



Santé Primaire Lobaye project (PSPL)

LOBAYE, Central African Republic

The project area of the ‘projet Santé Primaire Lobaye’ (PSPL) in the Lobaye prefecture of Central African Republic is home to the indigenous Aka, an ethnic group that has difficulty gaining equitable access to healthcare – not only because of the ongoing conflict but also because of their socioeconomic status. To help them live a healthier life, FAIRMED is helping local people to establish and maintain a functioning and effective healthcare system.

Background

The Central African Republic is one of the world’s poorest countries. Since gaining its independence in 1960, it has been through a seemingly never-ending series of political crises. The current military-political crisis followed the coup that was conducted by Séléka rebels in March 2013. The already precarious health situation of the population was once again dramatically worsened by the subsequent crises, which have brought the health care system –previously designated by MSF as a ‘phantom system’ – to the point of collapse.

The Aka are an ethnic group of semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers that live in the tropical rainforest in the Congo Basin. Excessive use of the rainforest has severely restricted their habitat, forcing them to change their ancestral way of life. With no source of income, the Aka depend on bartering and indentured work on the fields of the dominant Bantu population in order to secure their basic needs. As an ethnic minority, the Aka suffer from marginalisation on the part of the government as well as extreme discrimination by other groups. Although the population of Lobaye is in a relatively stable state of health compared to other parts of the country, the situation of the Aka people remains precarious, in particular for pregnant women, infants and people with disabilities. Poor access to health services – a consequence of the civil war – exposes the Aka and people living with disabilities to increased health risks.

The project

The aim of the project is to work together with the Aka and people with disabilities in order to ensure sustainable access to good quality healthcare services and to reconstruct what remains of the earlier health system. The project is focusing on the early detection and treatment of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), improving the health of pregnant women and infants, providing support for the general population (in particular the Aka people and those with disabilities), actively participating in the management of local health facilities and thereby playing a role in health policy activities.

FAIRMED works in close cooperation with the local health authorities, and provides these with support in the implementation of measures aimed at reinforcing the healthcare system. FAIRMED has concluded a framework cooperation agreement with the top-level authority, the Ministry of Health, meaning that the project is legitimised at the highest levels.

Objectives and activities

The central goal of the project is to provide the population of the health district of Mbaiki with access to quality healthcare, in particular the Aka people and those with disabilities. This will be achieved by improving their health status and promoting active participation in the management of their health. To accomplish this overall aim, the project is pursuing three specific objectives, which are realised through selected activities:

The Aka are being encouraged to make better use of the services offered by health facilities in the Mbaiki health district.

- Strengthening of the expertise of health workers and health centres, towards better quality health services: Training for health workers and support for the health district in vaccination campaigns, pre-natal examinations, emergency transfers and the supervision of health workers.
- Improved access to better quality health services for pregnant women, mothers and infants. In an innovative system, women receive a voucher for a symbolic amount, entitling them to free examinations both before and after giving birth, as well the opportunity to visit an appropriately equipped health facility with professional nurses, and even to receive a caesarean section.

Local people and health workers in the Mbaiki health district are empowered to recognise neglected tropical diseases at an early stage, and to treat them appropriately.

- Training and education to reinforce the capabilities of health professionals and voluntary community health workers in the early detection and treatment of neglected tropical diseases.
- Strengthening of the management capacities of health authorities with regard to neglected tropical diseases. Support for official agencies in the preparation of a national action plan against neglected tropical diseases, the management of data and medication, distribution of medicines, and the organisation of early detection campaigns.

Support for health management in the Lobaye prefecture through the active incorporation of the Aka and disabled people in the health system.

- Administrative committees for primary care systems are being directed towards self-financing for health centres.
- Reinforcement of the skills and knowledge of the Aka people and people with disabilities through the establishment of associations, and through training and support. This is working towards greater involvement in management committees, thus ensuring active participation.
- Establishment of intersectoral cooperation to promote income-generating activities through partnerships with relevant organisations and by training Aka and disability associations in poultry breeding and the keeping of animals for breeding.

Beneficiaries

The emphasis of the project is on improving the health of the 18,163 Aka living in the Mbaiki health district of Lobaye prefecture. As well as the Aka people, other parts of the population, such as the Bantu, also benefit from the project, because they also live in the region and can make use of the improved health care system. In addition, the project is giving particular attention to people with disabilities living in the project area. Due to a lack of accurate figures, their number is estimated at around 26,000, based on the WHO estimate of an average of 15% of the population as affected by disability.

Monitoring

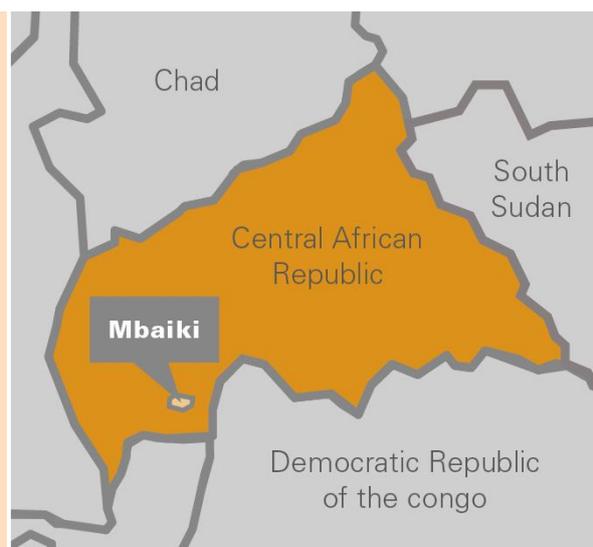
The FAIRMED project team at the coordination office in Mbaiki ensures the implementation of activities and undertakes a regular progress report, including financial statement. In addition, regular monitoring visits are carried out by the country coordinator of the FAIRMED country office in Bangui and the respective FAIRMED programme manager in Bern, as well as by local official agencies. Thanks to consistent monitoring and the engagement of the affected communities, problems at all levels can be identified in a timely manner, causes can be analysed and methods and objectives can be adapted where required. Throughout, specific indicators are used to measure the progress of the project:

- The quality of health services in the various healthcare facilities is measured on the basis of population satisfaction, the number of medically assisted births by trained health workers, and vaccination coverage.
- The impact of the early detection and treatment programme for neglected tropical diseases is measured on the basis of the number of affected children and the success rate of the treatment of diagnosed patients.
- The number of representatives in management committees of Aka communities and people with disabilities is a measurement of the extent to which they are participating in the composition of health services.

Facts & Figures

Project duration:	2017 – 2020
Population:	4.67 million
Development according to HDI*:	Position 188 (of 188)
Gross domestic product/capita:	\$ 562. -- (CH: \$ 55 100.--)
People living below the absolute poverty threshold:	66%.

Source: 2016 UNDP Human Development Report
*Human Development Index



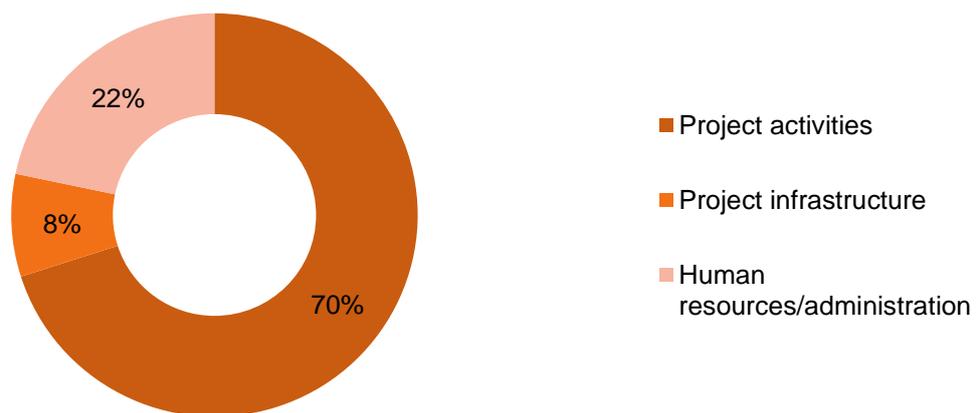
Sustainability

In a climate of mutual learning and respect, FAIRMED pursues its activities alongside local official agencies, government bodies and partner organisations, and works exclusively with local staff. This helps foster broad acceptance that, in turn, enables official agencies to assume responsibility for the continuation of activities once the project is completed. Throughout, the approach of community-based management, which incorporates the respective communities in the administration of the health system, is central to ensuring the sustainability of all FAIRMED projects. This helps establish individual responsibility, ensures the consideration of the interests of communities during implementation, and promotes sustainable development. This project is working towards sustainability through the following measures:

- The establishment of associations for Aka communities and people with disabilities, thus enabling capacity-building within these communities, towards greater participation in the political discourse and fuller exercising of their rights. Their integration also leads to a decrease in discrimination and marginalisation.
- The improvement of the economic situation through the sale of self-produced agricultural products represents a regular and sustainable source of income for the Aka people.
- 'Comité de Gestion de l'Hôpital' (COGE) & 'Comité villageois des soins de santé primaires' (CVSSP): these committees are made up of representatives of health institutions, the local population and official agencies. Through active participation in the management committees of health facilities, the Aka and people with disabilities are empowered to have a greater say and are better able to represent their health policy objectives before the authorities.
- We foster independent and local expertise by investing in the training and further education of local employees and partners.

Budget

The total Budget is 818,706 francs for the project period from 2017 to 2020



Project activities: directly assists the beneficiaries, including the workers that carry out the project activities

Project infrastructure: long-term investments that directly benefit those in need

Political work / communication: PR and advocacy work

Human resources / administration: administration, incl. employees not directly involved in project activities

Marie-Claire's Story

Midwife in an Aka community

Marie-Claire Amakadu Wo belongs to the Aka tribe. Some time ago, she gave birth to her son, a boy named Ogarama, in a health centre. From her own experience, she knows the problems that are faced by Aka women. A lack of transport, ignorance and poor hygiene are just a few of the reasons for the high infant and maternal mortality among the Aka people living in the Central African Republic. Thanks to the initiative from FAIRMED, Marie-Claire has been trained as an assistant midwife and helps with all the births that take place at the health centre. Above all, as a member of staff who is also an Aka woman, she fosters a sense of cultural closeness and trust in the patients from the same ethnic group. Marie-Claire would like to continue to work as an obstetrician, and hopes in this way to encourage other Aka women to visit health centres to give birth, or to become involved in health services themselves.

« I am happy to be able to help my community to live healthier lives. »



Our heartfelt thanks for your interest in our work. Since 1959, the Swiss development organisation FAIRMED has been committed to improving the health of people affected by poverty in Africa and Asia. Thanks to the support of our loyal donors, donations from foundations, as well as inheritances and bequests, FAIRMED is able to offer the very poorest a path to basic healthcare.

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