



Award No: AID-OAA-A-15-00063

Advancing Solutions for  
Peace through  
Intercommunity  
Reconciliation and  
Engagement (ASPIRE)

FY16 Q1 Report: October – December 2016

Total Award \$1,200,000

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## **A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The goal of Advancing Solutions for Peace through Intercommunity Reconciliation and Engagement (ASPIRE) is to enable community leaders of all faiths and marginalized young people to work together to peacefully manage inter-group tensions, rebuild community cohesion and strengthen pluralism in the town of Bouar. To these ends, Mercy Corps uses a holistic people-to-people approach that: 1) Facilitate and support the local community to undertake inclusive peace processes, mitigating against both current and future conflicts; 2) increases economic cooperation across lines of division; and 3) promotes positive attitude changes in favor of tolerance and non-violence.

This report presents the progress of the ASPIRE program activities for the period October to December 2016. During this time, Mercy Corps continued to work with Peace Committees, local authorities, religious authorities and NGO actors at the operational and cluster level.

## **B. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

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In the reporting period, Mercy Corps continued to train and support Peace Committees, who identified 17 conflicts, resolved 11 conflicts successfully and are still mediating six conflicts.

To prevent the risk of Muslim-Christian violence identified through an early warning system, Mercy Corps implemented targeted sensitization campaigns in four neighborhoods in Bouar and two villages in Nana Mambéré particularly affected by inter communal divisions. The program also conducted radio peace promotion messaging campaigns and reinforced the capacity of peace committee members to improve the management and implementation of the early warning system.

During the reporting period, the ASPIRE project conducted capacity building workshops for community conflict mitigation and citizenship for 179 community leaders in four neighborhoods of Bouar, and the villages of Nièm and Yéléwa from November 17 to December 14, 2016. Mercy Corps also established 7 early warning mechanisms in Bouar and the surrounding periphery to identify rising tensions.

## **C. SECURITY CONTEXT**

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In Bouar and surrounding localities, the security context was characterized by overall calm, but with volatile spikes in the number of security incidents. Many attacks between armed groups were observed during the reporting period. However, in general, life is gradually regaining a sense of normalcy.

North of the project zone, in Ouham-Pendé prefecture on the Kouï-Bocaranga-Bouar axis, continued clashes between armed groups have forced displacement of thousands. While most remain in Ouham-Pendé, some displaced people have moved further south, reaching Carnot, Gadzi and even Bouar. Meanwhile, the conflict centered around Bambari is a flashpoint of intercommunal tension and shows how quickly the security situation can deteriorate.

The intercommunal dialogue between the villages of Nièm and Yéléwa, which should have been held in early December 2016 did not take place after several key attendees withdrew from the meeting, notably the prefect of Bouar. Moreover, ministers who were invited demanded that their travel and lodging expenses be fully supported by the organizers. Dialogue organizers including

Catholic Relief Services, UNHCR, Minusca and the interreligious group of Bouar (PIRB in French) have arranged for travel expenses and assurances of personal security for government authorities. As of January 2017, a date has not yet been set for the dialogue.

## D. PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

### OBJECTIVE 1: FACILITATE INCLUSIVE, COMMUNITY-LED PROCESSES TO MITIGATE CURRENT AND FUTURE CONFLICTS

#### Activity 1.1: Form 10 Peace Committees of community leaders and youth that regularly identify and discuss tensions and resolve disputes

During the reporting period, the peace committees identified 17 conflicts in Bouar and the surrounding areas. Among these conflicts, two were related to disputes between farmers and pastoralists over land and resource use.

Table 1: Intergroup Tensions & Conflicts by location				
Location	Type of Conflict	# identified	# resolved	# ongoing
Bouar	Herder/Farmer conflict	2	0	2
Bouar	Domestic conflict	4	4	0
Bouar	Conflict between neighbors	2	2	0
Bozoum	Accusation of witchcraft	2	0	2
Baoro	Accusation of witchcraft	1	0	1
Ndongué	Accusation of witchcraft	1	0	1
Niem	Domestic conflict	2	2	0
Ngaidoua	Accusation of witchcraft	1	1	0
Dikofio	Accusation of witchcraft	2	2	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>

Domestic conflicts within families have also been identified by Peace Committees as having a negative effect on social cohesion - at the family level that affect the community as a whole. Accusations of witchcraft are the most common type of conflict identified, as traditional practices hold weight within communities. Often these accusations are based on social or monetary jealousy of peers and have more deeply rooted causes.

The peace committees helped to resolve 11 conflicts through constructive dialogue and communication in an inclusive, open environment where people talk openly and freely about their grievances. Six of the conflicts in Bouar, Bozoum, Baoro and Ndongue are still being resolved through dialogue and have not yet been closed.

Since the beginning of the project, 29 conflicts have been identified by Peace Committees and the interreligious group of Bouar (PIRB in French) and 23 conflicts have been resolved and closed, six conflicts are still being resolved and remain open.

#### Activity 1.2: Train Peace Committees in mediation, facilitation, dispute resolution, Do No Harm, and multi-stakeholder dialogue

Since the start of ASPIRE activities in November 2016, 113 people (41 women and 72 men), including



PIRB uses the Bible to educate youth and women about tolerance in Mamadou-Sara (Credit:

36 peer educators, 70 committee members and 7 PIRB members, participated in trainings supported by USAID funding. The training covered mediation techniques, facilitation, litigation resolution, and community dialogue.



An imam from PIRB uses the Koran to educate and inform in the Hauoussa district. (Credit: Octave Ngannafei Senerisse, November 2016)

From November 17 to December 14, 2016, ASPIRE conducted capacity building workshops for community conflict mitigation and citizenship for **179 community leaders**, including 38 women and 96 men. Young people attended (45), of which 16 were women and 29 men. Mercy Corps and PIRB brought together participants from diverse locations, including Gombou, Haoussa, Martino, Mamadou-Sara, Nièm and Yelewa.

PIRB used the Bible and the Koran to communicate messages of tolerance and non-violence to workshop participants. In turn, the community leaders took ownership of the techniques taught in the workshop and demonstrated their ability to manage conflict mitigation effectively in their communities. **Activity**

### **1.3 Facilitate Peace Committees in organizing awareness sessions to promote peaceful resolution of inter-group disputes and dialogue**

No update this reporting period.

#### **Activity 1.4: Establish an early warning system to identify rising tensions**

From October 11-20, 2016 Mercy Corps also established **seven early warning mechanisms** in Bouar and the surrounding areas to identify rising tensions. Early Warning Systems (EWS) principally operate through two tools: regularly updated communication plans and weekly reports. Members of the Peace Committees write the reports and send them to Mercy Corps, to alert us if there is a need to follow up. The communication plan organizes a chain of contact that starts at the Peace Committee and goes all the way up to the prefect. As such, the EWS identifies nascent conflict and mitigates the risk of it turning violent. If a conflict is outside the capacity of a Peace Committee to manage, it can be referred to the group leader/chief, mayor, and other leadership in the community.

#### **Activity 1.5: Train Peace Committees on the early warning system, collecting data and analysis**

From October 11-20, 2016, program staff trained community members on data collection and management of the early warning systems. By the end of training, community members knew how to monitor, collect, share and analyze data as part of an early warning system, now operational in the intervention area. The training on early warning system also helps to fight against rumors that can instigate conflict. Total trained were **249 community leaders**, including 58 women, 129 men and 62 youth.

In addition, 41 women were engaged and trained as skilled mediators for peace committees and peer educators for prevention and conflict resolution. The trainings increase their ability and confidence to assert them in decision-making process. As a result, the framework of conflict mediation includes their opinions.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: INCREASE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ACROSS LINES OF DIVISION**

### **Activity 2.1: Peace Committees organize community fora in Bouar to solicit inter-group economic and social projects.**

Mercy Corps and its partners organized two fora during the reporting period. The topics of discussion included soliciting feedback on intercommunity socioeconomic projects, types of projects and eligibility for criteria. The Peace Committees evaluate the project based on previously identified indicators and approve sustainable projects. To date, 18 fora have been organized and a cumulative 1,596 people have participated, reaching 80% of the final indicator.

### **Activity 2.2: Peace Committees assess and select 20 projects**

For this reporting period, 162 people participated in trainings and discussions on the preparation of community projects for reconciliation. Mercy Corps is preparing the required approvals to be submitted to USAID shortly. These projects should reach up to 3,000 beneficiaries, strengthening social cohesion, from different communities with the potential for conflict. Mercy Corps facilitated discussions on socio-economic projects empowered young people and women to participate in decision-making processes at the community level for projects that will affect local development. Their inclusion in discussions and decision-making will help to ensure a representative and participatory community project, increasing buy-in and investment in its long-term success.

### **Activity 2.3: Train community members on financial, technical, and vocational skills to help ensure successful economic and social projects**

Mercy Corps organized training for project holders in development and management of micro-projects on the November 3, 2016. In total, **18 people** including 4 women and 14 men from **2 new COGES-PC** participated in the training. The results of the pre-test and post-training showed that the training helped to build the capacities of the participants; the proportion of participants that knowing the definition of a project increased from 24% before the training to 100% after the training.

## **OBJECTIVE 3: PROMOTE MORE POSITIVE PUBLIC ATTITUDES IN FAVOR OF TOLERANCE AND NON-VIOLENCE**

### **Activity 3.1: Peace Committees initiate conflict management and peace-building messaging campaign in Bouar that includes all groups**

*Broadcasting:* In Bouar, radio talk shows were held daily. Peace messaging in local languages was disseminated on the radio station *Siriri*. In total, **14 radio programs** (nine sketch episodes and five radio spots) facilitated reconciliation and the peace processes.

Radio programs have greatly contributed to the increased stability in and around Bouar. In particular, the messaging has helped to remove barriers to intercommunal trust. Muslims and Christians coexist in relative peace and economic activity has equally increased, both in the city center and outside Bouar.

*Awareness Raising by Peer Educators (PEs):* The **6,296 community members** (1,362 men, 1,573 women, 3,361 youth) were reached through awareness that promoted tolerance and social cohesion.

**Table 2: Peace-Building Awareness Events**

Location	# of sessions	Men	Women	Youth	Total
Bouar	109	217	344	744	1312
Beninga	12	17	15	65	97
Ndongué Yoyo	12	29	35	56	120
Yongoro	11	05	13	07	25
Niem	33	124	66	167	390
Baoro	56	442	625	1,117	2,184
Bozoum	20	136	112	176	424
Ndongué	27	112	104	384	600
Béa	35	158	156	330	644
Bocaranga	52	122	103	315	540
<b>Total</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>1,362</b>	<b>1,573</b>	<b>3,361</b>	<b>6,296</b>

The communities of Bouar and the surrounding areas increasingly favor peace and reconciliation as evidenced by the peaceful cohabitation of Muslim and Christian communities in ASPIRE's intervention zone.

During the reporting period, the project undertook 367 peace building activities, for a cumulative total of 1,530 peace building activities since the program began. Funded by USAID, they include intercommunity events, trainings, and awareness raising radio spots that supported peace-building and reconciliation among parties to the conflict.

*Community awareness-raising activities:* Mercy Corps staff, PIRB members and Peer Educators (PE) organized six community awareness-raising events in Gombou, Haoussa, Martino, Mamadou-Sara, Bouar, Niem, and Yelewa. Each location hosted events that mobilized more than **4,000 people** participated in the activities.

For each event, two activities were organized: a soccer match and question and answer sessions on community cohesion, held before the match and during halftime. During each soccer match, Mercy Corps and PEs made a call for tolerance and non-violence.



Local imam presents a gift to a soccer player after a match organized by ASPIRE (Credit Octave Ngannafei Senerisse Gombou, December 2016)

## E. ADVOCACY STRATEGY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

On December 1, 2016, CAR's National Day of Independence, Mercy Corps supported the rehabilitation of a speaking platform in preparation for a speech by the mayor of Bouar. By aligning the program with government-supported initiatives, Mercy Corps advocates for community cohesion as a top priority for local officials. During the celebrations, the mayor made a speech calling for support for peaceful community cohesion by promoting tolerance and non-violence.

## **F. MONITORING & EVALUATION**

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ASPIRE is organizing a comprehensive mid-term program review from December 2016 to February 2017. The review is an exercise in adaptive management; after the analysis of the mid-term review, ASIPRE will review how best to reorient program implementation to tailor to the current context of local conflict management. Mercy Corps will leverage participative consultations with local communities to improve program implementation methodologies for the field. The program team has completed the terms of reference for the mid-term review in close collaboration with the Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) Department.

Three main monitoring activities have taken place to ensure that the project activities are being implemented and the objectives are achieved.

- An annual work plan which is reviewed on a quarterly basis this allows for a quarterly evaluation of the project progress as well as planning for the next quarter
- Daily visits of project sites to review and monitor activities
- Monthly and weekly project progress reviews

The program team and MEL Department developed a questionnaire to measure the quantitative impact of ASPIRE's activities as compared to the baseline indicators measured during program outset. An additional qualitative questionnaire was designed for focus group discussions involving key project stakeholders, while considering the specificities of each group.

The studies will launch in January 2017, opened by a two-day workshop with the project stakeholders, including the Peace Committees, Peer Educators, PIRB, etc. During the workshop, Mercy Corps staff will conduct a literature review and consult with community stakeholders. The program's results will be presented and discussed in order to identify best practices and lessons learned. The expected outcomes of this broadened stakeholder workshop are to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention to produce the first elements that can reorient the program towards achieving its outcomes by the end of 2017.

At the end of the review, Mercy Corps' in-country MEL Department will analyze the results in a mid-term evaluation report, based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered through field surveys and focus group discussions.

## **G. COORDINATION TO ACHIEVE THE PROJECT OUTCOME**

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### **Intercommunal Dialogue**

In response to intercommunal conflict in the municipality of Niem-Yéléwa, the prefect of Bouar convened a meeting on November 23, 2016, with the participation of Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and Minusca, and PIRB with Mercy Corps' logistical support. The meeting aimed to organize a platform for intercommunal dialogue in Bouar, the location decided by CRS, PIRB and Minusca.

### **Cluster Coordination**

On October 17, 2016, Mercy Corps participated in the creation of the action plan for return and reinstallation for the Working Group on Sustainable Solutions and Return for western CAR, which covers Nana Mambéré, Mambéré Kadéï and Sangha Mbaere (see annex).

## **H. CONCLUSION & UPCOMING ACTIVITIES**

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### **Key Challenges**

- While state authorities are present in the program's intervention zone, state authority is unable to assert any sort of effective control.
- Increasing armed confrontation between armed groups in Bambari could weaken the intercommunity dialogue of the Niem-Yéléwa municipality.

### **Priorities for Upcoming Quarter**

- Reorient program framework as needed, according to the results of the mid-term review analysis.
- Design and produce communication materials (leaflets, posters, etc.) on non-violence and peaceful cohabitation.
- Organize a mechanism to facilitate communication between communities as part of an Early Warning System.
- Identify, organize and support a collective of artists and musicians for who express a message of peace in CAR.