COALESCE: Mercy Corps' Social Cohesion Handbook

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Introduction

Social cohesion is at the heart of advancing secure, productive, and just communities. It's required to advance and sustain development goals, and to come out of crisis with stronger, more resilient communities that address all individuals' needs. It's at the bright center of peace, helping people, communities, and institutions forge bonds that will enable them to navigate differences and tackle shared challenges together. In short, strengthening social cohesion is mission critical for all humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.

The word coalesce means "to grow together," "to unite for a common end," and "to arise from the combination of distinct elements."[1] Coalescence, then, is not just a static state of togetherness; it's a dynamic journey that distinct people and communities can travel together to grow, develop, build resilience, and advance long-term peace. To coalesce represents the best of what people and communities can do when they have the attitudes, behaviors, and skills of social cohesion. That's why we call our approach to building social cohesion COALESCE: Collective Action and Local Engagement for Social Cohesion.

PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

The COALESCE Handbook for Social Cohesion guides program implementers in designing, implementing, and measuring interventions that seek to increase social cohesion. It is intended both for practitioners that focus on social cohesion as part of peace and good governance programming, as well as for those seeking to integrate social cohesion interventions into other development or humanitarian programs.

COALESCE is the product of a years-long process consolidating Mercy Corps' and external evidence, consultations with Mercy Corps' global program team, and a review of internal and external program documents. While COALESCE represents the current best knowledge and practice of social cohesion at Mercy Corps, effective social cohesion programming requires constant evolution, reflection, and tailoring. This document therefore serves as a jumping off point for implementers to design and implement the best-fit social cohesion interventions in their context. Importantly, though this handbook consolidates some of the lessons and practices within Mercy Corps, there are other important approaches to strengthening social cohesion that are not represented in COALESCE. For example, reconciliation and justice around past conflict incidents and grievances can be an important component of (re)building relationships, and therefore strengthening social cohesion, but it is not explicitly addressed here. Other organizations' approaches and strengths may well complement the central approaches of COALESCE.

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1   Merriam-Webster. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coalesce

PART 1

What is social cohesion, and why does it matter?

For newcomers to social cohesion as well as experts, this section lays out a working definition of social cohesion, including its components. It connects the concept of social cohesion to related peace, governance, and other development capacities. Finally, it outlines the contribution of social cohesion to various outcomes as well as potential pitfalls in implementing social cohesion.

PART 2

COALESCE: Our approach to building social cohesion

The five main elements of COALESCE include theories of change, illustrative activities, indicators, implementation tips, and program examples.

Facilitate opportunities for groups to engage in collective action across lines of division: *Through this evidence-based approach, groups engage over time across differences toward a common goal, strengthening trust and collective action norms.*

Foster social and cultural engagement: *This approach complements others by supporting social and cultural interaction across lines of division, increasing a shared sense of belonging and identity, as well as trust and attitudes across groups.*

Strengthen peaceful conflict management practice: *Supporting and strengthening local capacities in dispute resolution, including Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation, as well as in Early Warning/Early Response, increases trust, collective action, and attitudes across groups.*

Facilitate meaningful inclusion of youth, women, and other systematically marginalized groups: *This approach fundamentally cuts across all others and is essential to any social cohesion success. It involves deliberately including marginalized groups in collective processes to increase belonging and shared identity within and across communities.*

KEY APPLICATION
Facilitating joint natural resource management:
Bringing together elements of inter-group collective action and conflict management, this key application supports communities and governance actors simultaneously address resource-related drivers of conflict while increasing trust and collective action.

KEY APPLICATION
Strengthening dialogue and inclusive planning between communities and governments: *Drawing on the meaningful inclusion element, this is a common application that engages marginalized people and groups along with key governance stakeholders to address challenges collectively and engage in participatory decision-making and action.*

PART 3
Quick-start guide

This section outlines a succinct process for making key decisions around social cohesion gaps the intervention can fill, choosing and adapting a COALESCE element or set of elements, building on our CATALYSE process to implement the elements, and designing and enacting a learning and measurement strategy.

PART 4
Measuring and learning around social cohesion

Our framework for understanding the risks of social media and conflict includes considerations around social cohesion as a potential resilience factor, as well as gaps in social cohesion that the online environment might exacerbate.

You can use this handbook by reading it beginning to end, or by toggling to and from the parts that you need most. You'll find linked buttons that allow you to navigate easily across sections and back to the beginning.

Additionally, throughout each section, different types of guidance are marked with the following symbols:
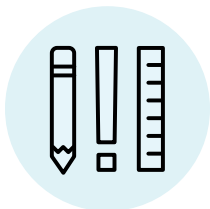
DESIGN TIP

Guidance you can use when designing or starting up a program and determining how to reach specific social cohesion objectives.

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

Guidance and lessons that support effective implementation at the activity or operational level.
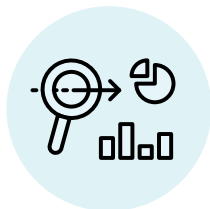
MEASUREMENT TIP

Guidance related to Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning, to be applied during design, implementation, or close-out stages.

DIGITAL SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion approaches adapted to the digital space to support online and offline social cohesion.

CENTERING INCLUSION

Guidance for ensuring the meaningful inclusion of all community members, including the most marginalized, throughout COALESCE.

PART 1

What is social cohesion, and why does it matter?

DEFINING AND TALKING ABOUT SOCIAL COHESION

DEFINITIONS

Social cohesion is a broad and multi-dimensional concept that varies by discipline and context. Broadly, social cohesion is the "glue that holds society together." Specifically, *social cohesion is a sense of shared purpose and trust among members of a given group or locality and the willingness of those group members to engage and cooperate with each other to survive and prosper.*[2] Without

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2   Kim, J., Sheely, R., Schmidt, C. (2020). Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit for Community-Driven
     Development Operations. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps and The World Bank Group.

MERCY CORPS

social cohesion, people are left to feel isolated, distrustful of others, and compelled to fend for themselves in an environment that encourages zero-sum competition.

Social cohesion has both vertical and horizontal elements. The vertical element represents the relationships between governance structures and society and includes trust in political, economic, or social leaders, institutions, and in processes like elections, access to justice, taxation, budgeting, and delivery of services. The vertical dimension of social cohesion relates strongly to the inclusivity and representation of the state.[3] In societies with high levels of vertical social cohesion, citizens have high levels of trust and confidence in governing institutions. The horizontal elements of social cohesion relate to relationships and interactions across societal divisions like ethnic background, class, religious affiliation, host, or displaced status, and other identities, as well as across different group members along gender, ability, age, and other lines. The presence of strong horizontal social cohesion includes robust networks, including informal and formal civil society. It is also a predictor of a society better equipped to productively manage conflict.[4]

Digital Social Cohesion

When considering the role that social media and other digital platforms play in a context, it is critical to understand the impact on social cohesion, both positive and negative. In this way, we can design inclusive of the digital space, thinking about norms, trust, and engagement between individuals and groups. We can also leverage digital tools in our responses, from monitoring to implementation.

Digital social cohesion falls under the broader umbrella of digital peacebuilding, which consists of addressing social media drivers of conflict and harnessing digital tools to advance peace online and offline. Mercy Corps' guidance on digital peacebuilding is found in our PRISM: Peace and Resilience in Social Media approach, which outlines guidance for identifying social media harms in a conflict context, assessing the information environment and social media drivers of conflict, and designing responses. Our framework for understanding risks and resilience of social media and conflict includes considerations around social cohesion as a potential resilience factor as well as gaps in social cohesion that the online environment might exacerbate. Throughout this handbook, specific applications of COALESCE to the digital space are highlighted to enable users to design and implement digital-specific approaches to building social cohesion.

WORDS MATTER

Patterns and understandings of social cohesion vary widely and can be highly politicized. In some places, the need for social cohesion programming might be met with skepticism because it assumes the presence of weak governance or societal fragmentation. In Myanmar before the

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3   UNDP. (2020). Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications. Retrieved from: https://www.undp.org/publications/strengthening-social-cohesion-conceptual-framing-and-programming-implications

4   See section of this guide "Social Cohesion and Peace" for more information

2021 coup, "intercommunal harmony" was used instead of terms like social cohesion which were seen as too politically sensitive. In Lebanon, civil society actors used "social stability" rather than "social cohesion" between hosts and refugees because authorities were concerned that 'social cohesion' implied refugees would be there for the long term. In many of the places Mercy Corps works in the Middle East, the term social cohesion is used in lieu of terms like conflict and peace because they are too politicized. Programs designed to increase social cohesion might not use this term at all beyond the program logframe, referring instead to the specific dimensions of social cohesion that the program seeks to address and measure.

Guidance for international organizations looking to build or reinforce social cohesion emphasizes that for social cohesion to be sustainable and meaningful, it must emerge as organically[5] as possible. Ownership of the definition of social cohesion is an essential starting point. *When developing social cohesion programming, make sure to create a consultative process that will allow practitioners to define the purposes, dimensions, and measures for assessing social cohesion that are appropriate to the context.* Discussions with government counterparts about the dimensions of social cohesion can also destigmatize the term and create avenues for working together. For example, starting a design workshop by asking participants to define social cohesion or create a word cloud can be a great way to begin breaking down the term and get context-specific perspectives on how it is used. For more information on participatory approaches to analysis and program design, see Part 2: Our Approach to Building Social Cohesion.

DESCRIBING SOCIAL COHESION

Perspectives from Mercy Corps Team Members

〉 Overall level of connectedness and cohesiveness

〉 It is the glue that binds society together

〉 It is what keeps society integrated

〉 People with a shared narrative

〉 Communities with a shared vision

〉 It ties social systems together

〉 Ubuntu—I am because we are

〉 It is the foundation for a cooperative and stable society

〉 Relationships between communities that keep them from falling apart

〉 It is what makes individuals into connected community members with shared interests and motivation to work together for a common good

〉 The quality of coexistence between multiple groups in a society

〉 The quality of coexistence between people within their own group and with the institutions that surround them
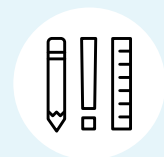
DESIGN TIP

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5   UNDP. (2020). Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications. Retrieved from: https://www.undp.org/publications/strengthening-social-cohesion-conceptual-framing-and-programming-implications

Photo: Mercy Corps, Nigeria/Corrina Robbins, 2016

SOCIAL COHESION AND RELATED TERMS

There are a number of related but distinct terms that connect to other programming areas and overlap with peacebuilding, governance and resilience. This section lays out these terms as Mercy Corps currently defines them and provides explanation about how they relate to other terms.

Importantly, social cohesion is not the same as peace. As noted below, social cohesion is often a necessary part of peace, but does not capture the full range of peacebuilding objectives, which also include violence prevention and reduction, as well as reducing the structural or underlying drivers of conflict. See *"Social Cohesion: What is it good for?"* below.

Social capital is the quantity and quality of resources, trust, and norms inherent in individuals' relationships. This definition connects the most frequently used definitions of social capital in the conceptual literature with four of the dimensions most commonly measured in the empirical literature: Relationships, Resources, Trust, and Collective Action Norms.[6]

Bonding social capital refers to horizontal relationships in a homogeneous group—such as within a peer group, family, culture, religion, gender, or ethnicity— where individuals share a location, identity, values, or demographic characteristics. **Bridging** social capital refers to horizontal relationships between heterogeneous groups from different geographic locations, ethnicities, religions, genders, or other identity groups. **Linking** social capital refers to vertical relationships between social networks with differing levels of power or social status (see discussion of vertical social cohesion in the Definitions section). This includes relationships and engagement that cross hierarchies or "vertical distance," such as links between decision makers (e.g., higher-level government, political elites) and the general public, individuals from different social classes, communities, and international NGOs, or communities and the private sector.

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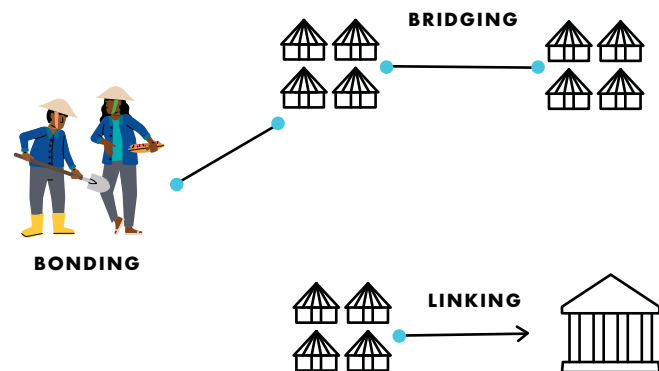
6   For more information on social capital, see the Mercy Corps Social Capital Research Brief and Social Cohesion World Bank Toolkit.

Sometimes social cohesion and social capital are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this handbook, social capital describes an attribute of relationships and connections between individuals and households, while social cohesion describes a state of being of a specific village, community, or country that contains multiple groups and their

TRUST
An individual's
1. Belief that another individual, group, or institution that could do them harm or betray them will not do so
2. Willingness to take actions that make themself vulnerable to that actor.

SHARED PURPOSE

BELONGING
The degree to which an individual or collective group feel like they "fit" together in a group

IDENTITY
The characteristics that an individual or collective group believe define them.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUT-GROUPS
How individuals perceive people with other values, lifestyles or identities within their group or locality.

Social Cohesion

COLLECTIVE ACTION NORMS
Collectively shared and internalized moral prescriptions that encourage costly actions thatprimarily benefit others

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
The attitudes and behaviors of individuals that result in participation to improve local area conditions for others and/or help shape the area's future.

behaviors, attitudes, and norms. The concepts are interlinked: areas with weak social cohesion will contain weak social capital structures and strong social capital structures and relationships will positively impact the state of social cohesion.

Social connections are the sum of people's social linkages: the social networks they can draw on, the extent and strength of those networks and the resources available within them, the nature of obligation that such networks carry, and the reciprocity presumed in terms of collective risk and mutual support. Social connections are not just the number of people that an individual or household can call on in times of need, but also how diverse these connections are (diversity). Social connections entail an individual's—or household's—confidence in their ability to mobilize resources from their connections (reliability). Further, individuals or households should not only receive support from their connections, but equally be called on to provide support (reciprocity). I.e., individuals or households not only receive support from their connections, but equally are called on to provide support. The term social connections emerged from Mercy Corps' work on resilience and a related body of research inside and outside Mercy Corps.[7]

DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL COHESION

Social cohesion is most often broken down into a set of core dimensions that differ depending on the discipline and context. This section focuses on how Mercy Corps frames the dimensions and includes discussions of how they are framed more broadly for the purposes of tailoring to context.[8]
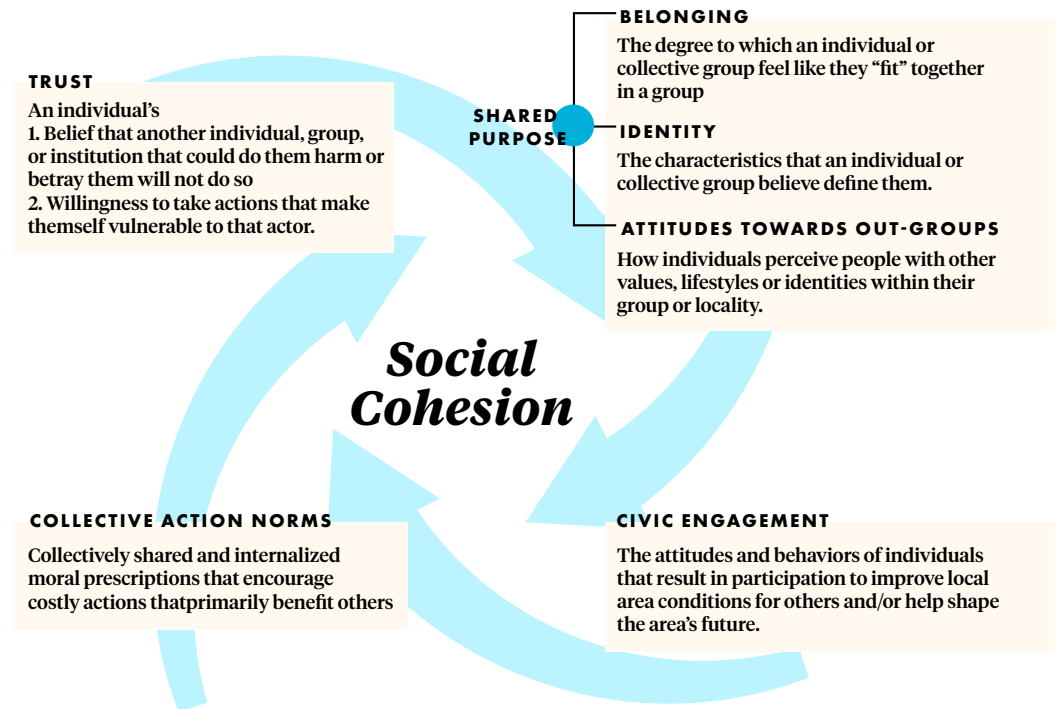
7   Kim, Jeeyon, Alex Humphrey, Anastasia Marshak, Nyuon Moses Gathuoy, Vaidehi Krishnan. 2020. "The Currency of Connections: Why Do Social Connections Matter for Household Resilience in South Sudan?" Washington, D.C.: Mercy Corps.
8   For more information on the development of Mercy Corps' dimensions see Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit for Community-Driven Development Operations, p 35 "Overview of Types"

Trust is an individual's expectation that people will regularly demonstrate honest and reliable behavior, based on commonly shared values. Without trust, an individual might believe that another individual, group, or institution that could do them harm or betray them will do so, and as a result they are unwilling to take actions that make themselves vulnerable to that actor.[9] Put another way, it is the expectation that people will regularly demonstrate honest and reliable behavior, based on commonly shared values.[10] Trust is an essential component of social cohesion because it is difficult to conceive of members of a society forming an effective and meaningful whole without trust among them.[11]

Shared Purpose consists of 1) **Belonging** or the degree to which an individual or collective group feel like they "fit" together in a group, 2) **Identity**, which consists of the characteristics that an individual or collective group believe define them, and 3) **Attitudes Towards Out-Groups** or how individuals within a group perceive people with different values, lifestyles, or identities. Importantly, social cohesion is formed through repeated interactions, in contrast to situations where individuals might work together and trust each other in the short term without the experience having an impact on their identity.[12] Other conceptualizations of social cohesion include an acceptance of diversity, defined as the extent to which individuals or groups recognize others' rights to belong, be trusted, and/or be helped, even where there are differences in values, identities, or lifestyles. Acceptance of diversity may refer to people within one's own group as well as across groups.[13] Though not included in our core dimensions of social cohesion, acceptance of diversity is implicit in "attitudes toward out-groups" and has particular salience when discussing how social cohesion contributes to sustainable peace.[14]

Social Cohesion, Peacebuilding, and Conflict Sensitivity

Social cohesion programs and approaches can work towards peace outcomes and are often referred to as a subset of peacebuilding. Given that peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity are often conflated we wanted to reinforce the distinction here:

Conflict sensitivity is a fundamental principle of responsible development practice and refers to the ability of an organization to: understand the context in which it is operating, particularly intergroup relations; understand the interactions between its interventions and the context group relations; and act upon the understanding of these interactions, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.

Peacebuilding refers to measures designed to consolidate peaceful relations and strengthen viable political, socio-economic and cultural institutions capable of handling conflict, and to strengthen other mechanisms that will either create or support the necessary conditions for sustained peace.

9   Kim, J., Sheely, R., Schmidt, C. (2020). Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit for Community-Driven Development Operations. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps and The World Bank Group.

10   Fukuyama, F. (1996). Trust: Social Virtues and the creation of prosperity. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

11   Chan, J., To, H. P., & Chan, E. (2006). Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. Social Indicators Research, 75(2), 273-302. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1

12   Ibid.

13   Kim, J., Sheely, R., Schmidt, C. (2020). Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit for Community-Driven Development Operations. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps and The World Bank Group; Sonnenfeld, A, Doherty, J, Berretta, M, Shisler, S, Snilstveit, B, Eyers, J, Castaman, K, Gupta, R, Anda Leon, MD, Franich, A, Yavuz, C, Baafi, A and Obaid, R, 2021. Strengthening intergroup social cohesion in fragile situations. 3ie Systematic Review 46. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.23846/SR00046; Jenson, J. (2010). Defining and measuring social cohesion (No. 1). London: Commonwealth Secretariat. Retrieved from http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/(httpPublications)/170C271B7168CC30C12577D0004BA206?OpenDocument

14   Ibid

Collective action norms: Norms are collectively shared and internalized standards of behavior that can be positive or negative. Mercy Corps' definition of this dimension frames it in terms of those shared attitudes and values that predispose citizens to cooperate, understand, and empathize with each other, or collectively shared and internalized moral prescriptions that encourage costly actions that primarily benefit others. Collective action norms are an essential part of creating and sustaining good governance with shared decision-making and accountability at all levels.

Civic engagement is defined as the attitudes and behaviors of individuals that result in participation to improve local area conditions for others and/or help shape the area's future. Some definitions of social cohesion make the distinction between an individual's practice of or willingness to participate (take part in political or civil society) and to help (engage in actions that benefit others based on altruistic motives like community service, volunteering, etc.)[15]

SELECTING AND ADAPTING SOCIAL COHESION DIMENSIONS

Which dimensions of social cohesion you choose to address (and what they are called) first depends on a rigorous diagnostic process for understanding social cohesion dynamics in context. *Focus on social cohesion dimensions that relate specifically to what the program is trying to achieve and what will resonate in the context.* Many programs will focus on just some of the above dimensions.
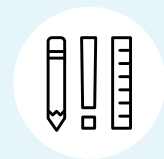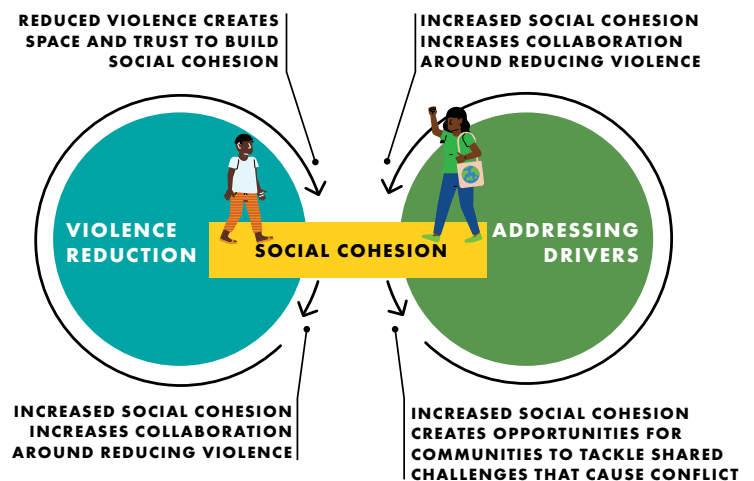
DESIGN TIP

SOCIAL COHESION: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

SOCIAL COHESION AND PEACE OUTCOMES

Evidence shows that increasing social cohesion is linked to reducing violence and achieving peace, equitable development, and good governance outcomes.[16] Mercy Corps views social cohesion as an intermediate outcome that contributes to peace: necessary, but by itself not sufficient for peace. Many dimensions of social cohesion are recognizable as building blocks of peacebuilding, and factors that erode social cohesion are frequently root causes of conflict—in particular different kinds of polarization.

Theoretically, the relationships between social cohesion and violence reduction, and between social cohesion and addressing drivers of conflict, are mutually reinforcing. Social cohesion can be considered a bridge between violence reduction and addressing the structural drivers of conflict, as shown

REDUCED VIOLENCE CREATES SPACE AND TRUST TO BUILD SOCIAL COHESION

INCREASED SOCIAL COHESION INCREASES COLLABORATION AROUND REDUCING VIOLENCE

VIOLENCE REDUCTION

SOCIAL COHESION

ADDRESSING DRIVERS

INCREASED SOCIAL COHESION INCREASES COLLABORATION AROUND REDUCING VIOLENCE

INCREASED SOCIAL COHESION CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES TO TACKLE SHARED CHALLENGES THAT CAUSE CONFLICT

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15   Sonnenfeld, A, Doherty, J, Berretta, M, Shisler, S, Snilstveit, B, Eyers, J, Castaman, K, Gupta, R, Anda Leon, MD, Franich, A, Yavuz, C, Baafi, A and Obaid, R, 2021. Strength

16   Mercy Corps (2021). Understanding the links between social cohesion and violence: evidence from Niger.

in the diagram. On one hand, increased social cohesion can help communities collaborate to mediate and resolve disputes peacefully, and it can also help the agreements made through dispute resolution 'stick' because of increased trust between groups. On the other hand, reduced violence–perhaps achieved directly via approaches such dispute resolution, early warning/early response, or other activities–may create the trust and confidence, in addition to physical safety, required for groups to take on longer-term social cohesion initiatives (see Part 2, Section 2: Strengthen Conflict Management Practices, for an in-depth discussion on this relationship and some of the limitations of dispute resolution on social cohesion outcomes). Similarly, social cohesion and addressing drivers of conflict create a virtuous cycle: increasing social cohesion creates more opportunities and a greater likelihood that groups will work together to address deep-seated conflict drivers. At the same time, addressing key drivers of conflict like marginalization of certain groups, relative deprivation, poor governance structures, and other issues can contribute to—and may be required for—a more conducive environment for groups to work together and build relationships.

Evidence supports various parts of these logical pathways outlined above. The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)'s systematic review of social cohesion programs in fragile contexts found that dimensions of social cohesion like higher levels of trust, a shared sense of belonging, and community-oriented norms can help people mediate or manage potential conflicts between groups across social cleavages like ethnic divisions or host-displaced groups.[17] Improved social cohesion can also lead to some convergence on the needs and interests held by different groups, which can make working together constructively easier.[18] The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index found that factors that positively affect social cohesion, like trust in institutions, human security and civic engagement, increase the effectiveness of reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives intended to heal the damage caused by conflict.[19]

Social cohesion exists when there are strong levels of trust and norms of reciprocity that bond groups, bridging relationships that transgress social divisions and mechanisms of conflict

Social Cohesion and Social Inclusion

As with all Mercy Corps programs, it is important to consider the way different individuals are impacted by conflict and fragility. A gender and social inclusion analysis can shed light on the contextual dynamics and social norms that influence social inclusion and exclusion. Programs should seek to address disparities in participation between women, men, girls, and boys, as well as across people with disabilities and other groups, in the design and implementation of interventions to increase social cohesion.

For more information on how social cohesion programs address the inclusion of marginalized groups, see Part 2: Our Approach to Building Social Cohesion.

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17   Sonnenfeld, A, Doherty, J, Berretta, M, Shisler, S, Snilstveit, B, Eyers, J, Castaman, K, Gupta, R, Anda Leon, MD, Franich, A, Yavuz, C, Baafi, A and Obaid, R, 2021. Strengthening intergroup social cohesion in fragile situations. 3ie Systematic Review 46. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie).

18   Ibid

19   NDP & SeeD. (2015). Predicting Peace: The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index as a Tool for Conflict Transformation. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/content/dam/cyprus/docs/ACT%20Publications/Score-July20.pdf

management (e.g. responsive democracy, independent judiciary and independent media) that enable just links to exist between government and communities.[20] On the other hand, weak social cohesion increases the risk of social disorganization, fragmentation, and exclusion. "Vertical relations plagued by inequality and unequal distribution of power and opportunity can instigate violent conflict. Horizontal relations, or the lack of ties between unlike groups in a multicultural society can erupt into hostilities if one group is seen as monopolizing resources and power."[21]

Though more research is needed on the relationship between social cohesion and different kinds of conflict, there is increasing evidence linking social cohesion and peace outcomes, including:

Photo: Mercy Corps, Democratic Republic of Congo/Corrina Robbins, 2015

〉 **Participation in violence:** A common theory of change in social cohesion programming is that increasing social cohesion will make it more difficult for armed opposition groups, including violent extremist organizations, to exploit identity differences, inter-group grievances, and marginalization or isolation to garner new recruits and support for violence. The Niger PEACE Program promoted dialogue between conflicting groups, improved collective action for local development through community-led, small scale social cohesion projects that target key drivers of conflict, and promoted cooperation in management of natural resources.[22] That study showed that only some dimensions of social cohesion were associated with propensity towards violence. For example, there was a clear relationship between a lack of trust–especially around the sharing and management of natural resources– and support for the use of violence. A final experimental program evaluation found that communities that had increased social cohesion also reduced their support for violence, though other results were mixed.

〉 **Perceptions of security:** Evidence from Mercy Corps' Engaging Communities for Peace (ECPN) Program in Nigeria confirmed that intergroup contact and trust between farmer and

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20   Cullen, M. and Whiteford, H. (2001). The Interrelations of Social Capital with Health and Mental Health. World Bank Discussion Paper, WorldBank.

21   Colletta, N.J., and Cullen, M.L. (2000). The Nexus between Violent Conflict, Social Capital and Social Cohesion: Case Studies from Cambodia and Rwanda. World Bank, Social Development Family, Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network.

22   Mercy Corps (2020). Building Social Cohesion: A Short Guide for Social Cohesion Practitioners.

pastoralist communities increased or deteriorated significantly less in program sites than in control sites, even as regional tensions increased.[23] Further, though trust between farmers and pastoralists in control sites decreased, trust within program sites increased. Also, perceptions of security increased significantly more in ECPN communities than in control communities.

SOCIAL COHESION AND OTHER OUTCOMES

Evidence on the connection between social cohesion and other technical areas is increasing, in particular as social cohesion is recognized as a core resilience capacity in fragile contexts.

❭ **Increased resilience to shocks and stresses:** Social cohesion builds community and household resilience to shocks and stresses by helping groups collaborate to manage shocks peacefully.[24] Additional evidence suggests that bridging social capital between groups is an important factor for building intergroup social cohesion, which in turn can strengthen household and community resilience to risks such as flooding and conflict. When intergroup social cohesion is strong, pastoralist and agropastoralist households can more effectively navigate access to resources even in the face of economic and environmental shocks, therefore strengthening resilience in communities.[25, 26] An Evidence Gap Map conducted by 3ie also found a number of effects of various social cohesion and conflict resolution interventions on resilience capacities in low- and middle-income countries, including positive impacts of psychosocial support interventions on psychological, economic, and social capacities, as well as a positive impact of intergroup dialogues and conflict resolution mechanisms on disaster risk management and social outcomes.

❭ **Improved economic conditions:** There are links between reduced conflict, increased social cohesion, and economic growth. The absence of conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria's Middle Belt would increase the country's GDP by nearly fourteen billion dollars and the average household affected by farmer-pastoralist conflict would experience 64-210% increase in income if this type of conflict was significantly reduced.[27]

❭ **Improved food security:** Mercy Corps' research in the Horn of Africa demonstrated that strong social and economic networks across clan lines reinforced the ability of households to maintain food security or recover more quickly during major food security shocks. Greater social cohesion fostered social networks that were accessed while families and individuals experienced food insecurity.

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23   For more information, see case study on ECPN in Annex.

24   Evidence from a review of resilience and peacebuilding studies in the Horn of Africa found reinforced the theory that "If social cohesion is key to coping with shocks and stresses, then strengthening it within and between groups makes it possible to manage shocks peacefully." https://adelphi.de/en/system/files/mediathek/bilder/2020_ USAID-ATLAS-Project_Lessons-learned-from-resilience-and-peacebuilding-in-the-Horn-of-Africa.pdf? P. 23

25   Kurtz, J., & McMahon, K. (2015). Pathways from Peace to Resilience: Evidence from the Greater Horn of Africa on the Links between Conflict Management and Resilience to Food Security Shocks. Mercy Corps.

26   Additional research indicates that social capital contributes to resilience by enabling households to rely on individuals within their network during times of hardship and facilitating local collective action to address shared challenges; see Aldrich, D. P. (2012). Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post Disaster Recovery. University of Chicago Press.

27   Mercy Corps. (2015). The Economic Costs of Conflict and the Benefits of Peace: Effects of Farmer-Pastoralist Conflict in Nigeria's Middle Belt on State, Sector, and National Economies. Retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/economic-costs-conflict-nigeria

RISKS OF SOCIAL COHESION

Despite these positive contributions, certain patterns of social cohesion can be destructive, whether they arise organically or are consciously developed to serve political purposes. An accumulation of bonding ties in already divided or segregated societies can reinforce communal divisions, hinder cooperation, and reduce incentives for leaders of those bonded groups to compromise. Bonding social capital, when concentrated among elite members of society, can be used to control the institutional basis of power and buttress one group's access to resources.[28] When this is layered on top of existing prejudices, strongly bonded groups can inhibit the access of out-groups, force the assimilation of minorities, or even justify ethnic cleansing in the name of social cohesion. Mis- and disinformation within the context of information bubbles can exacerbate these dynamics and cause people to perceive that other groups are more different from them than they actually are. In places with socioeconomic inequality, political exclusion, discrimination or marginalization of certain groups and dominance of other groups, social cohesion can be manipulated to suppress viewpoints and consolidate political power.[29]

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28   Mercy Corps (2017). Social capital and good governance: a governance in action research brief. Retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/social-capital-good-governance

29   UNDP. (2020). Strengthening Social Cohesion: Conceptual Framing and Programming Implications. Retrieved from: https://www.undp.org/publications/strengthening-social-cohesion-conceptual-framing-and-programming-implications

PART 2 COALESCE

Our Approach to Building Social Cohesion

This section describes the essence of Mercy Corps' approach to building social cohesion and provides examples and evidence from Mercy Corps programs. Given there is no one-size-fits-all programmatic approach to building social cohesion, this section also includes visuals of theories of change, key discussion points, and assumptions for teams to grapple with as they articulate how their approach can achieve different social cohesion outcomes.

THE COALESCE APPROACH DRAWS ON FOUR ELEMENTS OF BUILDING SOCIAL COHESION:

FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUPS

STRENGTHEN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

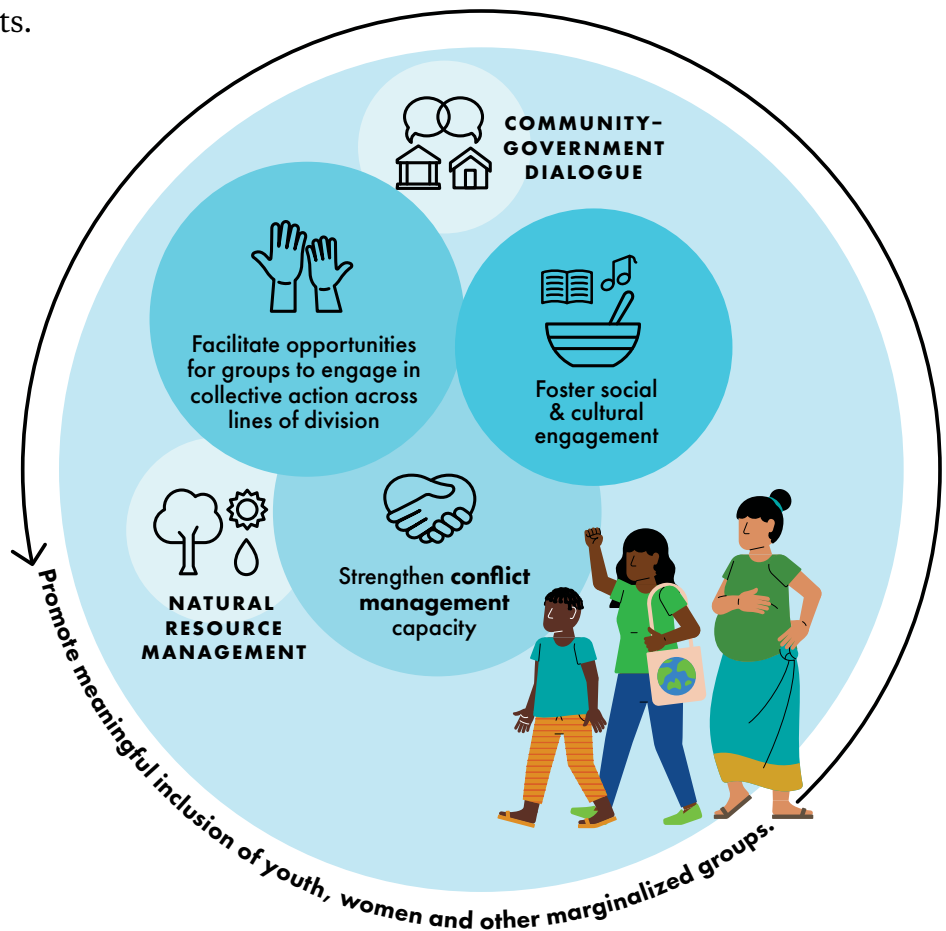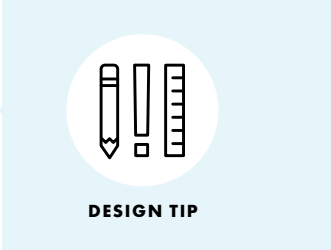**FOSTER SOCIAL & CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT**

PROMOTE MEANINGFUL INCLUSION OF YOUTH, WOMEN AND OTHER MARGINALIZED GROUPS

These elements are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they are likely to be more effective when layered according to the context needs. *You may want to invest in all elements to strengthen the likelihood of increasing social cohesion in some contexts, while at other times you may select just one or two elements to complement other activities or target specific social cohesion gaps.*

DESIGN TIP

These elements also have specific applications that surface across many contexts.

1. **Peaceful management of scarce natural resources** draws on two elements: facilitating opportunities for groups to engage in collective action and strengthening peaceful conflict management practice.

2. **Facilitating dialogue and planning between communities and governance actors and institutions** combines elements of both #1 and #4 to improve vertical trust and civic engagement. The graphic shows the key elements and applications of COALESCE.

COMMUNITY–GOVERNMENT DIALOGUE

Facilitate opportunities for groups to engage in collective action across lines of division

Foster social & cultural engagement

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Strengthen **conflict management** capacity

Promote meaningful inclusion of youth, women and other marginalized groups.

Underlying all of these elements is the importance of inclusive participation in decision-making, making it essential that COALESCE builds off Mercy Corps' existing approach to community mobilization and participatory decision-making, <u>CATALYSE: Communities Acting Together</u>. Guidelines for applying CATALYSE to social cohesion-specific outcomes are outlined below the four COALESCE approaches.
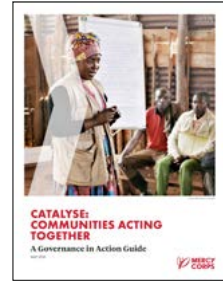
1. FACILITATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUPS TO ENGAGE IN COLLECTIVE ACTION ACROSS LINES OF DIVISION

CORE DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED

Trust

Collective Action Norms

A core element of COALESCE centers on providing opportunities for groups to engage, across differences, in collective action through joint projects. These opportunities are essential for building trust and strengthening relationships and collective action norms. Mercy Corps' and other organizations' research indicates that joint projects involving frequent, repeated, and positive opportunities to interact and work toward a common goal are the most effective way to strengthen social cohesion across all of its dimensions. By supporting groups to tackle an important shared need, people also experience directly the benefits of working together rather than in opposition.

Mercy Corps connects groups that do not frequently engage with each other through meaningful, repeated opportunities for exposure and positive social interaction that can enhance positive

BASIC THEORY OF CHANGE	PROGRAM EXAMPLES
IF groups experiencing tension work together to design and implement initiatives that address shared needs, **AND IF** that joint work results in increased positive interactions between these groups, **THEN** these groups will trust each other more, improve their attitudes toward out-groups, and strengthen collective action norms; **ULTIMATELY** making it more likely these groups will cooperate rather than engage in violent conflict.	**Engaging Communities for Peace in Nigeria (ECPN)** **IF** farmers and pastoralists collaborate on quick impact projects that demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and economic projects that address underlying tensions, **THEN** there will be an increase in positive interactions, thereby building trust and economic interdependence, while reducing violence.
	Jordan Strengthening Social Capital and Reducing Tensions between Jordanian Host Communities and Syrian Refugees: IF the Jordanian host and Syrian refugee communities see the benefits of working together to address common areas of difficulty, **THEN** they will be more likely to view each other as partners and seek joint solutions to current and emerging problems.
	Niger Preventing Violent Extremism Actions through increased social Cohesion Efforts (PEACE): IF communities are fully involved in the assessment, design and implementation of community projects, **AND** the community projects work to bring diverse communities together to strengthen trust, improve social interactions, facilitate cooperation, **AND** support tolerance, **THEN** community resilience to VE will improve.

perceptions of other groups and lay the groundwork for empathy and understanding, a fundamental approach under the contact hypothesis.[30] This can increase social cohesion by supporting the participation of different groups and increasing their exposure to each other, and through repeated, positive interactions, improve their perception of each other and increase their willingness to help each other[31]

In many contexts, before bringing groups together across lines of division, it is necessary to take the time to lay the groundwork for such engagements. Collective action may, in fact, be the last of a series of related activities that work towards building social cohesion (e.g. intra- or inter-group dialogue, trauma healing). Programs may wish to provide opportunities for groups to design and implement joint projects that will benefit both communities (e.g. small infrastructure projects). These joint projects provide additional opportunities to work together, have positive interactions, build relationships, and tangibly impact issues of shared concern.[32] Once groups are safely interacting in a positive way toward joint projects, some programs go further, building on these frequent engagements to provide or strengthen existing platforms that facilitate further intergroup cohesion (e.g. community conflict prevention forums).

DESIGN TIP

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

See Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach for more guidance on sequencing and implementing joint projects.

ILLUSTRATIVE OUTCOME INDICATORS:

The illustrative indicators below measure outputs and outcomes at different stages of the theory of change, and are meant to facilitate conversation about what is important to measure in a program using this approach. All indicators should be disaggregated by age, gender, role in community, identity group, and other relevant factors to the context.

> ❭ Percentage of people who have had positive interactions with members of the conflict group in the past month

> ❭ Percentage of people who trust members of the conflict group

> ❭ Percentage of people who express willingness to work toward a common good with members of the conflict group

FACILITATION QUESTIONS FOR DESIGNING ACTIVITIES:

> ❭ In this context, how does lack of positive interaction create a barrier to social cohesion? Which groups need more positive interaction? Which dimensions of social cohesion would this build?

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30   See "Does Peacebuilding Work in the Midst of Conflict?" by Mercy Corps for more detail on the contact hypothesis. (Hyperlink study name to here: https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/does-peacebuilding-work-midst-conflict).

31   Sonnenfeld, A, Doherty, J, Berretta, M, Shisler, S, Snilstveit, B, Eyers, J, Castaman, K, Gupta, R, Anda Leon, MD, Franich, A, Yavuz, C, Baafi, A and Obaid, R, 2021. Strengthening intergroup social cohesion in fragile situations. 3ie Systematic Review 46. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.23846/SR00046; See category "Collaborative Contact"

32   Ibid. See category "workshop based peace education with intergroup contact and economic support"

❯ How—in what ways—will joint projects contribute to social cohesion? Which types of projects are needed?

❯ What groundwork is needed for the joint projects (i.e., trust-building, training)?

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS FROM THE EVIDENCE:

❯ Link social cohesion interventions with conflict analysis findings: Mercy Corps' research in Niger highlights that focusing on issues over which mistrust influences violence may be more effective at improving cohesion than interaction over unrelated issues.[33]

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

COALESCE in practice

Conciliation in Nigeria through Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources (CONCUR) stabilized communities and increased social cohesion between conflicting groups in the Middle Belt by promoting economic cooperation through community-led initiatives. These projects that community members designed, led, and implemented, included communal gardens, markets, and milling facilities and provided an opportunity for community members to coordinate, develop trust, and improve relationships.

By the end of project activities,

50% of community members trusted members from the conflicting group,

a **17%** improvement from the baseline.

56% of respondents also recognized economic benefits of joint initiatives and

90% of them expressed acceptance of people from other religious groups, indicating stronger sense of cohesion between conflicting groups.

COALESCE in the digital space

Forty youth across Ninewa and Basra, Iraq, participated in a pilot program, **Iraqi Youth Against Disinformation (IYAD).** The youth worked to identify ways in which social media was impacting their communities, assess the weaponization of social media, and spearhead the design and implementation of small projects. The youth designed and implemented responses to deepen their confidence in the digital peacebuilding space, ensuring their relevance and ownership over the solutions.

One youth group focused on intergroup tensions between rural and urban communities, identifying the role of hate speech and rumors triggering conflict between these groups. They gathered approximately 100 residents from both urban and rural areas from diverse backgrounds, including activists, clan elders, and local media to a workshop to strengthen tolerance and encourage peaceful coexistence. Participants alongside the youth team transformed discussion on three influential social media pages from incitement of hatred to letters of tolerance and dialogue. The youth team manually monitored hate speech and immediately responded with counter posts urging rejection of extremism and acceptance of others, reminding the community of historical examples of collaboration between both sides.

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33   Mercy Corps. (2021). Understanding the Links Between Social Cohesion and Violence: Evidence from Niger.

❯ Prioritize positive inter- and intra-group interactions: Teams should pay careful attention to the conditions and process of intergroup interaction to increase the likelihood of positive interaction and focus on the quality, not the just the quantity, of intergroup interactions.[34] Evidence from Mercy Corps' work in Niger indicates that positive interaction between groups was significantly linked to reduced support for violence, but that simply more frequent interaction was not.

❯ Pairing "software" and "hardware" activities can increase impact by providing short-term benefits with longer-term change: The impact evaluation of a social cohesion program implemented by Mercy Corps in Jordan found that conflict management training and opportunities for positive interactions ("software activities") were effective on their own, but that infrastructure projects positively improved social cohesion above and beyond that of software activities.[35] This suggests that joint projects like infrastructure ("hardware") should be considered if these are likely to support social cohesion in the program context.

2. STRENGTHEN PEACEFUL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Mercy Corps identifies and strengthens local capacities in conflict management, focusing on Interest-based Negotiation and Mediation (IBNM) so people are able to mitigate tensions and proactively address potential or existing conflicts constructively. These skills equip people to understand their own and others' interests and perspectives on conflict issues, increasing the likelihood that tensions will not escalate into violence. By doing so, they decrease the likelihood that people will rely on negative assumptions about the other group's intentions or interests, and provide a shared framework for resolving disputes peacefully. In addition to strengthening IBNM capacity, this element encompasses the establishment or strengthening of Early Warning/ Early Response (EWER) initiatives, which helps groups establish systems and norms to work across differences to prevent violence. Though not the focus of this element in COALESCE, many activities could fall under conflict management processes, such as certain aspects of security sector reform and the prevention or mitigation of sexual and gender-based violence.

CORE DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED

Trust

Collective Action Norms

Attitudes towards Out-Groups

Programs using this element may increase social cohesion by supporting the participation and sense-making of people from different groups and giving them the skills to more constructively deal with conflict.[36] The dimensions of social cohesion this element can contribute to are trust (the extent to which people from one group think people from the other group will demonstrate reliable and honest behavior), collective action norms (the extent to which individuals are willing

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34   ibid.

35   Mercy Corps. (2019). What Works and What's Next for Social Stability in Jordan? Evidence from Mercy Corps' Host-Refugee Social Cohesion Program

36   Sonnenfeld, A, Doherty, J, Berretta, M, Shisler, S, Snilstveit, B, Eyers, J, Castaman, K, Gupta, R, Anda Leon, MD, Franich, A, Yavuz, C, Baafi, A and Obaid, R, 2021. Strengthening intergroup social cohesion in fragile situations. 3ie Systematic Review 46. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.23846/SR00046. See "Intergroup Dialogue and Conflict Resolution Training" category

to work on an activity of common interest with the member of another group), and attitudes towards out-groups (how people of one group perceive people from another). Alongside the more direct effects of increased capacity for nonviolent dispute resolution on levels of inter-communal violence, increased capacity for dispute resolution may decrease inter-communal violence through a social cohesion pathway by engaging members of conflicting groups in positive intergroup interaction—thereby strengthening intergroup trust.

However, the relationship between dispute resolution and social cohesion outcomes is not always consistent, so it is important that when incorporating IBNM, EWER, or other conflict management activities into a social cohesion-focused initiative, the specific outcome, theory, and evidence base are clear. In addition, conflict management activities may have an indirect or slower impact on trust and other dimensions of social cohesion. For example, in Mercy Corps' Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) program in North Central Nigeria, in the short term (one year after intervention) mediation training and support contributed to a decrease in violence and an increase in security perceptions compared to control communities, but it had less of an effect on social cohesion measures. However, in a second study three years after the initial intervention, mediation training and support led to improvements in trust and other norms, attitudes, and behaviors towards out-groups.

FACILITATION QUESTIONS:

❭ In this context, how would improved capacity for conflict management and dispute resolution contribute to social cohesion? Which dimension(s)?

❭ In this context, how does lack of capacity for conflict management and dispute resolution form a barrier to social cohesion?

❭ Who are the key leaders who should be trained/engaged? What structures need to be put in place to support them to reinforce these skills, even at moments when disputes are uncommon?

BASIC THEORY OF CHANGE	PROGRAM EXAMPLES
IF a diverse group of trusted leaders– including traditional leaders as well as women, young people, and other credible community members–strengthen their skills in peaceful dispute resolution	**ECPN, Nigeria: IF** key farmer and pastoralist leaders are given the skills and support needed to peacefully and collaboratively manage disputes, **THEN** inter-communal violence will decrease.
OR IF groups experiencing tension establish or strengthen collaborative mechanisms in Early Warning/Early Response (EWER)	**Ekisil, Uganda: IF** the capacities of traditional and formal leaders and peace structures are strengthened, and **IF** the coordination and collaboration between them and with higher-level conflict management actors is enhanced, **THEN** they will prevent and resolve conflicts over natural resources and livestock theft within and between communities.
THEN a higher proportion of inter-group interaction will be peaceful and positive and groups will experience collaborative management of inter-group disputes, both of which increase their trust in each other, strengthen their collective action norms, and improve their out-group attitudes,	
ULTIMATELY reducing the risk of violent conflict and laying the foundation for sustainable peaceful collaboration.	

❭ What types of disputes are expected?

❭ Does this intervention need to be paired with anything else to be sustainable/effective and contribute to social cohesion? What is the appropriate sequencing of this with other elements?

ILLUSTRATIVE OUTCOME INDICATORS:

The illustrative indicators below measure outputs and outcomes at different stages of the theory of change, and are meant to facilitate conversation about what is important to measure in a program using this element. All indicators should be disaggregated by age, gender, role in community, identity group, and other relevant factors to the context.

❭ Number of disputes resolved by program participants

❭ Percentage of people who report improved knowledge or skills in conflict resolution

❭ Percentage of people trained who have resolved a conflict

❭ Percentage of people who are aware of and/or have used conflict management services

❭ Percentage of people who believe that those responsible for conflict management in their area are effective at resolving conflicts in their community

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS FROM THE EVIDENCE:

❭ Conduct thorough analysis of perceptions of local leaders' legitimacy to inform participant selection and program design. Evidence from Niger found that while the existence of conflict management mechanisms was associated with higher perceived levels of social inclusion, they are also associated with decreased trust and less positive interactions with other groups. More research on the relationship between social cohesion and conflict management mechanisms is needed.[37]

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

COALESCE in practice

Sone Hmat worked with civil society actors to address socio-political and cultural drivers of intercommunal conflicts and strengthen social cohesion among various ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar. To strengthen the capacity of local leaders to prevent violence and promote interfaith tolerance, Mercy Corps worked with 167 religious and youth leaders from diverse communities and trained them in IBNM.

As a result of program activities, leaders successfully resolved 98 of the 119 disputes brought to them.

At the end of the program, 96% of the community leaders reported increased confidence in resolving conflict and applying tools and methods they had learned to help resolve conflicts in their own community.

Sone Hmat also worked to enhance inter-faith knowledge, understanding, and positive interactions among individuals from different religious groups through interfaith dialogues, which led to a 19% increase in members who reported having had positive, trust based, and comfortable interactions with members of different ethnic and religious groups.

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37 Mercy Corps and USAID. (2021). Resilience Rapid Learning Brief: Harnessing Local Sources of Social Cohesion in Niger.

❯ Programs should tailor workshop design to support participants to develop the communication skills and expertise needed to handle common disputes participants are likely to encounter, based on a needs analysis identified by participants as well as an assessment of existing behavioral drivers and biases.[38]

COALESCE in the digital space

Dangerous speech and fake news, often transmitted online via websites and social media platforms, are being attributed as major influencers of violent conflict in Barkin Ladi, a community in North Central Nigeria. The YAFE program connected local leaders to address potential conflicts before they turn violent by providing a space for users from different ethnic and religious groups to connect with each other, share information they were seeing online, and quickly work together to mitigate the impact or disrupt the information flowing through their communities.

Overall, the pilot participants felt that the YAFE pilot created a safe, dedicated space to discuss hate speech, as opposed to other commonly used, and minimally governed, Whatsapp groups which can become large, leading to various, unfocused conversations. For one female participant, the only other online groups she belonged to consist of former school groups, so she was happy to be connected with other leaders and have a new network of information.

3. FOSTER SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

In many communities experiencing low social cohesion, opportunities to interact across lines of division are scarce, particularly opportunities to interact in a positive, prosocial way. Building on Contact Hypothesis, which informs the first COALESCE element, facilitating opportunities for groups to engage in collective action across lines of division, we also provide opportunities for groups to come together for social interactions and to build appreciation and awareness across cultures and contexts. While Mercy Corps generally considers social and cultural interactions on their own to be insufficient for creating meaningful increases in social cohesion, we layer these activities onto other elements to increase the volume of positive social interactions and generally consolidate gains made through other activities.

CORE DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Belonging
Identity
Trust
Attitudes towards Out-Groups

One important reason to consider facilitating these social interactions is that cognitive and psychological factors arising from a history of mistrust or trauma can contribute to conflicts. Providing platforms for groups to connect around sports, music, dance, meals, arts events, theater, or other

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38   Mercy Corps. (2014). Project Proposal Application Form: Jordanian Host Communities and Syrian Refugees Work Together to Build Peaceful Communities

KEY COALESCE APPLICATION:

Facilitating Joint Natural Resource Management

Competition over scarce natural resources is a common cause of conflict. At the same time, platforms for natural resource management can be a valuable avenue of engagement for conflicting communities to cooperate and develop linkages, and when taken further, can support communities to build resilience to climate shocks while also building resilience to conflict shocks. By promoting opportunities for communities in conflict to collaborate and peacefully manage shared resources, Mercy Corps creates opportunities for groups to forge relationships based on trust and positive interactions, strengthen social cohesion, and address a fundamental driver of tension and conflict, while also breaking the cycle of underlying drivers and low social cohesion that can fuel conflict.

This element draws on the approaches "Facilitate opportunities for groups to engage in collective action across lines of division" and "Strengthen peaceful conflict management practice" so please see those sections for further discussion about connections to social cohesion dimensions and theories of change. It also draws on the cross-cutting inclusion practice contained in "Facilitate Meaningful Inclusion of Youth, Women, and Other Systemically Marginalized Groups."

Mercy Corps' **Inclusive Resource Management Initiative (IRMI)** was a USAID-funded project that enhanced stability in Nepal's western Terai plains by building platforms for resolving natural resource-based conflicts and promoting inclusive natural resource management. The program's approach was founded on two complementary theories of change:

〉 If local decision-making related to natural resource use and management is more inclusive, then resource-related conflicts will decrease.

〉 If Nepalese work together to reduce pressure on natural resources, then conflict over these resources will decline and dispute resolution agreements will be more sustainable.

IRMI facilitated the development of peace agreements around natural resource management issues; established Natural Resource Management Forums (NRMFs) to identify and resolve local conflicts; and implemented joint natural resource management initiatives. 421 key stakeholders participated in NRMFs and were successful in mitigating 61 and resolving 48 natural resource-based conflicts.

Communities also collaborated to implement 38 joint natural resource management initiatives, benefitting 43,287 individuals in the target areas. As a result of project activities, conflicting groups developed collaborative relationships, resulting in increased trust and greater social cohesion.

In another example, communities in the Karamoja cluster (border areas in Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia) often migrate in search of natural resources like pasture and water. These patterns of migration are characterized by tensions and hostilities between host and migrating communities over scarce resources. Mercy Corps' **PEACE III** program supported the foundations of sustainable peace in the Karamoja cluster by working to address these resource-based conflicts. PEACE III supported the development of three Resource Sharing Agreement (RSAs) at Nakonyen, Kobebe, and Loyoro, in consultation with 1855 individuals. These RSAs were instrumental in reducing tensions between conflicting groups by providing avenues for peaceful management of shared resources. As a result of the RSAs, 6000 migrating households from Turkana and Pokot communities peacefully shared resources in Nakonyen, and over 30,000 Turkana households Turkana migrated peacefully to Kobebe dam. By reducing conflicts and peacefully sharing resources, communities were able to rebuild trust and form positive relationships with each other, thereby strengthening social cohesion.

cross-cultural and social dimensions helps groups to build a shared identity and improve their attitudes toward each other. The addition of direct psychosocial support to trauma-affected groups and others in the community may increase understanding across differences and build the trust and relationships needed to act collectively and inclusively. Healing-centered peacebuilding and psychosocial support initiatives are a sub-sector of peacebuilding in their own right, but can and should be incorporated into social cohesion initiatives when relevant.

FACILITATION QUESTIONS:

❭ In this context, what types of social interactions are most widely enjoyed across different groups?

❭ What types of activities would be meaningful for people and groups?

❭ How can communities layer onto and reinforce the impact of other activities, such as joint projects or dispute resolution, social and cultural activities?

❭ How can these activities ensure inclusion and enhanced participation among systemically marginalized people, such as women, young people, people with disabilities, and others?

❭ What types of psychosocial support might be needed across individuals and groups who have experienced trauma or might benefit from healing-centered approaches?

❭ What is an appropriate frequency of social and cultural activities that enables groups to maintain positive contact over a period of time?

❭ What gender and other inclusion considerations might lead to decision-making to ensure appropriate social, cultural, and psychosocial activities for different groups of people?

❭ What types of social and cultural interactions can be sustained after the end of the program? How can the program contribute to that sustainability?

BASIC THEORY OF CHANGE	PROGRAM EXAMPLES
IF people and groups come together through social and cross-cultural activities that celebrate both differences and sources of similarity; or participate in healing-centered and trauma-informed psychosocial activities; **THEN** people will understand other groups more deeply and increase their sense of shared identity and belonging, and groups will increase their positive interactions and therefore positive attitudes across divides; **ULTIMATELY** laying the groundwork for future positive interactions based on mutual respect and understanding, decreasing the likelihood of violent conflict.	**Strengthening Social Capital and Reducing Tensions between Jordanian Host Communities and Syrian Refugees, Syria: IF** Jordanians and Syrians increase the frequency and depth of their social interactions, **THEN** perceptions and trust of the other group will improve.

ILLUSTRATIVE OUTCOME INDICATORS:

The illustrative indicators below measure outputs and outcomes at different stages of the theory of change, and are meant to facilitate conversation about what is important to measure in a

program using this element. All indicators should be disaggregated by age, gender, role in community, identity group, and other relevant factors to the context.

〉 Percentage of people who state that they have a very good or good relationship with a member of the conflict group

〉 Percentage of people who have positive interactions with members of the conflict group

〉 Percentage of people who trust members of the conflict group

〉 Percentage of respondents who have positive perceptions of members of the conflict group

〉 Percentage of people who believe that every person has a right to their own opinions or beliefs [39]

〉 Percentage of people who report efficacy or confidence in their abilities to take control of their lives

〉 Percentage of people who report a sense of belonging within the wider community

COALESCE in practice

The first phase of the USAID-funded **Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity in Karamoja Activity (EKISIL)** brought together ethnic groups from four districts of Karamoja, Uganda, and used a people to people approach to address legacies of conflict and trauma and support cooperation over natural resources. A reflective study found the trauma healing workshops were uniquely successful at providing space to process the past, discuss opportunities for reconciliation, and enable participants to focus on the future, essential steps to address the impacts of conflict. There were many examples of collaboration across ethnic lines after the program.[39] The activity emphasized the importance of pairing trauma healing with joint projects as an essential step towards building social cohesion. Trauma healing on its own would contribute to individual healing but not broader group cohesion.

COALESCE in the digital space

In 2020, through an existing youth development program in Myanmar, Mercy Corps hosted an essay competition on Facebook for youth to imagine a unified response to COVID-19. The team gained local attention for the initiative as a way to respond to hate speech and later facilitated a youth-led digital community center to generate dialogue about COVID-19 impacts. At the same time, Mercy Corps worked with local government officials to help them address the challenges they faced in garnering trust around COVID-19 response and enforcing restrictions, enlisting youth to both improve compliance with public health measures and build stronger linkages between state and society.

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39   Mercy Corps. EKISIL Final Reflection: Collaboration, Learning Adaptation, Oct 2019

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS FROM THE EVIDENCE:

Carefully consider "dosage" effects for social and cultural engagement activities. Evidence from a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a dialogue intervention in the CIPP program in Nigeria found that bringing communities together for contact and dialogue did not have an effect on any of the dimensions of social cohesion measured in that study. One explanation for this finding is that the dialogue activities in this program were "light dosage"— individuals only participated in one dialogue, and the program prioritized broad reach among community members above repeated engagements with community influencers. Based on other research on the effectiveness of dialogues and similar interventions, we recommend that dialogues involve the same individuals over time to provide people with sufficient opportunity to learn about each other, understand each other's perspectives, and begin to formulate a new group identity.

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

4. FACILITATE MEANINGFUL INCLUSION OF YOUTH, WOMEN, AND OTHER SYSTEMICALLY MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Across all social cohesion interventions, we ensure *deliberate inclusion and engagement of youth, women, and other marginalized groups to increase belonging and shared identity* within groups as well as across members of different identity groups. **This element contains a logic and set of activities in itself, described below, but it is also essential to incorporate the principles and elements listed below across all other social cohesion interventions**.

CORE DIMENSIONS ADDRESSED
Belonging
Identity

Inclusion and representation are core tenets of a cohesive society, both in terms of horizontal and vertical social cohesion. Exclusion and marginalization are some of the most common root causes of

What is Inclusion?

All team members, program participants, and partners are able to safely exercise their agency, access resources they need, and use and share their power in order to cope, adapt and thrive in their environments.

Agency: have the self-confidence and ability to exercise their voice respectfully, and participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them, their households, and their communities.

Access: reach the resources they need to cope, adapt and thrive without discrimination.

Power: influence and decide how resources are safely allocated on teams, in households, and in communities.

Photo: Mercy Corps, Pakistan/2023

Ensure inclusion of marginalized groups across all social cohesion activities

The CATALYSE process—which can guide the implementation of COALESCE approaches—must be inclusive of marginalized groups. This is often more easily said than done. Every context is different, so in the early stages, begin to gauge the level of willingness of the community to make space for this kind of inclusion. In the initial introductory meeting, aim to invite the whole community to participate. If this is not possible or unlikely to result in an inclusive process, one strategy is to convene marginalized and minority groups separately to develop relationships and identify common priorities away from the broader group and then find ways to integrate their perspectives.

The mobilization process is an opportunity to provide these groups:

1) a safe, constructive forum and joint purpose around which historically excluded groups can gather; and

2) a process for exploring commonalities and unifying priorities. Building this bonding and bridging social capital can increase marginalized groups' common sense of purpose within their community.

Also look for opportunities to expand marginalized groups' linking social capital within communities to ensure their voices are successfully integrated into broader social discourse. Consistent and persistent outreach to these groups throughout the entire CATALYSE process is critical for ensuring programming is meaningfully inclusive.

See _CATALYSE toolkit_ for more detail.

conflict Mercy Corps addresses in our programs. A foundational approach to Mercy Corps' work is the systematic inclusion of marginalized groups. Whether the primary focus of a program (e.g. increasing the inclusion and standing of women or youth in society, or peace and security decision making) or a principle mainstreamed and modeled throughout (e.g. ensuring community mobilization processes are representative of the diversity of a community), mechanisms that enable more voices to be heard are central to our peacebuilding and governance approaches.

Building and strengthening bonds _within_ a particular group can be an important precursor to social cohesion work _between_ communities or between community and governance actors. Mercy Corps convenes marginalized and minority groups (e.g. women and youth) to develop relationships and identify common priorities before engaging the broader community. _As you focus your outreach to traditionally marginalized groups based on sound behavior analysis—the groundwork for meaningful inclusion—it is equally important to engage with the circles of influence around these groups to ensure that leaders are receptive to and supportive of increased agency and action among marginalized people._ For example, this element requires working with formal and informal leaders to build knowledge and positively shift attitudes,

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

norms, and behaviors towards these groups and open up space for these groups to meaningfully and safely engage in available opportunities.

Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach to community mobilization provides a safe, constructive space for excluded groups to gather, both separately and with leaders, and a process for exploring commonalities and unifying priorities that can break down barriers to participation in community-level decision making structures. Building diverse skills and knowledge of marginalized groups including advocacy, civic action, effective communication and leadership can increase confidence and understanding of civic responsibilities and opportunities which can be critical motivating factors. For example, Mercy Corps provides opportunities for youth to actively engage in social issues and contribute to community improvement projects. Finally, creating strategic avenues for inclusion in society like community structures and platforms can facilitate diverse representation. Examples of these structures include special committees and quotas for representation. Often the benefits of inclusion will already be evident in that more diverse and representative groups are more effective and productive than homogenous groups.

FACILITATION QUESTIONS:

〉 Which groups are marginalized in this context? Which are centered?

〉 In this context, how does lack of inclusion of marginalized groups impact social cohesion positively or negatively? Which dimensions?

〉 How will the participation of marginalized groups strengthen social cohesion?

〉 Are the interventions sustainable? Is there potential to do harm?

〉 Is the process for facilitating increased participation of marginalized groups based on

BASIC THEORY OF CHANGE	PROGRAM EXAMPLES
IF marginalized people and groups gain increased skills in and access to meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making; **AND IF** leaders strengthen their attitudes and behaviors around inclusion of marginalized people and groups, while creating or strengthening mechanisms that allow for ongoing meaningful inclusion; **THEN** historically marginalized people and groups will increase their meaningful participation in decision-making and positive interactions, increasing their sense of belonging and shared identity within and across communities; **ULTIMATELY** creating more legitimate and durable systems for advancing peace and governance and other outcomes.	**PEACE, Niger: IF** marginalized groups are better integrated into communities through increased participation in social, economic, and governance activities, **THEN** they will experience less resentment **AND** fewer grievances **AND** will be less likely to participate in or support conflict for social or economic benefit. **Ethiopia Gender and Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Peacebuilding (GCAP): IF** peaceful reconciliation processes and services center gender equality and inclusion by local formal and informal institutions, both offline and online, **AND IF** government and conflict management groups increase their capacity to faciltiate survivor-centered support and referrals for GBV to survivors and trauma-affected women, men, girls, and boys, **THEN** regions will experience increased peace, security, and stability for people, particularly women and young women and men.

participatory and Do No Harm principles? Who do the facilitators represent, and what are participants' perceptions of them?

ILLUSTRATIVE OUTCOME INDICATORS:

The illustrative indicators below measure outputs and outcomes at different stages of the theory of change, and are meant to facilitate conversation about what is important to measure in a program using this element.

❯ Percentage of people who agree they are valued for contributing to secure and productive societies

❯ Percentage of people who believe they have a responsibility to their community, including people outside their specific identity groups

IMPLEMENTATION TIPS FROM THE EVIDENCE

❯ Address disparities in participation between women and men: Evidence from the PEACE Program baseline survey found that barriers to community engagement for women hinder some aspects of social cohesion and that social norms surrounding gender can generate different outcomes for social cohesion between men and women. Programs should seek to address gender disparities in participation and focus on elevating women's inclusion in decision-making processes in a conflict sensitive way to maximize social cohesion outcomes.[40]

COALESCE in practice

The European Commission-funded Youth Advancement for a Peaceful and Productive Tomorrow **(Peace-Pro)** worked in Jordan to reduce youth vulnerability to recruitment into violent groups by developing the capacity of communities to address youth's needs through knowledge, capabilities, relationships, and opportunities. The program worked with various actors throughout Jordanian society, including youth, parents and caregivers, community leaders, local authorities, and government representatives to establish community hubs, and develop the capacity of local communities to support at-risk youth. Peace-Pro facilitated the establishment of Community Action Hubs (CAHs) which created a safe and inclusive environment for youth and

ensured their psycho-social wellbeing. In addition, Community Support Committees for Youth (CSC) trained youth participants and supported their involvement in local community activities.

By the end of the program, 5315 youth were reached, of which 73% perceived an increase in their social capital.

Through trainings, youth were able to build positive relationships with the community and be more included in society. 80% of the youth surveyed felt that they were valued for contributing to a secure and productive society.

By strengthening social cohesion, Peace-Pro reduced the vulnerability of youth to radicalization and recruitment.

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40   Mercy Corps and USAID. (2021). Resilience Rapid Learning Brief: Harnessing Local Sources of Social Cohesion in Niger.

COALESCE in the digital space

The Gender Equality and Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Peacebuilding (GCAP) project implemented by Mercy Corps has conducted digital peacebuilding training with youth peace groups, in order to address the social media drivers of conflict. The GCAP team, together with our digital peacebuilding partner TIKVAH ETHIOPIA, provided a four-day Training of Trainers (ToT) on Gender-Sensitive Digital Peacebuilding across three regions in Ethiopia, including 50% female and 50% male youth.

The ToT aimed to increase the understanding of participants on digital peacebuilding; enhance participants' knowledge of and skill with digital peace framework tools to better address digital drivers of conflict, mitigate technology facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), and build peace and social cohesion through using social media; improve participant training facilitation skills; and prepare an action plan to further cascade the training to more youths at the community level.

After the ToT, all FGD participants (100%) noted that training enabled them to identify and report potential fake news, dis/misinformation, and hate speech on various social media platforms before sharing and liking and understand ways social media can be harnessed to build peace and community cohesion. The training also helped participants explore further the impact of fake news, dis/misinformation, and hate speech in aggravating drivers of conflict and instability in Ethiopia. In addition, FGD participants also stated that their training facilitation skills improved because of the ToT training.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Participatory approaches to implementation and measurement play an important role in effective social cohesion interventions by ensuring that interventions are tailored to a particular context. In addition, participatory approaches that are facilitated well can serve as a form of social cohesion intervention themselves by providing further opportunities for positive inter-group interaction in the course of program implementation and measurement. **Mercy Corps' signature approach to participatory, community driven development, CATALYSE: Communities Acting Together, forms the backbone of the above approaches to building social cohesion. The Quick-Start Guide and section on Learning and Measurement both address how to incorporate meaningful participatory approaches to implementation and learning**

CENTERING INCLUSION

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41   Mercy Corps and USAID. (2021). Resilience Rapid Learning Brief: Harnessing Local Sources of Social Cohesion in Niger.

KEY COALESCE APPLICATION:

Strengthening Dialogue and Inclusive Planning Between Communities and Governments

A common and important application "Facilitating Meaningful Inclusion of Youth, Women, and Other Systemically Marginalized Groups" involves bringing decision-makers together with a broad, inclusive base of community members. This is often an essential component of social cohesion programs because strengthening relationships between communities and governments builds vertical social cohesion. Mercy Corps works to build the capacity of local government to more meaningfully engage communities, platforms and processes (e.g. local development planning and conflict resolution mechanisms), build the capacity of citizens to more actively and strategically engage with government to get their voices heard and needs met, and create opportunities for government officials and community members to work together.

Responsive and accountable governance institutions that deliver services effectively and inclusively have been shown to reduce resentment and grievances over perceived exclusion. Mercy Corps strengthens the capacity of local government to engage communities in decision-making; for example, training officials in community engagement and participatory community planning processes, so that they can be more effective counterparts, understand the concerns of citizens and respond. In areas not impacted by conflict, these approaches might involve connecting community driven development processes with official bottom-up local development planning, making sure that communities, and diverse people within them—including systemically marginalized people—can participate and have a voice at all levels. These efforts strengthen social cohesion by increasing inclusivity and trust in government.

Mercy Corps also builds the capacity of citizens to more actively and strategically engage with civil society and governance actors. This involves strengthening civil society organizations to better represent their constituencies and develop networks that include a broader range of members and interests.

A core function of civil society is the role they play in establishing and strengthening networks across different communities and social cleavages whether geographic, ethnic, or sectoral, through mechanisms like facilitated forums and informal cross-visits that facilitate shared learning.

Mercy Corps also strengthens civil society's capacity to advocate for action on community level issues and needs of core concern to their constituencies with governance actors and institutions which enables them to aggregate demands across diverse communities. Strengthening local accountability mechanisms along with fostering this engagement helps increase transparent decision-making.

Photo: Mercy Corps / 2023

Promoting Sustainable Peace and Resiliency in Kayah (PROSPER) was a 44-month European Commission-funded project that increased trust, improved economic and social well-being, and built local capacity to promote peace and development among households, civil society, and government in 128 villages in Kayah State, Myanmar. Its theory of change was: If local decision-making structures are more inclusive, then trust between diverse stakeholders will grow, community needs will be better met, and confidence in local authorities will rise. Local government and ethnic non-state authorities were trained in community

engagement mechanisms, including facilitation, consultation, negotiation, and participatory planning to promote inclusive decision making and build trust between community and local governments. PROSPER strengthened the capacity of 235 government and ethnic armed organizations (EAO) representatives to engage with the community. By the end of the program, 93% of community members felt that their relationships with government representatives and EAO had improved, reflecting greater cohesion between communities and local governance structures and increased capacity to manage tensions.

Mercy Corps' decades of programming in strengthening community-government relationships has yielded important lessons

〉 It's not just the what, but the how, that matters. In programming in Lebanon, a final evaluation found that working to increase the inclusivity and responsiveness of municipal governments only played a minor role in improving inter-community perceptions, and that while programming with local government is important, it should not be the prime vehicle for building social cohesion. It is well documented that programming solely focused on increasing access to resources does not improve social cohesion. In Lebanon, Jordan, and Niger, changing perceptions of government legitimacy requires going beyond improving access to basic services. Programs need to address issues of inequity, transparency, and citizens' voice as it relates to service delivery and other government decisions.

〉 In program design, consider opportunities to build both horizontal and vertical cohesion. For example, violence prevention programs should go beyond inter-group strengthening efforts to include deliberate efforts to improve relationships between communities and government, and specifically between citizens and security actors. This integration is key because, when support for violence is related to mistrust of state authorities and institutions, simply improving inter-community cohesion will not be enough to influence these outcomes.

PART 3 COALESCE

Quick-Start Guide

This section serves as a reference for designing, implementing, and measuring social cohesion interventions.

1. DEFINE THE ULTIMATE GOAL

It is important to start with the question: **why do you want to build social cohesion?** In other words, what problem are you trying to solve? *Articulate the ultimate goal of a social cohesion intervention to identify the dimensions, approaches, and activities that are more likely to contribute to your program goal, regardless of the sector outcome.*

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

2. CONDUCT AN ASSESSMENT TO DETERMINE SOCIAL COHESION DYNAMICS

Once teams have articulated the ultimate goal of building social cohesion in a particular context, assessment of the local landscape of social cohesion dynamics is critical to identify gaps or bottlenecks that may hold back progress toward that goal and contribute to more effective interventions.[42] The 3ie Systematic Review found that programs that accurately identified local barriers to intergroup social cohesion tended to have larger and more positive effects and programs that fell short appear to have been misaligned either with the context or with the population.[43] Analysis approaches like **conflict analysis, political economy analysis**, and **gender and social inclusion analysis** can all offer useful insights for understanding local social cohesion dynamics.

PARTICIPATION IN ASSESSMENTS

Meaningful participation of diverse people is critical in this process to build understanding of what social cohesion means in this context, how it is contested and defined, and what it looks like on the ground. *Ensure national and local level stakeholders are involved from the start and are central in determining the definition and dimensions of social cohesion and program interventions.* The CATALYSE principles for participatory assessment can directly contribute to the success of an intervention and the extent to which people are able to contribute equally. Whatever the specific approach taken, a social cohesion assessment should address actors/stakeholders' interests; the relative effectiveness and perceptions of formal and informal institutions, relationships, interaction, and power dynamics within and across groups and between communities and governance actors; incentives stakeholders have that drive or detract from social cohesion; and future trends and scenarios.

CENTERING INCLUSION

When choosing assessment tools, teams should consider the following questions:

1) What gaps in social cohesion are most relevant in your context? Which gaps in social cohesion are holding back progress toward the ultimate goal you identified above?

2) What are the critical groups or stakeholders involved in these gaps?

3) Who or what sustains the gaps you've identified? Who benefits from the current system in relation to these gaps?

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42   3ie Systematic Review
43   Ibid

4) Who is trying to address the gaps you've identified? Who would benefit if the gaps were filled?

5) Which dimensions of social cohesion (trust, collective action norms, civic engagement, belonging, identity, attitudes towards out-groups) relate to the gaps you've identified?

CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOLS

A conflict analysis analyzes and prioritizes the dynamics of peace and conflict, focusing both on violent conflict and the broader sources of instability (and stability). Even if a country has not experienced violent conflict in the past, conflict analysis will highlight potential areas of concern and can help humanitarian and development programs begin to address destabilizing trends before they reach a stage of violent conflict. The purpose of a conflict analysis is to improve the effectiveness of programs by providing teams with a clear picture of how to prevent, manage and mitigate violent conflict. There are many conflict analysis tools that can be used alone or in combination to collect data and sort it into some kind of assessment framework and develop programming recommendations based on the information gathered. *See annex.* Teams focusing on building social cohesion to reach other sector goals, such as economic opportunity, may wish to pull out a light version of a conflict analysis that enables them to look at different groups and conflict dynamics in the economic, ecological, or political systems.

CONFLICT ANALYSIS RESOURCES

❭ Context, Conflict, and Do No Harm Analysis Worksheet

❭ Social Media and Conflict: Understanding Risks and Resilience

❭ CDA and Mercy Corps Conflict Sensitivity Training

3. DESIGN THE INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS SOCIAL COHESION DIMENSIONS

Once you have done a thorough analysis using a combination of tools and have a deeper understanding of social cohesion dynamics in context, return to the social cohesion dimensions. At this point, discuss with the core program team which dimensions are most relevant in context and which ones you want to work towards. There are many ways to facilitate this conversation, including posting all of the dimensions on flip charts around the room and using post-its to identify how the social cohesion-related dynamics map onto each dimension. However you decide to do this, it is a crucial step to take before choosing program interventions.
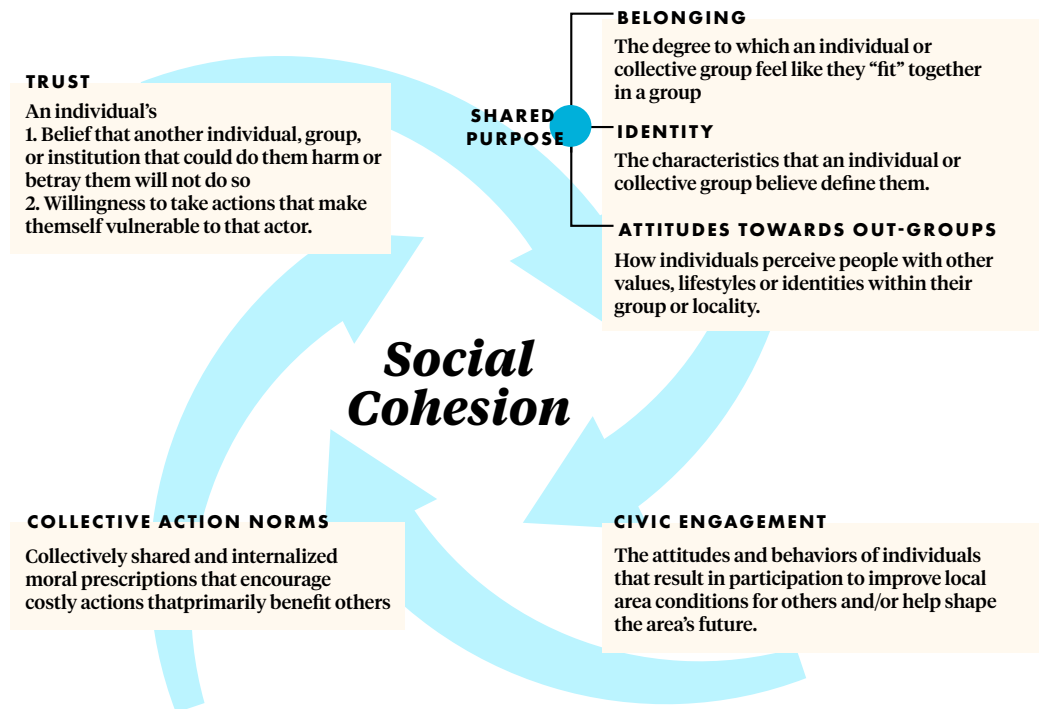
DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

As you prepare to design interventions to address the specific social cohesion dimensions agreed upon, the questions below may be helpful to consider:

❭ **What changes–structural, attitudinal, and behavioral–must come first to address the gaps you've identified?** Which must

DESIGN TIP

be undertaken later? Do certain stakeholders need to be brought on board immediately? Do some activities require trust-building first? Is a head-first approach (trying first to change knowledge or attitudes) or a feet-first approach (trying first to change behavior) more appropriate?[44]

TRUST
An individual's
1. Belief that another individual, group, or institution that could do them harm or betray them will not do so
2. Willingness to take actions that make themself vulnerable to that actor.

SHARED PURPOSE

BELONGING
The degree to which an individual or collective group feel like they "fit" together in a group

IDENTITY
The characteristics that an individual or collective group believe define them.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS OUT-GROUPS
How individuals perceive people with other values, lifestyles or identities within their group or locality.

Social Cohesion

COLLECTIVE ACTION NORMS
Collectively shared and internalized moral prescriptions that encourage costly actions thatprimarily benefit others

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
The attitudes and behaviors of individuals that result in participation to improve local area conditions for others and/or help shape the area's future.

〉 **In this context, what is your team or program well-positioned to address?**

〉 **What do you realistically have time to achieve?** It often takes substantial time to achieve measurable changes in social cohesion dimensions, but progress on intermediate outcomes can also be valuable.

〉 **How will your proposed intervention interact with the context, and how can you mitigate risks and leverage opportunities associated with this interaction?** A Do No Harm assessment is an important part of designing social cohesion interventions.

〉 **What is the role of social media in detracting from or building social cohesion?** It's important to understand the harms social media can cause, but also to consider ways to leverage the online space or address social cohesion online.

Building off the four elements and two applications listed under the COALESCE: Approaches section of the guide, **develop context-specific theories of change through which interventions are expected to strengthen social cohesion.** You may want to mix and match theories or incorporate two theories representing two different elements to achieve the right mix of social cohesion dimensions.

Consider opportunities to build both horizontal and vertical cohesion. For example, violence prevention programs should go beyond inter-group strengthening efforts to include deliberate efforts to improve relationships between communities and government, and specifically between citizens and security actors. This integration is key because, when support for violence is related to mistrust of state authorities and institutions, simply improving inter-community cohesion will not be enough to influence these outcomes.

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44   For more discussion of pathways of change in building intergroup social cohesion, see the 3ie Systematic Review.

Think through the logic of any anticipated spillover effects. If an intervention is expected to have spillover effects, think carefully through how this spillover might occur and include the logic in the program theory of change so it can be tested. For example, the ECPN impact evaluation found that outcomes related to trust and perceived security improved in the wider community but that community-level perceptions of dispute resolution did not improve—even though participants successfully resolved many disputes. These findings suggested additional research into the factors that facilitate ripple or spillover effects.

Be realistic about what is achievable with a given program design, timeframe, and resources. Social cohesion takes a long time to build, and the process is not always linear.[45] If a program is relatively short and/or the intervention is "lighter touch," it is realistic to aim to shift intermediate outcomes for direct program participants. These intermediate outcomes might be knowledge or skills supportive of social cohesion, or changes in attitudes or behaviors directly related to program activities.[46] For example, a research study evaluating the effects of a collaborative contact soccer league intervention in Iraq found that participants demonstrated more inclusive behaviors related directly to soccer, but that behaviors outside of that context did not change substantially.[47]

4. ADAPT CATALYSE FOR SOCIAL COHESION TO DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Mercy Corps has adapted and applied its community mobilization approach, CATALYSE, to work toward building social cohesion in multiple contexts. For general guidance and resources related to CATALYSE as an approach, please see the CATALYSE Guide and Toolkit.

IMPLEMENTATION TIP

THE CATALYSE PROCESS

Using CATALYSE, Mercy Corps guides communities through a participatory process of identifying and understanding community issues, developing solutions, and prioritizing what to work on through community-wide initiatives. It originates by bringing diverse community members, across different age, gender, and identity groups, into a common process. Communities discuss and assess their needs, and work toward building social cohesion in multiple contexts.

Adhering to the CATALYSE process helps community members change behaviors through its learning-by-doing, collaborative process that enables them to iterate and apply skills into the future. Resources for initiatives–whether for NRM, other collective action projects, or even to fund participatory events such as dialogues and cultural gatherings–are identified and sourced from the community, local government, and when possible Mercy Corps and/or the private sector. Community management structures, such as Community Development Committees (CDCs) or Community Action Groups (CAGs), are created and/or strengthened, drawing from existing community groups or bodies when possible. These structures carry out projects and

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45   Ibid.
46   Ibid.
47   Mousa, S. (2020). Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq. Science, 369, 866–870. https://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.abb3153

keep the community informed. Throughout the process, Mercy Corps serves as facilitator and mentor, supporting the community and helping catalyze action. Projects are developed, led and monitored by the community itself, often acting through CDCs or CAGs in consultation with the broader community. CATALYSE is an iterative process, and provides multiple opportunities for planning and implementation of projects. With each subsequent project cycle, the community takes increasing ownership of the process. The process is divided into the following steps which are detailed more in the CATALYSE guide:

Planning Steps:

〉 **Prepare to Mobilize:** Before going into communities, the preparation phase involves preparing as a team, gathering pre-information about communities, and making initial contact with communities.

〉 **Organize Together:** Hold introductory meetings with the community and establish relationships with groups across the community to prepare for the assessment phase.

〉 **Assess Needs Together:** Use joint assessment tools to collect information from a large cross-section of the community.

〉 **Prioritize Together:** Analyze collected data, build consensus on priority issues.

〉 **Plan for Action Together:** Develop proposed solutions and action plans, and determine how to mobilize resources from a variety of sources to ensure a successful project.

Implementation Steps:

〉 **Act Together:** Put the plan into action.

〉 **Monitor and Learn Together:** Determine if the CATALYSE process met its objectives and capture lessons learned.

〉 **Determine Next Steps Together:** Apply lessons learned and determine next steps in preparation for the next phase of the project or planning for an evaluation.

5. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT MEASUREMENT STRATEGY

A comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and learning strategy will incorporate measures that promote accountability to ensure that programs are genuinely affecting social cohesion outcomes in a systematic way. It will also identify gaps in the local context knowledge or global body of social cohesion work that the program may be able to address through learning. Learning questions may consider key issues raised in the design process, such as what spillover effects does the program anticipate? Or which dimensions of social cohesion are most

MEASUREMENT TIP

linked to the program's overall goal? Carefully and deliberately building the measurement strategy into the design phase will also ensure that the program is set up for learning and that it builds in regular process points for measurement toward accountability as well as learning and adaptation. The section below details specific steps and considerations for designing and implementing measurement and learning around social cohesion.

PART 4

Measurement and Learning around Social Cohesion

Measurement and learning should be baked into the process of social cohesion from conception, through design and implementation, and to evaluation.

MEASUREMENT GUIDANCE

Develop localized indicators throughout the expected pathway(s) of change to capture shifts in intermediate outcomes and build evidence about what works and does not work in these pathways of change. The high-level theories of change under each programming approach in this toolkit include sample indicators for different steps of the pathway to illustrate what might be helpful to measure for each type of intervention. These will need to be contextualized to reflect locally relevant relationships, interactions, and dimensions of social cohesion. For example, the Mercy Corps/World Bank measurement toolkit (see box) includes a consolidated set of core questions, but also includes a structured qualitative guide to help program teams adapt the questions and indicators to their context and intervention.[48] Participatory approaches can help to develop a framework of potential contextualized indicators, which can then be reviewed for consistency in measuring the underlying concepts.[49]

Use creative measurement strategies to capture social cohesion outcomes and multiple methods to triangulate the data collected. Measuring social cohesion includes measuring objective, or observable, elements like behaviors and institutions, as well as subjective elements like attitudes and norms.[50] Surveys, focus group discussions, or in-depth interviews can be helpful tools to collect data on attitudes and norms as well as self-reported behaviors—though direct questions about social cohesion outcomes carry the risk that people will try to answer in ways that are seen as socially desirable rather than reflecting their true attitudes. Observation of actual behavior, whether of everyday interaction or a scenario created by the researcher, is one way to triangulate self-reported data.

Combine qualitative and quantitative analysis to build understanding of what works to strengthen social cohesion, and how and why interventions affected outcomes in the ways they did. Qualitative analysis of program implementation context, processes, and decisions can highlight factors that might have contributed to the outcomes observed, and offer insight

Measuring Social Cohesion at Mercy Corps: The Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit

In 2020, Mercy Corps developed a toolkit to facilitate the measurement of social capital and social cohesion, particularly in the context of evaluating Community-Driven Development (CDD) programs in settings affected by fragility, conflict, migration and forced displacement.

The toolkit contains two core data collection tools:

1) a set of **15 survey questions** that measure the conceptually relevant dimensions of social capital and social cohesion (the social cohesion dimensions are highlighted in this Programming Guide and Toolkit), and

2) a **qualitative contextualization guide** that can be used to adapt the survey module to a particular evaluation context. It is designed to produce a module of survey questions for measuring social capital and social cohesion that can be integrated into a larger survey.

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48   Kim, J., Sheely, R., Schmidt, C. (2020). Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit for Community-Driven Development Operations. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps and The World Bank Group. http://dldocs.mercycorps.org/SocialCapitalSocialCohesionMeasurementToolkit.pdf

49   This is similar to an approach described in Pham, P. N., & Vinck, P. (2017). Indicators Framework for Peacebuilding, Education and Social Cohesion. UNICEF, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. https://inee.org/system/files/resources/Social_Cohesion_Assessmen_Framework_20170420_%28HHI%29.pdf

50   This framework of objective and subjective elements is described in UNDP (2020).

into how an intervention worked—or, if it did not work as expected, whether the breakdown was in the theory or implementation of the program. For example, Mercy Corps' MEL Guidance Note on final performance reviews suggests some useful questions related to process assessment:

〉 What planned activities were completed and which were not? If planned activities were not completed, why? If planned activities were dropped or replaced, why?

〉 Did activities in work plans follow the strategy? If the strategy changed, why? If the program made adaptations to the work plan based on emerging evidence, describe that evidence.

〉 Compare strategy and activities outlined in the proposal to the work plans: Is there concordance or discordance between the planned and executed strategy and activities? If there are differences between the two, why?

Qualitative analysis can also be useful in interpreting quantitative results. For instance, a small subset of survey respondents could be asked additional questions to elaborate on the answers they provided to the main survey. These are often open-ended, asking respondents why they gave the answer they did or if they can provide examples. Participatory analysis of quantitative data is another approach to generating this type of insight.

Where possible, incorporate a control/comparison group to support stronger evidence of changes attributable to program interventions. ECPN offers one example of the usefulness of these models for social cohesion interventions, as the control group approach enabled the

Emerging Methods

A common challenge in measuring attitudes related to social cohesion is social desirability bias—people's tendency to adjust their responses toward what they believe others will perceive favorably. It is not always obvious what direction this will bias the survey response data. For example, in some contexts it may be socially desirable to mistrust an out-group or to support the use of violent tactics to achieve political goals.

One strategy to try to get around this bias is to use **survey experiments** as an indirect measure of attitudes. In many survey experiments, some respondents receive a slightly different version of a survey question that is intended to assess their support for a policy or attitude by, for example, mentioning that it is endorsed by a group with a known political or identity affiliation. The ECPN and CIPP evaluations included survey experiments.

Another challenge is the accuracy of self-reported behavior. In addition to triangulating self-reported data with observation of behavior in everyday activities, researchers might invite people to participate in scenarios deliberately created to measure specific types of behavior—**behavioral games**.

The ECPN impact evaluation incorporated one type of behavioral game that assessed cooperative behavior by asking participants to decide what amount, if any, of a cash gift they would like to contribute to a development project for the community. As with other methods of data collection, it is important to ensure that the design of any behavioral games is carefully linked to the theory of change underpinning the program.

evaluation team to demonstrate that little change in intergroup contact in treated communities was a significant achievement relative to the substantial decrease in intergroup contact in control communities caused by deterioration in the conflict situation.

Put systems in place for ongoing monitoring and adaptive management that can respond to changing conflict dynamics, unintended negative outcomes, and new insight on pathways of change. Regularly update conflict and other context assessments to anticipate impacts on the program. During ECPN, for example, the passage of an anti-open grazing law increased tensions and caused major displacement and new outbreaks of violence that required significant program adaptation. Social cohesion interventions also rely on complex pathways of change and often push against existing power dynamics, so unintended negative outcomes or backlash are real possibilities. Plan for these possibilities in program design and watch for them during implementation. Examples of monitoring indicators to track engagement and signal potential behavior change down the line include: attendance levels, engagement over time in a program's activity (vs. attrition), and participant reports of applying lessons in regular, timely interactions.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DESIGN, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

Participatory approaches engage the people most affected by a program or research intervention in its design, implementation, and evaluation. This goes beyond consultation or extracting information, and implies that the people engaged are able to shape the course of the investigation. Participatory approaches contribute to social cohesion programming in at least two ways. First, Mercy Corps' own experience demonstrates that community-led approaches to assessment are much more effective than outsider-led approaches at gathering sensitive information about conflict dynamics because they leverage pre-existing trust. Second, participatory approaches offer opportunities to build social cohesion outcomes like inclusion and collective action norms.

Consider at each step of the process who should participate, when, and why. Many practitioners are familiar with participatory methods for data collection, but the design of an investigation, its management, analysis of the information gathered, and what is done with that analysis all offer opportunities to integrate participatory approaches.[51]

Activities that intend to be participatory can end up being tokenistic or otherwise harmful if they are not supported by sufficient understanding, time, resources, facilitation capacity, and ability to adapt. Effectively engaging a diverse group of people in a participatory process requires a well-grounded understanding of power and conflict dynamics as well as highly skilled facilitators—especially when the process involves questions about sensitive issues and/or is undertaken in a conflict-affected context. If the research is intended to inform a program, the program team must also have the flexibility and mechanisms to adapt the program in response to the information gathered.

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51   For more detailed questions and considerations, see Guijt, I. (2014). Participatory Approaches, Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.

Conclusion

COALESCE: A STARTING POINT?

Social cohesion is gaining strength across the peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development sectors as an essential resilience capacity and increasingly ubiquitous outcome to enable lasting impacts, regardless of sector. Similarly, evidence around what works to advance social cohesion is maturing, with increased focus on and attention to identifying the most effective, enduring ways to support communities and governance actors to strengthen their social cohesion. While the field of social cohesion has come a long way in recent years, it is actively evolving. This handbook should therefore serve as a launching pad to explore, hypothesize, layer, pilot, and research the best ways to advance social cohesion. Undoubtedly, as more evidence emerges, this handbook will change and reflect the community's increased understanding of social cohesion, how to strengthen it, and its role in advancing peace and lasting development.

Annexes
SOCIAL COHESION PROGRAM CASE STUDIES

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM ACTIONS THROUGH INCREASED SOCIAL COHESION EFFORTS (PEACE) PROGRAM IN NIGER

The Tillabéri region of Niger, hindered by poor service delivery, weak governance, and corruption, has suffered from increasing violent conflict driven by a combination of socio-economic crisis, climate shocks, shifting migration patterns, and the spillover of armed group activity from Mali, including violent extremist organizations (VEOs). As environmental stressors reduce the availability of natural resources VEOs compound the issue by further restricting pastoralists' access to land and water. These tensions expand communities' reliance on ethnic self-defense groups, which increases the prevalence of arms and the potential for violence in the region. There is deep concern that VEOs are capitalizing on the growing fear and hostility between different groups, along with feelings of marginalization, mistrust, and resentment against the government, to boost recruitment and expand their influence.

USAID's Preventing violent Extremism Actions through increased social Cohesion Efforts (PEACE) program seeks to respond to these concerns. Through the program, Mercy Corps and its local partner, Cercle Dev, are supporting communities in the development and implementation of joint community projects aimed at strengthening social cohesion along ethnic, citizen-government, and inter-generational lines. PEACE utilizes Mercy Corps' Communities Acting Together to Advance Linkages Yielding Social Engagement (CATALYSE) approach, working with communities to design, implement, and monitor projects intended to build social cohesion.

TREATMENT OF SOCIAL COHESION

PEACE examines which factors contribute to local-level variation in social cohesion in order to shape improved programming. The baseline survey measures six dimensions of social cohesion: trust, tolerance, inclusion, cooperation, interactions between groups, and collective action. The survey also collected data on a number of other contextual factors, including governance, participation of women and youth in conflict management and peacebuilding, and patterns of peace and security within the community in order to determine the impact they had on the dimensions of social cohesion.

THEORIES OF CHANGE

PEACE's overarching theory of change posits that if communities are fully involved in the assessments, design, and implementation of community projects, and the community projects work to bring diverse communities together to strengthen trust, improve social interactions, facilitate cooperation, and support tolerance, then community resilience to violent extremism will improve. By strengthening ties between social groups and between communities and leaders, program activities will make it more difficult for VEOs to manipulate inter-group and governance-

related grievances to recruit new members and garner support. The key assumption underlying this theory of change is that a lack of horizontal and vertical cohesion is a key driver of support for violence.

FINDINGS

Key findings from the PEACE baseline provide examples of both strong and weak dimensions of social cohesion and demonstrate the variations in these relationships across villages:

Photo: Mercy Corps / 2023

❭ Higher levels of collective action and collaboration with other groups do not necessarily increase intergroup trust — but positive interactions do.

❭ The relative strength of different components of social cohesion varies across villages.

❭ Some dimensions of social cohesion differ by gender, but not by age.

❭ There is no clear relationship between trust in leaders and social cohesion.

❭ Higher levels of access to public services are associated with increases in social inclusion.

❭ Conflict management mechanisms can help facilitate inclusion, but they may not contribute to other dimensions of social cohesion.

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES FOR PEACE IN NIGERIA (ECPN)

Photo: Mercy Corps / 2023

ECPN aimed to reduce violence in the Middle Belt states by peacefully preventing and resolving farmer-pastoralist conflicts. It used a people-to-people approach that: 1) strengthened the capacity of farmer and pastoralist leaders to resolve disputes in an inclusive, sustainable manner; 2) leveraged social and economic opportunities to build trust across lines of division; and 3) fostered engagement among farmer-pastoralist communities, local authorities and neighboring communities to prevent conflict.
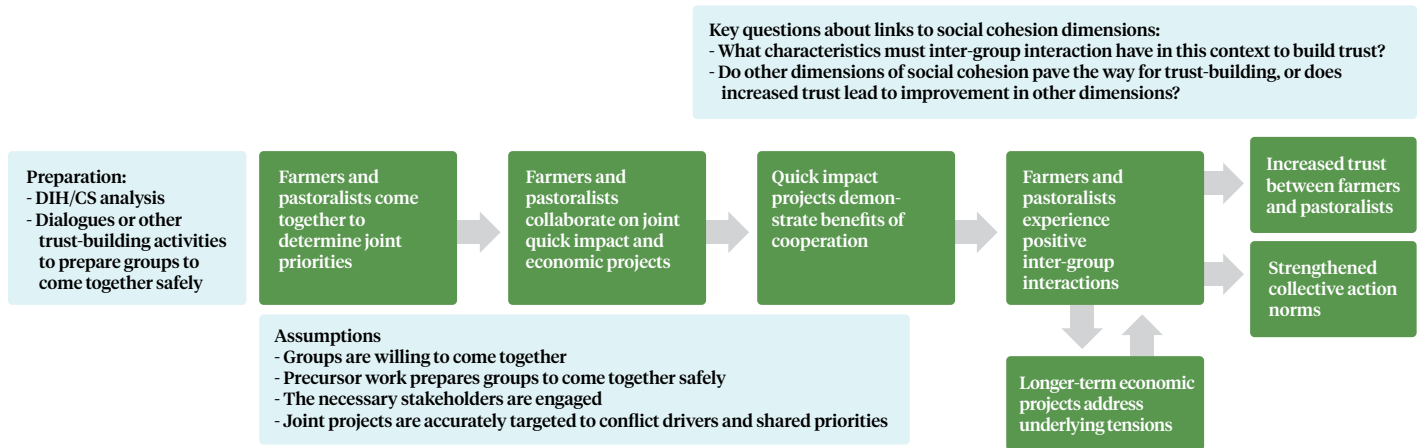
TREATMENT OF SOCIAL COHESION

ECPN was funded through the USAID People-to-People program, and was framed primarily not in terms of social cohesion but in terms of people-to-people peacebuilding with the goal of violence reduction.

However, Mercy Corps' evaluation of ECPN included measures of intergroup cohesion as a specific attitudinal outcome as well as other attitudes and behaviors relevant to social cohesion--including trust, interactions with out-group members, perceptions of dispute resolution, and contributions to public goods.

THEORIES OF CHANGE

1. If key farmer and pastoralist leaders are given the skills and support needed to peacefully and collaboratively manage disputes, then inter-communal violence will decrease.

2. If farmers and pastoralists collaborate on quick impact projects that demonstrate the benefits of cooperation and economic projects that address underlying tensions, then there will be an increase in positive interactions, thereby building trust and economic interdependence, while reducing violence.

3. If farmers and pastoralists work together with surrounding communities and local government authorities to monitor and prevent conflict, then these communities will be better able to absorb and adapt to shocks and stressors in their environment.

Key questions about links to social cohesion dimensions:
- What characteristics must inter-group interaction have in this context to build trust?
- Do other dimensions of social cohesion pave the way for trust-building, or does increased trust lead to improvement in other dimensions?

Preparation:
- DIH/CS analysis
- Dialogues or other trust-building activities to prepare groups to come together safely

Farmers and pastoralists come together to determine joint priorities

Farmers and pastoralists collaborate on joint quick impact and economic projects

Quick impact projects demonstrate benefits of cooperation

Farmers and pastoralists experience positive inter-group interactions

Increased trust between farmers and pastoralists

Strengthened collective action norms

Assumptions
- Groups are willing to come together
- Precursor work prepares groups to come together safely
- The necessary stakeholders are engaged
- Joint projects are accurately targeted to conflict drivers and shared priorities

Longer-term economic projects address underlying tensions

PARTICIPATORY CONFLICT ANALYSIS

ECPN carried out community-led conflict analysis, including resource and needs mapping, to prepare for joint quick impact projects and natural resource management initiatives addressing drivers of conflict. Conflict analyses informed activity design, and their participatory and site-specific approach built on lessons about local variation in conflict dynamics and effective collection of sensitive information.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

Mercy Corps conducted a rigorous impact evaluation of ECPN's first two years, combining a randomized controlled trial at the community level with pre- and post-program analysis of individual-level outcomes to separately consider effects on direct participants versus other members of ECPN communities. The evaluation used creative measurement strategies to triangulate data on difficult-to-measure outcomes, including attitudinal outcomes of trust and intergroup cohesion and behavioral outcomes such as intergroup interaction, perceived dispute resolution success, and contribution to public goods.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The impact evaluation found that intergroup contact and trust between farmer and pastoralist communities increased or deteriorated significantly less in ECPN sites than in control sites, even as regional tensions increased. Contact between farmers and pastoralists in the control sites decreased by approximately 15 percent, while contact in ECPN sites stayed the same. Interaction among ECPN participants was not solely in the context of formal ECPN activities. For example, ECPN participants reported more frequently hosting members of the other group in their own homes and going to the home of a member of the other group. Further, though trust between farmers and pastoralists in control sites decreased, trust within ECPN sites increased, leading to a difference of 13 percentage points in the overall level of trust between intervention and control sites. These effects were strongest among direct participants, but indirect participants in ECPN communities also experienced positive effects on intergroup trust.

TOOLS AND METHODS

SETTING GROUND RULES

Purpose: Setting ground rules during early meetings is a helpful exercise for demonstrating the key governance principles you hope to see throughout the CATALYSE process. Ground rules articulate a set of expected behaviors and are set by the participants of the meeting. They should be discussed and agreed upon at the outset of the meeting by everyone in attendance. Ground rules are a useful way to refocus a conversation if a meeting gets off track.

Using the Tool: At the beginning of any meeting, explain that the purpose of ground rules is to establish a set of principles that will guide interactions and keep the meeting space an open space for everyone. Some ground rules might include: Be on time for meetings, establish confidentiality, allow everyone the space to speak and be heard, practice active listening, etc. If you have a flip chart, post the ground rules somewhere everyone can see for the duration of the meeting. If it is an ongoing set of meetings that take place over time with the same set of participants, refer to the ground rules at the beginning of each meeting.

INTEREST-BASED NEGOTIATION AND MEDIATION

Photo: Mercy Corps / 2023

Overview: Mercy Corps uses an approach called Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation (IBNM) that is based on the principles of mutual gain and problem solving. This approach separates people from the problem, focuses on interests and not positions, creates options for mutual gain and defines objective criteria to determine fairness of agreements. Interest-Based Negotiation is based on a few principles: **1) Cooperation**: IBN uses a cooperative approach to negotiation and mediation where all parties come away having gained something through their interaction together; **2) Joint problem solving:** IBN enables negotiators to become joint problem solvers by offering opportunities to address conflicting interests in a proactive way to achieve the best outcomes for all parties; **3) Generating options:** IBN provides a way to collaboratively generate creative options to satisfy the needs of all parties; **4) IBN assumes mutual gains are possible,** that costs can be minimized or shared, that solutions that satisfy mutual interests are more durable, and that parties can help each other achieve better outcomes for everyone; 5) **Nothing left on the table:** IBN assumes that value is created through the negotiation process and therefore seeks to leave no mutual benefits on the table; and **6) Durability:** IBN assumes that solutions designed together by the parties will endure longer and be more sustainable.

The Seven Elements Framework serves as the backbone of the IBN approach:

1) Interests are basic needs, wants, and motivations. They are often hidden or unspoken and guide what we say and do. Experienced negotiators work to understand each other's interests.

2) Legitimacy is a critical component of effective communication, especially when conflict might be involved. Having standards of fairness and legitimacy will help parties to a conflict work together.

3) Relationships are a critical part of effectively managing conflict. Building and strengthening relationships through positive interactions, collaboration, exhibiting good faith, etc, are all ways to become more effective at negotiation and communication.

4) Alternatives provide an opportunity for negotiating parties to understand what their options are away from the table.

5) Options refer to any available choices parties might consider to satisfy their interests.

6) Commitments refer to an agreement or offer made by one or more party.

7) Communication approaches taken during a conflict can determine the outcome. IBN teaches a collaborative, question-forward approach to communication to increase trust, deepen relationships and form the basis for solving conflict peacefully.

TOOL: Seven Elements Negotiation Preparation Tool:

Related parties (counterparts, constituents, and others who may affect the situation. Consider drawing a diagram).

Important topics (subjects that need to be addressed)

Interests:

❭ List your and your organization's Interests, needs, concerns, hopes, and fears.

❭ List your counterpart's and their organization's Interests, needs, concerns, hopes, and fears

Options:

❭ List possible Options for each topic or major interest, looking specifically for solutions that could meet both parties' interests acceptably.

Legitimacy:

❭ Identify objective standards that could help you and your counterpart resolve conflicting Interests and choose among possible Options

Your alternatives:

❭ Identify your alternatives to a negotiated agreement (i.e. things you can do without their consent to meet your needs). Circle your BATNA (i.e. the Alternative that satisfies your Interests the best).

❭ How can you improve your Best Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement?

Their alternatives:

〉 Identify their alternatives to a negotiated agreement (i.e. things they can do without your consent to meet their needs). Circle their BATNA (i.e. the Alternative that satisfies their Interests the best).

〉 How can you test or, if appropriate, worsen their BATNA?

Commitment:

〉 What level of commitment do you want in your upcoming meeting(s)?

〉 Do you and they have the authority to deliver that level of commitment? If not, who does?

Relationship:

〉 Consider your current working relationship and your ideal working relationship. If there's a gap, diagnose why it exists.

〉 What can you do in your next meeting(s) to address that gap?

Communication:

〉 What questions can you ask to gather more information (for example, about their Interests) that would be helpful?

〉 What information do you plan to share with them and how?

Experiential Learning: Mercy Corps uses experiential learning approaches to build skills and knowledge in IBNM. Rather than telling participants what they should know, facilitators work with participants to generate their own learning, integrate their own experiences, and apply those to real world applications.

Facilitation draws heavily on participants' own experiences, uses cases drawn from real world examples tailored to their context, and prompts participants to reflect on their own experiences, examine their assumptions, and through self reflection, interaction, and practice, become better communicators, and negotiators. For more information, see the **Mercy Corps Interest-Based Negotiation Facilitation Guide** and the Annex for **Farmer Pastoralist Mediation Case**.

TOOL: IBN Participant Selection Criteria Careful selection of participants for IBN related interventions is a critical factor for the success of the project and to achieve social cohesion objectives as well. This tool is participant selection criteria used for the USAID-funded Community Initiatives to Promote Peace Program (CIPP).

PARTICIPANT SELECTION CRITERIA

Proposed Program Leaders for the Trainings Review the proposal for specific demographic requirements for the participants (e.g. specific number/percentage of women or youth, ethnic or religious groups, etc.). Make sure to find these requirements before engaging in the participant selection process.

Participant Characteristics Potential participants are leaders who:

1. Are seen as highly motivated to work on behalf of their community, whether a village, the private sector, local government, or non-state armed group.

2. Are members of local council, religious or tribal elder, civil society leader or other notable community leader. *It is also important to stress that, while the leadership in the councils is important, not every leader needs to be fully engaged to ensure the success of this program.*

3. Are recognized by their constituency as being influential and respected

4. Have a reputation as an active 'problem solver' or a demonstrated ability to 'get things done' under difficult conditions

5. Indicate expressed commitment to learning new skills to resolve disputes in a non-violent manner (for at least the majority of the participants) *

6. Demonstrate strong communication and analytical skills

* While willingness and commitment to conflict resolution will be visible in the majority of the participants, we can include at least a small handful of individuals from more hardline factions who may have greater influence over specific influential actors. We want to build a constituency of people who are committed to dispute resolution and these core participants will need to reach out to their different communities. Therefore, it is important to have leaders from diverse groups of people so the impact can potentially be greater.

Program Design: Mercy Corps deploys IBNM in a number of ways in its programs including different modalities like 1) multiple trainings with the same participants over time with opportunities to apply skills and knowledge to real world challenges, 2) Training of Trainers programs to broaden the base of available experts and give training participants new understanding of the content, 3) Peer learning that can deepen relationships between participants and gives new opportunities for interaction, 4) Refresher trainings for participants to come back and learn targeted content that could be newly relevant to their work, and 5) Mentoring that allows for relationships to develop between participants who are newer to the methodology and people with more experience and provides opportunities for one on one feedback in real time.

TOOL: Mediation Mentoring Plan and Guidance

This mediation mentoring plan is intended as a guidance document for the program team to support community-trained mediators. Through a locally-based approach, this plan aims to support existing local dispute resolution mechanisms and provide an alternative for communities from taking punitive action through the use of violence by bringing conflicting parties together across ethno-religious lines to resolve politically-motivated and resource based disputes. This plan is supposed to provide an alternative and **NOT** to serve as a substitute to existing traditional and legal community conflict resolution mechanisms.

Community leaders were trained in mediation and provide free mediation services to their communities and will be supported in supplementary refresher trainings on concepts and approaches. In order to get the required community buy-in, community members will be assisted in understanding the mediation services available and will be continually sensitized on how to access these services through public gatherings and various stakeholder meetings. Through

increased sensitization and the repetitive use of these services, it is expected that traditional and local government institutions along with the constitutional justice system will come to support and appreciate the available services and acknowledge its support towards ongoing dispute resolution efforts within the respective communities.

Beyond the mediation trainings, the program team will provide technical support and guidance as coaches and mentors with the trained community mediators who live within, or have very strong and credible community ties, and have the ability to quickly win trust and the confidence of the people within the communities.

How it works: Community mediation is confidential. Nothing discussed between the parties and the mediators can be shared at another forum or with a third party. The essence of community mediation is to help restore and improve community relations. Community mediation will respect the local principles and cultural norms and values of the respective communities.

〉 As part of the mentoring process, it is recommended that the trained community mediators will also be trained on basic principles of human rights and how it applies in a mediation process. The program team will work to identify a consultant or train in-house to complement the local leaders' capacity on legal and human rights matters/issues that it envisions will likely crop-up within the communities where we work.

〉 Trained mediators will be paired into small cohorts of "3" (i.e. farmers/pastoralists, leaders/ youth depending on the conflict dynamics and population distribution of the groups) to encourage them to closely work together, thereby building closer linkages within the communities that will feed into the larger networks along the conflict systems.

– Paired mediators will be encouraged and supported to keep regular interaction within their small group thereby, sharing timely information that can easily avert any tension or potential violence within the communities. *(The program team will set up a quarterly schedule to meet personally with each cohort, to check in on their progress and challenges)*

– Partner organizations will be required to give monthly updates on individual cohorts. This level of feedback will help provide necessary support where it is needed.

〉 Through settlements with agreed-upon terms set by the disputants, the mediators will encourage the disputants to write down the settlement and have it signed by the parties concerned (this is expected to be a legally binding document). A copy of the settlement will be handed over to each of the parties involved, the mediator(s), and local partner staff for filing purposes and possible future reference in case of default to the agreement.

〉 Through the formal introduction of the community mediators to local, traditional and security authorities, the community mediators can tap into this relationship to formally request that cases be referred to them to handle if it is within their capacity to do so. They can also refer cases brought to them by community members to relevant authorities where they do not have the requisite skills to handle such a case. CIPP staff will work with the community mediators for advice on cases that fall within this category.

❭ Through personalized visits and interaction with the community mediators, cases will be looked into closely on whether mediation is appropriate in any given scenario and share with the mediator(s) alternative dispute mechanisms where necessary and discuss through on considerations for referrals using the various channels available.

❭ For cultural and religious considerations, **women-only** community mediator groups will be encouraged that will also connect to the larger mixed networks. With these considerations, women will be able to approach issues that respect and understand their concerns and will help to resolve disputes in a way that is non-discriminatory and is mutually accepted by the communities.

❭ Experience shows that opening up opportunities to integrate women in peacebuilding can help build vital bridges toward workable solutions, breaking deadlocks that are often experienced in male-dominated disputes. CIPP will use its available resources and apply a sensitive approach to these opportunities, by working closely with its female staff and partners to provide support for this specific group.

❭ Program staff will work with local authorities to identify/provide a neutral space where larger mediation processes can take place in situations where movement and access to locations are restricted. In the interim, on a case-by-case basis MCN will consider providing some higher-level support to communities to carry out these sessions in a neutral and safe space both conflicting parties deem fit. MCN will however still encourage the parties to identify these safe spaces within their communities.

❭ All mediators as a collective group will be expected to meet with CIPP quarterly to discuss challenges and lessons learned to improve the process. During these meetings, community mediators will be expected to conduct a self-assessment of their performance and identify areas of improvement. Components of these self-assessment meetings will include; how they were able to disagree without falling out with the parties; how they were able to reach a win-win solution to the dispute; how they creatively got the parties to collaborate and cooperate and work towards shared goals and how they were able to use their indirect influence to build consensus between the parties etc.

TOOL: CONFLICT ANALYSIS FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Conflict Profile

a) What is the political, economic and socio-cultural context? (Geography, population demographics, recent history, political and economic structure, social composition, environment, geo-strategic position)

b) What are the emergent political, economic, ecological and social issues? (Elections, disruption of social networks, mistrust, return of refugees/IDPs, presence of armed forces)

c) Is there a history of conflict? (Critical events, mediation efforts, external intervention)

Conflict Causes

a) What are the structural causes of conflict? (Lack of equal economic and social opportunities, inequitable access to natural resources, poor governance.)

b) What issues can be considered as proximate causes of conflict? (Uncontrolled security sector, light weapons proliferation, human rights abuses.)

c) What triggers can contribute to the outbreak/further escalation of conflict? (Elections, arrest/assassinations of key leaders or political figures, unemployment, increased price of basic commodities.)

d) What factors can contribute to conflict management? (Communication channels between opposing parties, civil society commitment.)

Actors

a) Who are the main actors? (Police, local leaders and armed groups, private sector/business –donor agencies, religious or political networks, civil society, political parties, neighboring areas, refugees/IDPs.)

b) What are their main interests, goals, positions, capacities and relationships? (Religious values, political ideologies, interest in political participation, economic resources.)

c) What actors can be identifies as spoilers? Why? (Groups benefiting from war economy – combatants, smugglers.)

Conflict Dynamics

a) What are the current conflict trends? (Escalation or de-escalation, changes in important framework conditions.)

b) What are the windows of opportunity? Are there any positive developments? What factors support them? How can they be strengthened?

Other Conflict Analysis Resources

TOOL/RESOURCE	SOURCE	PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION
Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation Manual (See Annex)	Mercy Corps	Mercy Corps uses an approach called Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation (IBNM) that is based on the principles of mutual gain and problem solving. This approach separates people from the problem, focuses on interests and not positions, creates options for mutual gain and defines objective criteria to determine fairness of agreements.
Baseline/ midline/ endline surveys	ECPN	The impact evaluation found that intergroup contact and trust between farmer and pastoralist communities increased or deteriorated significantly less in ECPN sites than in control sites, even as regional tensions increased. Contact between farmers and pastoralists in the control sites decreased by approximately 15 percent, while contact in ECPN sites stayed the same. Interaction among ECPN participants was not solely in the context of formal ECPN activities. For example, ECPN participants reported more frequently hosting members of the other group in their own homes and going to the home of a member of the other group. Further, though trust between farmers and pastoralists in control sites decreased, trust within ECPN sites increased, leading to a difference of 13 percentage points in the overall level of trust between intervention and control sites. These effects were strongest among direct participants, but indirect participants in ECPN communities also experienced positive effects on intergroup trust.
CATALYSE facilitators' guide	Mercy Corps	A guide for facilitation of CATALYSE, Mercy Corps' signature community mobilization approach, to support staff and partners in techniques for engaging with community leaders and members, managing group dynamics and deliberation, supporting constructive dialogue to build consensus and cohesive community vision and plans. https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/catalyse-communities-acting-together
Setting Ground Rules	Mercy Corps	Setting ground rules during early meetings is a helpful exercise for demonstrating the key governance principles you hope to see throughout the CATALYSE process. Ground rules articulate a set of expected behaviors and are set by the participants of meetings. See the Annex for more information.

TOOL/RESOURCE	SOURCE	PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION
CATALYSE: A Governance in Action Guide	Mercy Corps	CATALYSE is Mercy Corps' approach to mobilizing communities, developed and honed through years of research and practical experience that show that the most effective community mobilization efforts engage with the attitudes, norms, and practices of both individuals and groups. Our evidence-based and proven methodology promotes community members' ownership of decision-making and iteratively builds their knowledge and skills to carry out those decisions. This approach incorporates tools, principles, and practices that can be adapted to any context or program. https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/catalyse-communities-acting-together
Social Capital and Social Cohesion Measurement Toolkit	Mercy Corps & World Bank	The purpose of this toolkit is to facilitate the measurement of social capital and social cohesion, particularly in the context of evaluating Community-Driven Development (CDD) programs in settings affected by fragility, conflict, migration and forced displacement. The toolkit contains two core data collection tools: 1) a set of 15 survey questions that measure the conceptually relevant dimensions of social capital and social cohesion, and 2) a qualitative contextualization guide that can be used to adapt the survey module to a particular evaluation context. The toolkit is designed to measure the multiple underlying dimensions of each concept while also being easy to use by evaluators and researchers.
Community Behavior Monitoring Tools	Mercy Corps & External Resources	The purpose of these tools is to create and collate best practice materials that allow for ongoing outcome and process measurement of Social and Behavior Change activities, in addition to or in complement with MEL processes. This can include proposed indicators to be adapted based on context and checklist(s) for consistency. Tools will be easy to adapt and implement with limited resourcing and will focus on community preferences and interpretations of goal behaviors using mixed method tools.
Methodological Brief on Participatory Approaches in Impact Evaluations	UNICEF	Using participatory approaches in impact evaluation means involving stakeholders, particularly the participants in a program or those affected by a given policy, in specific aspects of the evaluation process. The term covers a wide range of different types of participation and stakeholders can be involved at any stage of the impact evaluation process, including: its design, data collection, analysis, reporting and managing the study. https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/750-participatory-approaches-methodological-briefs-impact-evaluation-no-5.html

TOOL/RESOURCE	SOURCE	PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION
Participatory Learning and Action Brief	INTRAC	Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is a type of qualitative research. It is used to gain an in-depth understanding of a community or situation, and is always conducted with the full and active participation of community members. PLA is applied through a range of participatory tools and approaches. It is also a philosophy that emphasises reversals in power relations between communities and outsiders. https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Participatory-learning-and-action.pdf
Overview of Participatory Action Research and Evaluation	Organizing Engagement	A community-driven approach to research, evaluation, and social change that intentionally includes the people who are most affected by an inquiry in the design and execution of the process. https://organizingengagement.org/models/participatory-action-research-and-evaluation/
Participatory Impact Assessment: A Design Guide	Feinstein International Center	The Feinstein International Center has been developing and adapting participatory approaches to measure the impact of livelihoods based interventions since the early nineties. Originally released in 2009, this updated version of our PIA guide takes account of the continuing need to include local people in defining and measuring impact, while also using a systematic approach to gathering evidence. The guide has been expanded to cover both humanitarian and development projects, and to take account of the growing interest in "participatory numbers." https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/participatory-impact-assessment-a-design-guide/
Formalizing Behavior Change at Mercy Corps: Guidance Note	Mercy Corps	Overview of how Behavior Change (BC) principles can be applied across Mercy Corps' programming and operations. Lays the foundation for effective program design and outlines core principles and opportunities for behaviorally informed solutions in complex settings. https://library.mercycorps.org/record/41081?ln=en
Scored Relationship Mapping	Mercy Corps	The purpose of Scored Relationship Mapping is to understand how relationships affect tensions within the community. These relationship mapping tools are used to show the various connections between actors and group and how to respond in delivering a program.

TOOL/RESOURCE	SOURCE	PURPOSE/DESCRIPTION
Power Analysis: A Practical Guide	SIDA	This guide offers practical advice and resources for those wanting to bring an understanding of power into development cooperation, whether in the stages of analysing context, developing strategy, designing a programme, selecting partners or delivering results. The guide presents an approach to power analysis that can be used to understand how power relations may reinforce conditions of poverty and marginalisation, and to develop strategies for responding and mobilising alternative forms of power that can address inequalities. https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/power-analysis-a-practical-guide.pdf
Gender Equality & Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis Steps	Mercy Corps	A quick reference sheet for 6 easy steps to conducting a gender and social inclusion (GESI) analysis.
Remote Gender Analysis Guidelines	Mercy Corps	This document constitutes technical guidance for conducting a gender analysis remotely, such as was required in the context of COVID-19. These guidelines are based on international development gender analysis guidance, and can be adapted to particular program requirements.
Community-led resource & conflict mapping and needs assessment / Participatory needs assessment and conflict analysis	ECPN Jordan	Communities take the lead in analyzing the linkages between resources and conflict and identify economic opportunities and gaps in services that they can collaboratively address with conflicting groups
Building Social Cohesion: A Short Guide for Social Cohesion Practitioners in the Sahel	PEACE	This guide is made for helping social cohesion practitioners design projects with communities. The first part is focused on the strategy and steps for the project development proposal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The second part highlights different approaches to designing projects to build social cohesion.

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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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