

PEACE AND CONFLICT

Mercy Corps' Approach and Programming

MAY 2021

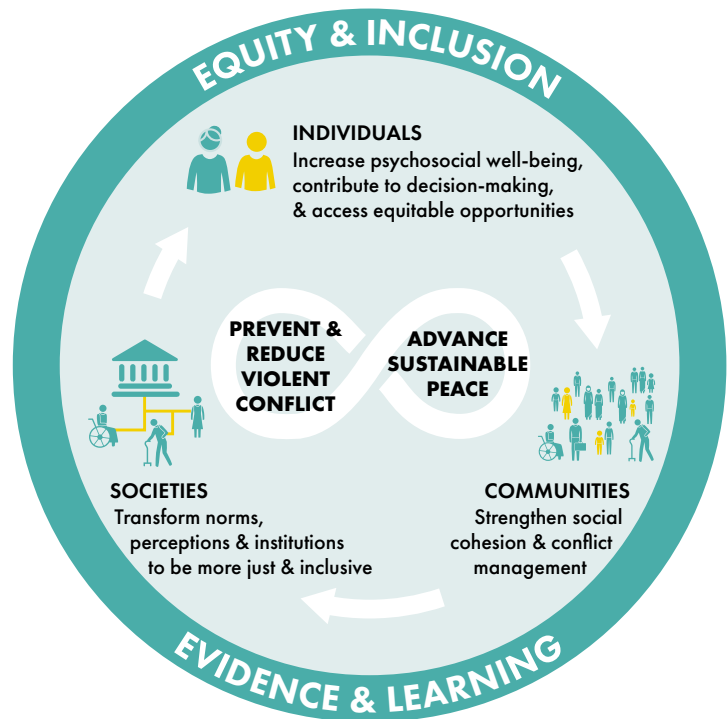
As a global humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organization, Mercy Corps is committed to reducing and preventing violence, as well as strengthening the pillars of long-term peace. This commitment is critical to Mercy Corps' mission to create secure, productive, and just communities, given that conflict now drives [80% of all humanitarian needs](#). As the [UN Sustainable Development Goals 2019 report](#) noted, "Conflicts and instability in many parts of the world have intensified, causing untold human suffering, undermining the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] and even reversing progress already made." Emerging accelerants like climate change, the impacts of COVID-19, shrinking civic space, and the weaponization of social media threaten to contribute to even higher levels of conflict in the coming years.

Faced with these compounding challenges, Mercy Corps pairs local leadership with unprecedented global connections to advance peace, building on a decades-long track record of implementing innovative peacebuilding programs. Operating in some of the world's most complex conflict environments, including 10 of the 13 extremely fragile contexts from the [OECD States of Fragility 2020 report](#), Mercy Corps currently implements a peacebuilding portfolio of more than \$220 million, composed of nearly 50 programs across more than 20 countries.

What We Do

Our peace and conflict programming works holistically across societal, community, and individual levels to reduce and prevent violent conflict and advance sustainable peace.

PEACE AND CONFLICT THEORY OF CHANGE



Transforming norms, perceptions, and institutions that enable and drive conflict to promote justice and inclusion for long-term societal change

We seek to strengthen **good governance** as a peace multiplier to enable citizens, civil society, and governments to work together to root out injustices, exclusion, inequality, state abuse, and other sources of grievances. This, in turn, expands the space and opportunity for citizens and government—at all levels of society—to act jointly to tackle other conflict drivers. We work to increase **climate security** by supporting integrated climate adaptation and strengthening natural resource governance. We use markets to bring people together and increase **economic cooperation**. And we invest heavily in places undergoing acute crisis and transition, where

we integrate peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian approaches to reduce violence and set the stage for longer-term peace through our **Advancing Peace in Complex Crises** initiative.

*Our peacebuilding work in **Nigeria's Middle Belt** works to reduce violent conflict exacerbated by increasing climate-related resource scarcity and poor governance through joint economic and natural resource management projects, strengthened dispute resolution mechanisms, and increased government, business, and community engagement. One [impact evaluation](#) found that 86% of households in Mercy Corps' program sites reported decreased tensions compared to 56% in comparison sites. Another [impact evaluation](#) demonstrated that intergroup contact and trust, as well as perceptions of security, were significantly higher in program sites compared to control sites.*

Strengthening social cohesion and conflict management practices for safer and more secure communities

We help communities—whether defined by geography or other characteristics—prevent conflict from escalating into violence through our foundational conflict management approaches that build on local institutions and processes. A cornerstone of our work is strengthening **social cohesion** within and across communities, identity groups and authorities so they can cooperate to achieve common goals and engage in productive dialogue. We also strengthen mechanisms to **detect, manage and respond to violent conflict**, including through enhanced Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation practices as well as sustainable Early Warning/Early Response systems.

*In **Iraq**, through conflict management programming since 2005, Mercy Corps has trained and mentored community leaders in mediation. Mercy Corps supported the group's evolution—into an Iraqi NGO coordinating a network of nearly 500 mediators—including Sunnis and Shia, Arabs and Kurds, tribal leaders, religious leaders, government officials, academics, and elected Members of Parliament. They resolve disputes—from tribal conflicts over land, to tensions between citizens and government over elections. Since the ISIS invasion in 2014, the mediators convinced provincial leaders to house and feed internally displaced persons, prevented Yazidi women rescued from ISIS captivity from being honor-killed by their families, and facilitated the women's reintegration into their homes by community elders.*

Facilitating increased psychosocial well-being, meaningful participation in decision-making, and access to equitable social, economic, and civic opportunities for young people

We emphasize gender-sensitive partnership with young people to strengthen their entire ecosystem and help them become peaceful and productive leaders. Drawing on the [Positive Youth Development framework](#), we **prevent youth participation in violence**, including **preventing violent extremism**, and support community approaches to reintegrating former members of armed groups. Our conflict sensitive approach addresses complex factors such as exclusion from governance processes, experiences of individual and collective trauma and other psychosocial needs, lack of dignified employment and livelihoods, and the breakdown of critical social bonds.

*Mercy Corps' **Somalia** Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI) sought to promote stability by increasing access to secondary education and civic engagement opportunities for youth. An impact evaluation found that youth in SYLI-supported schools who were also invited to participate in civic engagement opportunities were 65% percent less likely to demonstrate moral or material support for political violence than youth who were not engaged. Analysis indicated that the interventions reduced the appeal of armed opposition groups by improving young people's perceptions of the government, increasing their optimism about future employment opportunities, and fostering belief in the power of nonviolence.*

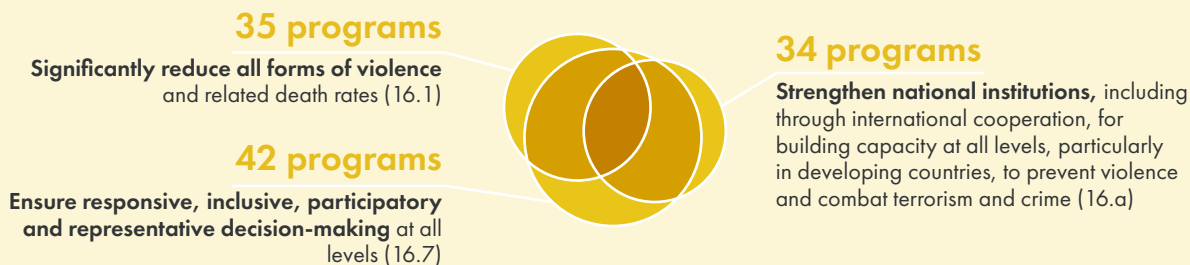
Cross-cutting areas

- › By partnering with humanitarian and development teams, we also ensure **conflict sensitivity** across all programs in fragile contexts, using a 'Do No Harm' approach and leveraging existing interventions to bridge divides.
- › We integrate offline and online conflict dynamics and information into our analysis and programming, **addressing the weaponization** of social media and other digital drivers of conflict, while also harnessing technologies for **digital peacebuilding**.
- › We advance **gender equity and equality in peace and security** programming by ensuring that our analysis, strategic frameworks, and approaches are not only gender sensitive and responsive, but also transformative. We intentionally elevate the role and responsibility of girls and women in peacebuilding, challenging and (unapologetically) dismantling harmful gender norms related to violent expressions of conflict.

Advancing Global Stability Goals

Mercy Corps' peacebuilding work not only contributes to local impact, but it also advances key global frameworks to increase peace and stability.

Our peacebuilding programs are making significant contributions to the realization of [SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions](#) across a range of targets:



They also address all five of the [OECD's dimensions of fragility](#):



Leading Systemic Policy Change

At Mercy Corps, we partner with the communities we serve to advocate for systemic policy change to address the causes of violence. Mercy Corps, in partnership with the Alliance for Peacebuilding, led a sustained advocacy campaign in support of the [Global Fragility Act](#) (GFA), an innovative new law to increase U.S. government support for global peacebuilding efforts. Enacted into law with broad bipartisan support in December 2019, the GFA requires the first-ever [U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability](#). Several Mercy Corps programs already advance key objectives of the Strategy, including:

Goal 1: Prevention

Anticipate and Prevent Violent Conflict and Large-Scale Violence

Goal 2: Stabilization

Achieve Locally-Driven Political Solutions to Violent Conflicts and Large-Scale Violence

Values

To promote long-term peace through a principled approach, we are committed to:

- › Advancing equity, inclusion, and human dignity for all team members, partners, and participants
- › Promoting local ownership of goals, activities, and measurement, drawing on local peacebuilding experts and facilitating inter-context sharing opportunities
- › [Generating evidence](#) and incorporating continuous learning to push the boundaries of what can be measured in peacebuilding and rigorously test our assumptions

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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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