

MERCY CORPS
CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
SECTOR OVERVIEW

2009



Photo: Joni Kabana for Mercy Corps

INTRODUCTION

Mercy Corps helps people in the world's toughest places turn the crises of natural disaster, poverty and conflict into opportunities for progress. Driven by local needs and market conditions, our programs provide communities with the tools and support they need to transform their own lives. Our worldwide team of 3,700 professionals is improving the lives of 14.5 million people in more than 40 countries. In recognition that climate change poses an imminent threat on our development gains to date and that natural resources management (NRM) is integral to the success of relief and development programming, Mercy Corps currently has incorporated climate change, environment and natural resources management into programs and proposals among more than 15 countries worth around US\$ 8,000,000. It leverages its impact with a global [Cool Carbon campaign](http://www.mercycorps.org/coolcarbon) (<http://www.mercycorps.org/coolcarbon>), an Asian wide climate change and cities network and a multi-agency emergency capacity building network.

The increasing severity and frequency of climate change impacts calls for an immediate need to alter the way we conceptualize and respond to development issues. Challenges such as war, famine and financial recessions tend to be relatively short, over in less than ten years. Election cycles and national plans are usually over in less than five. By contrast, climate change and its impacts are set to progressively and noticeably worsen over the next twenty years and accelerate catastrophically into the final half of this century and beyond unless mitigation measures are put in place over the near term. We must pro-actively consider climate change problems in the long-term and find sustainable solutions that will help vulnerable populations adapt to unavoidable impact while advocating for global changes needed to slow climate change's pace.

Our climate, environmental and natural resources management (NRM) programming is adapted for the transitional situations in which we work. Programming has successful **crosscutting relationships** with other sectors such as Disaster Risk Reduction, Food Security and Agriculture. There is also a clear synergy with our market development and conflict management programming. All of these sectors interact with and are affected by local and international environmental conditions as well as access to natural resources. In these contexts, addressing the competition for natural and environmental resources while building a sustainable livelihood base are key program areas, in both urban and rural settings.

OUR CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENT AND NRM APPROACH

Climate Change, Environment and NRM Sector Goal

We aim to mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation into disaster risk reduction and development programming via alternative energies and carbon markets, helping communities adapt to climate change and develop working partnerships that build a response of effective scale.

Structuring a Response

Mercy Corps launched its climate change initiative in October 2006 in recognition that climate change will:

- Be a driver of future global humanitarian crises;
- Threaten to undermine any development progress made to date in support of the populations that we serve.

Mercy Corps considers climate change a lens through which to assess both threats and opportunities to development and humanitarian action.

Our efforts are intended to:

- Provide adaptation strategies for communities coping with the effects of climate change;
- Provide viable options for communities to diminish their own negative impacts on the environment;
- Integrate Mercy Corps successes and other experience into global policy development on climate adaptation and mitigation that impacts poor and vulnerable communities.

Mercy Corps leverages its presence in more than 40 countries with the intent of reaching hundreds of communities and thousands of people to bring results of scale. Regarding climate change, it focuses on three main areas:

- 1 **Alternative energy:** Identifying and promoting alternative energy options that benefit poor and vulnerable communities and provide sustainable economic benefits at meaningful scale.
- 2 **Sustainable Resource Management:** Supporting and promoting best practices and enhancing community capacity to protect environmental and ecological services.
- 3 **Advocacy, Outreach, and Example:** Catalyzing governments and people to replicate successful, environment and climate-friendly programs.

Who We Work With

We bring about positive environmental change by applying Mercy Corps's vision for change that engages the public, private and civic sectors. Our climate change and ERM programs work in partnership with:

- **Civil Society:** Civic organizations that are comprised of, or work for, low income households and individuals (formal and informal cooperatives, local CBOs/ NGOs.)
- **Private Sector:** Businesses, because they are primary movers in the market economy and stakeholders such as carbon traders or trade associations.
- **Public Sector:** Governments, because they are integral to enabling and sustaining climate mitigation and adaptation at effective scale.

*Photo: Thomas Cook for Mercy Corps*

Identifying and Promoting Scaleable Alternative Energies

Traditional fuels providing energy for light, heat and cooking often result in environmental degradation including releasing carbon into the atmosphere. Mercy Corps is working with the private sector to identify alternatives, driven by market demand, that are cost efficient, safeguard the environment and utilize less carbon.

Both Mercy Corps and the private sector are interested in achieving the greatest scale possible within and across countries. For businesses, larger numbers of users means greater profit. For Mercy Corps, larger numbers of people using cleaner fuels means greater benefit to communities and their environment. Furthermore, as alternative energies are scaled there is an increasing need for distributors and equipment maintenance that create clear employment pathways for community members. It is at this nexus point that Mercy Corps can catalyze the private sector and communities to serve their self-interest, while limiting the harmful contribution to climate change.

Beyond the companies that are interested in developing countries as markets for alternative energies, there is an ever-growing interest in the developed world of offsetting carbon usage by buying into carbon reduction projects in the developing world. Mercy Corps is actively pursuing strategies to capture the resources that are becoming increasingly available for activities of sufficient scale.

Supporting Natural Resource Management Practices and Enhancing Community Preparedness

Some community and individual practices harm fragile environments. With the onset of climate change, the fragility of these environments is accentuated. Increased degradation of water, forests, land, and air will force communities to move more quickly to adaptation strategies. Mercy Corps is continuing and reinforcing its many years of implementation of projects with environmental components by supporting sustainable resource management practices in communities in which we work. We are focusing our efforts in both rural and urban settings since there is often a direct connection between poor resource management in rural areas, enhanced problems in urban areas. Overall these lead to an integration of environmental management as a part of long-term disaster risk response. We prepare communities and mitigate potential hazards.

Catalyzing Governments and People Through Advocacy, Outreach and Example

Climate Change is a global phenomenon that will require collaborative action by individuals, communities, governments, organizations and corporations to bring about meaningful change. Mercy Corps recognizes that it has an important role to play in direct implementation of adaptation and mitigation programming. But perhaps a more important role is to inspire others to work towards the necessary behavioral changes. With our wide geographic reach, Mercy Corps has the ability to use this platform to engage stakeholders in government, donor community, academia, media, business, and communities to create a force multiplier.

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