

Humanitarian- Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence

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ABOUT IDEAL

IDEAL is an activity funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) that works to support the United States Government's goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world's most vulnerable households and communities. IDEAL addresses knowledge and capacity gaps expressed by the food and nutrition security implementing community to support them in the design and implementation of effective emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement	MPCA	Multi-purpose Cash Assistance
BASATINE	Bolstering Agriculture Systems’ Ability to Invest, Nourish, and Employ	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ERP	Emergency Response Plan	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
HDS	Household Deprivation Score	VASyR	The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
IDEAL	Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning Activity	WFP	World Food Programme
KII	Key Informant Interview		
LCAT	Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team		
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan		

Executive Summary

This practice note explores a programming example that demonstrates the operationalization of one of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) principles in the context of Lebanon. The note describes how Mercy Corps' experience implementing shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management (HDP Principle 5) was underpinned by three key practices: **recurrent risk analysis for data-driven adaptive management, joint design of programming pivots to respond to shocks, and leveraging existing funding flexibility and partnership networks.**

The first key practice—rapid, reliable recurrent risk analysis—has proven essential for informing data-driven adaptive management. Mercy Corps Lebanon relied on timely and comprehensive contextual analysis to make informed decisions and propose shifts in their programming. By analyzing primary and secondary data from sources across the humanitarian and development spectrum, Mercy Corps was able to identify vulnerabilities and impacts at various levels—from households to market systems. This broader risk analysis helped identify entry points for HDP-coherence programming and facilitated a more holistic understanding of the shock landscape in Lebanon.

The second practice—joint design of programming pivots—emphasized the importance of involving expertise from both humanitarian and development sectors. By bringing together multidisciplinary teams and engaging in regular meetings, Mercy Corps Lebanon fostered collaboration, avoided siloed responses, and designed emergency responses that connected to development outcomes. This approach allowed them to maintain a balance between addressing immediate needs and mitigating risks to undermine past investments. Leadership and team experience along with intentional methods for joint design played a crucial role in successfully adapting programming to respond to shocks.

The third practice—leveraging existing funding flexibility and partnerships—enabled Mercy Corps Lebanon to adjust its development programming to quickly respond to shocks. The team utilized existing funds and sought permission from donors to adjust programming, demonstrating the importance of flexibility within funding agreements. Leveraging partnerships and consortia proved to be efficient, especially in the aftermath of a shock, as it allowed for faster assessments and broader geographical coverage. The ability to access different funding sources, including smaller and more flexible donors that complemented the larger but slower-moving donors, strengthened the organization's response capacity.

Overall, the implementation experience of Mercy Corps Lebanon demonstrates how shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management can support an HDP-coherent approach to addressing the complex challenges of an increasingly shock-affected environment. By conducting recurrent risk analysis, engaging in joint program design, and leveraging existing resources and partnerships, Mercy Corps Lebanon ensured its current funding could swiftly adjust to respond to rising needs to support food security, livelihoods, and other necessities. These key practices and lessons can provide valuable guidance for organizations striving to achieve HDP coherence in their responses to shocks and crises.

Introduction

USAID's Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence Principles

In January 2022, following extensive internal and partner consultations, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published its working document Programming Considerations for Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence: A Note for USAID's Implementing Partners. The document identifies seven core principles, one cross-cutting commitment, and programming examples to improve HDP coherence and achieve common objectives. The principles are:

- 1 Uphold and respect humanitarian principles to ensure humanitarian assistance remains unhindered and effective.
- 2 Plan jointly and seek a common agenda.
- 3 Create and strengthen communication, coordination, and learning platforms across different kinds of assistance.
- 4 Strategically sequence, layer, and integrate humanitarian, development, and peace assistance where appropriate.
- 5 Promote shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management.
- 6 Champion conflict integration and opportunities for enabling or building peace where possible.
- 7 Ensure programming is with, by, and through local partners and systems.

Underpinning each of these key principles is USAID's cross-cutting commitment to gender equality and inclusive development. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access are at the heart of USAID's mission.

About this Series

IDEAL's HDP Coherence Practice Note Series responds to a demand among food and nutrition security practitioners for clear examples of HDP coherence in practice. The series aims to increase knowledge and capacity and create inspiration among USAID implementing partners and other organizations by providing practical examples of how USAID's HDP coherence principles are being operationalized to maximize food and nutrition security outcomes. Rather than comprehensive case studies, each practice note presents a concise and operationally focused example of one or more of the HDP coherence principles "in action" and draws out lessons learned that may be applicable in other contexts. Examples include HDP coherence approaches within a single activity (intra-activity), between separate humanitarian and development activities (inter-activity), or within a single organization (intra-organization).

About this Practice Note

This practice note outlines key HDP coherence practices and lessons within a single organization (intra-organization), focusing on Mercy Corps Lebanon. It highlights lessons related to the HDP coherence principle, “Promote shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management.” This qualitative learning review draws on Mercy Corps team members’ experience in Lebanon and their use of analysis, programming, and partnerships to make programmatic and operational adjustments based on the social and economic deterioration during several compounding shocks in 2020–2021. The review examines: (a) how strategic program models or approaches were modified to respond to the shock context, including how this supported coherence across humanitarian, development, and peace needs; and (b) practical lessons for operationalizing these approaches.

Methodology

IDEAL collected the content for this practice note through a series of qualitative in-depth interviews with staff from Mercy Corps and Agence Française de Développement (AFD).¹ Based on the interviews, IDEAL explored practical examples of Mercy Corps programming in Lebanon that illustrate the HDP coherence principle focused on promoting shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management.

From December 2022 to January 2023, IDEAL conducted nine 60-minute key informant interviews (KIIs), both in-person in Beirut and virtually through Microsoft Teams. The interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed for information accuracy. The views and opinions expressed in this document reflect the recollections and perspectives of the people interviewed. IDEAL analyzed the interview responses to derive key findings and lessons which were then validated with the interviewees.

AFD staff have been included as key informants in this case study for the agency’s creative MINKA fund, which allows single programs to adopt humanitarian and development approaches and principles to comprehensively respond to population needs and ultimately support resilience.

¹ Agence Française de Développement (French Development Agency) is a public financial institution. Accountable to the French Government, it works to combat poverty and promote sustainable development.

Context & Background

The Lebanon Context and Aid Architecture

Since 2011, Lebanon has experienced a rapid succession of challenges and shocks, transforming it from a middle-income country with a relatively stable operating environment for development programming, to a country on the verge of complete economic and political collapse. As a result of the Syrian war, Lebanon is hosting an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and more than 13,700 refugees of other nationalities.²

In January 2020, mass protests over economic problems and political corruption brought down the Hariri government. Hassan Diab replaced Saad Hariri as Prime Minister, but by August Diab's government had resigned after months of protests over currency devaluation, COVID-19 lockdowns, and the devastating explosion at the Port of Beirut.



Mohammed Mahmoud Mahmoud, 17, fled to Lebanon from Homs in 2013. He occasionally works at a vegetable market near the refugee settlement where he lives.

Sidon, Lebanon. Peter Biro (2015)

² UNHCR. (n.d). *Lebanon at a glance*.

By the end of 2021, 45% of Lebanon’s population faced food insecurity with 33% of the population unable to meet minimum dietary requirements.³ Three main events contributed to the worsening food insecurity in Lebanon: the COVID-19 pandemic, the Port of Beirut explosion, and the start of the Ukraine crisis. All these events limited the access to food supply, weakened the country’s import capacity, and exacerbated its dependency on imports of various products, including cereals and pulses.

These shocks triggered shifts in the prevailing aid posture since the start of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, where humanitarian funding focused primarily on responding to refugee populations’ needs. The shocks exposed and exacerbated preexisting issues around aid coordination and funding siloes.

Mercy Corps respondents agreed that actions taken by the aid community, including bilateral donors and other stakeholders, following the Syrian crisis largely failed to promote HDP-coherent responses. For instance, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)—led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—was intended to meet the needs of Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities in tandem, while the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Emergency Response Plan (ERP) was supposed to complement the LCRP by providing support to 1.1 million of the most vulnerable Lebanese and migrants. The two plans sought to increase complementarity by ensuring that different needs were addressed. However, without any established or built-in coordination mechanisms, the outcome was instead two mostly separate communities of donors and implementing agencies working in parallel silos—one focused on long-term response and the other on immediate assistance. The aid community struggled—and at times failed—to create coordination mechanisms between the two structures, missing opportunities for added value and complementarity. Respondents shared that without that strategic coordination, the parallel systems worked against a cohesive nexus approach across the wider aid sector.

Respondents noted this existing aid architecture as an important element in Mercy Corps’ shift towards a shock-responsive HDP coherence portfolio. The absence of a coordinated donor vision for an HDP coherence response limited the team’s opportunities to pursue models that combined humanitarian and development funding in jointly targeted geographic areas with acute and rapidly increasing vulnerability.

“The international community built a humanitarian architecture in Lebanon after the 2011 Syria crisis, but it remained largely separate from the development objectives, with separate target populations and goals.”

— KII respondent

³ Based on the Household Deprivation Score (HDS) developed in Lebanon by the World Food Programme (WFP), see: World Food Programme. (2022). *Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis of Lebanese Residents*.



Damage as a result of the explosions at the Port of Beirut, seen 5 days after the disaster.

Beirut, Lebanon: Mercy Corps (2020)

Mercy Corps in Lebanon

As widespread shocks and stresses began to compound around 2019, Mercy Corps, along with the wider aid sector in Lebanon, realized programming needed to significantly shift to respond to increasing humanitarian needs and conflict tensions. For Mercy Corps, the shift followed two decades of long-term programming that focused on economic development and, to a lesser extent, food security, environment, and education support—all intended to address systemic drivers of underdevelopment, poverty, and exclusion.

In 2019, Mercy Corps refocused their Lebanon portfolio, concentrating on pressing foundational issues and root causes of increasing humanitarian needs and conflict. Looking at the systems level, Mercy Corps worked through three interrelated pillars—market system development, governance, and youth engagement—while expanding their humanitarian services.

From early 2020, Mercy Corps' humanitarian assistance portfolio in Lebanon increased considerably, either through dedicated emergency funding, or by shifting development funds toward humanitarian response. More than 75% of Mercy Corps' Lebanon funding was aimed at development assistance, most of which was adapted to respond to COVID-19, the Port of Beirut explosion, and the effects of the Ukraine crisis.

KEY PRACTICES & LESSONS FOR HDP PRINCIPLE 5:

Promote Shock-Responsive Programming & Data-Driven Adaptive Management

This section explores three key practices and corresponding lessons that demonstrate how Mercy Corps adjusted its programming and pursued data-driven adaptive management across their portfolio to respond to an increasingly shock-affected environment to meet food security, livelihoods, and other basic needs. The key practices include:

- 1 Use recurrent risk analysis to inform data-driven adaptive management
- 2 Synergize systems development and expertise for integrated responses
- 3 Leverage existing funding flexibility and partnership networks

Key Practice:

Use Recurrent Risk Analysis for Data-Driven Adaptive Management

Reliable and timely context analysis paired with joint reviews assessing the implications of new dynamics lay the foundation for responses rooted in HDP coherence. Ongoing context analysis can promote coherence when used by teams working across the humanitarian, development, and peace spectrum to consider impacts at household, community, and systems levels. To promote HDP coherence, analyses should always maintain focus on preexisting drivers of fragility, while addressing present urgent needs derived from shocks.

DISCUSSION

The Mercy Corps Lebanon team relied heavily on recurrent, rapid, and deep-dive contextual analyses to make decisions about how to best elevate population needs and propose shifts in the portfolio's direction to donors. The Mercy Corps Lebanon Crisis Analytics Team (LCAT)⁴ triangulated primary and secondary data from institution across Lebanon. They focused on projection of prices, inflation monitoring, a dashboard for projecting currency depreciation, and how these impacted the household level (focusing on especially at-risk groups, such as Syrian and Palestinian refugees and certain Lebanese populations), as well as the community

⁴ Mercy Corps' Crisis Analytics (CA) teams, active in DRC, Nigeria, Mozambique, Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Venezuela, analyze data to improve decision making within Mercy Corps' country programs and the wider humanitarian community. The teams directly contribute to data-driven decision making by layering information from primary and open sources, respondents' programmatic data, and combining it with analysis by subject matter experts. Since CA products are often used to make important programmatic and policy decisions, they must maintain a high level of quality. While each CA team operates differently, common analysis guidelines help ensure consistent quality across products. For more information, see: <https://mercycorps.org.lb/blog/lcat-reports/>.

and market systems level (such as informal and formal micro and small businesses). Functional teams jointly reviewed the analysis, offering insights on how preexisting social, political, and economic factors could contribute to rising needs, and providing a broader risk assessment that revealed key entry points for HDP coherence programming (discussed in the next section) This information was shared with the wider aid community in Lebanon.

Pivoting to Humanitarian Assistance: Using Data to Confirm Needs

The Syrian war and subsequent influx of refugees, as well as the series of shocks and stresses that began to compound around 2019, devastated the Lebanese economy. However, as several respondents noted, specific data on vulnerability and resilience were not always promptly available or comparable, even though respondents noted that the “analysis space was crowded.” They further noted that the UN-led working groups were slow to undertake assessments and release reports and analyses. Therefore, the swiftly evolving circumstances caused published data to rapidly become irrelevant, resulting in a halt to preventative measures. The structure and functioning of the international donor environment in Lebanon made comprehensive vulnerability information difficult to obtain. For instance, during 2021, two separate vulnerability assessments were conducted almost in parallel: the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon⁵ (VASyR) conducted by UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Food Programme (WFP) (July 2021), and the Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment (MSNA) led by OCHA under the ERP⁶ (late 2021). According to respondents, the two competing aid coordination frameworks had different indicators of vulnerability, which created confusion and made an already charged political situation worse.

Centralization of Data Analysis

The lack of comprehensive vulnerability information made it difficult to obtain a complete picture of the situation. In response, Mercy Corps established the LCAT in 2021 to centralize data analysis and provide more cohesive, rapid, and predictive insights, using funding from the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

The LCAT combined primary and secondary data, looking at both immediate needs and emerging dynamics and their connection to systemic factors. Products included flash reports on specific events, monthly reports, and thematic deep dives. To produce the analyses, the LCAT coordinated with all key stakeholders, including the UN agencies, to identify 12 indicators that served as the core for a common understanding of vulnerability in this context. Additionally, “nightlight data” from satellite imagery served as a proxy for vulnerability and rising humanitarian needs as it showed countrywide changes in electrification over time, helping to identify populations unable to afford or access power supply. Relevant to actors across the nexus, this centralized analysis helped the wider aid community better understand the shock landscape in Lebanon.

Analysis for Data-Driven Adaptive Management

Analysis for data-driven adaptive management is fundamental to interventions across both humanitarian and development sectors. The LCAT has been instrumental in conducting assessments, analyzing data, and

⁵ UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP. (2022). *2021 Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR)*.

⁶ OCHA. (n.d.). *Lebanon*.

publishing insights, with a specific focus on developing a dashboard to project the impact of inflation and currency depreciation on Lebanon's most at-risk populations. Moreover, this type of analysis has played a crucial role in informing response strategies that address both conflict risks and long-standing development challenges. It also provided Mercy Corps with valuable insights on transitioning from development to humanitarian response.

For example, analysis related to the highly politicized and complex cash programming landscape in Lebanon highlighted underlying historic governance-related factors that contributed to the inflation rate soaring to over 84%.⁷ Such analysis directly informed the decision to provide multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) as a key response modality. The analysis also supported cash response considerations rooted in contextual dynamics. These include: (a) the requirement to seek the municipality's engagement and approval for distributions to access vulnerable communities; (b) the development of targeting and prioritization criteria (especially important, the team noted, in a population composed by Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, and other minorities); and (c) the value of the cash distributed.

“Crisis analytics is not purely humanitarian—everything is cross-cutting in Lebanon—in its essence the nexus approach is that everything is entwined.”

— KII respondent

Key Practice:

Synergize systems development and humanitarian expertise for integrated responses

Involving systems development expertise in the design of humanitarian response interventions can strengthen the connection to development outcomes and helping to avoid siloed responses. At the same time, humanitarian response expertise specific to the areas of need is critical for development program design as well as fostering greater collaboration with the wider humanitarian sector.

DISCUSSION

Jointly designing pivots in programming requires combined humanitarian and development expertise and knowledge and capacity to design shock-responsive, multi-sectoral interventions that can effectively work through each type of assistance.

⁷ WorldData.info. (n.d.). [Inflation rates in Lebanon](#).

Intentional Methods for Joint Design

Several factors facilitated collaboration on program design among team members with multidisciplinary skill sets. One way Mercy Corps worked to improve HDP coherence across different types of programming was by having program managers fill two roles, one being the program management role and the other an advisory role for their technical sector. In the advisory role they were responsible for providing technical guidance and mainstreaming standard operating procedures across funding streams and programs, whether humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding.

When it came to design processes, the team embraced a more systematic approach, holding weekly program development meetings with participation from across programs. They also invested in an information management coordinator within the M&E department and a full-time grant manager. These efforts allowed the team to aggregate information and support coherent design, and to jointly make sense of the frequent analyses—to “see it as a whole” and avoid “looking at programs in silos,” as described by one respondent.

Experience with Systems Development

In response to the deepening crisis, Mercy Corps sought a balance between pivoting to address emergency needs while mitigating risks of undermining past investments.

Drawing on information and past experiences working on systems development, the team managed to design emergency responses that connected to development outcomes. For instance, their primary approach involved utilizing MPCA as the initial step to bolster the purchasing power of individuals impacted by shocks. This approach addressed households' immediate requirements rather than distributing specific goods and positively affected local market systems. Furthermore, development programming was context-specific and incorporated humanitarian elements, enabling responsive pivots. Rather than aiming for business expansion, the programming shifted towards preserving business operations by providing cash subsidies, such as energy input subsidies, that were linked to business recovery. Agricultural programming, which had mainly targeted Syrian refugees, adjusted to respond to the deepening vulnerability among the Lebanese host populations and address social tensions by increasing inclusion of Lebanese labor through market-based strategies. This approach of layering and integrating responsive interventions within existing economic development programs helped reduce the risk of participants' dependency and strengthen resilience of businesses targeted for assistance.

“I don’t think of it as shifting—we’re adding in humanitarian work. We should not be doing humanitarian programming only—market actors in Lebanon are still very dynamic. It would be a mistake to fall into the mistake of not doing development work. Our main approach is cash to continue support markets because everything is still available in the market. It’s a poverty problem.”

— KII respondent

Tjada D'Oyen McKenna (green shirt and vest), Chief Executive Officer for Mercy Corps, talks with agricultural workers, most of whom are Syrian refugees. Tjada traveled to Iraq and Lebanon as part of a week-long visit to the region.



Zahle, Lebanon. Mercy Corps (2022)

Leadership and Team Experience

The team's composition and experience were crucial in shifting from development to humanitarian programming in a rapidly changing context. With diverse skillsets in both fields, team members' joint expertise facilitated a rapid transition in programming alongside specialized transitional and recovery responses that supported local systems.

Since 2019, Mercy Corps Lebanon's leadership team has maintained a tight focus on market systems development while continuing to implement humanitarian interventions, taking advantage of a highly skilled and specialized staff to engage on protecting markets in crisis and supporting livelihoods recovery. This enabled the team to leverage their existing economic development portfolio towards response efforts. However, the team required additional humanitarian skillsets to support growing need across the country. A leadership transition pushed to increase humanitarian funding to complement long-term interventions implemented through the development portfolio. "The turnover in senior leadership gave us a chance to think more deeply about our strategy," recalled one respondent.

Uniting around HDP Coherence for a Shared Response Vision

During the refocusing process in 2019 and onwards, Mercy Corps carefully considered how to ensure that humanitarian responses would not undermine the hard-won progress on development goals while taking into account programming shifts and portfolio adjustments. Some expressed the need for an increased focus on bringing in humanitarian response expertise earlier to initiate a more specialized and effective response. One respondent highlighted that the reconsideration of portfolio rebalancing was only taken seriously after a change in leadership, with both the country director and director of programs leaving. While many team members wanted this rebalance, it had been a matter of priority from the senior management.

HDP coherence programming emerged as the best option to minimize risks associated with a narrow humanitarian response—such as unintentionally creating aid dependency—by linking humanitarian distribution to a development goal and working together towards shared outcomes. Indeed, several team members reflected on the crises in Lebanon as primarily economic and political, requiring a solution larger than humanitarian response.

The pandemic underscored how some humanitarian crises create unexpected potential to address underlying development constraints. “COVID-19 was a huge shock—a pause phase to start thinking about redesigning our strategies,” said one respondent. For example, when all vocational trainings shifted to online delivery the team saw a jump in engagement from women. Previously, social pressure, reluctance to engage outside the household, and disapproval from their husbands or fathers curtailed women’s participation in these trainings. But as trainings shifted to online delivery, their participation increased at least in part due to the ease and appeal of participating from home.

“The key recommendation is: If we want to have a cohesive HDP response, we need to have cash distribution tied to a development objective, such as cash distribution for business continuity with a longer-term plan for the business itself or cash for rehabilitating infrastructure that benefit the larger community. We should keep the community/household participation in our objective. So, it’s not only us responding.”

— KII respondent

Joseph Mkhayel Youssef (42, left) packages pickles with Rawan Al Sheikh (right), at his small factory. Mercy Corps’ BASATINE Project provided his business with a range of modern equipment that has significantly improved their production process and overall efficiency.

Zahle, Lebanon. Mercy Corps (2022)



Key Practice:**Leverage Existing Funding Flexibility and Partnerships for Rapid Response**

Drawing on existing resources can help facilitate quick pivots in crisis response. For instance, provisions in existing funding may allow programming adjustments through defined tools such as a crisis modifier. Other types of accommodations for crisis response may be built into the agreement or negotiable through approval from donors. Preexisting partnerships and/or consortia can also enable faster data-driven response and expanded reach.

DISCUSSION

Mercy Corps pursued a two-fold response in Lebanon: (1) using existing funds to adjust the response for the same targeted participants; and (2) finding new funding to extend reach to affected populations.

Response through Existing Funds

In a rapidly changing environment, Mercy Corps managed to adapt using shock-responsive flexibility built into programs and seeking other permissions from donors. Mercy Corps was able to utilize development funding to respond, which gave them a unique perspective on how to best support the market system during multiple shocks. Some donors were more flexible and responsive than others. The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, allowed Mercy Corps to use existing funding to respond to emerging needs. Similarly, AFD's MINKA fund already permitted as-needed humanitarian response in development programming, approving cash programming within days of the Beirut explosion, following a rapid assessment. By leveraging its multi-donor portfolio to respond to changing needs, Mercy Corps Lebanon was able to match smaller, more flexible, and responsive donors with slower moving, less flexible donors able to provide significantly larger resources.

Mercy Corps Lebanon found that working through a consortium structure—with multiple actors specialized in different sectors and/or geographies—was more efficient than operating on its own, especially immediately after a shock and during the recovery phase. It enabled swifter, more widespread assessments, and faster cash distributions because at least one organization within the consortium was likely to have a practical relationship with the supported business or target group.

Response through New Funds

To expand reach to affected populations amidst the crises, Mercy Corps sought new funds in the humanitarian sector. However, with a portfolio largely oriented towards economic development, Mercy Corps had to consider responses that could be quickly launched to address rising humanitarian needs. For instance, the program platform adjusted a development intervention into an emergency action by directing a response strategy aimed at protecting local markets through targeted support for micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises heavily affected by the 2020 shocks. While the portfolio orientation led to prioritizing programming protective of local market systems, it also affected Mercy Corps' initial entry into the humanitarian funding space. As the organization tried to establish connections with the

limited network of humanitarian actors in the country, Mercy Corps Lebanon faced skepticism from major humanitarian donors about its ability to implement emergency programming, despite the team's effort to address the broader needs identified through the crisis analysis. "Economic, governance, and social stability work were our calling cards," stated one respondent. Several respondents expressed that Mercy Corps' crisis analytics work, which informed issues such as the economic crisis and government collapse, played a crucial role in establishing its credibility with humanitarian donors and opened the door to information sharing and coordination with the humanitarian response network.

Portfolio composition can both facilitate and challenge how an organization adapts to respond to humanitarian needs. An organization with a development-focused portfolio can innovate programming to meet urgent needs while protecting local systems, but collaborating agencies and donors might still doubt its legitimacy as a humanitarian actor. Offering value to the humanitarian community, for instance through sharing relevant analysis, can potentially counteract exclusion from these coordination spaces and support an improved HDP coherence response.

HDP Coherence Approaches in Programming Are Still Nascent across Donors

Mercy Corps leadership in Lebanon found the donor environment supportive of HDP coherence in theory, but difficult to operationalize in practice. They mentioned situations where a donor wanted the organization to program across the HDP nexus, but simultaneously instructed them to only spend money on a specific modality. In other cases, donors were aware of their funding limitations but still desired linkages across HDP modalities. As a respondent explained, one donor "was keen to link cash and development livelihoods. They told us, 'We want to fund multi-purpose cash assistance—we can't fund livelihoods, but we want you to link them.'"

Humanitarian response funding was directed towards the Syrian refugee crisis, necessitating a shift to accommodate the rising needs of host communities. One respondent recalled, "There was no emergency cash for Lebanese a year and a half ago. In that sense we were one of the first. We were part of the wave."

Despite LCAT's clear analysis of rapidly rising acute vulnerability across the country, the absence of a coordinated donor vision for an HDP coherence response limited the team's opportunities to pursue models that combined humanitarian, development, and peace funding in jointly targeted geographic pockets. On the other hand, donors like AFD have proven their capacity in adapting to a rapidly shifting environment by merging humanitarian and development assistance in Lebanon.

"[Donors] say they want us to be less obviously humanitarian focused. We are funded by humanitarian actors but the people we meet are all development and peace folks."

— KII respondent

Closing Remarks

Mercy Corps' operational experience in Lebanon highlighted the successful application of shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management (HDP Principle 5). This achievement was attributed to the implementation of three key practices: recurrent risk analysis, joint program design for shock response, and leveraging existing funding flexibility and partnerships.

These key practices provided crucial insights into how organizations can effectively respond to complex challenges in shock-affected environments while maintaining HDP coherence. By conducting recurrent risk analysis, fostering collaboration through joint program design, and leveraging available resources and partnerships, organizations could swiftly adapt to emerging needs and ensure the provision of essential services like food security and livelihood support.

“It was about convincing donors of the value. All donors recognize the importance of the nexus, but few can fund both parts.”

— KII respondent



Nour Wahid/Save the Children (2019)