

Health and Empowerment for the Baka people in Abong-Mbang, Cameroon

The 'Health and empowerment' project in the Abong-Mbang district of Cameroon, is a self-help oriented project that aims to improve the health and strengthen the empowerment of the indigenous Baka people. Since 2008, FAIRMED has supported the people of the region through the development of health-promoting and income-generating measures, and has worked to facilitate access to higher-quality health services and to reinforce the local health care system through the expansion of services that are better able to meet the needs of the local population.

Background

The Baka people originally lived in the rainforest as semi-nomadic hunters, fishermen and gatherers. Today, deforestation, poaching and mineral exploitation has forced the indigenous people out of their habitat and into makeshift, usually non-recognised settlements along transit roads. As an ethnic minority in Cameroon, the Baka suffer from social and legal disadvantages such as inadequate healthcare, unequal access to education and a lack of drinking water. As a result, the life of the Baka is characterised by poverty, disease and high maternal and infant mortality.

The project

The aim of the project is to work together with the local population to facilitate sustainable access to health services and to strengthen the existing health system. Thereby, the project is focused on improving the health situation and living conditions of the local population, in particular the Baka people. Alongside the establishment of health structures, the Baka are provided with support in asserting their civil and land rights, enabling them to gain control of their own futures over the longer term. Likewise, the integration of Baka into the health system and their participation in the health and economic development of the project area is aimed in the long term at decreasing discrimination and marginalisation.

The affected communities as well as local partner organisations are directly involved in the planning and implementation of the project. Throughout, FAIRMED works closely alongside local authorities in the Abong-Mbang district, as well as other health authorities and their governing bodies, the Department for Social Affairs, the Department of Agriculture, the local association for the Indigenous Baka people (CADDAP), and the local NGO (AIDER).

Objectives and activities

By increasing the quality of offered health services, the indigenous Baka are gaining access to higher quality health services, enabling them to lead a life of improved health and empowerment. This project objective is being pursued through a range of carefully selected measures and activities:

Improving health care and establishing intact infrastructure

- Training for traditional midwives and healers and integration in the health planning process.

Improving hygiene and disease prevention

- Launch of the 'villages en santé' (healthy villages) awareness campaign, which uses various means such as films or theatre performances to inform the local population about hygiene matters.
- Development and expansion of infrastructure towards improved hygiene and access to clean water. This activity includes the reconditioning of existing wells and the construction of new wells and sanitary facilities.

Improving the nutrition of the Baka people and achieving a modest income

- Training the Baka in chicken breeding and the cultivation of agricultural land
- Increasing income through the sale of chickens and crops.

Empowering the Baka to assert their civil and land rights

- Reinforcing the interests of the Baka people through work with local partner organisations and by assisting in the development of corresponding measures.
- Promotion of dialogue with the authorities in Cameroon on the issue of birth certificates and identity cards for the Baka people, and on participation in profits from forestry.
- Promotion of education for Baka children through financial contributions for school costs.
- Support for participation of the Baka people in health centre management committees, towards active communication of their needs and improved participation in decision-making.

Strengthening of institutions for health promotion

- Training for members of operating committees and the medical staff of health centres, carried out through the district public health authority.
- Reinforcement of administrative capacities of existing pension systems and establishment of new health funds to reduce financial barriers.

Beneficiaries

The population of the health district of Abong-Mbang is over 80,000. All Baka communities as well as the native Bantu in the project area are directly supported by the project. The general population also benefits from the improved health system and is thus integrated in the project.

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 and support of interest groups ('Groupements d'Intérêt communautaire', GIC) encourages the establishment of dialogue structures that promote the participation of the Baka in the political discourse and enable them to assert their civil rights.
- The construction of solidarity-based collective insurance schemes enables communities to benefit from healthcare services.
- 'Comité de Gestion de l'Hôpital' (COGE) & 'Comité de Santé' (COSA): these committees comprise representatives of health centres, the local population and official agencies. Through active participation in the management committees of health facilities, the indigenous Baka people are empowered to have greater involvement and are better able to represent their health policy objectives before the authorities.
- We safeguard independent and local expertise by investing in the training and further education of local employees.

Facts & Figures

Project duration:	2014 – 2018
Population:	24,3 million
Development according to HDI*:	Position 153 (of 188)
Under-five mortality rate:	88 per 1000 live births
People living below the absolute poverty threshold:	24%

Source: 2016 UNDP Human Development Report
*Human Development Index



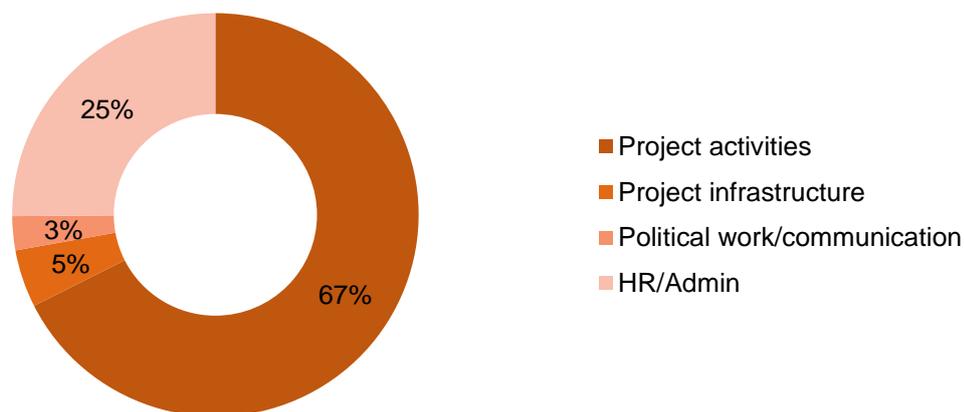
Monitoring

The FAIRMED project team in the Abong-Mbang coordination office safeguards the implementation of activities. The progress of the project and expenses are regularly monitored in cooperation with the responsible FAIRMED programme manager in Bern. FAIRMED pursues a systematic approach alongside its partners, and works to incorporate the local population. In this way, problems at all levels are identified in a timely manner, causes are analysed and methods and objectives can be adapted, where required. Progress is measured on the basis of selected indicators:

- The medicines distributed to dispensaries are used to measure whether quality and access to healthcare is meeting the needs of the population.
- The number of officially registered children is used as a measure of their rights of access to health services, education, property and government programmes.
- Productivity of agriculture and livestock as well as the malnutrition rate is used to measure whether the nutrition of their new sedentary lifestyle is suited to the Baka.

Budget

The total Budget is 961,407 francs for the project period from 2014 to 2018



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

Raimond's story

Years of suffering from a curable disease

Raimond Sada is 67 years old and belongs to the indigenous Baka people. Around 20 years ago, Raimond became so ill that he was unable to move. Raimond's wife tried to heal him with traditional methods, but these did not help. The other villagers distanced themselves from Raimond out of fear of infection. One day, a FAIRMED health team came to the village looking for people suffering from skin diseases. In doing so, they found Raimond and were able to give him a proper medical examination. Raimond was diagnosed with yaws. On the very same day, he received medication for the treatment of the infectious disease, and after just one week Raimond's condition began to improve.

“After ten years with this disease, I did not believe that I could get well. I'm so thankful that FAIRMED cares about the health of my people.”



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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