



RESILIENCE IN EAST AFRICA

a framework for action

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Chronically vulnerable populations throughout East Africa – including those within Mercy Corps' programming areas in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan – are increasingly exposed to a complex array of shocks and stresses that compromise their food and livelihood security, contribute to conflict, and erode the natural resources upon which most rural households depend. Although the dynamic interaction of underlying factors contributing to chronic vulnerability to livelihood insecurity is highly context-specific, there are several common factors that have a direct bearing on the vulnerability and resilience of individuals, households and communities throughout the region. These factors include climate change, ecosystem degradation, dramatic increases in food and fuel costs, population growth, gender inequity, conflict over access to and use of natural resources, and unstable or ineffective governance.

While Mercy Corps and other development actors have implemented effective activities in each of the countries in East Africa, in general vulnerable populations – particularly those residing in dryland agro-pastoral areas – remain highly exposed to ecological, social and economic risks. The difficulty of designing and implementing effective programs in this context is due in part to the fact that several of the underlying causes of vulnerability such as ecosystem change, migration/displacement of human populations and livestock, inefficient markets, and conflict each span across borders and cannot be effectively addressed in the short term. To date, developing a strategic regional approach to programming has also been made difficult by the fact that governance structures in the region vary considerably in terms of stability, commitment to serving vulnerable populations, and capacity to effectively support longer-term development.

Mercy Corps has been working on resilience-based programming in East Africa since 2004.¹ Since that time, we have helped to reduce vulnerability and increase coping capacity among beneficiary populations through effective safety net programs; enabled individuals and households to adapt to change through diversification of assets and income sources, and contributed to transformation in marginalized communities through improved governance, greater access to markets and basic services, and conflict management. Despite the successes of our previous programming in the region, we have yet to fully coordinate our approach to resilience building at the national or regional levels. Mercy Corps has established this Framework for Action to support a more coherent and strategic approach to its resilience programming in the region. The Framework is directly informed by lessons learned from both the successes and failures of Mercy Corps' previous initiatives and seeks to guide integration and application of our comparative strengths in livelihood programming for dryland pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and people transitioning out of pastoralism, support for development of local market systems, conflict mitigation, and employing innovation and new technologies.² Across each of these areas, Mercy Corps believes it is critical to carefully target interventions towards vulnerable community members, while enabling them to use project participation as a means of achieving resilience for their households and communities. Ultimately, the Framework is intended to help Mercy Corps assess systemic issues constraining resilience in dryland areas of East Africa, facilitate strategic partnership with other important stakeholders in the region, and create opportunities for learning through innovative approaches to resilience programming.

¹ Currently, Mercy Corps manages a portfolio of \$180 million in ongoing programming in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sudan and South Sudan.
² The term pastoralist refers to those whose livelihoods depend almost entirely on the production and management of livestock (cattle, camels, goats, sheep). In East Africa, these populations tend to be highly mobile in search of adequate pasture and water for animals. The term agro-pastoralist refers to those who maintain somewhat more diverse livelihood strategies by complementing livestock production with small-scale crop production. People transitioning out of pastoralism or TOPs refers to individuals and families who have either chosen to or have been forced to leave their pastoralist or agro-pastoralist livelihood and seek opportunities in non-agriculture/livestock livelihoods either still in rural or peri-urban and urban contexts.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE AND HOW IS IT RELEVANT TO MERCY CORPS' PROGRAMMING IN THE REGION?

There is a growing consensus that despite saving thousands of lives, previous emergency responses to recurrent crises in East Africa have not enabled affected populations to adapt to change in a way that reduces their exposure to similar events in the future. In response, Mercy Corps has joined others in promoting the concept of resilience as a means of helping vulnerable communities prevent, cope with and recover from a diverse array of shocks and stresses that contribute to chronic food and livelihood insecurity. At the same time, Mercy Corps seeks to promote a proactive perspective on resilience that emphasizes the importance of learning from and adapting to change in order to achieve transformative improvements in interrelated social, economic and ecological systems.

While a number of actors have developed and refined their own specific definitions of resilience at the individual, household and community levels, there is growing recognition that achieving resilience within the context of East Africa and other shock-prone environments is founded on the strengthening of key capacities. A focus on capacities enables an understanding of resilience as a dynamic process rather than a static state, with its determinants consistently changing within evolving social, economic, and ecological conditions.³ In order to effectively achieve and maintain resilience in East Africa, Mercy Corps will seek to establish and strengthen absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities among beneficiary communities.

Absorptive capacity is seen in the ability of individuals, 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. Mercy Corps will strengthen the absorptive capacity of communities by supporting effective disaster risk management, enabling adoption of positive coping strategies, promoting multi-stakeholder conflict mitigation, and improving access to formal and informal safety nets.

Adaptive capacity entails making proactive and informed choices about improving management of their existing livelihoods and/or alternative livelihood strategies based on an understanding of dynamic interactions between changing social, economic and ecological conditions. Mercy Corps will build the adaptive capacity of individuals, households and communities by supporting livelihood diversification, equitable and sustainable natural resource management, greater access to basic services (e.g., health, education), and improved access to markets and financial services.

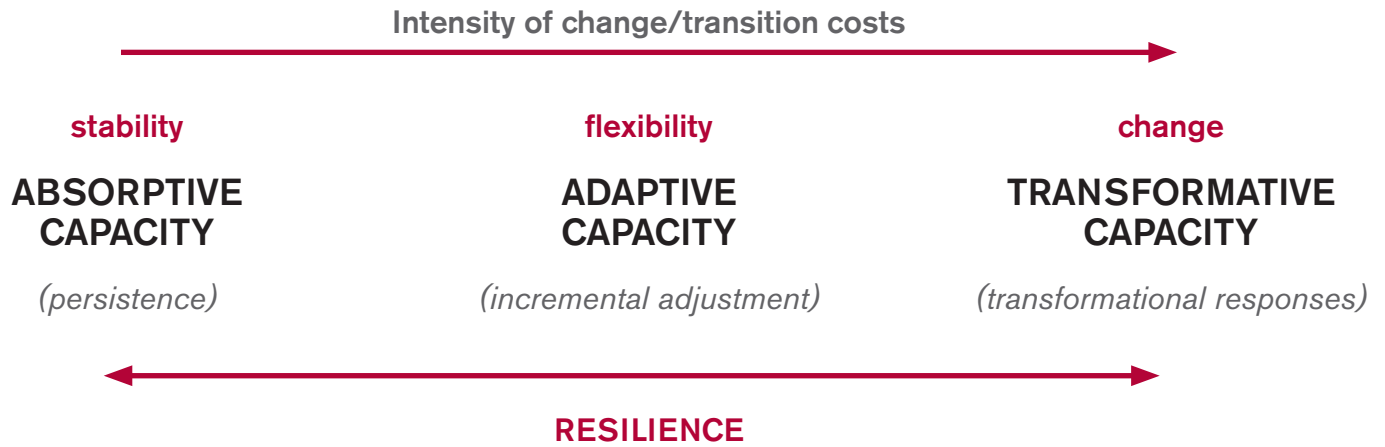
Transformative capacity is a factor of the enabling conditions – the governance mechanisms, policies/regulations, gender norms, infrastructure, market systems, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms – that facilitate the systemic change needed to address structural issues that contribute to food and livelihood insecurity. Mercy Corps will seek to enhance transformative capacity in East Africa by promoting the adoption of innovative technologies and practices, supporting greater coordination and collaboration between formal and traditional governance structures, and empowering women and youth to more effectively engage in economic activities.

What is 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.”

³ Béné, C., R.G. Wood, A. Newsham, and M. Davies. (2012). Resilience: new utopia or new tyranny? Reflection about the potentials and limits of the concept of resilience in relation to vulnerability reduction programmes. IDS Working Paper, volume 2012 Number 405

Figure 1: **Core Capacities for Achieving and Maintaining Resilience**



Source: Béné, Christophe, Rachel Godfrey Wood, Andrew Newsham and Mark Davies. 2012. Resilience: New Utopia or New Tyranny? Reflection about the Potentials and Limits of the Concept of Resilience in Relation to Vulnerability Reduction Programmes. IDS Working Paper, Volume 2012 Number 405. CSP Working Paper Number 006. Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Centre for Social Protection (CSP). September 2012.

Figure 1 provides a graphic depiction of the role each of these capacities plays in resilience at the individual, household, community and ecosystem levels. Assessing and strengthening each of these capacities in a strategic and integrated way will enable Mercy Corps' resilience-building efforts in the region to avoid the pitfalls of traditionally separate approaches to emergency relief and development programming. In East Africa, this calls for coherent and contextually-specific interventions in the areas of social protection, livelihood adaptation in response to climate change, gender empowerment, market development, peace building and support for effective governance.

Finally, promoting and sustaining **community capacity for collective action** among vulnerable populations is critical for ensuring the resilience of social systems.⁴ By adopting a strategic approach to these activities in our programming areas, Mercy Corps will strengthen capacity for collective action in the priority areas of market services, conflict mitigation, management of natural resources, and empowerment of women and youth.

Mercy Corps' Framework for promoting resilience in East Africa recognizes that these capacities are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and exist at multiple levels. Effectively helping beneficiary communities to acquire and sustain these capacities will require that Mercy Corps adopt a **systems approach** to the design and implementation of resilience programs. Adoption of a systems approach highlights the very important fact that urban and rural households are embedded within interdependent social, economic and ecological systems that influence their potential for achieving and maintaining resilience to food and livelihood security shocks. Recognizing these different systems and understanding how people and communities interact and influence each other within these systems, as well as how the systems themselves interact and influence one another is critical for identifying key leverage points and opportunities for effective resilience programming. For instance, gender differences in access to and control over resources, information, and power within a system result in differing vulnerabilities to shocks and stresses, which in turn require gender-differentiated responses for coping and adaptation.

Adoption of a systems approach requires a focus on achievement of strategic priorities at the program-level rather than a "silo" view of individual projects or activities within particular sectors. Importantly, a systems approach to program

4 Frankenberger, T. R., T. Spangler, S. Nelson, and M. Langworthy. (2012). *Enhancing resilience to food security shocks in Africa*. Discussion paper.

design and implementation highlights the importance of appropriate **layering, sequencing** and **integration** of resilience initiatives.⁵ Similarly, rather than distinguishing **assumptions** and **risks** under a traditional log frame approach, Mercy Corps will take a holistic view of both as integral elements of program design. Developing and implementing a systems approach to strategic planning of Mercy Corps' resilience-building initiatives in East Africa will also require that we adopt a broadly inclusive approach to partnerships and a long-term commitment to programs and the populations they are intended to serve.⁶ Mercy Corps' systems approach to building resilience will include building on our comparative strengths in supporting development of local market systems. These efforts will be integrated with complementary activities focused on enhancing the resilience of agro-ecological and social systems in beneficiary communities.

This Framework for Mercy Corps resilience-building programming in East Africa will inform development of a Regional Resilience Strategy for East Africa. Together, the Framework for Action and the Regional Resilience Strategy will help ensure that Mercy Corps' resilience building efforts across the region are internally coherent and complementary to ongoing initiatives supported by key institutional partners including government, donors, academic and applied research organizations, civil society, training institutions, and the private sector.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESILIENCE-BUILDING PROGRAM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Mercy Corps has and will continue to seek ways of overcoming significant challenges to attainment of sustainable livelihood security and well-being among vulnerable populations in the region. While many of these challenges are not new, they pose specific constraints to the type of integrated and long-term program strategies that will be necessary to sustainably enhance the resilience of beneficiary households and communities. The following actions will inform our overall response to these constraints:

Iterative Design Process

Deciding where and how to intervene, and with whom, to most effectively build resilience requires strong commitment to an iterative process that involves assessment, development of hypotheses (theories of change), pilot testing, rigorous outcome and impact measurement, an ability to learn from failure, a culture of inquisition, redesign in response to changing conditions, and adaptive program management. Mercy Corps commits to directly involving local communities in carrying out continuous robust, in-depth analysis capable of providing important insight into power dynamics and the interplay of social, economic and ecological systems that influence their wellbeing. Achieving a lasting impact on resilience will depend on our commitment to think holistically; conduct ongoing analysis; and combine global experience, local knowledge and scientific expertise to understand the context of our work. Such analyses – including gender, conflict and market analyses – will enable identification of key leverage points for action and inform design of pilot activities to test contextually-appropriate strategies for enhancing resilience. Finally, the evidence gained from our efforts in East Africa will support Mercy Corps' efforts to facilitate and catalyze partners to engage in and scale up effective resilience-building initiatives.

Mercy Corps' Four Core Principles of Resilience

Our approach to enhancing resilience among beneficiary communities will be tailored to local conditions and flexible in response to changing conditions. The following principles will guide development of effective resilience-building strategies:

- **Complex systems require a systems approach**
 - **Our role is one of facilitation**
 - **Strong partnerships and dynamic relationships are transformative**
 - **Model, test, and iterate to build an evidence-base towards resilience**
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5 Layering refers primarily to the extent of geographic overlap of various Mercy Corps resilience activities and those implemented by other actors and supported by multiple donors. Sequencing refers to the particular chronological order in which complementary humanitarian assistance and development programs are implemented within Mercy Corps operational areas. Integration is the degree to which various activities achieve synergy and contribute to common resilience programming objectives.

6 Achieving resilience among Mercy Corps beneficiary communities in East Africa is likely to require a 10-15 year time horizon as opposed to the 3-5 year project lifespans supported by some donors.

Identification of Target Populations

Consistent with our systems approach to resilience-building programming across multiple sectors, Mercy Corps adopts an inclusive approach to targeting efforts aimed at supporting market development, expanding financial services, mitigating conflict and ecological change, improving agricultural and livestock productivity, supporting economic growth that creates off-farm and non-farm employment opportunities, creating greater economic opportunity for women and youth, and supporting effective governance. As part of our overall approach to enhancing resilience in both rural and urban settings, we will also develop and test resilience building activities aimed at supporting especially vulnerable populations including women, youth, and the displaced. An inclusive approach requires using contextual knowledge about gender roles, political economies and patronage networks, relations between competing ethnic or religious groups, local market dynamics and other structural factors influencing vulnerability. This knowledge will enable Mercy Corps to effectively target and leverage activities to achieve the greatest impact on resilience at the individual, household and community levels.

Measuring resilience outcomes and impact

The continuous, complex and dynamic process of building resilience makes it inherently difficult to measure.⁷ Looking forward, a major milestone in Mercy Corps' efforts to promote resilience at a significant scale will be the ability to measure resilience capacities and outcomes at the individual, household and community levels. This is because development of robust measures of resilience can inform comprehensive assessment, formation of theories of change, design of contextually-appropriate interventions, and resource allocations for specific projects. Identifying linkages between socio-ecological systems and critical capacities of beneficiary communities requires a participatory and mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to monitoring outcomes and impact. Given the dynamic interaction between actors in complex local systems, traditional outcome monitoring will be complemented by information on resilience-building processes and community capacity for collective action. Context-specific insight into Mercy Corps' resilience building activities will also be gained through ex-post evaluations and research instruments designed for gauging responses to different types of risks.

KEY ELEMENTS OF A REGIONAL RESILIENCE STRATEGY FOR EAST AFRICA

This Framework for Action enables formulation and implementation of Mercy Corps' Regional Resilience Strategy for East Africa. The Regional Strategy will in turn guide development of country-specific strategies for Mercy Corps' resilience-building programming. Key elements of the regional and country strategies will be consistent with core principles for resilience-building programming and will include the following strategic priorities:⁸

Support for Effective and Inclusive Governance

National and local governments are key actors with control over information and decision-making authority regarding access to and use of collective resources (e.g., land, water, pasture, forest, public goods and services). Accordingly, the lack of governance transparency and technical capacity that characterizes many of the areas in which Mercy Corps operates can and does have a substantial impact on the resilience of vulnerable populations. Likewise, the specific roles and capacities of customary institutions have a direct influence on the abilities of individuals, households and communities to successfully cope with and adapt to dynamic changes in social, economic, and ecological systems. Given the diversity and complexity of governance structures at the local level, Mercy Corps' efforts to enhance resilience will be carefully tailored to the local institutional context. In doing so, we will be responsive to disparities in social and economic power and influence that affect social cohesion and community capacity for collective action.

⁷ Frankenberger et al. (2012).

⁸ Mercy Corps. 2013. Principles of Resilience. June 2013. <http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/Mercy%20Corps%20Resilience%20Principles%20April%202013.pdf>

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Mercy Corps' Strengthening Institutions for Peace and Development (SIPED) project has made significant contributions to improved security, mobility and access to resources in southern Ethiopia. We've done so by supporting negotiation of community-driven peace processes, facilitating agreements on the governance of natural resources, and strengthening linkages between formal and customary governance mechanisms. As a result of these efforts, conflict-related obstacles to accessing water for livestock, markets, and livelihood opportunities have decreased substantially in intervention areas – especially during times of stress and shocks.

Support for Market Systems and Engagement of the Private Sector

Mercy Corps has established and continues to strengthen its niche in market systems development in dryland economies. We will contribute to resilience-building among beneficiary communities by maintaining a wider systems perspective on market functions and facilitate effective engagement of stakeholders at multiple levels. This may be accomplished through a range of activities including expanded support for index-based insurance schemes for agro-pastoralists or use of mobile information technology for improved smallholder access to financial services. The overall focus of our market interventions will be on creating greater economic opportunity for marginalized populations (e.g., women, youth, displaced) and leveraging of business incentives for engagement of the private sector in resilience building activities.

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Mercy Corps' Relief and Recovery for Northern Kenya's Drought-Affected Population and Livestock Economy (ReKNDLE) is a 26-month program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation aimed at improving access to financial services and input and output markets; strengthening governance and conflict management; promoting adaptive natural resource management; and promoting livelihood diversification by providing pastoral youth with vocational and life skills training.

Encourage the Social and Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls

Mercy Corps recognizes that even within the same household, individuals will likely be affected differently by the same shock or stress (i.e., some will be more/less impacted than others depending on the nature of the disturbance and gender, age, etc. of those affected) and will have different capacities for coping with and adapting to the consequences. Despite the fact that women often face a range of unique challenges in areas affected by recurrent crises – and often bear the heaviest burden of shocks and stresses – they also possess enormous individual and collective capacity to help themselves, their families, and their communities recover and achieve resilience. By helping women gain greater access to productive resources, sources of income, social networks, and equitable decision-making power – especially in the household – Mercy Corps can ensure a direct and lasting impact on individual, household and community resilience.

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Through Mercy Corps' PROSPER Savings and Credit Co-op (SACCO) program, women gain the confidence and skill needed to profitably engage in small businesses. Participants are provided ten days of leadership and technical training to enable establishment and management of community-based savings and credit organizations. Many women have used savings and loans from SACCOs to purchase materials – grains, small livestock, fruit – that they sell for profit in local markets. As their businesses grow with the support of additional skills training, women can present business plans to a review group in their region and if their proposal passes that review, they can then apply for a loan. A local Mercy Corps team, comprised of Ethiopian loan officers, reviews the plan and determines whether the loan is approved. In some cases, loans ranging from \$60-180 have been made contingent on keeping girls in the household enrolled in school.

Support Formation of Strategic Partnerships

In order to facilitate change toward pro-poor resilience, Mercy Corps will proactively engage with an inclusive and diverse range of partners, while remaining conscious of institutional motivations, incentives and power dynamics. By facilitating coordination and collaboration between local government, customary institutions, academic researchers, civil society, policy actors, implementing organizations, and the private sector, Mercy Corps will drive identification of new ideas and common interests among complementary partners. Importantly, our partnership approach will be focused on promoting effective layering, sequencing and integration of activities to achieve resilience impact at scale.⁹

In partnership with World Vision, Tufts University, and Ugandan local NGO Kaabong Peace for Development Agency, Mercy Corps launched the Northern Karamoja Growth, Health and Governance (GHG, formerly known as SUSTAIN) program in the Karamoja region. GHG is promoting peace and food security for 375,000 people through an integrated approach that blends market development, good governance, conflict management and 'Do No Harm' principles. To strengthen the livelihoods of agriculturalists, pastoralists, and agro-pastoralists in Karamoja, the program addresses systemic constraints to market development by strengthening input and support services, improving market access, and promoting agro-processing investments.

Facilitate greater access to formal and informal safety nets, public goods and services

Recognizing that the frequency and severity of shocks in East Africa are likely to continue to increase, Mercy Corps' resilience building strategy for the region will support both formal and informal social protection mechanisms. This is particularly relevant in some of the fragile states where Mercy Corps is engaged (e.g., Somalia, South Sudan). Mercy Corps will prioritize identification and strengthening of existing community assets and institutions rather than creating new, unsustainable mechanisms for social protection. This may also entail the use of vouchers to support accumulation of community and household assets, establishment of informal savings and credit groups, or creating village grain and fodder banks to enable improved coping in response to climate change. Mercy Corps' support for formal and informal safety nets will be flexible in response to dynamic changes in the local vulnerability context in order to ensure the effective use of resources and minimize the risk of dependency on external assistance.

Working in Abyei and Union states of South Sudan, Mercy Corps' Assist Demand-Driven Livelihoods and Employment in Markets with High Returnees (ADDL) and Emergency Assistance to Conflict-Affected Populations (ECAP) projects enable conflict-affected individuals to re-enter a productive agricultural food cycle through technical training and voucher-based provision of seeds and tools. Beneficiaries insulate themselves from shocks via interventions that support enhanced market development, including establishment of village savings and loan associations (VSLA), trader support, and temporary cash-for-work when appropriate.

Promote collective and sustainable management of natural resources

Climate change, population increase, and the lack of inclusive planning processes continue to fuel conflict over access to and use of natural resources in East Africa. Mercy Corps will draw on its comparative strengths in conflict mitigation and agro-pastoral livelihood programming through promotion of climate smart practices and improved monitoring of land, water and pasture resources. We will facilitate coordinated and collaborative approaches to natural resource management among local governments and customary institutions in a manner that mediates potential sources of conflict and enhances the resilience of agro-ecological systems. In facilitating strategies for sustainable resource

9 USAID, "Building Resilience in Recurrent Crises." December 2012. Ibnouf, Fatma. "The Role of Women in Providing and Improving Household Food Security in Sudan: Implications for Reducing Hunger and Malnutrition." Journal of International Women's Studies, Web. <http://www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/May09/Sudan-FoodSecurity.pdf>.

management, Mercy Corps will promote the active involvement of women and other marginalized populations in leadership and decision-making roles.



Mercy Corps is improving food security and resilience of 12,120 vulnerable individuals in the Lower Juba region of Somalia. Supported through the United Nations Common Humanitarian Fund, the project strategically targets beneficiaries, providing them with skills, toolkits and cash-for-work opportunities in ten riverine villages where farming comprises the chief coping and economic opportunity. Simultaneously mitigating shocks and addressing poverty, the project bolsters disaster risk reduction infrastructure such as embankments, and delivers irrigation to agricultural fields.



Commit to effective knowledge management

Mercy Corps' programs in East Africa will adopt a proactive approach to knowledge management and learning by planning for and investing in measurement, research and sharing of lessons learned. Emphasis will be on developing, testing, and collecting evidence on specific theories of change to inform future resilience strategies. Knowledge management also requires consistent support for innovation in response to on-going change in ecological, social and economic conditions. Evidence-based knowledge regarding the effectiveness of alternative approaches to building resilience and cost-benefit analysis of these various alternatives are especially high priorities for Mercy Corps and our partners as we seek to identify and scale up proven resilience activities



In Ethiopia, the Pastoralists Areas Resiliency Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) program marks a paradigm shift in development assistance to vulnerable populations by supporting adoption of alternative livelihood strategies in response to climate change. A cornerstone of PRIME is its participatory monitoring and evaluation systems, which are easily accessible for all stakeholders, enable program managers to determine which interventions should be brought to scale and which should be adjusted, and contribute to the wider knowledge on pastoral areas development through targeted policy research and knowledge management initiatives.



Establishment of the Mercy Corps “Resilience Fund”

Mercy Corps will spur innovation and establish an evidence base for resilience programming in East Africa through creation of a Resilience Fund. Using internal resources, the fund will enable context-specific assessment of constraints to resilience, capacity building of Mercy Corps and partner staff on resilience concepts and design principles, pilot testing of promising practices and technologies, and applied research that informs efforts to better coordinate and scale up effective resilience building activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on addressing current knowledge gaps, identifying successful community practices, and building the capacity of local partners for resilience learning.

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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