Photo Credit: L. Murphy / Somalia / Mercy Corps 2013

ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE-CONFLICT NEXUS:

Evidence, Insights, and Future Directions

DECEMBER 2021

While the relationship between climate and conflict is nuanced and context-specific, there is increasing evidence of climate change amplifying and compounding existing sources of economic, social and political risks that drive violence.[1] These challenges are most pronounced in fragile states already grappling with weak governance, high rates of poverty and income equality, as well as current or historical violent conflict.[2] The intensification of climate change likely, may further escalate conflict risks, exacerbating threats to peace and stability. Furthermore, many of the people facing protracted crises are also some of those that are predicted to experience the greatest effects from climate change.

For over a decade, Mercy Corps has been working in places like Colombia, Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, Myanmar and Afghanistan, building resilience to climate change, conflict and other risk factors, to help communities achieve their long-term development goals. Our teams around the world from Haiti to Iraq, have seen first-hand the growth in the number and duration of conflict-driven crises in places that are also experiencing the greatest effects of climate change. In turn, we have steadily increased our focus on the nexus of climate change and conflict, conducting research and implementing programs to address this growing source of insecurity in fragile and conflict-affected states.

1   Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change and Conflict: Lessons from Emerging Practise. Edinburgh, UK: Mercy Corps
      https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/mercy-corpss-study-interventions-addressing-climate-conflict-dynamics
2   Mach, K.J., Kraan, C.M., Adger, W.N. et al. (2019). Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict. Nature 571, p.194.

MERCY CORPS

Written from the perspective of an agency with active programs addressing climate change, conflict and their interaction around the world, this paper aims to share our learning and make evidence-based recommendations on investments we see as necessary for driving this work forward, and how Mercy Corps is contributing to these focal areas. The following insights draw heavily from Mercy Corps' experience and lessons learned from delivering programs in multi-risk environments. We share details on current efforts to advance the evidence base and develop new strategies to understand and address the increasing risks emerging from the intersection of climate change and conflict.

Climate Change & Fragile States

Nowhere are the challenges of climate change and conflict more evident than in the world's most fragile states.[3] Research finds that in states with large populations, political exclusion and low levels of human development, nearly a third of conflicts from 1980-2016 were preceded by climate-related disasters.[4] In these contexts, climate variability tends to compound the deep-seated—and often interconnected—factors driving fragility: low economic development, weak political institutions, a history of violent conflict.[5] Widespread inequality and a lack of social safety nets further increases the vulnerability of marginalized groups, who are both the most likely to suffer from climate-affected risks and the least likely to have the resources to adapt.[6] Climate stress can also lay bare the weakness of the state, which may have limited capacity to mitigate environmental impacts on livelihoods or negotiate tensions over natural resource access.[7] As a result, the intensification of climate change will further compound conflict risks in fragile states, threatening livelihoods[8] and driving migration.[9] These risks are unlikely to decelerate. By 2030, 2.2 billion people will live in fragile states, which will represent 26% of the total world population.[10]

By 2030, **2.2 billion people** will live in fragile states,
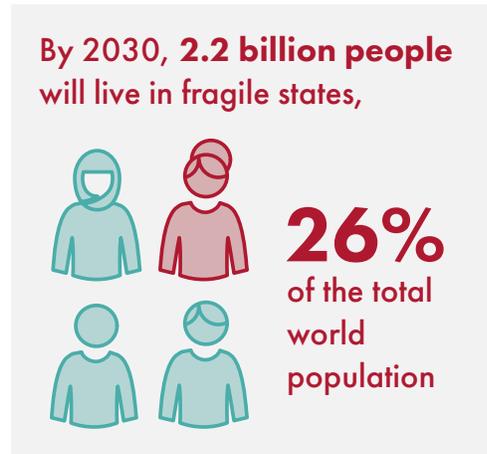
26% of the total world population

Figure 1

Climate change is broadly understood as an indirect driver of conflict, a threat or risk multiplier that amplifies existing sources of economic, social, and political risk.[11] In other words, climate change influences conflict dynamics via a complex interplay of intermediary variables.

Finally, the relationship between climate and conflict must be understood as a vicious cycle. As illustrated in Figure 2, on the one hand, the effects of climate change create profound shocks and stresses that can exacerbate conflict risks. For example, the inability of a struggling government to address the damages and inequities resulting from severe and frequent extreme weather, can exacerbate already fraught state-societal relationships. On the other hand, in contexts experiencing conflict and insecurity, fragility can undermine the

3   Mach, K.J., Kraan, C.M., Adger, W.N. et al. (2019). Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict. Nature 571, p.194.
4   Ide, T., et al. (2020). Multi-method evidence for when and how climate-related disasters contribute to armed conflict risk. Global Environmental Change, 62, 102063.
5   Peters, K., Mayhew, L., Borodyna, O., Measures, H., Petrova, K., Nicoson, C., Nordqvist, P. and Peters, L.E.R. (2020) Climate change, conflict and security scan: December 2018–March 2019. London: Overseas Development Institute
6   Sovacool et al. (2017). New frontiers and conceptual frameworks for energy justice, Energy Policy, 105, (C), 677-691.
7   Marchetta, Francesca.(2013). Migration and Nonfarm Activities as Income Diversification Strategies: The Case of Northern Ghana. Canadian Journal of Development Studies / 34(1):1–21. doi: 10.1080/02255189.2013.755916; Heslin, Alison. 2020. "Riots and Resources: How Food Access Affects Collective Violence:" Journal of Peace Research. doi: 10.1177/0022343319898227.
8   Paavola 2008; Connolly-Boutin & Smit 2016; Panthi et al. 2016; Shah et al. 2020; cited in Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change Research Agenda. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps.
9   Barrios et al. 2006, 2010; Backhaus et al. 2015; Henderson et al. 2017; Delazeri et al. 2018; cited in Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change Research Agenda. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps.
10   OECD (2020), States of Fragility 2020, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/ba7c22e7-en.
11   Ghani, T. and Robert Malley (2020). "Climate change doesn't have to stoke conflict." Foreign Affairs.

ability of communities and states to adapt in the face of climate change. For example, while climate-smart agricultural practices are now being prioritized in support of smallholder farmers, such techniques often require multiple years to achieve desired outcomes. These longer-term investments have proven difficult in contexts where access to land resources is threatened due to conflict risks, and/or governments are unable or unwilling to support land tenure security.
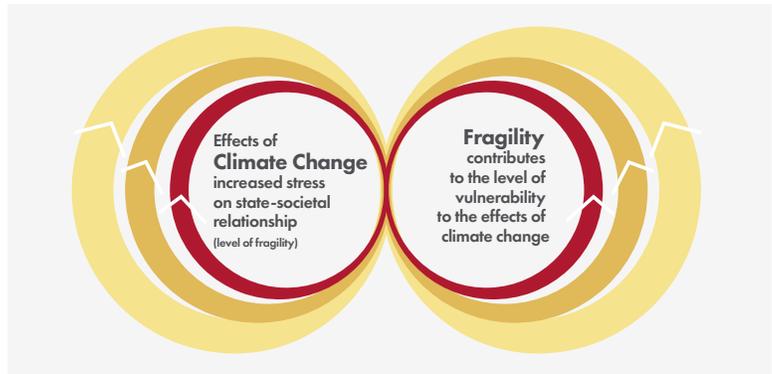

Figure 2: A vicious cycle- the relationship between climate change and fragility

Implications for Development Investments

In contexts of fragility, it is no longer sufficient to address climate change and conflict separately, as if they are somehow disconnected global challenges. Addressing them together presents a unique opportunity to interrupt the negative cycle, and safeguard climate adaptation and peace outcomes against future risk. Addressed together, the promotion of climate adaptation and the reduction of fragility drivers may enable better use of resources and create a positive feedback loop of climate action that supports peace. However, there are a number of barriers to overcome in order to realize the integration of these two sectors at scale.
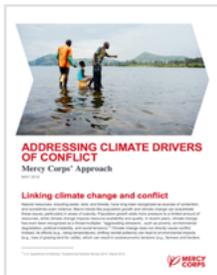

Figure 3: In 2019 Mercy Corps produced a climate-conflict approach, which reflected our deep experience to-date.

As Mercy Corps has made efforts to develop our own climate-conflict approaches,[12] we have identified three priorities to guide us, and which we believe should be prioritized by the international development community.

The following sections will unpack Mercy Corps efforts to: (a) formulate an analytical framework and assessment methodology to inform program design; (b) develop and implement integrated, multi-sector approaches that address the nexus of climate and conflict challenges; and (c) grow the evidence base for "what works."

PRIORITY ONE

Analytical Frameworks and Assessment Methodologies

Climate-conflict interactions are highly context specific - therefore commonly used risk analysis processes aren't very effective. For example, a climate stress, such as a decrease in rainfall, can have opposite effects in different places or times. A drought may cause forced migration to areas with available resources, in one case, leading to competition and tensions, while in another the drought may be so severe it erases the financial resources necessary to be able to move. In other words, even if a relationship exists between climate change and conflict, it does not manifest in a simple, linear way and is heavily influenced by multiple other factors. As a result, the mechanisms linking climate change and conflict risks must be analyzed in the specific contexts in which shocks and vulnerabilities play out, while also accounting for the broader socio-economic and political context to avoid reinforcing or creating new tensions. Another conceptual challenge in designing programs are the spatial and temporal patterns of climate-driven conflict. That is, that climate factors often lead to conflict impacts at a different time and place than when and where climate impacts are felt.[13]

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12 Mercy Corps (2019). Addressing the Climate Drivers of Conflict: Mercy Corps' Approach. Washington, D.C.: Mercy Corps. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MercyCorps_Climate_Conflict_Approach.pdf

13 Daniel Abrahams, "Conflict in abundance and peacebuilding in scarcity: Challenges and opportunities in addressing climate change and conflict," World Development 113, (2020): https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X20301248?via%3Dihub

This complexity necessitates a set of appropriate and robust analytical tools tailored to the needs of civil society, implementing organizations, donors, and policymakers. Ideally, such tools should provide a process for integrating both actual and projected analysis of climate and conflict risks. However, several studies, including our own, have indicated a gap in the necessary guidance to support such processes.[14]
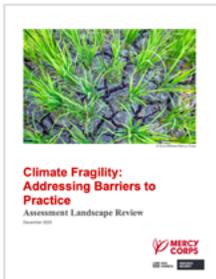

Figure 4: Mercy Corps' landscape assessment of climate-conflict tools for implementing agencies.

Seeking to gain additional insights into this potential challenge, Mercy Corps conducted a landscape review of climate-conflict assessment methodologies. The review encompassed more than 20 tools, scoring each according to a set of six variables[15] identified through programming best practice and expert consultation. Our research found that there are an abundance of high level global, regional and national efforts which aim to better understand climate security "hot spots" or broad threats.

While these efforts do provide a useful starting point for broad program design (such as geographic focus), they fail to provide the level of detail required by implementing agencies tasked with designing program activities in collaboration with communities. These actors need a more fundamental and localized understanding of the complexity of drivers contributing to heightened climate conflict risks in order to identify actionable entry points. Furthermore, while many more focused research efforts aimed at unpacking climate-conflict risks present more actionable information, their methodologies do not fit easily into contemporary program development timeframes. The time investment, financial resources, and at times reliance on deeply technical studies would all be barriers, for example, to an organization responding to a request for proposal in under 2 months, or charged with refining its approach during a 2-3 month program inception phase.

In the absence of tailored approaches, implementing organizations have sought to adapt existing tools. Most available assessment tools appear to be specific to either the climate or conflict sectors. A climate vulnerability assessment may include the integration of conflict sensitivity questions, just as a conflict assessment may build in climate questions. These adaptations are, for the most part, best categorized as "do-no-harm" additions to existing methodologies, rather than examples of robust, cross-cutting analytical integration.

Mercy Corps is supporting the evolution of fit-for-purpose tools to better help policy makers and implementers address interconnected climate and conflict risks. Our work in this space started in 2015 with the development of our first Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS). This methodology was developed to help practitioners use resilience thinking (considering a range of social, environmental and economic shocks and stresses) to prevent instability from derailing communities' progress toward humanitarian and development objectives. In undertaking these assessments around the world, we continually analyzed the interaction of climate shocks and stresses (like droughts, rising temperatures) and conflict dynamics (such as cattle raiding, natural resource-based conflict and government or inter-communal grievances). Through this work, we developed programming which began to build the resilience capacities of communities to manage these challenges. However, as we surveyed the breadth of our resilience programming, we recognized the need for our analytical processes to develop a deeper understanding of climate-conflict dynamics specifically.

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14   Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change and Conflict: Lessons from Emerging Practise. Edinburgh, UK: Mercy Corps. https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/mercy-corpss-study-interventions-addressing-climate-conflict-dynamics

15   https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/climate-fragility-addressing-barriers-practice Tools were assessed according to the following variables: (i) user friendly (i.e., simple, cost-efficient, offering a clear roadmap for how information will be collected and analyzed); (ii) examined interconnected climate and conflict systems and were sector neutral; (iii) provide tangible entry points to target interventions, in part through the development of measurable theories of change; (iv) incorporate climate and environmental change information; (v) include "expert agreed" variables deemed highly relevant to conflict risk (i.e., low socioeconomic development, low state capacity, intergroup inequality, and a recent history of violent conflict); and (vi) considerations of gender.
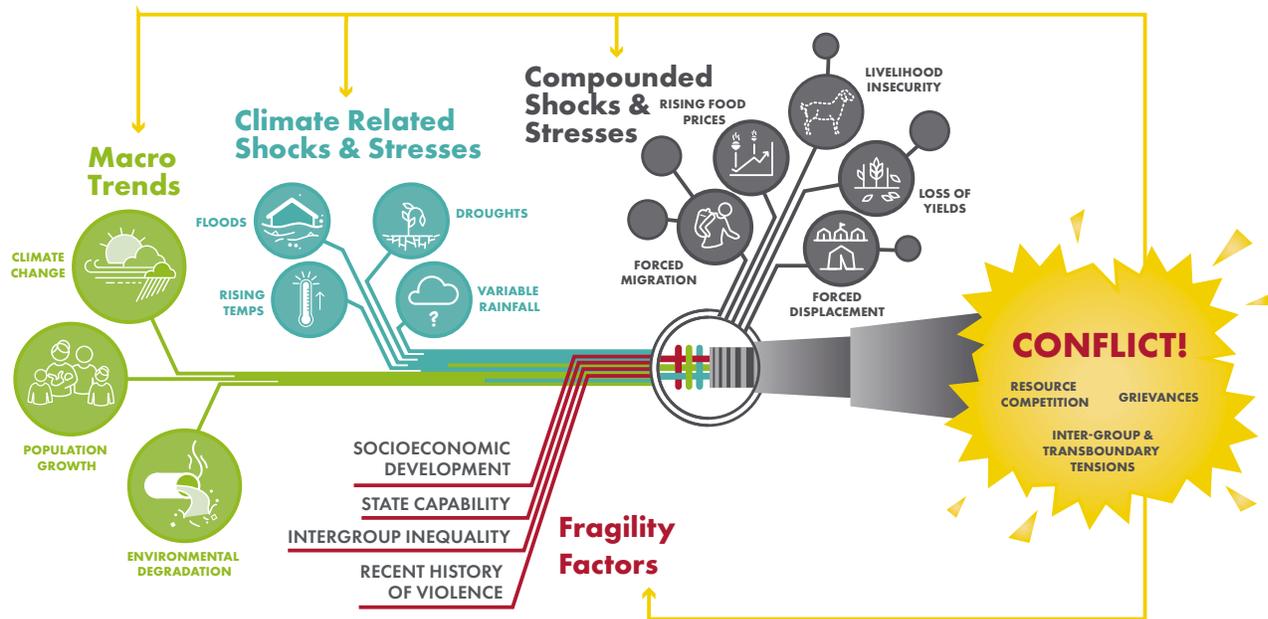
Figure 5: Mercy Corps' Climate-Conflict Assessment Framework

Mercy Corps is building on this foundation to pilot a new approach to addressing climate-conflict risks specifically. We have developed an integrated and sector neutral approach to unpacking the complex web linking climate change and conflict. Using a 4-part assessment framework, Mercy Corps' Climate-Conflict Risk Assessment is designed to provide a cost and time efficient tool for field-based practitioners and communities to draw-out both the context specific and broader systems dynamics through which climate change amplifies conflict. This 4-part model examines the dominant themes Mercy Corps' has identified as influential to creating climate fragility outcomes.

Climate Shocks & Stresses: The climate variability and climate change related shocks and stresses that can directly and indirectly raise the risk of conflict.

Macro Trends: Fluctuations in key social, economic and ecological dynamics like population growth and environmental degradation which can act as drivers of conflict, and can be exacerbated by climate shocks and stresses.

Fragility Factors: Factors which have been identified to increase the likelihood of conflict in a given context such as intergroup inequality, history of violence, state capacity and socioeconomic development.
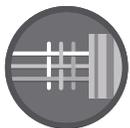
Compounded Shocks and Stresses: The result of the factors, trends, shocks and stresses described above which directly and indirectly interact to elevate conflict risks, and sometimes result in violence.

Findings from this assessment process are designed to support the development of a contextual climate-conflict narrative, identifying entry-points and approaches which can interrupt the cycle of fragility.

Looking ahead, we will continue to pilot this methodology via program design processes, capture lessons learned from these experiences, and seek to develop guidance aimed at the practitioner community.

Developing Robust Programing Strategies to Address Systemic Climate-Conflict Challenges

While there is increasingly strong consensus that climate change and conflict intersect, and that each compounds the other in a variety of ways, there is less knowledge of how to address the associated risks. With support from the UK Government, Mercy Corps set out to understand the landscape of existing approaches employed by the international development community. As a result of this research and cross-institutional engagement, ten recommendations[16] were distilled, including: (1) Continue to engage environmental peacebuilding approaches. (2)Invest in subnational level governance capacity building (3)Pilot integrated, multi-sector approaches (4) Expand programming strategies which engage beyond the community level (5) Programs should prioritize addressing immediate risks as well as long-term challenges.

Figure 6: In 2020 with support from FCDO Mercy Corps produced a landscape review of existing efforts to address climate-conflict risks by development actors.
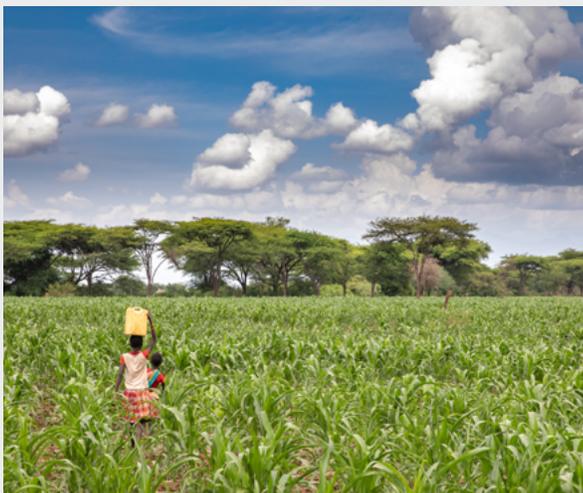
While Mercy Corps' global portfolio of climate-conflict programs has certainly been challenged to address these recommendations, **we have gained significant insight from a critical subset of our work and we share some of our lessons on the next pages.**

Photo Credit: Ezra Millstein / Uganda / Mercy Corps 2021

Locally Led Solutions to Address Acute Climate-Conflict Risks: In Karamoja, Uganda, Mercy Corps is convening communities to address conflict risks emanating from a complex mix of ecological, social and governance challenges that are increasingly exacerbated by climate change. Access to water and grazing land is critical for the pastoral communities that lie along the border of Kenya and Uganda. However, these resources are increasingly scarce in-part due to escalating drought and rising temperatures. The resulting imbalance of resources has applied additional stress on the government's inability to manage a history of resource-based conflict, driven by increasing agricultural production, poor natural resource management, and commercialization of land.

To address these challenges Mercy Corps has worked closely with national and local officials, civil society stakeholders and communities to implement a mutually reinforcing portfolio of strategies including: the development of cross-border natural resource sharing agreements, endorsed by communities in support of water and pasture sharing, coordination of natural resource management strategies, with the necessary funding to support them, and strengthened governance capacity of local institutions through development of policies and processes to protect resources.

As noted by USAID, these strategies have led to "increasing livestock value, strengthening management and productivity of livestock watering resource facilities, diversifying livelihood options to generate household income, improving access to natural resources, and increasing women's engagement in socioeconomic activities."[1]

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1   USAID. (2021). Uganda: USAID Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity (EKISIL) Activity. Washington, DC: https://www.climatelinks.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/2021-10/2021_USAID-EKISIL_CRM-Case-Study-2021-Final.pdf

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16   Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change and Conflict: Lessons from Emerging Practice. Edinburgh, UK: Mercy Corps. https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/news/mercy-corpss-study-interventions-addressing-climate-conflict-dynamics

Integrated, Multi-Sectoral Programming: In North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, food security is hampered by two driving and interrelated constraints; restricted availability of food due to limited access to and productivity of land, and limited market functioning due to insecurity. In this context, the impacts of climate change, including changing rainfall patterns, have further increased tensions between groups, as long-held relationships and resource use patterns became strained under the changing landscape.

In recognition of the compounding nature of these threats, Mercy Corps implemented an intregrated resilience-building and conflict-transformative program. Specifically, the program first supported communities

Photo Credit: Elizabeth Dalziel / DRC / Mercy Corps 2018

to collectively advocate for equitable land access rights. As a result, 82% of program participants reported improved access to customary or state recognized documents and legal titles, enabling a secure basis for a viable economic activity. In parallel, the program helped address sources of insecurity, by promoting inter-group collaboration across economic lines and by addressing economic challenges including enhancing linkages to extension services, organizing producers, and business advising on the establishment of last-mile service. These activities helped to reduce inter-communal tensions. Climate change adaptation support, in the form of climate smart agricultural improvements, were included as a tool to further reduce land conflict issues by promoting the sustainability and productivity of available land. Despite a highly unstable program context; security and socio-economic conditions were improved in 120 villages and food security increased for an estimated 25,000 households. Further, participant households reported increased optimism after program interventions about the prospect for stability in their community in the future.[1] Learning from this program also suggests an increased focus on integrated environmental aspects could have led to greater overall impact.

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1   Intermedia Development Consultants. (2021). Food Security and Inclusive Access to Resources for Conflict Sensitive Market Development Endline Review.

Photo Credit: Ezra Millstein / Ethiopia / Mercy Corps 2019

Securing Access to Land Through Strengthened Governance: In Ethiopia, Mercy Corps has helped address a systemic cause of conflict around the world- the lack of land security. In many contexts, vulnerable populations lack secure access to critical natural resources and as a result are unable to invest in medium to long-term climate adaptation strategies. In these same cases, the increasing stress of climate change effects and the growing tensions resulting from the need for increasingly scarce resources contributes directly to rising conflict risks. In Afar, Oromia and Somali regions, Mercy Corps worked to revitalize, and build capacity of centuries old Rangeland Councils responsible for the management of roughly 4 million hectares of critical land resources for pastoralists. Resource mapping, environmental restoration activities, enhanced coordination, and establishment of dry seasons grazing

reserves were a few of the critical activities undertaken by the councils early on. Further, women's participation in complimentary natural resource management committees and the growth of Village-level Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups, whose members are mostly women, played a significant role in increasing women's participation in decision making in their households.

Building on these structures, Mercy Corps supported the Ministry of Peace to develop a pastoral development policy. This legislation, for the first time, recognized the land use rights of customary institutions, and clearly articulated customary land administration roles and responsibilities, notably for the establishment of grazing and farming lands and tourist attraction sites. This new legislation empowered Mercy Corps to work closely with USAID's LAND program to pilot communal land certification programs in the Oromia region.

Photo Credit: Mali / Mercy Corps 2019

Developing Future Oriented, Data Driven Approaches: Communities in fragile contexts are already grappling with the effects of climate change, and evidence suggests these risks will become increasingly frequent and more severe.[1] In Mali's Southern and Central region, widespread poverty, climate vulnerability, and a growing rural-urban divide are increasing the regions' susceptibility to violence. In 2020, Mercy Corps and its partners began implementation on a 4-year integrated program, which aims to prevent the further spread of violent conflict. In this context of rapid and evolving complexity, effective investments must not only address today's instability, but also harness solutions that are sustainable in the face of changing risks ahead.

To this end, one of the key components of this program include action-research that can help inform our understanding of climate-related conflict risks and adaptive capacities within this context. One specific analytical exercise undertaken includes a geo-spatial analysis using existing survey and environmental data that examined the spatial and temporal distribution of conflict in Mali and its relationship to environmental factors. An important contribution of this exercise was to explain how conflict played out in areas where land is used for different purposes, namely: agriculture, grassland and mixed areas of both. In doing so, we observe the varying ways that environmental factors like access to vegetation and water, combined with specific land-use types, can have different levels of impact on conflict occurrence. For example, we found that greater distance from water is associated with higher incidences of conflict in grassland areas, while the inverse is true in agricultural areas. These results, after ground-truthing with qualitative data, present the basis for tailored environmental peacebuilding approaches in different parts of Mali that respond to specific drivers of current conflict and predict future risk. By identifying the dominant shocks and stresses threatening stability, as well as the resources and capacities needed to address them today and in the future, the program is supporting communities to decrease risk factors for conflict and improve human security.

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1   IPCC. (2021). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [MassonDelmotte, V.,et al. Cambridge University Press. In Press.

Growing the Evidence Base

The development of an evidence-based set of approaches is critical to advancing climate-conflict programs around the world. In part, the relative lack of an evidence base is a result of the gap in targeted programs addressing climate-conflict risks. At the same time, the dearth of evaluative research constrains the development of climate strategies with positive peace outcomes. Many programs refer to positive gains, but actual impact evaluation of programs demonstrating improvements in peace or adaptation outcomes are rare. As a consequence, donors and implementers still know too little about what works and how to tailor programming to contextually-specific challenges.

With the goal of bridging theory and action, Mercy Corps is implementing a research agenda to fill knowledge gaps and support evidence-based, context-specific strategies. Building on programs that operate in fragile states, this research agenda focuses on evaluating how existing climate programs affect livelihoods, displacement/migration and ultimately peace and conflict. The research also looks at how external factors such as local governance and access to climate finance may influence success in mitigating the climate-conflict nexus. Importantly, we recognize the need to continue testing, we understand the need to test what approaches may be most effective in fragile contexts, which remain the most at-risk for conflict and the adverse effects of climate change.

Below we highlight a few efforts to address research questions we believe will improve the funding, design and implementation of strategies that address climate-conflict risks.

Can improvements in governance mitigate climate-conflict risk?

Figure 7: In 2020, Mercy Corps undertook an assessment of relationships between climate variability, conflict and governance.

Mercy Corps recently concluded an analysis of the relationships between climate variability, conflict and governance in five sub-Saharan African countries analysing a 17-year period. The evidence supported two findings: first, a link between higher temperature variability and violent conflict; second, stronger state capacity appears, at least in some cases, to reduce the likelihood that climate variability is linked to conflict.[17] The findings suggest a link between climate change and conflict in fragile states, as well as the role that effective local governance can[18] play in mitigating and responding to climate-influenced conflict drivers.[19] Specifically, the study implies that the capacity of states to prevent, mitigate and respond effectively to the social and economic challenges brought about by climate change, may determine, in large part, whether violence occurs.[20] While research on climate-conflict pathways is still nascent, such research represents a vital avenue for clarifying

10%

of climate adaptation funds reach communities outside of capitals

Figure 8

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17   Mercy Corps. (2020). Addressing the Climate-Conflict Nexus in Fragile States: Understanding the role of governance, Washington, DC: Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/climate-conflict-nexus

18   In this study the "efficacy" of political institutions was measured in terms of (1) reach or penetration, measured by the presence of a police station and a post office, and (2) performance, measured by perceptions of how well the local government handles corruption.

19   Ibid.

20   Ibid.; Alcayna, T. (2020). "At what cost: how chronic gaps in adaptation finance expose the world's poorest people to climate chaos." Flood Resilience Alliance.

priorities, designing programs and achieving sustainable success in helping communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and reduce conflict.[21]

Can peacebuilding enhance resilience to climate shocks?

Figure 9: Mercy Corps' Pathways from Peace to Resilience report.

As noted earlier, Mercy Corps has looked at the relationship between climate change and conflict through a resilience lens. Many of our resilience programs have focused on strengthening the capacity of households and communities to cope with external shocks, such as climate and weather-related shocks in fragile and conflict affected places. Our 2015 study focused on Southern Ethiopia—Pathways from Peace to Resilience[22]—highlighted that household food security is heavily affected by economic and climate-related shocks, as well as conflict. To address these challenge's Mercy Corps and USAID's Communities Helping Their Environment and Land by Bridging Interests (CHELBI) project tested how an environmental peacebuilding program may affect vulnerability to such shocks. The research found the effects of shocks—including climate shocks—on food security can be mitigated by strengthening community and institutional conflict management skills and systems. The research highlights the importance of peacebuilding in fragile contexts to help communities manage environmental and conflict impacts.

Is climate finance reaching the most at-need in a conflict-sensitive manner?

Figure 10: At What Cost assessed donor commitments to invest in climate adaptation in countries most in need.

Climate finance is an important tool for helping communities adapt to and mitigate the risks of climate change. A study commissioned by Mercy Corps and other partners under the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (ZFRA), "At What Cost", assessed donor commitments to invest in climate adaptation in countries most in need. By analyzing publicly available budget data, the report found that climate finance was not reaching the most climate vulnerable or poorest countries.

The majority of the most climate-vulnerable countries **received less than $20 per person per year in climate change adaptation financing** from 2010–2017.[23] This is particularly troubling as climate change is already affecting the lives and livelihoods of communities in climate-vulnerable countries, especially in fragile states. For example, from 2004-2014, **58% of disaster-related deaths occurred in the top 30 fragile and conflict-affected countries.[24]**

The majority of the most climate-vulnerable countries received less than

$20

per person, per year in climate change adaptation financing from 2010–2017.

Figure 11

In fact, only a quarter of bilateral financing and less than half of the major multilateral financing has targeted the most climate vulnerable countries with climate change adaptation funding (2010–2017). Further research from Mercy Corps and the Overseas Development Institute explored the "blind spots" in climate adaptation finance

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21   Mercy Corps has documented four pathways by which an intensification of climate variability may amplify conflict risks: (i) increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that displace vulnerable populations; (ii) greater livelihood insecurity due to climate variability, which will shift migration patterns and exacerbated resource-based conflicts; (iii) increased food insecurity, due to climate impacts on agriculture, which will increased the likelihood and intensity of conflict; and (iv) population growth and climate variability placing greater pressure on shared water resources, increasing the likelihood of sub-national, national, and international disputes.

22   Mercy Corps (2015). Pathways from Peace to Resilience. Washington, D.C.: Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/pathways-peace

23   Alcayna, Tilly. "At What Cost: How Chronic Gaps in Adaptation Finance Expose the World's Poorest People to Climate Chaos ." Flood Resilience Portal, Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance, July 2020, https://floodresilience.net/resources/item/at-what-cost-how-chronic-gaps-in-adaptation-finance-expose-the-world-s-poorest-people-to-climate-chaos/.

24   Peters, Katie, and Mirianna Budimir. "When Disasters and Conflicts Collide: Facts and Figures." ODI, ODI, May 2016, https://odi.org/en/publications/when-disasters-and-conflicts-collide-facts-and-figures/.

that both increase the risk of ill-designed programs and prevent finance from reaching the countries most in need of the support. Examining funding and programs in Sudan, Somalia, and Mali, the research finds that despite evidence of a relationship between climate change and conflict, climate adaptation programs are rarely financed in fragile states and those which are, are not delivered in a conflict sensitive manner.[25]

Conclusion: Future Directions

Growing momentum in the development and foreign policy communities around the need to address the effects of climate change on the world's most vulnerable people presents an opportunity to refresh and scale-up global efforts to address climate security. To date, practitioners have too often relied on approaches that lack empirical evidence, that suffer from sectoral silos and that are limited in scale and scope. However, we observe these challenges as representative of the ambitious, but complicated early stages of an accelerating effort to address the biggest crises facing our collective wellbeing.

Mercy Corps remains passionately convinced that innovative, well resourced and evidenced based efforts can interrupt the negative cycle of climate fragility. Below we present a set of guiding principles and complimentary program recommendations to guide future climate security investments. These are not intended to be exhaustive (there are other important considerations), but were prioritized based on our institutional knowledge and experience.

Guiding Principles for Future Investments:

Funding supporting climate resilience, should be targeted to fragile and conflict affected states. Fragile contexts are missing out when it comes to support from the international community to build resilience to climate change, even when those funds are specifically mandated to support the most vulnerable (Mercy Corps, 2020). Yet, because research indicates that climate pressures can compound and exacerbate fragility factors in these contexts, to avert conflict and instability, climate resilience should be a sizable and growing funding priority in fragile and conflict affected states.

Pilot integrated, multi-sector approaches, that address short and long-term risks. Because there are often many interconnected drivers of conflict, efforts to address such dynamics address the complex economic, social and environmental dynamics that result in increased conflict risks. Immediate and long-term efforts are needed. The international community must balance the need to ensure acute shocks don't derail development gains, while averting future challenges.

Efforts should expand beyond the community level. Further focus should be placed on addressing sub-national, national and transboundary challenges, allowing efforts to address systemic underlying drivers of conflict such as poor governance, unequal power-sharing, or inequitable national policies around, for example, land use and tenure.

Finally these efforts must be accompanied by research on identifying what is or is not effective. Importantly, opportunities for piloting and innovating new tools, partnerships and interventions will be critical to break out of the limited programming options that currently exist. In part, the relative lack of an evidence base is a result of the gap in targeted programs addressing climate-conflict risks. However, beginning with investing in rigorous evidence generation from studies (including evaluations) of existing program, and exploratory analyses to better understand the climate security nexus will stimulate action and expand space for more evidence-based, innovative actions.

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25   Cao et. Al, "Synthesis report: Exploring the conflict blind spots in climate adaptation finance," SPARC, September 2021, https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/resources/synthesis-report-exploring-conflict-blind-spots-climate-adaptation-finance.

Programmatic Recommendations:

#1 Support state, civil society and local stakeholders to strengthen peace and climate resilience

An enabling environment for peace and climate resilience is central to addressing the complex drivers of conflict. Priority should be placed on identifying the knowledge and technical gaps of formal and informal institutions and building capacity to address issues of resource scarcity, manage tensions and disputes, and respond to disasters effectively. Evidence demonstrates the role that effective subnational governance can play in mitigating and responding to climate-influenced conflict drivers. Effectively matching locally led solutions and governance infrastructure with the financing, technical assistance and know-how to address climate change and conflict is critical to promoting sustainable peace.

#2 Manage use of and competition over natural resources to reduce conflict

Where natural resource scarcity leads to competition over resources, or where restricted access to resources is a source of tension, sustainably managing resources can reduce or prevent conflict. Environmental peacebuilding approaches should continue to be prioritized for their role in mitigating acute conflict risks. The development of resource sharing agreements and joint management structures across administrative boundaries have demonstrated perceived gains in coordination and use of resources, trust through information sharing, and ultimately reduction in resource tensions. However, efforts should also be made to address the evidence gap associated with these strategies, through more formal evaluations of their impact.

#3 Support diverse, climate-smart livelihoods that promote food security

Strengthening livelihoods can lower the risk of conflict between groups over scarce resources, improve climate resilience, and reduce food insecurity. Priority should be placed on assessing the vulnerabilities of food systems, while diversifying natural resource-based livelihoods, facilitating market linkages to increase household income, and working with communities, especially youth, to identify and support alternative economic opportunities that can diversify sources of employment.

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