MERCY CORPS

Harnessing Evidence *to* Promote Stability

LESSONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE GLOBAL FRAGILITY ACT

The Global Fragility Act (GFA) and U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability (SPCPS) commit the U.S. government to incorporate data and evidence to rigorously assess the impact of its efforts to reduce fragility. As part of this commitment, the SPCPS pledges to develop **"an integrated learning agenda on breaking the cycle of fragility and conflict,"** and **"a robust evidence base to address the long-term causes of conflict and fragility."**

This brief describes *how* the departments and agencies tasked with implementing the GFA and the SPCPS can make good on this commitment to better understand what works in conflict prevention and stabilization by embedding research and learning in the SPCPS's approach to partnership and integration.

Facilitate inter-agency collaboration in creating research agendas and sharing data and results.

The State Department, USAID, and Department of Defense should develop shared research and learning agendas for the GFA priority countries (Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Mozambique, Libya, Papua New Guinea, and Togo). They should also develop a common platform for collecting and sharing data across agencies, country posts, implementing partners, and broader stakeholders. Breaking down barriers between silos is key to evaluating the cumulative impacts of coordinated development, defense, and diplomatic efforts under the SPCPS—and avoiding duplication, inefficiency, and the fragmentation of evidence and learning. Agencies also need to invest in collective sensemaking, allocating resources to share key findings and facilitate their uptake into policy and program decisions.

How to Build the Evidence Base on Addressing Conflict and Fragility

Many evaluations of conflict prevention and stabilization interventions lack theoretical and empirical rigor. To generate systematic evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches, the SPCPS should embrace diverse research methods, from randomized control trials—the "gold standard" for evaluating policy interventions—to in-depth case studies and "thick" process-tracing analyses. **For specific priority areas of inquiry that should be explored under the SPCPS, read the full report.**

Read more about the GFA:
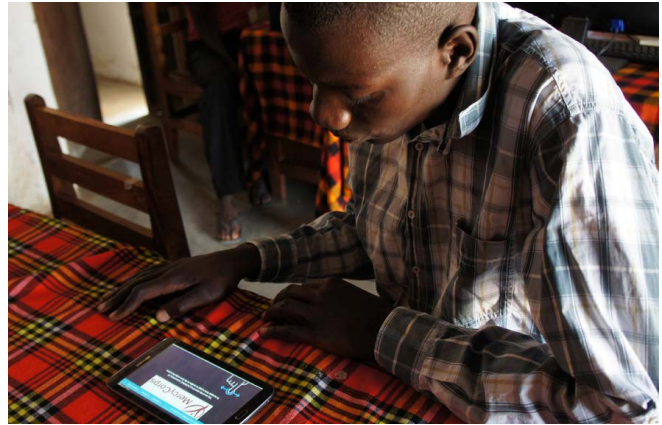**mercycorps.org/global-fragility-act**

Build a diverse, multi-actor research consortium.

Rather than funding one-off studies, investments in research and learning under the SPCPS should aggregate insights from the broader body of research and evaluation on conflict prevention and stabilization to build up the evidence base for the effectiveness of different policies and interventions. This should integrate insights from the countries and region prioritized within the SPCPS, along with the growing body of research on conflict prevention from around the world.

To build this evidence base, the departments and agencies tasked with implementing the SPCPS should expand strategic partnerships with local and international knowledge producers from academia, civil society, and the private sector in order to ensure participatory engagement by local communities and uncover innovative approaches to peacebuilding. When research networks include a coalition of local and international researchers, it can foster trust among communities and increase the impact of initiatives addressing conflict. A research network focused on the SPCPS would allow for direct alignment of research questions and the priority evidence needs identified by the U.S. government.

Incorporate locally-defined measures of impact.

The GFA and the SPCPS stress the importance of participatory engagement by local partners in implementing and monitoring programs. This focus provides an opportunity to deviate from the traditional donor approach of depending on aggregate, externally-defined indicators to assess impact, which often overlook important subnational variation. Some outcomes are better captured by more localized, context-specific indicators of impact. Participatory methods and indicators provide a set of tools for measuring community-defined impact indicators that are both locally-grounded and scientifically valid. Since many peacebuilding actors tend to work at the local level, understanding local definitions of success and the process through which people come to perceive whether, when, and how interventions achieve success is essential for learning.

Investigate how specific collaboration and implementation models affect outcomes.

The SPCPS emphasizes a collaborative, integrative approach to implementation across agencies, donors, and country stakeholders. Complex, multi-sectoral initiatives are increasingly common, but they are difficult to evaluate. This multidimensional focus raises the question of how interventions incorporating different sectors or thematic areas should be combined, sequenced, and scaled up. There should be a greater focus on understanding how different implementation modalities and program components influence long-run impacts. This can help tell donors and policymakers how to combine individual initiatives into an effective overarching approach to addressing conflict, violence, and fragility in a given country or region.

Read more about the GFA:
mercycorps.org/global-fragility-act

Require that programs include a robust research and evaluation component.

Rigorous research requires resources. To ensure that U.S. assistance under the GFA is informed by high-quality evidence—and that it produces reliable insights on what works—program proposals should stipulate that sufficient funds must be allocated to research and evaluation. Each GFA investment should have a **dedicated research budget and seek to allocate at least 15 percent of project funds towards monitoring, evaluation, and research.**

15%