Photo Credit: Mercy Corps DRC

CATALYSE : COMMUNITIES ACTING TOGETHER

A Governance in Action Toolkit

MAY 2018

MERCY CORPS

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

In the creation of this Guide we have drawn inspiration from Catholic Relief Services' Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Manual, CARE's Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis, and the Mercy Corps Guide to Community Mobilization Programming.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit is a resource for planning, implementing and evaluating community mobilization processes using Mercy Corps' CATALYSE framework. It was written with a few audiences in mind: Mercy Corps staff looking to integrate the CATALYSE process into their programs and activities; international development actors interested in strengthening community participation and leadership in programming; citizens engaged in community mobilization processes; and members of government from the local, national, and regional levels, to illustrate how the process of mobilizing communities can link to broader local development efforts.

This Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the guidance document entitled: CATALYSE: A Governance in Action Guide. The Guide provides helpful framing, general guidelines and best practices, while the toolkit outlines a step by step process for mobilizing communities via CATALYSE.

What is CATALYSE?

Over the past two decades, Mercy Corps has developed and refined CATALYSE: our signature approach to mobilizing communities. CATALYSE builds a community's capacity to identify and organize around collective priorities, mobilize resources, implement projects and influence leaders. It 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, CATALYSE encourages more informed, connected and active community members that can work collectively, advocate to their leaders and promote change.**

Through the CATALYSE process, communities are better connected, more capable of addressing their own development needs, and better placed to advocate for themselves. The process originates with community members—building on existing community strengths and capacities—and is managed by community members. Mercy Corps, as the catalyst, is accountable to the community in order to achieve their vision.

Mobilizing communities looks very different in different contexts. Not every tool or recommendation is appropriate for every context. This toolkit presents a menu of options to be tailored and adjusted. The content is highly adaptable to a variety of contexts, from humanitarian relief and complex crises, to recovery and long term development settings. It can be used in rural settings or urban settings, and to tackle a range of issues.

This Toolkit:[1]

- Presents the CATALYSE process and a series of steps for mobilizing communities
- Offers practical tools and tips to help communities assess, prioritize and create solutions

1 This guide is part of Mercy Corps' Governance in Action Campaign, a series of Toolkits and How to Guides for operationalizing good governance programming.

- Provides facilitation strategies for creating an inclusive and participatory environment, and encouraging dialogue
- Outlines a progression for increasing community capacity and responsibility over multiple project cycles

How Does CATALYSE Work?

Using CATALYSE, 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. It originates by bringing diverse community members, across different age, gender and identity groups, into a common process. Communities discuss and assess their needs, and create action plans with concrete projects that address their identified concerns. 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 when possible. These structures carry out 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. CATALYSE is an iterative process, and provides multiple opportunities for planning and implementation of projects. With each subsequent project cycle, the community takes increasing ownership of the process.

The CATALYSE process emphasizes the need for partnership between communities, civil society, government and private sector. In fact, community mobilization efforts that have the greatest sustained impact are those that connect to or link with the formal governance system. Sometimes, municipalities or local governments are full partners in a program with government representatives serving as part of the community group that implements the project. In other situations, a group's key objective might be to directly advocate for policy change by the local government. In this case, groups draw on the strength of their diversity to represent a cross section of the community and influence local decision making. Overall, the process aims to enhance civic responsibility, by empowering people to work collectively, participate in political decision-making and hold leaders accountable.

Mobilizing communities via the CATALYSE process:

- Increases participatory decision making processes by bringing diverse stakeholders into a common process
- Expands inclusion of often marginalized populations, such as women, youth, people with disabilities, and religious or ethnic groups, and lays groundwork for more inclusive social structures and norms
- Leverages local resources, both human and material, and brings additional resources from donors and government
- Fosters stronger relationships between local businesses, government, community members, CBOs and NGOs
- Fosters the development of stronger social relationships, or social capital, connecting communities and leading to the creation of networks across traditional divides

- Ensures local ownership of development
- Promotes a more active and informed citizenry
- Builds or strengthens mechanisms and systems through which communities can sustain an enabling environment for social change

Using the CATALYSE process, Mercy Corps not only helps build the skills to effectively create and implement community-led projects, but also effectively models the principles of good governance and the values of collective action. By putting as much emphasis on the process of mobilization as we do the outputs of projects, by the time the agency leaves, communities are more likely to continue to use the skills and relationships they have gained to lead their own development.[2]

The CATALYSE Process

CATALYSE Cycle:

Acting as a catalyst, Mercy Corps guides community members through the process of identifying their needs and resources, framing solutions, and implementing projects, all while ensuring the process is community-owned. Mercy Corps has developed an effective and tested methodology for doing this over the past 20 years. The process is divided into the following steps:

Planning Steps:

1. **Prepare to Mobilize:** Before going into communities, the preparation phase involves preparing as a team, gathering pre-information about communities, and making initial contact with communities.
2. **Organize Together:** Hold introductory meetings with the community and establish relationships with groups across the community to prepare for the assessment phase.
3. **Assess Needs Together:** Use joint assessment tools to collect information from a large cross-section of the community.
4. **Prioritize Together:** Analyze collected data, build consensus on priority issues.
5. **Plan for Action Together:** Develop proposed solutions and action plans, and determine how to mobilize resources from a variety of sources to ensure a successful project.

Implementation Steps:

6. **Act Together:** Put the plan into action.
7. **Monitor and Learn Together:** Determine if the CATALYSE process met its objectives and capture lessons learned.
8. **Determine Next Steps Together:** Apply lessons learned and determine next steps in preparation for the next phase of the project or planning for an evaluation.

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

2 In our ongoing effort to be rigorously evidence-based, we have created a series of recommendations to accompany this Guide. This guidance document is based on lessons learned from both Mercy Corps community mobilization programs and from peer agencies. See *"Community Driven Development Evidence: A Mercy Corps Research Brief."*

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 communities as they work towards broader development objectives. Although there is no "right" way to mobilize communities, this toolkit outline best practices and standards that every team should consider. There is room for adaptation and creativity when determining how to apply this framework in a given context.

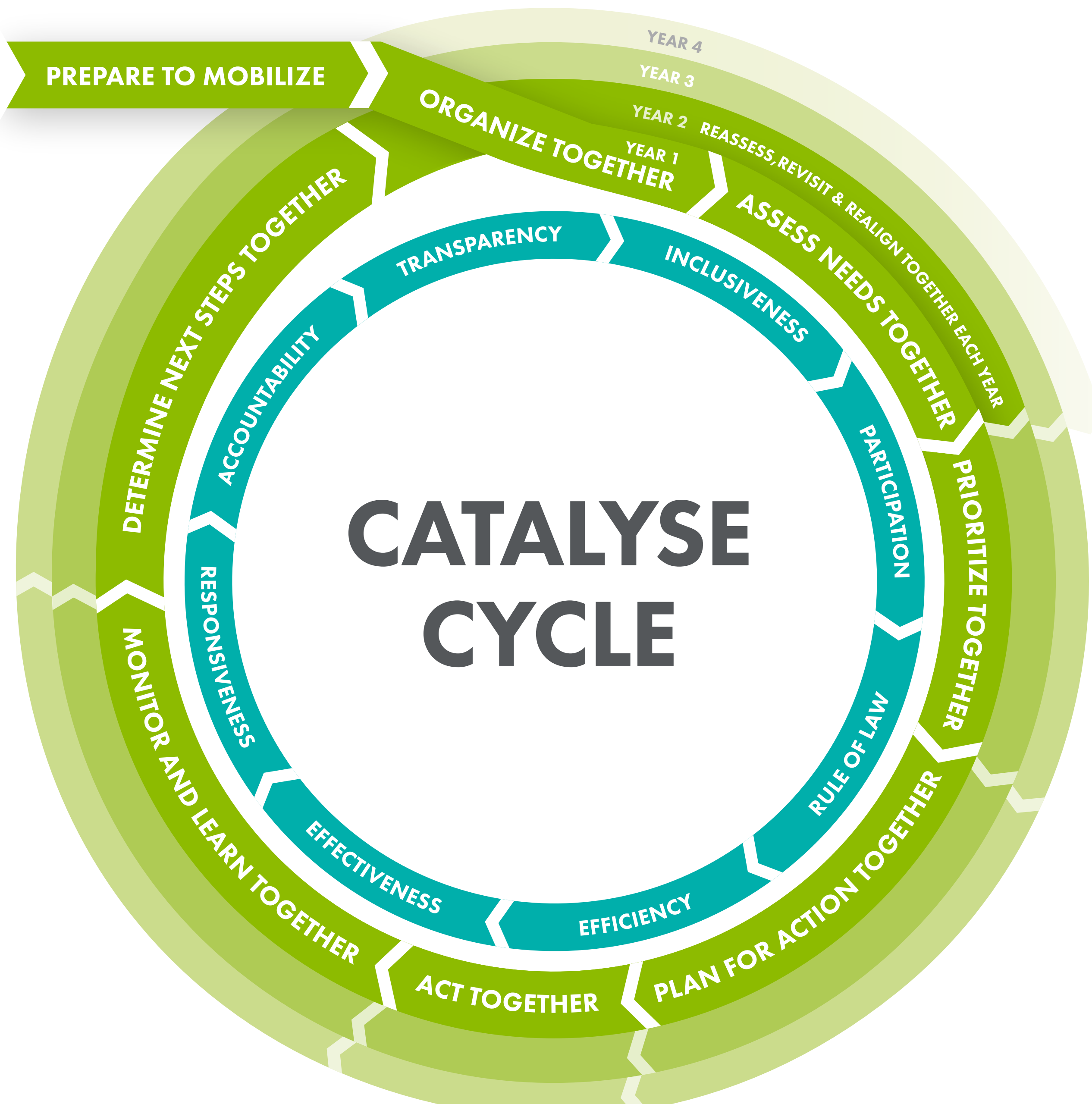


Figure 1: The CATALYSE Cycle

What does it mean to be community-led?

Strengthening the capacity of communities to lead their own development processes is one of the main goals of CATALYSE approach. With CATALYSE, Mercy Corps is not leading the process, but rather accompanying 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 during the 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
- Regular meetings are held between Mercy Corps and the community 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

TIP: A community's investment of its own resources increases community ownership. This is a multi-phase process and there are typically multiple CATALYSE cycles within a program. During the initial stages of a program, communities and Mercy Corps will often provide an equal share of resources to support community projects, splitting responsibility evenly. As programs proceed, Mercy Corps reduces its role in resourcing community projects, providing less and less of the necessary resources until providing minimal or no resourcing support. As Mercy Corps diminishes its contributions and role over subsequent cycles of community projects, communities increase their responsibility, ownership and investment.

STEP 1: Prepare to CATALYSE

The first step in CATALYSE involves preparing as a team and making initial contact with the community and partners. These initial interactions establish the foundation for continued partnership, and are critical for setting the tone for our engagement. This stage involves creating a CATALYSE plan that outlines our mobilization strategy and how we'll measure progress. It also involves gathering initial information about the community, getting a better understanding of the broad context, and making initial contact with community leaders.

Prepare to Mobilize

Create a CATALYSE Mobilization Plan

Gather Pre-information About the Community

Make Initial Contact with the Community

CATALYSE Plan:

A key part of the preparation phase involves creating a CATALYSE Plan that articulates how our CATALYSE activities will support the overall program goal and objectives. This plan should outline the outcomes we expect to result from our mobilization activities, and the indicators we'll use to measure progress. It should also outline a work plan with activities, timeline, responsibilities, and resourcing. Developing the elements of the CATALYSE plan as a team provides an opportunity to build a shared understanding of the process and the goals we're working towards. It is essential to do this before staff interface with community members. Be sure that your team has a common understanding of terms like goal, objectives, outputs, activities, etc. since definitions can vary. Here are some common definitions:

GOAL The highest level result or impact we hope to achieve through our actions. What does the community look like if the plan is successful?

OBJECTIVES Smaller order changes that need to be accomplished to fulfill the goal. What changes will add up to achieve the goal over time?

OUTPUTS The tangible results of the plan's activities that together contribute to the objectives.

ACTIVITIES The actions that together will create the desired outputs, then outcomes, and then goals. These are what you have control over from the program perspective.

CATALYSE Objectives:

Since the big picture program goal and objectives will typically be determined in the program proposal, begin by reviewing existing program documents so program staff feel sufficiently grounded in the big picture. This is also an opportunity to renegotiate program objectives due to changing circumstances, if necessary. CATALYSE objectives are specific to the mobilization element of the program. To craft CATALYSE objectives, consider the history of mobilization and community participation in your context and articulate objectives that are realistic and achievable. Sample objectives include: Increased citizen ownership and engagement in development process and increased intra/inter-community cooperation in development processes.

CATALYSE Indicators:

In order to know if you are making progress, staff should work together to refine existing indicators or create new ones. Like objectives, indicators to measure the mobilization of a community and related activities should correspond

TIP: CATALYSE facilitators, or "Catalysts," play a critical role in program success. They are the link between Mercy Corps and the community, and guide the process from start to finish. When choosing your team, ensure they are set up to succeed by clarifying roles and responsibilities and developing their capacities throughout the project. Typical CATALYSE staff positions may include:

- Catalysts: community members who coordinate with the CAGs, other stakeholders in the community, and Mercy Corps.
- Technical Officers: provide specific expertise related to the projects like an engineer, youth opportunities officer, health officer, etc.
- CATALYSE Trainers

to the logical framework for the program. These initial indicators can be refined over time, but it is important for staff to get on the same page about what changes you are trying to make with the program, how you will know if you are progressing towards those changes, and to be able to clearly communicate that to the communities they work with. Remember indicators should always be "SMART" –Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This is an illustrative list of indicators, with some ideas of how you might measure progress towards the indicator.

Sample CATALYSE indicators (and sample data sources):

- Attitude and behavior change in communities (measured through community cooperation index and increased intercommunity activity)
- Increased levels of trust and social cohesion (measured by self-reporting surveys and focus groups at key stages in the program)
- Percentage of community members actively involved in community projects disaggregated by gender, age and ethnicity (measured through attendance sheets)
- Number of partnerships with government, NGOs and CBOs, private sector actors and other communities created or strengthened during the project (measured by documented reports on partnership activities and cross check with partner organizations)
- Number of new, community-led activities as a result of the project (measured by documented reports on the activities and cross check with community members who participated in these said activities)
- Diversity of Community Action Group membership (measured by counting different kinds of diversity including gender, ethnicity, sector, age, etc.)
- Perception of CAG effectiveness related to its ability to put in place processes, policies and procedures related to management of projects, its ability to act independently of Mercy Corps, its ability to advance activities in the community (measured by self reporting from CAG members, surveys, interviews or focus groups with community members)[3]
- Percentage of women, youth and other marginalized groups that report meaningful participation in community-level decision-making
- Increased engagement between communities and government actors on development planning (measured by number of advocacy meetings held by the CAG and committees)

3 See Mercy Corps Organizational Capacity Index for more indicators on organizational development.

TIP: Remember that with indicator development, less is often more. It is more important to have a strong set of indicators that resonate with the team than to have an exhaustive list.

Later steps of the CATALYSE process will support community members to define their own measures of success. It is essential that these indicators are created through a collaborative process, and that communities develop their own understanding and ownership of what progress looks like.

The final elements of a CATALYSE plan are the activities, timeframe, responsibilities, and resources needed for each activity. This work plan will serve as a roadmap for the team as the project progresses. It needs to be clear, logical, and flexible enough to adjust along the way. Remember that this is the work plan for the Mercy Corps team supporting the CATALYSE process. Later in the guide we will discuss developing action plans for the community projects which will be similarly structured.

TOOL: CATALYSE Implementation Template

Purpose: The CATALYSE Plan lays out the logic and steps for successful implementation of the mobilization process. It is critical that the entire team has a working knowledge of different elements of the plan and ideally is involved in its development.

Using the Tool: Adjust the following template to your program needs.

CATALYSE Plan for X Community

Goal: Improved food security in X community

Objective 1: Increased community ownership of development planning.

Output 1.1: Engagement with the community is transparent, participatory and systematic.

	Activity	Person(s) responsible	Timeframe	Budget	Indicator	Means of verification
1	Hold meetings with village leaders to explain the project	Names	Before project begins	X$	Meeting attendance sheets	How many people, quality of participation
2	Meet village elders communities to discuss project	Names	Within first month	X$	Mercy Corps staff perception of	How many people, qualitative measure of level of meeting success
3	Hold large community meeting to introduce project	Names	Within first month	X$	Meeting attendance sheets	Meeting attendance, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, etc.
4	Meet with subsections of the community to introduce project	Names	Within second month	X$	Meeting attendance sheets	Meeting attendance of targeted groups, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, etc.

Gather Pre-information about the Community

Whenever community selection occurs, whether during the proposal development process or after receiving funding, a thorough understanding of the context is a prerequisite to any intervention. Contextual understanding sets Mercy Corps up to do no harm, understand and acknowledge what local capacities can be built on and strengthened, and ensure no efforts or institutions will be duplicated. This stage involves gathering information about the context you will be working in before engaging with the community and can be as simple as doing desk research, holding meetings with partners, reading reports from previous community development programs, etc.

TIP: It is important to not draw too many conclusions about the future project during the preparation phase. This is not the time to make decisions about future outcomes—that comes later and involves the community. Instead this is the time to develop a deep understanding of the context that will set Mercy Corps staff up for successful support of facilitating community ownership.

Determine what you need to know based on existing levels of understanding and engagement in the context. Given the goal of the project, what kind of information do you need? Consider these additional questions and tailor them to context:

- What is the political and institutional context? What is the potential level of political will of governance institutions?
- What is the non-governmental institutional context?
- Who are the existing groups, decision-makers, and other actors who could have influence? What are the power dynamics?
- What is the history of participatory development/mobilization/local collective action in this community?
- What are the policies or programs that relate to this potential mobilization effort?
- What is the sector context?
- What is the conflict context?
- What are the demographics of the community?
- What is the relationship among issues that relate to the scope of program?

Consider setting some broad goals for the pre-information phase. For instance, for a program that aims to mobilize a community to improve food security, you might want to:

- Understand the demographics of specific communities and food needs in those communities
- Gain better understanding of communal decision making mechanisms
- Study relationships between and among issues relevant to the scope of the program (e.g. among livelihood systems, food insecurity, and food aid dependency)
- Gain a better understanding of how seasonality relates to the issues of the program and how different sub groups within communities are impacted

TIP: It is particularly important to understand how CATALYSE will fit into the local development process. Any resulting community plans should link with the local development planning process at the outset, or plan to eventually. The pre-information phase can give early indications about the state of local development planning and the potential for engaging government officials in the CATALYSE process. It can also help you identify who your first point of contact with the community will be, and the best way to make contact.

TOOL: Do No Harm Worksheets (See Annex)

Purpose: Mercy Corps' programs strive to take a conflict sensitive approach, minimizing the negative and maximizing the positive impacts of any intervention on peace and conflict dynamics. A Do No Harm approach recognizes that: 1) When an intervention of any kind enters a context, it becomes part of that context; 2) All contexts are characterized by Dividers and Connectors; 3) All interventions will interact with both Dividers and Connectors, making them better or worse; 4) Interventions interact with Dividers and Connectors through their organizational actions and behavior of staff; 5) The details of an intervention are the source of its impacts; and 6) There are always options for re-design or doing things differently.[4] This worksheet can be used as a reflection tool for teams at any stage of a project, and can be a great group activity at the pre-information gathering phase to deepen knowledge of the context.

Make Initial Contact with the Community

The purpose of making initial contact with the community is to provide an introduction to Mercy Corps and the project and gauge interest and access. This initial meeting should happen with traditional community authorities, whether they be community elders, local councils or government officials. Determine who you will make initial contact with during the pre-information phase. This might be your first time contacting the community, or it might be part of an ongoing relationship-building process based on other work Mercy Corps has done. Working through traditional authorities at the outset can help expand our access within a community, and provide a conduit for Mercy Corps to organize an inclusive and participatory process. These initial interactions set the foundation for continued partnership, create support and buy in for the CATALYSE process, and are critical for setting the tone for our work with communities.

Things to discuss in this first meeting include:

- Who is Mercy Corps? What is the CATALYSE approach?
- What are the expectations of the community for this project including the importance of inclusion, transparency, participation, etc.?
- What is the timeframe for the project?
- Next steps for engaging the broader community, like scheduling the first community meeting to share this information. Determine next steps for engaging the broader community including scheduling the first community meeting to share this information. Other considerations include determining who will be at the meeting, emphasizing the importance of inclusion and diversity from the outset, and being clear that you want to meet with as many members as possible.

4 For more information on how to facilitate a Do No Harm analysis, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects Do No Harm tools.

Step 2: Organize Together

Once you have had an introductory meeting with community leadership, it is time for the initial engagement with the community. The main goals of this phase are to build relationships, establish trust, and create a sense of ownership within the community from the outset of the project.

Organize Together

Hold Introductory Meetings with Community

Ensure inclusion of marginalized groups

Engage existing community groups

Hold Introductory Meeting(s) with the Community

The introductory meetings with the community set the tone for our engagement and can lay the foundation for creating community ownership and buy in. Take time to design the agenda of the meeting. This meeting can be an opportunity to:

- Introduce the community to the program by sharing the purpose and objectives of mobilization, and the big picture parameters like scale, timeframe, and budgets (although depending on the context, budget considerations can also be introduced at a later stage)
- Share expectations for what a community-led process looks like
- Gauge different stakeholders' interest levels in mobilization
- Begin to discuss what issues might be most pressing for the community to address with their projects and what the scope of the projects could be
- Set expectations for Mercy Corps' role as facilitator, but not leader, of this process
- Answer questions

Though an introductory meeting can seem straightforward, careful preparation and consideration of a few factors can make all the difference. Consider:

- How does your team present in the meeting?
- Do all team members understand the purpose and expectations of the meeting?
- How do you establish Mercy Corps' credibility within the community?
- What is your tone and framing for different elements of the project?

Principles in Action

Whether this is your first interaction or part of an ongoing relationship, these initial interactions with the community set the tone for the entire project. Think about what good governance principles look like at this stage. Are we emphasizing inclusion by meeting with a broad cross section of the community including representatives of traditionally marginalized groups? Are we modeling participatory facilitation by being genuinely curious about responses to questions and listening to understand? Are we considering meaningful participation by allowing everyone an opportunity to speak?

Engage Existing Community Groups

Obtaining the perspectives and input of as many people in the community as possible is fundamental to the CATALYSE process. This requires robust outreach. Establishing relationships with influential community

TIP: Depending on your existing understanding of dynamics and relationships within the community, be sure to have everyone on your team constantly gathering data. Sometimes the most important information is shared outside of meetings. Maybe the driver or meeting attendance taker can provide information that can help inform how groups are organized to ensure maximum participation from the beginning or otherwise be valuable for project success.

members and reaching a wide cross-section of the community is critical for a successful CATALYSE process. Engaging existing groups expedites access and increases buy-in. Work with formal and informal community leaders to gather people from all sectors and populations within the community to ensure maximum participation. Consider traditional leadership structures within the community that can help you reach out to different parts of the population. Are there Village Development Committees or other community groups convened through past projects? Understanding who in the community has formal and informal authority is a good first step to the development of Community Action Groups which will comprise the subset of the community responsible for the success of the project.

Ensure Inclusion of Marginalized Groups

The CATALYSE process must be inclusive of marginalized groups. This is often more easily said than done. Every context is different, so in the early stages, begin to gauge the level of willingness of the community to make space for this kind of inclusion. In the initial introductory meeting, aim to invite the whole community to participate. If this is not possible or unlikely to result in an inclusive process, one strategy is to convene marginalized and minority groups separately to develop relationships and identify common priorities away from the broader group and then find ways to integrate their perspectives. The mobilization process is an opportunity to provide these groups: 1) a safe, constructive forum and joint purpose around which historically excluded groups can gather; and 2) a process for exploring commonalities and unifying priorities. Building this bonding and bridging social capital can increase marginalized groups' common sense of purpose within their community. Also look for opportunities to expand marginalized groups' linking social capital within communities to ensure their voices are successfully integrated into broader social discourse. Consistent and persistent outreach to these groups throughout the entire CATALYSE process is critical for ensuring programming is meaningfully inclusive.

Bonding social capital involves horizontal relationships within homogeneous groups—such as peer groups, family, culture, religion, gender or ethnicity

Bridging social capital includes relationships between heterogeneous groups from different geographic locations, ethnicities, religions, genders or other identity groups. These relationships or networks cross social stratifications and identities

Linking social capital involves vertical relationships between social networks with differing levels of power or social status.

For more detail on social capital see Social Capital and Good Governance: A Governance in Action Research Brief.

TOOL: Setting Ground Rules

Purpose: Setting ground rules during early meetings is a helpful exercise for demonstrating the key governance principles you hope to see throughout the CATALYSE process. Ground rules articulate a set of expected behaviors and are set by the participants of the meeting. They should be discussed and agreed upon at the outset of the meeting by everyone in attendance. Ground rules are a useful way to refocus a conversation if a meeting gets off track.

Using the Tool: At the beginning of any meeting, explain that the purpose of ground rules is to establish a set of principles that will guide interactions and keep the meeting space an open space for everyone. Some ground rules might include: Be on time for meetings, establish confidentiality, allow everyone the space to speak and be heard, practice active listening, etc. If you have a flip chart, post the ground rules somewhere everyone can see for the duration of the meeting. If it is an ongoing set of meetings that take place over time with the same set of participants, refer to the ground rules at the beginning of each meeting.

Principles in Action

Establishing ground rules is an opportunity to practice the good governance principle of rule of law. Articulating this and drawing attention to it is an effective way to demonstrate this otherwise potentially abstract principle.

Step 3: Assess Needs Together

At the heart of the CATALYSE approach is the goal that the whole community feels that they have had input in the process, a role in moving the program forward, and that the plan reflects their interests. Using a participatory assessment process to collect data from the community will result in plans that are rooted in a contextualized, deep understanding of community problems and solutions that are relevant to the community. This will strengthen community ownership and the overall CATALYSE process.

There are many ways the participatory assessment process can be designed. This section includes a recommended sequence of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, a growing family of approaches and methods that enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and the conditions in their context, and to plan and take action accordingly. The philosophy behind PRA is that community members are the best experts about their own situation. Facilitators help community members tap into their own knowledge, and resources and guide the community as they analyze this information.

Assess Needs Together

Conduct a participatory assessment

- *Resource or Community Mapping Tool*
- *Historical Timeline Tool*
- *Transect Walk Tool*
- *Seasonal Calendars Tool*
- *Venn Diagram Tool*
- *Vulnerability Matrix*

Synthesize Results

Document Results

- *Community Profile*

An assessment using PRA tools helps groups analyze local problems and formulate tentative solutions. It makes use of a wide range of visualization methods and mainly deals with a community-level scale of analysis. These methods can be very effective for getting detailed information from large groups. The emphasis on ensuring community feedback broadens the group of people involved, while keeping the facilitation of data-gathering and analysis manageable.

Principles in Action

The process for conducting participatory assessment should be taken as an opportunity to model participatory decision making, which is a process that highlights shared goals, allowing for collaboration and understanding. It can deepen individual commitment to a project and group commitment to the process, and result in better decisions. A participatory space is also one in which people are able to contribute equally. If individual community members dominate discussions not everyone will be able to contribute. If this happens, it is important to take action, referring to ground rules related to making space for everyone to share their perspective, creating small groups so more people have space to share, etc.

Some general principles to take into consideration when preparing for a participatory assessment are:

- **Participant-centered:** When designing a participatory process, think about planning from a participant point of view and consider their needs and expectations
- **Structured, transparent process:** Designing the process based on context is important for purposes of triangulation, which refers to using three or more methods to gather diverse sources of information about a particular issue in order to get various perspectives, confirm information, and more accurately focus project planning. Structuring the process also models transparency since it would be irresponsible to rely on only a few sources of information. Consider which tools would be best used in combination, taking into account logistical considerations like space, materials, etc.
- **Diverse team:** Having a diverse team with representatives from different backgrounds and roles working together models inclusion and collaboration
- **Inclusivity of perspectives:** This is an opportunity to engage as much of the community as possible. It is inevitable that insights from different individuals and groups will be conflicting. Make clear that the purpose of this process is to understand the complexity of the issues at hand. Prioritization will come later. Also, consider structuring the assessment in a way that will facilitate the most sharing. For instance, if women are not contributing in a large group workshop setting, having a smaller women-only focus group can shift dynamics
- **Sensitive facilitation:** Diversity of perspectives will inevitably lead to disagreement. Be sure to have skilled facilitators who understand the importance of drawing out and honoring all contributions, shaping process, handling conflict, etc.[5]
- **Emphasize the value of process:** There is inherent value in coming together as a community to gather and analyze information and dialogue on important issues. Demonstrating participatory processes will set the tone for the rest of the CATALYSE process
- **Documentation:** Be sure to have a plan for capturing the information that comes up in this process. This can include note taking during and after the session, staff debrief of information, video or picture taking, etc.

Conduct a Participatory Assessment

The following tools can be used over a series of meetings. Depending on the size and make up of the community, these tools can be used with smaller groups. Information collected at the end should be synthesized and shared with everyone.

TOOL: Resource or Community Mapping

Purpose: Resource/community mapping allows communities to visually demonstrate their priorities and how they perceive their communities. This can give valuable insight to teams trying to understand the most effective ways of engaging the community.

In the mapping exercise, community members themselves do the drawing. The purpose is to gain a local perspective of the community.

5 See the upcoming CATALYSE Facilitation Guide for more information.

Mapping is often one of the first activities that is carried out when the organizing team arrives in the community because it is a lively "ice breaker" that helps to put both the team and the community in a participatory mode. It provides information that the team (especially if it is not very familiar with the community) needs about major resources. Information that can be collected through this exercise includes: community landmarks; community infrastructure: water, health, education, food storage, community buildings; social structures (e.g. the organization of neighborhoods or quartiers); settlement patterns; information on livelihoods and places that are important to livelihoods; markets; relations with other communities; dwelling places of community authorities or specialists (e.g. chief, midwife, health worker, etc.).

Figure 2: Resource or Community Mapping

The most common type of resource map focuses on the inhabited part of the community. Variations include creating a map that can look at a larger area, such as the whole community territory, or even the larger region. A territorial map would include the boundaries around the community lands and could explore resources in the territory and how they are managed. A regional map might include neighboring communities and areas used by community members (marketplace, health facilities, sources of credit). Other kinds of maps that can be used are family resource maps (showing resources controlled by an individual family) and historical maps (showing changes that have taken place over time).

TIP: Depending on the number of community members present, it may be helpful to break into smaller groups before beginning the exercise. If you do divide community members, be sure to use some sort of criteria when dividing them into groups (considering gender, age, profession, neighborhood, etc.). In some cases, it may make sense to have homogeneous groups with people from similar identity groups – i.e. a group with all women or a group with all men – so participants feel comfortable speaking freely. In other cases, you may want to divide participants into heterogeneous or mixed groups, so group members reflect multiple views and perspectives. If you divide community members into groups, it can be interesting to have each group present their results to the other in order to illuminate and provoke discussion on different perspectives in the community and the implications for planning

Using the Tool: To begin the map, clear a large open area, ideally, outside where there is plenty of space to expand as needed. If flip charts and markers are available, use these to draw the map. If flip charts or large sheets of paper are unavailable, find a large space of open ground, and use sticks, shells, rocks, leaves and other objects as markers. Alternatively, chalk on a cement floor or masking tape on carpet also work well.

The facilitator should explain the purpose of the exercise and provide clear instructions throughout the activity. It is often helpful to start the activity by drawing in one or two landmarks (usually those that are immediately evident from the spot where everyone is standing). These landmarks might be the road by which the team arrived in the community, or a major building or tree. Whenever a landmark or specific location is mentioned, a marker should be drawn or put down (e.g. using a stone, shell, or leaf) to indicate its location.

After drawing some initial landmarks to set the stage, the facilitator should ask community members to map out the natural resources in their community: bodies of water, forests, agricultural fields or plots of land, etc. What natural resources exist and where are they located? After mapping natural resources, use a similar process to ask community members to map man-made resources, such as schools, health centers, religious centers, etc. Finally, ask community members to draw where neighborhoods are in relation to the mapped resources.

TIP: Try not to direct participants or tell them which resources to draw. Instead, give prompts like "natural resources" or "man-made resources" – remember you are facilitating, not providing the answers. It is important to let community members decide what to draw and when, as this will help reveal their own perspectives and priorities.

The team should be careful to stand back and leave the drawing and placement of markers to the community members. The facilitator should initially limit their questions to asking, "Is there anything else?" "Has anything been forgotten?" Only when community members have completed the map should team members ask other, more leading questions.

Consider Resilience: To help communities understand their risks, and what resources or areas of the community may be impacted by various hazards, consider asking the following question: Which areas or resources are at risk from different types of hazards?

- Climate shocks and stresses: temperature, precipitation, (annual, seasonal, daily) sea level rise (erosion of beaches/cliffs, changes in tides/rivers/bays), extreme events (drought, heavy rainfall, wildfire etc.)
- Natural shocks and stresses: typhoons/cyclones/hurricanes, flood, drought, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions
- Human-made shocks and stresses: Socio-political conflicts, deforestation etc.

Don't confuse shocks and stresses with their impacts. Shocks and stresses that affect the whole area (not location-specific) can be noted in the margin.

TIP: Encourage community members to discuss resources before drawing or marking; there should be consensus before anything is placed on the map. It is also important to ensure one or two people do not dominate the activity. Make sure everyone is included and has the opportunity to contribute when using the tools!

The community often appreciates retaining a copy of the map for their use when the team departs the community. Consider some ways to capture the results of the map so that the community can save the version they work on for their own future planning purposes.

TOOL: Historical Timeline

Purpose: A historical timeline is a semi-structured group discussion that focuses on historical information and attempts to organize that information into a systematic chronology of events. Typically, a historical timeline begins with the founding of the community and attempts to identify all the landmark dates that have had significant impact on people's lives up to the present date. Creating historical profiles can assist communities to identify patterns over time and draw out their development priorities. Usually, this tool is carried out in groups with different community members and should include elderly people and those who are known for their historical knowledge.

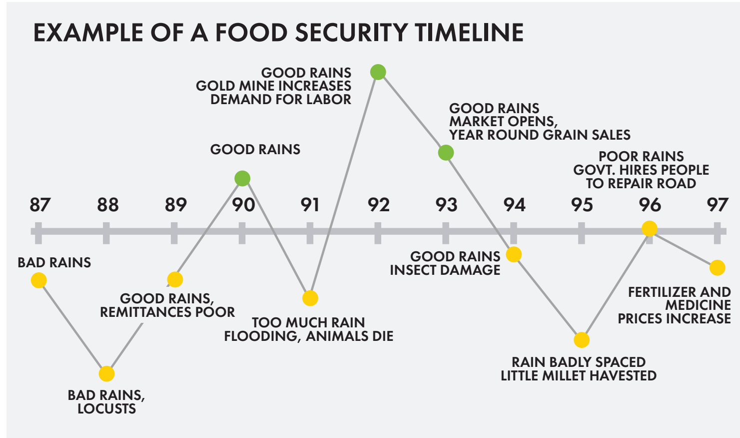


Figure 3: Food Security Timeline Example

Using the Tool: Start by asking community members to draw a horizontal timeline on a piece of flip chart paper or on the ground. Have them label the right side with the current year, and the year the community was founded on the left side. Ask participants to brainstorm significant events that have occurred in the community, and to come up with approximate dates for each event. Each time a significant event is mentioned, it should be noted on a small card or sticky note. As possible, the dates and events should be organized in chronological fashion. Events that are not associated with particular dates should still be placed in approximate order.

Once the major events are documented, begin to map out positive and negative trends. This offers a way to visualize changes in the community over time, and will help you to put each year in the larger context. You can ask, for example, how does food security (labor opportunities, incidence of malaria, or any other topic of interest) this year compare to years in the past?

TIP: Having participants write the events on cards or sticky notes will enable them to discuss, reorder, and move them around the timeline.

Using the horizontal time line as a representation of an "average year", ask participants to review their timeline and major events, and determine which years were better or worse than average. Beginning with the most recent year, ask participants whether it was better or worse than average. Ask your informants to mark above or below the "average" line to indicate how much better or worse. Discuss briefly what factors contributed to the year being either good or bad. Repeat this going back 10 years, asking participants to mark whether each year was above or below average, and to discuss why.

Consider Resilience: Are there any trends or changes in the frequency or intensity of events over time? This is a good opportunity to discuss whether any of the hazards and seasonal changes are consistent with observed climate changes and the climate change predictions of scientists.

TIP: For additional data points, you can continue going back in time on the timeline asking participants to rank the years above or below average, focusing primarily on the years with major events.

TOOL: Transect Walk

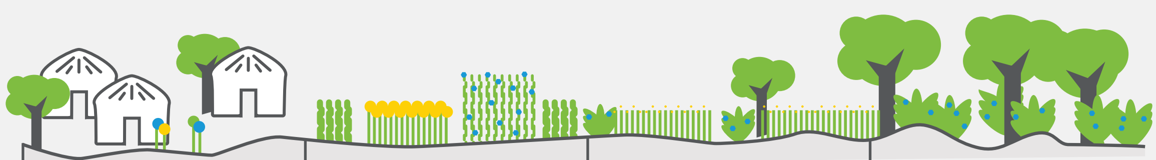
Purpose: During a transect walk, team members walk through the community accompanied by "guides"—community members with knowledge of community resources and issues. As the team walks along, they ask questions related to the things they are seeing, as well as other issues or questions they have prepared. The transect walk takes advantage of local knowledge surrounding particular issues, and allows for in-depth examination. Transects can be helpful in focusing on resources—where they are located, how and by whom they are used, how much pressure exists on various resources and whether there is the potential for conflict over access. They can also be useful to verify information and add new insights through observation.

The idea of a transect walk is to get the team out of the usual interview setting and to make use of people's powers of observation. It allows for a visual assessment and conversation about the community's resources and practices. For example, conducting a transect walk with a farmer can lead the team through agricultural fields and provide more detail about food security and how the agricultural system of the community works. Common topics that can be covered through a transect include: community resources, differences in households and their assets, credit sources, agriculture production and constraints, livestock management, health assets, water resources, community infrastructure, land use patterns and seasonal variations, livelihood strategies, crops and other food production, gathered foods and medicines.

Through the process of the transect walk, the team can engage community members, including those who have been unable to engage in other assessment exercises, in the assessment and appraisal process before creating development plans.

Consider Resilience: Transect walks are opportunities to discuss both potential hazards/risks and also existing capacities to address those risks. As you come across different community resources on your walk, ask about any hazards (natural, climactic or human-made) that may have impacted these resources.

Example of a Transect Focused on Food Security and Nutrition Issues



Zone	Central Village	Inner Fields	Outer Fields	Forest
Food Production/ Gathering	• Household vegetable gardens, chickens, papaya, mango and orange trees • Goats fenced in during rainy season	• Groundnuts, corn, some hibiscus in womens garden • Some tree products • Small ruminant grazing during dry season	• Millet, sorghum some rice • Watering holes for animals • Karite trees • Cattle grazing during dry season	• Fruit from baobab, wild date, fig and other wild trees, honey. • Cattle grazing during rainy season
Food Processing & Storage	• Dried vegetables and fruits • Groundnuts in women's fields	• Family granaries in or near fields	• Oil processed from karite nuts	

Figure 4: Transect Walk Example

Using the Tool: Create a checklist for items to examine during the walk. If the team is large, it makes sense to divide into several subgroups when doing a transect. Each subgroup will have its own guide(s). These guides are generally chosen by the community as "experts" in the area being studied. Hence, a transect that was looking at health issues might ask the traditional medicine practitioner to serve as the guide/informant for the walk. A transect focusing on agriculture might rely on information from someone considered to be a "master farmer" or the herding expert in the area.

Through discussions with the community, choose a logical starting point for walking the transect line. If a mapping exercise has been completed, it can also be used to plan the transect walk. Assign responsibilities for observations to various team members, and when proceeding along the predetermined route, take time for semi- structured interviews with community members. It is recommended to walk directly to the furthest point of the transect and then ask questions along the more leisurely return walk. This increases the chances of actually reaching the outermost point of the walk. The purpose of going to the territorial limit is to reduce the spatial bias that often results because the bulk of activities are likely to be carried out in the central, inhabited part of the community. Things are frequently different at the periphery where more marginal populations may live or farm, land use patterns may be different, access to resources may change, etc. As the group progresses, it will observe its surroundings and team members will ask questions about things they see that might be related to issues on the checklist.

TIP: It will often be useful to have one or two guides with different characteristics for each group (e.g. a man and a woman or people from two different ethnic groups). By walking in different directions, the team can ensure that more area is covered and thus have a better understanding of the overall community.

TIP: A transect walk can be used to channel vocal participants who tend to dominate the conversation during community meetings. The transect walk can give these vocal individuals an opportunity to provide their input one-on-one, while creating space for others to speak up during community meetings.

TIP: The transect walk can be a good way to verify and expand on information that was obtained in the resource mapping exercise.

The information from a transect walk should be organized and transferred to a diagram after each team returns to the community. This diagram will usually have the different areas of the territory on the horizontal axis (x axis). On the vertical axis (y axis) will be categories relating to the types of information collected on the walk.

TOOL: Seasonal Calendars

Purpose: Calendars are diagrams that focus on seasonal issues and how things change throughout a year. Calendars have a particular importance in food security, agricultural, and health assessments because these often involve important seasonal issues. The calendar allows the team and community to consider how the reality changes during different seasons as conditions change in the community.

Calendars will help create a visual image of a community's yearly timeline – for example, when do diseases strike? When are people laboring in the fields? When do people commonly migrate for work? What are the income patterns at different points of the year? And so on.

Having the community create a calendar presents an opportunity to better understand the community's "schedule". The calendar will show what months are busiest and most difficult to implement projects. With the help of the community, teams can then plan when project implementation will be most effective. For example, a training on malaria prevention the month before the community has noted that incidence of malaria rises would be much more effective than a training the month after malaria season.

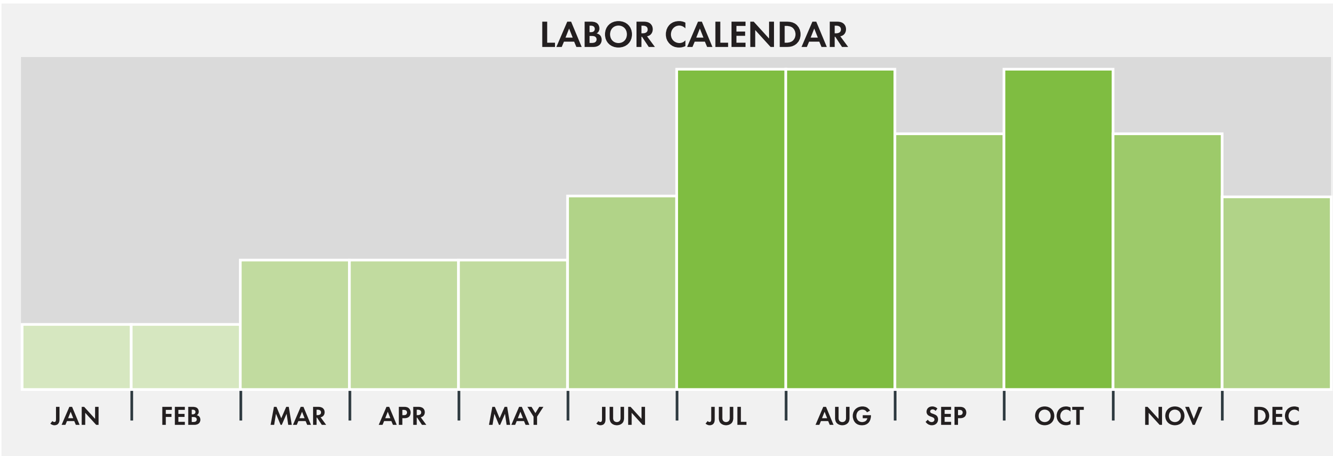


Figure 5: Labor Calendar Example

Using the Tool: Create the calendar on the ground in a large open area where everyone can see clearly what is being done. The time axis should begin at a time that makes sense in terms of the questions that are to be asked. For example, a calendar that focuses on food security issues will probably want to start the time axis at harvest time since that is, in some sense, the "beginning" of the year.

One of the first steps in doing a calendar is to figure out (with the community) the unit of time that makes the most sense to them. In some places, people are familiar with the western, twelve-month calendar. In other places, they will prefer to use other time intervals such as a religious calendar or seasons. Use the timeframe that is most familiar to the community members and add it to the x axis (horizontal axis) of the calendar. Afterwards, the team may choose to transpose the time scale to something that is more recognizable to outsiders who need to access assessment information.

Consider Resilience: When the calendar is complete, ask the group members the following questions:

- *Are there certain times during the year when the community is more likely to experience different shocks and stresses?*
- *Are there any differences in the timing of seasonal events as compared to 10/20/30 years ago (depending on age of participants)?*

This is another opportunity to discuss whether any of the seasonal changes are consistent with climate change.

A simple calendar will include just one variable, such as when different fruits are collected, or labor patterns at different times of the year. The simplest type of calendar just asks when something happens without adding a quantification element, such as, "When do you collect the fruits of a certain tree?" Ask participants to map when they undertake the action – or when the event occurs – on the calendar. A complex calendar adds a quantitative aspect by asking not just what happens when but how much happens when. The variables can be represented using columns drawn to different heights (like a bar graph) or using local materials, such as sticks that are broken to be longer or shorter, or smaller or larger piles of stones. These are measured against the y axis (vertical). A composite calendar can be used for analysis of a problem or situation when several variables are considered in the same calendar. The vertical axis will include several variables of interest while the horizontal axis will include dates (months or years). For each variable, consider whether the variable is to be evaluated simply in terms of when it happens (a dot to indicate that people consume millet during that season) or whether it will be useful to add a ranking dimension to show how much of something happens during a given season (several dots if more millet is consumed, fewer if less is consumed).

TOOL: Venn Diagram

Purpose: A resource map represents the community's analysis of its space, and focuses principally on physical landmarks. A Venn diagram offers another way to "map" a community with a focus on social relationships rather than physical ones. The Venn diagram looks at how a community is organized, both in terms of its internal organization and in terms of its relationships with the larger community beyond its borders. The Venn diagram allows communities to begin engaging with the idea of their community as a unit by laying out all the different internal and external connections and relationships. The Venn diagram can help the community visualize and examine power structures that were previously taken for granted, understand better how outside influences are affecting their community, and most importantly, facilitate communication and critical discussion on how the community is organized.

Using the Tool: As with the participatory map, the organizing team should begin with a thorough checklist of the types of issues they wish to explore using the Venn diagram. However (as with the map), it is best to keep this list in the background until the community members have completed their own diagram with their own priorities.

Some of the issues that can be examined in a Venn diagram include: the role of organizations in local decision making; role of external forces on the community; community leaders and decision makers; decision making processes; role of government and NGOs; relationship with other communities; credit and marketing institutions; conflicts and conflict resolution mechanisms; social safety nets; sharing of food and other resources; and access to land and other resources.

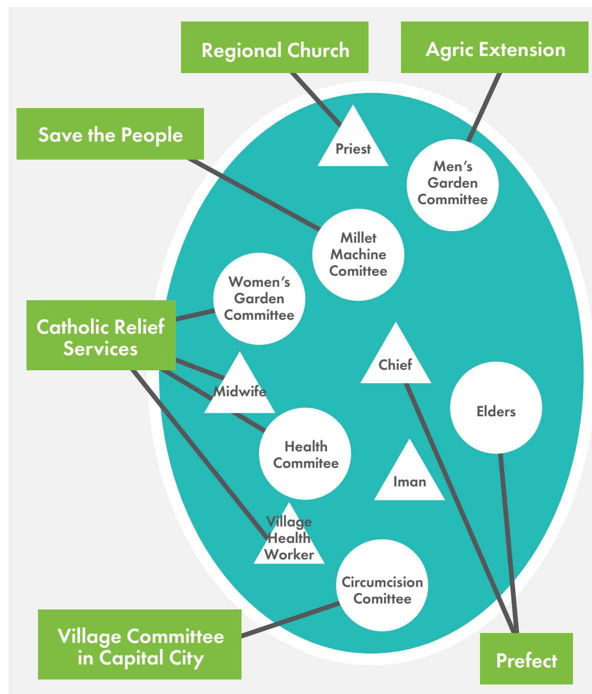


Figure 6: Venn Diagram Example

The facilitator begins by drawing a large circle on the paper or ground. This circle represents the community; everything inside the circle is a community institution, while anything outside is an external source of power or influence. It is best to start with internal organizations and individuals, asking the group to think of all the groups, committees, individuals, associations in the community. As each one is listed off, a colored circle (either cut out of paper or drawn with marker) is placed on the diagram with the name of the group. These ovals may be cut or drawn in different sizes to reflect the size of the group or its influence on the life of the community. This will depend on what type of information the team is seeking.

TIP: While a Venn diagram can be done on the ground, using natural markers such as stones and leaves, it is easier to use a large sheet of paper with shapes that are cut out of different colored card stock or paper. Alternatively, if the only paper available is white, markings can be made using different colored markers to distinguish between the different groups, associations, and individuals on the diagram.

The next question will address individuals who have a particular role in the community. These may be represented by triangles, generally using only one size to avoid controversy. The team should be careful to ask about both men and women who play important roles in the community. Different colored triangles may be used to show men and women who have a particular influence in the community.

Once all the insiders have been identified, the facilitator will direct attention to the outside of the circle and ask about external organizations that have an influence, whether positive or negative, on the community. Here again, it can be useful to begin with groups and organizations and then finish with individuals. As each external organization or individual is listed, a rectangle should be placed or drawn on the map, outside of the large circle.

As the external organizations are placed on the diagram, you may wish to show the mechanism by which they intervene in the community. If they work with the whole community, a line would be drawn to the inside of the circle. If they work through a particular committee or individual, a line would be drawn from the outside group to the person or committee with whom they most often work.

It is particularly important with the Venn diagram to facilitate a discussion once the picture is completed since there information that can be gained by probing the relationships that are visualized in the diagram. The Venn diagram provides a vehicle for getting at information that can otherwise be quite difficult to access, such as intra-community decision making and mutual assistance.

TOOL: Vulnerability Matrix

Purpose: A vulnerability matrix is used to identify potential hazards, vulnerable livelihood resources and the coping strategies currently employed by a given community. Much of this information may have already been gathered through other tools (historical timeline, seasonal calendar, transect walk). However, the process of creating a matrix allows the community to collectively highlight the most significant vulnerabilities and begin to identify existing capacities and gaps.

Using the Tool: Prepare a matrix like the one below in advance. Ask the group to identify the community's most important livelihoods resources. It is helpful to categorize the resources according to the following classification:

- **Natural resources:** the natural resources which people rely on for income, food, medicine, protection, etc. Examples: forests, water, air, soils, crop, vegetables, fish, livestock, etc.
- **Financial:** Money and capital. Examples: income from the sale of agricultural products or other goods, casual work, salaries, remittances, etc.
- **Human:** the skills, knowledge, capacity and good health important to the pursuit of livelihoods. Examples: health, agricultural or technical knowledge/skills
- **Social:** the formal and informal relationships and institutions important to community well being. Examples: local councils, churches, cooperatives, trade union, family
- **Physical:** Infrastructure and productive capital for transport, energy and communications, Examples: roads, hospitals, dwellings, water tanks

Ideally, the community will identify at least three resources in each category.

Next, ask the group to identify the two to four main hazards (shocks and stresses) to resources—and list them horizontally across the top of the matrix, using symbols if necessary.

Then, using the scoring system below, ask participants to decide on the degree of impact that each hazard has on each of the resources. Try to get group consensus. A note taker should note key points of discussion and any disagreements on the scores.

SCORING SYSTEM (can be helpful to use different colors for the different numbers.):

3 = significant impact on the resource
2 = medium impact on the resource
1 = low impact on the resource
0 = no impact on the resource

EXAMPLE OF A VULNERABILITY RANKING MATRIX

	4 Most Important Hazards				
Most Important Livelihoods Resources	**Drought/ erratic rains**	**Localized flooding**	**Intercommunal Conflict**	**Malaria/ dengue**	**Totals:**
Natural:					
Agricultural Land	3	3	3	0	**9**
Water	3	2	0	0	**5**
Livestock	2	2	3	0	**7**
Financial:					
Jobs/employment	2	2	2	3	**9**
Market income	3	2	3	3	**11**
Loans/insurance	1	1	2	0	**4**
Human:					
Health	3	3	3	3	**12**
Security	2	2	3	2	**8**
Physical:					
Roads	1	3	0	0	**4**
Schools	2	2	0	0	**4**
Social:					
Churches	1	1	3	2	**4**
Village councils	2	1	3	2	**5**
Local CSOs	2	1	3	2	**5**
Totals:	**24**	**26**	**28**	**17**	

Add the numbers vertically and horizontally: Which livelihood resources have the highest horizontal sum and are thus most vulnerable? Which hazard has the highest vertical sum and thus induces the highest impact on the identified livelihood resources? Considering projected climate change, how might hazards and the vulnerability of livelihoods change in future? Will other livelihoods become vulnerable?

When the matrix is complete, ask the group members the following questions:

- What coping strategies are currently used to deal with the hazards identified? Are they working?
- Are there different strategies that you would like to adopt which would reduce the impact of hazards on your livelihoods?
- What resources do you have that would help you to adopt these new strategies?
- What are the constraints to adopting these new strategies? The note taker should carefully transcribe the key points of the discussion

A second Matrix, including capacities can also be created at this point, see the example here.

EXAMPLE HAZARD/CAPACITY MATRIX

HAZARD	IMPACTS	COPING STRATEGIES
DROUGHT	› Shortage of water › Shortage of food › Decreased health and nutrition › Increased criminality › Lack of respect › Loss of social values › Decreased income › Increased domestic violence and conflicts › Loss of fruit tree productivity	› Increase of sexual work › Criminality › Eating wild roots and fruits › Migration › Selling livestock › Selling household properties › Casual work for food › Drought-resistant grains › Conservation farming › Shift from crop to garden work › Mulching › Drying vegetables › Food/grain storage

TIP: The process of creating a matrix like this before moving to the next step of the CATALYSE process reminds the community to consider potential risks and vulnerabilities before prioritizing actions.

Document and Synthesize Results

PRA meetings generate a large amount of information about the community and the many issues they would like to address through their projects. Be sure that someone is in charge of documenting all of the discussions, which can include a combination of taking pictures, writing notes, or taking video. Having a clearly documented process is critical for subsequent project stages since the community will come back to all the problems they have identified in this phase.

Results can be distilled into a Community Profile which is an important document for Mercy Corps reporting purposes. It is also essential for the community to give feedback on and approve the Community Profile.

TOOL: Community Profile

Purpose: Information collected from assessments should be assembled into a community profile. The purpose of the profile is to store important demographic, technical, and contact information about the focus community. It ensures that assessment data is easily accessible and that whoever comes to a community is working from the same information, and does not bother the community by repeating the same questions. It also compiles valuable information that will be used in later stages of the engagement process, including when monitoring development progress. Finally, this information can be helpful to the community by providing a single document that captures essential issues and opportunities related to community development.

Using the Tool: Community profiles are compiled based on assessment data (from the previous step) and through discussions with community leaders. The community profile should include general categories of information such as: 1) Major problems, 2) Main livelihoods or sources of income, 3) Resources, 4) Existing socio-economic infrastructure (e.g. schools), 5) Any ongoing projects, 6) Active and inactive community organizations, 7) Relationship with local government, 8) Any existing development plans within community / local government, and 8) Photos and documentation of any assessments done prior to creating the profile.

Once drafted, it is important to share the document with the wider community to review, discuss and approve. Once the community vets the profile, one copy should be kept on file with relevant government officials/ mobilizers and another should be given to the community for their records. Profiles can be used by the community in the future as they consider other projects or long-term community development plans.

Step 4: Prioritize Together

Now that you have a large amount of information about the issues affecting the community, the next step is to facilitate a consensus building and prioritization process to come to agreement about which issues are most critical to address through initial community projects. This will be done in multiple workshops.

Prioritize Together

Facilitate participatory prioritization

- *Dot voting*
- *Problem trees*

Many communities have engaged in other assessment activities in the past. However, even where results are shared with the community, community members themselves have often not been involved in the process of analysis and issue selection. Through the CATALYSE process, communities themselves participate in prioritization of issues.

The following section outlines a series of tools that can be used during community meetings to identify and prioritize issues for local development planning. Together, these tools will enable you to gather and analyze input from the community about their needs, prioritize the needs most critical to the community, and begin generating solutions and potential projects.

Principles in Action

Begin these workshops by grounding participants in the analysis of the assessment phase, by sharing all or parts of the community profile. Also emphasize why we are doing each activity, and its relevance to the broader process of participatory decision making. Each activity is an opportunity to demonstrate a governance principle. For instance, emphasizing ground rules can demonstrate rule of law. Ensuring that everyone who wants to has an opportunity to speak and be heard models responsiveness, etc.

TIP: Prioritization, like the assessment phase, requires skilled and sensitive facilitation. There will inevitably be differences of opinion. For more information on how to handle conflict, identify and deal with power dynamics, and maintain a safe and participatory space for broad participation. More to follow in our upcoming CATALYSE: Facilitation Guide.

Tool: Dot Voting

Purpose: Dot voting is a very simple and quick method for groups to use in setting priorities when there are many options. It can be used to identify where to start in addressing an issue, which project to start first, etc. In the community engagement process, dot voting should be used to begin narrowing down the problems the community would like to prioritize and address. It presents an opportunity to review, finalize, and ultimately prioritize the list of community issues that emerged during the assessment process. Because the community will not be able to solve every problem at the same time, the dot voting method helps give a sense of which items are most important and should be addressed first.

Using the Tool: After analyzing information collected during the assessment phase, and creating a community profile, write down the major problems the community identified on a flip chart (in any order). Convene community members and share the list of problems identified during the assessment. Ask community members if there is anything they would change, take off, or add. Let community members discuss the list until they have built consensus around the issues listed.

Give each person in the group three dots or stickers. Instruct them that to indicate their priorities, they are to put dots next to the issue(s) they feel are most important for the community to address. Remind them that they can either select three separate issues (i.e. put their dots next to 3 different problems listed on the flip chart) or they can put all three of their votes on one issue that they feel is especially important. The choice is theirs.

TIP: It can be helpful to limit the number of votes each person has, and there may be times when you decide to give each person only one sticker for voting. No matter the number of votes you give each person, make sure everyone gets the same number of votes (i.e. everyone should have the same opportunity and number of stickers!)

After providing instructions, participants should walk up to the flipcharts and place their dots under the items. If you have a larger group, split the items on two flipcharts on opposite sides of the room so as not to take too much time or cause congestion. Start half the group on each chart.

When everyone has placed his/her dots, count the number of dots for each item and make a priority listing on a new flipchart page (listing the issues in order of the number of votes they received). There usually are a few clear winners. You may then discuss with the group if they agree those should be top priorities on which to start working. Remind the community that those not selected are not eliminated and can be revisited in future years.

TOOL: Problem Trees

Purpose: Problem Trees can help communities further analyze their prioritized issues. Using a problem tree analysis, community members focus on the issues prioritized through the dot voting exercise and explore the causes of the issue and how the issue affects their community. The problem tree diagram allows communities to visualize and map out the cause and effect around an issue. Often, issues identified by communities can be symptoms of other problems. The Problem Tree exercise helps participants break down issues into the "root" of the problem, ensuring development plans address root causes rather than symptoms.

Using the Tool: Begin by discussing and agreeing on the larger problem or issue to be analyzed through the exercise. The Problem Tree exercise is most effective when it follows the dot voting activity as you can use the issues prioritized by the community and conduct the Problem Tree analysis for each selected issue.

On a piece of flip chart paper, draw a tree and write the identified issue in the center or the 'trunk' of the tree. This becomes the 'focal problem'. The wording does not need to be exact as the roots and branches will further define it. Next, ask the community to identify the causes of the focal problem – these become the roots. What causes or contributes to the prioritized issue? Are any of these causes related? How? Continue asking questions that will help community members identify the "roots" of their prioritized issue. You can write the causes and effects directly on the flip chart. Alternatively, use post-it notes/cards that participants can move around and re-arrange in a cause-and-effect logic.

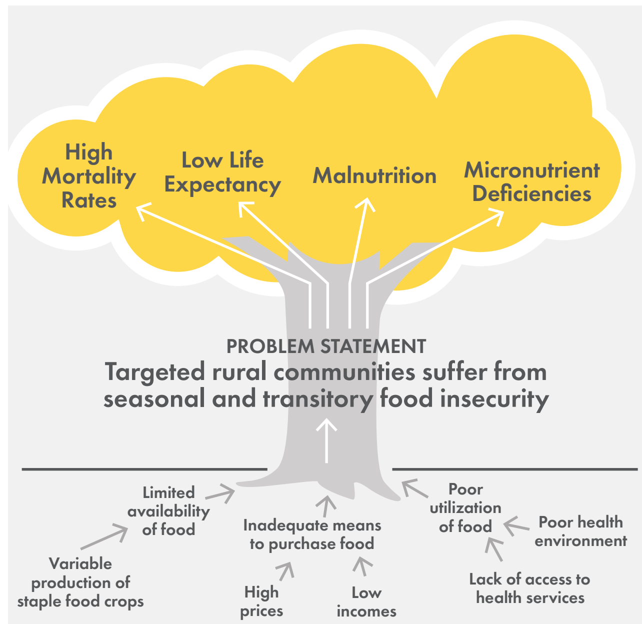


Figure 7: Problem Tree Example

Then identify the consequences of the problem – these become the branches. What happens as a result of this issue or problem? What other problems does it create? The heart of the exercise is the discussion, debate and dialogue that is generated as factors are arranged and re-arranged, often forming sub-dividing roots and branches.

TIP: Make sure to record the root causes identified in this exercise as they will be used in the problem ranking matrix activity.

Take time to allow people to explain their feelings and reasoning, and record related ideas and points that come up on separate flip chart paper under title such as: solutions, concerns and decisions. An important part of this activity is that all stakeholders get a chance to express their experiences and ideas.

TOOL: Problem Ranking Matrix

Purpose: The Problem Ranking Matrix helps the community to prioritize the problems that have been identified through the assessment exercises and subsequent analysis. The Problem Ranking Matrix allows communities to work together to prioritize their issues. Through discussion and exploration of each issue, the community can have a more informed conversation on which issues receive priority in the development planning process.

Using the Tool: Create a chart with the community's identified problems on the vertical (Y-axis) line. Ideally, this activity will be conducted following the Problem Tree exercise, and will incorporate the root causes identified by community members on the Y-axis. This ensures community members are prioritizing the causes of problems, and not the symptoms (and therefore that subsequent solutions or actions will get at the "heart" or "root" of the problem.)

Along the horizontal (X-axis) line, ask the community to develop criteria to help them prioritize the identified problems/ root causes. Criteria can help 'measure' the impact of each problem or the likelihood of a solution. Community members should discuss and build consensus around how they will use the criteria to rank each problem. Again, criteria should be developed (or at least vetted) by the community and could include, among others:

- the number of people affected/how big of an impact the problem has in the community
- whether the problem is a "root" cause of other problems (per the Problem Tree exercise)
- the likelihood the community can solve the problem itself
- the likelihood the community can find outside help with the problem

EXAMPLE OF A PROBLEM RANKING MATRIX

	Number of people affected	Gravity of impact	Causes other problems	Solutions depend on solving other problems first	Likelihood we can solve the problem ourselves	Chance we can find outside help for the problem	Total score
Problem 1							
Problem 2							
Problem 3							

Next, the community should review each problem or root cause against the agreed-upon criteria and decide which they would prioritize. Ask community members to judge how well each problem meets the criteria using the following scoring index:

0 = Does not meet criteria

1 = Partially meets criteria

2 = Almost completely meets criteria

3 = Perfectly meets criteria

If community members do not agree on scoring, allow for discussion until consensus is reached (and use voting when necessary). At the end of each row, develop a total score for each problem, and allow community members to use this score to prioritize the importance of solving that problem through the development planning process.

TIP: The goal of these exercises is to narrow down the list of issues into several problems that can be tackled through the development planning process. If after the Problem Ranking exercise, the community is still unable to prioritize, you can try repeating the dot voting exercise to further narrow the list.

With the completion of this matrix, the community will have a better understanding of each problem, how it is affecting them, and the feasibility of solving the problem.

Step 5: Plan for Action Together

Plan for Action Together

Develop solutions

- *Visioning and problem solving*
- *Impact/effort matrix*

Create Action Plans

Clarify Structures

Community Contribution

Build Targeted Capacity

Finalize Implementation Plans

Now that the community has prioritized issues, it is time to develop solutions and plan for action. At this stage, develop concrete solutions to the problems identified, and translate those solutions into concrete, actionable projects. In preparation for the implementation phase, put in place roles, responsibilities, resources and systems for monitoring and evaluation. Finally, discuss what structures and capacity building are needed to ensure the successful implementation of the project.

Develop Solutions

Moving from prioritized issues to creating solutions is a critical point in this process. It is often a lot easier to talk about all the problems at hand than it is to figure out what to do about them. Settling on a specific project should include discussion of the pros and cons of different options in light of what came up during the consensus building process. Be sure that Mercy Corps staff know the criteria for the kind of projects that Mercy Corps can support so they are prepared to answer questions.

Principles in Action

Participatory tools are an excellent way to demonstrate many of the core governance principles in action. Taking a little extra time to emphasize when and why we are using each of these tools can have powerful demonstration effects. For instance, reflect on the use of transparent and responsive facilitation: point out when and why you ensure everyone who raises their hand has a chance to speak or when you seek consensus from the group.

TOOL: Visioning and Problem Solving

Purpose: The first step in action planning is helping communities think through proposed solutions to their prioritized community issues. The goal here is to help community members develop a common vision around a given issue and brainstorm concrete steps or actions for achieving this vision. This visioning and problem solving exercise is an important step in building consensus and local ownership over proposed interventions and solutions.

Using the Tool: Begin by reviewing the problems identified and prioritized by the community in the previous phase. For each prioritized problem, pose the following question: "For problem X, what change would you like to see in your community?"

Have community members individually list changes that they would like to see, either on paper or in their minds. Next, create small groups (around 3-6 people) and have community members share their lists in their groups. After discussing commonalities and differences, ask each group to choose up to three "changes" to draw on a flipchart paper. One at a time, post the pictures from each group and have them explain their desired changes. Repeat this process for each problem prioritized in the previous phase.

Next, cluster the pictures together into groupings of similar goals or visions for change. Once all ideas are clustered, have a conversation to build consensus around the community's goals. Following this discussion, community members should consider what interventions or activities are needed to achieve their vision and promote their desired changes. Ask community members to generate a list of potential solutions or interventions that would address the problems they have prioritized. No idea is a bad idea! Write down all ideas and activities the community proposes on a "Potential Activities" list.

TOOL: Impact/Effort Matrix

Purpose: The Impact/Effort Matrix is a helpful tool that can be used to help a group decide where to focus efforts when there are many possible actions that can be taken. For each potential activity, community members will consider the potential impact (high impact vs. low impact) and the amount of effort the activity will take (difficult vs. easy). This exercise is intended to remind community members to be strategic and realistic in solution generation. It can be useful for explaining resource limitations and programmatic constraints to prevent communities from prioritizing projects or interventions that are not feasible.

Using the Tool: It is important to start the exercise by developing a common understanding of the terms "impact" and "effort" to ensure all community members are using similar criteria to judge whether activities will be high/low impact or difficult/easy. Ask community members to develop common definitions, write them down and post them so everyone can see, and revisit them throughout the matrix activity.

Using the list generated in the Visioning and Problem Solving exercise, create a numbered list of all the potential activities. Taking one intervention at a time, ask the community to indicate how much effort they think it will take to accomplish that activity. Then ask how much impact that activity will have on the community's overall goal(s). Write the activity number in the location on the matrix that represents the intersection of the effort and the impact for that item.

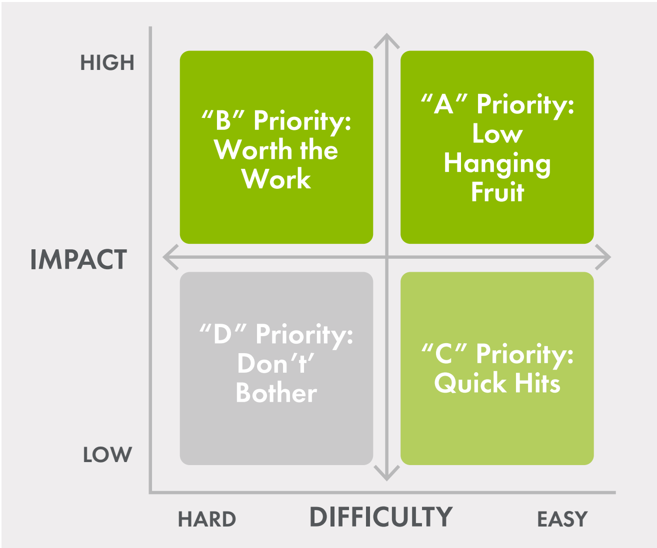


Figure 8: Impact/Effort Matrix Example

Clusters of activities that end up in the "A" quadrant are those that will make the most difference for the least amount of effort, and should be prioritized in action plan development. Conversely, those interventions in quadrant "D" will make the least difference and take the most effort, and should be cut as the community proceeds with planning.

TIP: Emphasize that this exercise is not a competition between groups and the interventions that they've proposed. This is about choosing projects that benefit the whole community.

The community may want to prioritize activities in quadrant "B" and "C" and it is important to facilitate a discussion about whether they think any of their high effort/high impact or low effort/low impact activities should be considered in the action plan.

TIP: To narrow down activities in quadrants B and C before moving into action planning, it may be helpful to conduct a dot voting exercise so community members can further prioritize.

Create Action Plans

An action plan is an evolving document that includes a concrete plan for implementation of planned projects and includes activities, budgets, roles, responsibilities, and a monitoring and evaluation plan. Also think about your action plan in resource terms and take stock of what you need to make implementation a reality. What resources will come from Mercy Corps, the community, and/or other sources? Other actors, including the private sector and local government, may have community development funds that could support the community's projects.

When formulating activities, think about how to incorporate targeted opportunities to build relationships and trust across diverse community groups and sub-populations. By engaging communities in projects that benefit a broad range of people, community members experience first-hand the positive impact of collective action that crosses 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' inclusion in decision-making, particularly youth and women, by increasing their confidence and demonstrating their capability to contribute to community affairs.[6]

Think about how the community action plan can fit into or link with the broader local development planning and budgeting processes. In some cases, government officials will be actively engaged throughout the process, or can be asked to provide technical support to bring the plan in line with national or regional government requirements for development planning or will be active participants in the CATALYZE process. The process of linking up these plans provides an opportunity to support bridging and linking social capital.

In some contexts, Village Development Plans will already exist, and in others, the CATALYSE process can lead to their development. Village Development Plans are the result of an extensive planning process that results in the community's development vision for itself. They can be road maps for the holistic development of a community's natural, social, and economic resources. The timeframe is long term, often beyond the scope of Mercy Corps projects.

TOOL: Action Plan Template

Purpose: Create an action plan template based on the complexity of the project. Some communities will be able to develop a complex, multi-year plan at the outset, and some communities will develop simpler plans. The objective of this exercise is to formulate how the community will address the issues and promote the activities they have prioritized over the next year. Concrete actions to address issues should be established, along with responsibilities and materials required for completion.

Using the Tool: Revisit each of the activities/interventions prioritized through the Impact/Effort Matrix Activity. For each prioritized activity, ask communities to discuss what actions and resources are needed to implement this activity, who will undertake each action, and by when. Keep in mind that, especially in the early phases of the planning process, several of the tasks to be accomplished may involve searching for more information. The community may not know all the options that are available to it and may need to consult specialists to gather more information.

6 More about facilitation and building trust in our upcoming Governance in Action: Facilitation Guide

For example, one community might want to focus on developing market gardens. As a part of its plan, it may note that this will require (1) ensuring that it has enough water during the dry season and (2) looking further into marketing issues. A first step of the plan, then, might be to carry out more detailed studies of these two issues. Women might decide to visit other communities that have active gardens to see what works in those communities. They might also go to local markets and talk to people there in order to assess what products sell the best. Once this information has been gathered, additional details would be added to the plan. These would outline specific interventions for deciding where to place the garden and the wells (or other water source), determining what crops would be grown, etc. At this point, to move to the second point of the plan, they might contact a water technician to determine where they are most likely to find water in their territory, decide together how big the garden will be, negotiate use rights to the land with the chief and elders, recruit men to assist in fencing the garden area, etc.

The Action Plan acts as a way to anticipate the general areas where community members see a need for intervention (will there be enough water in the dry season?). You can also include more specific tasks within the plan that can take place around the most immediate interventions (contact water technician) The others interventions can be addressed a rolling process as some activities get underway and people feel comfortable in taking on additional responsibilities.

When creating your plans, this is a good time to begin engaging the community in thinking about how they will monitor and evaluate their progress. When creating activities, brainstorm what success looks like and how we will know if we have gotten there. What information can tell us if we're making progress towards the goals, objectives and activities in our action plan? Next, determine the methods you will need to collect the information. What are the most relevant and accessible methods we can use to get the information we need? See the monitoring and evaluation section for more information on methods for participatory reflection and evaluation.

TIP: Use the problem statements and results generated during the Problem Tree exercise to identify goals and objectives. Reversing problem statements into positive statements is an effective way to identify an overarching goal: E.g. X Village suffers from seasonal and transitory food insecurity > Improve food security year round in X Village. Causes are helpful to clarifying objectives: E.g. Limited production of staple food crops > Improve agricultural production of staple food crops.

TIP: The action planning exercise is not meant to produce a rigid, "complete" document that sits on a shelf somewhere. It should evolve as the community moves through the process and gathers additional information. Therefore, it needs to be revisited through continued engagement with communities.

CATALYSE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Goal:				
Objective #1:				
Indicator for Objective #1:				
	Activity	Person(s) responsible	Target date	Resources needed
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
Objective #2:				
Indicator for Objective #2:				
	Activity	Person(s) responsible	Target date	Resources needed
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Clarify Structures

At this stage, communities should select a group that can represent them and provide leadership for the duration of the project. The CATALYSE process establishes or works with existing project committees or groups made up of community members to act as leaders in the process. These groups can be called by a variety of names, including community action committees, community initiative group, community project committees etc. For the purposes of this guide, we will refer to these groups as Community Action Groups (CAGs). CAGs provide a structured, transparent process for a community's self-organization around common values and priorities, rather than along traditional ethnic, socio-economic or gender lines that can reinforce community divisions. Through CAGs, communities collectively develop and implement community actions, using inclusive, accountable and transparent decision-making methods. With clear rules and expectations, communities can act collectively and enhance community-wide trust.

CAGs organize and oversee project implementation, manage the implementation of activities and and identify or elect qualified community members to serve on them. These committees are typically made up of people with relevant technical background and are responsible for project proposals, managing day-to-day project implementation, and developing a sustainability plan to ensure project implementation into the future.

CAG membership and structure will vary based on location, but a few considerations to keep in mind when thinking about the membership of the CAG are:

- **Manageable:** Make sure the CAG membership is a manageable size so decision making is not hindered
- **Inclusive:** Inclusive membership on the CAGs and associated committees should be a priority. Determine what inclusion looks like in each context, and consider the representation of all religious, gender, ethnic, disability, age, geographic, and political groups in the community. Special steps might have to be taken to ensure women and youth are represented on the CAG. Also consider representation by municipal/ local government, youth and social clubs, private sector, religious institutions, schools and people with specific technical expertise
- **Clear division of roles and responsibilities:** Experience shows us that it is important to have a clear division of roles and responsibilities among CAGs, committees (like project implementation and maintenance), Mercy Corps, local government, and any other groups involved in the project. These roles can be formalized in a partnership agreement that all parties sign in advance of implementation
- **Link to existing structures:** CAGs should be linked with local government officials and other development actors to help them achieve their goals and objectives

A core component of the CATALYSE approach is identifying and supporting change agents not yet holding leadership positions. Sometimes communities initially select typical leaders out of habit to sit on CAGs. In some contexts, traditional leaders may be less willing to include women, youth and minority voices in leadership structures as well. When this is the case, consider facilitating additional platforms, like working groups within the leadership structure, to elevate their voices and ensure they are heard. Investing in building the leadership and management support of both CAG members and members of these alternative structures gives opportunities for joint collaboration and dialogue when carrying out planned activities. This process can create space for new leaders to demonstrate their competence and build their skills and knowledge. Multi-phase project cycles, along with regular transparency and confirmation meetings, provide opportunities for communities to become confident in choosing younger or alternative leaders who represent their interests and fulfill their roles effectively.

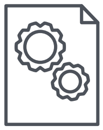
Principles in Action

CAG establishment is an excellent opportunity to reflect on governance principles in action. When CAGs are representative and act transparently, trust and participation are reinforced and communities are more likely to continue community-led actions after the program ends.

There also might be disagreement or conflict as it relates to who sits on the CAG and committees. Revisiting the venn diagrams or relationship mapping from the assessment phase will help you better understand dynamics that might be at play. If communities form separate CAGs, perhaps where sub-populations do not work well together, continue to work with each group until a joint committee can be formed. By supporting capacity building around conflict management, negotiation and mediation, communities can more effectively ease tension and proactively address potential or existing conflicts with other communities. By equipping people living in high-risk conflict and transitional environments with the skills to understand their and others' core needs, and the capacity to satisfy these interests by collaborating on joint development initiatives, conflict will be reduced. Consider training CAG members in conflict resolution approaches.[7]

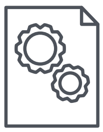
7 For more information on Mercy Corps' approach to negotiation and mediation training, see materials under "training" at https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/cgi-bin/library?a=p&p=conflict#training

There are several tools in the annex that can help you establish a CAG:[8]



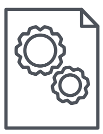
TOOL: Community Action Group Formation

Purpose: This tool outlines the process by which the broader community develops basic criteria for CAG membership and holds CAG elections.



TOOL: Establishing a CAG Constitution

Purpose: This tool outlines considerations for creating a constitution for the CAG that can provide a framework for which the CAG and associated committees will operate.



TOOL: CAG Meetings Format and Content

Purpose: The CAG is required to hold meetings regularly with the broader community to provide a forum to keep them informed about progress on the project and provide opportunity for feedback from the community. This tool describes the sequence of potential meetings to have over the course of project implementation.

With support from Tazo Tea and the Starbucks Foundation, the Community Health and Advancement Initiative (CHAI) has helped more than 82,000 people in tea and botanical producing communities in Assam and Darjeeling, India and Alta Verapaz, Guatemala to improve their socioeconomic and health conditions since its inception in 2003. The program works through representative CAGs that mobilize their communities to improve local infrastructure, health, income sources and opportunities for youth. Community contributions and participation through the formation and strengthening of the CAGs have been integral to the success and sustainability of CHAI interventions. In many cases, CAGs have also allowed communities to address additional problems on their own or garner support from Government of India programs or estate owners. This has resulted in new cross-sectoral collaboration, with tea estate management sharing costs and government departments providing technical guidance.

Photo: Mercy Corps, S. Sheridan 2014

Community Contribution

Every project requires some element of community investment. This can range from cash, labor, in-kind items, time contributed by CAG members, etc. The percentage contribution from the community will increase and Mercy Corps' will decrease with each subsequent project cycle as the community takes on increased leadership of their own development goals. In addition to supporting communities to pool their internal resources, Mercy Corps also supports communities to leverage outside resources from the private sector and government to feed into the CATALYSE process (which is evidence of linking social capital). Capacity building on advocacy can help citizens lobby for support from the public and private sectors, civil society and government.[9]

Build Targeted Capacity

Every mobilization approach involves ongoing leadership and capacity building. Make sure that capacity building is thoughtfully targeted, sequenced, tailored to specific roles and stages of the program cycle, and meets people where they are. For instance, considerations for when to use training, mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, accompaniment, general awareness raising, etc., depends on program goals and where you are in

8 Also see Mercy Corps' Organizational Capacity Index materials for more information on supporting local partners
9 See https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/docs/AdvocacyStrategyKit.pdf Mercy Corps materials on advocacy training to support CATALYSE approach.

the life cycle of a program. Technical capacity training for project implementation can often be prioritized over softer skills like conflict management, good governance, etc. Be sure that capacity development plans take into account the range of skills that community members will need to successfully carry out a project, including those that contribute to social cohesion and the building of social capital.[10]

TIP: Develop a capacity assessment for your CATALYSE process to determine the skills and knowledge stakeholders will need to do their roles well. Also engage CAG membership in determining their own capacity development needs and how Mercy Corps can work to support them.

Finalize Implementation Planning

Once the CAG and committees have been established, revisit and adapt the action plan to make sure there have been no changes in the context that will affect implementation like severe weather events, changes in the government, or changes in the community itself, including members who have key roles in the project. Also ensure there is adequate resourcing for the implementation phase: including gathering information about potential changes in resources, including possible contributions from the community, local development funds or the private sector. Also revisit the details of the action plan to make sure there is a clear budget, clearly delineated roles and responsibilities, that the objectives, outputs and activities are clearly linked with indicators, and a monitoring and evaluation plan is in place.

Principles in Action

This phase presents another opportunity to model transparency by ensuring that the finalized action plan is shared back with the community so they can see how the project has evolved since the initial participatory meetings. This can be done by holding a meeting, distributing leaflets, or posting a simplified version of the action plan in a public place e.g. a notice board at the market square or outside a government office or a school.

Step 6: Act Together

Plan for Action Together

Activity Implementation

Monitor Progress

Strategic Communication

Project Completion Celebration

After all the careful analysis, problem solving, and detailed planning, it is time to implement the action plans.

Activity Implementation

This phase can begin with a kick-off event to mark the formal beginning of the Act Together phase. This event can garner excitement and bring attention to the project, raise awareness about the importance of the issue it is addressing and set expectations for what community members can expect during project implementation. It is also important to celebrate small successes throughout the implementation phase, which can bolster engagement and a sense of confidence and accomplishment for everyone involved.

Monitor Progress

Community members should take the lead in monitoring progress on action plans. Since community members were involved in indicator development, they should also determine with program staff what monitoring tools to use to track progress. Good monitoring systems will highlight problems early so there can be problem solving

10 For more information, see Mercy Corps Capacity Development Guide.

and course correction. Determine the role that Mercy Corps staff will have during the Act Together phase and clearly communicate it to community members. This can include, for instance, an ongoing assessment of capacity development needs and other support. See the Monitor and Evaluate Together Step for more information. As projects are implemented, CAG members should engage in ongoing monitoring and reflection about how projects are going and recalibrate as needed.

TIP: Consider how the CAG and other groups are functioning the way they were designed to. The CAG constitution and original project agreement can be useful tools in addressing issues of marginalized CAG members of a lack of participatory decision making.

Strategic Communication

Before this phase begins, establish communication mechanisms that will keep open lines of communication between all the stakeholders in the project, including CAGs and committees, local government, the broader community, and Mercy Corps staff. Having effective feedback loops highlights the importance of accountability and transparency, and ensures that there will be effective flows of information that go in both directions. Putting in place regular meetings with set agendas for those involved in implementation, and holding broader meetings that give community members not directly involved in the project the opportunity to be briefed on progress, give feedback, and see that their feedback is being taken info account can reinforce accountability and transparency and generate buy in for the process. Systematic communication will also reduce the likelihood of conflict.

TIP: To ensure that the community has the best opportunity to influence development planning and leverage potential resources for their activities, as implementation proceeds, continue to be aware of opportunities to integrate community plans into the government planning process. Eventually, the goal is for the community's perspectives on local development planning to reach multiple levels of government.

Project Completion Celebration

Upon completion of the project, schedule a celebratory event as well to honor achievements, recognize contributions of the CAG membership, government officials, Mercy Corps, and other partners, and look forward to future collaboration.

Step 7: Monitor and Learn Together

The CATALYSE process has a monitoring and evaluation plan in place at the outset that 1) provides information to people to enable them to make decisions, 2) tracks progress towards specific indicators, and 3) facilitates learning. Community members should be integrally involved in monitoring, reflecting on and evaluating community projects, on themselves as implementers of those projects, and of other program partners including the government.

Monitor and Learn Together

Conduct a participatory reflection and evaluation process

Analyze, document and communicate results

Engaging community members in the process of monitoring and evaluation is an essential step in building community ownership. This section focuses on simple strategies for conducting participatory reflection sessions at key phases of the project cycle with community members. Begin by reviewing the project goal and objectives. What did you set out to do? What were the expected outcomes? Then revisit the indicators developed with the community earlier in the CATALYSE process. Did we collect the information we wanted to? What does the information tell us?

TIP: For people who have not been involved in monitoring and evaluation efforts in the past, the concept can be daunting. Make sure everyone understands the purpose of the evaluation, the methods for carrying it out, what we hope to learn from it and how the results will be used. For community members who have participated before, encourage them to share their prior knowledge and bring the group along. This is another opportunity to build capacity and should be approached in the spirit of learning, with curiosity and support.

TOOL: Participatory Reflection Session Guide

Purpose: Perhaps the most straightforward way to engage community members in reflection on progress at different intervals throughout a project is to create a reflection guide with key questions related to the project. Figure 9 is an example of what a template can look like.

Using the Tool: Tailor these questions to the project context and schedule reflection sessions at predetermined times through out the project cycle.

TIP: Eventually, having these reflections sessions facilitated by CAG membership is a goal. When running these reflection sessions, like any facilitated process, keep in mind the importance of establishing ground rules, ensuring everyone has an opportunity to speak, and making the sessions open to a broad cross section of people who are involved in the project.

Participatory Evaluation Methods

Participatory monitoring and evaluation tools can be an effective means of creating mutual accountability for everyone involved in a project. This section introduces a number of approaches that can be tailored to context. Have the community choose the ones that are most relevant. Remember that these tools are most often used to gather community input into external program evaluations. These tools remain applicable but may need to be modified to apply to the inward focus of a community's evaluation of its own community-led plan.

Key informant interviews: This involves interviewing a number of (15-20) individuals selected for their knowledge and experience with the project. Interviews are qualitative, in-depth, and semi-structured. They rely on interview guides that list topics or open-ended questions. The interviewer subtly probes the informant to elicit information, opinions, and experiences.

Focus group interviews (with Appreciative Inquiry): Selected participants freely discuss issues, ideas, and experiences among themselves. A moderator introduces the subject, keeps the discussion going, and tries to prevent domination of the discussion by a few participants. Focus groups should be homogeneous, with participants of as similar backgrounds as possible.

Another way to approach focus groups is by using an approach called Appreciative Inquiry, which is based on the principle that what we focus on becomes our reality. So an Appreciative Inquiry approach to evaluation shifts the focus away from problem identification to discovering successes in order to learn from them and enhance factors for increased success. Focus group participants split into pairs and spend 5-10 minutes each relating a personal story to the other about a positive experience they had within or as a result of the project. Guiding questions include: 1) What was the most successful or important part of this process? What made it so important? 2) How could more situations like this be possible? 3) What are three things you would do, if you could do anything, to see more results like this? Participants then share results in plenary as facilitators record and group the various comments by theme. As commonalities emerge, discussions can take place about what the results seem to indicate regarding people's experiences with the project and implications for future activities. The strength of this process is that it provides a set of recommendations from participants themselves.

Participatory Reflection Guide Template

Date: __/__/____ Persons present: _________ _________

1. What were the activities this quarter?
____

2. How did the activities influence individuals, groups, or institutions to change? What is your source of evidence?
____

3. Have there been any unexpected results? Positive or negative?
____

4. Did any major factors or conditions change since last quarter? How did these affect the project?
____

5. What opportunities and risks do you see in the operating environment in the next quarter?
____

6. Which partnerships were challenging this quarter and why? Which were effective and why?
____

7. What strategies and activities were most effective? Please specify why.
____

8. What would you have done differently? Please specify why.
____

9. Has any issue come up that you'd like to explore in greater depth?
____

Figure 9: Participatory Guide Template

Community group interviews: These take place at public meetings open to all community members. The primary interaction is between the participants and the interviewer, who presides over the meeting and asks questions based on a prepared questionnaire.

Direct observation: Using a detailed observation form, observers record what they see and hear at a program site. The information may be about physical surroundings or about ongoing activities, processes, or routines.

Surveys: Simple questionnaires with a limited number of mostly closed-ended questions (For example, true/false, multiple choice, matching) can quickly gather data about the impact of a project. The advantage of surveys is that quantitative data can be collected and analyzed relatively quickly.

Case studies: Case studies record anecdotes that illustrate a program's shortcomings or accomplishments. They tell about incidents or concrete events, often from one person's experience. These can be valuable to present qualitative information.

Peer evaluations: In this approach, communities evaluate projects of peer communities or beneficiary groups. This gives groups exposure to other similar programs and can generate learning about a specific sector as well as reflections about the groups' own projects through the evaluation of peers.

Log books and diaries: Participants, households or specifically designated people keep track of specific indicators in log books or diaries over a period of time. These log books can serve multiple purposes: i.e. to show how many times a particular service or tool is accessed or used; to track incidents of violence; to track household food security and dietary diversity; to track maintenance of infrastructure; to track crop yields, harvests and sales, etc.

Most significant change: This is a qualitative method of gathering information at the end of a project to get a sense of what was the most important impact of the project for community members. This method consists of collecting a series of personal stories from participants, by asking them the open question: "What was the most significant change that occurred in your life (or your family or household) as a result of your participation in the project?" The collected stories are then analyzed in successive rounds by different stakeholder groups in order to emerge with the most significant or meaningful examples of changes brought about during the program, and why these were deemed significant.

Analyze, Document and Communicate Results

Once you have collected and analyzed the data, prepare a brief report to highlight the findings of the participatory evaluation. This is an important part of capturing lessons learned and informing the next (and subsequent) rounds of interventions. The evaluation report should also be distilled into a brief, one to three-page document whose contents can be shared widely within the community. Reporting on evaluation is also an opportunity to reiterate the importance of accountability and transparency. Results of most programs are imperfect—evaluating impact, examining strengths and weaknesses and reporting them out to the broader community is an important exercise in openness and a means of building trust and strengthening ongoing opportunities for engagement.

Hold feedback sessions with communities to share the results of the evaluation. Present the information in a way that is easy to understand and structure the session so there is time for feedback and dialogue. Completing this loop can reinforce transparency and accountability at this step.

Step 8: Revisit and Reassess Together

At this stage, stakeholders need to jointly decide what will come next. Possible next steps include preparing for the next phase of a project and planning for the post project evaluation.

Determine Next Steps Together

Prepare for next phase

Long Term Planning

Plan for a Post Program Evaluation

Prepare for the Next Phase

The CATALYSE process usually involves multiple project cycles.
Therefore, upon the successful completion of one project, it is often time to gear up for the next one. In each subsequent phase there should be an increase in community leadership and percentage of resource contribution, and a corresponding reduction in Mercy Corps' role. Rather than go through the entire CATALYSE cycle again,

planning for the next phase builds on elements of the in-depth participatory processes that were conducted initially. Approaching this in a participatory way will deepen learning, improve community buy in, and increase the likelihood of project success and the overall mobilization of the community.

Hold Community Meetings to Revisit and Reassess Priorities, Plan for Action

The purpose of this meeting is to revisit the results of the last phase of the project and make some decisions about what to prioritize in the next phase. The meeting should be facilitated by CAG members. Content to cover in the meeting (or meetings) includes:

- **Revisit the outcomes of the assessment.** What was learned that can inform the next round of planning? Since evaluations are meant to inform future planning, work with all program partners to ensure lessons learned inform the design of the next phase
- **Revisit analysis and action plans from the first cycle.** What needs to be augmented or changed? Sometimes projects may have addressed root causes of other priorities, so returning to the problem tree analysis can be particularly important
- **Revisit the list of priorities from the first phase and determine if anything has changed on this list.** Consider changes in the operating environment like changes related to politics or conflict, changes in community leadership, the weather etc.
- **Facilitate group decision making about what problem the community will address in the next project.** Return to the participatory decision making methods as needed
- **Create a new action plan for the new phase of the project cycle.** This might involve augmenting the original action plan or creating a new, more in depth one depending on the scope of the project. See the action planning template above

Preparing for the next phase is an important time to reflect on the degree to which a project was community led. Engage CAG membership and other stakeholders in reflection about what went well and what could be improved for the next round. What does increased community ownership look like in terms of community contribution, CAG membership taking on more responsibilities, etc. This is also an opportunity to revisit all roles and responsibilities of CAG members. Reflecting with CAG membership on indicators related to principles of good governance is another way to build capacity. What are specific ways they worked to increase transparency, inclusiveness, accountability, participation, etc., and how can those efforts be built on? What efforts were less effective?

TIP: Reflect on how successfully the first phase of the project linked up with local development planning. What can be done in the next phase to deepen relationships with local government, leverage government resources for local development, and improve efforts to feed community perspectives into government processes?

Often, communities with no positive history of engaging with government do not immediately make meaningful government connections during the first CATALYSE cycle. In Mercy Corps' experience, receptivity toward government increases over subsequent project cycles as the CATALYSE process encourages and empowers communities to articulate more specific asks of their government officials. This shift in perspective can also be spurred by the necessity in later program cycles for communities to take on more responsibility and make greater contributions to projects—this is frequently when communities start getting creative and looking to government and the private sector for additional resources. The CATALYSE process contributes to an increase in trust within a community, thus strengthening bonding social capital. By increasing the radius of trust within a community based on common values, communities are more prepared to establish and strengthen bridging social capital between them. Communities that are linked to each other are better positioned to hold their elected officials to account.

TIP: Since meaningful learning happens through this cycle of action and reflection, revisit capacity assessments and adjust them based on what new skills and knowledge might be needed for new projects. Since individuals involved in the program have had a chance to learn new skills, practice them, reflect on how this went, and practice again, capacity building in later program cycles can increase in depth.

Long Term Planning for Full Community Ownership

Ideally, at the end of a program (having gone through multiple project iterations or CATALYSE cycles), the community will have made great strides and will be leading its own development with little support other than technical assistance and advising from Mercy Corps. A few things to think about relevant to full community ownership of projects includes:

- **Maintenance:** The community should establish systems and groups to oversee ownership and maintenance of infrastructure created during the project. For instance, the creation of Maintenance Committees responsible for the upkeep of infrastructure like waterways, community centers and roads is a common way to promote sustainability and ongoing commitment to community-led development
- **Services:** Develop or strengthen mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of services or activities in order to maintain trust in the CAG and other responsible groups
- **Planning:** Take steps to encourage the facilitation of the ongoing process of revising community action plans to incorporate new projects and keep mobilization momentum going

Coordinate with and inform all stakeholders involved in the project including the CAG, project and maintenance committees, NGOs and CBOs, the broader community, local and higher level government, and private sector partners. It is also important to establish guidelines for community leadership on coordination of all these processes so participatory decision-making can continue.

TIP: Developing meaningful local partnerships should be a part of long term program strategy. For example, develop strong links between traditional leaders, local and higher level government officials and CAG membership. Ensure community action plans are aligned and feed into local level development planning from the beginning of the project, so these linkages are already in place.

Plan for Post Program Evaluation

In addition to the many outputs and outcomes achieved during the program activities, ultimate success of CATALYSE is arguably best measured in the long-term impact on communities themselves. Plans should be put in place if there are program targets that should be measured one, three, five or more years after the leadership transition. If so, plans for a follow-up evaluation should be outlined at this stage and timelines set for revisiting the process.

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. 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 steps and activities outlined in this toolkit.

DO NO HARM WORKSHEET

1. Groups in Conflict			
What conflicting groups (e.g., pastoralists / farmers, Christians / Muslims) experience tensions that have erupted into violence in the past and/or have the potential to become violent?			
2. Dividers and Sources of Tension		**3. Connectors and Local Capacities for Peace**	
What creates tensions between groups and/or threatens peace and stability? **Consider these categories:**		**What connects groups of people and/or promotes peace and stability?** **Consider these categories:**	
Systems & Institutions (e.g., militia structures, legal systems)		Systems & Institutions (e.g., markets, roads)	
Attitudes & Actions (e.g., racism, terrorism)		Attitudes & Actions (e.g., collaboration, coexistence)	
Values & Interests (e.g., land use, religious beliefs and practices)		Values & Interests (e.g., children's health, religious beliefs, safety)	
Experiences (e.g., past violence, selective interpretation of history)		Experiences (e.g., bonding over common suffering)	
Symbols & Occasions (e.g., requirements to practice majority religion, prohibitions against practicing minority religion)		Symbols & Occasions (e.g., national holidays, historical anniversaries, music)	

DO NO HARM WORKSHEET (CONT.)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">4. Analysis of Intervention</th><th colspan="2">5. Options and Opportunities</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="10">Project Details

Why?
What needs are we addressing and not addressing?

Where?
Why this location and not others?

When?
Is the situation post-conflict, pre-conflict, or is the conflict still "hot"?
Why intervene now–what are we trying to promote /prevent?

What?
What resources are we bringing and not bringing? Why?
Based on what criteria?

With whom?
Who in community benefits from our presence? How selected?
Who is left out? Why?

By whom?
Who are staff /partners?
Is their role appropriate?
Who did we not hire / partner with?

How?
How are we assisting?
How do we behave?</td><td rowspan="4">Resource Transfers

Theft/diversion of our goods/services?

Market effect caused by influx of goods?

Goods/services distributed along conflict lines?

Existing functioning systems replaced?

Legitimization of groups or leaders?</td><td>Biggest risks of exacerbating tensions / grievances through intervention. Why?</td><td>How to mitigate those risks / lessen that negative impact</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>3.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="6">Implicit Ethical Messages Sent by Staff

Respect or disrespect?

Accountability / lack of accountability?

Fairness or unfairness?

Transparent about our projects and its aims?

How do the Resource Transfers and Implicit Ethical Messages impact the Dividers and Connectors?</td><td>Most important capacities that can help groups overcome tensions / grievances</td><td>How to strengthen those capacities to maximize positive impact</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>2.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>3.</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">How will we monitor changes that result from implementing these Options and Opportunities?</td></tr>
</table>

ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

Goal:				
Objective #1:				
Indicator for Objective #1:				
	Activity	Person(s) responsible	Target date	Resources needed
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
Objective #2:				
Indicator for Objective #2:				
	Activity	Person(s) responsible	Target date	Resources needed
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Tool: Community Action Group Formation

Purpose: Mercy Corps will facilitate the process by which the broader community develops basic criteria for CAG membership and holds CAG elections. The process should be conducted transparently and democratically.

Using the Tool: When engaging the community in discussing CAG member criteria, discuss the following objectives before conducting the nominations and elections:

- Explain that the CAG will have about 8-15 members who will be responsible for a wide range of community-defined projects;
- CAG members will receive training that might include leadership, management, organizational skills, proposal writing, and how to advocate for community interests;
- CAG members will be the conduit through which communities can leverage resources from the government, the private sector, and outside agencies for financial and technical support.

When electing CAG members, community members might want to vote for individuals who:

- Has respect from community members and have proven organizing and mobilizing skills.
- Are fair and honest and will be accountable for community problems.
- Are active in the community, with an interest in participatory decision-making.
- Have the desire to learn and share knowledge with others.
- Value different perspectives and encourages other community members to express their opinions.

Other things for community members to think about:

- The CAG members must serve their community as volunteers.
- The CAG must have a gender balance with a minimum of 20% representation from young community members.
- The CAG must be inclusive and should also have representation from all groups in the community.

Tool: Establishing a CAG Constitution

Purpose: Creating a constitution for the CAG provides a framework for which the CAG and associated committees will operate. The constitution is a living document, constantly undergoing changes to meet the needs of the community. It can form the basis for the CAG to develop into a sustainable, community-based organization should the community choose to pursue it.

Using the Tool: CAG constitutions should address the following factors. Tailor this language to context and make sure the process of creating the constitution includes all CAG members.

Who can be elected to the CAG?

The following people can be designated to the CAG by getting more than 50% of votes in the election process:

1. Males
2. Females
3. Youth
4. Intellectuals
5. Private sector members and entrepreneurs
6. Government officials
7. Religious leaders

Rights and Duties of CAG Members

CAG members have an obligation to:

- Participate in community meetings
- Present new ideas and support ideas of community members
- Help implement these ideas
- Vote on accepting important ideas

CAG members must cooperate with stakeholders of <<Program>>, involve youth and community members in the implementation of projects, actively participate in community work, carry out their duties in a timely manner and inform the community on progress and results of the project. CAG members must also arrange to share information about the project regularly and have a CAG meeting at least once a week.

Additional potential by-laws for CAG constitutions:

- Criteria for the departure of CAG members (for example, members can be voted off the CAG with a majority vote if they do not take active part in CAG activities and meetings).
- A plan of action for providing transparency and ensuring accountability for all activities undergone by the CAG or project implementation committee in the community.
- A mandate prescribing regular CAG meetings and methods by which the CAG and PIC will inform the community about their activities.
- A specific list of duties and expectations for CAG members.
- By-laws dictating the election process and the frequency with which elections will be held for CAG members.
- An action plan describing the processes by which community members will conduct mobilization in the field.
- A general set of objectives listing ways in which the community hopes to collaborate with local government, other organizations or neighboring communities.

Tool: CAG Meetings Format and Content

Purpose of the Tool: The CAG is required to hold meetings regularly with the broader community to provide a forum to keep them informed about progress on the project and provide opportunity for feedback from the community. This tool describes the sequence of potential meetings to have over the course of project implementation.

Using the Tool:

Overview:

- CAG members should facilitate meetings.
- Meetings should be at least an hour long.
- Meetings should be open to the entire community, held in a convenient and central location that is well publicized.

Meeting: Project progress report with broader community

- Review the objective of the meetings and the project objectives and timeline.
- Report on the implementation of the project from CAG and project implementation committee members.
- Participants can ask questions about the project.

Meeting: Lessons Learned

- At a defined point in the project, like midway or at the end, hold this meeting to discuss lessons learned.
- Divide meeting participants into small groups (have CAG members facilitate the small groups) to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of different elements (project planning, procurement, community contribution, CATALYSE process, project management). Then discuss ways that the situation might be improved.
- Designated CAG members summarize and document the content of the meeting for all participants.

Meeting: Revising the priorities of the community

- Review the community priorities selected during the Prioritize Together step and discusses their ongoing relevance, and perhaps creates revisions.
- Review the criteria for project selection to determine ongoing feasibility. Criteria can include: Is the project truly necessary for the community? Is the project realistic? Can the community reasonably contribute? Can the community lead the project? Will the project have a significant impact on the community? Etc.
- Use prioritization exercises from the PRA tools to determine the revised community priorities.

Meeting: Review of CAG member activities and contributions

- CAG members report out on their activities over the course of project implementation, and people can ask questions. They reflect on lessons learned personally from their work as a CAG member, and what they might do to improve their performance in the next project cycle.
- Discuss any changes to CAG membership and determine a process for electing new members as needed. Be sure to include a broad cross section of the community if new CAG members are being selected.

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