



PATHWAY TO FOOD SECURITY

PEOPLE ARE WELL-NOURISHED AT ALL TIMES, WITH ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLY PRODUCED, SAFE, AND NUTRITIOUS FOOD.



The Problem

Extreme poverty and malnutrition are on the rise. Food systems are repeatedly failing to meet the food and nutrition needs of systematically marginalized populations facing the compounding effects of conflict and climate change. At the same time, the allocation of food – and control of income for food purchase – remains highly inequitable within households and across communities. Without urgent action at scale, it is expected that 840 million people – almost 10% of the population – will be food insecure by 2030, with women and girls the most affected.¹

Inequity and Exclusion in the Food System

Equitable access to, use, and control of resources by women and marginalized groups is essential to food and nutrition security. Yet food insecure populations face significant barriers accessing productive land, improved production technology, markets, and information required for both food production and income generation for food purchase. Women, girls, and other marginalized groups in particular have fewer assets, fewer economic opportunities, and less decision-making power – though they are often most affected by increases in food prices or limited food

availability. Social norms dictate that they are often the last in line to consume food and most limited in their food choices.

Food Security, Violent Conflict, and Climate Change

Violent conflict is a key driver of both acute and chronic malnutrition, and hunger is clustered in conflict-affected areas. Conflict disrupts agricultural production and trade, destroys infrastructure, and displaces labor. At the same time, the climate crisis is only growing, with extreme or erratic weather events leading to declining yields and crop loss in areas already struggling with productivity. Climate change exacerbates land degradation and water scarcity in areas with poor resource governance, further impacting the lives of at-risk communities and households.

Conflict and climate change reinforce one another, deepening both hunger and physical insecurity in already fragile places where limited opportunities and natural resource scarcity often fuel further conflict – creating a violent cycle of vulnerability and a growing food security emergency.

¹ UN Report on Sustainable Development Goals 2022

Objectives

Our pathway to improved food security moves us closer to a world where **people are well-nourished at all times, with access to sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious food.** This means:

- › Crisis-affected populations meet acute food needs with dignity and self-determination
- › Women, adolescent girls, and systemically marginalized groups increase access and control of income, assets, and decision-making to improve food security
- › Food-insecure households access and consume sufficient nutritious food year-round through local production and markets
- › Communities apply climate-resilient solutions and engage in peacebuilding to improve food security



Resilience Approach

Sustained participation in inclusive and resilient food systems and autonomy over food choices improve and protect food security in fragile environments.

Mercy Corps works through programs, partnerships, and influence to meet urgent food needs while building more inclusive and resilient food systems to ensure lasting food security for all.

We aim to minimize the impacts of food crises on households, prevent the destabilization of food systems during conflict and natural disasters, and increase the resilience of food systems to climate change.

We identify and support individuals and groups with the greatest food security needs – women, adolescent girls, underserved youth, and children – who are living in or at risk of malnutrition and poverty and most affected by shocks. We use cash and voucher assistance to meet urgent food needs, while simultaneously layering market approaches that support food system continuity in times of crisis. We partner with local service providers to help strengthen safety nets and increase access to basic health, water, sanitation services so that people can consume safe and nutritious foods at all times. We facilitate access to information, technology, and resources that increase yields and food access in the last mile. We prioritize women's empowerment and inclusion in governance and

decision-making processes so that food systems benefit women and children – now and into the future.

Our actions and advocacy seek to address the systemic constraints and inequities that prevent people from accessing resources to improve their own food security.

And by sequencing, layering, and integrating our peace, humanitarian, and development assistance we strengthen the capacity of people and the food systems they rely on to cope, adapt, and thrive.

COPE: in the midst of crisis

We meet immediate food and nutrition needs through cash, voucher, and WASH assistance and strengthen capacities for crisis preparedness and response. During acute crises, we deliver cash assistance at scale to meet the immediate food and nutrition needs of those affected by conflict or disaster. We work alongside local responders to provide emergency water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), nutrition support, and access to key services and information for those most in need. We partner with government institutions, communities, and market actors to mitigate tensions, strengthen government-led social safety nets and service delivery, and enable business continuity in the food system. Across our work, we ensure conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm to minimize market disruption and reduce further strain on existing systems.



ADAPT: to climate and conflict threats

We strengthen the capacity of local food systems to increase access to and availability of nutritious food year-round by promoting climate-smart and conflict-sensitive agricultural production. We partner with food producers, traders, wholesalers, and suppliers across local systems to adapt to shocks and stresses. We help ensure that natural resources and agricultural investments are managed equitably and sustainably. This, in turn, promotes productivity in the face of a changing climate, reduces conflicts over scarce resources, and ensures that affordable and nutritious foods are available for last mile consumers. We help farmers invest in new technologies and practices for climate-smart agricultural production by broadening access to climate information and flexible financial services. Through early warning systems, we help communities anticipate and respond early to shocks and threats in order to avoid potential disruptions in production, livelihoods, and income.

THRIVE: today and into the future

We foster inclusive decision-making, individual autonomy, and equitable control over resources – transforming local food systems to eliminate hunger and malnutrition. We partner with communities and food system actors to address the underlying drivers of food insecurity among marginalized groups. We foster inclusive governance, individual autonomy over food choices, and equitable control of resources. We work with women, youth, and other marginalized groups to strengthen their capacity to influence and benefit from improved food systems over time. In partnership with governments, civil society, and the private sector, we advance policies and practices to increase equity, inclusion, and environmental sustainability across the food system to achieve lasting food security.

Areas of Focus

Mercy Corps has defined five distinctive areas of focus in each of our four outcome areas: water security, food security, economic opportunities, and peace and good governance. These distinctives are not the only programming pathways that we will pursue over the next decade – but we believe these approaches will lead to the greatest impact for the resilient, inclusive communities we work with.

These distinctive focus areas are not just what we will do; they set us apart. Though they may be tailored to the specific contexts in which we work, these unique and innovative areas of focus articulate what people can expect of Mercy Corps and set the programming standards to which we hold ourselves accountable.

Facilitating Cash Assistance, Safety Nets, and Economic Inclusion

Cash assistance, social safety nets, and economic inclusion help households meet immediate needs with dignity and self-determination and prevent further decline in food security for those living in poverty. Digitized cash and voucher assistance expedites households' abilities to meet basic needs and increase their consumption of nutritious food in times of crisis. As early as possible, we support households to generate income, transition away from assistance, and build resilience to future shocks. We partner with governments to develop more inclusive and shock-responsive social protection systems – enabling sustained support to households moving out of poverty and food insecurity.



Advancing Peace to Prevent Hunger

Addressing the drivers of conflict-driven hunger is critical to advancing food and nutrition security outcomes. Understanding local power dynamics and strengthening social cohesion enables communities to identify long-term solutions that reinforce peace and food security. This includes building trust between and strengthening connections across conflicting groups, working transparently across lines of division, and always centering the needs and priorities of affected populations. In the midst of crises, we apply conflict-sensitive approaches to avoid exacerbating tensions while meeting urgent food needs. In more stable contexts, we deliberately promote peace through food security work by helping communities peacefully manage conflicts over land and water access and improve food systems through cooperation.

Promoting the Autonomy of Women and Girls in Food Systems

Addressing the unique needs and priorities of women and adolescent girls can influence food and nutrition outcomes for future generations. We acknowledge and elevate the role of women and adolescent girls as leaders, consumers, entrepreneurs, advocates, decision-makers, and agents of change essential to the food security of their households and communities. We help increase women’s participation and autonomy throughout households, communities, and food systems. Through partnership, we help increase women’s and girls’ knowledge and decision-making power, and secure access to and control over assets in support of food security. In contexts where adolescent girls are likely to give birth at a young age (often while undernourished themselves) we enhance their ability to positively impact the lifelong health and potential of

themselves and their future families. We promote access to resources and services that address unique constraints facing women and girls, including traditional caretaking roles and labor burdens.

Promoting Nutritious Diets

Multi-stakeholder engagement across food systems and within communities is critical in addressing the complex dynamics of malnutrition and gaps in households’ abilities to afford nutritious food. We support last mile communities to produce nutritious crops and improve livestock productivity while

strengthening the capacities of local market systems to provide nutritious food and products year-round. This includes business development support for key actors in the food system – particularly women and adolescent girls – and working with financial service providers to adapt savings and loans products to improve nutritious food production, processing, and trade. We also support governments’ efforts to respond to acute needs, ensure continuity of health and water services and nutrition referrals to address malnutrition.



Developing Climate-Resilient Food Systems

Diverse, connected, inclusive, and informed agriculture and livestock systems have a transformational impact on communities' food security and help mitigate the impacts of conflict and climate change. We promote climate-resilient agricultural practices across the food system to improve yields and protect the environment. We support the uptake of community-led soil, water, and biodiversity management techniques that advance

climate-smart agriculture. We incentivize the private sector and market actors to invest in last mile agricultural markets, including working with financial service providers that support climate-smart investments by food system actors. With our partners, we facilitate access to information and services, including data and digital solutions, that support improved decision-making and ensure that marginalized communities directly participate in and influence climate-resilient food systems.



CAMBODIA, 2008

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