OUR EXPERIENCE

Mercy Corps helps communities in the world’s toughest places turn the inevitable shocks and stresses of change — social, economic and ecological — into opportunities to thrive. For over 35 years, Mercy Corps’ Vision for Change has compelled us to partner with communities as they leverage market, governance, and civil society levers to reduce vulnerabilities and increase collective agency for resilience. **Globally, we define resilience as the capacity of communities in complex socio-ecological systems to learn, cope, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks and stresses.** Our approach is understanding how complex systems support or constrain the communities we serve and facilitating ways for the poor and vulnerable to become fully integrated into resilient systems.

We recognize that underlying, chronic vulnerabilities hinder communities’ ability to cope and adapt when confronted with inevitable and often reinforcing social, economic and ecological shocks. We also see incredible examples of communities inventing strategies to manage such shocks, adapt and thrive in the most challenging contexts. Short-term interventions focus on reducing vulnerability and the impact of shocks and increasing coping capacity, for example through safety-net programs. Longer-term programs focus on structural causes of vulnerability and increasing absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities. **Absorptive capacity** is seen in the ability of households and communities to minimize exposure to shocks and stresses through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to avoid permanent,
negative impacts of livelihood shocks and stresses. **Adaptive capacity** entails making proactive and informed choices about traditional as well as alternative livelihood strategies based on an understanding of dynamic interactions between changing social, economic and ecological conditions. **Transformative capacity** is a factor of the enabling conditions – the governance mechanisms, policies/regulations, infrastructure, market systems and community networks – that facilitate the innovation and systemic change needed to address the structural issues that contribute to food and livelihood insecurity.

Mercy Corps has been working on resilience-focused programming in Africa since 2004, with a current portfolio of over $200 million in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, Uganda, and South Sudan. Operating a suite of programs in the drylands of **Niger** for nearly ten years, Mercy Corps is helping climate and conflict-prone communities to become more resilient. Our award-winning, $2.7 million USAID/OFDA-funded PASTORAL project broke ground in not only stabilizing household economic circumstances, but also making great strides in disaster risk reduction through infrastructure and establishment of early warning information channels.1 This has enabled our work to expand, more recently launching the $30 million USAID/FFP-funded “Sawki” project in the Maradi and Zinder regions, with a special emphasis on empowering women and adolescent girls as key levers in combating household-wide food insecurity to build resilience. Among our largest programs is the five-year, $57 million USAID-funded **Ethiopia** Pastoralists’ Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) project, which builds upon Mercy Corps’ successful USAID/OFDA-funded Revitalizing Agricultural/Pastoral Incomes and New Markets for Enhanced Resilience and Recovery (RAIN+), making an important link for resilience programming between humanitarian relief and development programming. Another major USAID/FFP-funded resilience program in **Uganda**, the $53 million Northern Karamoja Growth Health and Governance (GHG) project builds upon Mercy Corps’ ongoing long presence in Karamoja, beginning with post-conflict emergency assistance, transitioning to medium-term USAID/OFDA response to the food crisis, and now emerging into a program that combines long-term market development programming with targeted assistance to the critically vulnerable, along with a strong focus on the sub-region’s complex gender dynamics.

Our programs in the **Sahel** began in Niger with a focus on assisting households most vulnerable to the food crisis in 2005. Since then, we have expanded our activities through a combination of private foundation and US government funding to closely-linked Northern Nigeria and Northern Mali. Our resilience approach in the Sahel capitalizes upon the significant cross-border opportunities for trade and enhanced productivity, while confronting common systems

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1 In October 2012, USAID/OFDA presented the Mercy Corps PASTORAL project in Niger with an award for “Recognition of Excellence in Innovation and Learning in Disaster Risk Reduction.”

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constraints faced by pastoralist populations in these three countries, especially those related to climate variability (early warning systems, rangeland management), infrastructure (water, markets), access to livestock services (community animal health workers, service centers), government policy, conflict and traditional leadership structures. Mercy Corps is a leader across the region in sharing information and forging collaborative partnerships with government, NGOs and institutions such as INRAN\(^2\) and ICRISAT\(^3\). Complementing this, our activities in Niger (MILK, Sawki) and Nigeria (ENGINE project) are building on an emerging evidence base indicating that increasing gender equality in households and communities leads to increased resilience to shocks and stresses.

\[\text{\textbf{OUR LEARNING AND EVIDENCE}}\]

A strong commitment to learning and enhancing adaptability and accountability has generated a wealth of evidence that guide our current programs. Our resilience learning agenda is robust, identifying best practice and sharing across programs. An independent evaluation report, \textit{Tracking Resilience in Niger}, indicated that entrepreneurial training for women and enterprise support was pivotal in building resilience to the next crisis impacting Niger. In 2012 Mercy Corps published a study, \textit{From Conflict to Coping}, researching the links between conflict and drought resilience among pastoralists in the Somalia-Oromiya areas of Ethiopia. We are currently testing the wider validity of the findings through research in Northeast Uganda and Southern Ethiopia. In collaboration with the UK-based Springfield Centre, we recently published a case study on our market development work in the Somali region of Ethiopia, \textit{Making the Input Supply Market Work for the Poor}. The forthcoming study in Somalia, \textit{Separating the Wheat from the Chaff}, is an empirical test of commonly held assumptions about which characteristics, capacities, and conditions were linked to household resilience in the face of the complex political, ecological, and humanitarian crisis in 2011. Mercy Corps’ leadership in resilience learning is further demonstrated in the securing of two awards from the Intergovernmental Authority in Development (IGAD): Strategy Development for a Land-Potential Knowledge System, and Responsive Evaluation of Growth and Resilience Interventions.

\(\text{\textit{From Conflict to Coping}}\)

In 2012 Mercy Corps undertook a study to explore the links between conflict and drought resilience among pastoralists in Southern Ethiopia. The research provides strong evidence of the contributions of Mercy Corps peace-building programming to pastoralists’ abilities to productively cope with and adapt to the recent drought. The findings showed that improvements to freedom of movement and access to water, pastureland and other natural resources were key contributing factors to households’ drought resilience. The study sheds light on how peace-building programming can help mitigate the effects of severe drought among pastoralists. Such programs can serve as an effective part of disaster risk reduction efforts, reducing the need for large-scale humanitarian relief during periods of severe drought. The study can be viewed here: http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/copying-drought-ethiopia-building-peace-0

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\(^2\) Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique du Niger

\(^3\) International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (http://www.icrisat.org)
PROJECT PROFILES


Mercy Corps’ Revitalizing Agricultural/Pastoral Incomes and New Markets for Enhanced Resilience and Recovery (RAIN+) was a three-year, $17 million program that used humanitarian financing as a bridge for relief-to-development activities in the Somalia and Oromia regions of Ethiopia. RAIN emerged out of the 2007-2008 Horn food price crisis. According to a USAID/OFDA representative, “We wanted a more sustained intervention that would help program participants to be resilient to the next shock.” The resulting relief-to-development program worked to protect assets through diversification, prevent food insecurity through strengthening and diversifying livelihoods, and promoting economic development. In addition, the funding mechanism itself, which was multi-year and provided significant budget flexibility, facilitated the development of activities that responded rapidly to changing conditions on the ground. Mercy Corps has just published a case study on the RAIN project, illustrating how flexible funding and adaptive project management contributed to effective resilience building. The study can be viewed at: http://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/lessons-effective-resilience-programs.

Mercy Corps’ “Pastoralists’ Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion” (PRIME) program marks a paradigm shift in development assistance to vulnerable populations by building on the RAIN program (above) to address systemic change, and including climate adaptation and alternative livelihood option components. The $57 million USAID-funded initiative is designed to enhance resilience among pastoralist communities of Ethiopia, and thus enhance prospects for long-term development in Ethiopia’s dryland landscape where the pastoralist livelihood system prevails. With a view to the overall carrying capacity of pastoral systems in Ethiopia, PRIME works in parallel with households and communities transitioning out of pastoralism, equipping them with skills and resources to adapt and support new coping strategies. Financed through Feed the Future and Global Climate Change facilities, PRIME is designed to be transformative, innovative and achieve scale through market-driven approaches to livestock production and livelihood diversification that simultaneously support dryland communities to adapt to a changing climate.

Kenya ReKNDLE/Gates Foundation (2011-2014)

Mercy Corps’ “Relief and Recovery for Northern Kenya’s Drought-Affected Population and Livestock Economy” is a 26 month 2.5 million dollar program aimed to protect affected populations from harm, restore viable livelihoods in the short-term, and help communities to adapt in ways that build long-term resilience. With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Mercy Corps’ interventions in Wajir have transitioned from emergency to economic and market development, including: support for financial services and input and output markets; governance and conflict management; natural resource management and climate change adaptation, including alternative energy; and employment with a focus on young people transitioning out of pastoralism, including technical and life skills trainings.

Innovative Solutions for Pastoralists in Kenya

Mercy Corps capitalizes on a number of innovations for pastoralists in the arid north-eastern Wajir County of Kenya. Working in partnership with a camel milk processing company, Mercy Corps is facilitating the development of camel milk production businesses using new technologies. We are also working with Takaful (Sharia compliant) Insurance Company and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) on a ground-breaking Index Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI) pilot activity in Wajir County. This innovation in insurance avoids problems that make traditional insurance unprofitable for small, remote clients by utilizing satellite imagery and geographic clustering to develop a localized index designed to protect pastoralists against the risk of drought related livestock deaths.

The $1.5 million Gates Foundation funded “Hope For Sahel’s Pastoralist” (EESA) project takes a unique approach to building the resilience of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist households along the international transhumance corridors in Mali and Niger. The emergency phase of the project addressed critical lean season needs of pastoral populations through distribution of vouchers for supplementary livestock feed. During the recovery phase, the project is working to build the capacity of Community Animal Health Workers (CAHWs), improved quality of animal feed, and working through private sector livestock service providers to establish service centers along key transhumance corridors. Complementing this, Mercy Corps is working the strengthen access to information at the community level as a part of the national early warning system in Niger, and transferring information and capacity to Mali. Further, the project is taking initial steps at laying the foundations for peaceful resolution of conflicts over land and resources, facilitating meetings and productive dialogue between customary leaders that will enable improved rangeland management in the long-term.

Niger PASTORAL & Wadata (OFDA), Sawki (USAID/FFP), PROSAZ (Private)

In Niger, a suite of programs focused on reducing the vulnerability of pastoralists supports diversifying assets and market access, managing natural resources increasingly stressed by climate change and population growth, and strengthen dispute resolution skills for community members and leaders. The award-winning “Projet d’Appui a la Sécurisation des Terres et Ouvrages de Réhabilitation des Aires Locales” (PASTORAL) program responded to the continuous emergency situation in Niger catalyzed by the 2008 food price crisis that left 7.8 million people, over half the population, in need of assistance. With $2.7M from USAID/OFDA, PASTORAL improved food security of agro-pastoralists and pastoralist households in rural areas of the hard-hit Filingué region. Beyond providing urgent supplementary feed to thousands of cattle, the program strengthened the risk prevention capacity of over 10,000 vulnerable households (over 65,000 people) through infrastructure rehabilitation such as water points and harvest storage and rehabilitating 530 ha of rangeland.
through bio-reclamation techniques. Establishing channels for communities to share information regarding herd management and monitoring nutritional status is a long-term investment in dryland resilience and disaster risk reduction. Evidencing this, in October 2012, USAID/OFDA presented the Mercy Corps PASTORAL project in Niger with an award for “Recognition of Excellence in Innovation and Learning in Disaster Risk Reduction.” In 2013, USAID/OFDA awarded the “Wadata Makiyaya” project to Mercy Corps, solidifying gains by building resilience in PASTORAL communities and expanding to new ones.

Other programming in Niger builds on these efforts, with an emphasis on food and nutrition security as the foundation for building resilient communities, including “Sawki”, a five-year $30M USAID/FFP program started in 2012 in Maradi and Zinder, two of the most food insecure regions of Niger. The partnership with Helen Keller International (HKI), Africare, the Government of Niger, local NGOs, the National Institute of Agronomy Research (INRAN) is delivering an integrated comprehensive package of activities, with a special emphasis on empowering women and adolescent girls’ as household decision-makers to combat malnutrition and build resilience. Finally, the Early Recovery, Resilience, and Livelihoods (PROSAZ) program integrated economic recovery with food security for vulnerable households in the department of Ouallam through micro-credit and women’s Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA).4 Initiated in 2012, the funding consortium for PROSAZ includes four private foundations, two US-based and two UK-based, contributing to a combined budget of $1.25M.

**At a Glance:**

**Mercy Corps’ Resilience Programs in the Sahel**

**NIGER**

Project: PASTORAL, Wadata Makiyaya/OFDA
Area: Filingue, Tillaberi
Project/Donor: Sawki/USAID/FFP
Area: Maradi, Zinder
Project/Donor: PROSAZ/4 Private Foundations
Area: Quallam, Tillaberi

**MALI**

Project/Donor: EESA/Gates Foundation
Area: Ansongo (Gao), Tillaberi (Niger)

**NIGERIA**

Project/Donor: ENGINE/DFID, Coke, Nike
Area: Northern Nigeria
Project/Donor: CONCUR/DFID
Area: Middle Belt

In Nigeria, Mercy Corps is working to prevent and resolve conflict between pastoralists and farmers in the ethnically diverse Middle Belt region, where the southern fringe of the pastoral Sahel meets more agrarian communities. As the frequency of drought becomes ever-more regular, pastoralists in search of pasture come into conflict with already established agrarian/agro-pastoral communities. The situation in the Middle Belt is exacerbated by a complex ethnic brew of groups frequently coming into associated ethno-religious conflicts and weak resource governance. This has the effect of undermining prospects for stability and resilience in the region. Working in partnership with Pastoral Resolve (PARE), the £3 million CONCUR project targets 20 geographic areas in southern Sahel Middle Belt region where Muslim pastoralists and Christian farmers frequently come into conflict, providing 20 leaders in each location with skills and tools to map conflicts, facilitating dispute resolution, and sharing learning and successes across communities. Taking proactive measures to address the drivers of conflict and implement agreements reached between parties, the CONCUR project supports follow-on economic and natural resource initiatives in each of the 20 areas, including projects such as dairy processing. The intervention is rounded-out by a policy and advocacy component providing both the project and community leadership with a systems lens to inform program decisions, and possibly leading to government policy reform that lessen the impact of conflict and increase resilience of both pastoralists and farmers throughout the Middle Belt.

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4 See a video overview of the PROSAZ program in Niger at [http://youtu.be/2iYKTtyCcaA](http://youtu.be/2iYKTtyCcaA)
Mercy Corps’ recently secured the participation of Coke Foundation, DFID, Nike Foundation, and d.light to launch the £6.8 million ENGINE project, a ground-breaking approach to resilience in the southern Sahel reaches of Northern Nigeria with empowered adolescent girls at the center. Not only does the program support schooling and skills development for girls, but provides them with real franchising opportunities within the Coca-Cola company’s supply chain in Nigeria. ENGINE’s theory of change states that when marginalized Nigerian girls complete a full education cycle and are supported by gatekeepers they will be more skilled employees and have increased earning power and increased decision-making authority, thereby building the resilience of the overall household. The linkage between this approach to adolescent girls’ empowerment and increased resilience is directly supported by a recent end-of-project evaluation of Mercy Corps’ MILK project in Niger and research carried-out by MIT’s Poverty Action Lab, entitled “Young Women: What do we know?” With a major M&E component and project-level impact evaluation already underway, the ENGINE project is providing a rigorous testing ground for Mercy Corps’ burgeoning evidence base demonstrating that increased gender equity in households and communities leads to increased resilience to shocks and stresses.

Rounding-out the Mercy Corps project portfolio in northern Nigeria’s southern reaches of the Sahel, Mercy Corps has recently been awarded the USAID-funded Girma (“Grow” in Hausa) project. The project takes a multi-sector approach to help 42,000 very poor households to grow their agricultural production, incomes and children through improved nutrition. As households advance through the program, resistance to shocks is correspondingly increased through a suite of activities that build agricultural know-how and resources including diversified production and use of technologies. Reflecting Mercy Corps’ systems approach to resilience programming, this work is done in close coordination with local government authorities in the respective regions, providing them with the skills and resources to undertake this work independently and correspondingly address policy and implementation constraints to support these gains.

South Central Somalia and Puntland Emergency Response Program (SCAPE)/USAID/OFDA (2012 – 2013)

Somalia is one of the most unstable countries in the world, and its population is constantly at risk of conflict and drought. Southern Somalia in particular represents one of the most critical contexts where a resilience-building approach is needed, and among the most challenging places to do this effectively. When in 2010 - 2011, drought conditions ravaged the Horn of Africa, it was only in southern Somalia that a famine ensued, due in large part to the political instability, conflict, food price spikes, and a lack of humanitarian access. Yet, despite these compounded shocks, some households managed to productively cope, adapt or quickly recover. Of utmost interest is what enabled these groups to exhibit such resilience.

Research:
Separating the Wheat from the Chaff, Exploratory Evidence on the Determinants of Resilience to Food Insecurity in Southern Somalia

When significant areas of South Central Somalia were recovered from Al Shabab control in 2012, Mercy Corps, in partnership with TANGO International and other agencies, took the opportunity to study how some households were better able to cope with drought. The research set out to empirically test commonly held assumptions about which characteristics, capacities, and conditions were actually linked to household resilience in the face of the complex political, ecological, and humanitarian crisis in 2011. Findings indicate there is little indication that having a greater number of income sources contributed to households being more resilient to the multiple food security shocks. As well, female involvement in household decision-making was strongly linked with greater household dietary diversity and less distressful coping in the face of crisis.
Continuously examining our impact, Mercy Corps is laying the groundwork for resilience-building by increasing the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacity of households in Somalia. Our projects build on the gains made by six previous years of emergency funding from USAID/OFDA, augmenting responses to immediate needs, restoration of livelihoods, and capacity building for long-term recovery in order to enhance communities’ ability to cope with and recover from natural and man-made shocks. Absorptive capacity interventions address basic needs through cash-based programming designed to restore assets. Building upon this, the adaptive capacity of communities and households is strengthened through the rehabilitation of irrigation networks, in concert with provision of seeds and tools. Transformative capacity to cope with future disasters is strengthened through community-led DRR processes that are bolstered by investments in necessary infrastructure such as embankments, reliable water resources, and markets. Our activities are carried-out in close partnership with the Juba Foundation, a leading indigenous NGO in Somalia.

**South Sudan Assist Demand Driven Livelihoods and Employment in Markets with High Returnees (ADDL) & Emergency Assistance to Conflict Affected Populations (ECAP)/USAID/OFDA (2011-2013)**

Working in South Sudan since 2006, Mercy Corps builds resilience to natural and man-made shocks through a progressive approach that transitions communities and entrepreneurs from relief (absorptive capacity) to sustainable livelihoods (adaptive capacity), with a particular focus on planning, infrastructure and DRR systems (transformative capacity). Communities in South Sudan’s transitional areas are susceptible to recurrent drought, annual flooding, and outbreaks of violent conflict. Working in Abyei and Unity State, our USAID/OFDA-supported work enables 50,000 conflict-affected individuals to re-enter a productive agricultural food cycle through temporary cash for work, technical training and voucher-based provision of seeds and tools. Working through local leadership structures, transformative capacity is built through participatory planning activities to develop proactive measures to prevent and mitigate shocks and stresses, including development of early warning systems and infrastructure. Market infrastructure initiatives are built-upon through targeted initiatives to bolster adaptive capacity, including Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) and trader support to unlock capital, promote market access and smooth consumption patterns throughout the year.


The $5 million **Uganda Horn Food Price Crisis Response (HFPCR)** project was designed as a multi-year, medium-term response to the food crisis that swept the region in 2007/8. Building on Mercy Corps’ experience with emergency response in the Karamoja region, the project recognized that bold initiatives were required to assist households in breaking-out of the ongoing cycle of shocks. Effectively integrating well-targeted, short-term humanitarian assistance with longer-term market-based investments, HFPCR addressed the immediate food security needs of the vulnerable while building a basis for longer-term economic prosperity. Making tremendous progress to integrate Karamoja with other regions of the country and improve household resilience to shocks, the program ended in 2012 with Mercy Corps’ USAID funding transitioning to the more long-term development-oriented GHG project (see below).

The $53 million **Northern Karamoja Growth Health and Governance (GHG)** project scales-up and builds upon Mercy Corps’ previous work under the USAID/OFDA-funded HFPCR project in the Karamoja region of Uganda. GHG is improving peace and food security for 375,000 direct beneficiaries by tackling the structural causes of vulnerability through an integrated approach that blends market development, good governance, conflict management programming, and “Do No Harm” principles. In order to strengthen the livelihoods of agriculturalists, pastoralists, and agro-pastoralists in Karamoja, the program is addressing systemic constraints to market development by strengthening input and support services, improving market access, and promoting agro-processing investments. Recognizing that peace is a prerequisite for sustainable economic growth, the program is also improving the overall governance of the conflict management system (which includes all formal and informal actors), resulting in a more viable and secure environment.
ABOUT MERCY CORPS

Mercy Corps is a leading global humanitarian agency saving and improving lives in the world's toughest places. With a network of experienced professionals in more than 40 countries, we partner with local communities to put bold ideas into action to help people recover, overcome hardship and build better lives. Now, and for the future.

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