



Mercy Corps

BUILDING AN EMPOWERED KARAMOJA

STRESS Summary and Capacities

AUGUST 2016

Karamoja is a region in transition socially, ecologically, and economically. Recent peace and security have brought new economic opportunities, market development, and possibilities for forging more equitable gender roles. However, the decline of highly adaptive pastoral livelihoods and frequent shocks and stresses from a variety of sources are challenging resilience in the region. Mercy Corps and its partners are refining a vision and theory of change for an Empowered Karamoja—resilient to shocks and stresses—where all Karamojongs can benefit from these new opportunities. This Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS), conducted from February-April 2016, allowed Mercy Corps and its partners to deepen their understanding of vulnerability and resilience in Karamoja and identify a set of resilience capacities. These capacities will serve as the foundation for the development of integrated programming around this vision and theory of change for an Empowered Karamoja.

Summary

Karamoja's main livelihood strategies and the social, ecological, and economic systems that underpin them are in transition. In response to a catastrophic decline in the livestock population—which communities have traditionally

depended on for food, income, and collective identity—many households have turned to agriculture, natural resource extraction, urban livelihoods, and out-migration to meet basic needs. While new urban livelihoods are bringing individuals closer to services like health care and education, a concurrent rush to claim land in agricultural settlement areas is doing the opposite. Enhanced peace and security, a need for agricultural and urban land, and government concessions to mining companies have contributed to rising land value and competition to claim it.

These changes have altered the nature of and exposure to shocks and stresses in the region. Compounded by the absence of effective veterinary services, quarantines, and regional trade bans, livestock diseases and pests continue to threaten the productivity of pastoral and other-livestock based livelihoods. While traditional pastoral livelihoods are well adapted to Karamoja’s dry and unpredictable climate, communities newly dependent on agriculture are more vulnerable to increasingly severe rainfall variability and dry spells.

Among other factors, population growth, dry season burning, and a push to cultivate non-viable land are contributing to ongoing land degradation. This degradation has increased the impacts of disastrous floods, during which communicable disease outbreaks are more probable. Conflicts over natural resources—particularly land, water, and minerals—continue to escalate. And, in the absence of effective local and state institutions, communities rely on weakened traditional governance systems struggling to enforce decisions, particularly disputes related to resource use.

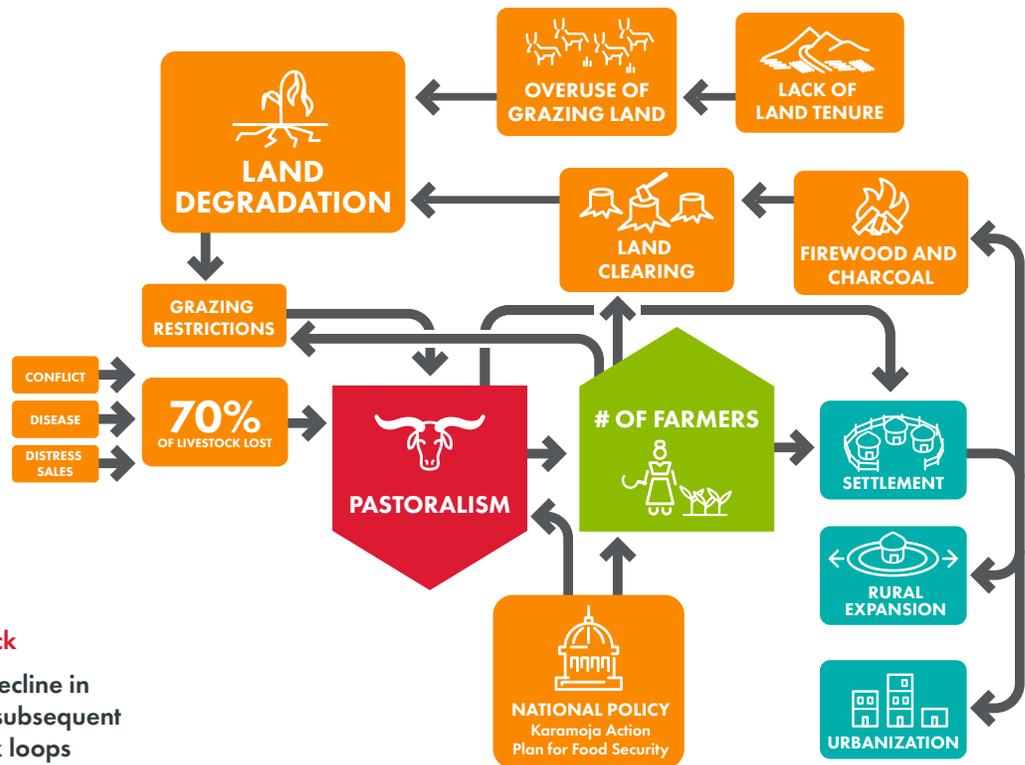


Figure 1:
The Decline in Livestock
 Factors leading to a decline in pastoralism, and the subsequent impacts and feedback loops associated with this decline.

Changes in institutions and social norms have accompanied these livelihood transitions. Livestock decline and the shift to agriculture have increased women and girls’ workload without an equivalent expansion in their decision-making power or control of key resources. For men and boys, a loss of power, wealth, and identity has accompanied the decline

in pastoralism, increasing unemployment, alcoholism, and their likelihood of engaging in gender based violence. Though low for Uganda, HIV rates are rapidly rising in Karamoja with increasing urbanization and out-migration, low awareness, and limited control of sexual health among women. And, households turning to non-farm livelihoods and out-migration are more vulnerable to labor exploitation and human trafficking.

If Karamoja’s economy continues to commercialize and transition into a cash economy, groups with access to assets (e.g., land, livestock) or education will be well positioned to take advantage of new opportunities. Others may shift into crop production with varying success, but a growing number will depend on wage labor, urban livelihoods, or outmigration. A theory of change for Karamoja must ensure—through equitable resource distribution—that the greatest number of people will fall in this first group, while guaranteeing the remaining vulnerable groups have access to decent and safe labor opportunities.

Resilience Capacities

To build resilience to shocks and stresses within this complex context, Karamojong men, boys, girls, and women must have access to appropriate resources and apply risk-mitigating strategies that support their ability to maintain progress towards development goals. Through STRESS, Mercy Corps and its partners identified a set of six key themes—identified below as capacity groups—to frame the development of specific resilience capacities required for households and communities to absorb, adapt, and transform in the face of these disruptions. Mercy Corp and its partners designed these capacity groups to complement this vision for building an Empowered Karamoja by 2026.

Capacity Group #1: Increased Capacity to Manage Natural Resources Equitably and Transparently

Inequitable and unsustainable natural resource management is driving a number of shocks and stresses (e.g., flooding, conflict), increasing livestock producers and farmers’ vulnerability. Increasing government capacity to use information adaptively and effectively in managing resources at large scales will require engaging stakeholders beyond any single community, expanding their ability to manage existing degradation, reducing trends over time, and increasing transparency. The creation of a clear land tenure system where ownership is recognized, and can be clearly confirmed, communicated, and enforced is foundational to this capacity. Once established, a legal, community accepted, and transparent system for land tenure provides opportunities to reduce natural resource conflict and develop and enforce a mix of policies addressing risk and sustainability (e.g., comanagement agreements between national wildlife agencies and communities).



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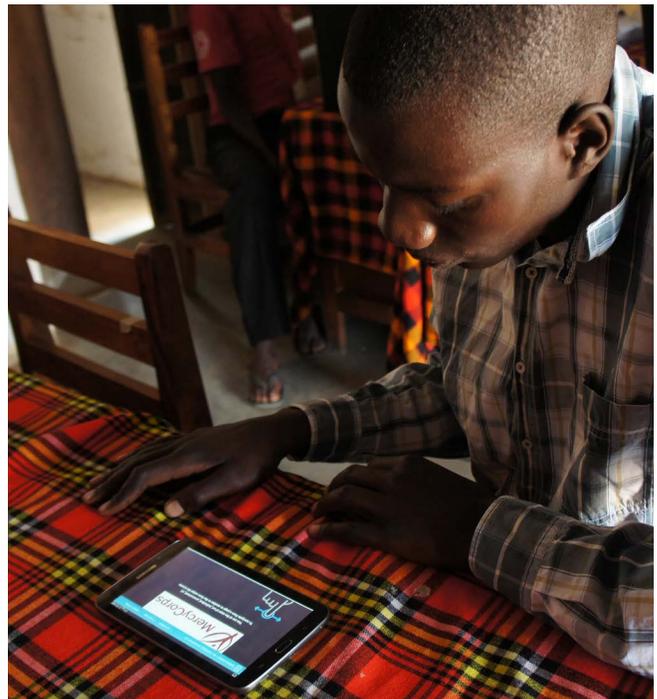
Capacity Group #2: Increased Access to Products and Services that Reduce Risk

There are viable technologies, information services, and skills which could drastically increase the capacity of communities to prepare for, manage, and recover from shocks and stresses such as rainfall variability, dry

spells, livestock diseases, pests, and land degradation. However, neither local markets, nor governments are providing them. Livestock and crop extension services can support risk reduction and management—especially by equipping herders and farmers to better utilize technology—against a range of shocks and stresses. Reducing vulnerability to diseases and pests that have devastated livestock herd populations in recent years through animal health services provision is the most important capacity for building the resilience of livestock production. Ultimately, the resilience (and productivity and profitability) of livestock-based livelihoods will hinge on the degree to which development policy provides a supportive framework for those livelihoods, which have been undermined by recent state policy favoring sedentarism.

Capacity Group #3: Increased Access to Appropriate Financial Services

Reducing risk to shocks and stresses (e.g., rainfall variability, crop pests, and livestock diseases) requires innovative financial products and services (e.g., loans) which allow individuals to invest in adaptive strategies and savings structures that allow for debt-free recovery. These mechanisms are essential to protecting market actors and decreasing perceptions of risk among potential investors. Loans allow households to buffer themselves against a range of shocks by allowing them to plan for the future and invest in livelihoods that are more flexible or adaptive. They can support income generating activities and small businesses that help accumulate income and assets. Meanwhile, savings can support efforts to recover from damage associated with shocks such as floods, droughts, or loss of livestock to diseases. Despite limitations, the strong presence of village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) suggests a willingness to save and borrow. A more formalized banking system, which provides equal access to standard and customizable loans and savings products, would likely be successful. These innovative new banking structures need to be gender sensitive, allowing women unprecedented access to capital and preventing greater sensitivity to shocks and stresses.



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Capacity Group #4: Increased Access to Information and Early Warning Systems

Communities require basic strategies and information for managing risk associated with livestock disease and pests, drought-induced food insecurity, flood, general weather, and price shocks in Karamoja. The provision of timely information allows households and individuals exposed to hazards to take action to avoid or reduce their risk and prepare for effective response. Relatively minor shifts in weather can have a major impact without forewarning, and therefore basic weather information can promote better decision-making. For this reason, it is critical that women, men, boys and girls receive targeted information equally, including early warning information. Communities also must perceive warnings to be reliable, understand their inherent uncertainties, and take appropriate action based on information. Warnings must accurately illustrate the probabilistic nature of forecasts and projections and avoid overly prescriptive messaging.

Capacity Group #5: Improved Mechanisms for Disaster Risk Management and Response

To reduce casualties, manage resources effectively, and ensure a quick economic recovery, it is essential that communities and governments are prepared when disaster strikes. District management committees (DMC) must be able to mobilize in response to early warning system (EWS) triggers and execute plans for collective action to increase survival and the distribution of emergency food aid. At the district and sub-county level, DMCs can play an important role supporting communities in utilizing EWS information effectively. In response to EWS, local, regional, and/or national storage food aid needs to be made available. District and community systems should be used to coordinate international aid. Cash transfers from government and/or foreign aid systems need to target households.

Capacity Group #6: Increased Access to Water Management and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) Services

Functioning community water management mechanisms—such as linked district and watershed management systems—will be essential to increasing access to quality water, reducing the impact of rainfall variability and health disturbances. Basic water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities and strategies are essential for reducing transmission of water and vector born diseases, particularly following heavy rains. Governance of water systems at the district and county levels needs to be accountable and transparent, balancing the needs of various users for productive means. Such governance mechanisms will support community-scale efforts to increase: 1) utilization of sanitation in urban and rural areas through enforcement of by-laws focused on good sanitation practice, and 2) water storage technologies for use during dry periods.

A Strategy for Resilient Development

Karamoja is a dynamic place, recovering from years of conflict and economic insecurity. Seemingly on a new trajectory, the region is seeing significant progress, new economic opportunities, and productive social changes. Significant steps must be taken to ensure these benefits are distributed equitably over time. Mercy Corps and its development partners and beneficiaries envision a future for Karamoja where its citizens are empowered and equipped to navigate the shifting dynamics of markets, livelihood opportunities, and governance institutions. However, a number of shocks and stresses seriously compromise the ability of communities, state, and non-state actors to meet these development objectives sustainably.

To prepare for, manage, and quickly recover from the impacts of these disturbances, stakeholders must integrate resilience capacities into development strategies. As with the development vision and theory of change for an Empowered Karamoja, no single institution can increase resilience for all vulnerable populations within the region. This work will require a shared platform and vision, strong partnerships, and strategic resource investment among a number local, national, and international development actors in Karamoja. For Mercy Corps, the STRESS process represents just the beginning of a strategic effort to establish this platform and engage in partnerships to ensure Karamoja has the opportunity to attain a sustainable, resilient future.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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