

The Context: Conflict, Climate Change, and a Call to Action

Unprecedented Challenges

We are living in a moment of unprecedented change and uncertainty – a moment posing great threats and presenting immense opportunities. Decades of international cooperation, global movements for greater equality, and technological advancements have lifted millions across the globe out of extreme poverty and put them on a path towards prosperity.

Unfortunately, these gains have been uneven. Global crises are increasing in number, duration, and complexity. Extreme poverty is on the rise for the first time in two decades.¹ The global COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the stark disparities in wealth, power, and vulnerability – and plunged an additional 100 million people into poverty around the world.²

Rising autocracies or weak governance combined with unequal economic opportunities have left hundreds of millions vulnerable to violence and displacement. Violent conflict is currently at a 30-year high,³ and the World Bank estimates that by 2030, up to 2/3rd of the world's extreme poor could live in conflict-affected, violent, or fragile settings.⁴

Unsustainable economic development and harmful environmental practices have culminated in a global climate emergency affecting everyday lives and livelihoods. Weather- and climate-related disasters have displaced millions of people in recent years, while climate stressors such as changing rainfall patterns, severe drought, heavy flooding, and sea level rise pressure people to leave their homes in search of better conditions.

This dangerous combination has reversed progress towards a more secure, productive, and just world. Both conflict and climate change affect and compound other threats, such as rising food prices or global pandemics – further preventing people from achieving their aspirations. Climate variability and extreme weather are escalating food and water insecurity and global hunger. This in turn fuels competition over scarce resources, which can quickly deteriorate into conflict. **Without a new course of action, conflict and climate change will continue to drive rising hunger, water shortages, loss of incomes, violence, and displacement over the next decade.**

¹United Nations Press Release

² Ibid.

³United Nations and World Bank. 2018. "Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict." Executive Summary booklet. World Bank, Washington, DC.

⁴ World Bank Fragility Forum <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>

Immense Opportunities

The enormity of these challenges makes it easy to see a world of unsolvable problems. But Mercy Corps sees pathways to possibility and countless opportunities for transformational change – in the increasing power women have in decision-making processes, in today’s youth becoming the leaders and peacebuilders of tomorrow, in digital solutions that help farmers sustainably produce more food or bring communities closer together, and in green economic growth that protects the environment while increasing incomes for those previously struggling to make ends meet. **Mercy Corps’ Pathway to Possibility reflects our ambitions to not only meet the basic needs of communities affected by conflict and climate change, but to achieve lasting, transformational change at scale.**

Who we are: Our Vision for Inclusive, Resilient Communities

Lasting solutions to the complex and dynamic challenges posed by conflict and climate change require action on multiple fronts. That’s why we are a multi-mandate organization that provides access to

humanitarian aid, development, and peace assistance that builds bridges within and across communities. Driven by local priorities, we sequence, layer, and integrate our program models and approaches to meet immediate needs, address the drivers of crises, and enhance long-term resilience.

Mercy Corps works in places affected by fragility and crisis, where the impacts of conflict and our changing climate threaten people’s ability to flourish. **Mercy Corps exists to alleviate suffering, poverty, and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities.** We focus on systems change. Through our programs, influence, and partnerships – including with the private sector, governments, civil society, and communities themselves – we make it easier for communities to access resources, services, and opportunities so those most impacted by conflict and climate change can cope, adapt, and ultimately thrive. **We support communities – and the most marginalized within them – to emerge from crisis and build towards a more inclusive, resilient future.**



What we do: From Fragility to Resilience

Supporting Inclusive and Resilient Communities
No matter the context, we believe in the power of human potential and the ability of communities to grow stronger and more resilient. **We partner with and aim to improve the lives of those who are systemically marginalized because of their gender, age, ethnic, religious, or other identity, those living in or at risk of extreme poverty, and those most affected by climate, conflict, and compounding threats.**

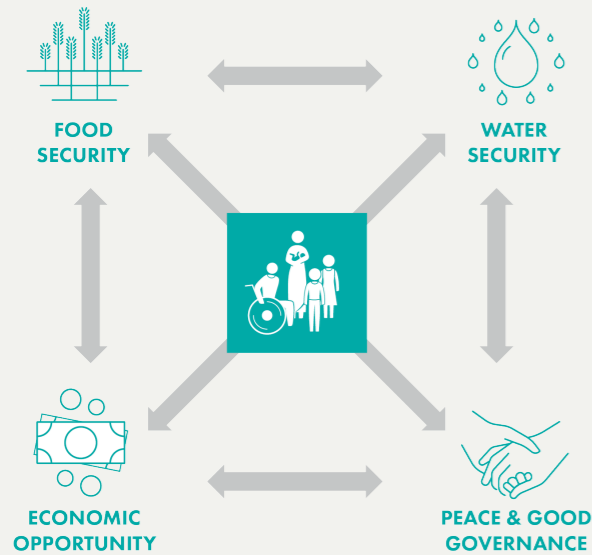
We believe inclusion and resilience are foundational characteristics of secure, productive, and just communities in which everyone can thrive, even in fragile contexts. Inclusive and resilient communities strengthen connections and cohesion across diverse identity groups, promote transparent and inclusive decision-making, and support equitable access to and control of resources. **With this in mind, we foster inclusive and resilient communities that positively impact and protect the physical, social, and economic wellbeing of all their members even in the face of adversity.**

Inclusive and resilient communities have the capacity to collectively:

- › Invest in and draw on inclusive and transparent decision-making processes, practices, and institutions
- › Allocate resources, information, and services equitably and fairly
- › Foster connections, cohesion, and belonging within and across groups while nurturing individual autonomy and aspirations
- › Leverage effective safety nets to prevent the most marginalized from sliding deeper into poverty
- › Foster inclusive, adaptive, diverse economies
- › Maintain equitable access to a productive, healthy environment
- › Embrace all people and celebrate diverse, intersectional identities
- › Proactively address power imbalances to include all members changing risks, turning crisis into opportunity

Improving and Protecting Community Wellbeing

Through our programs, partnerships, and influence, we work towards four interconnected outcomes that determine people's wellbeing in fragile contexts impacted by conflict and climate change:



- › **Food Security:** People are well-nourished at all times, with access to sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious food.
- › **Economic Opportunities:** People grow and sustain their assets and income.
- › **Peace and Good Governance:** People experience less violence, build more cohesive and peaceful communities, and participate meaningfully in inclusive, responsive governance systems.
- › **Water Security:** People have equitable and sustained access to clean and safe water to meet their everyday needs.

These outcomes are interdependent and reinforce one another. For example, the ability to produce, purchase, and safely consume nutritious food requires sufficient income as well access to safe water. People cannot go to work and grow their incomes if they are malnourished, unhealthy, or unsafe. Peace and good governance are necessary for people to reliably access nutritious food, clean water, and dignified income sources throughout their lives and into future generations. At the same time,

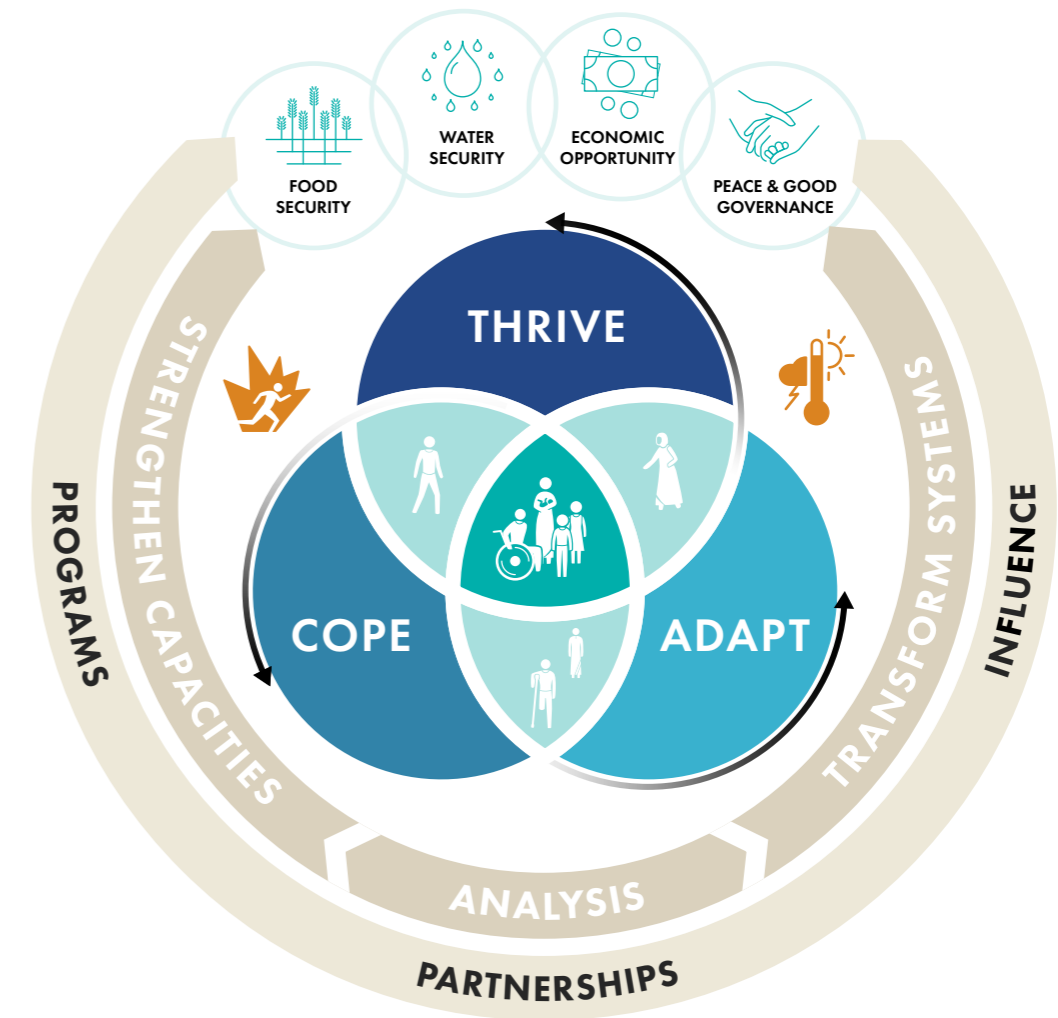
peace is unlikely to be sustained if people do not have economic opportunities that support their aspirations or meet their basic needs. We look beyond traditional aid approaches to identify opportunities for collective action and transformation – actively linking our program models to ensure communities receive multiple sources of support, and thus maximize wellbeing.

How we work: Our Resilience Approach

Enhancing Resilience Capacities

Resilience means people and systems can protect and advance wellbeing – such as food security and incomes – in the face of shocks and stresses. Communities living in fragile contexts affected by conflict and climate change often face multiple

shocks - such as political upheaval, recession, violence, failed rains, a drought, or pandemics. Often, these shocks occur simultaneously, repeatedly, or continuously – overwhelming the abilities of communities to sustain progress, putting them at risk of further backsliding, and negatively impacting their ability to prosper.



Humanitarian Response Approach

Driven by a humanitarian imperative, Mercy Corps responds rapidly to meet the immediate needs of those most impacted by conflict and climate change. We prioritize the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian assistance during times of acute need – even as we look for ways to help communities prevent, mitigate, or adapt to future shocks and stresses.

We are agile and nimble, with the operational readiness and the adaptive management capacities, skills, and structures to pivot our approaches as the context requires. We partner with communities to anticipate and respond to urgent needs as they arise – enhancing resilience even in the most extreme humanitarian contexts.

Mercy Corps' programs, partnerships, and influence focus on strengthening sources of resilience, enhancing the capacities of people, markets, and institutions to deal with shocks and improve wellbeing. Our resilience approach helps communities achieve positive, inclusive change by identifying and addressing vulnerabilities, and strengthening capacities to reduce risk. We tailor responses to address gender differences and inequality and recognize women and other marginalized groups as critical changemakers on the route to enhanced community resilience.

We know that communities' journeys to a more secure, productive, and just future will not be linear. The capacities to cope with the crisis at hand, adapt to future threats, and transform crisis drivers so everyone can thrive are all essential. Whether the threat is sudden shock or a slowly emerging crisis, natural or political, Mercy Corps uses our resilience framework to sequence, layer, and integrate our assistance to ensure relevant, technically sound, and high-quality support. In the most severe crises, we respond rapidly and meet urgent needs while investing early in enhancing resilience. We pivot quickly – working flexibly across humanitarian response, peacebuilding, and long-term development approaches to respond to changing circumstances on the ground.

COPE: in the midst of crisis

We support people's ability to COPE with the immediate effects of conflict and climate change. We respond quickly when people face violence, displacement, hunger, or a sudden loss of assets or incomes. We help meet urgent needs with dignity and self-determination, using cash, voucher, and water, sanitation, and hygiene assistance, while partnering with government and community institutions to help people access safety nets that protect access to food, water and incomes. Through financial and technical assistance, we help sustain markets and local institutions through crises while strengthening their ability to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to future threats. Given our work in conflict contexts, we ensure conflict sensitivity in our assistance, while laying the foundation for inclusion and community cohesion.

ADAPT: to climate and conflict threats

We enhance people's ability to ADAPT to future threats. We help individuals and communities equitably access the knowledge, resources, technologies, and services they need – and use them effectively – to make informed decisions, reduce risk, and maximize their wellbeing over time. We help ensure people are better connected to their local institutions and markets opportunities that can support climate

change adaptation, conflict management, and social cohesion. Through links to stronger institutions, social connections, and improved markets, we bolster people's ability to build back better after each crisis and avoid or lessen the impacts of future shocks.

THRIVE: today and into the future

We support people to THRIVE, strengthening their capacities to transform their own lives and influence their local systems to address the

underlying drivers of conflict and climate crises. We work with communities, the private sector, and governments to address power imbalances that perpetuate marginalization, poverty, and risk. We facilitate connections across lines of division to help build inclusive and effective governance institutions and facilitate equitable access to and influence over resources for all. We help ensure that historically excluded individuals and groups have opportunities to meaningfully influence decision-making processes and are empowered and confident to invest in their futures.



Supporting and Strengthening Local Systems

The magnitude of challenges we seek to address requires lasting, locally-led solutions that can reach tens of millions. That's why we focus our work on systems change. Through our programs and influence, we help support and strengthen local systems that communities rely on to better meet their needs and secure their future.

We know that people in fragile contexts depend on local markets, services, social networks, and their natural environment to meet their needs and build their futures. The characteristics of these local systems – economic, ecological, and social – and how they are organized and governed directly influence community members' abilities to manage adversity and achieve their goals. When local systems are inclusive, effective, and able to adapt to shocks and stresses they will, in turn, support the resilience of those who depend on them.

However, systems themselves are often fragile – unable to withstand compounding threats – and are therefore unable to meet the needs of the most affected populations. They are also often

inequitable or exclusionary and can restrict access to critical resources for systemically marginalized individuals and groups, inhibiting their abilities to cope, adapt, and thrive in response to conflict and climate shocks.

To support and strengthen systems, we identify and partner with innovators and key decision-makers with the greatest potential to achieve lasting change and transform systems from within. We collaborate with these champions of change to better understand how market, governance, and environmental systems currently function, who benefits and who is excluded from them, and how they can be improved for the benefit of all community members – including the marginalized or historically excluded. Together, we work to address barriers to accessing, benefiting from, or influencing these systems. We work to identify innovative solutions that build on our and our partners' comparative advantages, while intentionally involving those most marginalized in decision-making around local systems can best meet their needs and aspirations.

The following principles drive our systems-strengthening and resilience work:

- › We take the role of facilitator, connector, catalyzer, and motivator.
- › We intervene directly when necessary to meet the most urgent needs, working through and in support of local responders wherever possible.
- › We actively challenge power imbalances, and support local actors to do the same, while being guided by principles of do no harm and conflict sensitivity.
- › We monitor and measure the resilience of people and systems in the face of shocks, and adapt our work based on evidence.
- › We are committed to processes, timeframes and scales that will strengthen inclusive, responsive, and resilient systems and allow us to exit responsibly.
- › We actively partner with diverse local, national, and international private, public, community and stakeholders - centering their needs and priorities all we do.



Grounding Our Work in Evidence and Analysis

We aim to be a leading producer, consumer, and broker of evidence to advance resilience in food security, water security, economic opportunity, and good governance and peace. We routinely examine how conflict, climate change, and other threats are evolving, and use this to inform immediate and long-term responses. We rigorously monitor and evaluate our work, and test our program models to bring together development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian approaches to achieve stronger, more equitable, and sustained impact.

In each context we operate we seek to address and answer questions about resilience capacities:

- › **Resilience for Whom?** Which communities are most at risk due to conflict and climate change? Who within them is most marginalized, living in or at risk of poverty, and most likely to be affected?
- › **Resilience to What?** What threats linked to conflict and climate change (and other risks) undermine food security, water security, economic opportunity, good governance, and peace? And how?
- › **Resilience of What?** How do local systems – economic, social, political, and ecological – undermine or support people’s ability to cope, adapt and thrive? What support or transformation is necessary to enhance the resilience of the systems or those who rely on them?
- › **Resilience through What?** What resilience capacities exist or are needed for people to advance and protect their wellbeing in the face of conflict, climate change, and other threats? How can these capacities be enhanced?

We use data, evidence, and analytics to improve our programs, scale what works, and influence others.

Improve Our Programs: We ensure our programs, strategies, and advocacy are based on the best available evidence. We use data and analysis to effectively and adaptively manage programs and improve their impact.

Influence Others: We combine evidence of what works with timely contextual analysis and compelling human stories to shape major debates and decisions affecting our sector and the communities we partner with.

Scale What Works: We design, test, adapt, and scale promising models and effective approaches with the greatest potential to achieve impact in the most fragile environments.

Driving Impact through Influence

Equitable and accessible systems, policies, and practices cannot be built through programming and partnerships alone. Influence and advocacy are critical pathways towards more inclusive and responsive natural resource management, service delivery, markets, and institutions.

Our influence is built upon our expertise and experience working to enhance community resilience in multiple contexts, our contextual understanding of local systems, and our rigorous research that exposes the barriers to community resilience and identifies the most effective programs and policy responses. We use our influence to help:

- › Open up humanitarian access and promote protection of civilians, while pushing for a more effective, coordinated humanitarian response
- › Enable greater inclusion of and accountability to local stakeholders and affected populations

- › Ensure resource flows are transparent, impactful, and equitable
- › Shape systems and policies at the local, regional, and national levels to support communities to protect and advance their own wellbeing
- › Create enabling conditions – including supportive policies, legislation, regulation, incentives, and investments – for systemically marginalized groups and the systems they rely on to cope, adapt, and thrive
- › Ensure the inclusion of marginalized populations and communities in decision-making, service delivery processes, and governance systems



NEPAL, 2021

We connect with and influence the decision-makers most critical to the systems and policies we seek to change. At the global level, this includes donor governments, international institutions such as the UN, the private sector, and operational organizations like our own. At the national and local levels, we influence relevant authorities, line ministries, governance systems, security actors, the private sector, and the local representatives of global institutions and agencies.

As in all our work, we seek to center power and decision-making within the communities we work with and increase our efforts to ensure communities and local partners not only participate in, but actually define the priorities for advocacy and influence. We also ensure that key global and national systems are similarly inclusive of and accessible to communities and local actors.



MONGOLIA, 2017

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

