Adeline Nayah Tim washes her family's clothes using buckets and soap she received as part of CRS' ACER IV project in northwestern Cameroon. In June 2023. Photo by Emmanuel Joko/Caritas for CRS

Anglophone Crisis Emergency Response (ACER)

Introduction

Since 2016, political instability and ongoing security threats in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon have created a protracted crisis. As of July 2023, 638,421 people are internally displaced in the Northwest and Southwest due to the conflict, which continues to upend livelihoods and severely limit access to food, markets, and farmland.

The ACER program began in 2019 as a small pilot funded by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in the Northwest (NW) Region and continues today with funding from USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and in partnership with the Archdiocese of Bamenda. Since its inception, ACER has assisted 102,398 individuals living in vulnerable conditions through electronic vouchers (e-vouchers), which are redeemed for essential food and non-food items (NFI) such as cooking supplies and other household goods. The project currently provides chicks, chicken feed, coops, and other inputs to a targeted subsection of participants who take part in poultry-raising trainings with the aim of improving their ability to earn income and meet their basic needs sustainably.

Community Input on Participant Selection

In the current phase, ACER IV works in 19 communities in five divisions of the NW: Mezam, Momo, Boyo, Ngo Ketunjia, and Bui. In each community, ACER establishes two Participant Validation Committees (PVCs), each made up of

ACER QUICK FACTS	
Activity sectors	Food security, livelihoods, NFIs
Donor	USAID/BHA
Total funding	$10.1 million since 2019 ($2.5 million for 2023 -2024)
Location	Cameroon
Target participants	Internally displaced persons, host communities, persons living with disabilities
Total participants and families	102.398 individuals 14,983 families
Timeframe	2019 – 2024
Partners	Archdiocese of Bamenda

7-10 diverse representatives charged with ensuring their communities understand ACER objectives. The PVCs ensure the most vulnerable internally displaced and host community families are selected to participate in the project and serve as a source of feedback to the project team throughout the project.

ACER KEY OBJECTIVES

1. Meet the basic food needs of vulnerable displaced and host community families in the Northwest.
2. Meet the basic non-food item (NFI) needs of vulnerable displaced and host community families in the Northwest.
3. Improve the livelihoods of vulnerable displaced and host community families in the Northwest via poultry raising.

Provision of Credit for Food and Essential Household Items

E-vouchers are distributed to participants in the form of smart cards. These cards are "topped-up" with funds at regular intervals during the region's lean periods and then families redeem them at approved vendor shops for food and other household and hygiene items of their choice. Vendors agree to accept payment through these e-vouchers and receive training on the Point of Sale equipment they use to process transactions and which are linked to CRS' Cash and Asset Transfer Platform.

Livelihoods Support

Piloted in ACER III and scaled up in ACER IV, the livelihoods program is now supporting around 110 families in poultry raising. Poultry-raising does not require much land access, has growth potential, allows for quick income, and also promotes dietary diversity. Poultry participants receive training on best-practices for poultry-raising, as well as their own chicks, coops, feed, and veterinary support.

A poultry participant receives her 21-day-old chicks during the distribution exercise in Bamenda. © Blessing Beri/CRS.

Accountability and Community Feedback

ACER uses a robust and confidential feedback, complaints, and response mechanism (FCRM) that allows participants and the community at large to submit and receive responses to concerns about the project through various channels. The channels include hotlines, suggestion boxes, complaint registers, and face-to-face conversations with project staff.

RESULTS

Through the ACER project, the participants have improved their food security and families are more capable of meeting their basic needs. Below are some of the results, comparing baseline data to endline data (June 2023):

- **Food Consumption Scores (FCS)**: Families reporting poor food consumption scores decreased from 31% to just 4%. FCS measures dietary diversity, food frequency, and the relative nutrition of different food groups.
- **Negative Coping Strategies (rCSI index):** The frequency with which families used negative coping mechanisms in response to food scarcity (such as reducing portion sizes) reduced from 25 to 8.4 on the rCSI index for core caseload participants, and reduced further to 7.45 for poultry participants.
- **Family Hunger Scale (HHS):** Families reporting little to no hunger increased from 25% to 91%, and those with severe hunger reduced from 15% to 0.4%. Further, 96% of poultry participants reported little to no hunger.
- **Meeting Basic Family Needs:** Families reporting that they are able to meet all or most of their basic needs increased from 8% to 78% on average. Over 98% of poultry participants reported that they could meet most or all of their basic needs.
- **Partner Capacity Strengthening:** CRS and the Archdiocese of Bamenda/Caritas Bamenda collaborated on continual capacity building through staff training, coaching, and accompaniment. They have become more efficient in delivering high-quality activities and timely results. Furthermore, they received support in developing or improving processes and policies for financial management, safeguarding, MEAL, livelihoods & business skills, community mobilization, and security.

Transition from Humanitarian Aid

Due to the protracted nature of the crisis in the NW, predicting an end to the needs of conflict-affected families remains unclear. CRS is committed to assisting these communities, while preparing them to transition away from humanitarian aid. Consistent turnover in the ACER caseload as households achieve higher levels of food security suggests e-vouchers have helped cover basic needs, freeing up scarce resources for investment in other economic recovery activities. Continued livelihood activities also make families more resilient and less dependent on direct transfers, enabling them to cover their own basic needs in the long-term.

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