RESILIENCE RAPID LEARNING BRIEF

LEVERAGING CRISIS ANALYSIS TOWARDS RESILIENCE-BUILDING RESPONSES: A CASE STUDY FROM THE DRC

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ABOUT THE RESILIENCE RAPID LEARNING SERIES

LESSONS FOR BUILDING RESILIENCE IN PROTRACTED CRISES AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SETTINGS

REAL's Resilience Rapid Learning Series is designed to provide the practitioner and donor community with insights and emerging evidence on how to build resilience in protracted crises and conflict-affected settings. The series documents promising program approaches and contextual insights through rapid research, case studies, and technical analysis. This series was inspired by a Conflict and Resilience Roundtable in June 2020, organized by the REAL Award and the USAID Center for Resilience, and framed by Mercy Corps' paper *Towards Resilience: Advancing Collective Impact in Protracted Crises*. This paper calls for humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development action to align behind a resilience agenda to protect current and future well-being in conflict settings.

Research questions for each brief in this series align with the framework presented in the *Towards Resilience* paper, calling for collective action around three practice areas to drive resilience:

1. Rapid, real-time analysis of risk factors that drive and perpetuate fragility.
2. Support to local market and social systems to strengthen sources of resilience to the shocks and stresses defining protracted crises.
3. Short-term violence prevention paired with efforts to transform the structural drivers of conflict.

The roundtable discussion validated a desire for practitioner and donor communities to work differently at the intersection of peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, and development, and to include resilience perspectives in program design and implementation. To further this agenda, participants called for documentation of promising program practices for building resilience among conflict-affected communities through rapid (light-touch) learning briefs.

This brief investigates the effectiveness of rapid situational analysis tools to guide resilience programming in protracted crisis contexts by examining the methodology, structure and capabilities of Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics Team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global rise in the number and duration of conflict-driven crises has reinforced the importance of developing longer-term interventions that not only address humanitarian needs, but also strengthen households' ability to better cope in crisis, reduce the occurrence of conflict-related shocks, and transform the underlying drivers of crisis and vulnerability. Risk and resilience assessments[1] are often the first essential step in the design and delivery of international assistance intended to help households cope, adapt, and transform in shock-prone environments,[2] but these tools have proven inadequate in protracted, conflict-driven crises.[3] The need for continuous, granular, real-time risk analysis motivated inquiry into the relevance and applicability of rapid situational analysis tools—typically reserved for humanitarian settings—to resilience investments in protracted crises. This brief provides a case study in one such analytical method, Crisis Analytics at Mercy Corps, and its application to protracted crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Through document review and key stakeholder interviews, the team assessed three cases of Crisis Analytics application in the DRC, including displacement alerts, monthly-deep dives on relevant social, political, or economic issues, and perception-tracking. Across all three cases, the team found that Crisis Analytics in the DRC effectively supported Mercy Corps and other humanitarian actors to shape more appropriate, conflict-sensitive, and forward-thinking responses that laid the foundation for resilience. Specifically, the information supported Mercy Corps to pivot towards markets and livelihoods programming among internally displaced populations and facilitate trust-building, community engagement, and local partnerships in the Ebola response. The responses strengthened local systems, ensured Do No Harm principles were put into practice, and supported local resilience capacities. The information also informed key donors to better preposition assistance in response to evolving displacement and conflict dynamics.

Resulting recommendations for donors and implementing partners on the application and use of crisis analysis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo include:

- Crisis analysis should be an essential component of humanitarian, peace, and development programs' decision making in conflict contexts to enable local investments to build resilience and avert future humanitarian need.
- Programs should apply and use crisis analysis methods throughout all phases of resilience project or portfolio management in protracted crisis contexts, including design, monitoring, and adaptive management. This includes adapting existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning tools and processes to inform real-time decisions that can improve resilience outcomes in crisis contexts.
- Donors should fund independent crisis analysis hubs at a portfolio-level, thus ensuring the continuous availability of highly relevant, actionable, real-time crisis data for humanitarian, development, and peace actors operating in a particular context.
- Donors and implementing partners should leverage existing coordination structures to disseminate crisis analysis information widely and use the data for shared planning that informs collective action.

1 Vaughan, E. and Henly-Shepard, S. (2018)
2 Ibid
3 Mercy Corps (2018)

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INTRODUCTION

The global rise in the number and duration of conflict-driven crises has reinforced the importance of developing longer-term interventions that not only address humanitarian needs, but also lay the foundation for long-term peace and well-being. Resilience investments in protracted crises are intended to bridge the humanitarian, development, and peace divide, ensuring that collective action can strengthen households' ability to better cope in crisis, reduce the occurrence of conflict-related shocks, and transform the underlying conditions that lead to crisis and vulnerability.

Risk and resilience assessments are often the first essential step in the design and delivery of international assistance intended to help households cope, adapt, and transform in shock-prone environments.[4] Depending on their level and scope, these analyses are intended to help policy-makers and program teams consider the major shocks and stresses that could disrupt and upend well-being outcomes in fragile contexts, anticipate the downstream effects of these disruptions, and design intervention packages accordingly. For example, the World Bank's Risk and Resilience Assessments have now been widely applied as a "primary diagnostic tool by which to inform and shape fragility, conflict and violence (FCV)-sensitivity in country strategies," with specific attention to root causes and "threats to stability."[5] Similarly, the Center for Strategic and International Studies undertook a comprehensive risk and resilience assessment for Nigeria to recommend key actions for U.S. government investments there.

While providing comprehensive and in-depth analysis, these large-scale, largely static, and time-intensive initiatives have proven inadequate for shaping resilience interventions in protracted, conflict-driven crises, which now dominate humanitarian outlays. For example, Mercy Corps' first application of its Strategic Risk and Resilience Assessment (STRESS)[6] process in Northeast (NE) Nigeria[7] revealed that the tools were too slow and too cumbersome to stay ahead of a moving crisis, where shocks and stresses were evolving rapidly and continuously and localized disruptions had reverberating effects. Resilience programming in these contexts required insight into various risk factors. These included evolving perceptions of government, armed groups, and other elements that could spike violence, affect the ability to anticipate and avert market disruptions, or identify stable enough conditions to begin shaping livelihoods and financial services, among other factors. Typical static risk and resilience assessments were not providing the timely information needed for quick pivots and tactical changes to programming given shifting contexts and situations.

The need for continuous, granular risk analysis motivated inquiry into the relevance and applicability of rapid situational analysis tools—typically reserved for humanitarian settings—to resilience investments in protracted crises. This brief provides a case study in one such analytical method, Crisis Analytics at Mercy Corps, and its application to the protracted crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Examining the methodology, structure, and capabilities of Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics Team (CAT) in the DRC provides insight into where and how improved rapid crisis analysis tools can be deployed to inform resilience-focused program action in highly shock-prone, rapidly changing conflict environments.

CONTEXT

Crisis Analytics at Mercy Corps seeks to enhance the systematic analysis of crisis dynamics, including risks, needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities, to inform timely and relevant action in rapidly changing conflict environments. As such, it intends to fill existing gaps in situational and humanitarian analyses in crisis contexts, much of which is sector-specific

4 Vaughan, E. and Henly-Shepard, S. (2018)
5 World Bank (2019)
6 Mercy Corps (2017)
7 Mercy Corps (2018)

Figure 1: Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

or incident-based and lacks the contextual framing vital to interpretation and crafting resilience-building program responses.[8] Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics methodology—developed over the past five years and now deployed in complex crisis contexts such as Syria, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo—explores the interconnected political, economic, social, technological, and cultural dynamics which drive crisis events, and maps crisis actors at institutional and individual levels. Crisis Analytics Teams (CATs) are deployed at the country level and connected to a global Crisis Analytics Unit.

Together, they derive data from two core components: 1) human intelligence; and 2) 'big data' on the crisis. CAT analysts at country level provide subject-matter expertise on different aspects and areas of a crisis, and are connected to a diverse network of information sources across different crisis actors, sectors, and locations. CATs remain in constant contact with these information sources, which can include principal actors at the highest levels of the main rival factions or groups, *de facto* authorities, and political and military actors garnering the most nuanced and up-to-date information available. The team also nurtures key contacts with the economic and business sector, as well as operational humanitarian and development agencies in the UN/multilateral system and NGO spheres. By maintaining an active conversation with such a diverse network, the analysts are able to gain multiple insights into factional perspectives on key issues, triangulate information, and synthesize the feedback into actionable insights and predictive forecasting.

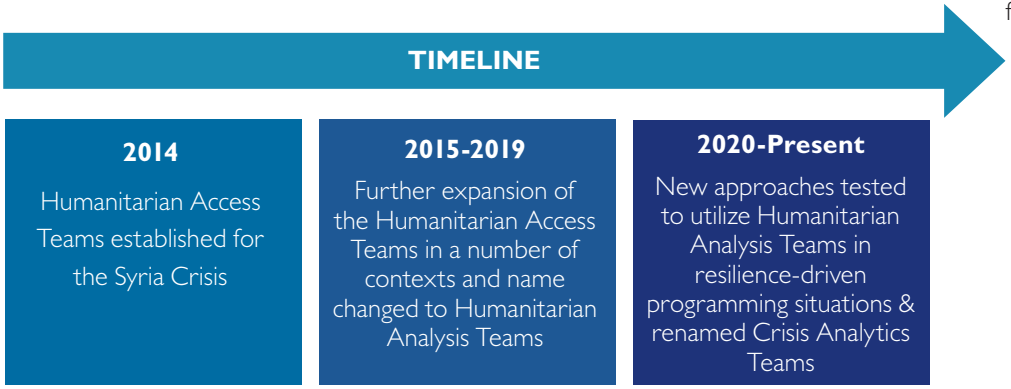

Figure 2: Evolution of Crisis Analytics Teams

While Crisis Analytics may be geared towards different audiences, based on the level of detail and its sensitivity, the information is broadly intended for donors, implementing partners, and Mercy Corps' implementing team, to inform resource allocation and operational and other programming decisions.

This brief examines the work of Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics Team in the DRC, or the Mercy Corps' Congo Humanitarian Analysis Team (CHAT) and assesses the potential effectiveness of using Crisis Analytics as a tool for risk analysis that guides resilience programming in protracted crisis contexts. The CHAT was established in 2019 to inform

8 OCHA (2019)

targeted humanitarian interventions among crisis-affected populations, including cash assistance, distribution of non-food items, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programming. Over the last two years, the CHAT has provided distinct analysis for decision-makers. This analysis ensures that assistance is appropriately targeted and conflict-sensitive, communities are well-informed, and organizations have a better understanding of the drivers of conflict, displacement, and the perceptions of the people they are serving. The CHAT has a core team of analysts embedded within Mercy Corps' team in Goma and select sub-offices and partners with a diverse network of informants, including individuals and local organizations. The team has conducted analyses in North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Maniema, and Tanganyika provinces.

While the CHAT initially focused on displacement alerts, it quickly began developing monthly reports and situational briefs to provide more in-depth analysis on immediate socio-political conflict drivers—or variables influencing the escalation of violence—including predictive analysis. In 2020, the CHAT added a weekly report for mission leadership and launched a weekly monitoring of community health perceptions in areas affected by Ebola for the humanitarian sector as a whole. The CHAT is now involved in supporting project design and context monitoring. It continues to explore the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics in the crisis zones of Eastern DRC.[9] The information is regularly shared with donors and implementing partners operating in Eastern DRC.

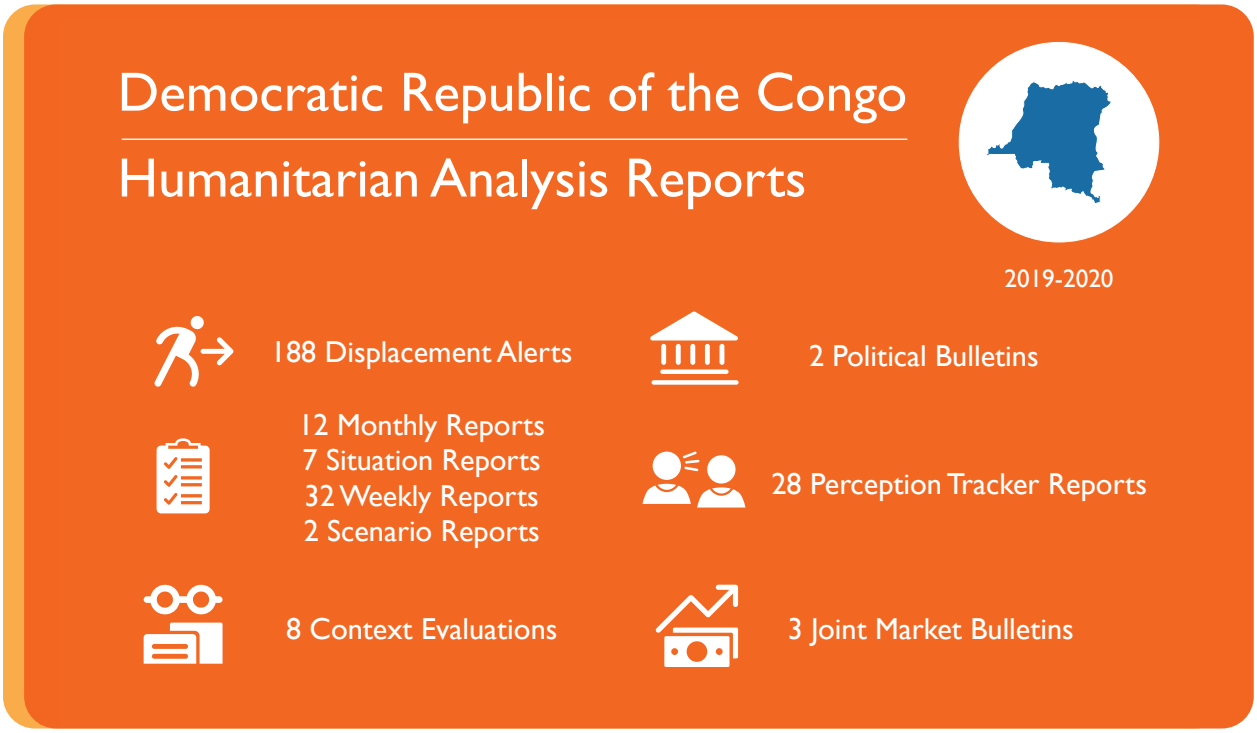

Figure 3: CHAT deliverables, 2019-2020

Given the overall effectiveness and focus of the CHAT, this brief examines where and how information intended for humanitarian actors could be applied, or further refined, to inform collective action at the nexus of humanitarian, peace, and development programming that strengthens resilience in protracted crisis contexts. In particular, this brief identifies where Crisis Analytics can help programs: 1) strengthen positive coping capacities without inadvertently causing harm;

9 Mercy Corps (2020)

2) leverage pockets of relative stability to strengthen participants' ability to anticipate, prevent, or adapt to future shocks, and 3) advance transformative solutions that address the root causes and systemic barriers to long-term peace and stability.

DATA AND METHODS

The research team reviewed documents to assess the "informative capacity" of current CHAT products and provide insight on their potential use for resilience and development programming activities. Simultaneously, surveys and structured interviews were conducted with relevant CHAT, program, and leadership staff to understand the following questions:

1. Is the CHAT able to conduct quality analysis of highly contextualized local risk factors that affect the well-being and development prospects of local populations in Eastern DRC and how did that information lead to specific program decisions that either helped participants better cope with, anticipate, or prevent those shocks?
2. Has the CHAT analysis been utilized to influence the development of programs and their impact and helped teams anticipate potential shocks and crisis dynamics in their context (i.e., potential for violence, displacement, price spikes)?
3. How best can the CHAT provide analysis that influences programmatic decisions and further inform decision-making capabilities of other organizations towards more effective and robust programming?
4. Is the CHAT a unique provider of information that is different from other analytics providers such as the International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), and/or The Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS)?

This research is based on 17 key informant interviews (KIIs) with senior Mercy Corps staff to glean their perspective on overall CHAT effectiveness and how best they could be utilized to engage more deeply with programmatic decision-making, specifically on resilience programming and outcomes. An online survey with 26 respondents within Mercy Corps and a review of relevant documents (e.g., situation reports, strategic documentation, thematic reports) supported this research.[10]

Kavugho Eugenie Mayelo stands in her doorway in North Kivu Province, DRC. Olivia Acland/Mercy Corps 2020.

10 Mercy Corps (2020)

KEY INSIGHTS

The following programming examples highlight the comparative advantages of the Crisis Analytics methodology in assessing local risk factors and showcase how it can be capitalized on to strengthen resilience outcomes.

HUMANITARIAN ALERTS

A key application of the CHAT in the DRC has been the provision of the Humanitarian Alert System focused on displacement. The CHAT utilizes a number of approaches to collect real-time data on population movement and displacement as a proxy for understanding evolving crisis situations throughout the Eastern part of the country. By triangulating data from secondary sources, field-based assistants, and other sources, Mercy Corps is able to report on specific events that are typically drivers of humanitarian crisis triggering displacement in Eastern DRC (e.g., violent incidents, epidemics, natural disasters). Based on this timely reporting, which includes posting data to a secure website, Mercy Corps and other humanitarian actors in the area of operations are able to develop actions to potentially mitigate humanitarian crises, and, in most cases, prepare an adequate response. The CHAT actively monitors situations in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika, and Maniema. Recent surveys show that over 90 percent of humanitarian actors interviewed feel this system is an important component of timely responses throughout the region and is an influential knowledge base for all agencies.

CASE 1

The CHAT in Eastern DRC was established to monitor and respond to what was perceived to be frequent displacement of multiple populations over short periods of time. Following initial analysis of one situation, the CHAT was able to ascertain that many populations were not actually being displaced on a frequent basis, and in many cases stayed for 8–9 months in neighboring villages where they had strong social connections. Contrary to common perceptions across humanitarian actors, the displaced were not usually settling in areas that were foreign to them—but rather in areas characterized by ethnic and language similarities, cultural affiliation, shared trade, and often strong social or even familial ties that provided them with refuge. Mercy Corps quickly adapted its humanitarian assistance package to move away from short-term shelter and emergency goods provision, to markets support and livelihoods enhancement, including through cash assistance. This was particularly important, as inequitable goods distribution to the displaced in areas with well established family ties could have had wider negative implications for the local host economy and potentially fractured social relationships.[11] On the other hand, livelihoods and markets support strengthened social ties and allowed

> *"So what we did was change our post-distribution monitoring surveys, and began asking when they are moving and why they are moving. Their answers were clear. They were settling and waiting for their area to have livelihoods opportunities to be re-established. They weren't planning on going anywhere for a while. They didn't need 'emergency response' in Ituri, they needed more longer term economic opportunities. We also began to change the way we positioned staff, ensuring that we were able to have the correct languages and cultural understanding of our staff ensuring we were providing the right assistance at the right time."*
>
> (Mercy Corps' former Humanitarian Director)

11 Levine, S. and Becton, G. (2019)

displaced populations to contribute to the local economy and to their host family.

Mercy Corps also engaged with the European Commission, USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, and the current Foreign Commonwealth Development Office towards adapting funding allocations to better address the needs of displaced populations, and move away from purely short-term assistance to more market-oriented programming.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Continuous and granular analysis of conflict and displacement dynamics in protracted crises can provide a clear picture of where it is possible—and often necessary—for humanitarian investments to go beyond meeting immediate needs, and take a medium-term approach to programming that lays the foundation for resilience. This analysis in the DRC supported teams to not only adjust their own interventions to strengthen resilience capacities among displaced populations through livelihoods and markets support, but the information helped influence humanitarian donors around what type of investments could help communities move beyond crisis and build resilience as well.

Mercy Corps team members hold a meeting in the evening, preparing for a cash distribution for people displaced by violence. Olivia Acland/ Mercy Corps, 2020.

THEMATIC AND MONTHLY REPORTS ON CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

While providing succinct, timely messages through the alert and tracking systems, the CHAT in the DRC also provides detailed thematic and monthly reports on conflict and displacement dynamics. Thematic reports predominantly focus on extensively researched, high-level topics such as a political transition and critical economic or market variables. They offer an in-depth lens into a significant and evolving crisis dynamic, and can include a predictive component. Monthly reports also build on the displacement tracking system described above, and give practitioners both a summary and a more detailed look at the displacements of the month, their causes, and their potential implications.

CASE 2

At the end of 2019, the CHAT conducted an assessment of potential government military interventions in Beni, North Kivu province, against rebel groups in the area. Following the assessment, the CHAT conducted a detailed scenario planning exercise—predicting potential areas of clashes and displacement over a 4-5 month period—to prepare for the potential displacement and humanitarian impact of military movement. These scenarios laid out where attacks would occur, by whom, possible government counter attacks, and predicted movement of displaced populations. Out of five potential scenarios that the CHAT predicted, four came to fruition. Their findings were presented to the Humanitarian

Country Team at the provincial level in North Kivu who subsequently utilized the pertinent information to plan their humanitarian action, develop pre-positioning protocols, and allocate staff for pre-deployment. Humanitarian donors also received the report and subsequently began pre-positioning funds to assist those who may be displaced. Scenario planning helped identify how many people would be displaced, where they might go and how teams could provide assistance there.

Similarly, in Ituri, during the escalation of the conflict in late 2019, the situation was very fluid with new and extremely violent actors taking the front stage. One previously unknown rebel group began a number of attacks, but very little information on their cause and their goal was known. The CHAT was deployed to assess the intentions of the group and better understand the humanitarian impact that they could potentially cause with their actions. They conducted an extremely well received analysis that was welcomed by both the implementing and donor community. In both cases, the information directly informed the pre-positioning and allocation of humanitarian assistance, the deployment of staff, and the specific targeting of the most affected populations. However, because the information was highly sensitive and limited to a core group within the humanitarian community, it was not otherwise used as an early warning mechanism by peacebuilding or development efforts to reduce the negative effects of rebel movements on local populations, seek dialogue or negotiation opportunities for conflict prevention, or to lay the groundwork with potential host communities for a potential influx of internally displaced people.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The ability of Crisis Analytics Teams to produce in-depth reports on evolving crisis dynamics, including the intentions and motives of armed groups, provides invaluable information that could be better utilized by peace and development actors to adjust their interventions before the full escalation of a crisis. Crisis analysis reports should be shared with a wide array of actors and donors that influence humanitarian, development, and peace programming decisions to increase the potential for collective action that builds resilience in addition to addressing acute needs. Consistent analysis and systematic reporting can raise awareness with communities, local government, and donors and depoliticize data sharing.

Men and women check a list for their names to see if they will receive cash assistance from Mercy Corps. Olivia Acland/Mercy Corps, 2020.

PERCEPTION TRACKING

Over the course of the latest Ebola outbreak (2018-2020) in Eastern DRC, Mercy Corps, together with partners, established a perception survey tracker to combat the spread of misinformation and rumors related to Ebola that could spread violence, undermine people's ability to cope with the current situation, and deepen the crisis. This included

providing information to its partners to stem any potentially false or incendiary information from spreading across at-risk populations. The CHAT's weekly reports described the nature of the misinformation — be it perceptions of the disease itself, or rumors spreading around healthcare workers — to operational partners and internal teams to help adjust programming accordingly.

CASE 3

The spread of misinformation was a known challenge in fighting Ebola in the DRC, but often the source and vector of misinformation remained unknown. During the 10th Eblola outbreak in August 2018, there were very few active cases in Ituri, but there was news that the virus was spreading. The CHAT deployed a team to assess the Ebola spread and possible infection rates and were violently attacked. Vehicles were burned and humanitarian staff beaten. After the situation had dissipated, the CHAT deployed another team to the area to ascertain why they were attacked. It turned out that an official from a different Ebola-affected area had returned to his home village and began spreading misinformation to a local, politically-affiliated youth group that Mercy Corps was "…Coming to give you the vaccine and it will kill you!" The youth group then spread the lies throughout the community, who in turn began to fear the situation and wanted more clarity on these rumors but felt they had no one to turn to. The CHAT immediately formulated a response. Recognizing the youth group as the key vector of misinformation, Mercy Corps began to actively engage the group to dispel the rumors initiated by the official. Following a number of consultations, Mercy Corps was allowed to return to the area and began working closely with the youth group on an Ebola information campaign, helping to demystify the disease and build trust around related health care efforts. The group eventually became close allies and community ambassadors in Mercy Corps' Ebola response.

Mercy Corps also used rumor and perception tracking to facilitate its entry into a new operational area. The areas within and surrounding Beni city are notoriously difficult areas of the country to conduct humanitarian operations. The intensity of the conflict and the numerous armed groups operating in the area restrict humanitarian access and space. Prior to Mercy Corps engaging in Beni, and having full knowledge of what had happened in Ituri, Mercy Corps deployed an initial CHAT survey team to the area to better understand the context and current perceptions. What they found was daunting. First, following community discussions, CHAT members noted that local communities believed that Mercy Corps was coming to take their bodies—literally, because Mercy Corps phonetically translates in French to, "Thank you for the bodies." Secondly, Mercy Corps at the time was being funded by UKAID (now FCDO). Many of the citizens in the area did not understand the meaning of the acronym, with many pronouncing it as it sounds in the local vernacular: Al Qaeda. Many people in Beni believed that Mercy Corps was coming to take their bodies because they worked for Al Qaeda. These negative perceptions triggered a quick and urgent information campaign to allow for engagement with the community. Mercy Corps immediately began meeting with local youth and community leaders and dispelled a number of the rumors. Similarly, they began addressing the concerns of the wider population through radio campaigns. The CHAT's ability to collect and present real-time actionable data not only enabled an entry-point into the community by dispelling rumors, it paved the way for trust-building, community engagement, and partnership, and a conflict-sensitive response. While the nature of rumor tracking and the response triggered was not exclusive to resilience, it was clear that mitigating rumors—whether about the intentions of NGOs, or other operations—was a precondition for establishing a longer-term relationship of trust with local actors.

KEY TAKEAWAY: Rumor and perception monitoring helped program teams identify hyper-local dynamics that lead to a breakdown in trust, fueled violence, and reduced local capacity to better cope with, or prevent, the escalation of shocks like the Ebola outbreak. Mercy Corps' work to consistently monitor the "pulse" of the community in a very tense and difficult context, and counter negative perceptions when they arose, allowed for not only immediate life-saving programming to take place; it also helped to build trust, strengthened partnership with community structures, and supported conflict-sensitive interventions, thus strengthening the potential for resilience to take root.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The CHAT's displacement alerts, rumor-tracking and thematic and monthly reports provide in-depth, real-time The CHAT's displacement alerts, rumor-tracking and thematic and monthly reports provide in-depth, real-time information on the movements, behaviors, motivations, and perceptions of local actors, and yield unique insights into the risk factors driving protracted crisis. This application provides important insights into whether such continuous, granular analyses in dynamic conflict contexts can better inform resilience-building interventions relative to static, one-time resilience assessments at project inception, and whether the data could motivate collective action towards resilience across the humanitarian, peace, and development community. Key insights from the application of Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics methodology in the DRC include:

- **Crisis Analytics in the DRC is highly relevant not only for humanitarian actors, but peace and development implementers, and can steer collective action towards resilience-building.** The CHAT's information allowed humanitarian actors to implement measures that strengthened the ability of communities to better cope and adapt to local crisis dynamics, and thus lay the foundation for resilience. This included strengthening livelihoods and markets responses among displaced populations, and partnering with community groups to ensure they were empowered as frontline actors in the Ebola response. The nature of the information could be better disseminated and utilized across peace and development actors as well, to tailor, sequence, and layer interventions across the humanitarian, peace, and development spectrum, ensuring shared and reinforcing ways of working.
- **The Crisis Analytics methodology was seen as providing clear value-add to existing humanitarian situational analysis, which often focus on occurrence and needs, but not on motivations, root cause ,and systemic implications.** While other sources of humanitarian analysis exist in the DRC, Mercy Corps' overall Crisis Analytics approach, as undertaken by CHAT in the DRC, was seen as providing new, actionable insights that opened the door for deeper engagement and more longer-term programming in protracted crisis contexts.
- **Crisis Analytics reports are not currently broadly disseminated, nor requested, beyond the humanitarian community, suggesting a missed opportunity for strengthening resilience through collective action, and demonstrating shared results.** Systematic and shared planning, dissemination, and application of Crisis Analytics across local implementing partners and donors in the DRC has yet to be achieved, despite the relevance of the information.
- **Stronger partnership across program and Crisis Analytics teams could further improve the relevance and analytical capacity of the unit to inform resilience programming.** While the CHAT in the DRC tracks a range of relevant risk factors and local dynamics that shaped key program decisions, greater partnership across program and analysis teams is needed to deepen the relevance of the information and ensure a broader, yet more tailored set of indicators which help inform resilience-building measures. Crisis Analytics can also enhance program decision-making if it is better integrated into program management and adaptive management processes.

These lessons hold the following recommendations for donors and implementing partners.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Crisis analysis should be an essential component of humanitarian, peace, and development programs' decision-making in conflict contexts if local investments are to build resilience and avert future humanitarian need. Program teams operating in protracted crises should move away from one-off, large-scale inception assessments and make better use of real-time, continuous data to inform project decisions. This is required for programs to effectively build resilience in complex risk environments characterized by protracted conflict and humanitarian need.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Crisis analysis methods should be applied and utilized to support decision-making throughout all phases of resilience project or portfolio investment, including design, monitoring, and adaptive management. Program teams are best able to act on data if they are provided with a consistent, localized barometer reading of the context throughout a project life cycle, not only at or during project inception and early investment. This includes in-depth and updated information on conflict and displacement dynamics, rumors, and perceptions, as well as shifting market and political dynamics. Wherever possible, existing monitoring, evaluation, and learning tools and processes can be adapted to help provide more granular and tailored information of the changing environment.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Donors should fund independent crisis analysis hubs at a portfolio-level, thus ensuring the continuous availability of highly relevant, actionable, real-time crisis data for humanitarian, development, and peace actors operating in a particular context. Donors should invest in area-based crisis analysis hubs as a context monitoring tool for informed decision-making, and to track changes in context. It is critical that these units are implemented and run by groups considered independent of the government and neutral. USAID's FEWSNET model or SERVIR functions provide a good base model of analytics units to build from. A crisis analysis hub has the potential to dramatically improve the appropriateness and timeliness of interventions in protracted crisis contexts, as well as strengthen reinforcing ways of working across humanitarian, peace and development actors towards resilience outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Crisis analysts should be incorporated into program budgets and connected to assessment and monitoring teams to help shape and gather more granular information relevant to a localized project context. As a priority, donors that fund humanitarian, peace, or development programs with a resilience mandate should ensure that crisis analysts are included in the program team MEL (monitoring, evaluation, and learning) structures. This could be perpetuated as a percentage cost of each program budget to ensure that it is adequately equipped. Program-level crisis analysis should feed into and support broader crisis analysis hubs where they exist, for the benefit of the wider implementing community.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Donors and implementing partners should leverage existing coordination structures to disseminate crisis analysis information widely, and use the data for shared planning that informs collective action. The basis for collective action, and collective impact, is a shared agenda based on a common understanding of the context. Given the dynamics in crisis environments, crisis analysis can provide state-of-the art analytical capacities to inform collective action towards building resilience in crisis contexts. Existing "backbone" support structures, as well as humanitarian coordination units, can be leveraged for dissemination, discussion, and planning around crisis analysis data.

Mugunga 3 IDP camp on the outskirts of Goma. Corinna Robbins/Mercy Corps, 2015.

CONCLUSION

The CHAT has effectively supported Mercy Corps and other humanitarian actors in the DRC to shape more appropriate, conflict-sensitive, and forward-thinking responses that lay the foundation for resilience in protracted crises. The CHAT's in-depth, granular, real-time context analysis provides a clear, continuous picture of not only conflict and displacement incidents, but also the perceptions, motivations, and drivers behind the behaviors of local actors in conflict situations. Unlike static risk and resilience assessments, or other humanitarian situational analysis, this information provides a detailed picture of the shifting landscape in crisis contexts to inform resilience-oriented responses. In the DRC, this information informed Mercy Corps' markets and livelihoods programming among internally displaced populations and facilitated trust-building, community engagement, and local partnerships in the Ebola response in areas that might otherwise only receive direct humanitarian assistance. The responses strengthened local systems, ensured Do No Harm principles were put into practice, and supported local resilience capacities. Dissemination of data to policy-makers and other implementing partners supported the humanitarian community to mitigate the effects of evolving risks that disrupt and upend well-being outcomes in the DRC, and design humanitarian assistance packages with greater foresight and flexibility.

At the same time, the full potential of Crisis Analytics in informing collective action across the humanitarian, peace, and development communities has yet to be realized. Early evidence shows that continuously monitoring societal, political, or economic variables in local contexts can hold tremendous value for all actors in shaping responses that strengthen local resilience capacities and advance long-term goals in protracted crises. Broadening the application — and ensuring sufficient resources for — Crisis Analytics can ensure all actors work in mutually reinforcing ways to strengthen local coping mechanisms, anticipate and mitigate future threats, and ultimately advance transformative solutions among crisis-affected populations.

DEFINITIONS

Protracted crises: Defined as contexts where a significant portion of the population is "acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of livelihoods over prolonged periods of time." These contexts share a few common features—natural disasters and/or conflict are recurrent livelihood systems break down, which in turn contributes to malnutrition and mortality and can fuel conflict over resources, and; the state has limited capacity or lacks the political will to support and protect its citizens.[12]

Crisis Analytics: A rapid analysis methodology developed by Mercy Corps that seeks to enhance the systematic analysis of crisis dynamics, including risks, needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities, to inform timely and relevant action in rapidly changing, conflict environments. As such, it intends to fill existing gaps in situational and humanitarian analyses in crisis contexts, much of which is sector-specific or incident-based and lacks the contextual framing vital to interpretation and crafting resilience-building program responses.[13] Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics methodology explores the interconnected political, economic, social, technological, and cultural dynamics which drive crisis events, and maps crisis actors at institutional and individual level.

Crisis analysis: A body of methodologies that seek to provide rapid, ongoing, contextual analysis in crisis settings. Drawing from different secondary and primary sources of data, crisis analysis provides an evolving understanding of crisis drivers, effects, and risk factors at various timeframes and scales. It often involves forecasting and predictive capabilities.

Crisis Analytics Team (CAT): Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics Teams are deployed at the country level and connected to a global Crisis Analytics Unit. Together, they derive data from two core components: 1) human intelligence; and 2) 'big data' on the crisis. CAT analysts at country level provide subject-matter expertise on different aspects and areas of a crisis, and are connected to a diverse network of information sources across different crisis actors, sectors, and locations. CAT analysts are able to gain multiple insights into factional perspectives on key issues, triangulate information, and synthesize the feedback into actionable insights and predictive forecasting.

Congo Humanitarian Analysis Team (CHAT): Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics Team in the DRC. The CHAT explores the links between socio-political, economic, and cultural dynamics in areas of eastern DRC frequently prone to crises and conflicts. The objective is to inform the humanitarian and developmental community on how to better adapt programming to the population's needs.

Perception tracking: Refers to data collection and analytical methods that identify and track the spread of attitudes, beliefs, positions, and rumors with respect to a particular group, entity, issue, or place. Perception tracking often captures the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech in crisis environments.

Risk and resilience assessment: A data collection and analytical process intended to help development actors better understand the complex factors that drive and influence resilience to shocks and stresses in a given context. This process is considered critical for shaping investments in crisis-prone contexts. Risk and resilience assessments support development actors to better understand the shocks and stresses affecting a particular context, the systemic drivers and root causes that perpetuate vulnerability to these shocks and stresses, the capacity of populations and institutions to manage these threats, and the resulting impact on population well-being.

12 FAO (2010)
13 OCHA (2019)

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