

FROM RELIEF TO RESILIENCE

Policy Recommendations for Donors Supporting Resilience Programming

FEBRUARY 2016

Building resilience is a long-term commitment. In an increasingly volatile world, where climate change, conflict, and poor governance undermine progress toward achieving significant development outcomes, donors and implementing agencies must become more sophisticated in their strategies. They must move beyond single project thinking and instead invest in more facilitative, multiyear and flexibly funded program approaches to building portfolios capable of catalyzing transformative change.

For Mercy Corps, resilience is a process—a way of thinking, acting, and learning—that requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of the dynamic places in which we work. Our teams and partners use this resilience framework to analyze the vulnerabilities and capacities of the complex systems and structures that support the communities we serve, and strengthen communities' ability to plan for and quickly recover from a growing array of inter-connected shocks and stresses. This document summarizes Mercy Corps' recommendations for policymakers—gleaned from extensive field experience—to inform donor and implementing partners' policies, strategies, and funding practices around resilience.

Recommendations

1. **Develop and fund multi-year programs.** Multi-year funding and programs should be the rule, not the exception. Multi-year programming is essential to bridging the relief-to-resilience divide, building communities' capacity to recover more quickly from shocks and stresses, and ensuring the sustainability of incremental development gains. Communities in crisis often require short-term humanitarian aid, but quickly delivered handouts do not help families build resilience to future crises and in fact, could reduce communities' resilience capacity in the long-term. Multi-year funding and donor support for syncing humanitarian programs with development programs is a much smarter investment, allowing communities to build resilience strategies that better protect people in the face of recurring crises.
2. **Prioritize flexible funding.** Flexible funding—including line-item flexibility, funding for inception phases, crisis modifiers, and flexible development funds—that prioritizes iterative learning, adaptive management, and a deep understanding of context allows for more sustainable and effective change. For example, line-item flexibility within budgets enables field teams to adjust to crises and re-focus programming where needed and in concert with lessons learned. This flexibility enables programs to progress where they are most effective, while providing assistance to meet unforeseen crises. Because resilience is not as easy to measure as bags of corn that are given away for free, donors should also allocate more resources to the analysis phase, including monitoring and evaluation, research, and impact measurement.
3. **Invest in conflict mitigation.** This is especially true in humanitarian crises, where conflict mitigation contributes to overall resilience. In many of today's biggest humanitarian crises, conflict is the primary shock causing extreme suffering. Programs aiming to build resilience must invest in clear strategies that address the root causes of conflict, including addressing grievances and

inequality, while at the same time, increasing security through improved conflict management systems.

4. **Support good governance, not just government.** Too often donor investments stop at the outskirts of capital cities or focus too heavily on formal institutions. Investments in a broader concept of governance are central to resilience. When rooted in good governance principles, innovative resilience-building processes can provide new multi-sector, inclusive spaces for stakeholders to engage, learn, and mobilize around development efforts. As governing capacities increase, these dynamic constituencies—including members of vulnerable communities—support communication and linkages that increase their capacity to influence power structures and the decision-making processes central to systems change. Because these processes take time and energy, donors should support and invest in programming at the intersection of resilience and governance.
5. **Count (and measure) outcomes and resilience capacities, not (just) outputs.** Indicators for success in the development field continue to favor quantitative and material deliverables. This model needs to change. Resilience is now widely recognized as a set of capacities (at individual, household, community and systems levels) that enable well-being outcomes to be sustained and even improved in the face of shocks and stresses, rather than an outcome in and of itself.
6. **Prioritize market-based solutions.** Recognizing the need to make markets work for the poor and that market development is not synonymous with resilience, donors should explore how resilience strategies can ensure that market-based interventions support and grow development gains. Too often fragile development gains are lost when programming and external financial support end. The private sector can help bridge transitions from donor-funded interventions to market-based solutions and ensure long-term development.

CONTACT

Ann Vaughan
Director | Policy and Advocacy
avaughan@dc.mercycorps.org

Shannon Alexander
Senior Director | Strategic Programs and Resilience
salexander@mercycorps.org

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.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org