



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ezra Millstein, Kenya / 2022

RESILIENT RANGELANDS, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

**Mercy Corps' Strategy
for Kenya's Rangelands**

OCTOBER 2025



Overall Vision and Strategic Approach

Challenges Facing Kenya's Rangelands

The rangelands of Kenya's drylands are at a critical inflection point, as climate hazards, resource pressures, and governance failures converge to threaten the viability of pastoral livelihoods and the ecosystems that have historically sustained them. Kenya's rangelands are part of the country's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), which cover over 80% of the country's territory (Schilling et al 2012). These counties are home to roughly one-third of the population and about 70% of the national livestock herd (Schilling et al 2012), underscoring their importance for Kenya's food security and economy. Pastoralism is the dominant livelihood: the ASAL livestock sector supports half of Kenya's livestock and produces as much as 90% of the meat consumed nationally (Nkonya et al 2018). However, households and communities living in Kenya's rangelands remain among the poorest and most marginalized in Kenya. The latest data show overall poverty headcounts far above the national average – for example, Turkana's poverty rate was 82.7% in 2022 (the highest in Kenya), with Samburu at 71.9%, Garissa 67.8%, Marsabit 66.1%, and Wajir 64.3% (Stats Kenya 2023).

Kenya's rangeland ecosystems function under non-equilibrium dynamics, characterized by highly variable rainfall and frequent

drought that drive vegetation change more than grazing pressure (Derbyshire et al 2024). Pastoral communities have historically adapted to these conditions through mobility and collective resource governance, but these strategies are under increasing strain. Localised degradation is driven by sedentarisation, blocked migration routes, and land fragmentation (Nkonya et al 2018). Climate hazards, particularly the increasingly severe and frequent droughts of the last decade, have decimated livestock herds and pushed communities beyond recovery thresholds. In the 2022 drought alone, over 2.5 million livestock perished, driving rising malnutrition and food insecurity (OCHA 2023). Meanwhile in the rainy season, erratic rainfall and floods damage infrastructure and erode already fragile soils.

These environment and climate pressures intersect with economic underdevelopment, conflict, and governance gaps. Violent intercommunal conflict is driven by resource competition, cattle raiding, and weak cross-border security (Schilling et al 2012). Although Kenya's 2010 constitution devolved responsibility for local development, county-level



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ezra Millstein, Kenya / 2024

planning and service delivery remain heavily centralized and vulnerable to political capture (Hakiman and Sheely 2023). Local governance institutions rooted in customary practices still play a vital role but are often excluded from formal systems and rarely include meaningful participation by women, youth, or minority voices.

Mercy Corps' Strategy for Kenya's Rangelands

Addressing the multidimensional challenges facing Kenya's rangelands requires integrated approaches. The science and practice of **rangeland management** provides a strong entry point for sustainably protecting and sustaining natural resources. To achieve inclusive, resilient development in Kenya's rangelands, it is necessary to use this scientific knowledge as the foundation for a holistic, locally led approach to rangeland management that embeds **participatory natural resource governance** within broader supports to **local market systems** and **governance institutions**.

FIVE INTERCONNECTED THEMATIC AREAS

- 1
Pasture and water
management for rangeland
health
- 2
Inclusive and accountable
governance

OUR OVERARCHING VISION THAT GUIDES THIS STRATEGY:

By 2035 the rangelands of Kenya's drylands are supported by sound policies and public services and are sustainably governed and managed by communities for productive livelihoods, biodiversity, peace, inclusion, and adaptation to climate change.

- 3
Market systems for rangeland
management
- 4
Climate information services
- 5
Conflict management and
peacebuilding

Since 2008, Mercy Corps has been active in supporting this kind of integrated approach to inclusive resource management and locally led development in Kenya's rangelands. Across a diverse programming portfolio, we have partnered with communities, county and national governments, civil society organisations, community conservancies, and market actors to develop and implement solutions that help to promote the health and availability of the natural resources that are vital to the rangelands—pasture and water—while strengthening capacities and linkages necessary to support effective, accountable governance, functioning market systems, preparation for and response to climate shocks, and sustained peace and security. This integrated portfolio in the rangelands has been supported by development partners including institutional donors such as USAID, DFID/FCDO, the Netherlands, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), AFD - Agence Française de Développement, and the EU, along with foundations and corporate donors such as the Gates Foundation, Google, and CISCO.

As an evidence-driven organisation, we use data and analysis to guide learning, adaptive management, and strategy, both within individual programmes and at the portfolio level.

We also actively contribute to the growing body of policy-relevant evidence on Kenya's rangelands, both through our own studies, context analyses, and programme evaluations, and as active members of the FCDO-funded Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crises (SPARC) consortium.

The purpose of this document is to articulate **Mercy Corps Kenya's rangeland management strategy** for the next ten years. This strategy will guide our current and future work in Kenya's rangelands, leveraging our experience, technical capacities, partnerships, and evidence to support transformational change at scale. Our overarching vision that guides this strategy is that **by 2035 the rangelands of Kenya's drylands are supported by sound policies and public services and are sustainably governed and managed by communities for productive livelihoods, biodiversity, peace, inclusion, and adaptation to climate change.**

Arid and Semi-Arid Counties in Kenya



We pursue this vision through an **integrated multisectoral programming strategy** that brings together five interconnected components: **pasture and water management for rangeland health, inclusive and accountable governance, market systems for rangeland management, climate information services, and conflict management and peacebuilding.** Rather than existing in silos, these five programming components are deeply integrated with one another and work in tandem to address the interconnected challenges facing the rangelands. In addition, we incorporate gender equity and social inclusion considerations into each of these components to help address the intersectional norms and power dynamics that lead to disparate impacts of challenges on women, young people, and other marginalized groups. Building on our organisational commitment to be locally led, we see our role in supporting inclusive, resilient development in Kenya's

rangelands as being a convenor, connector, and facilitator. In fulfilling this role, we centre inclusive, meaningful community participation in all of our programmes and activities and pursue equitable, trust-based partnerships with a diverse array of international, national, and local organisations.

In this document, we outline the specifics of our programming approach, capacities, and partnerships in each of the five components of our strategy. We conclude by describing our approach to evidence and learning within this strategy, which features a unified strategy-level results framework and indicators and a set of aligned evidence and learning priorities, which simultaneously guide our adaptive management and broader advocacy and influence.



Photo: Kenya Livestock Market Systems 2022

OUR VISION

Pastoralist communities have ownership of their grazing lands and the skills and knowledge to sustain biodiverse, and climate resilient rangelands and water points for multiple uses.

Key Challenges

- Degraded lands caused by droughts, uncoordinated grazing, variable rainfall patterns, land use change, and the spread of invasive species have severely reduced pasture quality and access on Kenyan rangelands, with between 50% and 90% of Kenya's rangelands considered somewhat to severely degraded (GoK, 2021, Lutta et al, 2020, and Nkonya et al, 2018).
- Despite increased annual rainfall levels across the northern counties, recent analysis estimates that 20 – 30 m³/second of water is lost to productive use or groundwater recharge due to compacted soils (Hansen, Comeau, and Larsen, 2022). This coupled with increasing air and surface temperatures increasing evaporation may increase pressure on water resources.
- Many county and community-level actors lack the technical knowledge and skills required to manage rangelands under rapidly changing climate and ecological conditions. This includes limited capacity to coordinate adaptive grazing, operate water infrastructure, and identify and implement cost-effective nature-based restoration techniques.
- Insecure land tenure, coupled with increasing privatisation and fragmentation of rangelands, disrupts traditional communal access arrangements and limits the feasibility of long-term, area-wide grazing plans. These trends create tensions between land users and reduce incentives for sustainable land stewardship.
- Scepticism or distrust of new pasture management approaches persists among some communities, particularly where interventions are perceived as externally imposed or misaligned with local needs and knowledge. This undermines uptake and weakens the sustainability of programme investments.

Mercy Corps' Approach

1. Strengthen traditional grazing systems through participatory, community-based rangeland management.

Mercy Corps supports pastoralist communities to maintain mobility and adapt traditional grazing practices to current ecological and climatic realities. Through Community-Based Rangeland Management and Participatory Rangeland Management (CBRM/PRM), we work with communities to improve productivity, biodiversity, and resilience by integrating both natural and active regenerative practices. This includes demarcating degraded pastures for rest and recovery, increasing grazing pressure in targeted areas to reduce invasive species, and adjusting livestock numbers and grazing times to support nutrient cycling and grass regeneration. Management plans created through these processes are vehicles for coordinating grazing, preventing unsustainable land conversion, and planning and implementation of rangeland restoration.

2. Apply Resilience Design (RD) to restore degraded rangelands using nature-based solutions.

Originally developed for smallholder systems, the RD approach uses ecological design principles—such as water flow, soil regeneration, plant succession, and biodiversity—to guide community-led rehabilitation. When adapted for rangelands, RD is quickly taken up by communities and can yield visible improvements after a single rainy season. Near settlements, RD increases access to productive land for women, small ruminant herders, and vulnerable groups. In more remote areas, it empowers communities to reclaim degraded pasture without waiting for external assistance. Community-developed plans can also be used to mobilise funding through climate finance and grants.

3. Promote integrated, adaptive management of pasture and water resources.

Mercy Corps supports government and community partners to apply a broad suite of tools to sustain healthy rangelands. These include continuous rangeland condition monitoring that combines satellite data with participatory approaches using mobile tools and community reporting. On water, we work across sectors to rehabilitate key water points and reduce overgrazing in surrounding areas. Where appropriate, we apply technological solutions such as solar-powered boreholes, digital monitoring systems, and rainwater harvesting to support access and avoid resource degradation near settlements.

4. Empower communities to manage rangeland resources during periods of stress.

Mercy Corps partners with government and communities to develop contingency plans for droughts and other climate shocks and builds leadership capacities to implement these effectively. This includes preventative measures such as designating drought grazing areas and brokering reciprocal grazing agreements with neighbouring communities and more distant counties for mobility during extreme droughts, as well as anticipatory actions such as haymaking to prepare for an upcoming drought. Integration of conflict management and peacebuilding approaches into these is crucial, to mitigate the problem of natural resource conflict.

Our Partnership Approach

Mercy Corps partners with a wide range of actors to promote sustainable, climate-resilient management of pasture and water resources. At the community level, we collaborate with traditional and administrative leaders at village, ward, and county levels—working closely with both male and female elders to foster buy-in and guide the adoption of improved pasture and water management practices. We also engage youth, religious, and business leaders to strengthen local understanding and build broader support for change.

At the county and national levels, we partner with technical officers and government officials to co-create inclusive grazing management plans, strengthen capacity for tools such as GIS-based rangeland monitoring and Resilience Design, and adapt national

policies to county-specific contexts. We also work alongside government-affiliated bodies such as the Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), the Kenya Meat Commission (KMC), and the Pastoralist Parliamentary Group (PPG) to support policy localisation and investment in rangeland governance. In addition, we collaborate with international and national research institutions—including ILRI, CIRAD, the University of Twente, the University of Nairobi, and Garissa University—to generate and share evidence on what works in rangeland restoration and why. We are also engaging market actors, including livestock offtakers and community conservancies, to explore business models that support sustainable rangeland management—such as input credit schemes, carbon financing, and incentives for collective action.



49

COMMUNITY-BASED RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PLANS CO-CREATED

1.49M

HECTARES OF RANGELAND UNDER IMPROVED MANAGEMENT

MERCY CORPS' ACHIEVEMENTS TO-DATE

Since 2013, Mercy Corps has worked to support sustainable pasture and water management in Kenya's ASAL counties through a combination of community-based rangeland management, regeneration efforts, digital innovation, and policy engagement. Across the Northern ASAL counties Mercy Corps has supported communities and government to develop rangeland management plans in 49 wards, with an additional 12 wards underway through ongoing programs. Collectively, more than 1.4 million hectares of rangeland is now under improved management with demonstrated improvements in ecosystem services for pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. These communities have also regenerated

10,000 hectares of rangeland through active rehabilitation (such as clearing of invasive species and re-seeding) and through nature-based solutions and resilience design.

Over the past five years, Mercy Corps has also strengthened government capacity to use geospatial technologies and crowd-sourced data for planning and budgeting. Through platforms such as KAZNet, we have contributed to the integration of disparate data points—including range condition, livestock body condition, livestock market prices, household food security, and conflict trends—to enable responsive and evidence-informed management of rangeland systems.



Photo: Admedia Communications - contracted by Mercy Corps

OUR VISION

Rangeland units are effectively managed by inclusive, accountable, and interconnected local institutions, contributing to sustainability of the rangelands at scale.

Key Challenges

- Effective rangeland management requires inclusive, accountable, and legitimate governance institutions that can develop and enforce policies and bylaws to protect and restore natural resources and provide key public infrastructure and services such as boreholes, extension services, public markets, and abattoirs.
- Governance in Kenya has historically been highly centralized, leading to uneven patterns of policy implementation and service delivery. Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) counties have typically been especially marginalised. Although Kenya's devolved governance system aims to address these disparities. Community members typically have limited awareness about how to participate in public consultations and how to advocate for their priorities to be included in County Integrated Development Plans.
- Within pastoralist communities, local governance institutions—typically featuring collective decision-making by elders-- have historically enabled communities to adapt to the high variability of dryland environments. However, functioning local governance institutions are rarely integrated into government planning and policies, leading to a top-down and fragmented approach that fails to support and align with locally-led decisions, and adaptations within rangeland units that cut across formal boundaries.
- While community-level governance institutions and newer institutions such as Rangeland Management Committees have historically enabled communities to make and enforce decisions about managing natural resources, they typically centre the voices and perspectives of the oldest male members of a community, limiting opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making by women, young people, and members of minority ethnic groups in a given locality.

Mercy Corps' Approach

1. Facilitate ward-level participatory planning to support basic service delivery and foster inclusive, accountable governance norms in ASAL counties.

Mercy Corps Kenya utilizes the Ward Development Planning (WDP) approach to address the core governance challenges in ASAL counties by creating an institutionalized process for participatory planning at the ward-level. The approach involves broad mobilisation of all members of each village in a ward to identify development priorities and to elect a representative to a Ward Planning Committee (WPC). The WPC harmonises the inputs from each village into a shared 5-year Ward Development Plan and interfaces with the county government, donors, and civil society to advocate for resources to implement the plan. Research on the WDP model shows that this intervention fills an important governance gap at the ward level and that the initial implementation of WDP in 5 counties in northern Kenya led to substantial shifts in community perceptions of the inclusivity and trustworthiness of county and national government actors.

2. Create and support locally led natural resource governance structures that are empowered to manage rangelands and water resources across multiple scales.

Mercy Corps Kenya also leverages its expertise in facilitating meaningful community participation to support effective natural resource governance and land use planning within a diverse set of locally led structures and processes. This overall approach includes a diverse set of structures including Community Based Rangeland Management (CBRM) and Participatory Rangeland Management (PRM) by Rangeland Management Committees (RMCs), Participatory Land Use Planning (PLUP), and participatory planning for shared water resources led by Water Resource User Associations (WRUAs). While these local structures differ with respect to the specific natural resource that they govern—and the geographical scale at which they operate—they all share the aim of supporting effective, legitimate natural resource governance by combining state-of-the-art technical approaches for managing pasture and water with deep engagement with local knowledge and resource governance practices.

3. Connect and align the efforts of formal and informal governance actors and institutions across multiple overlapping levels and scales.

Mercy Corps Kenya works to ensure that women, young people, and other historically excluded groups are able to participate making decisions about development planning and natural resource governance in ways that are meaningful to them. This entails both creating opportunities for members of marginalized groups to participate in community meetings and committees and utilizing behaviour change approaches to shift restrictive norms that may limit contributions to a constrained set of decisions. Research in the counties where WDP has been implemented shows that community members perceive that inclusion can lead to better governance outcomes, expressing greater confidence in the ability of committees with higher representation of women and young people to understand community needs, address crises, and represent the community to NGO and county actors.

Our Partnership Approach

Mercy Corps works to influence county-level legislation and implementation related to local development planning and natural resource governance, in collaboration with key intergovernmental organizations that focus on economic and policy coordination, such as FCDC (representing 11 Northern ASAL counties), NOREB (North Rift Economic Bloc) and SEKEB (South Eastern Kenya Economic Bloc).. To date, this advocacy campaign has been successful in leading to the passage of Ward Planning Bills in two counties (Turkana and Isiolo) and in updates to the Village Units

Delineation Acts in Samburu and Turkana Counties to bring a WDP-inspired institution to the village-level.

In addition to partnering to advocating for the passage of these laws, Mercy Corps and FCDC work in collaboration with county governments and local Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to support implementation of these laws by providing technical assistance, thought partnership, and accompaniment.



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**WARDS HAVE
IMPLEMENTED WDP
WITH MC SUPPORT
ACROSS 6 COUNTIES
IN KENYA**

15%

**INCREASE IN PERCEPTION OF
TRUSTWORTHINESS OF NATIONAL AND
COUNTY GOVERNMENTS IN WARDS
WHERE WDP HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED**

MERCY CORPS' ACHIEVEMENTS TO-DATE

Since 2017, Mercy Corps has worked to support inclusive, effective governance systems at scale across Kenya's northern ASALs. WDP was initially piloted and deployed in 26 wards in 5 counties (Turkana, Garissa, Wajir, Isiolo, and Marsabit) as part of the USAID- funded Livestock Market Systems (LMS) programme. In subsequent programmes, Mercy Corps and its partners have continued to work with the Ward Planning Committees established throughout the WDP process while also expanding the intervention to other wards in the counties where LMS operated, and to Samburu county (as part of the USAID-funded Nawiri programme).

In addition to piloting the WDP model and scaling it up to additional wards and counties, we have also adapted this approach to participatory governance approaches to the needs at different geographical scales. In the USAID-funded Nawiri programme, we expanded on the WDP the model to support participatory planning at the village level in Turkana and Samburu counties. In the Dutch-funded RANGE programme, we are working to integrate the development plans developed by WPCs with natural resource governance at the resource unit and landscape scales in Samburu, Isiolo, and Marsabit.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Josephine Kiruku, Kenya / 2025

OUR VISION

Inclusive market systems incentivize and enable livestock management practices for healthy rangelands, and healthy, well-managed rangelands are the bedrock for dynamic and pro-poor livestock market systems.

Key Challenges

- Livestock production in the ASALs of Kenya is not viable without rangeland grazing. The degradation of rangelands is therefore undermining the main livelihood for 70-80% of households.
- To cope with the increasing frequency and severity of droughts, pastoralists in the Kenyan ASALs need to shift to livestock production and marketing practices that generate income and savings. When drought strikes, savings and incomes enable pastoralists to purchase the supplementary feed and veterinary services needed to maintain their herds.
- Effective management of rangeland pasture requires communities to coordinate their herd management, including collective grazing. This means that livestock from different herds are at close quarters for part of the seasonal cycle which brings increased risk of disease transmission, so animal vaccination is crucial to protect herds and maintain productivity. Yet in the ASALs of Kenya, rates of livestock vaccination are extremely low, with the lack of private sector vaccination services a key underlying constraint.
- Rangelands are non-equilibrium systems with regular booms and droughts. Currently, livestock marketing and feed/fodder systems are not developed in ways that support pastoralists to manage their herds through these cycles. When droughts strike, livestock marketing systems typically break down, so pastoralists are not able to sell animals and reduce their herds, which puts additional strain on depleted rangelands. Similarly, during droughts there is very limited availability of feed/fodder in the ASALs, and prices are prohibitively high, so herders are entirely reliant on grazing.
- Responses to crises by government and humanitarian actors still typically rely on direct distribution of animal vaccinations and drugs or feed, and these undermine nascent private sector systems supplying these services.

Mercy Corps' Approach

1. Refine and scale MSD approaches to catalyse livestock marketing and fodder/feed systems that support effective herd management through non-equilibrium cycles.	Mercy Corps builds on proven market systems development (MSD) strategies to improve livestock marketing and feed/fooder systems across the ASALs, where supply chains remain fragmented. We promote inclusive, integrated livestock marketing models with embedded services that support herd management and income generation, while enabling sales to continue during drought. Building on the AgriFin Programme, we will also test business models that use digital tools to reduce uncertainty, expand access to markets, and improve incomes
2. Convene public and private stakeholders to develop and implement a strategy and roadmap for public-private partnership (PPP) vaccination services in the ASALs.	Government-led animal vaccination services currently reach only a limited share of livestock in the north due to logistical and funding constraints. Mercy Corps will bring together government, vaccine producers, veterinary providers, and other stakeholders to co-develop a strategic plan for private sector delivery of vaccination services. We will support pilots of public-private partnership (PPP) models and work with county and national authorities to strengthen the regulatory and policy environment, ultimately scaling private-sector driven vaccination across the ASALs.
3. Foster market systems that create opportunities for livestock livelihoods for women.	In designing MSD interventions and supporting communities to develop rangeland management plans, Mercy Corps emphasizes the importance of addressing the specific needs and opportunities of women as livestock producers and entrepreneurs. Mercy Corps supports private sector business models that deliberately include and target women as agents, customers and suppliers.
4. Design and implement innovative MSD tactics that incentivize communities to adopt best-practice approaches for herd management.	Achieving sustainable rangeland management requires a shift in livestock management behaviours. Mercy Corps designs MSD interventions that use results-based incentives to reward community institutions—such as Rangeland Management Committees—for uptake of practices like collective grazing or coordinated vaccination. In parallel, we broker private sector partnerships that apply out-grower models and bundled services to align commercial incentives with sustainable herd management.
5. Promote market-based approaches to crisis response which reinforce, not undermine, local private sector systems	Mercy Corps has demonstrated proven approaches to crisis response that leverage the power of the private sector to support pastoralists to cope during severe crises, such as commercial de-stocking and e-vouchers for animal health services and feed. Mercy Corps partners with government and Kenyan civil society to integrate these approaches into contingency planning for droughts and build their capacities to adopt similar approaches during crises.

Our Partnership Approach

Because this component of strategy is implemented using MSD approaches. Mercy Corps plays a catalytic role as a facilitator and convener, partnering with a wide range of system actors and stakeholders.

MSD partnerships with **private sector actors** are the key approach for catalysing the changes in systems and behaviours required to achieve our long-term goal for market systems in the rangelands. These partnerships involve a range of private firms working in vaccination service provision, livestock marketing and processing, feed / fodder production and other key supporting functions. Partnerships go beyond simple business expansion grants and aim to deliberately foster more transformative

changes in systems that support key behaviours on the rangelands. Mercy Corps also works closely with **government stakeholders** at national and county levels to influence market actors and drive changes in the policy and enabling environment. A key government partner is the recently established Livestock Development and Promotion Service Board, which will be a key ally in pushing the new models of PPP in vaccination services and transformations in livestock marketing and processing. Mercy Corps also collaborates closely with other **implementing agencies** using MSD approaches to foster changes in livestock systems and rangelands, such as Gatsby Africa.



4

COUNTRIES IN EAST AFRICA IN WHICH MERCY CORPS HAS IMPLEMENTED MSD PROGRAMS IN LIVESTOCK SYSTEMS

2M+

PASTORALISTS AND AGRO-PASTORALISTS HAVE INCREASED THEIR RESILIENCE THROUGH IMPROVED LIVESTOCK SYSTEMS

MERCY CORPS' ACHIEVEMENTS TO-DATE

Mercy Corps has been implementing MSD approaches in livestock systems in the Horn of Africa for more than 20 years, in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Somalia. For example, in Kenya, Mercy Corps' Regional Livestock Program is fostering last-mile agent models for animal health services in partnership with agri-vets across Garissa and Wajir. In Ethiopia, Mercy Corps catalysed a model of integrated livestock supply chains which increased livestock sales through local

level aggregators by 193% on average and sustained purchases even during the worst drought in 30 years. While these programs have focused on building improved and inclusive livestock systems with the aim of increasing incomes and resilience of households in general, this strategy is unique in focusing specifically on MSD approaches that foster market and herd management behaviours that support the vision for sustainable management of rangelands.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ezra Millstein, Kenya/ 2024

OUR VISION

An inclusive and functional climate information value chain supports evidence-based policies and decisions related to land-use planning, grazing management, and water conservation strategies in Kenya's rangelands.

Key Challenges

- Climate-informed planning for rangeland management remains underdeveloped. Although counties often have resources earmarked for climate adaptation, the absence of accessible and relevant climate information results in underinvestment or misallocation of these funds, risking maladaptive planning and implementation.
- Coordination, resources and ability to deliver on mandates remain as gaps between key agencies, constraining access to and use of critical datasets, such as localised weather forecasts, soil and evapotranspiration data, wind-speed, and climate vulnerability indicators, undermining integrated land-use and rangeland planning for future climate scenarios. In turn, over time this has reduced public use and trust of some forecasts.
- Most counties in Kenya's northern rangelands lack functional multi-hazard early warning and early action systems (MHEWS) that provide alerts on droughts, floods, pests, and fire risks. Without these systems, it is difficult to implement anticipatory rangeland planning, to prevent escalating environmental degradation or reduce the exposure of a weather or climate hazard on the local population. Currently, early warning is delayed or not timely enough to the hazard and rarely provide related action advisories.
- Feedback loops between national information producers and local users are rarely formalised, meaning community observations and experiences are not systematically used to improve seasonal forecasts required for scenario planning. This also contributes to low uptake and limited perceived relevance of seasonal advisories for rangeland users.
- There is limited availability and formal integration of GESI-disaggregated climate vulnerability data into advisory services, early action protocols, or climate risk-informed development plans, reducing the relevance of CIS for women, youth, and other marginalised groups.

Mercy Corps' Approach

1. Institutionalise functional climate information service (CIS) chains that are responsive to end-user needs.

Mercy Corps Kenya supports the development of CIS systems that create actionable, localised climate information for use by national and community actors, based on their needs (improved weather advisories lead time, seasonal forecasting as actional advisories, using long term projections to influence planning and implementation). This involves strengthening the entire CIS value chain, from engagement with ministries, producers, media, extension services, and telecoms at the front end, to closing the feedback loop between producers and users at the back end. Our approach focuses on building partnerships with regional climate centres, hydro-meteorological ministries, academia, and the private sector to address coordination, data, and dissemination gaps and ensure that climate services are accessible, sustainable, and user-driven.

2. Support local institutions to integrate CIS into climate risk analysis, planning, and budgeting.

Mercy Corps Kenya works with local actors to improve understanding of climate vulnerability and to strengthen the use of environmental and climate data for policy, planning, and resource allocation. We prioritise the use of scenario planning under uncertainty, integration of gender and social inclusion considerations into risk management frameworks, and the application of the best available evidence for county-level interventions. This includes supporting community and county government end users to iteratively interpret and use seasonal advisories, understand their uncertainty, and plan for dynamic changes. Our work aligns with the Kenya National Climate Information Strategy (NFCIS) and supports GESI-responsive CIS integration into disaster risk management, early warning systems, and long-term development planning.

3. Facilitate county-led coordination platforms to drive decentralised, transboundary climate planning.

Through Rangeland Management Committees, we convene County Climate Outlook Forums (CCOFs) to bring together government, technical experts, and communities to jointly assess seasonal forecasts and develop actionable plans. These forums strengthen county capacity to produce and apply co-produced and end-user focused CIS (weather, seasonal and long term projections), promote shared decision-making across administrative boundaries, and create a structure for localised scenario planning, particularly important in water-stressed areas of the rangelands.

4. Strengthen participatory tools and feedback systems to track climate vulnerability and adaptation outcomes.

Our climate work is grounded in Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP) and the co-production of advisory content that reflects multidimensional risks. We also support the development of standardised dissemination systems and decision-support platforms that link local data to rangeland planning. This includes building local capabilities to monitor and report shifts in vulnerability, assess adaptation progress, and generate the insights needed to inform adaptive rangeland governance over time.

Our Partnership Approach

For our CIS work in the rangelands to be effective, Mercy Corps partners with national agencies (National Drought Management Authority and Kenya Meteorological Department), technical providers (ESRI), local media, telecoms, and academia. Our collaboration with Garissa University has strengthened local government engagement and sustained our CIS approach. Community partnerships are central to embedding participatory methods and collecting climate vulnerability data in underserved dryland areas. We follow an “accompaniment” approach to ensure ongoing learning and implementation among government, private sector, and community stakeholders.

To strengthen CIS feedback loops, we partner across the climate knowledge value chain: data providers, sector experts, boundary organisations, national users, and communities. This enhances the relevance and use of county climate outlook forums and supports institutionalising Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP). Key partners include KMD, ICPAC, county departments (e.g., water, forestry), water source associations, community forestry groups, CBOs, and community members. We will also work with the ADA Consortium and embed research partners like Garissa University within our strategy and implementation.



6

**ASAL COUNTIES IN WHICH
MC HAS STRENGTHENED
CIS SYSTEMS**

2

**ASAL COUNTIES WHICH MC HAS
SUPPORTED TO ESTABLISH GIS
LABS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT /
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**

MERCY CORPS' ACHIEVEMENTS TO-DATE

Since 2012, Mercy Corps has worked to advance the use of Climate Information Services (CIS) for rangeland management and local development planning in Kenya's ASAL counties. Under the ASAL Adapts programme, Mercy Corps has pursued systems change approaches to enhance both institutional uptake and community use of CIS tools. This has included supporting the enactment of county rangeland management bills to establish clear legislative and policy frameworks, alongside functioning GIS systems and structured feedback loops between county governments and communities. Mercy Corps

has also partnered with county governments and local institutions to integrate CIS into rangeland management decisions and land-use planning processes, helping to promote policy coherence between national and local levels.

In collaboration with Google and other stakeholders, Mercy Corps has expanded the use of digital tools to disseminate rangeland data with weather and climate forecasts through mobile applications, radio, bulk SMS, and online platforms. Through iterative, user-centred research, Mercy Corps has ensured these digital climate products are responsive to the needs of rangeland users.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Patrick Meinhardt, Kenya/ 2024

OUR VISION

State and non-state institutions are more effective in peacefully preventing and resolving conflicts and ensuring security in the rangelands by building the skills and capacities of peace and security actors, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring inclusivity.

Key Challenges

- Violent conflict disrupts livelihoods and strains community cohesion in Kenya's rangelands. Resource-based clashes between pastoralist groups are closely tied to competition over pasture, water, and livestock. These types of conflict have become more deadly in recent decades, with widespread availability of automatic weapons contributing to cycles of land invasion, raiding, retaliation, and displacement.
- While pastoralist communities have historically relied on customary mechanisms to manage disputes and regulate access to shared natural resources, these systems have been weakened by increasing frequency and severity of drought, limited integration with formal governance structures, and the growing influence of armed actors who operate outside of traditional norms.
- County and national political dynamics increasingly shape the landscape of conflict, as leaders mobilize along clan lines to contest control of administrative boundaries and development resources. This has led to periodic spikes in violence during election cycles and delayed progress on cooperative resource management, especially in areas that span ward, county, or international borders.
- Women and young people are both disproportionately impacted by violent conflict and excluded from meaningful participation in formal peace processes. These patterns are shaped by patriarchal social norms that structure intersectional identities, including masculinities that affect and are affected by conflict in the rangelands.

Mercy Corps' Approach

1. Integrate conflict sensitivity across all components of rangeland management programming

Conflict in Kenya's rangelands is driven by the complex interactions of natural resource degradation, governance gaps, economic hardship, and climate shocks/stresses. As a result, Mercy Corps Kenya draws on **conflict sensitivity** principles and practices to effectively integrate peacebuilding considerations into broader multi-sectoral rangeland programming. Ongoing **conflict analysis** is the foundation of this integration, providing programming teams, partners, and communities with the tools to identify the core drivers and root causes of conflict. Programme teams and partners use these conflict analyses to guide programme design and adaptive management, with the aim of minimising harm and strengthening opportunities for peace.

2. Support local actors in their efforts to prevent and resolve resource-based conflicts, strengthen social cohesion, and address the root causes of conflict.

Mercy Corps Kenya draws on our organisation's broad base of cutting edge programming approaches and evidence on peace and conflict to support and accompany a wide range of local peace and security actors—including elders, Local Peace Committees (LPCs), local NGOs, and the government—in their efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts. This includes building the capabilities of these local actors to implement Early Warning Early Response (EWER) mechanisms that identify emerging resource-based conflicts and to resolve conflicts before they escalate to violence using conflict management approaches such as Interest-Based Mediation and Negotiation (IBMN). However, our work with local peace actors also involves using conflict analyses to identify and address the root causes of intercommunal conflict by strengthening social cohesion and addressing governance grievances and perceptions of injustice. Since 60 - 80% of participants in conflict in Arid counties are young people, we engage youth in groups that empower them to make the right decisions and access pathways to education and entrepreneurship.

3. Foster inclusive social norms and identities that contribute to lasting peace and security.

Mercy Corps Kenya draws on best practices from the fields of Gender, Peace, and Security (GPS) and Positive Youth Development (PYD) to integrate inclusive, gender transformative peacebuilding approaches into our integrated rangeland management programming. We do this by incorporating an intersectional lens on social identities and norms into programme design and adaptive management, by facilitating opportunities for women and young people to meaningfully participate in and lead peacebuilding initiatives, and by creating spaces for locally-led transformation of gender norms and identities, including masculinities that fuel conflict and violence.

Our Partnership Approach

Partnership is at the heart of Mercy Corps' approach to peacebuilding in the rangelands, given our focus on strengthening and supporting local conflict management systems. Across our decade-plus of peace and conflict work in the northern ASALs, we have partnered with a wide range of local actors. In particular, we have partnered with county governments in Turkana, Samburu, Isiolo, and Marsabit, and the FCDC, an intergovernmental organisation that coordinates policymaking and development across the 10 counties in

Kenya's northern and eastern ASALs. We have also partnered with a wide range of local NGOs such as IMPACT, Caritas Maralal, TUPADO, and the Community Safety Initiative, among many others. Our emphasis in these partnerships is in partner-led programme implementation and capacity strengthening, and in facilitating connections and collaborations across actors from different sectors and geographies.



122,000
**ASAL YOUTH
ENGAGED IN YOUTH
LIVELIHOOD / PEACE
INITIATIVES**

51
**WARDS WITH STRENGTHENED
INSTITUTIONS FOR PEACE**

MERCY CORPS' ACHIEVEMENTS TO-DATE

Since 2014, Mercy Corps has worked to advance peace in Kenya's northern ASALs, particularly in Turkana, Samburu, Isiolo, and Marsabit, both as a part of standalone conflict management and peacebuilding programming and integrated within multisectoral rangeland management, food security, and resilience programming. This portfolio of programming has worked to strengthen local conflict management systems and actors, especially local NGOs and Local Peace Committees.

Rather than focused on on-off projects, our peacebuilding work in the rangelands has focused on building networks of local community, civil society, and government

actors at all scales within Kenya's rangelands. Programmes within this portfolio have operated within individual counties (as in the EC-funded SCALE programme in Samburu County), but also across county borders (as in the USAID-funded NAWIRI programme in Samburu and Turkana Counties and the Dutch-funded RANGE programme in Samburu, Marsabit, and Isiolo counties) and international borders (as in the USAID-funded PEACE III programme on the border between Turkana county and Uganda and the EC-funded Movement and Mobility programme on the border between Marsabit county and Ethiopia).

Evidence and Learning within Mercy Corps Kenya's Rangeland Management Strategy

As part of our organisational commitment to being evidence-driven, Mercy Corps uses data and analytics to promote adaptive learning and decision making, scale-up effective program approaches, and influence others. In the context of Mercy Corps Kenya's Rangeland Management Strategy, this commitment shows up in two ways. First, we assess our progress towards achieving our vision for Kenya's rangelands by tracking a harmonised set of indicators, defined by a strategy-level results framework, across our entire portfolio of relevant programmes. Second, we are pursuing a strategy-wide learning plan that identifies prioritised learning questions for each of the five programming components that make up this strategy. These questions are designed to fill key evidence gaps, bolstering our capacity for adaptive management within this strategy and aiding our efforts to influence national policymakers, international donors, and other stakeholders.

Strategy-Level Results Framework and Measurement

Mercy Corps' strategy for Kenya's rangelands is measured using a dedicated results framework which is applied across our program portfolio. This framework articulates how each of the five thematic areas contributes to our overall vision for the rangelands and defines how Mercy Corps will measure each thematic area and overall progress against the strategy across our country programs.

Goal-level impact: The overall success of our strategy will be assessed through the impact of Mercy Corps programs on the ecological health of rangeland ecosystems and the benefits that improved rangelands and ecosystem services provide for the populations of Kenya's drylands. To assess rangeland health we will utilize geospatial data to measure changes in vegetation cover, and this will be validated through on-the-ground analysis, such as community reporting and soil samples.

Thematic areas: For each thematic area of the strategy, Mercy Corps will assess two key categories of impact. Firstly, we will assess the extent to which our programming has contributed to systemic change in the targeted systems and services, including the sustainability of these changes. Secondly, we will assess the extent that the targeted improvements in systems and services have resulted in improved



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ezra Millstein, Kenya / 2024

participation and enhanced benefits for households in the Kenyan drylands.

Aligned Evidence and Learning Priorities

In addition to tracking results across this strategy, we have articulated a strategic learning plan that identifies the key questions we must answer to effectively advance the vision that motivates our portfolio of work in Kenya's rangelands. These questions guide our efforts to test, validate, and refine the theory of change underpinning each of the five thematic areas of this strategy and cross-cutting issues such as gender equity and social inclusion, while also helping us to better understand contextual shifts or dynamics that may affect the relevance and effectiveness of our programming approaches. For each thematic area we have identified a set of prioritised learning questions, along with the types of evidence that can be used to answer them.

Our prioritised learning questions for each thematic area include the following indicative questions:

Pasture and Water Management for Rangeland Health: What incentives and support are needed to drive community uptake and maintenance of improved rangeland and water management practices after initial program support ends?

Inclusive and Accountable Governance: What are the most effective strategies for integrating formal government systems and community structures (e.g. Ward Planning Committees, WRUAs, and RMCs) with traditional governance institutions to promote effective and inclusive decision-making and improve development outcomes for marginalised groups?

Market Systems for Rangeland Management: How do push and pull interventions in market systems (e.g. poverty graduation, financial inclusion, and market linkages) interact with improved rangeland management practices to support resilient livelihoods, especially in marginalized households?

Climate Information Services for Rangeland Management: What institutional and community capacities are needed to access, interpret and act on climate and risk information, and how do these needs differ across intersectional dimensions of marginalisation and vulnerability?

Conflict Management and Peacebuilding in the Rangelands: What are the psychosocial and governance factors that influence community capacity to manage conflict and maintain peace during periods of environmental stress and/or shifting patterns of mobility?

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps supports communities – and the most marginalized within them – to emerge from crisis and build towards a more inclusive, resilient future.



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