



IRC in Cameroon Education and Child Protection

January 2022

Since 2014, Cameroon's Far North (FN) region has endured attacks by non-state armed groups (NSAGs) that have devastated local communities, driven 545,000 people¹ from their homes, and left 1.2 million people in urgent need of humanitarian aid. The outbreak of violence in 2017 in the North West (NW) and South West (SW) regions between NSAGs and the country's security forces has contributed to the internal displacement of more than 742,000 people² and left 2.2 million people in need of humanitarian aid in the two regions. In 2021, the severity of needs increased due to a rise in insecurity, the impact of COVID-19 and flooding in some areas.³

In Cameroon, the IRC began programming in the FN region in 2016, in the SW region in 2018, and in 2019 in the NW region to meet the needs of crisis-affected persons whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by conflict, and to assist them to survive, recover, and regain control of their future. This document highlights the protection challenges facing crisis-affected people, the response provided by the IRC during the 2021 fiscal year and plans to continue providing support to them.

Education and Child Protection Needs

Insecurity and violence in the border areas of Northeast Nigeria have created an unprecedented population movement in the FN region of Cameroon, depriving thousands of children of social services such as education. At the peak of the crisis, in 2015, up to 144 schools were closed due to insecurity. As of the 2020-2021 school year, only 77 have gradually reopened, 67 remain closed, while 50 have been destroyed. This situation affects access to school for around 35,000 children. From a security perspective, more than half of elementary school students surveyed (64%) say they do not feel safe on their way to school. The dropout rate is of 77% for girls and 76% for boys. Most (60%) of the out-of-school children are drop-outs from formal education programs, which can be explained by the closure of schools due to insecurity; however, poverty and lack of civil documentation, particularly birth certificates, are also major driving factors.⁴



Public School Gouria, Mayo Tsanaga, Far North, Children supported by IRC with school and COVID kits (school bags, face masks)

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has only worsened the situation of children living in conflict zones such as the FN region. To mitigate the spread of the virus, schools in Cameroon were closed for six months. Since schools reopened in October 2020, the implementation of COVID-19 barrier measures has remained a challenge due to the lack of basic hygiene and sanitation infrastructure, including water points, and supplies such as soap and facemasks.

The IRC's Response Strategy

The IRC, in partnership with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) under the new Pilot Programmatic Partnership, is implementing a 36-month project entitled *Protective and Adaptive Education Approaches for Children in Emergencies* (PEACE) across Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon. The IRC is currently implementing phase two of this project, which runs from May 2021 to April 2022.

With an integrated education and child protection approach, PEACE supports school-aged girls and boys in the FN region to access education opportunities and improve their academic and socio-emotional skills in safe, functional schools and other learning spaces. Since the start of the PEACE project in 2020, the IRC has reached a total of 8,166 people (3,680 girls and 4,486 boys) in the FN region. The same people have been supported from October 2020 to September 2021. With the PEACE project, IRC implemented the following activities from September 2020 to October 2021:

¹ IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, August 2021

² Multi-sectoral Needs Assessment, NWSW, September 2021

³ Humanitarian Response plan (HRP), March 2021.

⁴ IRC's PEACE Project Needs assessment, Sept. 2020

- **Provide support to formal schools:** In Year 1, IRC provided support to seven formal schools, including three schools in Mayo Sava (Oudjila Igzawa I, Oudjila Igzawa II, and Gouvaka Chefferie), and four in Mayo Tsanaga (Makandai, EP Galdala, Gaboa, and Gouria). Then in Year 2, four new schools were identified in September 2021 including a school in Mayo Sava (Oudjila Bilingual School), a school in Mayo Tsanaga (Morgo public school) and two schools in Logone and Chari (Afade 2 and Ngardougoum). To date, IRC reached a total of 8,187 (4,125 girls, 4,062 boys) students in these schools.
- **Develop early warning and safety plans** for each of the eleven schools selected to mitigate protection risks faced by children, teachers, and communities.
- Employ the **Safe Healing and Learning Spaces⁵ (SHLS) approach** in certain priority communities with a high number of children out-of-school and at risk: three SHLS were implemented in Year 1 (1 in Oudjila-Igzawa, 1 Gaboua, 1 in Gouria), and two are being implemented in Year 2 (1 in Fotokol, 1 in Makary). A total of 265 children (139 girls, 126 boys) have participated to SHLS program.
- Provide **holistic protection programming, including case management**, through a community-based approach to identify and refer children experiencing neglect and violence to IRC caseworkers. 268 vulnerable children (119 girls, 149 boys) benefited from **case management services** and 541 children (296 girls, 245 boys) were referred to appropriate services.
- Conduct **awareness and information campaigns** on child protection concerns and parenting skills for groups of up to 20 caregivers, reaching 1,182 persons (525 women, 547 men, 49 girls and 61 boys).
- **Support teachers'/facilitators' professional development:** The IRC built the capacity of 164 teachers (96 women, 68 men) in targeted schools of the project, as well as 15 animators (5 women, 10 men) on basic child protection concepts, child rights, and referral systems.
- Provide **psychosocial support group activities:** The IRC, through trained facilitators, provided inclusive, targeted, and structured group psychosocial activities for 37 children Galdala (04 girls, 13 boys), in Makandai (02 girls, 01 boys) (Mayo Tsanaga) and in Makoulahe (13 girls, 04 boys) (Mayo-Sava).

Next Steps

If more funding is secured, the IRC envisions building on gains made since May 2020 through the following strategies:

- **Capacity building of key actors** (government, NGO, staff, community) on child protection prevention and response.
- **Psychosocial Support activities for caregivers** experiencing conflict and displacement.
- Provide support to issue **birth certificates** to conflict-affected children.
- Support adolescents and youth through **Youth Empowerment Program (YEP)** activities.
- Provide support to children who have **dropped out of school** and are at risk of dropping out of school due to regular absences via child protection assistants.
- Establish an **Education and Child Protection exchange forum** to reduce the protection risks to which children are exposed in schools.
- Launch Child Protection activities in **the Southwest and Northwest regions** and focus more on **Nigerian refugees needs**.

Client Spotlight

Talaka Hahad is a 14 years old boy currently living in Gaboua, Koza commune, Mayo-Tsanaga department, Far North region of Cameroon. Five years ago, he had to flee his village Gouzda-Vreket, in the Mandara Mountains near the Nigerian border. No longer able to attend school, Hahad began working as a "Bariyama", the local name for paid labor in the onion, maize, and millet fields, to contribute to their household economy. Hahad benefited from IRC's case management process in response to protection issues including child labor and non-enrollment in school. Among other services, he received home visits, listening and counseling on the consequences and harms of child labor, children's rights, and the importance of education. To re-establish a positive parent-child relationship, Hahad's parents have been enrolled in Parenting sessions.

Thanks to these actions, Hahad has returned to school and has given up his field work. Thanks to an advocacy led by the child protection team, Hahad is exempt from paying school fees. Hahad passed his primary school graduation exams in May 2021, with an average of 16.90/20. He is now attending secondary school (level 1).



Talaka Hahad in his village

⁵ A safe, caring, and predictable environment where children and adolescents in conflict and crisis settings can go during the day to ensure that they are protected from violence and are learning and doing well socially and emotionally.