



Basic medical care for the indigenous Aka people LOBAYE, Central African Republic

The Lobaye prefecture in the Central African Republic is home to the indigenous Aka people. They live in extreme poverty and are openly discriminated against as an ethnic minority. To bring about access to urgently needed healthcare services for the Aka people, FAIRMED is supporting the local population in their efforts to establish a stable and properly functioning health system.

Background

Since gaining independence from France in 1960, the Central African Republic has been afflicted by near-constant political instability. The military-political crisis of recent years has seen a drastic deterioration in the living conditions of the general population, and since 2013 the health system has been in a state of collapse. The majority of the 4.6 million inhabitants of the Central African Republic depend on humanitarian aid, and more than a quarter are currently displaced or living as refugees. The maternal mortality rate as well as that of children under the age of five are among the highest in the world. In addition, access to education, drinking water and sanitation is poor, which in turn negatively impacts the health of the general population.

In this catastrophic situation, the indigenous Aka people are particularly hard hit. The Aka are an ethnic group that live in the tropical rainforest of the Congo Basin as semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers. Excessive use of the rainforest has severely restricted their habitat, forcing them to change their ancestral way of life. With no source of income of their own, the Aka are dependent on bartering and indentured work on the fields of the dominant Bantu population in order to secure their basic needs. And as an ethnic minority, the Aka suffer from extreme discrimination by other groups. In particular, pregnant Aka women, infants and people with disabilities are exposed to increased health hazards as a result of restricted access to health services.

The project

The emphasis of this project is on improving the health of the nearly 20,000 Aka in the Mbaiki health district of Lobaye prefecture. As well as the Aka, other parts of the population such as the Bantu also benefit from the project, as they live in the region and can make use of the improved healthcare system. Throughout, special attention is being given to people with disabilities, where the aim is to provide them with long-term access to health services. The focus is also on the early detection and treatment of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and improving the health of pregnant women and infants. Alongside, the general population – in particular the Aka and people with disabilities – are encouraged to actively participate in the administration of their local health facilities. FAIRMED works closely with the local health authorities and supports them in the implementation of measures that reinforce the healthcare system. FAIRMED has concluded a framework cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Health, meaning that the project is legitimised at the highest level.

Objectives and activities

The main goal of the project is to provide the population of the health district of Mbaiki with access to quality healthcare. To this end, the project is pursuing three specific aims that are being realised, among others, through the following activities:

Utilisation of local health services by the people in the project area

- To improve the quality of health services, the staff at health facilities are trained on a variety of topics. In addition, employees at the health district level are supported in the planning of activities.
- All childbirth costs for Aka women are covered by a voucher system. Among other benefits, they can take make use of free pre- and post-natal examinations and can give birth to their child in a specially equipped health facility, assisted by properly trained staff.
- Emergency patients from the Aka community are transported from their homes to the health facilities in M'baiki or Bangui, where they can receive appropriate treatment.

The population and health workers are empowered in the early detection and treatment of neglected tropical diseases

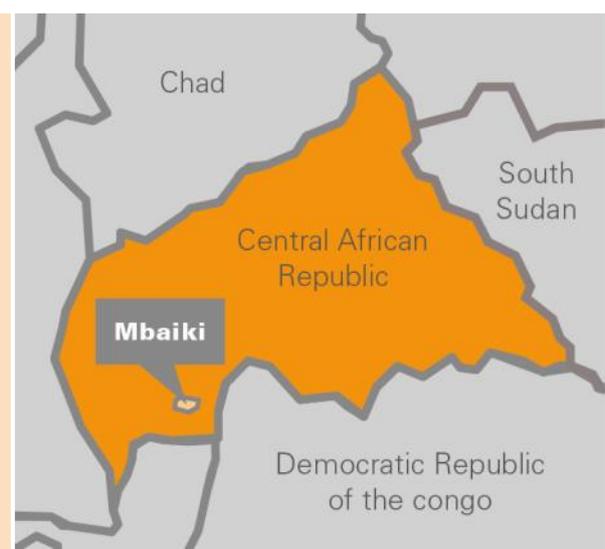
- Health workers and voluntary health workers receive training and advanced instruction in the early detection and treatment of neglected tropical diseases (leprosy, Buruli ulcer and yaws).
- The health authorities are supported in the development and implementation of a national action plan against neglected tropical diseases. They also receive support in the distribution and storage of medicines, the organisation of early detection campaigns and data management.

All of the various ethnic groups and minorities are actively incorporated in healthcare structures

- Efforts are made to include Aka people and those with disabilities in management committees. In addition, the skills and knowledge of these two groups are reinforced through the formation of associations and the implementation of corresponding training.
- Income-generating activities are promoted through training activities and guidance for the Aka people and disabled associations in poultry breeding and livestock cultivation.

Budget

The total budget for the project duration 2017 to 2020 amounts to CHF 1,303,504.



Monitoring

The FAIRMED project team at the coordination office in Mbaiki ensures the implementation of activities and undertakes a regular progress report, including the compilation of a financial report. There are also regular monitoring visits by the monitoring evaluation officer, the national coordinator of the FAIRMED country office in Bangui and the respective FAIRMED program officer in Bern, as well by local authorities. Thanks to this consistent monitoring and the incorporation of the involved communities, problems at all levels can be identified in a timely manner, causes can be analysed and methods and objectives can be adapted, where necessary.

Sustainability

In a climate of mutual learning and respect, FAIRMED works exclusively with local employees and the participation of local authorities, government and partner organisations. This fosters broad acceptance and enables the respective local entities to assume responsibility for the continuation of activities once projects are completed. Throughout, the approach of community-based management, in which the population is involved in the administration of the health system, is central to ensuring the long-term viability of all FAIRMED projects. This establishes individual responsibility, safeguards the inclusion of the interests of the communities in the overall implementation and promotes sustainable development. The presented project is working towards sustainability through the following measures:

- The founding of associations for Aka communities and people with disabilities enables the development of capacities within these communities, allowing them to participate to a greater extent in the political discourse and more fully exercise their rights.
- 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.
- Both the management committee (COGE: Comité de gestion) and the municipal committee for primary health services (CVSSP: Comité villageois des soins de santé primaires) are made up of representatives of health institutions, the general population and official agencies. Through active participation in the administration 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.

Beneficiaries

The emphasis of this project is on improving the health of the approximately 20,000 Aka people in the Mbaiki Health District of Lobaye prefecture. In addition to the Aka, the general population also benefits from the project in the form of an improved health system in their region.

Felicité's Story

A happy birth

Due to complications in childbirth, 40-year-old Aka mother Felicité Monzabo had to give birth to her son Opéré August by caesarean section. Felicité's costs for transportation to the hospital, her medication, the operation as well as meals during her hospital stay were all paid for thanks to the childbirth voucher provided by FAIRMED.

« I'm simply overjoyed to have given birth to a healthy son »



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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