

MICROLINKS WEBINAR: SUPPORTING RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS IN CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENTS

WEBINAR PRESENTATION AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Kali Glenn-Haley: Hi, everyone. This is Kali. Thanks so much for hanging in there as we got our technical difficulties sorted. Really appreciate it. Many of you guys have already started, but if you can use the chat box to introduce yourself. Give your name, organization, position and where you're calling from. And then also it looks like people have started this as well –

Female 1: Okay. I think I'll move through this quickly and turn it over to Bennie shortly. We were excited to do this presentation on livelihoods in fragile context. Just because it's a difficult topic. So without further ado, I'll turn it over to Bennie Kaufman to start his presentation.

Benjamin Kaufman: First of all, thank you so much for USAID and Microlinks for facilitating this presentation. I'd also like to thank my fellow presenters from Oxfam and Plan for their help in organizing the event.

Just to give a little bit of quick context in CAR and some of the challenges we face, we are looking at a population of the country of around 4 to 5 million. And 25 percent of those people are currently in some form of displacement. You have massive poverty and low capacity levels across the board. And another thing I'd like to stress in terms of the conflict here is that it's not a Muslim/Christian conflict, it's often a local, even hyper-local dynamics that we're looking at that has economic and political dimensions.

These are some of the programs I'll be discussing today. first of all is our Air Cap program. Which ended in December. It was a two year project funded by the EU looking to rebuild and regrow women and youth associations through economic development, village savings and loans, literacy circles and importantly also the infrastructure rehabilitation, including two markets.

We have a USAID conflict mitigation and management social cohesion program in the west of the country, in Bouar. And the two programs I'll be discussing most are Recover 2. Which was a OFDA funded project in Bambari in the center east. With five components, as well as its follow on program, BRE, also in Bambari. Both of those had economic recovery components. Three hundred IGA beneficiaries per.

Ah. So the Relief Resilience for Mercy Corps is we're really trying to prioritize market based solutions. There is a need to make markets work for the poor, as well as to acknowledge that market development isn't actual synonymous with resilience. So you may ask yourself, how can resilient strategies ensure that the market based interventions support and grow development gains? A lot of the times we have fragile development gains that are lost when programming and external financial support end in the context of the Central African Republic.

So we want our emergency response interventions to be both market aware and ensure that in our approaches, even in the emergency response, we're thinking about the longer term implications.

So peace building interventions before, during and after the crisis phase of conflicts can help break down that humanitarian development divide and help us accelerate towards a more sustainable economic recovery faster. So in the Central African Republic we're really helping to empower communities to build their economic resilience by fostering access to sustainable returns of revenue and equitable access to markets while all at the same time mainstreaming protection throughout our activities.

So as I mentioned, these sort of two levers through which we really try and focus our work are market access and income generating activities. I'll focus on market access a little bit more on the next slide, but for the income generating activities we're really looking at choosing a profitable IGA, managing that income generating activity, the development of a micro business plan and participation in village and savings and loan associations.

So you may ask yourself is it sort of hard to identify viable livelihoods in a situation with unpredictable and thin market opportunities? Luckily, here in CAR it's not that difficult to identify livelihoods as most of the work we do with our IGAs were previous activities undertaken by beneficiaries. And they often just need help to restart after displacement, as well as formalize and to standardize their business practices. So example, in recover two, about 60 percent of the respondents didn't have the capital to start an income generating activity, even though most of them had past experience exercising that activity that they were forced to abandon due to internal displacement and security. And just some of the examples of livelihoods that we work on here include welding, carpentry, soap making, honey production and bakeries.

As I mentioned. Sorry. Did we lose the audio? Okay. So just making markets successful doesn't mean you're building community resilience. And so some of the approaches Mercy Corps uses to foster that community resilience capacity include a social cohesion approach that could include equitable provision for equal access. In the air cap projects, we built two – we rehabilitated two hanger markets in, outside of Bambari in places called Kijikia and Bouno. That serve different communities. This helped encourage parity by building equal infrastructure in different communities to avoid impression of favoritism while at the same time we're stressing freedom of access for all members of those communities.

I can tell you last week I was actually in Bambari and I was in an area called Maidu which is about 60 percent Puel and I was asking them about their market. I bought a beautiful Panje out there. It's an African sort of style fabric. And I was talking with the vendor, if he gets a lot of work from – a lot of customers from _____, which is also a large Puel community. And he said, no, even that it's not a question of – it's a question of their communities not crossing over. So we're really trying to look at building informal and formal market networks through even just intercommunity, through the rehabilitation of these markets.

So part of the social cohesion strategy is going to bridge those relationships between groups that can have histories of intercommunal tensions.

Another way we do that is in our Aspire program. The social cohesion program in the west. We'll amalgamate different groups that are more homogenous to make larger heterogeneous groups to try and build social cohesion. This also takes on the aspect of reintegrating marginalized youth. So, for example, we'll try and purchase as many local products, especially bricks, for our rehabilitation projects, from local youth associations.

You also need to adapt to the context in terms of push and pull factors for IDPs and returnees. So one market we're currently rehabilitating is in a village called Waibai, which is about 40 kilometers from Bambari. It's an important return zone. And the village since last year has experienced a lot more stability than the larger town of Bambari. The market is a large agricultural market. It's a primary food market for Bambari. And so it's bringing together a lot of people from a wide zone. And so a

rehabilitated market serves not only a large number of people but a wider variety of those beneficiaries. So we're trying to use that rehabilitative market structure in Waibai as a co-factor to encourage returnees to stay, as well as attracting displaced people back in their homes.

Another way to adapt to the context here is in terms of the materials and the physical design of the market. The number one thing beneficiaries ask for is shade. I can tell you, again, having been in Bambari last week, around 3:00 in the afternoon it is pretty uncomfortable to be outside, so shade is incredibly important to have.

Another question is in terms of what actual beneficiaries are selling within these markets. Produce sellers will have different physical needs for their stalls than someone who's selling clothing or fabric. Keeping in mind that different communities will sell different goods. So some communities will sometime specialize in animal products versus others who will specialize in oil versus produce versus fabric.

So you need to ensure that the physical design of your market, if you're doing stalls, benches or display stands, are responsive to ensure that no one community benefits from a sort of cookie cutter market design. And that you're equitable in the actual physical design of the rehabilitated market.

And, next, of course, is project sustainability to ensure that those operations continue after program close. So in the market in this picture actually is in Kijiko just outside Bambari. It's my friend Vitale standing in front of the picture. But we instituted a management structure at that market that charges rental fees to use in their stalls. And with those rental fees they were able to build drainage routes for sanitation after the program closed. So they're still actually improving the markets after the program ended in December.

In terms of protection, which is one of the major focuses that covers all of our projects here in CAR, we specifically target people with protection concerns because protection concerns are stresses and shocks on individuals. Which will impact functionality and their ability to contribute to their household. So it's a question of how do you integrate livelihoods with protection and protection with livelihoods. Be it GBV, social cohesion or psychosocial assistance.

Twenty percent of our income generating activities, their beneficiaries are GBV survivors. They'll be identified by Mercy Corps psychosocial agents and listening centers. Who then refer them as marginalized individuals and viable candidates. They're never labeled as GBV survivors to maintain confidentiality and reduce stigmatizing. Integrating GBV survivors into the same BSLAs with a variety of community members and not just other GBV survivors not only minimizes their stigmatization of being in a group but also increases their resilience by connecting them to the broader community and rebuilding support networks.

So marginalized groups and individuals who've experienced protection incidents like GBV or accusations or sorcery, which is a huge problem here in the Central African Republic, with massive gender and economic dimensions, they benefit largely from economic recovery activities.

So some of the lessons learned include changing ratios of those beneficiaries be it, as I mentioned earlier in the if it's not only male to female, but also further specifying if we're trying to target returning households, host family households or IDP households. Keeping in mind the changing security context. Livelihood chains adapted to the needs of specific groups. So if you're looking at trying to mainly engage young youth, a male youth, you're gonna be looking at specific livelihoods than you are for adolescent girls. And that's mostly done we look through market profitability studies as well as homogenous interviews at the outset of a program.

And complementary activities are another thing that we found to be incredibly useful. Especially with regard to income generating activities and village savings and loan associations. So in Recover 2, six months after the program closed we were looking at 95 percent continuation of village savings and loan participation even if the income generating activity participation dropped down to closer to about 70 to 75 percent.

And just some of the major takeaways that we're looking at here. Integration. It is important to mainstream protection throughout. As well as integrating and leveraging other economic recovery activities such as village savings and loan and income generating activities for that multiplier effect.

Peace building. This is a unique opportunity you have in a conflict setting. Markets can cross fertilize relationships and they can facilitate informal and formal networks across communities. This is a long term approach of economic development. So even in emergency responses you need to be considering long term implications.

And when we say security at the last, we're really talking about safety for beneficiaries here. So it's adaptive program design and absorption capacity. So you're being flexible to ensure safety for the beneficiaries.

This is my last slide, so I'd just like to thank again my fellow presenters, USAID for organizing and I believe my mom is listening in and possibly my uncle, so hello both and I love you. And now over to Valentina.

Valentina Dal Lago: I'm present my self. I am Valentina. I'm working for Oxfam in CAR as funding officer. Actually I'm not the manager of the project we are going to present. So I want to introduce also my colleague. I'm with Morgan Kadna. She is also an officer like me. And aruna tambura is food security manager. So mr. aruna is not speaking English, so I'm going to present on his behalf. And for questions and also for that is going to – we are going to do a translation. So I would like to apologia if there is a little bit late between our response and your questions. And that's all.

Okay. Thank you for USAID for giving us the opportunity to present our job. Actually I am going to present the OFDA project. Which is developing the sub professor of power. It's a one year duration project. And it's going to finish at the end of June.

Actually, for begin the Oxfam is in CAR since January 2014. And arrived for due to the events of December 2015. Our program especially focus on water sanitation, food security and livelihood, community protection and good governance. We are very big part of advocacy program. We are based in four field offices. We are working in Bangui, in Birao and _____ and _____.

According to our project finance by OFDA, we want to focus on three most important lesson learned. Pesticides and chemical and bio pesticides in a crisis context. In our activities especially in market famine activities, we are – we help communities, we support communities to use the biopesticide. And – okay. And found where in the past we are using chemical products and found that the natural products where will be even better. And it's helps to improve the yield in comparison to the last campaign of the bio pesticides.

Actually, the use of the bio pesticide was really appreciated by local communities. And they understand that it could be very durable for the intervention in the field. The local communities, especially understand the connection with the groups. People's making - hello? And they are producing for the bio pesticides too.

So there are many different bio pesticides use for improving the yield. And there is the most important thing for us, the way they produce it, it was not financed by our project. It was just an improvement in the technical support we give them to evaluate in this direction.

The second most important lesson learned, we understand that the local process was the very important factor for agriculture products. The local purchase of eight seven one five tons of seeds from the local channel allow Oxfam finding good quality seeds that could be adopted to the local context.

Actually, the utilization of local purchase allow us to develop local market and as an example, now world food program, other international NGO are buying local production to improve the distribution in group of agriculture beneficiaries. Like cash voucher – sorry, vouchers of and distribution of food.

The groups that we support were really interested in development of local production because they really understand the importance to create and to animate the local market.

The third lesson learn it's really important for our intervention in CAR because it's actually allow us to focus on our intervention. The intervention that is not linked to

status of people. We have the very broad, very huge difficulty in identification of vulnerability _____ area. Because we choose no hot spot areas in the crisis of CAR, which can be a very forgotten crisis. And we use the – vulnerability criteria of different villages, which were not touched by armed attack. That's was because actually the villages were touched by very strong situation in vulnerability, strong presence of refugees and those people who wanted to come back to their home. And also the loss of the means of their production due to the consequences of armed attack.

So the local community welcome Oxfam's presence and despite of the access difficulties. And this is because we had a very great coordination with all the humanitarian actors in the area, we did a very strong advocacy for the humanitarian actions. And we work in very hard the monitoring and evaluation of their needs.

Okay. Um. If you can see the, our intervention was in sub prefecture of _____. Which is in the north west of CAR. We touch 56 villages and suburbs.

We travel especially in agriculture and market system. And our beneficiary was a small group of farmer group of _____ and groups of market _____.

We show you in the impact of the program. So one of the most important results was the, as we said, the use of bio pesticides. Which allowed us to improve a yield of for the farmer. Um. So the group generated also median profit of 153 dollars per month.

The success rate was 98 in functioning groups. We have just two groups _____ who had some problem and decided to not to go on activities.

Okay. Sorry. Um. We wanted to focus on some summaries. In working in CAR and especially in the area of Bouar. Actually the situation is very volatile. And the security context is really complicated. Especially for the humanitarian access.

So the group coordinators and the acceptance in for the local community was one of our mitigation measures with which we try to put in place.

Um. Okay. We tried to identify some recommendation in general. And we would like to focus on the idea that it's really important for us to work on our target, for existing activities. And try to work in an integrate approach. Which can add in our intervention gender protection and WASH activities. The idea is that as the mission of the DA is saving lives, we want to improve the living condition of people in this community. And we do it through their constant participation in the all the phases of the project. And without targeting them due to their status.

According to logistic condition, what we did was to encourage local purchase and be very flexible to be able to readapt our intervention to local context.

Okay. I think I finished and I want really thank you for this opportunity. We will be able to respond to your question. I hope it was quite clear. And I will try to be more clear if needed. And I will give – I will leave to Henri to be – to do his presentation. Thank you very much.

Henri-Noel Tatangang: Thank you, Bernie. Thank you, Valentina. I hope you can get me. So my project, what I was presenting has to do with the program funded by OFDA during the period of September 2015 to March 2017. During this project we did some activities that targeted some specific –

Adam: Hi, Henri. This is Adam. I'm sorry. I am going to interrupt. I know that you're using your computer for sound. If you could just either speak up or speak more clearly into your microphone that'd be appreciated. And I'll ask you to do your best to do that. For our participants, he is in the Central African Republic. You might just have to turn up the volume on your computer because there's little control, as you guys have already seen, that I have over this webinar. Okay. Thank you. Back to you, Henri.

Henri-Noel Tatangang: Thank you very much. I hope it's clearer now. So I am the contractor of Plan International with Central African Republic. And I will be talking about a project which was funded by OFDA during the period of March 2015 to March 2017.

As you can see, Plan International's focus is always centered around children. And in particular for the crisis in CAR, we have to target children separated and unaccompanied from their families. And children that were involved in or associated with armed groups. So some children really suffer from the conflict because they are recruited into groups and they begin to cause some atrocity. And during this conflict we also have situation of children which are for one reason or another separated from their family and now become children on their own and are exposed to different forms of abuses and exploitation. So Plan had to see how to target these children and provide assistance to them.

So as you can see on this slide, the project summary we, is talking about the 100 unaccompanied and separated children and those that we have associated with armed groups and armed forces have benefited from this project. So we have to do a program of trying to reunify them and trying to organize a package for their reintegration into the society through some forms of livelihood training which we organized.

So the first objective of this funding of this activity was to support some interim care and reintegration of these unaccompanied and separated children, including children associated with armed groups and armed forces. So they were all placed in some foster families or a few in their reunited families. So that they could have some direct care and some structural support while living with these families.

The second part of the program was to see how to do a kind of support which would help them improve or recover from the economic challenges and the part that they, because of poverty get into carry weapons and cause atrocities. So this program was coming to help them reintegrate the society and be productive for their community.

As you can see the figures now, this figures are a summary of the children that were enrolled in this program. We have, if you can see from the last bar at the bottom, these are children that were doing the program with _____ and in this program they were 26 of them. Ten of them were girls and 16 were boys. Just to inform you that they were all aged between 14 and 17 years old. There are a few that chose to do mechanic. And this was especially specialized on motorcycle mechanic. There were 22 boys doing this program. Then we have 23 boys doing carpentry. We have 29 youths made of 12 girls

and 17 boys doing tailoring. As I said earlier, there was a total of 100. And in the 100 we have 78 boys and 22 girls. You can see in the figure.

Now considering that this training was conducted for a period of six months, the children acquired a lot of knowledge and during the course of the training they were being accompanied with some psychosocial support. Now as you can see on this slide, at the end of the training they benefited from social reintegration package. This package was made up of kits which the children were to use. Kits which the children were to use at the end of the training which they just benefited. So there were kits for mechanics, kits for carpentry, kits for the bakery and kits for mixed sewing.

So as you can also see, it's mentioned that 98 percent of the beneficiaries went through the program and really benefited. Out of the 100 which were enrolled in this program, we have two dropouts, which did not finish the program. And the 98 involved in this program finished the training in March 2017 and we organized in the second phase of the project a three months monitoring to ensure that they really settle and continue with the training without deviating and going back into what they were doing before. So this monitoring is occurring and will be ending this June.

Of course, project implementation came with some risks, which I will present to you. First of all, some of the children were really traumatized during the conflict and in order them to overcome their feelings we had to do some psycho-structive support alongside the training. And in this package we did more recreative activities. We had some listening centers which we used to try to listen to them. We did the training of the trainer so that they could identify children with special needs and try to provide the care. And we trained also the families hosting them so that they know how to provide special care during this period so that they will feel comfortable going on with the training to the end.

Secondly, we also have the issue of acceptance from the community. We know the children have done some atrocities. Especially those that were involved in the armed groups and armed forces. So we had to do a lot of mediation meetings with the community, with the families so that they can admit them back in their communities and open up to support them in their reintegration program which we are doing.

The third one was that we have to ensure the effective productivity after the training was done. We know the training ended in March. And we wanted to be sure that the training is not abandoned or that it recuperate their arms. So we have to accompany them to enable them settled. So in order to form groups to work together others accepted to work individually, but this program is what is going on and the children are to live productive. Some of them already generating income, which his making them very happy.

You can see here that this really contributed to social cohesion and economic recovery. In terms of social cohesion, the community accepted the coming back of these children. The community was empathized and they opened up to receive the children. The temporary host families who benefited training were also prepared to host these children affected with, involved in armed groups. And the reunification with their biological families was also done. So this was done and many children regained their families again. And this was also contributing to their trauma from which they were living. Of course the general acceptance from the other children and the rest of the community.

In terms of economic recovery, as I said earlier, the training was done for six months. The children, they are working now and more productive in their community. The post training support is in place to ensure that we keep the success, we keep the children on track. And as much as possible, the options are in line with market study also which we did. We did a market study which gave the opportunities that were available to the children could benefit from. And today they are happy with what they have done as training.

On this slide I want to summarize the takeaways. One of them is that the psychosocial support is key in maintaining these children on track. The children need to be listened to and to be involved in recreational activities. It is very important to help face the trauma with they live. And, of course, when we train the people who work with them they are capable of identifying special needs and be referrals to appropriate services.

The second thing is that children associated with arms groups are very vulnerable but they talent and they can be exploited to make them useful to themselves and their community. And that's what we saw happening. This 100 which I am mentioning in this project is just part of the over 1,000 children which are benefiting from different projects that we are implementing across the country.

The third thing is that reintegration options are available and could be used to keep these children free from different forms of abuse and to help them stop continuing be involved in atrocity.

The fourth thing is that we must do a market study to enable us to know what other options available in the environment so that we use that to guide the children in the choices they make for their different programs and what we work in.

Also, the post training monitoring is key to keep these children on board. to be sure that they don't give up. To be sure the needed guidance is provided to continue their program. The sixth takeaway is that in armed conflict settings there is a lot of poverty, of course, and to a certain extent it pushes arm group to fight the systems and also make the system so difficult for reintegration. But this vocational training program is a very useful solution. We have seen children still useful to their communities and drop their weapons to focus on that.

And the last point to make here is the planning of resources. Children in the course of the training are also taught how to manage their income and make their project grow with the possibility of some _____ groups to unite effort.

So note that the children below 14 that were also in this category rather went back to the normal formal education training. Which is done in the government system This is what I have to present to you. I'm ready to answer to the various questions so if you want to present to me. Thank you.

[End of Audio]