



Adapting in Adversity

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLIMATE ACTION
IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

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Photo: Mercy Corps,
Uganda/T. Slavisa, 2014

Introduction

Countries characterized as fragile and conflict-affected are often extremely vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis. Many of these nations are geographically exposed to extreme and persistent climate hazards, and the same characteristics that define them as fragile — weak institutions, poor governance, and conflict — also ensure they struggle to cope with and adapt to these shocks. In fact, 19 of the top 25 most climate-vulnerable countries are fragile and conflict-affected situations (FCS) as defined by the World Bank.¹

¹ To ascertain climate vulnerability, we use the University of Notre Dame's [ND-GAIN Country Index](#) which calculates a country's susceptibility to the negative effects of climate change based on exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity measurements. Of the 25 most vulnerable countries, 19 are also on the [World Bank's FCS list for FY24](#).

Key Terms

Climate Adaptation refers to adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climate shocks and their effects. It refers to changes in processes, practices, and structures to moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change. In simple terms, countries and communities need to develop adaptation solutions and implement actions to respond to current and future climate change impacts.¹

Conflict a situation of acute insecurity driven by the use of deadly force by a group — including state forces, organized non-state groups, or other irregular entities — with a political purpose or motivation. Such force can be two-sided — involving engagement between multiple organized, armed sides, at times resulting in collateral civilian harm — or one-sided, in which a group specifically targets civilians.²

Fragility a systemic condition or situation characterized by an extremely low level of institutional and governance capacity that significantly impedes the state’s ability to function effectively, maintain peace, and foster economic and social development.³

Mercy Corps has been working at the intersection of climate change, fragility, and conflict for over a decade. Working hand in hand with communities in countries such as Mali, Iraq, Uganda, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, our teams have witnessed an increase in the number and duration of conflict-driven crises in places that are also experiencing the greatest effects of climate change. Through these efforts we have come to understand the relationship between these forces as a “vicious cycle²” (Figure 1). On the one hand, we see the effects of climate change intensifying many of the traditional drivers of conflict and raising the risk of violence. On the other hand, we see how fragility and conflict limit the ability of both communities and institutions to respond to climate impacts.

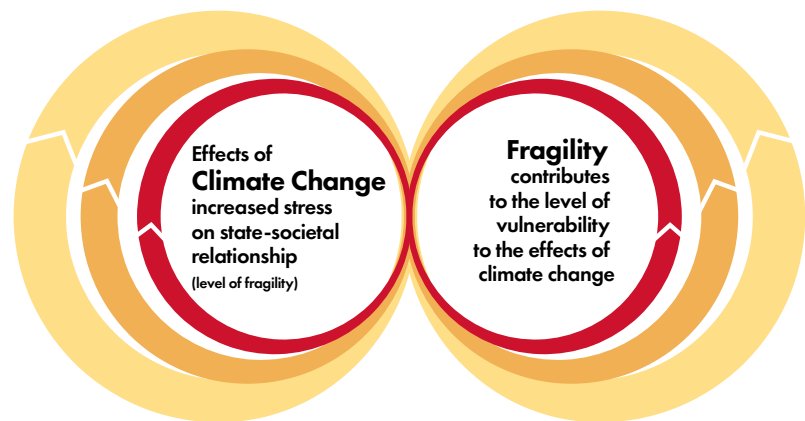


FIGURE 1 A vicious cycle - the relationship between climate change and fragility

Too frequently we find that fragility itself serves as a barrier to receiving climate adaptation finance, which is a lifeline for communities preparing for and responding to climate change. In 2021, \$21 billion was mobilized for climate adaptation financing.⁶ However, within the ten most fragile states, only \$223 million was received in climate adaptation financing in the same year⁷, representing less than 1% of total flows. Even where adaptation finance is available, donors are hampered by risk aversion that both severely limits what can be financed in such

2 Mercy Corps. “Addressing the Climate-Conflict Nexus.” Mercy Corps. <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/addressing-climate-conflict-nexus>.

3 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Introduction to Adaptation and Resilience. <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/the-big-picture/introduction>.

4 World Bank. Classification of Fragility and Conflict Situations (FCS) for World Bank Group Engagement <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fb0f93e8e3375803bce211ab1218ef2a-0090082023/original/Classification-of-Fragility-and-Conflict-Situations-FY24.pdf>.

5 World Bank. Classification of Fragility and Conflict Situations (FCS) for World Bank Group Engagement <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/fb0f93e8e3375803bce211ab1218ef2a-0090082023/original/Classification-of-Fragility-and-Conflict-Situations-FY24.pdf>.

6 United Nations Environment Programme (2023). Adaptation Gap Report 2023: Underfinanced. Underprepared. Inadequate investment and planning on climate adaptation leaves world exposed. Nairobi. <https://www.unep.org/resources/adaptation-gap-report-2023>.

7 To determine the top 10 fragile states, we use The Fund for Peace’s Fragile States Index, which uses twelve cohesion, economic, political, and social indicators to rank 178 countries based on state fragility. To calculate the adaptation finance for fragile states in 2021, we analyzed 2021 OECD DAC adaptation funding tagged as “principal.” This represents programs with a focus on or outcomes supporting adaptation.

contexts, and creates extremely onerous processes for key actors to access financing.

The extent to which the characteristics of FCS inhibit climate adaptation has been given relatively little attention in global discussions and research. Mercy Corps has undertaken this study to understand the limits fragility and conflict place on adaptation and how development actors, in partnership with vulnerable communities, are finding a way forward.

Adapting to Adversity draws on the perspectives of Mercy Corps country and program teams implementing climate adaptation strategies in FCS. This report identifies emerging lessons and promising approaches to guide bilateral donors and implementing partners to deliver effective adaptation interventions in fragile and conflict-affected situations.

What's Known and What's in Debate

The interconnected nature of conflict, climate adaptation, and fragility make it a complex but important topic to understand, yet this has received relatively little engagement and investment from donors and development organizations.

Broadly, existing literature agrees that climate change is a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates already fragile systems and leads to increased or protracted conflict.⁸ While Mercy Corps understands climate change as a threat multiplier, there is a need to go beyond this broad characterization to provide a more concrete understanding of how, empirically, climate change is exacerbating the interconnected factors that drive state fragility and how, in turn, that fragility affects states’ adaptive capacity.⁹

The existing evidence base presents several adaptation strategies of particular relevance in FCS. ‘Environmental peacebuilding’, for example, is a theoretical framework used by both academics and practitioners to understand how environmental cooperation across political borders can be a tool for peacebuilding.¹⁰ In practice, this kind of coordination has been primarily implemented through transboundary water agreements. In one case, two states previously in conflict created effective water-sharing arrangements that had a “positive and significant effect on the improvement of interstate relations.”¹¹ In cases where there isn’t a larger national government or NGO presence, communities themselves may drive

Emerging Lessons:



Adaptation is not only possible but effective in fragile places.



Climate adaptation must incorporate peace and governance interventions.



Decision making is improved when government actors and communities have better access to information to support policy and planning.



Programs must be designed to allow teams to test and adapt to climate and conflict dynamics.



Private sector solutions can work in fragile contexts.

8 This wording has been widely used by the U.S. government, particularly the Department of Defense, governments and international organizations, and in some academic journals.

9 Mercy Corps. “Addressing the Climate-Conflict Nexus.” Mercy Corps. <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/addressing-climate-conflict-nexus>.

10 Dresse, Anaïs, Itay Fischhendler, Jonas Østergaard Nielsen, and Dimitrios Zikos. “Environmental Peacebuilding: Towards a Theoretical Framework.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718808331>.

11 Tobias Ide and Adrien Detges, “International Water Cooperation and Environmental Peacemaking,” *Global Environmental Politics* 18, no. 4 (November 2018): 63–84, https://doi.org/10.1162/glep_a_00478.

cooperation over water or other resources, improving both the supplies of those resources and relationships amongst those sharing them.¹² However, evidence on the effectiveness of such approaches is mixed. In one case, local cooperation did not lead to improved community relations with either the private sector or the state.¹³



Photo: Mercy Corps, DRC/E. Millstein, 2022

Furthermore, there is evidence that climate change adaptation projects that don't strategically build capacity¹⁴ or take conflict dynamics¹⁵ into account can undermine peace efforts in FCS. To mitigate this, the authors highlight the need for a conflict-sensitive approach to adaptation and the co-development of adaptation policies with local communities.¹⁶ Conflict-sensitive adaptation takes into account the factors that may provoke new or exacerbate existing conflicts when planning, implementing, and managing adaptation

activities.¹⁷ This method calls for a contextual understanding of both the climate change and conflict challenges, including the drivers of conflict in an area.¹⁸

Overwhelmingly, academics and nonacademics agree that there is not enough empirical research at the nexus between climate change adaptation, and conflict. The existing evidence tends to use conflict as a proxy for fragility and only explicitly mentions fragility when referring to fragile and conflict-affected states. This is an important gap that should be addressed in future studies. Finally, the research identified a significant and worrying gap in understanding the intersection of climate, fragility, and gender. The impacts of climate change affect men and women differently and these linkages should be a priority for further research, analysis, and interventions.

12 *ibid*

13 Samyra Hachmann et al., "Conceptualizing Community-Based Environmental Peacebuilding in Cesar, Colombia," *Human Ecology* 51, no. 2 (April 1, 2023): 221–35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-023-00399-9>.

14 Johnson, McKenzie F., Luz A. Rodríguez, and Manuela Quijano Hoyos. "Intrastate Environmental Peacebuilding: A Review of the Literature." *World Development* 137 (January 1, 2021): 105150. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X20302771?via%3Dihub>

15 Tim Forsyth and Constance L. McDermott, "When Climate Justice Goes Wrong: Maladaptation and Deep Co-Production in Transformative Environmental Science and Policy," *Political Geography* 98 (October 2022): 102691, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102691>.

16 Tim Forsyth and Constance L. McDermott, "When Climate Justice Goes Wrong: Maladaptation and Deep Co-Production in Transformative Environmental Science and Policy," *Political Geography* 98 (October 2022): 102691, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2022.102691>.

17 Babicky, "A Conflict-Sensitive Approach to Climate Change Adaptation."

18 Dennis Tänzler, Alexander Carius, and Achim Maas, "The Need for Conflict-Sensitive Adaptation to Climate Change," *Environmental Change and Security Program Report* 14, no. 2 (2013): 5–12. <https://adelphi.de/en/publications/the-need-for-conflict-sensitive-adaptation-to-climate-change>.

FIGURE 2 The feedback from team members across Mercy Corps global network shaped this report.



Methodology

Building on the literature review documented above, we engaged Mercy Corps country offices in rapid practitioner-focused research to understand how country and program teams in FCS are supporting climate adaptation, the barriers they face, and the promising practices they are implementing in their programming (Figure 2). We administered an online survey to a sample of Mercy Corps country offices, to elucidate views on a range of topics related to climate change and fragility. Recognizing fragility as a spectrum, we heard from individuals across three different country-level contexts: (i) countries with a history of adaptation programming, partially or totally in fragile contexts, (ii) countries that had a history of adaptation programming, which has been further constrained by a rise in conflict, and (iii) countries with little to no climate programming due to ongoing conflict.

Semi-structured interviews were then undertaken with willing survey respondents. Interview discussions were coded into key themes to support a more nuanced understanding of barriers to effective adaptation programming in these contexts. This approach also identified specific examples of how such challenges are being addressed. It is important to note however that the majority of respondents were based in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and identified barriers may not fully reflect the challenges faced in other regions.

Barriers and Solutions to Climate Adaptation in Fragile Contexts

An enabling environment is critical to supporting effective responses to climate change impacts. However, the fundamental conditions needed to enable robust adaptation programming are frequently absent in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Key barriers to effective adaptation identified through this work are outlined below, alongside examples of the innovative approaches Mercy Corps country programs are adopting to address these challenges.



Poorly functioning or nonexistent government institutions

Good governance is a prerequisite for effective climate change adaptation and is also critical to effective conflict mitigation and prevention. Interview respondents frequently cited issues of poorly functioning government institutions as a barrier to effective climate response in FCS. Specific challenges include limited capacity to respond quickly and effectively to shocks and stresses, and an inability to enforce existing policies, however well formulated. Weak institutions also hinder long-term adaptation planning, and efforts to ensure adaptation interventions are equitable and inclusive. These governance challenges are compounded by pervasive and nuanced issues of corruption in FCS.

Bureaucracy is often framed as both a symptom and cause of poor governance. Respondents highlighted the role of excessive and inflexible bureaucracy in fueling inefficiency and inertia in supporting adaptation to climate change in FCS. Respondents emphasized the importance of close collaboration with the government in program delivery, indeed in several country contexts formal collaboration is a requirement. However, such partnerships bring challenges as government counterparts are often underfunded, necessitate adherence to inflexible rules, and require sustained and dedicated engagement to facilitate access to community members.

Overcoming Governance Challenges to Support Adaptation in Uganda

In the Karamoja region of Uganda, Mercy Corps is implementing the USAID funded Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity program (EKISIL). The program is focused on peace and livelihood outcomes and incorporates several climate adaptation strategies to address the increased rainfall variability, shorter rainy seasons, and longer dry seasons that the region is experiencing. However, these efforts are challenged by ongoing conflict and weak governance.

The Karamoja region has experienced conflict for decades, with a long history of cattle raiding between different ethnic pastoral groups. The violence associated with the region's primary livelihood activity - cattle herding - has in part created a culture of gun ownership for self-protection. Governance is also a challenge in this region, as there are very few laws and regulations around land and water use, and limited enforcement of those that do exist. As a result adaptation options which seek to maximize the use of increasingly limited resources are hamstrung.

The EKISIL program has addressed this challenge directly, working in partnership with local government to develop and institutionalize resource-sharing agreements, policies that govern access and use of land and water across different groups, and working with government actors to strengthen their ability to

enforce them. This has included the development of a formal management plan for one of the region's most important water resources- the Kobebe reservoir. With these policies in place and more secure and equitable access to resources, fighting has diminished. Together these changes have created a better enabling environment for adaptation. As stated by one woman in the region "Our livestock have multiplied. There is free movement without fear of insecurity."



Photo: Mercy Corps, Uganda/E. Millstein, 2021



Limited Access to Shock Responsive and Flexible Funding

The literature identifies limited access to climate finance as a key constraint to climate programming in FCS. Donor aversion to risk, stringent requirements on access to funding, inflexible operational protocols, and difficulties in monitoring progress and measuring outcomes, are all identified as barriers to accessing climate funding.¹⁹ These challenges were borne out in survey responses and stakeholder interviews. Respondents noted that adaptation funding remains heavily skewed in favor of developing countries that are easier to operate in, whilst noting a lack of access to flexible funding to support rapid response to climate shocks. The overall result is a lack of funding to support climate action in FCS at scale.

Issues of inadequate access to finance in FCS are frequently exacerbated by challenges with poor coordination at the national level, particularly between humanitarian, development, and climate donors and implementing partners, which leads to duplication of support in some areas and gaps in others.

Financing Resilient Recovery and Supporting Adaptation in Ethiopia

In the Somali region of Ethiopia, by the start of 2022, La Nina had resulted in four consecutive failed rainy seasons, leading to exceptionally severe drought conditions and acute food insecurity across the region. Water sources dried up and pastureland was depleted, resulting in rapid increases in livestock morbidity and mortality. Multiple compounding shocks including complex local and regional conflict dynamics, displacement, COVID-19, and rapid inflation posed immediate threats to the lives and livelihoods of millions. The Mercy Corps program team was able to effectively respond to these complex challenges, build resilience, and support adaptation to climate change.

This was only possible thanks to a pre-planned financing mechanism or crisis modifier that could be rapidly mobilized to support a resilient recovery. A strong working relationship with relevant government stakeholders at multiple levels, developed over years of prior programming, minimized bureaucratic obstacles and supported rapid mobilization and targeting of funds to support adaptive actions.

It was also critical that this 'emergency' response - to the drought - was embedded within a longer term Market Systems Development program. This allowed the team and participants to take a longer-term perspective, which is a crucial component of robust adaptation programming. It also provided an opportunity for effective engagement with private

sector partners including private veterinary pharmacies and financial service providers, leveraging support for the crisis response through, for example, improved access to finance. The program also considered not only current but future climate risks and included activities to improve the governance of natural resources.

This experience demonstrates the effectiveness of embedding shock-response climate adaptation funding within longer term development programs and investments. It highlights the value of adopting a systems approach to address funding gaps and bridge the humanitarian-development divide, whilst reducing the likelihood of maladaptive responses.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ethiopia/E. Millstein 2023

¹⁹ Alcayna, T. and Cao, Y. Breaking the cycle: practical solutions to unlock climate finance for fragile states. Washington, D.C.: Mercy Corps. (2022). <https://www.mercycorps.org/research-resources/breaking-the-cycle>.



Limited Private Sector Engagement

Greater private sector engagement was repeatedly raised as providing opportunities for innovation, flexible funding, and sustainability. However, there are particular barriers to this in FCS, including insecurity, political instability, limited market opportunities, legal challenges, and risk aversion. Often the strongest opportunities for more substantive private sector collaboration are focused on urban settings and are not well aligned with the heavily rural focus of many of Mercy Corps' adaptation interventions.

Interview respondents noted that whilst the long-term vision for increased private sector engagement often exists, this is often challenging in these settings. However, there are exceptions. Respondents from Ethiopia reported that strong national policy frameworks that define clear priorities have provided greater certainty, reduced levels of perceived risk, and encouraged greater levels of private sector engagement. Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy²⁰ and National Adaptation Plan²¹, set out the country's ambitious agenda for climate action. Covering adaptation priorities and implementation plans in the contexts of regional and sectoral development, these frameworks demonstrate long term commitment to adaptation action, provide clear direction, support program implementation, and ultimately derisk private sector investment. Programs that adopt a proactive market systems approach to private sector collaboration, build private sector capacity to engage on these issues and enable the benefits of private sector engagement to be realized.



Volatile economic environment

The challenges posed by resource constraints are frequently exacerbated by the volatile economic environment which is a feature of many fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Hyperinflation, currency fluctuations, and non-functional banking systems impact available adaptation options. A lack of access to financial services means that savings and loan-based interventions such as increasing access to finance, and the creation of village saving and loan schemes, which are often an important element of adaptation strategies, rarely work in these contexts. Respondents from Zimbabwe noted that currency fluctuations can exacerbate this challenge, and may also impact the uptake and effectiveness of insurance-based interventions to improve resilience. Hyperinflation can rapidly erode the value of funds paid into such schemes leaving intended beneficiaries unable to adapt to climate shocks.

In such capricious contexts, programming teams highlighted the value of building individuals' asset bases outside of traditional structures. Interventions that focus on supporting and strengthening the resources available to vulnerable populations, for example by investing in small livestock that can be sold easily in the event of a delayed rainy season, can represent a useful adaptation strategy that does not rely on formal financial systems. Adopting an approach that layers such interventions was cited as a way to bolster adaptation efforts.

20 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) Strategy. (2011). https://cdn.climatepolicyradar.org/navigator/ETH/2011/climate-resilient-green-economy-crge-strategy_877eee58f4e51ec758d4d6d1c500348b.pdf.

21 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Ethiopia's Climate Resilient Green Economy: National Adaptation Plan (May 2019). <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NAPC/Documents/Parties/Final%20Ethiopia-national-adaptation-plan%20%281%29.pdf>.



Limited Technical Capacity to Engage

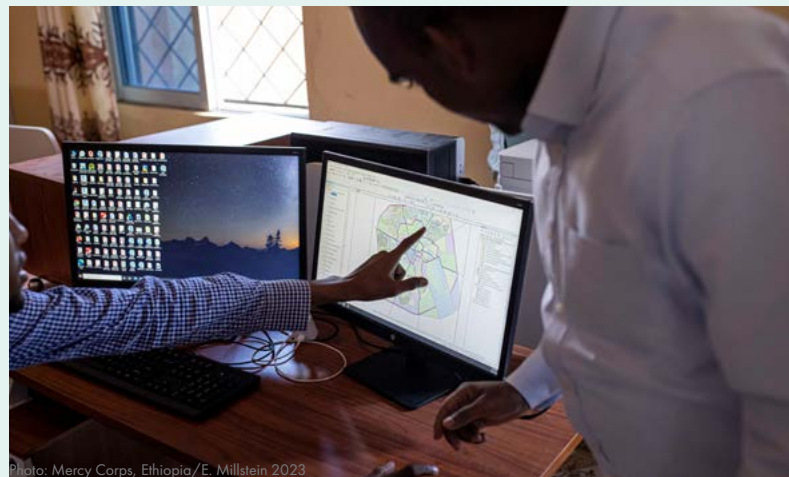
A lack of technical capacity was identified as a further barrier to effective climate adaptation programming in FCS. At the national level, this frequently manifests as an inability to prioritize and focus scarce resources on non-immediate challenges. At the local level, communities and government structures may not have the capacity (technical or otherwise) to participate in complex climate programs. Conflict compounds this - further hampering engagement, particularly where some community members have been displaced. The lack of available weather and climate information to support decisions that reduce climate risks and prevent maladaptation is an additional capacity challenge reported at all scales. Targeted support to strengthen the provision of timely, reliable, and sustainable weather and climate services is critical to support a range of actors in making informed decisions and managing the risks and impacts resulting from increased climate variability and change, including small-scale producers, farmers, sellers, public and private extension providers, insurers, agriculture and natural resources planners, and policymakers.

Improving Access to Information to Support Long Term Adaptation Planning

In Northern Kenya, one of the major challenges for county governments is the lack of weather and climate information to support decision-making. Unpredictable rainfall impacts the availability of water resources which creates pressure on communities' livelihoods and leads to conflict over water and pasture resources. In addition to this, weak institutions at the local government and community level lack the capabilities to plan and implement adaptation interventions.

Through the ASAL Adapts program, Mercy Corps has partnered with the Wajir County government and the Drought Management Authority, to develop an improved and more inclusive decision making and planning process. This involves strengthening Ward Development Committees (WDCs) which include community representatives. We have also partnered with ESRI, an American GIS software company, to establish a GIS lab and are working cooperatively

with local government partners and the WDCs to establish a system to visualize ecosystem data, traditional knowledge, and climate information to inform participatory planning processes.



The Complex Relationship Between Climate, Fragility, and Conflict

The complexity and weak evidence base around the relationship between climate change, fragility, and conflict further complicates the design and delivery of activities at the local level. Respondents highlighted the frequent challenges they face in understanding climate-conflict dynamics. Through our work in Uganda, we have seen that local communities also have a limited understanding of how fragility or conflict risks contribute to broader challenges that are exacerbated by climate change.

For our team members who are new to engaging with the climate-conflict nexus, making sense of these dynamics and identifying interventions that support the achievement of both peacebuilding and adaptation outcomes can be difficult. In Nigeria, our team reported a tension between understanding conflict risks to maximize program impacts and untangling the relationship between climate shocks and conflict risks. Strengthening the evidence base on the pathways through which adaptation interventions reduce conflict risk in climate-vulnerable contexts will help support more effective programming.

Unpacking Climate and Conflict Dynamics at the Local Level

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, water sharing agreements amongst the former Soviet republics mostly disintegrated and infrastructure that was once regionally managed became fractured and neglected. For Mercy Corps' Kyrgyzstan team, this has meant that water resources and water sharing are some of their main concerns. Resource mismanagement and perceptions of inequitable water distribution are key drivers of conflict in communities on the Kyrgyz and Tajik border. While water management and access are the main challenges affecting communities, instability is predicted to worsen as the effects of climate change exacerbate water stress across the region.

Mercy Corps' will be applying its new 'climate-conflict assessment tool' - to assess and understand the conflict and climate risks impacting communities. This tool goes a step further than a general conflict assessment by drawing out both the context specific and broader systems dynamics through which climate change amplifies conflict. Linking climate and conflict and identifying entry points to interrupt this cycle will increase our capacity to mobilize communities and design a strategy to improve local capacity

to adapt to the effects of climate change, mitigate water management issues, and rehabilitate existing infrastructure.

While there haven't been incidents recently along the border, there remains the risk that a sudden escalation will negate the team's efforts to build trust in water management. The climate-conflict assessment will help the team prepare for these shocks and strengthen their ability to engage in more climate change and conflict programming.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Kyrgyzstan/C. Spurway, 2001



Focus on Short Term Natural Resource Management Gains

Effective natural resource management has a complex yet critical role in supporting conflict mitigation and prevention, whilst underpinning many approaches to climate change adaptation. Equitable and participatory natural resource governance is fundamental to effective nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation. However, FCS are frequently characterized by insecure land rights, conflict over natural resources, land grabbing, and displacement. A lack of land tenure security exacerbates competition for increasingly scarce resources, driving conflict risks. This challenge is compounded by a lack of incentive to invest in more costly, longer-term adaptive solutions such as climate smart agriculture and sustainable land and water management practices. All too often the result is short term approaches to natural resource management that lack consideration of longer-term climate trends and impacts and can result in maladaptation.

Interview discussions highlighted a clear need for more flexible, adaptive, and long-term programming to address these challenges. Implementers should move away from interventions as usual, and should identify opportunities to capitalize on the achievements of past programs, adopt a longer term perspective, and seek to identify innovative solutions.

Where longer term programs are not an option, supporting the development of community based natural resource management institutions and policies can sustain effective ecosystem-based approaches to adaptation after a given program ends. Respondents from Kyrgyzstan and Ethiopia highlighted the development and strengthening of robust, representative community-based institutions as a foundational step in the creation of durable solutions that meet the time horizons required for effective adaptation programming in FCS.



Weak evidence of ‘What Works’

A shared lack of evidence of what works to support adaptation, in which contexts, and how approaches can be flexible enough to work in very fluid environments further constrains programming in FCS. Interview respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of conflict context and the variability of this over time and space in determining effective approaches to adaptation.

A lack of access to concrete examples of the types of interventions that have been successful in different circumstances leaves many program teams uncertain of how best to build resilience and avoid maladaptive actions²². Drawing on this experience and in partnership with our country teams and the communities that they serve, Mercy Corps is working to address this critical evidence gap and identify practical solutions to this challenge.

Emerging Lessons

The following emerging lessons draw on insights from our country leaders and our programming experience. These lessons reflect where Mercy Corps as an organization finds itself on our programming and learning journey: we have identified actions to guide bilateral donors and implementing partners to deliver effective adaptation interventions and noted areas where we will explore new and innovative approaches to overcome the barriers fragility places on our work.



ADAPTATION IS NOT ONLY POSSIBLE BUT EFFECTIVE IN FRAGILE PLACES.

It's widely understood that there is not enough climate finance overall, and the financing that is available is not being allocated to fragile contexts. The experiences shared in this paper illustrate that when climate finance is available our teams are overcoming the unique challenges presented by fragility and conflict to implement highly effective programming. Donors should complement these efforts by providing adequate, predictable, and additional grants-based finance to increase the scale of this work.



CLIMATE ADAPTATION MUST INCORPORATE PEACE AND GOVERNANCE INTERVENTIONS.

In places affected by fragility and conflict, peace and governance interventions *are* adaptation actions, as they are the first step in creating an enabling environment

22 Mercy Corps. (2020). Climate Change and Conflict: Lessons from Emerging Practice. Edinburgh, UK: Mercy Corps. https://www.planetarysecurityinitiative.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Climate-Conflict%20Report_Mercy%20Corps_April%202020.pdf.

that supports climate adaptation. In Uganda, this means institutionalizing informal structures and natural resource sharing agreements and strengthening relationships between communities sharing those resources. This has paved the way for sustainable and equitable land and water management practices to take place. Furthermore, when governments at any level (local, subnational, or national) are seen as legitimate and able to enforce policies, this enables much more effective and sustained adaptation interventions.

Donors should support the inclusion of peace and governance practices in adaptation programs such as (but not limited to) social cohesion, participatory planning, and conflict resolution²³ in fragile places. This will ensure that programs address the root causes of conflict that can hinder effective adaptation programming and planning. Implementing partners must break down peace and climate silos to integrate these approaches in programs and highlight the co-benefits of governance interventions for adaptation.



DECISION MAKING IS IMPROVED WHEN GOVERNMENT ACTORS AND COMMUNITIES HAVE BETTER ACCESS TO INFORMATION TO SUPPORT POLICY AND PLANNING.

A lack of government capacity and knowledge of climate change can hinder effective and long term adaptation planning in fragile contexts. To enable power holders at all levels of government to make clear, transparent, and equitable decisions, the use of tools such as climate and weather information services and climate-conflict assessments must be increased and mainstreamed. Prioritizing tools that support natural resource governance, anticipatory action, rapid response, and recovery efforts, which are critical for long term adaptation planning, will reduce the risk of adaptation programs leading to conflict outcomes.



PROGRAMS MUST BE DESIGNED TO ALLOW TEAMS TO ADAPT AND RESPOND TO CLIMATE AND CONFLICT DYNAMICS.

A different approach to climate action in fragile contexts is needed and requires that donors increase their risk appetite and allow for the use of flexible approaches in programs. This approach would benefit contexts like Zimbabwe, where the current trial and error strategy of testing climate solutions, seeing what works, and scaling up interventions is at odds with what donors are interested in funding.

For implementing partners, this moment necessitates that we develop program solutions that address both climate impacts and conflict risks and establish cross program links to respond to shocks. Our Nigeria team has seen success in this area by rolling out a cash response mechanism to sustain gains made through a climate smart agriculture program and support communities that were impacted by floods.



PRIVATE SECTOR SOLUTIONS CAN WORK IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS.

While the private sector is often viewed as a partner that can support the financing of climate solutions, this can be a challenge in fragile contexts due to the high risk aversion of operating in these areas. Civil society can play an important intermediary role in supporting public and private sector engagement actors. By guiding interactions with the private sector and setting the foundation for sustained collaboration and learning, this can help derisk public-private engagement in FCS and support innovative and sustainable programming.

23 Kurtz, J., & Elsamahi, M. (2023). How can peacebuilding contribute to climate resilience? Evidence from the drylands of East and West Africa. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 63, 101315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2023.101315>.

In Ethiopia where strong national frameworks enable private sector engagement, we have demonstrated that underserved populations will pay significantly more for quality energy services than was believed, which has opened opportunities for private companies to build out commercial offerings, with the right support. In Uganda, through our close partnership with the central and local government, we have engaged with local chambers of commerce to identify business opportunities that would benefit from private sector investment.

Conclusion

This time spent learning from the experiences of our team members left us with two main takeaways. The first is that while situations of fragility and conflict do present unique challenges to adaptation solutions, these barriers are being overcome by those on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Where adaptation is being supported the programs are successful and those leading them are eager to scale up their impact. The second is that of all the barriers discussed, the lack of financial resources to support adaptation in these contexts is the most limiting. The frustration expressed over these missing resources was palpable across all of the interviews.

As such, Mercy Corps will continue to partner with these leaders in adaptation, our fellow peers, governments, and others to raise our voices to support calls for greater access to adaptation finance while continuing to demonstrate that this work is not only possible but highly impactful.

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