TOO HOT TO IGNORE

MERCY CORPS

Scaling Heat Resilience Where it's Needed Most

Climate: Possible

October 2024, Wayama Japta, Kenya, Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps.

TOO HOT TO IGNORE

Extreme heat is a rapidly rising threat—deadly, under-prioritized, and outpacing local adaptation efforts. From heatwaves in South Asia to urban heat islands in African cities, the world's most vulnerable communities are being hit hardest, despite contributing the least to climate change.

"This year, it felt much hotter compared to the previous year. The heat persisted for a long time, and I suffered from headaches and dizziness. My children couldn't attend school due to the extreme heat. The water level has decreased, and the hand pump has dried up. Consequently, our crops got damaged. Our income was badly affected as we couldn't work during the day."

— Rukmani Rana Belauri, *farmer in Sudurpaschim province, Nepal*

At Mercy Corps, we combine **grassroots climate resilience building with global innovation, influencing and investment** to help communities cope and adapt. Whether it's retrofitting schools in Nepal or supporting heat early warning systems and community-level anticipatory action, our approach is holistic, scalable, and focused on equity.

Early philanthropic action in heat adaptation is promising. Now it's time to accelerate efforts to protect at risk communities and create a more resilient future, before the crisis worsens.

Extreme heat is under-addressed and unequally felt

Heat is a slow-onset crisis: underfunded, under-measured, and often invisible in climate strategies. While significant progress has been made in adapting to floods and storms, the systems we rely on—early warning, public infrastructure, and worker protections—are not equipped to withstand severe heat stress. The result is that those most at risk, including urban poor people, informal workers, and subsistence farmers, face mounting dangers with few tools to adapt.

OUR APPROACH

Partnering for heat resilience: from local pilots to global impact

Mercy Corps takes a systems approach to addressing the social, economic and environmental risks of rising heat stress. We partner with vulnerable communities, civil society, governments and the private sector to build systems that better understand and predict heat stress. Through these partnerships, we are investing in, testing and scaling approaches that help communities take early action to save lives and reduce economic losses.

We have been piloting context-driven solutions in Nepal, Jordan and Pakistan—and with further support, we can expand our work to many more geographies.

April, 2025, Tilathi Koiladi, Nepal, Mercy Corps.

NEPAL: A CASE STUDY

Mercy Corps is working in the Terai region of Nepal, where temperatures of over 104°F (40°C) are now routine in summer months. Through our work, we have found:

- Heat-related illness is rising, yet heat is absent from most disaster plans and policies
- 91% of **surveyed schools in Madhesh Province** reported heat-related health problems but lack cooling infrastructure; consequently, school attendance and education suffer
- Women and children bear the brunt, especially in communities with high male outmigration (when men from rural areas leave to other regions or countries, often in search of economic opportunities), requiring women to work in the fields and sell produce at market even in very high temperatures

LOCALIZING CLIMATE RISK AND ADAPTATION PLANNING IN NEPAL AND JORDAN

Since 2018, Mercy Corps has been a core partner of the Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance (ZCRA), a multi-sectoral global initiative focused on reducing climate risk for the most vulnerable people. Through ZCRA, we've strengthened disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation systems in 24 municipalities across Nepal, Jordan, and Indonesia. Initially, the program focused purely on floods, but in 2024, we expanded the model to support communities facing a wider range of climate hazards, including extreme heat.

Our Climate Resilience for Communities project across 15 communities in Sudurpaschim and Madhesh Provinces, Nepal, has significant results to date:

- 7,000+ people gained awareness about flood and climate resilience strategies
- 2,000+ individuals accessed resilience-enhancing resources through community-led advocacy

June 2023, Al Zubaireya, Jordan, Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps.

- Supported four municipalities to adopt local disaster and climate resilient plans and operational guidelines for community disaster management committees
- Tripled provincial disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation budgets, benefiting over 510,000 people

In Jordan, we are applying community-driven approaches to heat through our Tabeaa project, which focuses on localizing climate risk and adaptation planning for extreme heat, flash flooding, and water management. We are:

- Applying the Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities tool to map heat risks, understand community needs, and prioritize interventions
- Piloting community-led solutions such as shaded rest points, school-based cooling hubs, and health alert systems
- **Conducted a national assessment** of Jordan's climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction landscape, in partnership with the London School of Economics, to support evidence-based policy interventions
- Exploring future initiatives including heat-smart agriculture, public health preparedness, and private-sector engagement for climate resilience innovation

Strong local ownership, flexible partnerships, and advocacy support make our work with ZCRA a powerful, scalable platform to replicate and tailor heat resilience solutions globally.

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES FROM EXTREME HEAT IN PAKISTAN

In Multan District, Pakistan, Mercy Corps and our local partner Agahe are helping communities better prepare for the growing threat of heatwaves. Through close collaboration with government agencies, including the Ministries of Interior, Education, Health, and Social Welfare, we secured key approvals and developed coordinated response plans to protect vulnerable populations during the 2024 heatwave.

Our outreach surpassed our targets:

- **3,000 educational pamphlets** were distributed to raise public awareness about heat risks and how to respond to stay safe
- **86 frontline responders**, including education officers, health workers, and paramedics, were trained to deliver lifesaving interventions
- **437 students** from four schools took part in hands-on preparedness sessions, equipping the next generation with the knowledge to stay safe during extreme heat
- **32 government and community leaders** came together in a project progress meeting to align on lessons learned and next steps for stronger heatwave resilience

September 2023, Mir Barkat Buledi, Pakistan, Ezra Millstein/Mercy Corps.

These programs represent a place-based systems approach, linking grassroots action with institutional change. While the scale of the results is modest so far, they demonstrate the much greater impact we could achieve if scaled.

NEW INITIATIVE IN NEPAL TO BRING HEAT RELIEF

Building on this foundation, Mercy Corps aims to launch the RAAHAT program: Resilience, Awareness and Action for Heatwave Adaptation and Transformation. "Raahat" is also a

Nepali word meaning 'relief' and is often used in the context of relief from heat. This new initiative is designed to protect those most vulnerable to extreme heat—such as informal workers, older people, school children, women, and people with pre-existing health conditions—particularly in underserved urban areas and informal settlements.

With the right support, RAAHAT will:

- Build localized heat early warning systems and inclusive heat action plans
- Develop and test index-based heat insurance for high-risk populations
- Leverage existing networks and government partnerships to ensure scale and sustainability

SCALING AND TESTING HEAT SOLUTIONS THROUGH MERCY CORPS VENTURES

At the same time, **Mercy Corps Ventures** is piloting and investing in breakthrough solutions to help people adapt to climate extremes, including heat.

Our portfolio includes:

- **Satellites on Fire:** Real-time wildfire detection platform monitoring 16.6 million hectares across 15 countries in Latin America.
- **Ignitia:** AI-driven climate risk scores and weather forecasting for 2 million farmer subscribers in West Africa.
- **Pula:** Insuring over 15 million farmers across 22 countries, with a recent $20 million Series B round.

Through our **Climate Venture Lab**, we're testing and accelerating scalable, locally rooted technologies with a focus on:

- **Predictive climate modeling:** advanced data analytics to better forecast extreme heat events
- **Early warning systems:** provide advance notice to vulnerable communities about impending climate disasters
- **Parametric insurance:** policies specifically designed for extreme heat and heatwaves
- **Anticipatory cash transfers:** for low-income, vulnerable communities to prepare for heatwaves

THE OPPORTUNITY

Philanthropy can shape the future of climate adaptation

This is a rare moment to shape an emerging climate agenda before extreme heat becomes the next systemic crisis. Donors can partner with Mercy Corps to:

- Back evidence-based community pilots in heat-vulnerable regions and invest in scaling what works
- Accelerate private sector innovation in heat insurance, early warning tech, and heat mitigation, such as nature-based solutions, green and gray infrastructure
- Influence systems and funding mechanisms to prioritize heat alongside other climate risks
- Invest in building government capacity to create the policies, plans and safety nets needed to support communities

We're seeking bold, values-aligned philanthropists to help us scale effective models, mobilize markets, and shape the future of climate adaptation.

TOO HOT TO IGNORE

Join us in confronting one of the most urgent, but overlooked, climate threats of our time.

mercycorps.org/ClimatePossible

MERCY CORPS

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