

“ Mercy Corps’ urban resilience programs have the overall goal to mitigate the short and long-term effects of urban shocks and stresses on vulnerable communities while creating an enabling environment for inclusive urban growth. ”



Yangon, Photo Credit: Mercy Corps

BUILDING INCLUSIVE URBAN RESILIENCE

JULY 2019

CONTEXT

Asia is the fastest urbanizing region in the world. Urban populations are growing at a rate of 1.5% annually and an estimated 64% of the Asian population is expected to live in cities by 2050. Urbanization can signal economic growth and offer critical opportunities to improve household well-being through better access to education, health care, and employment. Rapid urban growth, however, can also strain public services and restrict economic opportunities.

In Asia, the growing demand for improved infrastructure and the lack of public institutional capacity to adequately provide for the number of migrants from rural areas puts significant pressure on urban systems. Cities are expanding in some of the most economically attractive but ecologically vulnerable terrain including coastal areas and flood plains, where the natural environment is compromised by infrastructure growth, leaving concentrated populations more vulnerable to extreme weather events and effects of climate change.

The interconnected challenges of global climate change, market instabilities, environmental health hazards and ecosystem degradation in Asian cities are being exacerbated by the pace and scale of city development that will undermine development prospects for urban citizens. In the majority of Asia's cities, the enabling socio-political environment required to mitigate the negative impacts of these shocks and stresses is missing or ineffectual. Migrants, youth, women and those in or just emerging out of poverty are often the most vulnerable to these factors, as they face repeated crisis that can erode their limited resources.

It is within this context that there is now widespread recognition among national governments, the donor community, and humanitarian and development partners that more must be done to enhance the resilience of chronically vulnerable populations in urban areas. Achieving equitable and sustainable development outcomes in a context of shocks and stresses inherently requires a resilience approach.

Resilience

Mercy Corps defines resilience as the capacity of communities in complex socio-ecological systems to learn, cope, adapt and transform in the face of shocks and stresses. This means individuals, communities and the systems they live in and rely on – social, economic and ecological – must better navigate and adapt to an environment of disturbances and unpredictability in order to establish or maintain a pathway to development.

Shocks and Stresses

Shocks are sudden, sharp events that threaten a city, including: price fluctuations, disease and violence outbreaks, earthquakes and floods.

Stresses, on the other hand, are slow moving disasters that weaken the city. They include: high unemployment, chronic food and water shortages and environmental degradation.



Mercy Corps is leading **ACCCRN as a regional network** that connects professionals and communities across Asia to build inclusive Urban Climate Change Resilience (UCCR). Since its launch in 2014, Mercy Corps has been leading the network with over 2,000 practitioners joining the network and facilitating collaborative work in the region.

The ACCCRN Network has three main pillars:

- › **Knowledge:** Provide a platform for generating and sharing knowledge about inclusive UCCR
- › **Resources:** Leverage access to funds, people and networks
- › **Advocacy:** Advocate for inclusive UCCR

URBAN RESILIENCE AT MERCY CORPS

Since 2008, [Mercy Corps'](#) South and Southeast Asia (SSEA) Region has been building a portfolio of programs and research in the field of [Urban Resilience](#). Asia is the fastest urbanizing region in the world, and there is growing recognition among development experts and practitioners that while urbanization can hold many benefits for poverty reduction, unsustainable rates of urban growth can undermine potential for inclusive development in both urban and rural areas. Accordingly, Mercy Corps has identified urban resilience as a critical strategic area of intervention in Asia.

Mercy Corps' engagement in urban resilience began under the, Rockefeller-funded Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN) program that instituted an inclusive multi-level governance-focused approach to addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability in urban areas. Since then, Mercy Corps has drawn on important lessons from ACCCRN to develop and expand its voice in this field across the region.

I. Our Approach

Mercy Corps' program Interventions focus on small and medium-sized cities, which are the fastest growing urban agglomerations across Asia. They aim to *mitigate the short and long-term effects of urban shocks and stresses on vulnerable communities while creating an enabling environment for inclusive urban growth.*

While our programs have a primary impact on the socio-economic well-being of vulnerable urban communities, achieving this goal requires a **systems level approach** – requiring us to working within and across complex, interconnected socio-political, ecological, and economic systems that influence resilience and vulnerability. Conditions with these systems in a particular urban landscape determine access to key urban development resources, such as food, water, infrastructure, transportation, and employment. These conditions also determine the extent to which shocks and stresses will affect access to these resources, the capacities required to mitigate risk, and the formal and informal rules that determine who can access them and who cannot.

To understand these dynamics we conduct a **strategic resilience assessment (STRESS)** that helps us apply resilience thinking in distinct humanitarian or development contexts. The methodology deepens our understanding of risk and the systems communities rely on and allows practitioners to adjust what they do and how they do it—helping maintain progress toward well-being outcomes even in the face of increasing instability and fragility.

II. Our Key Intervention Areas

Mercy Corps' integrated urban programs address the multiple issues faced by urban communities and facilitate access to financial services, employment opportunities, basic needs, and political representation and voice. We recognize that multi-sector interventions are required to address the inter-related needs of urban populations. Our **interventions focus on three main areas:**



STRENGTHENING URBAN RESILIENCE IN SEMARANG, INDONESIA

In Semarang — a bustling port city on the Java Sea — the impacts of climate change are a day-to-day reality. Flooding, landslides and unpredictable seasons threaten the city's economy, coastal lands, public health and groundwater. One of the first cities to join ACCRN, Semarang is:

Improving coastal ecosystems and fishermen's livelihoods in partnership with local youth groups and government agencies; the project is restoring mangrove forests, reviving fishponds and educating residents on climate change and alternative livelihoods, such as ecotourism.

Strengthening the health sector to reduce incidences of dengue fever; The Ministry of Health and University of Indonesia conducted the country's first ever assessment to investigate the ties between dengue fever and climate change. Community health workers are documenting the disease and promote behavior change to reduce the spread dengue fever.

Improving preparedness and response to floods in the city's most vulnerable neighborhoods; Local groups are developing flood information systems, early warning systems, evacuation strategies, as well as identifying temporary shelters.

Sharing knowledge with other cities; The Semarang City Team is building local, national and international networks to share their knowledge and experience as a member of ACCRN.

1. Inclusive, accountable decision-making in urban governance and service delivery

Mercy Corps has been working with a network of cities to assess current and potential urban vulnerabilities, develop city resilience strategies and test concrete risk-reducing interventions. This process is implemented through a multi-stakeholder, governance approach focused on developing solutions to existing, immediate and future risks in urban areas, while addressing some of the root causes of vulnerability.

Specifically, we engage diverse “City teams” that consist of government departments, civil society groups, the private sector and universities in facilitated discussions on not only the scientific and technical aspects of a city’s vulnerability, but focused on the good governance processes required to make an impact, often across traditional administrative boundaries.

Mercy Corps aims to affect the socio-political conditions that determine rights, resource allocations and capacities for resilience among marginalized groups in urban areas. We work through local civil society to mobilize neighborhood-level citizen groups, support them to understand their own vulnerability and develop their capacity for seeking and applying solutions. The focus is on building social capital and collective action towards local solutions for mitigating risk, while enhancing citizens’ voice and agency in articulating their problems to government bodies, advocating for improved services and holding government accountable for action.

URBAN RESILIENCE IN PRACTICE

Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN): From 2009 and 2016, Mercy Corps was an implementing partner for the Rockefeller-funded ACCCRN program in Indonesia. ACCCRN supported the scaling-up of UCCR through engagement with national policy, development of guidelines and a national platform for learning and exchange, refinement of tools, and strengthening of city-level stakeholder capacities to develop city resilience strategies. ACCCRN successfully leveraged over \$10 million USD in funding from city governments for urban resilience activities at the community level. The program’s achievements have enabled citizens to access much needed basic services and have helped Mercy Corps to have significant influence in national climate change conversations and over policies.

100 Resilient Cities (100RC): With support from 100RC, initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation, Mercy Corps was appointed Strategy Partner under the 100RC Program in Semarang and supported the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) between 2014 and 2017 in drafting the [City Strategy Document](#). Our teams facilitated an urban climate resilience building process, owned by local government and citizens, with particular focus on the needs of vulnerable communities.



2. Climate-smart ecosystem management and practice

Urban populations fundamentally rely on healthy ecosystems for clean water, clean air, a livable, predictable climate, and to protect them from natural hazards. Businesses and their consumers rely on the natural environment for food production, raw material or inputs into manufactured commodities.

Mercy Corps engages across stakeholders to temper the effects of ecological hazards in urban landscapes, while restoring functions of ecosystems to provide needed services for marginalized urban citizens that can enhance their resilience. Our teams facilitate cross-boundary cooperation, and support emerging institutions that allow implementation of critical trans-boundary market and ecological solutions whilst ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are key participants in planning and recipients of interventions.



URBAN RESILIENCE IN PRACTICE

Transboundary flood risk management through governance and innovative information technology ([TRANSFORM](#)):

Under the Global Resilience Partnership' Water Window Challenge funded by the Zurich Foundation, Mercy Corps took a systems approach to Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) through ecosystems management and transboundary coordination to strengthen natural infrastructure and resilience against hazard impacts. The project introduced cutting-edge, user-friendly, decision-making tools, as well as a Return on Investment analysis using the Ecosystems Services Identification and Inventory ([ESII Tool](#)) to quantify the impacts to ecosystems within the transboundary watershed and to incentivize good governance and increased investment in flood risk reduction across upstream and downstream areas.

Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance ([ZFRA](#)): As the advocacy lead in a consortium of nine other INGOs and research organizations, Mercy Corps leads influence and advocacy of the ZFRA and implements flood resilience programs in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Nepal. Out teams leverage their regional and global networks for "influence and advocacy" efforts with government and multilateral actors to improve national and sub-national policies and encourage increased investment in support of flood resilience. This includes: conducting loss and damage assessments for coastal areas to demonstrate the need for landscape perspective and transboundary governance in river and coastal management; and piloting innovative financing schemes (particularly impact bonds for CCA) to incentivize investment in resilience of vulnerable and flood exposed communities.

3. Enhanced knowledge of and access to risk information, including Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)



Building resilience is a forward-thinking endeavor that requires people and institutions to adjust to an environment of unpredictability to mitigate risk. Resilience planning, decision-making and investment must be agile and anticipatory, and therefore based in accessible, timely and intelligible information flow. Our urban resilience programs work on knowledge and information systems that support rapid, forward thinking decision-making for vulnerable citizens, their government and the private sector in the face of rapid and slow-onset urban shocks and stresses.

Mercy Corps also supports knowledge and learning platforms that connect urban resilience practitioners through networks and information exchange systems for continued learning. The current regional networks established by ACCCRN as well as the collaborative initiatives of 100 Resilient Cities help us promote practical knowledge-sharing and information exchange.

URBAN RESILIENCE IN PRACTICE

Zurich Flood Resilience Program (ZFRP): The ZFRP is a regional community flood resilience program in Indonesia, Timor-Leste and Nepal, funded by the Zurich Foundation. The program, which was implemented between 2015 and 2017, allowed Mercy Corps to apply the innovative Zurich Flood Resilience Measurement (ZFRM) tool to help communities identifies gaps in strengthening resilience, develop action plans and enable them and other stakeholders to measure how well investments have contributed to flood resilience. Community action plans support vulnerable, urban households to mitigate flood risks, protect lives and assets, and stay on a pathway to development in the most severely flood-prone urban landscapes.

Managing Risk through Economic Development (M-RED): The M-RED program was launched in 2012 through support from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP). In Phase 1 of the M-RED program, Mercy Corps developed an innovative “nexus” approach to mitigate the effects of flooding and landslides by combining traditional community-based DRR approaches with economic and market development interventions. The program team conducts flood inundation mapping across the watershed – covering both rural and rapidly growing urban areas – by using hydrological modeling and defined warning and risk levels along the rivers to strengthen the flood early warning system. M-RED also conducted a river shifting study across the watersheds by comparing temporal satellite imagery data from 2009 to 2017 in order to identify potential areas for scale-up.

RESEARCH AND LEARNING

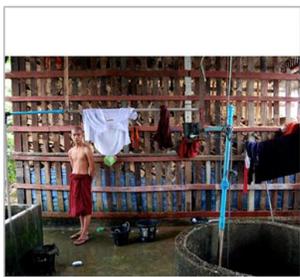
The emergent field of urban resilience is complex and Mercy Corps' regional urban resilience program commits to implementing a **strong research and learning agenda**. The focus of this agenda builds an improved understanding of poverty and vulnerability in the urban context, as well as on measuring resilience.



STRATEGIC RESILIENCE ASSESSMENT (STRESS) REPORT

Sichuan Province, China

DECEMBER 2016



Vulnerability Assessment
Dawei, Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar
July 2016

Taylor Martin
2016/07/16



Mercy Corps produced major research products that have helped advance our understanding of urban resilience and contributed to our regional voice: The first completed study, [Transforming Chennai](#), was released for the anniversary of the Chennai floods in India in December '16, and highlight how the financial services environment affects how small urban businesses can cope with and manage the effects of floods and the long-term economic costs to a city if small businesses are unprotected.

Also in December '16, we released our [China Strategic Resilience Assessment \(STRESS\)](#) on rural poverty, urbanization and climate change that examined what is required to help build the resilience of small businesses and urban migrants in the context of China's rapid urbanization in Sichuan province. The study looked more closely at rural-urban linkages, with particular focus on peri-urban areas.

Mercy Corps' [Mongolia STRESS](#) focuses on the country's rural herding and urban migrant communities, and how these groups can better mitigate the impacts of interconnected shocks and stresses in Mongolia's shifting socio-political, ecological and economic context. The process helped identify critical resilience capacities that can holistically support resilience in Mongolia over the long-term.

In collaboration with the Urban Climate Resilience in Southeast Asia (UCRSEA) partnership, Mercy Corps undertook a [Vulnerability Assessment of the city of Dawei](#), located in Myanmar's Tanintharyi Region. The assessment sought to understand the exposure of urban systems in Dawei to climatic and non-climatic shocks and stresses, as well the most salient shocks and stresses that are impacting the socio-economic well-being of populations in Dawei.

Our teams work with partners to develop monitoring and evaluation systems that test the programs' contributions to key resilience capacities as proxies for resilience. These include improved governance, social inclusion, access to resilience market systems, enhanced resilience investments and improve ecosystems management. Importantly, Mercy Corps established periodic data gathering systems following the onset of urban shocks and stresses, such as flooding or a fiscal shock, to understand how well the resilience capacities are helping target citizen groups cope and improve well-being outcomes following these disturbances. This helps our program teams test their theory of change, and whether it is truly building urban resilience.

Urban Resilience Curriculum

With the support of a USAID-funded Technical and Operational Performance Support grant, Mercy developed a [Training Guide on Urban Resilience Measurement](#) for USAID programs staff in Asia. The objective of the manual is to ensure that key stakeholders receive training on advanced urban resilience measurement practices, by providing a hands-on learning opportunity to assess resilience capacities, develop resilience indices and indicators, and apply these through a program M&E framework.

REGIONAL RESILIENCE HUB

Mercy Corps' SSEA Resilience Hub, one of three global Regional Resilience Hubs established in 2013, works closely with country teams and dedicated resilience experts at Mercy Corps' headquarters to drive technical excellence in resilience thinking and action, including on urban resilience. The SSEA Hub works with Mercy Corps Country Offices and external partners to support:

- 1. Technical Excellence & Impact;** SSEA Hub delivers technical excellence and impact in resilience primarily through flagship programs that are selected and targeted for in-depth technical support, including strategically integrating resilience assessments, design, reflection, and redesign of activities in programs.
- 2. Influence & Voice;** We aim to build strong, targeted [evidence](#) from our flagship programs that can be influential among government and donor decision-makers. We support strategic initiatives both inside and outside the core program portfolio that have the ability to generate strong learning and catalyze influence, and we seek strategic partnerships that can amplify our voice and impact.
- 3. Integration & Scale;** Recognizing the increasing demand for more practical and focused technical support and capacity building, our Hub will work in close coordination with global resilience initiatives to improve tools and methods for scaling resilience across country and regional portfolios.
- 4. Hub Resourcing;** The SSEA Hub looks to leverage financial opportunities to scale and replicate best practice in resilience across the region.



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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