



TOWARDS RESILIENCE: ADVANCING COLLECTIVE IMPACT IN PROTRACTED CRISES

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Global crises are increasing in number, duration, and complexity. 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. Yet it is only the latest threat highlighting the limitations of the international aid architecture to achieve better outcomes for populations facing protracted humanitarian need. 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.

¹ Petryniak, Olga, Proctor, Keith, and Jon Kurtz. (2020). Towards Resilience: Advancing Collective Impact in Protracted Crises. Mercy Corps.

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

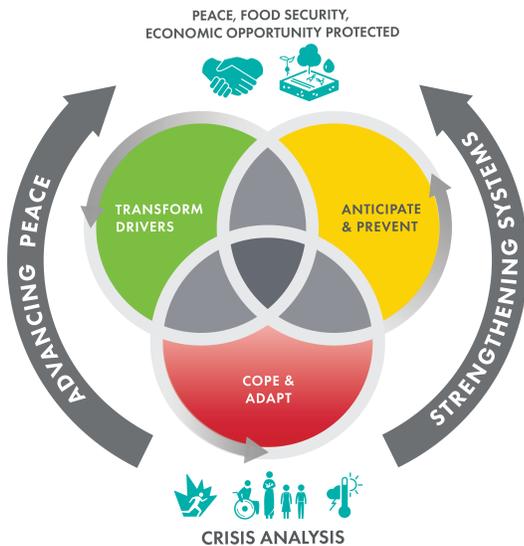


Figure 1: A resilience agenda in protracted crises would guide international responses to collectively strengthen sources of resilience that advance and protect peace, alongside food and water security, and economic opportunity.

Resilience offers an organizing framework for aligning and improving collective impact across international responses - activities and funding streams. 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.² Following the 2011-2012 Horn of Africa drought and famine, 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.

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.

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 In this paper we refer to a ‘resilience agenda’ as one that works intentionally to support these abilities.

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. 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. 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.

2) Support to local market and social systems to strengthen sources of resilience to the shocks and stresses defining protracted crises

Though often overlooked or undermined by international responses, local systems are essential to achieving better, more durable outcomes in protracted crises. Research 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, and provide opportunities to reduce violence.³ 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.⁴ Markets also 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.⁵ Efforts, such as offering flour subsidies to local bakeries in Syria to maintain the food supply and keep prices stable, in order to strengthen local market systems work against the grain of rapid, in-kind aid delivery that meets immediate needs.⁶ However, 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.

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

The dynamic nature of conflict limits the potential of development to gradually cultivate peace and stability. Pairing short-term violence reduction with activities that alleviate the long-term drivers of instability have worked at the subnational levels in places like DRC, where more inclusive governance 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.⁷

3 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.

4 Ibid

5 Mercy Corps. (2017). [Northeast Nigeria Joint Livelihood and Market Recovery Assessment](#).

6 Hemberger, A., Muench, S. & Algosio, D. (2017). [Beyond cash: Making markets work in crisis](#). Mercy Corps.

7 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.

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, and broken economies can dramatically heighten the grievances that drive violence.

Recommendations

The approach outlined in the 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. 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, such as USAID’s Transformation, the UN’s COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery Framework and the EU’s investments in the triple nexus, offer opportunities to advance the resilience agenda and push through the reforms needed to transform how we approach conflict-driven crises.

To guide the adoption and application of a resilience agenda, we recommend the following:

- › Ensure greater coherence of international responses by adopting and holding aid actors accountable to shared metrics of success.
- › Shift the assistance bias away from direct delivery and toward working through and in support of local market and social systems.
- › Ensure peacebuilding expertise and funds are part and parcel of the design and delivery of humanitarian and development investments in conflict-driven crises.
- › Allow for greater flexibility in mandates and approaches across funding streams.

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