare as a group and ½ hectare individually.

Another 24 groups (of 25 persons each) were involved in gardening through training on the abovementioned subjects, followed by cultivation. The gardening component particularly aided IDPs. Four of these 24 groups had been living in the IDP site since 2010 and the land given to them by local authorities was degraded due to overuse. Poor soil quality in the IDP community garden was remedied by bringing in manure. Following seed distribution and trainings, IDPs were involved in gardening cabbage, carrots, onions, tomatoes.

Fish farming: 11 groups of fish farmers (of 25 persons each) received 40 kilos of both of tilapia and carp fry (baby fish) and food for these fish. These groups underwent training in fish farming and the protection and maintenance of fish ponds. The 52 stocked ponds occupy an area of 1,614 square meters. During the monitoring sessions, as the fish grew, practical advice was given on the maintenance of ponds to avoid predators, and using compost for fry food.



Fish Farm, Bangassou, May 2015

“I warmly thank Mercy Corps for the different trainings I received. These trainings are special for me, as I’ve not received such training since my youth. This knowledge will help me a lot during the years of my life. The fry received by the food security project are growing gradually. It is a privilege for me to raise the fish and also an opportunity that will allow me to alleviate my poverty. I hope the project continues in the upcoming year for the development of our prefecture.” – Member of the fish farming group, Nzagba Sayo



Tilapia fry, Bangassou, May 2015

Animal husbandry: 15 groups (of 25 persons per group) raising goats received 10 goats per group and vaccinations and deworming for their animals through Mercy Corps partners, ACDA (Agence Centrafricaine pour le Développement Agricole), ANDE (Association Nationale des Eleveurs), and the Water and Forest Services.

The training focused on the routine maintenance of the enclosure, and ventilation, as well as husbandry techniques.



Vaccination campaign, Bangassou, June 2015

DIRECT BENEFICIARIES OF AGRICULTURAL VOUCHERS BY TYPE OF VULNERABILITY

Type of vulnerability	LRA survivors	IDPs	Returnees	Host families	Physically vulnerable/ disabled
Number of beneficiaries	321	644	790	630	115

Sector: Humanitarian Coordination and Information Management

The main objective of this sector was to collect monthly survey data to contribute to the national Early Warning System. The Early Warning System (EWS) was piloted by Action Contre la Faim (ACF) with ECHO funding in 2013. ECHO is the impetus behind the Early Warning System initiative in CAR, and they have strongly requested to all of the NGOs that they support to include a component that feeds into the ACF-led coordination of the initiative. At the time that SERAP began, ECHO did not have any projects in Mbomou prefecture, and Mercy Corps became the reference agency with the support of OFDA. The surveillance system engaged national, regional and international partners to provide timely and rigorous early warning and vulnerability information on emerging and evolving crises situations in CAR.

At the beginning of the program, in August 2013, Mercy Corps program agents were trained on how to collect surveillance data using mobile devices. Staffs learned how to carry out the surveys on digital tablets and were taught how to transmit the data electronically twice a month to the central system managed by Action Against Hunger. Following the training, Mercy Corps staff in Rafai and Bangassou selected the key markets in each town where regular surveillance data would be conducted. The first round of data collection for the surveillance system from Mercy Corps began in late September 2013. Mercy Corps collected data twice per month in Rafai and Bangassou, sending it to Action Against Hunger. All Early Warning System activities finished in early August 2014 due to the end of Action Against Hunger's funding for the project.

V. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges encountered during the program's implementation included:

- Legal assistance for survivors of violence is still a problem in the target region because of the lack of an operational court;
- Throughout the program, certain zones of intervention were difficult to access, causing delays in the delivery of certain program materials;
- The sites where IDP farmers served by the program were given to farm were of poor quality; and
- Certain VSLA units were not finished. They will be finished without Mercy Corps' monitoring.

Despite these challenges, we were able to identify certain lessons from the program's implementation, including:

- The involvement of community leaders contributed greatly to community mobilization against GBV, promoting protection in the target region; and
- Outside the traditional benefits of VSLA groups (savings, access to credit, social cohesion), we observed that participation in VSLA groups contributed to the psychological stabilization of members experiencing mental health challenges.
- Combining livelihood activities (agricultural or non-agricultural livelihoods) with VSLA helped beneficiaries save and access credit throughout the year and in between harvests – this approach proved instrumental to ensuring the success of livelihoods recovery.

VI. Monitoring & Evaluation

Program staff members used the GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS) to collect data on gender based violence cases seen in the Listening Centers.

In terms of monitoring food security activities, Mercy Corps facilitators carried out weekly monitoring with groups that have been trained in fish farming, agriculture, and animal husbandry. After the farming tool distribution Mercy Corps staff monitored activities in the field with the farming groups, providing technical guidance on field cultivation. VSLAs were monitored during weekly VSLA meetings by facilitators to collect data from these groups (amounts saved, lent, etc.).

The findings presented in this report are also largely based on the internal final evaluation that was completed at the end of the program in September of 2015. To assess the impact and sustainability of the program, and to ensure that lessons learned could be taken into account for future programming, Mercy Corps decided to conduct the final evaluation internally. The evaluation exercise was planned and led with support from an M&E manager from our Mali country team, who conducted a short-term mission to CAR to collect data, conduct the analysis and complete the evaluation report. The final evaluation report (in French), is attached to this report.

VII. Conclusion (Overall Performance and Cost Effectiveness)

According to the program's final evaluation, the SERAP program was designed to meet the needs of vulnerable communities in the target area, and all activities were well appreciated by program participants. Support to agricultural groups and resilience groups will continue to have sustainable impacts for many program beneficiaries, as increased yields and new income

generating activities will allow vulnerable households (especially women-headed households) to take care of their immediate needs and to pay for the school fees for their children. Trainings to these groups in VSLA methodology was key – we’ve already seen qualitative successes of beneficiaires starting small income generating activities thanks to VSLA loans and reporting an increased ability to recover from shocks, including natural disaster, variable harvests, death or illness of a family member. Almost all VSLA groups reported at the final evaluation that they would continue their activities after the end of the program.

The final evaluation found that the program’s logical framework was well designed, though the program’s M&E plan was not frequently reviewed and updated. This would have improved the ability of the team to adaptably manage according to changes or difficulties encountered over the life of the program. Also, the evaluator cites community complaint mechanisms – although these were used at times by beneficiaries – the mechanisms were not always well-structured or well-communicated to beneficiaires, which is a lesson learned for future programming.

The evaluation found that overall, the program was effective in reaching its objectives, in spite of difficulties in terms of access and coordination between the two program areas (especially concerning the remote and difficult to access Rafai). Of all the program components, the evaluator found that the protection sector was the most effective (and clearly, reached the largest number of beneficiaries).

Finally, although most members of the Protection Committees were disappointed by the departure of Mercy Corps from Bangassou and Rafai, referrals for GBV survivors to partners providing psychosocial care should continue following the closure of Mercy Corps’ offices in the Southeast. In fact, we have coordinated closely with MSF-Belgium, who is active in Bangassou, to take over listening center activities in a location near the hospital. Community counselors will also continue their awareness raising activities using the training and skills that they’ve built through working with the program, so that the program’s impact can continue on with the support of local networks and other actors in the zone.