



**Climate Resilient
Development**
at Mercy Corps

CLIMATE RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY SERIES

Experiences and Lessons in Climate Change Integration



Climate Resilient Development at Mercy Corps

For Mercy Corps, resilience is a process—a way of thinking and acting—not just an end state. We work to build diverse connections and relationships—between people, communities, and the systems that support them—which enable communities to plan, prepare, and manage for change in times of increasingly complex and dynamic crises.

To maintain and enhance development outcomes in the face of complex and interrelated shocks and stresses, Mercy Corps' Resilience Initiative focuses on developing an approach to operationalizing the concept of resilience throughout our programs and strategies.

Because we recognize climate change is a key driver of these shocks and stresses, we have developed a Climate Resilient Development (CRD) approach to guide how we integrate climate considerations and adaptation strategies into all long-term development objectives. This development-first approach builds climate resilience through strategies that reduce poverty, including measures aimed at increasing food security, enhancing social cohesion, and strengthening governance inclusive of those now marginalized and impoverished.

Mercy Corps' capacity to integrate climate change into its broad portfolio of programming has evolved rapidly through experience across nine countries over seven years. To inform CRD design and implementation at Mercy Corps and share this knowledge with other practitioners and agencies, we initiated a series of case studies of our programming, identifying key lessons and best practices for integrating climate change into diverse programs and contexts. This document summarizes these lessons and recommendations.

To access the full case study library please visit www.MercyCorps.org/Climate.

Climate Resilient Development (CRD): Development programming that integrates climate change adaptation and behavior change strategies, while building inclusive and resilient development pathways that can adapt to unpredictable climate futures.

Climate Change Adaptation (CCA): Strategies or actions specifically aimed at reducing vulnerability to actual or expected changes in climate.





Photo: M. Samper/Mercy Corps

The Climate Integration Challenge

Mercy Corps works in places where weather and natural climate variability challenge development gains. Many of our target populations engage in livelihood strategies that are highly natural resource dependent and often undertaken on arid and degraded lands—factors which limit their productivity and make them vulnerable to shifts in weather patterns. These populations have an extremely low capacity to prepare for and manage climate shocks and stresses in part because governments are often unable to plan, adequately fund, or implement adaptation measures. Among poor and marginalized communities, limited representation, lack of access to information and vital resources, and often-restrictive social norms can compound existing disenfranchisement and vulnerability.

Scientists confirm climate change is magnifying existing development barriers and degrading development legacies, impacting human and natural systems across all continents. Our teams have witnessed extreme and often unpredictable weather patterns, which damage social, economic, and ecological systems at multiple scales and give rise to new hazards. The increased frequency and intensity of these weather-induced hazards—including shorter or nonexistent seasonal rains, groundwater salination and depletion, and humanitarian disasters—exacerbate drivers of fragility, limit development, and drive involuntary migration and conflict across the least developed, most crisis affected nations.

By threatening essential inputs for economic prosperity and human well-being, climate instability is challenging our assumptions about security and livelihoods, especially for vulnerable communities who are the focus of development work. While it is increasingly clear that climate and related ecological factors are among the root causes of complex social and economic challenges, the development community struggles to address these drivers effectively.

Climate change is often perceived as too long-term a challenge, distinct from—rather than related to—shorter-term project based approaches to development outcomes, such as improved health, economic prosperity, agricultural productivity, and inclusive governance. Yet, allocating comparatively limited resources toward climate-related development programming and failing to integrate this programming across development efforts will dramatically hinder long-term achievement and return on investment.

We have a clear opportunity—and very little time—to increase the sustainability and resilience of development investments by integrating inclusive climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies into measures designed to increase well-being.

Lessons and Recommendations for Climate Resilient Development

Incorporate climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies across outcomes.

Our experience has shown that effective CRD programs integrate CCA across development strategies, rather than creating an isolated CCA program pillar. This ensures climate information informs all program strategies, and in turn, all outcomes.

Build a systemic understanding of climate challenges

Assessments and analysis conducted at the program design stage should be multi-disciplinary and focused on how climate and non-climate factors influence desired development outcomes. Siloed, sector-specific assessments are less effective for designing multi-scale CRD programs.

Facilitate mainstreaming

The role of implementation agencies is to facilitate a process of learning, network-building, and advocacy that supports and enables the mainstreaming of climate considerations into policy and planning. Mainstreaming climate within local systems, not programs, is the ultimate goal of CRD. This requires carefully targeted strategies aimed at growing and supporting the systems needed for climate resilience as opposed to providing services directly.

Enhance the capacity and knowledge of decision makers

The ability of decision makers to understand climate risk and learn and adapt to new information is fundamental to CRD. Vulnerability assessments, adaptation planning, and pilot project development provide opportunities to build capacity and engagement among decision makers at multiple scales in government, civil society, and business sectors.

Target climate information

To integrate CCA strategies effectively, decision makers at all scales—including government and market actors, community members, and project teams—must be able to access and interpret climate information quickly and easily. Climate and weather information must be user specific, time appropriate, accessible, and targeted to identified needs.

Monitor climate information from design to evaluation

Climate vulnerability assessments are essential tools for informing program design and understanding the impacts of climate shocks and stresses. Analysis of climate disturbances should extend beyond

design phases to monitoring and evaluation efforts. CRD programming requires adaptive management, including monitoring outcomes (not just outputs) and their intended effects on reducing climate vulnerability throughout implementation. Extreme weather events provide opportunities to evaluate the success of adaptation strategies and inform and adjust theories regarding which capacities truly build climate resilience in a given context.



Photo: K. Lynch/Mercy Corps

Engage market approaches to increase sustainability and scalability.

Pairing market systems development strategies with CCA strategies can support the financial sustainability of interventions while furthering development. This is especially true for community scale disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions which often rely on community volunteers for maintenance and management after programming ends. Continued financial support for these interventions after programming ends is essential.



Photo: K. Lynch/Mercy Corps

Lessons and Recommendations for Broader Resilience Programming

Use a systems-approach

To build resilience, development strategies need to move beyond community scale projects which narrowly address specific issues. Resilience requires strategies that address the root causes of climate and non-climate vulnerability and build the capacity of social, economic, and ecological systems that enable communities to absorb, adapt, and transform. This work requires strategies which directly address less tangible issues related to social and cultural norms, governance (including natural resource management), and behavior change over the long-term.

Seek Long-term strategies

Integration of climate adaptation within development strategies leads to larger scale and longer term programs that bring together various organizations and partners across social, ecological, and economic systems. Working within and around existing funding cycles requires sequencing and layering of projects so that they contribute to and build toward goals beyond the time-scale of any one activity.

Design pilot projects as learning mechanisms

By providing processes for engagement and opportunities to test new concepts, pilot projects can play an important role in advancing resilience strategies. However, pilots must be intentionally designed as opportunities for learning, network building, and meaningful engagement of actors and decision makers.



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