CATALYSE: COMMUNITIES ACTING TOGETHER

A Governance in Action Guide

MAY 2018

MERCY CORPS

Contents

Acknowledgements

Overview

Guided by our Vision for Change, Mercy Corps has helped facilitate community-led collective actions in more than 100 countries over the past 35 years. We bring communities together to identify priorities, implement joint development projects, and connect with government through a process that strengthens a sense of common purpose. We call Mercy Corps' field-tested approach to mobilizing communities CATALYSE: it lies at the foundation of our work.

Involving community members in a way that promotes their ownership over decision-making and builds their knowledge and skills to carry out those decisions is a complex task. Yet our experience leads us to believe that it is an essential component of rapid recovery and lasting change. At its core, the CATALYSE process is about supporting people to work together to transform their communities from within.

This guide will provide framing to support teams as they design, plan, implement and evaluate programs using CATALYSE. It provides a basic understanding of the process of mobilizing communities, introduces the CATALYSE framework, and outlines strategies and principles to keep in mind when designing, implementing and evaluating mobilization efforts. The Guide is designed to accompany our new **CATALYSE Toolkit** which outlines a step-by-step process for community mobilization and provides hands-on tools and tips along the way.

Mobilizing communities looks different from context to context and program to program. Some programs define themselves as "community mobilization" or "community-driven development" programs in their title, goals, objectives or activities. Other programs may have a primary focus elsewhere, but make use of mobilization methodologies in order to accomplish program objectives in a more participatory and empowering manner. *Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach incorporates proven tools, principles and practices that can be adapted to any context or program.*

The Basics: What is CATALYSE?

Over the past three decades, Mercy Corps has developed a tested and proven methodology for mobilizing communities that we now call CATALYSE. CATALYSE is the process we use to build a community's capacity to identify and organize around collective priorities, mobilize resources, implement projects and influence leaders.

The CATALYSE process fosters peaceful, community-led change, empowering diverse community members to work together to address their common challenges. The iterative process demonstrates the value of collective action while strengthening the capacity of communities to lead their own development. The CATALYSE process also demonstrates the value of good governance as communities experience first-hand the importance of representative participation, transparency and accountability. Ultimately, the process encourages more informed, connected and active community members that can work collectively, advocate to their leaders and promote change.

The Benefits of Mobilizing Communities

A number of studies, including Mercy Corps' own research,[1] have shown that the process of mobilizing communities can help meet the challenges of societies in transition by changing the attitudes, norms, and practices of

---

1 For more analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of community driven development processes see the Mercy Corps Governance in Action Research Brief: How effective is community driven development? Incorporating the Evidence into our Approach to Mobilizing Communities.

both individuals and groups. When implemented intentionally, mobilization increases participatory decision-making by bringing diverse stakeholders into a common process. It can expand the inclusion of marginalized populations—such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and religious or ethnic minorities—and lay the groundwork for more inclusive social structures and norms. Over the long-term, the process of mobilization leads to structural shifts in social relationships and hierarchies within communities, a critical transformation that supports lasting change. The process provides increased opportunities for interaction and fosters cooperation across traditional divides, building social capital and helping to break cycles of intra-communal and inter-group tension.

> ## WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?
>
> *Mercy Corps defines social capital as the networks and resources available to people through their relationships with others. It refers to the connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation. See our **research brief** on Social Capital and Good Governance for more information on how the process of mobilizing communities contributes to social capital.*

In addition to building stronger relationships within and between communities, mobilization can strengthen relationships between community members and local government, businesses, and civil society. When linked with the formal governance system, the process of mobilization can increase a community's influence on government decision-making and enhance the legitimacy of local government in the eyes of its constituents.

Successful mobilization efforts leverage local resources, both human and material, while linking to additional resources from government and the private sector. The process ensures local ownership of development and leads to more effective solutions to community issues. Mobilized communities reduce their dependence on outside aid, as they become adept at identifying and solving their own problems.

> By increasing a community's connections with decision-makers and its ability to quickly and effectively identify communal needs and priorities, mobilization efforts support communities to better prepare for or respond to disasters and crises.

In sum, the mobilization process seeks to put communities in charge of their own development, and to facilitate positive interactions between stakeholders. When implemented effectively, mobilization can have numerous immediate and long-term benefits. However, not all community mobilization efforts are successful. The remainder of this guide will explore Mercy Corps' evidence-based approach to mobilizing communities and outline principles and practices to ensure our programs realize these benefits and avoid potential pitfalls.

Mercy Corps' CATALYSE Framework

Using the CATALYSE framework, Mercy Corps guides communities through a participatory process of identifying and understanding community issues, developing solutions, and prioritizing what to work on through community-wide projects. Resources for project implementation are identified and sourced from the community, Mercy Corps, and when possible, government and/or the private sector. Community management structures, such as Community Development Committees (CDCs) or Community Action Groups (CAGs), are created and/or strengthened drawing from existing community groups or bodies to carry out the projects and keep the community informed. Throughout the process, Mercy Corps serves as facilitator and mentor, supporting the community and helping catalyze action. Projects are developed, led and monitored by the community itself (often acting through CAGs or CDCs) in consultation with the broader community.

Our CATALYSE framework comprises eight steps:

1. **Prepare to Mobilize:** Before going into communities, prepare as a team by gathering information about communities and making initial contact with community leaders and members.

2. **Organize Together:** Hold introductory meetings and establish relationships with various groups within the community. Following the introductory meeting with community leadership, this phase aims to build relationships, establish trust, and create a sense of ownership within the community from the outset of the process.

3. **Assess Needs Together:** Using participatory assessment tools, convene a large cross-section of the community to discuss and collect information. The participatory assessment process strengthens community ownership and results in a contextualized, deep understanding of community problems and potential solutions.

4. **Prioritize Together:** Support the community to analyze collected data and build consensus on priority issues. Using assessment data about the problems affecting the community, facilitate a process of consensus building and prioritization to come to agreement about which issues are most critical.

5. **Plan for Action Together:** Develop proposed solutions to identified issues and translate solutions into concrete, actionable projects. Facilitate action planning, and determine how to mobilize resources from a variety of sources to ensure a successful project. Discuss what management structures and capacity building are needed for project implementation.

6. **Act Together:** Put the plan into action. After all the careful analysis, problem solving, and detailed planning, support the community to implement its action plans.

7. **Monitor and Learn Together:** Determine if the community mobilization process met its objectives and capture lessons learned.

8. **Determine Next Steps Together:** Apply lessons learned and determine next steps, including preparing for the next phase of projects or planning for an evaluation.

How Do We Define "Community*"?

Community means different things in different contexts. Some common ways Mercy Corps defines community are:

– Individuals or groups who share a common geographic location

– Individuals or groups who have a common language, culture or values

– The ways individuals or groups interact or are in relationship with each other

– The ways the individuals or groups use common resources to make decisions

*Communities in urban settings may be more heterogeneous and overlapping. It is important to define the community you are targeting at the outset of the CATALYSE process

The components of the CATALYSE framework are arranged into a cycle (see Figure 1) to illustrate the relationship between the different steps. The arrows represent the general sequence of activities, and are meant to be used as guide posts, with room for flexibility. At the center of the cycle are good governance principles—inclusiveness, participation, rule of law, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability and transparency—which are demonstrated and practiced through every step of the process.

Programs using the CATALYSE approach will go through the cycle multiple times, iterating and building on previous rounds. The process can be adapted to a range of contexts and is typically used as an approach to engage
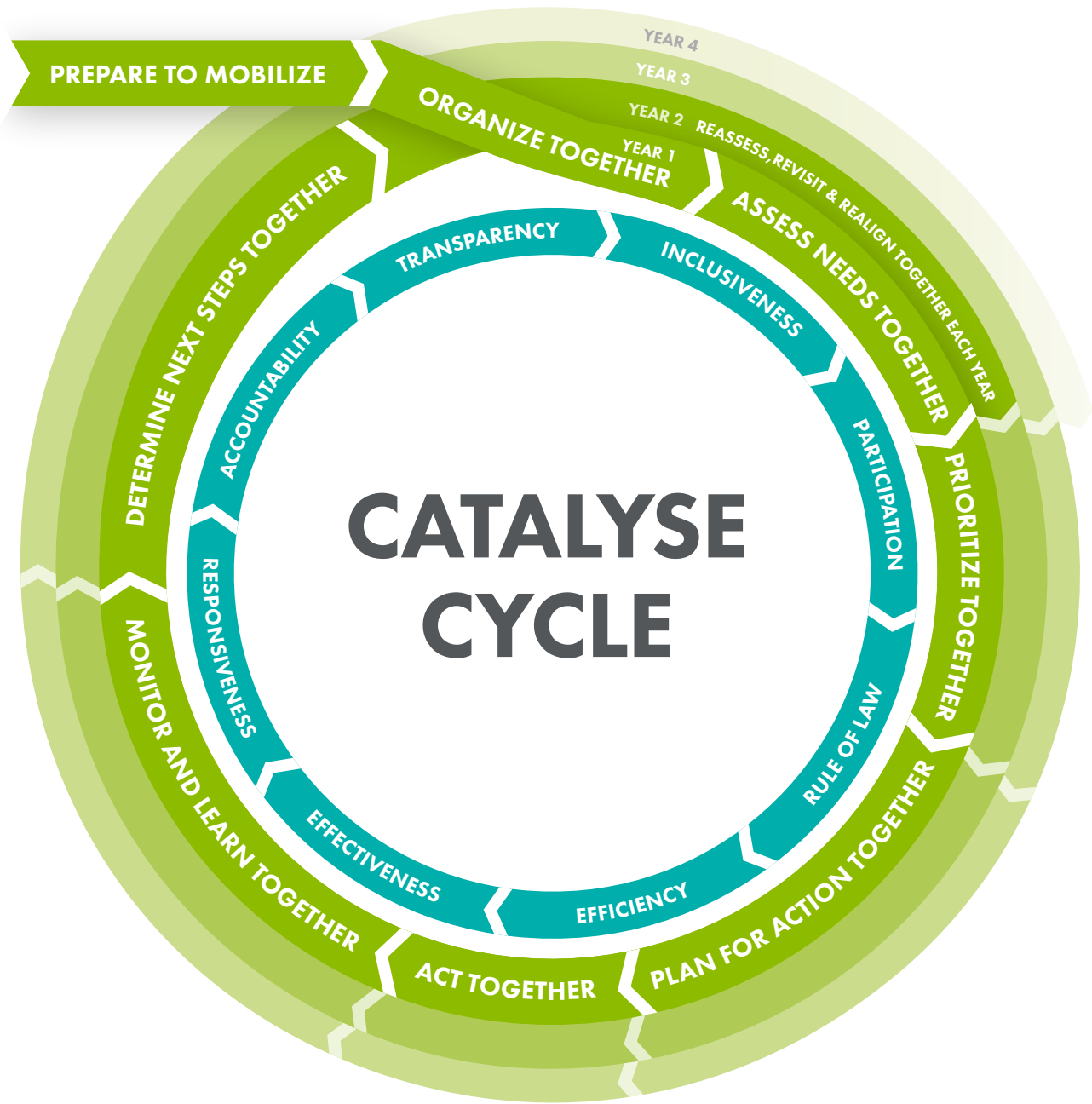
Figure 1: The CATALYSE Cycle

communities in working towards broader development objectives. Although there is no "right" way to mobilize communities, the recommendations provided in this guide (and the process/tools included in the accompanying CATALYSE Toolkit) outline best practices and standards that every team should consider. Of course, we encourage adaptation and creativity when determining how to apply this framework in a given context.

CATALYSE: The Fundamentals and Why They Matter

The CATALYSE approach originates by bringing diverse stakeholders into a common process, builds on existing community strengths and capacities, and is managed by community members. Mercy Corps, as the catalyst, is accountable to the community and facilitates activities that assist community members to develop a common vision. Through iterative cycles of the process, Mercy Corps not only helps build the skills to effectively create and implement community plans via community-led projects, but also creates opportunities for constructive dialogue and relationship-building while modeling good governance principles and the value of collective action.

There are seven basic guidelines fundamental to the CATALYSE approach, regardless of program objectives or context. A program that successfully implements CATALYSE will:

- ❭ Be community-led

- ❭ Provide multiple, iterative opportunities for collective action

- ❭ Encourage active participation

- ❭ Prioritize learning and capacity development

- ❭ Strengthen social capital and community cohesion

- ❭ Emphasize equity and social inclusion

- ❭ Demonstrate the value of good governance and work to strengthen governance systems

Each guideline, and its importance to the CATALYSE process, is detailed further below.

A Community-led Process

Strengthening the capacity of communities to lead their own development processes is one of the main goals of any approach to mobilizing communities. When we mobilize communities through CATALYSE, Mercy Corps does not lead the process, but rather accompanies the community to carry out its own plans by providing support and partnership. A process is community-led when it gives a community control over planning and decision-making about how resources should be invested, while also strengthening community capacity to plan, work and learn together. To ensure community ownership, programs that use CATALYSE should make certain that:

- ❭ Participatory processes for decision-making are standard

- ❭ A diverse and representative portion of the community participates in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of the project

- ❭ There are mechanisms that enable community members to inform Mercy Corps and community leaders about how the project is going and requirements for responsiveness to those concerns

> › Mercy Corps and the community meet regularly to share information on progress and course correct as needed

> › Communities make an investment of their resources (financial, labor, in-kind, other) to the project as a match for Mercy Corps' resources and funding

Our experience has shown that a community's investment of its own resources increases community ownership. While Mercy Corps may provide resources to support community projects in early cycles of the CATALYSE process, we should diminish our contributions and role over subsequent projects, encouraging communities to increase their responsibility, ownership and investment.

Provide multiple opportunities for collective action

CATALYSE provides iterative and repeated opportunities for collective action. Using a series of project cycles and grants, the process provides multiple opportunities for joint actions that demonstrate the advantages of collaborative, community-led development. With each subsequent cycle, communities take increasing ownership of the process: independently engaging in problem solving activities; using mobilization skills and methodologies they acquired through the previous project cycle; and demonstrating greater initiative and ingenuity through an iterative learning process. By providing repeated opportunities for communities to work together and apply learned skills, Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach emphasizes that collective action is not a one-off strategy, but a larger practice for effectively meeting communal demands. This also ensures that the skills, practices and principles introduced through the community mobilization process feel relevant and transferrable beyond a given project because they have been used for multiple different types of activities.


Analysis of Mercy Corps' community mobilization initiatives in Georgia found that "sustained behavior change often does not take place during implementation of the first project" and that reinforcing skills through multiple applications, with the support of the implementing agency, contributes to the likelihood of sustained behavior change.

Photo: Mercy Corps J. Grant 2013

Encourage Active Participation

CATALYSE continually demonstrates the value of active participation in each step of the process. When every member of the community has a chance, directly or through representation, to participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring of community-level initiatives, there is a higher likelihood that projects accurately reflect their needs and interests. Our approach takes into consideration the different experiences, needs and capabilities of various groups within a community—women and men, youth and the elderly, persons with disabilities and the able-bodied, ethnic/religious/language minorities and majorities. Because of this, participation can take a number of forms and may not look the same for every community member in every step of the process. At its foundation, the CATALYSE approach seeks to move communities across the spectrum of participation (see Figure 2). On one end of the spectrum is "passive participation" in which community members participate by being informed about something that will happen or has already happened. At the other end of the spectrum, "self mobilization" occurs when communities organize and take initiative independent of external actors.
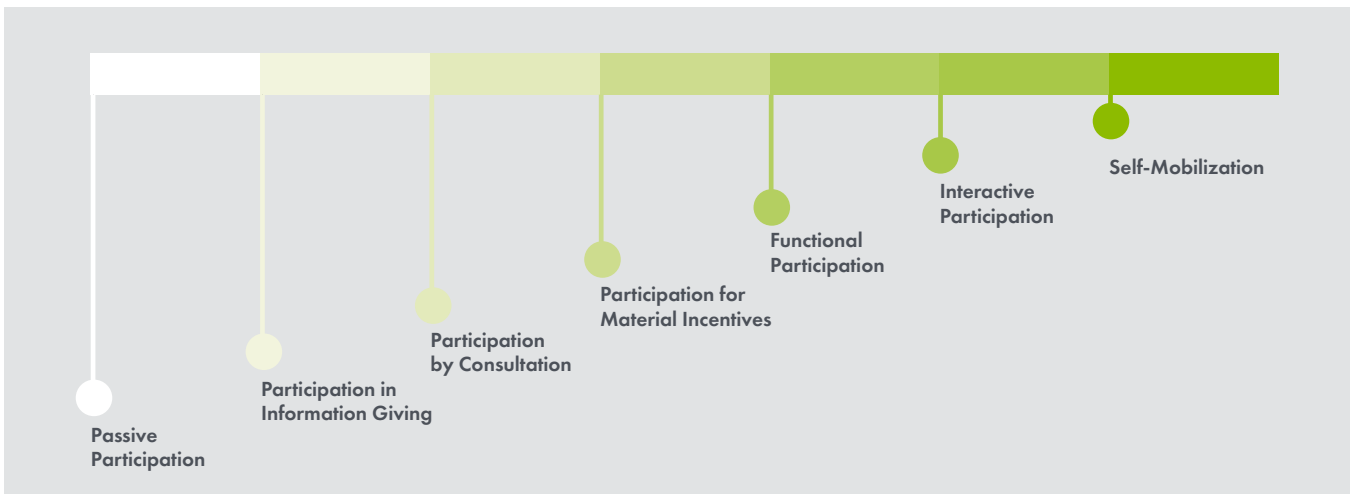
Figure 2: the spectrum of participation

Prioritize Learning and Capacity Development

Starting with our very first interactions with the community, all the way through project implementation and evaluation, the CATALYSE process aims to build the skills and capacities of community members, and emphasizes the importance of "learning-by-doing." We provide targeted skills training to build the project management and leadership abilities of the members of community management structures. In addition, throughout the entire process, Mercy Corps demonstrates good management practices and utilizes facilitation techniques that model good governance principles.

The CATALYSE cycle provides opportunities for community members to first witness and then apply these newly-learned principles, practices and skills. This experiential learning process enables management structures (including CAGs or CDCs) to develop the capacity to facilitate inclusive community meetings and dialogues; create and manage responsive community plans/projects; effectively and transparently communicate with all members of the community; articulate communal needs and advocate on behalf of community priorities; and ensure accountability and sustainability of project outcomes. We also work to build the conflict management and negotiation capacities of the members of community management structures so they can reduce tensions that arise between community groups and promote positive social interactions during the CATALYSE process and beyond. By putting as much emphasis on learning through the process of mobilizing communities as we do on the deliverables or outputs of community projects, we increase community agency and ability to independently lead future development.

In many places where Mercy Corps works, migration, climate change, displacement and urbanization are forcing disparate communities to share increasingly scarce space and resources. By supporting capacity building around conflict management, negotiation and mediation, the CATALYSE process can enable communities to more effectively manage tensions and proactively address potential or existing conflicts over resources.

Strengthen Social Capital and Community Cohesion

The iterative, multi-cycle CATALYSE process supports social capital development and can strengthen community cohesion, trust and reciprocity over time. The process connects community members including groups that may not frequently engage with each other. By providing opportunities for positive social interaction and constructive dialogue, CATALYSE can foster more positive perceptions of other groups and lay the foundation for increased

A cohesive community is one where: There is common vision and a sense of belonging for all groups; the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued; those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and; positive relationships are developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, schools and neighborhoods.

From UK Local Government Association 2016

empathy and understanding. Throughout the CATALYSE cycle, the process incorporates tools and methods to facilitate consensus-building and supports communities to channel tensions and manage change peacefully.

In addition to building cohesion within a community, CATALYSE builds relationships across different sectors so communities can work together with private and public sector leaders to address common challenges. Thus, in addition to emphasizing the importance of community-level action, we also support linkages between community members, business owners and private sector institutions, and government officials. Our experience demonstrates that mobilization efforts have the greatest impact when they connect to or link with the formal governance system.[12] For example, a key finding from Mercy Corps' work mobilizing communities in Kosovo was that to sustain efforts, government officials and communities needed safe and facilitated opportunities to build relationships.

Meetings between communities and local officials are often institutionalized as part of the CATALYSE process, and we typically work to gain government support and ownership of both the process itself and resulting projects.

Sometimes, municipalities or local governments are full partners in a program with government representatives serving as part of the community group that implements a project. At other times, we may support communities to coordinate with local planning, budgeting or development processes to integrate community voices into these processes and leverage government budgets and resources. Through the mobilization process, a community may identify the need to directly advocate for policy change. In this case, the CATALYSE approach supports groups to create advocacy strategies and to connect with their local leaders and civil society organizations who can elevate community priorities and influence higher-levels of decision making.

Emphasize Equity and Inclusion

The CATALYSE approach encourages the inclusion of diverse community groups and subpopulations—bringing together women and men, youth and traditional elders, people of all abilities, and different religious, ethnic or cultural groups. Mercy Corps' staff are

All efforts to mobilize communities must be conflict-sensitive and should incorporate a Do No Harm analysis. Teams should be aware of how projects may exacerbate existing tensions, whether projects may impact perceptions of disparity and access, and what precautions we may need to take ensure only positive impact. Careful facilitation and ongoing analysis are required throughout the CATALYSE process to determine dynamics between divided groups and ensure the process creates opportunities to address rather than exacerbate them. More detail coming soon in: "CATALYSE and Conflict: Guidance Note"

---

2 Engaging government in the mobilization process often requires additional time and resources, and can create additional implementation challenges. Despite this, our programs have seen greater influence and sustainability of mobilization efforts when government is engaged. When it is possible to accompany CATALYSE processes with opportunities to build capacity of local government actors, the long term benefits to governance increase.

Mercy Corps' CATALYSE approach works to expand inclusion of traditionally marginalized populations in community decision-making. Some programs may find it is helpful to convene marginalized and minority groups—such as women and youth— separately to develop relationships and identify common priorities before engaging in a community-wide mobilization process. This provides a safe, constructive forum in which historically excluded groups can gather to develop a common sense of purpose and collective voice, increasing their ability to influence the broader community.

trained in techniques to encourage participation in divided societies, including targeted mentoring for marginalized groups in communities where they have higher barriers to entry and require additional support.[3] By engaging communities in projects that benefit a broad range of people, community members experience first-hand the positive impact of collective action across traditional barriers.

The CATALYSE process also provides an opportunity for direct engagement between marginalized groups and traditional power holders. Working together on community-led development projects helps lower barriers that limit marginalized groups' (particularly youth and women's) inclusion in decision-making by increasing their confidence and demonstrating their capability to contribute to community affairs. At the same time, traditional power holders learn the value of representative participation and the importance of opening space for the involvement of historically marginalized groups.

Use CATALYSE to Demonstrate Good Governance and Strengthen Governance Systems

The CATALYSE process equips community members with the skills and confidence to act collectively, participate in decision-making and promote more responsive, accountable, and transparent governance. Underpinning these changes is a fundamental transformation in individual self-perception: community members adopt a sense of responsibility and agency, viewing themselves as agents of change and active participants in governance.

Through the CATALYSE process, we increase community members' understanding of the foundations of good governance and their rights and responsibilities. We provide opportunities to turn that understanding into action by encouraging inclusive, responsive and accountable decision-making during each phase of project planning and implementation. The process encourages civic engagement and supports community members to join together to make a difference in their communities. At the same time, it builds community capacity to draw on the strength of its collective voice to articulate interests to leaders. CATALYSE most effectively supports change within the broader governance system when it strengthens government-community interaction and creates opportunities for communities to use their collective voice to influence decision-making and hold leaders accountable.

When possible, it is important to coordinate with existing government efforts, including local development planning. In many contexts where we work, the government's bottom-up planning process is structured to aggregate community plans at district, regional and national levels as they move up the governance system for approval and resourcing. Mercy Corps programs aim to connect the mobilization process to this planning process, making sure communities can participate and have a voice at various levels of planning.

---

3 See Mercy Corps Gender Integration Tool Kit, Mercy Corps Youth and Conflict Toolkit

*The CATALYSE process is a fundamental component of Mercy Corps' **Good Governance approach**. CATALYSE helps inform and energize communities, empowering them to work together to actively engage in decision-making and hold leaders accountable.*

Each step of the CATALYSE cycle intentionally demonstrates the foundations and value of good governance. For example, by clarifying our expectations of community members, and what they can expect from us, during initial community meetings and later through project agreements, we reflect the importance of transparency and accountability. As we convene community-wide meetings and strengthen community management structures, we encourage inclusion and representation of all community members. As we support communities to analyze assessment results and identify community projects, we encourage the selection of projects that are responsive and meet community needs. Individuals elected to help lead projects are accountable to the wider community—their neighbors who are counting on them to implement projects in the best interest of everyone. We ensure community management structures effectively and efficiently manage project resources and support them in providing information about resource management to all community members. By explaining good governance principles, and intentionally demonstrating them throughout the CATALYSE process, we highlight how effective and necessary they are. Over time, these repeated opportunities to experience the use of these principles in action leave a positive imprint on community members: eventually these principles become embedded in their value systems.

Mercy Corps complements our CATALYSE approach with efforts that ensure government officials can serve as effective counterparts and sustain relationships with communities. This includes building the capacity of local institutions to engage communities in participatory planning and budgeting processes. Through the CATALYSE process we also work to increase the networks and skills of community-based organizations so they can more effectively play their part in the community, make connections and influence decision-making. Local non-governmental and community-based organizations are key stakeholders and partners in the CATALYSE process. By engaging civil society and incorporating complementary organizational development components, we strengthen their capacity to mobilize, aggregate citizen demands, and link communities to decision-makers.

Best Practices for Using CATALYSE

Community-driven approaches to development, such as CATALYSE, are used widely by governments and development agencies. However, studies have shown mixed results, especially in achieving less tangible social outcomes. The results of mobilization processes are ultimately dependent on program design and objectives; quality of implementation; context and existing agency relationships; and the indicators used to measure progress. In our ongoing effort to ensure our approach is rigorous and evidence-based, we have examined lessons from Mercy Corps programs, peer agencies and academic literature. The following recommendations outline some of the key lessons from this body of evidence, and should be incorporated by teams using the CATALYSE process.[4]

Program Design and Logic

Formulate strong, specific theories of change: Clearly articulated theories of change are important for measuring the impact of community mobilization, especially when our desired outcomes are longer-term. Community-driven development programs often seek to impact multiple economic, social and governance outcomes. Taking time to ensure theories of change are sound, logical and rigorous will pay off in the long run. Make sure CATALYSE activities are aligned with our desired outputs and outcomes, and that causal pathways are clear. For example, if we want to see changes in a community's social cohesion, we need to clearly articulate how the various activities, steps and outputs of the CATALYSE process will help us get there, and develop appropriate indicators to measure our progress. See page 9 of CATALYSE Toolkit.

---

4 For more, see: How Effective is Community Driven Development

Conduct a Comprehensive Risk Analysis: Carefully consider conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm to minimize the negative and maximize the positive impacts of any CATALYSE program on peace and conflict dynamics. See page 13 of the CATALYSE Toolkit for more detail.

The <u>process</u> of mobilization is just as important as project outputs: High quality, tangible project results (e.g. increased incomes, access to education, reduced incidence of disease, etc.) are critically important, but are complementary to the long-term capacity and cohesion of communities. Infrastructure and social projects should be viewed not as stand-alone outputs, but as tools for the practical application of mobilization skills. For example, we know that participation in a common infrastructure project will not result in strengthened social capital if not accompanied by interactions that are intentionally focused on building trust and relationships. Therefore, the focus of CATALYSE is on the process itself. We use targeted facilitation techniques to provide community members with repeated opportunities for learning, interaction and engagement over an extended period of time, working together on something of benefit to the entire community. Projects are not ends in and of themselves, but also opportunities to demonstrate and experience the benefits of collective work guided by the principles of good governance. To ensure community members possess the skills and relationships to lead their own development by the time a program ends, the process must provide repeated opportunities to practice these skills in as many different ways as possible. Failure to build in a focus on process at the outset will yield results that last only as long as the project itself.

Plan for realistic timeframes: Transformational change takes a long time. Entrenched power dynamics and social stratifications are not transformed during one project cycle. When designing programs to achieve a noticeable effect on social norms and behaviors it is important to ensure sufficient time for these effects to take place. The CATALYSE process can be both layered over existing programs and built into new proposals, and should have a long term strategy for continuing to build on program gains.

CATALYSE employs social capital theory and therefore intentionally and deliberately acknowledges the need for a change in attitudes and beliefs first, in order to catalyze long-term efforts of collective action. The CATALYSE process provides the community repeated opportunities to engage as a group, over an extended period of time, developing trust between members. CATALYSE also encourages multi-stakeholder involvement in projects (government, private sector, CSOs), hence building important linking social capital that can help sustain collective action efforts into the future. Strategic geographic targeting and linking of closely located communities or communities facing common issues, helps build bridging capital. Cross-visits between community groups are institutionalized throughout the CATALYSE process with the explicit aim of increasing bridging and linking forms of social capital, as well as building trust between communities and Mercy Corps by demonstrating the concrete results of Mercy Corps' facilitation in other communities.

Analyzing the Context and Building Relationships

Gauge pre-existing levels of experience with mobilization: Pre-existing factors will influence the probability of sustained mobilization, including any history with collective action and mobilization activities, strong leadership within the community and access to resources and information. Take an asset-based approach, recognizing that in every community there are capacities and strengths that can be built on and leveraged. Time should be taken at the outset of programs to map and identify these existing resources. Capacity building, mentoring, and facilitation methodologies should then be adapted accordingly.

Sensitize high-level government institutions and secure buy-in: In order to obtain the buy-in of local government officials, who often require approval from higher-level officials to participate or engage, it may be important to meet with relevant stakeholders at the central government before starting the CATALYSE process at

the community-level. This "sensitization" phase lays the groundwork for successful engagement with communities by cultivating government counterparts who are 'primed' to respond to community demands. This should be framed within and coordinate with the government's own decentralization policies/plans, if they exist.

Determine level of government involvement based on context: A common indicator of successful mobilization is the sustained ability of community members to interact with leaders and advocate for equitable allocation of public resources. To build linkages between government and communities, some mobilization efforts involve government officials and resources from the start. Others may begin without active buy-in from the government, and work to build support throughout the process. Before designing interventions, take time to understand a community's relationship with and expectations of the government. Also assess to what extent the government is committed to community engagement in development planning. Use this understanding to determine how the CATALYSE process can increase community and government interaction. Consider whether CATALYSE can create or strengthen communication channels between government actors and their constituents, and set realistic targets for government-community interaction during the process. Keep in mind that involving government in mobilization efforts communicates to communities—as well as government—that Mercy Corps is not seeking to replace the government or fulfill its responsibility to provide effective services. Rather, Mercy Corps becomes an essential development partner alongside the government, civil society, and the private sector.

Quality of Implementation

Link to existing structures: The CATALYSE process supports the development and/or strengthening of community management structures. Emphasis should be on engaging pre-existing local governance structures and seeking over time to broaden these structures' participation and representativeness rather than replacing them with new or parallel structures. Working with pre-existing structures and finding ways to integrate diverse community members and new practices for decision-making helps ensure that the learning gained during the CATALYSE process is transferred to existing institutions and and not lost when we exit. When new structures are necessary, they must be subsidiary to or linked with existing structures. Teams should plan and articulate how platforms like CAGs or CDCs introduced or strengthened during the CATALYSE process will continue to function even after Mercy Corps transitions out of a community.

Focus on change agents, including youth: Although incorporating existing governance structures is critical, it is also important to identify and support change agents not yet holding leadership positions. Communities often select typical or traditional leaders out of habit to sit on CAGs. In some cases, this may reinforce the exclusion of women, youth and minority voices in leadership structures. In the CATALYSE process, CAGs provide an opportunity for new and traditional leaders to work together, put principles of good governance into practice, and achieve something tangible that can objectively show the benefits of participation in collective action. Multi-phase project cycles, including regularly scheduled meetings to maintain transparency and confirm that things are progressing as planned, provide opportunities for communities to become confident in choosing younger or alternative leaders to represent their interests.

Ensure sufficient human resources and team capacity to facilitate and sustain outcomes: CATALYSE is a long-term process that requires sustained support over multiple rounds of the program cycle. Investing in skill development for staff and community members beyond just what is required to implement the planned projects is crucial. For example, participatory facilitation and training in good governance approaches are as important as the skills needed to successfully implement an infrastructure project. The facilitation skills of Mercy Corps' team members, and their ability to effectively monitor and support communities throughout the process, will have a significant impact on the success of CATALYSE. Ensure team members, local partners and

CAG members have opportunities to build their facilitation, dialogue, conflict management and social inclusion skills, and provide clear performance criteria to measure capacity in these areas.

Incorporate advocacy skills: Evidence suggests that in many cases, interaction between communities and government officials increases during mobilization projects, but fades after the project ends. Integrating advocacy skills training and application into the CATALYSE process builds on the foundation of an organized and connected community. It ensures that communities feel sufficiently equipped not only to address the issues that affect them, but also to lobby the public sector, private actors and civil society for support. In an ex-poste evaluation of Mercy Corps' community mobilization work in Central Asia, advocacy skills were mentioned by community groups as one of the primary tools that enabled them to look for outside resources and therefore sustain collective responses to locally identified problems three years after the project closed. Participants felt that applying these skills in practice, with support of Mercy Corps in the initial phases, reinforced the value of advocacy skills and increased their abilities. The CATALYSE approach therefore places a strong emphasis on integrating and applying strategic advocacy tools and skills.

Measuring Progress

Diversify measurement methods: Measuring the impacts of mobilization processes like CATALYSE can be challenging—particularly as it relates to intangibles like levels of trust, cooperation and social cohesion. For this reason, it is important to utilize diverse measurement methods. Self-reporting through quantitative surveys can be unreliable and limited. Include other methods—direct observation, qualitative interviews, etc.—to more objectively assess the impact of mobilization efforts. Consider how to involve community members in measuring impact, and use participatory methods when possible.

Don't forget about long term evaluation: Prioritize longer-term, longitudinal studies to illuminate the emergence and sustainability of improved community cohesion, inclusion of under-represented groups, and strengthened local level governance systems.

CATALYSE: Applying it in Practice

There are as many ways to implement the CATALYSE process as there are communities to mobilize. This guide and the accompanying Toolkit are meant to provide a general framework that can be applied in any context. The chart on the next page can be used as both a diagnostic tool—a way of examining where your current efforts to mobilize communities fit—and a way to guide your planning as you utilize the CATALYSE cycle in your programming.

ASSESSING LEVELS OF MOBILIZATION

		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
		Poor project implementation and little community engagement. **(Poorly conceived efforts to mobilize communities)**	Projects may be effective but have little or no accountability, transparency, community participation or inclusiveness. **(Weak or under-resourced efforts to mobilize)**	Community understands and appreciates importance of good governance principles but may not have sufficient skills to continue without external support. **(1st CATALYSE Cycle)**	Community implements effective, response projects via equitable, accountable processes with some support from Mercy Corps. **(2nd or 3rd CATALYSE Cycle)**	Community works together largely independent of Mercy Corps, additional resources are mobilized. **(3rd or 4th and Subsequent CATALYSE Cycles)**
	CATALYSE PROCESS					
KEY ELEMENTS	**Community Led**	All activities require external facilitation, decision making and resourcing.	Community relies heavily on external leadership; processes for decision making are minimally representative and accountable.	Participatory processes for decision making are standard; a representative portion of the community participates; reporting mechanisms and regular meetings in place	Communities implement small scale projects independently, investing their own resources.	Community adapts and develops its own tools and/or processes and plans projects without Mercy Corps resources or funding.
		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
KEY ELEMENTS	**Prioritize Learning and Process**	Program completely focused on physical outputs with no consideration of process.	Physical outputs and projects are the primary focus, with some consideration for the process used to develop project ideas.	Program intentionally promotes participation, accountability and transparency along with physical/ tangible component.	CAGs develop facilitation, negotiation and communication skills and are increasingly able to manage responsive projects/ programs effectively.	CAGs facilitate inclusive community meetings; manage effective and responsive community plans/projects; transparently communicate with community members; and proactively address potential conflicts.

KEY ELEMENTS		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
	Promote Good governance	Distrust between communities and government. Community lacks understanding of its role in good governance.	Community has limited understanding of its role in governance. Limited engagement between community and government.	Community members understand their rights and responsibilities and the foundations of good governance.	Community-government interaction strengthened. Community has increased opportunities to encourage inclusive, responsive and accountable decision-making by government.	Communities form alliances and coalitions in order to mobilize, aggregate citizen demands, and link communities to decision-makers.
	Strengthen Social Capital and Social Cohesion	Project fuels existing tensions. Deep lack of trust between groups.	Project has no impact on community cohesion or social capital. Distrust between groups continues.	Process provides opportunities for positive social interaction, constructive dialogue and consensus building. Trust and reciprocity between groups improves.	Project engages and connects community groups and builds horizontal and vertical linkages among community groups and between community and government.	Communities have strong norms of trust and reciprocity, and horizontal and vertical linkages across sectors. Communities regularly make decisions through consensus, effectively manage tensions, and proactively address potential conflicts.
	Encourage Social Inclusion	Historically marginalized groups remain excluded.	Lip service paid to inclusion of marginalized groups.	Staff are trained in techniques to encourage participation of marginalized groups. Minority groups are convened separately if necessary.	Repeated opportunities for direct engagement between marginalized groups and traditional power holders.	CAGs are truly representative of community (age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) Marginalized groups participate meaningfully in all aspects of programs/projects.

Conclusion

CATALYSE is a powerful approach to community-led development that enhances social capital and encourages communities to collectively create change. It can be used to increase participatory decision-making, leverage local resources and capacities, expand inclusion of marginalized populations, and foster the development of stronger social relationships and non-traditional leadership. When intentionally applied, CATALYSE lays the groundwork for more inclusive social structures and norms, promotes more active and cohesive communities, and strengthens mechanisms for collective action and holding government to account. There is no "right or wrong" way to use CATALYSE. Teams should adapt the process to meet the needs of their context and the goals of their programs, while keeping in mind the fundamentals and best practices outlined in this guide.

CONTACT

SANJAY GURUNG
Director | Governance and Partnerships
sgurung@mercycorps.org

ALLISON SHEAN
Sr. Technical Advisor | Governance and Partnerships
ashean@mercycorps.org

CARRIE O'NEIL
Technical Advisor | Governance and Partnerships
coneil@mercycorps.org

KAREN BARNETT
Technical Advisor | Governance and Partnerships
kbarnett@mercycorps.org

About Mercy Corps
Mercy Corps is a leading global organization
powered by the belief that a better world is possible.
In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries
around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into
action — helping people triumph over adversity and
build stronger communities from within.
Now, and for the future.

MERCY CORPS

45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842

mercycorps.org