

BRACED aims to build the resilience of more than 5 million vulnerable people against climate extremes and disasters. It does so through 15 NGO-consortia working across 13 countries in East Africa, the Sahel and Asia.

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Assessing gender in resilience programming: Uganda

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This case study is one of four commissioned by BRACED to assess the links between resilience and gender in partners' projects. It documents approaches used to promote gender equality in the BRACED Mercy Corps project, as well as the latent challenges and opportunities faced in this process.



KEY MESSAGES

- Life is changing for the Karamojong, with new challenges in the form of more tenuous livelihoods, worsening and recurrent drought owing to climate change and evolving gender roles. Social inequality exacerbates vulnerability, undermining attempts to build resilience.
- Reducing gender inequality and empowering women, men, boys and girls is critical to the success of the BRACED Mercy Corps project and its ability to *'improve the well-being of households, by building the absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience capacities needed to manage the shocks and stresses of climate extremes and disasters at the individual, household, community and systems scales'*.
- There are a number of opportunities that the project can harness to increase its gender-related impact and drive resilience in the region, including a committed team with strong technical capabilities, a strong legal and policy framework on gender equality and Mercy Corps' own experience from the field of gender and resilience in the Sahel and Somalia.
- Many challenges remain, including the project's short timeframe, the number of actors working in the same space and the challenges inherent in trying to communicate and secure support for gender and resilience activities that partners and beneficiaries either do not understand or value.

1. INTRODUCTION

The following case study explores the links between resilience and gender in the BRACED project in Uganda and Kenya, led by Mercy Corps, to addressing the connections, challenges and opportunities in doing so, specifically looking at the Karamoja region, located in north-eastern Uganda. The data for the case study were drawn from an analysis of BRACED documentation such as the Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA), the project proposal and the Theory of Change (ToC). This was supplemented with findings from key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with two Karamoja-based consortium members (Makerere University and the Uganda Land Alliance), as well as stakeholders from outside the consortium.

Context: Climate change, shifting livelihoods and gender dynamics in Karamoja

The Karamoja region, located in north-eastern Uganda, is one of the most isolated in the country. It is also one of the poorest, with a population of 1.2 million people and overall poverty rates of 82%, which is significantly higher than the national average of 37%.

Karamoja has been devastated by years of protracted armed conflict (large-scale cattle-raiding between warring ethnic groups). A successful Government of Uganda (GoU) disarmament process brought peace in 2008, but communities struggle with the effects of massive livestock loss resulting from animal disease and with the acute impacts of climate change. Droughts and dry spells are consistent features of the ecological system but appear to have worsened,

The BRACED and BRACED Mercy Corps project

Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED)

The Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme aims to improve the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation methods into development approaches.

BRACED is implemented by 15 consortia to build the resilience of sedentary and nomadic populations in 13 countries across Africa, South and South-East Asia.

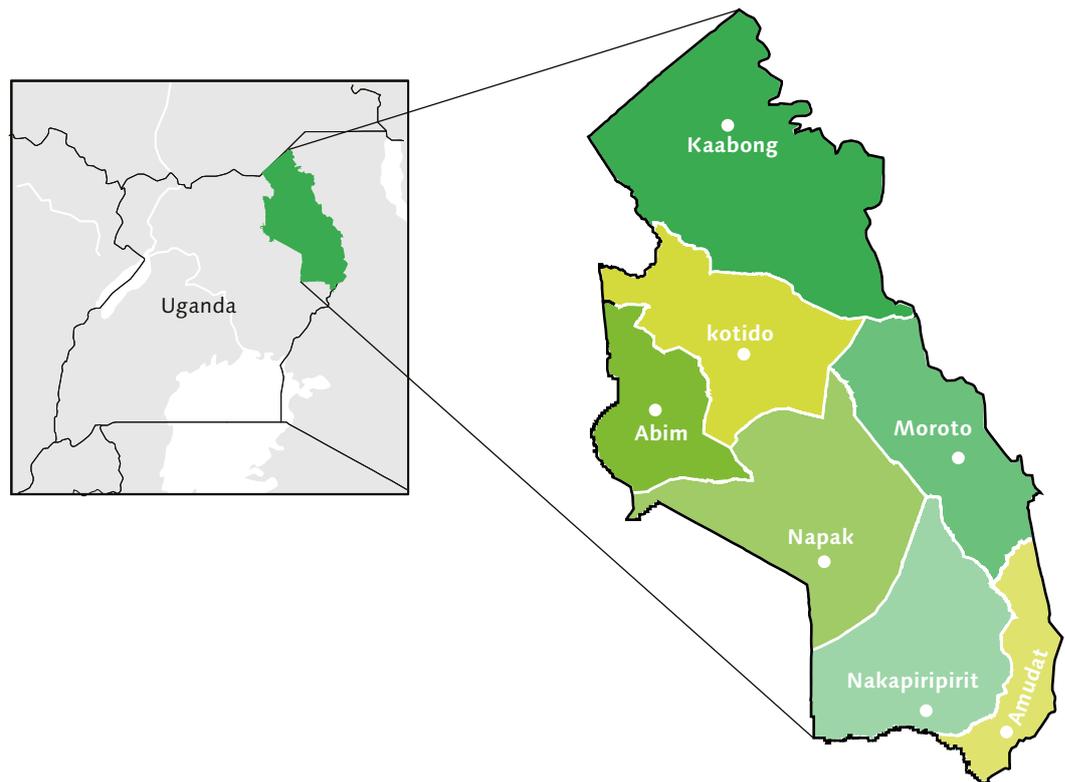
The Project: BRACED Mercy Corps

The Mercy Corps-led BRACED project seeks to enhance resilience to climate extremes and disasters in Karamoja, Uganda, and Wajir, Kenya, through a community-led and systems-driven approach.

Project partners

Mercy Corps, the University of Nairobi, Wajir South Development Association (WASDA), Makerere University, the Uganda Land Alliance (ULA) and Technical Assistance to NGOs (TANGO).

Figure 1: Map of Karamoja region



particularly over the past two years. Erratic rains and poor water management cause flooding that destroys young crops and washes away fertile topsoil. Another key impact of climate change in Karamoja has been a significant loss in the amount of grassland in the region. Between 1986 and 2014, the total amount of grassland in Karamoja decreased by 6,000 km² (BRACED, 2014b), with impacts on grazing patterns and the health of the remaining animals and their keepers.

Communities are more sensitive to climate variability because they are increasingly sedentary and dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Too much or too little rain initiates a negative spiral of failed crops, sick livestock, exploitation of natural resources and food insecurity, which exacerbates people's vulnerability to climate extremes. Markets in this region are remote and fragmented, with poor infrastructure development. Karamoja also suffers from political

exclusion, lack of coordination between formal and informal governance systems, low education levels, limited capacity of leaders and a paucity of women's voice in community affairs.

Gender and age differences increase the vulnerability of socially excluded groups, promote negative coping strategies and undermine the resilience of individuals, households and the community as a whole. Women and girls are the most heavily affected by these changes. A VCA conducted by Mercy Corps in 2014, with funding from DFID, indicated that women's work day had lengthened by five hours since 2008, with their productive tasks (farming, small businesses, sale of charcoal and local brew, etc.) multiplying in the absence of livestock-based livelihoods. Girls are at increased risk of being pulled out of school; sent to work in peri-urban town council areas in exploitative, poorly paid work; or forced into early marriages with much older men

so their families can access bride price payments during lean periods. Men and boys have struggled to adapt to these changes, being unwilling to engage in agriculture, which they consider 'women's work' and to contribute meaningfully to household livelihoods. The heavy burden posed by this 'male redundancy' includes rising levels of idleness, alcoholism and gender-based violence.

In response to these challenges, the BRACED project in Uganda and Kenya, led by Mercy Corps seeks to support pastoralist communities in Uganda and Kenya to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change by building absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience capacities. In Uganda, BRACED is implemented in four out of seven districts in Karamoja: Moroto, Napak, Kotido and Kaabong. At output level, the project seeks to 1) strengthen the technical and adaptive capacity of formal and informal governance structures to manage climate change; 2) promote market development through strengthened linkages and investments in a climate-smart economy; and 3) reduce inequalities and empower women, men, boys and girls.

Project background

Under Outputs 1–3, BRACED makes direct investments in activities that address the gender-related inequities, beliefs and practices that disempower women, men, boys and girls and that have the potential to undermine resilience. Examples include support to gender-responsive government budgeting and planning; female participation in natural resource management (NRM) and disaster risk reduction (DRR) committee processes; the provision of quality, affordable products and services (savings, loans, insurance, etc.) tailored to women and girls; the development of female-oriented markets like poultry and dairy; and a gender behaviour change strategy that involves the identification of community champions in advocacy work that challenges gender stereotypes and roles, by promoting women and girls' empowerment, positive masculinities and the use of less distressful coping mechanisms. BRACED also has a strong adolescent component, with gender programming targeting in- and out-of-school boys' and girls' clubs.

2. KEY GENDER AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY ISSUES IN KARAMOJA

Methods for assessing people's vulnerabilities and capacities

The BRACED consortium conducted a VCA in Karamoja and Wajir to inform the project design and proposal. The VCA was the principal assessment tool, and aimed at evaluating:

- Type and magnitude of potential shocks and stresses (exposure) during droughts, famine and floods; and

- Degree of impact of the threats or disturbances (sensitivity, ability or opportunities to absorb, adapt and even transform in the face of climate disasters).

The methodology used for the VCA included 20 focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women from different age groups and livelihood zones to determine their distinct vulnerabilities and capacities. The VCA gender analysis employed analytical tools to identify the division of labour, the distribution of assets, vulnerabilities and capacities and the coping strategies used.

Climate change affects the whole community, but women and girls are especially hard-hit. Their perceived low social status translates into increased vulnerability, lowered development outcomes and diminished resilience. Understanding that women and girls' limited access to resources, decision-making power and enjoyment of individual and community rights and their poverty affect their ability to respond effectively to shock/stress provides a strong basis for designing climate change adaptation activities and policies that build resilience for women, men, girls and boys.

Human development indicators for women in Karamoja are among the lowest in the world. Women represent less than 32% of the student population and 8% of the literate population and have the highest maternal mortality rates in the country – at 750 per 100,000 births. Women also find themselves on the

margins of political and economic life, excluded from customary governance systems, present in formal government but unable to make meaningful contributions and clustered in low-paid wage employment or segregated in low-value female markets. A recent Mercy Corps study indicated that women lose up to eight productive days after a violent incident and that the majority (73%) believe violence against women is justified. Harmful cultural practices like early and forced marriage, courtship rape and widow inheritance are on the rise in post-conflict Karamoja. Gender inequality is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and contributes greatly to communities' vulnerability to shock/stress (TANGO & Mercy Corps, 2013).

Evolving gender roles and the implications for resilience

The transition from a predominantly pastoral lifestyle to increased dependence on rain-fed agriculture has precipitated a number of changes where gender roles, responsibilities and power relations are concerned. Women's income-generating activities have increased dramatically in recent years, lengthening their work day by five hours and adding to their reproductive tasks, which include cooking, cleaning, caretaking and collecting water, wood, wild fruits and berries. In contrast, men's roles and responsibilities have contracted, as they have lost their livestock and their identity as warriors. Their reluctance to engage in alternative livelihoods is a maladaptive response to changing circumstances. This inefficient use of human capital – that is, the overexploitation of women's labour and the underutilisation of men's – has clear implications for the resilience of families in the region.

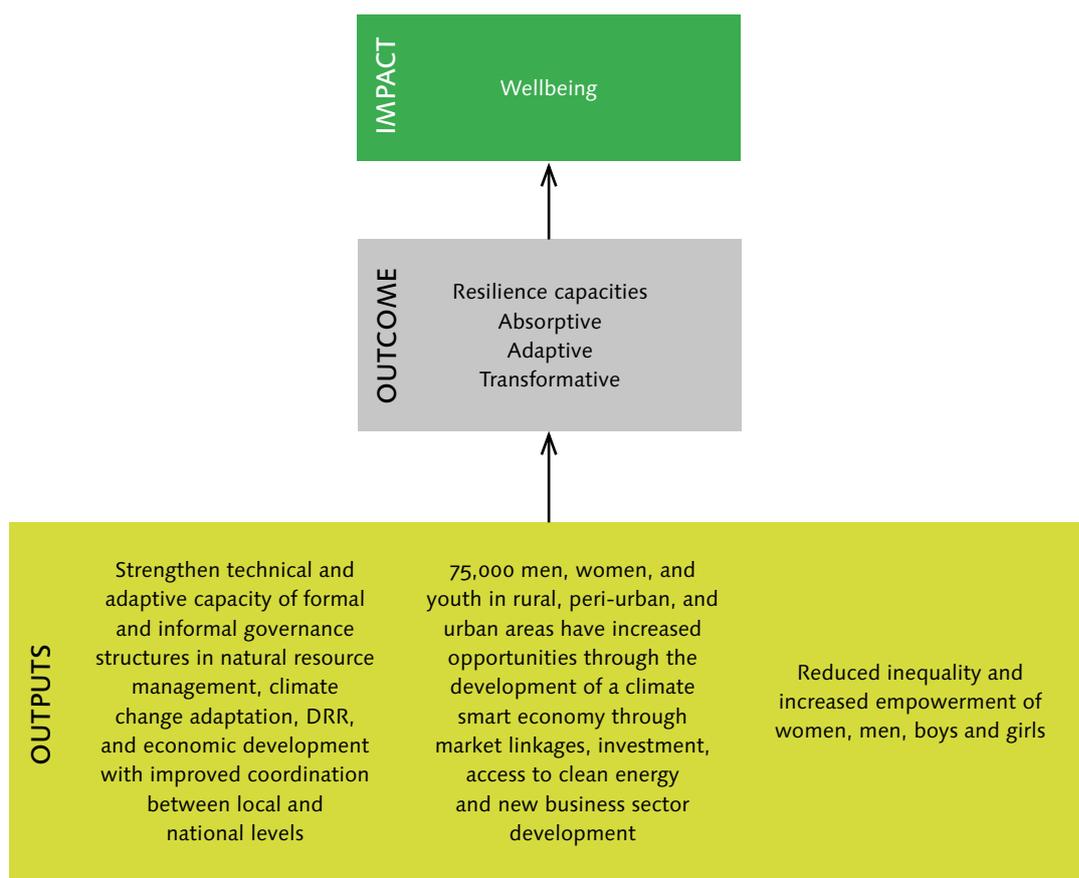
Gender, vulnerability and the impact of shocks

Women and girls are the most vulnerable in this scenario of shifting livelihoods and recurrent and worsening climate-induced shocks and stresses. As a group, women are more time-poor than before – working 18 hours a day and five to 10 hours more than adult men. When drought results in crop failure and widespread hunger, women eat smaller portions or skip meals altogether because tradition dictates that men eat first. Girls between the ages of nine and 18 years are exposed to harm when they travel to the bush in search of dwindling water supplies. Some families pull girls out of school so they can work as house assistants in urban areas or as paid labourers on farms. Reports of domestic violence, prostitution, child neglect and early and forced marriage also soar during this time.

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Figure 2: The Theory of Change of the BRACED Mercy Corps project in Uganda and Kenya



Gender-related resilience capacities

The gendered division of labour in Karamoja is highly segregated. Women's knowledge of farming has been what has sustained families in the region as households shift to a greater dependence on agriculture. This skills base needs to be refined further so women and families have the technical skills and information needed to be successful in an increasingly

water-constrained environment. An important capacity needed to be able to adapt is decision-making power. There is some evidence to suggest that, as women's role in economic life (farming and small business) grows, their ability to make household decisions improves. This is another capacity that should be encouraged and extended to other areas of women's lives, to bolster resilience at different levels of the system.

3. GENDER IN THE THEORY OF CHANGE

Reducing gender inequality and empowering women, men, boys and girls is one of three pathways in building the resilience capacities of communities and contributing to the long-term well-being of individuals, communities and systems in the target area. The BRACED Mercy Corps ToC is premised on the belief that inequality drives vulnerability, leading to poor coping strategies and setting families backwards on the path to development when a shock hits. This vulnerability can be exacerbated by gender-blind programmes that meet the needs and/or interests of one or two groups at the expense of others.

The project has a comprehensive approach to ensuring gender is integrated throughout the project cycle, contributing to long-term, transformative systems change. Gender equality and the

empowerment of women and girls is one of the project outputs, but gender considerations are also addressed through the other outputs of improved governance and NRM and inclusive market systems. Mercy Corps' experience from other contexts and the findings of the BRACED VCA suggest there are two critical steps to transforming vulnerability and strengthening resilience. The first is to build the physical, financial, human, political and natural capital of women and girls. The second is to begin a process of redefining harmful gender norms so they support rather than inhibit well-being during times of shock or stress, which includes active engagement with gatekeepers and champions. The Mercy Corps project will test the viability of this approach through a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and data collection protocol.

4. INCORPORATING GENDER INTO RESILIENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

The specific activities designed to support the project's ToC and its approach to gender are described below. The activities represent a snapshot of gender activities under BRACED Mercy Corps and are by no means exhaustive. They are also not static, and continually evolve in response to project learning, the changing needs of development partners and shifts within the broader socio-ecological system.

Promoting women's leadership in NRM and DRR (Output 1)

The focus of Output 1 is on building the capacity of local governance systems to effectively manage the development process, naturally occurring resources like water, pasture and forest and the DRR process. The VCA demonstrated that women's participation in formal and informal governance systems is weak and could undermine efforts to build resilience and to meet the needs of the



most vulnerable. Over the course of the three years, BRACED Mercy Corps will sensitise local populations about the importance of female leadership and their active engagement in politics. In the first year, the project supported the district government with the development of a Karamoja-specific gender strategy for building resilience to climate shocks and extremes. This involved a gender audit of government departments engaged in resilience-building, to determine whether they were taking sex and age considerations into planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring. The audit findings have been shared with district officials, who will take the lead in the strategy development process and its operationalisation.

BRACED Mercy Corps also facilitates monthly open forum discussions between the Community Development Office (CDO), women's representatives and councillors, to strengthen communication, access to information and vertical and horizontal linkages. The open forums are

also used as an avenue to consult with the wider public about gender issues in budgeting, policy planning and natural resource and land management.

Investing in women markets (Output 2)

The Karamojong economy is fragmented and remote, with weak infrastructure, including roads, water and electricity. The region is beginning to attract outside investment, but nascent markets face significant barriers to growth, including limited access to finance, low levels of education and a narrow skills set of the local workforce. The focus of this output is to build efficient, climate-smart markets by addressing some of these deficits.

Labour is highly segregated in Karamoja, but the livelihoods shift has created new opportunities for women in agriculture and small businesses. Women lag behind men in terms of access to finance, knowledge and skills and business and social networks. To help women to thrive



Labour is highly segregated in Karamoja, but the livelihoods shift has created new opportunities for women in agriculture and small businesses



in this post-conflict economy, the project will invest in women-oriented markets like poultry and dairy, establish village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) and link VSLAs to savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) that offer women-friendly products and services that focus on skills-building and training.

To date, BRACED Mercy Corps has supported female poultry producers to access Newcastle disease vaccine drugs at subsidised prices as local drug stores and community animal health workers (CAHWs) build their businesses and drive up product awareness and demand. The project is working with a total of 16 VSLAs in the four target districts of Karamoja (four in each district) and supports women's 'barazzas, or networking events, so women can be linked with buyers, sellers and service providers and learn new skills through trainings on specific topics.

Empowering women and girls and redefining gender (Output 3)

The resilience of markets and governance systems is enhanced when there is equity. Project activities are designed to initiate a process of change around harmful cultural norms that undermine resilience, including women's time poverty, lack of decision-making, uneven division of labour, high prevalence of domestic violence and an upsurge in cultural forms of violence (courtship rape, early and forced marriage and widow inheritance) during a crisis. BRACED Mercy Corps core strategy for this output is to identify gender champions from a range of occupations and sectors, across target communities, who can advocate for new ways for men, women, boys and girls to think, act and relate to one another.

Behaviour change communication (BCC) campaign

In Year 1, 'gender champions' were identified who could own and lead the BCC campaign and activities. The selection criteria covered influential people from within the community (community leaders, religious leaders, activists, business people and youth), who have a demonstrated interest in and/or track record of successfully advocating on behalf of women's rights in target communities. Gender champions have received initial training and have begun to tailor gender and resilience messages to target audiences. These messages will be communicated through radio, drama and songs and debated and discussed at community meetings. A series of radio spots will be aired on Nenah FM/Moroto in the lead-up to the dry season to encourage parents not to pull their girls out of school to work.

Preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Women and girls' exposure to SGBV increases rapidly during a shock, undermining resilience capacities. BRACED Mercy Corps has been supporting communities to develop and operationalise SGBV prevention and response plans, through monthly dialogues with community members in 12 locations. Targeted practices include domestic violence, child marriage, courtship rape and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), which spike during droughts or prolonged dry spells.

Redefining post-nomadic notions of masculinity

Many Karamojong men are struggling to come to terms with their role and identify in the post-conflict setting. BRACED Mercy Corps will establish male-only platforms to support, debate and redefine emerging forms of masculinity in target communities undergoing a livelihoods and lifestyle shift from pastoralism to agriculture and market-based systems. These platforms will bring elders, youth, former warriors and champions to discuss the need for men to actively engage in caretaking and alternative livelihoods; to adopt less violent approaches to managing conflict; and to act as allies in the struggle for gender equality.

Focus on adolescent boys and girls

The VCA identified adolescent girls and boys as highly vulnerable to and affected by drought. They also have more fluid ideas about gender, so small investments in gender change interventions can bear significant fruit, if the ideas are shared with peer cohorts and accepted. So far, the BRACED Mercy Corps project has established 10 'safe spaces' for in- and out-of-school adolescent girls and boys, aged 10–14 (in-school boys) and 15–19 (out-of-school adolescents) to provide opportunities to foster improved understanding, demystify and break down gender stereotypes and increase mutual empathy through games, sports, debates, concerts and team-building. The safe space clubs are avenues for equipping young girls and boys with much-needed skills and knowledge to prepare them to be able to better adapt to and cope with the effects of climate change.

5. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The BRACED Mercy Corps team's ability to deliver on its gender-related objectives and activities depends on a number of factors. A number of opportunities can be harnessed to accelerate/enhance impact (policy shifts, synergies between projects, etc.); there are also challenges (the long-term nature of social change, push back from communities, etc.) that need to be addressed.

Opportunities

Strong legal and policy framework on gender equality

GoU has created a gender-supportive environment by enacting policies that encourage the participation of women in politics. Measures include a 30% reserved seating system for elected officials, a women's council, gender focal points at the sub-county and district levels and required resource allocations for women. The legal and constitutional provisions for women provide a powerful incentive for government officials to collaborate on the development of a sub-regional gender strategy and to operationalise and resource the plan. There is also strong support for BRACED gender initiatives from the Gender Officer for Moroto district and from peer organisations like UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and from local community-based organisations (CBOs) like the Karamoja Women's Umbrella Organization (KAWUO). These organisations have been actively involved in the gender strategy development process led by the district, with support from BRACED.

Gender and staffing

The project took a deliberate approach to staffing, ensuring hired staff had strong gender expertise. Staff members are overwhelmingly female (75%), and the technical leads and officers all have gender as either a primary or a secondary competence. The team is also supported by a regional gender advisor, whose role is to provide technical guidance and support with quality assurance when possible. This in-house gender expertise provides a solid foundation for gender work within the project. Also, having a male gender officer on staff has proved greatly beneficial, as he has been able to more easily support and engage with men in the target communities. Francis Lowamoe, the BRACED Gender Officer, explains:

'[The fact that I am a man makes it] easier not only to reach the most conservative of men but also to help identify potential allies in the struggle for gender equality.'

Organisational experience

Mercy Corps has a portfolio of 24 resilience-building programmes, with a collective worth of \$120 million. The organisation has invested considerable time and resources in testing strategies and generating learning around the relationship between resilience and gender and the varying effectiveness of the approaches applied to flagship programmes in the Sahel and Somalia. From this, Mercy Corps has developed a gender ToC that will be tested in part by this project. The team benefits greatly from this experience, and is able to draw on the first-hand experience of staff who have worked on these programmes.

Challenges

Gaps between policy and practice

Gender equality is an official priority for GoU, as evidenced by the number of gender policy documents and mainstreaming guidelines that exist. However, the implementation of the policies has been weak. Many of these strategies have also been developed to enhance gender outcomes in development programmes but do not apply a resilience lens. The BRACED Mercy Corps project will encourage government officials to build a resilience angle into the gender strategy paper it is developing with a range of inputs from the Ministries of Natural Resources, Production and Marketing, Community-Based Services and Education, as well as the District Council, District Planning Unit and Water Department.

Lack of coordination and the duplication of efforts

While there are a number of regional efforts to empower women and build their resilience – and this is a positive sign – there is a need to more closely with peer organisations to avoid the duplication of efforts and the use of conflicting strategies that could be counterproductive over the long term. Part of the challenge is that the government-assigned district and sub-county gender focal points are overworked and constrained by limited resources, and are unable to perform a coordination function. The senior gender officer in Moroto district noted that, *'Convening quarterly gender coordination meetings involving government and NGOs has stalled owing to lack of funds to facilitate sub-county officers, stationery and refreshments.'* BRACED Mercy Corps has started the process of reconstituting gender working group meetings in Moroto, drawing on a core group of champions from within government, and will do so the same for the remaining three target districts.



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Shifting sociocultural beliefs, attitudes, norms and practices have met, and will continue to meet, resistance from factions whose interest it is to maintain the *status quo*

Concept of resilience still new

Resilience is still a new concept to BRACED staff, consortium members and government partners. Although trainings on resilience have been held, and the findings from the VCA shared, more time is needed to build understanding of the issues involved. Resilience thinking and programming is complex, and communicating about the issues and explaining the connections with gender inequality is challenging. For this reason, BRACED Mercy Corps is committed to continuous capacity-building over the course of the project to ensure knowledge translates into attitudes and practices that support gender and resilience.

Gender behaviour change a slow process

Within the BRACED Mercy Corps communities, patriarchy has been in place for many generations, held in place by a male-dominated elite that includes elders, opinion leaders and government officials. Shifting sociocultural beliefs, attitudes, norms and practices have met, and will continue to meet, resistance from factions whose interest it is to maintain the *status quo*. Also, the timeframe for the project – three years – may not be long enough to see a complete transformation in gender relations. It is the project's intention to *initiate* the process of gender change, by securing the buy-in of community activists who can ensure the process continues after the project ends.

6. CONCLUSION

Life is changing for the Karamojong, with new challenges in the form of more tenuous livelihoods, worsening and recurrent drought owing to climate change and evolving gender roles. As this case study demonstrates, social inequality exacerbates vulnerability, undermining attempts to build resilience. Reducing gender inequality and empowering women, men, boys and girls is critical to the BRACED Mercy Corps project success and its ability to 'improve the well-being of households, by building the absorptive, adaptive and transformative resilience capacities needed to manage the shocks and stresses of climate extremes and disasters at the individual, household, community and systems scales'.

There are a number of opportunities that the project can harness to increase its gender-related impact and drive resilience in the region, including a committed team with strong technical capabilities, a strong legal and policy framework on gender equality and Mercy Corps' own experience from the field of gender and resilience in the Sahel and Somalia. That said, many challenges remain, including the project's short timeframe, the number of actors working in the same space and the challenges inherent in trying to communicate and secure support for gender and resilience activities that partners and beneficiaries either do not understand or value.

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The BRACED Knowledge Manager generates evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation in partnership with the BRACED projects and the wider resilience community. It gathers robust evidence of what works to strengthen resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and initiates and supports processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes. The Knowledge Manager also fosters partnerships to amplify the impact of new evidence and learning, in order to significantly improve levels of resilience in poor and vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

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