



PATHWAY TO PEACE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

PEOPLE EXPERIENCE LESS VIOLENCE, BUILD MORE COHESIVE AND PEACEFUL COMMUNITIES, AND PARTICIPATE MEANINGFULLY IN INCLUSIVE, RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS.



The Problem

Violent conflict is at a 30-year high.¹ Conflict arises when weak sociopolitical, economic, and ecological systems break down. These breakdowns almost always result from poor governance: unaccountable or unresponsive institutions, inequitable access to services and resources, a lack of inclusive participation in decision-making processes, and low civil society capacity to address these challenges.

At the same time, increasingly intense and more frequent climate-related shocks disproportionately impact poorer countries, where the risk of violent conflict is already immense. The global climate emergency worsens conflict by increasing competition for increasingly scarce resources, exposing governance failures, and exacerbating inequities and marginalization.

Cycles of Conflict Challenge Lasting Peace

Inequity, systemic marginalization, and uneven or unjust access to services and resources all feed conflict. In turn, conflict causes the further destabilization of food, water, and economic systems already under constant threat of recurrent shocks. The resulting violence increases tensions – leading to

more violence and creating cycles of conflict that challenge lasting peace. Climate change compounds conflict and governance failures, further preventing people from achieving their goals. Increasingly, social media contributes to violence and conflict through the spread of misinformation, political manipulation, and extremist rhetoric. Combined with a lack of economic, social, and civic opportunities, these harmful online factors encourage recruitment into non-state armed groups – particularly for frustrated youth.

Displacement and Barriers to Participation

The effects of conflict are devastating and far-reaching. Complex crises have produced the highest number of displaced people on record² – creating economic and social challenges for the displaced and their host communities. In crisis-affected settings, women and girls face increased risk of gender-based violence as well as enormous barriers to meaningful participation in peace and governance processes. In protracted conflict, widespread trauma and other psychosocial barriers, including a lack of belonging and autonomy over the decisions that matter most, reduce households' and communities' abilities to cope, adapt, and thrive.

¹ United Nations and World Bank. 2018. "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." Executive Summary booklet. World Bank, Washington, DC.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Figures at a Glance 2022.

Objectives

Our pathway to peace and good governance moves us closer to a world where **people reduce or prevent violence, contribute to advancing sustainable peace, and participate meaningfully in inclusive and responsive governance systems.** This means that:

- › People live free from the threats of violence and physical and psychosocial insecurity
- › Youth have increased opportunities and viable alternatives to violence
- › People across diverse identity groups contribute to cohesive communities and cooperatively prevent, respond, and adapt to conflict and climate-related shocks
- › Inclusive and effective governance processes and institutions – including civil society – enable engagement and collective decision-making
- › Women and young people meaningfully contribute to formal and informal governance and peace processes



NEPAL, 2016

Resilience Approach

Resilience to conflict and climate shocks depends on peaceful, locally led action and meaningful participation in inclusive, responsive governance processes.

Mercy Corps works through programs, partnership, and influence to support communities to prevent, manage, and transform violent conflict over time.

Our efforts aim to reduce violence and address drivers of conflict to allow development outcomes to make lasting impact. Even while addressing immediate needs, we lay the foundation for long-term stability and sustained peace. Our ‘do no harm’ approaches intentionally avoid worsening conflict while strengthening connections and cohesion among communities and groups in conflict.

At the community level, our resilience approach centers on advancing sustainable peace by supporting local efforts to reduce violence and create more inclusive governance systems. We elevate locally-led collective action among civil society, government, community members, and formal and informal leaders and groups. Specifically, we focus on organizations led by or serving women, youth, or other systemically marginalized populations. We also work at the regional and national levels to help reduce barriers to participation, address conflict drivers, and contribute to a conducive environment for peace and good governance.

Within ecological systems, we connect communities to the processes, decisions, and skills essential for effective natural resource management and climate adaptation. We help identify or create opportunities for greater participation in decision-making processes around natural resources – a widespread driver of conflict. We also work within market systems to increase economic and social opportunities for those at risk of exclusion – helping to create viable, peaceful alternatives to violence, like a stable job that enables people to provide for their families or a sense of belonging in a community group. We help people

access formal and informal governance institutions, giving space to constructively address grievances and to contribute to meaningful change. And we support local peacebuilders in their efforts to resolve conflicts and lay foundations for longer-term change.

In practice, this means working with community members as well as decision makers, service providers, and other power-holders to build skills in: negotiation and mediation, civic engagement, advocacy and social accountability, social cohesion, and inclusive planning community mobilization.

By sequencing, layering, and integrating our peace, humanitarian, and development assistance, we help advance peace and promote inclusive, responsive governance processes, that enable communities – and the most marginalized within them – to cope, adapt, and thrive.



GUATEMALA, 2017

COPE: in the midst of crisis

We take conflict-sensitive humanitarian action, facilitate more equitable access to services, work with communities to prevent further conflict, and support collective action in response to climate shocks like droughts, heat waves, and natural disasters. Even as we respond to crisis, we lay the foundation for long-term stability by leveraging a ‘do no harm’ approach that avoids further exacerbating tensions. In emergencies, we develop meaningful partnerships with ‘first responders’ from the start, helping to strengthen capacities for effective humanitarian action and accountability to affected populations. We adapt conflict early warning/ early action systems to increase equitable access to information about critical support and services for crisis-affected households and communities. We promote physical and psychosocial protection for women and children at risk of violence, while helping to ensure more equitable access to essential services by applying a gender-sensitivity lens to basic service provision.

ADAPT: to climate and conflict threats

We strengthen conflict management and negotiation capacities, support inclusive governance processes, and bring community members together to identify and work towards common conflict prevention or climate adaptation goals. We facilitate groups in conflict toward shared priorities, and build trust to foster social cohesion and positive connections across groups and with leaders. We help strengthen and diversify formal and informal dispute resolution mechanisms and promote interest-based negotiation and mediation practices. We support civil society to elevate and address the unique needs and priorities of women, youth, and other marginalized groups. We help reduce and prevent youth participation in violence through increased civic, economic, and social engagement. And we bring community members together to identify and work towards common goals for climate adaptation or management of scarce resources – helping prevent further conflict.

THRIVE: today and into the future

We leverage long-term development solutions to address power imbalances and inequities that drive conflict, while strengthening the pillars of good governance to advance sustainable peace. We help communities thrive by fostering robust civic engagement and strengthening relationships between duty-bearers and rights-holders. We facilitate changes in behaviors and norms that are necessary for more responsive formal and informal

governance institutions, engaged communities, and proactive, connected civil society. We enable improved quality of, and inclusion in, service provision as well as more equitable access to resources, and we elevate leadership among women in governance and peacebuilding efforts. By harnessing collective outcomes across our food security, water security, market systems development, and other work, we bring groups in conflict together and reduce the inequities, marginalization, and scarcity driving conflict.



Areas of Focus

Mercy Corps has defined five distinctive areas of focus in each of our four outcome areas: water security, food security, economic opportunities, and peace and good governance. These distinctives are not the only programming pathways that we will pursue over the next decade – but we believe these approaches will lead to the greatest impact for the resilient, inclusive communities we work with.

These distinctive focus areas are not just what we will do; they set us apart. Though they may be tailored to the specific contexts in which we work, these unique and innovative areas of focus articulate what people can expect of Mercy Corps and set the programming standards to which we hold ourselves accountable

Advancing Peace in Complex Crises

In times of crisis, local actors play a critical role in reducing conflict and creating sustainable peace. We begin to mitigate tensions and bridge divides even at the start of a crisis, laying the foundations for sustained peace in the future. We strengthen early warning/ early action systems and support local actors and institutions to equitably deliver essential services. As early as possible, we work with local governance institutions – both formal and informal – to strengthen local conflict management, peacebuilding, and governance processes and capacities. We seek out opportunities to reduce violence and prevent recruitment into armed groups.

Preventing Youth Violence

Understanding and addressing the systemic issues that drive youth into armed groups is fundamental to conflict reduction and prevention. Context-specific barriers faced by youth include governance grievances, social exclusion, marginalization, and other frustrations. In absence of constructive opportunities, these challenges can drive youth into armed groups, including violent extremist organizations. We support youth leaders and youth-serving organizations to establish and increase positive channels for youth engagement in governance processes and advancement in civic, economic, and social spaces. We help young people pursue peaceful alternatives to violence and facilitate access to psychosocial support for violence prevention and reintegration of former members of armed groups.

Digital Peacebuilding

Employing social media constructively can prevent or reduce conflict and proactively promote peace. Increased awareness of and resistance to digital drivers of conflict can mitigate their negative effects. We leverage digital tools to promote online and offline social cohesion and support communities' efforts to monitor, track, and respond to social media threats in real time. We contribute to more inclusive environments and increased opportunities for women, youth, and systemically marginalized groups through social media. And through our advocacy work, we encourage national and international policymakers to prevent social media harms that can lead to or exacerbate conflict.



Enhancing Climate Security and Resource Governance

Transforming governance systems to effectively manage the impacts of climate change is crucial to reducing violent conflicts. We support communities to tackle climate-related drivers of conflict and integrate social cohesion and other peacebuilding approaches into climate change adaptation practices and policies. Depending on the context, this includes participatory planning for climate adaptation, water governance, natural resource management, and advocacy for improved and more equitable access to resources.

Transforming Norms and Behaviors for Good Governance

Behavior change approaches prevent the regression of democratic norms and foster inclusive governance. Sustained peace and good governance require positive and constructive engagement from both decision-makers and those they represent. We help strengthen norms, expectations, and experiences with participatory, accountable, and responsive governance at all levels – from the local to the national. We focus specifically on increasing the meaningful inclusion of women, young people, and marginalized groups in decision-making and governance processes.



A better world is possible. And this is how we get there.
mercycorps.org/pathway