TOWARDS RESILIENCE: ADVANCING COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN PROTRACTED CRISES

MAY, 2020

MERCY CORPS

Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

International responses are failing to address the rise in protracted, conflict-driven crises, which are increasing in number, longer in duration, and more complex. In places like Somalia and Northeast Nigeria, the recent COVID-19 outbreak promises to further decimate local economies, erode public trust, and upend social networks.[1] Yet it is only the latest threat highlighting the limitations of the international aid architecture to achieve better outcomes for populations facing prolonged and compounding humanitarian needs. Advances in multi-year, flexible funding, and efforts to achieve collective impact by blending humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding assistance – the so-called "triple nexus" – are falling short because they do not address the fundamental incoherence of aid. Each funding stream continues to have its own goals, structures, and success metrics. They often work at cross-purposes, undermining collective impact, and, in the worst cases, exacerbating the drivers of fragility. The triple nexus, as currently conceived, is not suited to galvanize collective action. Translating its aspirations into action demands a more ambitious reform.

To bring greater coherence to international responses and secure better outcomes for conflict-affected communities, this paper calls for resilience as the guiding framework for action in protracted crises. While resilience is not new in international development, it has been frequently misunderstood, and rarely has rhetoric matched practice, particularly in conflict contexts. A resilience agenda would clearly define and guide collective impact around strengthening sources of resilience that are proven to protect current and future well-being in crisis contexts, including those that can prevent and mitigate the effects of violence. Accountability to this agenda would further inform a coherent triple nexus strategy orienting collective action around three core practices that include: 1) rapid, real-time analysis of risk factors that drive and perpetuate fragility; 2) support to local systems and institutions to strengthen sources of resilience; and 3) short-term violence prevention paired with efforts to transform the structural drivers of conflict.

Introduction: The Failure of Business as Usual

Despite billions in aid, today's crises are increasing in number, duration, and complexity. The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic will only augment existing trends in conflict settings, further decimating local economies, eroding public trust, and upending social support mechanisms.[2] It also brings to the forefront the international community's failure to secure improved outcomes for populations facing prolonged and compounding humanitarian needs. Between 2005 and 2017, the number of conflict-related crises receiving international aid nearly doubled from 16 to 30.[3] The average humanitarian crisis now lasts more than nine years.[4] The year 2018 was the fourth consecutive year which recorded over 50 active conflicts.[5] And year after year, a familiar cohort of countries receive the lion's share of humanitarian outlays: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria, to name a few.

1 International Crisis Group. (2020). COVID-19 and conflict: Seven trends to watch. https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch; Lowcock, M. (2020 May 4). After COVID-19, it's in everyone's interest to help the world's poorest countries. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/04/covid-19-world-poorest-countries-aid-relief-package
2 Ibid.
3 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). (2019). Global Humanitarian Overview 2020. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO-2020_v9.1.pdf
4 Ibid.
5 Pettersson, T., Högbladh, S., & Öberg, M. (2019). Organized violence, 1989–2018 and peace agreements. Journal of Peace Research, 56(4), 589–603. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319856046

The world's crises are outpacing increasingly spare reserves of foreign assistance. Overseas development assistance (ODA) funding peaked in 2016, then fell.[6] Conflict prevention, historically under-funded, accounted for only 1.5% of gross ODA in 2018.[7] These trends promise to worsen as donors turn their attention to fighting the health and economic consequences of COVID-19.[8] The United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) appeal for $90 billion to fight the pandemic, coupled with wealthy nations' attention to domestic issues, will leave the world's remaining crisis response plans funded at a mere 12.5%.[9] Alongside the political pressure to reduce perennial humanitarian outlays is the moral imperative to meet immediate needs while advancing sustained peace and development for crisis-affected populations. In response, international actors are calling for a fresh approach.

Reform proposals have coalesced around the triple nexus, which seeks to build coherence and shared outcomes across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. In theory, activities will overlap and reinforce one another: humanitarian actors will take on multi-year assistance mandates typical of development programs, while development actors remain engaged in acute crises to address the "root causes" of conflict and instability. Peacebuilding will be integrated into humanitarian and development investments, promoting social cohesion and building capacity for conflict management.[10] Implicit to the triple nexus is that interventions will shrug off the straitjacket of traditional, overly narrow mandates. In response, leading donors and implementing partners have committed to layer funding that should be guided by a shared analysis, strategy, and outcomes.

> *Four years since the Grand Bargain commitments made during the World Humanitarian Summit and the UN's New Ways of Working, the triple nexus exists more in rhetoric than practice.*

Yet, four years since the Grand Bargain commitments made during the World Humanitarian Summit and the UN's New Ways of Working, the triple nexus exists more in rhetoric than practice. Examples of country-level progress exist, but these are isolated and small-scale.[11] Implementation of the nexus tends to stumble amid disputes over what collective outcomes should look like, or what (if any) set of analytical and strategic approaches should guide disparate activities. Conversations remain mired in protecting mandates. A lack of clarity in coordination structures; competition for resources; a continued shortage of reliable and sufficiently flexible funding sources; and the absence of a guiding strategic approach disincentivize collaboration.[12] Multi-year funding, and the blending of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding streams, while promising and necessary reforms, are in themselves inconsistently applied and proving insufficient to meet the challenges presented by the world's prolonged conflicts.

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6 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2019). ODA 2019 detailed summary. https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/ODA-2019-detailed-summary.pdf

7 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2018). States of Fragility 2018. https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/OECD%20Highlights%20documents_web.pdf

8 Lowcock, M. (2020 May 4). After COVID-19, it's in everyone's interest to help the world's poorest countries. The Guardian.

9 Financial Tracking Service (FTS). (2020). Appeals and response plans. https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2020

10 World Bank Group. (2020). Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025. http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/844591582815510521/World-Bank-Group-Strategy-for-Fragility-Conflict-and-Violence-2020-2025

11 The nexus: Joining forces -- peace-building, humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. (2019). Rural21 - The International Journal for Rural Development, 53(1). https://www.rural21.com/fileadmin/downloads/2019/en-01/Rural21_1_2019.pdf

12 Redvers, L. (2019 September 24). Searching for the nexus: The view from the ground. The New Humanitarian. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2019/09/24/triple-nexus-humanitarian-development-peacebuilding-views

Somalia offers a telling example. Following the famine in the Horn of Africa in 2011, alongside humanitarian aid, donors steadily increased development and peacebuilding funding.[13] Yet this layering of short- and longer-term responses, a core component of the triple nexus, did not lead to the expected decrease in humanitarian need – instead it increased by 2 million people in just one year, between 2015 and 2016. This spike was certainly the result of drought, resulting hunger, and rising insecurity. The numbers, however, make clear that simply increasing and blending funds is not sufficient to pull fragile contexts out of cycles of crisis. A 2013 assessment warned, "The humanitarian situation in Somalia remains critical due to lasting effects of the 2011 drought, ongoing conflict, and displacement." Five years later, the 2018 assessment echoed the same alarm: "The humanitarian situation in Somalia remains critical due to ongoing impacts of drought, displacement, and conflict."

Why the Triple Nexus is Not Enough

Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors each have their own approaches, mandates, and success metrics.[14] Each also has fundamental shortcomings in addressing the unique challenges posed by protracted, conflict-driven crises. When layered without shared analysis, strategies and goals, these efforts often work at cross-purposes, undermining collective impact. Multi-year, blended funding, while a critical first step, cannot resolve the fundamental limitations and incoherence of international responses. Piling one funding stream atop another in an attempt to capture the best in each often serves to magnify the worst.

For instance, humanitarian aid offers life-saving assistance by addressing immediate, acute needs. Unfortunately, a growing body of research shows that a narrow focus on life-saving assistance in prolonged crises can undercut local coping mechanisms,[15] destabilize sub-national economies,[16] and create long-term aid dependencies that fundamentally limit states' and citizens' capacities to address future shocks. For example, in Northeastern Nigeria, the humanitarian provision of agricultural inputs competed with development efforts to strengthen a competitive and self-sustaining market for farmers that could address economic exclusion and support communities to adapt agricultural practices to climate shocks. Similarly, in the West Nile region of Uganda, where the arrival of nearly a million South Sudanese refugees have placed immense strains on host communities, direct aid distribution hampered the development of local markets that could strengthen economic exchange and social cohesion across refugee and host populations.[17] Humanitarian aid has made considerable progress in increasingly employing cash transfers and vouchers over goods distribution to prevent the crowding out of local economies. These, however, continue to stumble over a poor understanding of the local environment, market dynamics, and social networks. Direct relief will (and should) always be a tool to address exigent need, but a protracted crisis – particularly one driven or complicated by

13 Foreign assistance to Somalia grew by nearly 50% between 2011 and 2015, and the proportion of long-term development assistance relative to humanitarian aid rose from 20 to 50% of the portfolio in that timeframe.

14 Norwegian Refugee Council. (2019). Financing the nexus: Gaps and opportunities from a field perspective. https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective/; Medinilla, A., Tadesse Shiferaw, L., and Veron, P. (2019). Think local. Governance, humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding in somalia. European Centre for Development Policy Management. https://ecdpm.org/publications/think-local-bridging-between-humanitarian-aid-development-peacebuilding-somalia/

15 Mercy Corps. (2019). The currency of connections: The reconfiguration of social connections in Benitu, South Sudan. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/BentiuPoCResearch_Brief_Final_092519.pdf

16 Mercy Corps. (2018). Borno, northeast Nigeria strategic resilience assessment: Full report and findings. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/PRG_BornoStrategicResilienceAssessmenet_R_lo_0319_WEB_v3.pdf

17 Mercy Corps. (2017). Refugee markets brief: The power of markets to support refugee economic opportunities in West Nile, Uganda. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/West_Nile_Refugee_Markets_Brief_Feb2018.pdf

conflict – differs from a short-term emergency. Extending immediate relief in protracted crises without considering longer-term goals may exacerbate the drivers of fragility, sowing the seeds of future crises.

On the other hand, the emphasis of development actors on long-term economic growth often reproduces the inequalities that drive conflict. In part, this stems from the practical necessity of partnering with existing economic and political elites to boost markets and labor demands. The consequence is that even inclusive growth investments tend to heighten perceptions of exclusion and corruption long before a rising economic tide lifts all boats. This dynamic was evident in Ethiopia. Immense investments – $19.6 billion USD between 2009 and 2018 – helped spur one of the fastest growth rates in Africa.[18] Unfortunately, this success has done little to mitigate entrenched ethnic divisions and perceptions of political marginalization, which now threaten to destabilize the country and erase years of progress.[19] In fact, some of the biggest spikes in inter-ethnic violence were happening just as Ethiopia was receiving international accolades for economic and political reforms.[20]

> *Multi-year, blended funding, while a critical first step, cannot resolve the fundamental limitations and incoherence of international responses.*

Finally, peacebuilding efforts can mitigate upticks in communal tensions, but progress is often not sustainable in the face of systemic shocks. In the Ethiopian context, Mercy Corps' peacebuilding activities improved inter-ethnic cooperation and created the space for a peace agreement between warring parties.[21] However, these successes were quickly reversed under the strains of political transition, which revived border disputes and inter-group competition over land and political representation. The limited lasting impacts of peacebuilding investments may, in part, be chalked up to the small-scale, local character of activities. Structural drivers of fragility, such as economic exclusion and political marginalization, routinely threaten to undo short-term achievements. Addressing these deep-seated drivers of conflict would require peace actors to become versed in development approaches, such as strategies for equitable growth, and development actors to see peacebuilding as part of their agenda, and a measure of their success. Neither sector has shown great appetite to cross these lines.[22]

The triple nexus, far from bridging the divide among international response actors, remains mired in clashing mindsets and mandates – and, increasingly, competition over scarce funding streams. Addressing the challenges of conflict-driven crises and advancing the triple nexus requires a more radical and clear approach than the Grand Bargain and New Ways of Working envisaged.

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18 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions." https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=TABLE2A
19 Lashitew, A. (8 November 2019). Ethiopia will explode if it doesn't move beyond ethnic-based politics. Foreign Policy. https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/08/ethiopia-will-explode-if-abiy-ahmed-doesnt-move-beyond-ethnic-based-politics/
20 Ibid.
21 Kurtz, J. and Scarborough, G. (2012). From Conflict to Coping: Evidence from Southern Ethiopia on the contributions of peacebuilding to drought resilience among pastoralist groups. Mercy Corps.
22 Slim, Hugo, "Searching for the nexus: How to turn theory into practice," October 2019. The New Humanitarian. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2019/10/23/Triple-nexus-theory-practice

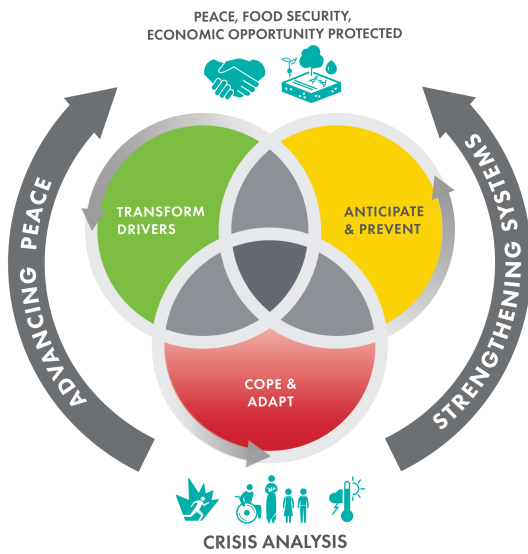# The Roadmap: A Resilience Agenda in Protracted, Conflict-Driven Crises

Figure 1: A resilience agenda in protracted crises would guide international responses to collectively strengthen sources of resilience that advance and protect peace, alongside food and water security, and economic opportunity.

Resilience offers an organizing framework for aligning and improving collective impact across international responses. Resilience hinges not simply on how activities or funding streams are layered, but how they are implemented and measured. A resilience agenda can shift incentives and guide a shared strategy to ensure that assistance reduces immediate need and mitigates future crises.

Resilience in international development refers to the ability of people and systems to advance and protect well-being – like food security, incomes, or health – in the face of complex shocks and stresses, such as recession, violence, drought, or pandemics.[23] Resilience in development evolved in response to the 2011-2012 Horn of Africa drought and famine, and the concept quickly took root in donor strategies.[24] Foreign assistance pivoted from a polarized discussion of "growth vs. relief" to one focused on protecting development gains and reducing humanitarian need in contexts of recurrent crisis. This dual emphasis – protecting gains and averting need – shifted the relief and development conversation from a focus on vulnerabilities to one focused on strengthening sources of resilience – or the capacities of households, markets and institutions to mitigate shocks and secure well-being among crisis-affected groups. In communities facing recurrent climate and economic shocks, a growing body of evidence points to effectiveness[25] of resilience strategies, and the potential return on investment.[26]

While the resilience agenda has generally been applied in more stable contexts, it offers substantial potential to protect current and future well-being of populations in protracted, conflict-driven crises that dominate humanitarian outlays. In these contexts, international assistance must protect and advance peace, alongside food and water security and economic opportunity as key measures of collective impact. Collective action must enable crisis-affected populations to better cope and adapt to the shocks and stresses defining crisis settings without compromising these outcomes, and to prevent future shocks that could undermine progress. This means strengthening sources of resilience that prevent and mitigate the effects of violence alongside other risk factors.

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23 In this paper we refer to a 'resilience agenda' as one that works intentionally to support these abilities

24 For example, see DFID (2011). Humanitarian Emergency Response Review. March 28.

25 Smith, L, Frankenberger, Fox, K., T, Nelson, S., and Griffin, T. (2019). Ethiopia Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion (PRIME) Project Impact Evaluation: Endline Survey Report. Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award. https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/Ethiopia%20PRIME%20Endline%20Report_FINAL_OCT_2019_508.pdf

26 Cabot Venton, C. (2018). Economics of resilience to drought in ethiopia, kenya, somalia. USAID Center for Resilience. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/Summary_Economics_of_Resilience_Final_Jan_4_2018_BRANDED.pdf

How Do We Get There? Three Success Factors for Resilience

Strengthening sources of resilience that can protect current and future well-being, including by mitigating conflict drivers, demands that international responses are collectively oriented around three priorities: 1) rapid, real-time analysis of risk factors that drive and perpetuate fragility; 2) support to local systems to strengthen sources of resilience; and 3) short-term violence prevention paired with efforts to transform structural drivers of conflict.

1. Rapid, real-time analysis of risk factors that drive and perpetuate crisis

International responses must be more attuned to the complexity of risk in conflict-driven crises, where interconnected and reinforcing shocks – droughts, food price spikes, epidemics, armed insurgencies –evolve rapidly, often in unexpected ways. In Syria, severe drought displaced 1.5 million people to the cities, creating the conditions for the 2011 protests, which in turn served as the prelude to a brutal, regionally-destabilizing civil war.[27] COVID-19 is the latest unexpected shock bringing an unforeseen layer of complexity and suffering to existing crises. The climate crisis will only continue to grow, and with it, bring new threats. A spiral of fragility can sap already limited resources and capacities, fuel new grievances, and render households more vulnerable to the next, inevitable shock. For example, in the DRC, ongoing insecurity has reduced the capacity of state and local actors to respond to Ebola; in Somalia, the infiltration of Al-Shabaab reduced aid delivery in the face of the 2011-2012 drought, resulting in famine levels not experienced in neighboring Kenya.

> ❭ *Risk analysis must be timely and granular, to inform agile programming that can quickly adapt to rapidly changing contexts.*

In highly-fragile contexts, international actors like the World Bank, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The Department for International Development (DFID) have begun to more consistently apply risk and resilience assessments to inform country strategies and operational plans. But Mercy Corps' application of its own Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS)[28] – a methodology that informed USAID's risk and resilience assessment guidance[29] – in Northeast Nigeria, revealed that risk analysis in a conflict-driven crisis is often too slow, too cumbersome, and too removed from local realities to inform appropriate action. The process painted a vivid picture of how quickly risks evolve, frustrating aid efforts and invalidating strategies. The armed insurgency catalyzed a series of acute shocks and stressors: shifting blockades, sudden food shortages, livelihood disruptions, fresh displacement, restrictions in goods and movement, and new resource-based tensions as communities struggled to eke out a living in garrison towns. The adaptability of program teams was constrained by "centralized systems that could

27 Read, M. R. (2019). Climate Change and the Syrian Civil War. In F. Golgano (Ed.). The Environment-Conflict Nexus: Climate Change and the Emergent National Security Landscape (pp. 167-176). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90975-2_11

28 Levine, E., Vaughan, E., & Nicholson, D. (2017). Strategic Resilience Assessment Guidelines. Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/STRESS-Guidelines-Resilience-Mercy-Corps-2017.pdf

29 Vaughan, E. and Henly-Shepard, S. (2018). Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Note Series 1: Risk and Resilience Assessments. Produced by Mercy Corps as part of the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award. https://www.fsnnetwork.org/resilience-measurement-practical-guidance-series-guidance-note-1-%E2%80%93-risk-resilience-assessments

not keep pace with a fast-moving environment."[30]

Risk and resilience assessments should be continuously applied to provide real-time feedback on the rapidly evolving dynamics in crisis contexts, in addition to strengthening an understanding of general risk factors, crisis trends, and root causes. This will enable responses to stay ahead of unfolding events and prepare for shocks coming around the bend. Risk analysis must be timely and granular, to inform agile programming that can quickly adapt to rapidly changing contexts – for example, by tracking both the spread of COVID-19 and related disinformation that could be a flashpoint for conflict in existing hotspots. Mercy Corps' crisis analytics approach attempts to meet this challenge by integrating continuous field-based monitoring with open source data, secondary data collection, and analysis by subject-matter experts. The aim is to provide real-time forecasts of emerging risks that shape responses. For instance, by utilizing multiple data sources, field teams in Syria have successfully predicted the sites of armed conflict, as well as safe zones, enabling Mercy Corps to pre-position assistance to conflict-affected communities. Investments in better, quicker risk analysis that leverage technology and human capability can enable international responses to stay ahead of the curve and avoid being caught unaware in the face of crises spinning out of control. This is particularly critical for misinformation related to COVID-19.

2. Support to local systems to strengthen sources of resilience

Though often overlooked, or even undermined, by international responses, local systems are essential to achieving better, more durable outcomes in protracted crises. Research consistently shows that social systems – community networks, informal institutions – and markets – such as the exchange among producers, traders, suppliers, and urban entrepreneurs – routinely enable individuals and communities to cope and adapt to crisis, provide opportunities to reduce violence, and are a requisite foundation for recover and future prosperity. [31] A resilience agenda would strengthen these systems and expand access across gender and age groups.

For example, social networks within and between communities can offer a reliable safety net. In South Sudan, crisis-affected communities with strong, diverse social relationships shared information, extended psychosocial support, and exchanged food, labor and cash, allowing them to better adapt and maintain their livelihoods during crises. If not intentionally designed, humanitarian responses can undermine these social connections, which are rooted in trust and perceptions of equity. For example, where neighbors are perceived to be receiving an unfair share of resources while others suffer, the resulting ill will may reduce cooperation in the future.[32] To support these systems, cash programming could target existing mutual support groups, often organized around asset sharing or livelihoods as a way of providing immediate assistance while reinforcing important sources of resilience. Identifying and strengthening groups that support women or youth to cope, or promote their collective action, can further address gender equity in representation and resource access.

30 Henly-Shepard, S., & Jolicouer, D. (2019). Risk and Resilience Assessment Case Study Series: Northeast Nigeria. Produced by Mercy Corps as part of the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award. https://www.fsnnetwork.org/risk-and-resilience-assessment-case-study-series-northeast-nigeria-next-frontier%E2%80%94-priming-resilience

31 Howe, K., Krystalli, R., Krishnan, V., Kurtz, J., & Macaranas, R. (2018). The Wages of War: Learning from how Syrians have adapted their livelihoods through seven years of conflict; Hemberger, A., Muench, S. & Algoso, D. (2017). Beyond cash: Making markets work in crisis. Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/CashMarketsMercyCorpsApril2018_0.pdf

32 Humphrey, A., Krishnan, V., Krystalli, R. (2019). The currency of connections: Why local support systems are integral to helping people recover in south sudan. Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/CoC_January_2019.pdf

Like social connections, local market systems enable affected populations to better cope and adapt in the face of climate and conflict shocks. Even in the midst of a crisis, these local resources tend to be more significant to households than humanitarian aid.[33] Markets facilitate information-sharing, financial transactions, social connections, and of course the trade in goods and services, which can limit disruptions to local livelihoods. Evidence suggests markets pivot in response to conflict more quickly than humanitarian actors.[34] Household economic production is essential to nutrition, incomes, and maintaining agency amidst conflict. Research from Syria, Northeast Nigeria and South Sudan shows economic systems can quickly adapt to crisis and have been shown to be strongly correlated with psycho-social as well as financial well-being.[35]

> *Research consistently shows that social systems and markets routinely enable individuals and communities to cope and adapt to crisis, provide opportunities to reduce violence, and are a requisite foundation for recovery and future prosperity.*

Where aid actors are guided by a thorough contextual analysis, market and production systems offer important leverage points for international responses.[36] In Syria, flour subsidies to local bakeries maintained food supply and kept prices stable.[37] This protected local businesses and supported existing socioeconomic relations in Syrian communities. In Northeast Nigeria, support to local market actors has enabled communities to adapt in the face of an armed conflict. For example, a poultry markets program worked with microenterprises to create a market-based supply of portable poultry assets to households that have high market value and nutritional content. Similarly, partnerships with agri-input suppliers facilitated the development of a market for bio-fertilizers following government restrictions on the sale of chemical fertilizers that could be used to produce explosives.[38] In Northern Uganda, Mercy Corps and its partners worked to expand agricultural input and produce markets for South Sudanese refugees by partnering with traders in neighboring communities.[39] This strategy built relationships and social capital between traders and farmers – both refugee and host – with the goal of increasing households' access to market-based goods and services after the project ended.

Efforts to strengthen local market systems and social networks work against the grain of rapid, in-kind aid delivery that meets immediate needs. The expediency of short-term, in-kind aid in a protracted crisis, however, undercuts the very coping mechanisms and foundation for recovery that can help communities rise out of crisis. As the fight against COVID-19 further imperils markets and social networks in protracted crises, the imperative to work through and strengthen these systems is more paramount than ever.

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33 Howe, K. et al (2018)

34 Mercy Corps. (2017). Northeast Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Northeast%20Nigeria%20Joint%20LMRA%202017.pdf

35 Howe, K. et al (2018)

36 The Emerging Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA) toolkit offers one widely accepted approach, though it is perhaps rarely used appropriately and generally does not account for relevant social factors in an in-depth manner.

37 Hemberger, A., Muench, S. & Algoso, D. (2017). Beyond cash: Making markets work in crisis.

38 Mercy Corps. (2017). Northeast Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment.

39 Levine, S. & Breton, G. (2019). Facing Up to the Challenges: Blending Market and Humanitarian Support for Refugees in Uganda. Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Facing_Up_to_the_Challenges_final.pdf

3. Short-term violence prevention paired with efforts to transform structural drivers of conflict

Responses to protracted crises need to do two things at once: enhance local capacities to anticipate and prevent violent conflicts in the short-term, while also investing in long-term development efforts to transform fragility and conflict drivers. A focus on the "root causes" of conflict – such as weak rule of law, state-perpetrated violence, and economic marginalization – is sensibly beginning to guide much of the big picture thinking on fragile states. The World Bank's *Pathways for Peace* report calls for anchoring conflict prevention in long-term sustainable development strategies. The best way to prevent violent conflict in the world's fragile states, the report argues, is by investing in inclusive and sustainable development.[40]

> *Efforts to strengthen local market systems and social networks work against the grain of rapid, in-kind aid delivery that meets immediate needs.*

Unfortunately, this prescription is incomplete: a focus on structural drivers may discount the combustible, potentially long-term effects of short-term drivers of conflict. The dynamic nature of conflict limits the potential of development to gradually cultivate peace and stability. In fragile states, crises erupt unexpectedly, and evolve more quickly than country development strategies can anticipate, with the consequence that linear efforts are routinely blindsided by the onset of new shocks. There is no way to transform the system-level drivers of fragility and crisis, and enable states to slip the bonds of fragility, so long as near-term sources of instability erase development gains and dissolve into conflict-driven crises. Put another way, efforts to play the long game must include short-term prevention efforts that nip in the bud conflicts that could threaten the entire enterprise.

Pairing short-term violence reduction with activities that alleviate the long-term drivers of instability have worked at the sub-national levels. For example, in the DRC, where land-based conflicts have been a flashpoint for simmering tensions,[41] investments have helped foster more inclusive governance structures composed of landowners, community members and local institutions. These structures mitigate conflict in the short-term, by promoting intergroup dialogues and dispute resolution. They also help alleviate structural drivers by formalizing land titles and sharecropping agreements across ethnic lines, advancing land reform, and improving agricultural productivity. In Somalia, a youth development program paired secondary education with deliberate efforts to strengthen civic engagement of youth, which improved participants' perceptions of state actors and institutions, and reduced their support for political violence.[42]

Where development investments prioritize peace outcomes alongside measures of economic development – by promoting equitable solutions to issues driving intergroup tension, such as resource competition – they can contribute

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40 This thinking also guides the Bank's strategy for Fragility, Conflict and Violence.

41 Mercy Corps. (2014). Assessing the humanitarian response to chronic crisis in North Kivu. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/MercyCorps_DRC_AssessingHumanitarianResponseNorthKivu_2014.pdf

42 Tesfaye, B., McDougal, T., Maclin, B., & Blum, A. (2018). If youth are given the chance: Effects of education and civic engagement on somali youth support for political violence. Mercy Corps. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/If%20Youth%20Are%20Given%20the%20Chance_LR_FINAL.pdf

to long-term stability in fragile states. Currently, this is almost never the case. To create the space for longer-term development efforts to take hold, development efforts need to prioritize near-term stability by making an explicit, measurable commitment to peace outcomes. This has increasing importance in a COVID-19 world, where disinformation, erosion of public trust, broken economies and more limited access to public services can dramatically heighten the grievances that drive violence against both government and other groups.[43]

Conclusion and Recommendations

The approach outlined in this paper calls for a radical departure from business as usual. Given the political and moral imperative to achieve better outcomes in states plagued by conflict-driven crises, policymakers and implementers must rethink how humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding investments are conceived, delivered, and assessed. A resilience agenda offers a unifying framework that could advance collective action and impact across the triple nexus, specifically by galvanizing investments towards sources of resilience.

Resilience is not a cure for all that ails the international aid architecture. On its own, it cannot resolve the deep seeded structural challenges that underpin the lack of progress toward collective impact in fragile contexts. However, recent developments offer opportunities to advance the resilience agenda and push through the complementary reforms needed to transform how we approach protracted, conflict-driven crises. USAID has established a new Office for Relief, Recovery, and Resilience that has the potential to better connect the work of its Resilience and Food Security, Humanitarian, and Conflict Prevention Bureaus. The U.S. Congress has also passed the Global Fragility Act, which focuses U.S. foreign assistance on preventing violence and conflict in fragile countries and calls for a cross-departmental coordination structure. The EU has identified triple nexus priority countries, and a number of UN Resident Coordinators are making efforts to leverage existing coordination structures to advance the triple nexus. The details of the UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan to COVID-19, coupled with the UN's COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery Framework point to an increased appetite for more agile strategies that better address peace and economic stability in an otherwise humanitarian crisis.

All of the above mechanisms provide an opportunity to bring key decision-makers together and advance practical reforms that move crisis-affected communities towards resilience. Making this a reality will require shared vision and political will among donors, greater flexibility around traditional mandates and a continued demand for reform from operational agencies.

To guide the adoption and application of a resilience agenda across the world's conflict-driven crises, we recommend the following:

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43 Mercy Corps. (2019). Good governance: Preventing conflict and building peace. https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/GoodGovernance_PreventingConflictBuildingPeace_ResearchBrief1.pdf

> **Ensure greater coherence of international responses by adopting and holding aid actors accountable to shared metrics of success.**

Donors and implementing agencies will act on what is measured. Achieving collective outcomes requires that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors come to define success in the same way. To this end, international response actors should adopt a shared set of measures that include sources of resilience and measures of well-being, including peace metrics such as social cohesion, perceptions of responsiveness and legitimacy of local institutions, and reduction in participation in and support for violence (both domestic and community). Shared metrics should also include measures of material well-being, such as protection of food security, use of positive coping mechanisms, and asset losses avoided. Donor funding should be contingent on the adoption of these cross-cutting metrics of success, and each investment should dedicate at least 15% of program funds towards measurement, evaluation and learning.

> **Shift the assistance bias away from direct delivery and toward working through and in support of local market and social systems.**

While exigent circumstances will require direct food, water or agricultural input assistance to the most vulnerable households, humanitarian actors should look at opportunities to support systems first, and reserve direct delivery for only the most insecure and non-permissive pockets. This must include investments to strengthen markets and social systems that communities rely on to cope and adapt in crisis settings, and that form the foundation for crisis recovery. Strengthening these sources of resilience is contingent on a fundamental shift in implementation bias across the aid industry. Investments in local systems can lead to longer-term gains but require donors to take on more risk in very fragile contexts. As COVID-19 poses new threats to social networks and local economies, however, this shift is more critical than ever.

> **Ensure peacebuilding expertise and funds are part and parcel of the design and delivery of humanitarian and development investments in conflict-driven crises.**

Humanitarian and development actors must prioritize conflict-sensitive response, grounded in scenario plans sensitive to evident and potential risks (be they exogenous or arising as an unintended consequence of international response activities). Conflict-sensitive responses oriented toward strengthening connections, building trust across lines of division, and building capacities for dispute resolution do not contradict the humanitarian principle of neutrality. Rather, they acknowledge the reality that humanitarian and development actors inherently impact local dynamics in a protracted crisis, with the potential to both do harm and good. In relatively stable contexts, responses must also incorporate explicit violence prevention measures by addressing grievances and tackling structural drivers. To achieve this, peacebuilders must be a central part of teams designing, implementing and measuring the impact of humanitarian and development investments in protracted crises.

❯ Allow for greater flexibility in mandates and approaches across funding streams.

The silos between short-and long-term funds, and the mindset and mandates that drive humanitarian, peace and development programming, stymie progress in protracted, conflict-driven crises. Multi-year investments in short-term assistance, including UN-OCHA's global appeal for $90 billion to fight the global COVID-19 pandemic, will not address this challenge. Advancing a common agenda requires more intentional efforts by humanitarian actors to take on "development-like" metrics and approaches, such as strengthening markets alongside cash assistance. This agenda also demands development actors embrace short-term violence prevention as a goal alongside economic or social inclusion. And, finally, that peacebuilders see themselves as key agents of resilience that help people cope and adapt to crisis as a step in building long-term peace. Each actor must expand their scope and responsibility and work to ensure greater connectivity and coherence across the triple nexus.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings a renewed urgency to the resilience agenda, or the imperative to protect local societies and economies in the face of devastating shocks. In protracted, conflict-driven crises, it is also a reminder of the international aid architecture's failure to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable populations already facing continuous humanitarian need. The current moment provides a unique opportunity, and an obligation, to reimagine how humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding investments are collectively designed and delivered to strengthen sources of resilience. Moving the resilience agenda from rhetoric to reform is essential to secure well-being for the world's most vulnerable populations, today, and in the future.

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About Mercy Corps

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