Sudan 2008 – Miguel Sampler for Mercy Corps

MercyCorps

Gender Programming at Mercy Corps

Findings from the Global Gender Assessment | December 2010

I. Executive Summary

A. Introduction

In 2010, Mercy Corps conducted an agency-wide Gender Assessment, examining how the organization currently integrates gender-sensitive approaches in its programs. Gender-sensitivity encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing differences, issues and inequalities between men, women, boys and girls and address these in strategies and actions. The assessment consisted of a survey of nearly 300 diverse program team members, focus group discussions with five field and two headquarters teams, a desk review and a series of key informant interviews. The information included in this document represents a summary of key findings from all data collection sources in order to provide Mercy Corps with a basis for looking at gender related program strengths and opportunities. For more detailed information, see the *Gender Assessment: Survey Findings* report and the *Focus Group Discussion Findings* report.

The purpose of the Gender Assessment was to better understand Mercy Corps team member perceptions on gender programming, identify existing capacity and specific needs for increased gender responsiveness, and contribute to strategic planning around Mercy Corps' approach to gender programming.

Mercy Corps' Gender Working Group,[i] comprised of field and headquarters team members with expertise or interest in gender programming, initiated this process with the support of the Technical Support Unit and the Program Operations teams. This document was authored by Mercy Corps team member Sahar Alnouri with oversight from the Gender Working Group. These findings and recommendations are intended to provide information and support to the agency as we strive to achieve our Vision for Change through impactful, inclusive, and quality programs that strengthen the most vulnerable members of the communities where we work.

B. Key Findings

The key findings of the Gender Assessment focus on two main themes: 1) Mercy Corps' program vision and capacity for gender integrated programming and 2) our ability to reach program beneficiaries. In each theme there is evidence of both solid foundations and gaps. Each key finding is discussed in greater detail in Section II: Results and Analysis.

Program Vision and Capacity for Gender Integrated Programming

- **More than 97% of survey participants reported that it is important to include gender considerations while planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating any project or program.** However, less than 30% report "always" using a gender approach in programs.

- **Female team members consistently scored Mercy Corps' integration of gender-sensitive approaches in strategic planning and the whole project cycle lower than their male counterparts.** In many of the contexts where Mercy Corps works, women are a traditionally disempowered group. This finding suggests that female program staff are more likely to recognize the need for targeted approaches than their male counterparts. It does not mean that women are better equipped to design and implement gender-sensitive programs without capacity building; rather that they may have a more comprehensive understanding of "gender-sensitivity" than their male counterparts based on professional and life experience , which is a valuable consideration in designing programs and developing teams.

- **Team members most frequently cited a lack of training as their biggest challenge to incorporating gender sensitivity into program activities.** About 80% of survey participants reported needing "significant training" or "some training and support" in order to conduct gender-sensitive program planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- **Forty-five percent of survey respondents could not identify a person or group within Mercy Corps who could provide them with gender technical support.** The remaining 55% of staff identified a number of sources. This finding suggests that gender technical support lacks a clearly identifiable home within the agency, and assistance may vary in quality, consistency and messaging.   Resources available through the Gender Working Group are not well enough publicized and are frequently only available in English.

Reaching Program Beneficiaries

- **Team members report that women and girls of all age groups are targeted as Mercy Corps beneficiaries more often than men.** Women between the ages of 26-40 were the most frequently selected target demographic group.

- **Nearly 65% of team members incorrectly said a gender-sensitive approach is one that "treats male and female beneficiaries exactly the same."** This indicates a "gender blind" approach, or an underlying assumption that men and women will have equal access to program participation without consideration for different roles, responsibilities and access to resources. This finding revealed significant gaps in team member knowledge about basic gender concepts.

- **Both focus group and survey participants identified more female staff as a critical need for reaching female beneficiaries and meeting program objectives.** Information gathered by headquarters program operations teams suggests that only about 28% of expatriate and national field program staff are women.[ii] In many Mercy Corps countries, male program staff reported that they cannot access female beneficiaries due to cultural norms and recommended having more female staff to support program quality.

C. Gender Assessment Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to inform a discussion among senior management and other team members that contributes to a one to three year plan for strengthening Mercy Corps' gender programming, as originally outlined in the Gender Assessment concept note.[iii] Review and feedback first by senior leadership and then a wider group of field and headquarters staff members will be an important step for finalizing our plan.

1. **Clarify the agency's position on gender integration as a part of Mercy Corps' Vision for Change.** For many team members from the executive to program officer level, both in the field and at headquarters, this is obvious; for many others it is not. A statement about the role of gender in the principle of participation and other aspects of the Vision for Change could accompany new hire orientations and be a reminder for all Mercy Corps staff that gender is a necessary aspect of program quality, part of our commitment to inclusion, accountability and Do No Harm philosophy.

2. **Act on program team members' widely expressed need for high quality, consistent capacity building opportunities** specifically relevant to Mercy Corps' programs in order to ensure that gender sensitivity is incorporated into the entire project cycle of diverse programs, not only those with a focus on women or gender. Gender-sensitive approaches should be based on Mercy Corps expertise, as well as best practices of the larger relief and development field. Existing Mercy Corps and LINGOs e-learning options and training opportunities can be utilized as cost effective, widely accessible and familiar platforms.

3. **Make particular effort to incorporate gender sensitivity principles in the growing Youth sector** of the agency. Increased programming with adolescent girls, in education and fostering civic participation, peacebuilding skills and economic activity presents fertile ground for ensuring that both girls and boys contribute to positive change in their communities.

4. **Create resource tools and technical support for gender programming and working with women.** Modeled on the DM&E Guidebook,[iv] a resource should provide program teams with guidance such as simple checklists, indicator menus and real life examples from Mercy Corps programming that can be adapted to local contexts for basic gender mainstreaming and disaggregation activities. Basic technical support can be accomplished through better leveraging the Gender Community of Practice on Clearspace, through regular forums for exchange organized by the Gender Working Group.

5. **Systematically collect gender disaggregated data that can be easily updated through GAIT in order to establish beneficiary statistics to contribute to the Mission Metrics initiative and increasingly required by donors.** Mercy Corps teams world-wide are already implementing creative and inclusive programs, but the information is not evenly collected, aggregated across programs or readily available for use in proposals, representation or advocacy efforts.

6. **Incentivize gender-sensitive program design and collaborate with the New Initiatives, Technical Support Unit and Program Operations teams to increase awareness of resource tools and technical support for proposal writers.** Further investigate examples from the assessment to create a learning document of short case studies that illustrate the impact of gender-sensitive program design as well as the results when it is not done. Use these examples to show how strong program design is the foundation for effective implementation and achieving impact.

7. **Work with appropriate field and headquarters teams to identify specific constraints to and strategies for meeting program team members' call for gender-balanced program teams.** Develop a field-headquarters task force to explore this challenge further and create an actionable strategy allowing Mercy Corps programs to more equitably reach intended male and female beneficiaries.

8. **Dedicate Mercy Corps resources for an Inclusion Program Officer**, new FTE position in FY12.[v] As the 2010 Gender Assessment was intended as an *initial* look at staff perceptions on gender integration and the interest and opportunities for Mercy Corps, further research and planning is needed in order to determine the best ways to implement and encourage the above recommendations, coordinate with respective teams and meet growing external representation needs. These functions are beyond the capacity of the current Gender Working Group, though the group would continue in a critical advisory role and support the larger Gender Community of Practice.

The above recommendations are both responsive to the findings of Mercy Corps' Gender Assessment and commensurate with the minimum standards practiced by peer organizations, which like Mercy Corps, have visions and missions that prefer a holistic, community program approach rather than women or gender specific approaches.

D. Gender Integration in Practice: Side-by-Side Case Studies from Mercy Corps Sudan

The two cases below, from monitoring and evaluation reports in Sudan, illustrate the advantages of utilizing a gender integrated approach to project activities. Each project was designed to benefit the entire community – these are not gender or women specific interventions. One example benefitted from gender-sensitive approach at the design phase and throughout the project cycle, and one did not.[vi]

Gender Integrated Education Project

By consulting with women, girls, men and boys during the design phase of this project and disaggregating data during implementation, the Mercy Corps Sudan team was able to ensure equitable access to resources for beneficiaries.

Encouraging Participation – When reviewing gender disaggregated data, team members realized that *far more male than female teachers were participating in education project activities* including teacher training workshops and school materials distributions. When examining the reasons for the gap, it was discovered that the timing, distance and accommodation arrangements of the training were not tailored to women's needs, responsibilities and traditional practices.

As a result, the program team adjusted the hours, location and accommodation arrangements. In addition, MC provided child care facilities in the training site enabling more mothers to participate. A long term impact of having more female participants is challenging the significant gap in girls' education in Sudan by having more female teachers as role models.

Increasing Access to Resources for Girls – Focus groups with girls revealed that male teachers – the majority of teachers in the school – tend to distribute donated school materials only to boys. In order to address this inequality, program managers added a gender awareness component to the teachers' training and set up a system of female teachers distributing materials to girls. In addition, the M&E plan for this project was adjusted to specifically measure access to project resources.

This approach has resulted in increased awareness of the importance of gender equality while challenging some of traditional beliefs regarding control over resources.

Non-Gender Integrated Water Project

This Sudan water project provides a clear example of how the failure to use gender analysis during project design and implementation can lead to unsustainable results. An M&E follow up visit to this project revealed that three out of five boreholes rehabilitated by Mercy Corps were non-operational, largely due to lack of consultation with women, who are the traditional water managers in this area.

Quality of Water – One borehole was reported to be "only fit for animals". This problem could have been avoided had project managers analyzed the gendered division of labor in the area, and understood that women are the water managers. Women were aware before the project started that the targeted boreholes produced non-potable water. This failure to consult with the main water users directly contributed to the project's failure.

Participation in Decision making – Based on traditional exclusion of women from decision making mechanisms in Sudan, women were not represented in the project's water management committee. The process of member selection was not monitored by MC. Setting up a minimum quota, as the Sudan government has, could have ensured appropriate inclusion and accurate reporting on the planned boreholes before project activities began.

Also, because women were not included in the decision making process, they were also not trained as technical pump technicians, in spite of the fact that women are the primary users of the bore holes and the most frequent visitors. This resulted in women having to wait three months for a male community member who was trained as a pump technician to fix one of the bore holes.

II. Results and Analysis

This section discusses the information gathered by the Gender Assessment which informs the key findings and recommendations presented in the executive summary. The grey boxes include analysis and findings relevant to the subsequent data presented. More detailed information, plus assessment methodology, can be found in the *Gender Assessment: Survey Findings* report and the *Focus Group Discussion Findings* report.

A. Team Perceptions of Beneficiary Profile

The demographic category of female beneficiaries between the ages of 26-40 was selected more frequently than the category stating that "Mercy Corps programs target all community members equally." If team members' perceptions that Mercy Corps is currently serving more female than male beneficiaries are accurate, then the question of if and how we design and implement our programs with a gender-sensitive lens becomes even more important.

Graph 1. Which age/gender groups of beneficiaries do programs in your country target most?
Check all that apply (Q.16)

In order to frame the conversation around Mercy Corps' current use of gender-sensitive approaches in programs, the Gender Assessment returned to the reason for Mercy Corps' activities – our beneficiaries[vii]. Precise data on beneficiary demographics is not readily available at an agency-wide level, and the GWG lacked the resources and capacity to gather this information, so the survey asked team members to report on their perceptions of who their programs target. **In all age groups, women and girls were identified more often than men as beneficiaries of Mercy Corps programs.**

B. Gender and Program Quality

B.1. Knowledge, Practice and Attitudes

B.1.1. KNOWLEDGE

The information in the Knowledge section suggests that while survey participants have a strong surface understanding of basic gender terms, their ability to apply basic gender sensitivity concepts to programs is limited. Participants in only one FGD group suggested addressing masculinity and including both men and women in gender program approaches is a key element of successful gender integration.

Basic Concepts. *Understanding that sex, or biology, is a fundamental difference between men and women while gender roles are culturally developed is the foundation for designing and implementing gender-sensitive programs.*

In the majority of focus group discussions, there was a common misperception that the term gender is synonymous with women. In many of the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), participants struggled with basic concepts, although there were a few team members able to identify a difference between sex and gender.

While nearly 90% of survey respondents answered this question correctly, the format of this survey question gave participants a 50% chance of selecting the correct answer. In the FGDs, participants were asked to actually define the difference between sex and gender, which requires a stronger grasp of the concept and may account for the difference in responses between the FGDs and the survey. When disaggregating the data by male and female responses, we discovered that 10% more women than men were able to correctly identify the difference between statements about gender versus sex.

Basic Concepts

"We work in programs only with women, as a gender program…we are facing some people who say that gender is not only a woman, but also men can be in gender programs. I don't understand this."
    – Iraq, female team member

"Where do sexual distinctions not align with gender distinctions? As far as MC's programs…what are the gender distinctions?"
    – Portland, HQ team member

Understanding the Application of Gender Concepts. *Understanding when and how to apply gender concepts is the next step required to design and implement programs that aim to empower male and female beneficiaries equitably.*

Survey respondents showed a limited level of understanding of the application of gender concepts. More than half of the respondents reported that program approaches that do not consider gendered access to resources are the best way to reach beneficiaries. Although both male and female respondents supported this "gender blind" program approach in high percentages, more than 70% of team members selecting "true" were male. In the FGDs, only Edinburgh team members raised the point that gendered program approaches should address local concepts of masculinity as part of a an approach to promote gender equity.

B.1.2. PRACTICE

Program/Project Design and Planning. *In order to design projects that support male and female beneficiaries without enforcing inequalities, it is important to understand gender roles within communities.*

> Mercy Corps program teams report "frequently" or "occasionally" conducting needs assessments with some level of gender sensitivity.

A Gender Approach

"During the start-up of any project, a gender analysis is conducted in the program operational areas to identify the roles and responsibilities of men and women in light of access and control of resources. This analysis greatly helps to adjust program actions into more focusing addressing the issues of gender role in the community…"
— Qualitative Survey Response

When asked how often they analyze gender roles and responsibilities through gender-sensitive needs assessments survey participants most commonly selected "frequently," at a rate of 29%.

One senior staff member said, "…When designing projects, we often do not sit down and look through the gender lens and say… 'could we make this more gender-friendly', or 'is there anything here that will negatively impact women?' We should do this more of this."

Program/Project Implementation. *A gender approach to programs considers differences in gendered roles and responsibilities within local contexts and structures program implementation to encourage equitable participation and opportunities for participation without causing conflict in communities.*

> **About 40% of the respondents who tried to describe the gender approach they reported using were unable to do so.** This raises questions about the accuracy of responses in the Practice section, where respondents reported incorporating a gender approach.

Monitoring and Evaluation

"M&E team members should talk to women and men separately about how [the program] will be successful and was successful. Another thing is that success for a man can be different to success for a woman. Men grow vegetables, and get money. Women could be growing vegetables to give to the family. These are different outcomes."
— Sudan, female team member

"We are not using any tools to examine the impact of our programs. This could be very beneficial for our micro enterprise groups. Many of the groups did not last because we didn't understand women challenges. For example, when we were asking women to put together some of their savings they told us 'we still didn't get the money from our husbands.' Design with a gender approach will help us identify the problems before they happen."
— Sudan, male team member

Survey participants were asked how often they actually use a gender approach in their projects and programs. **A large discrepancy arises between male and female team members' responses, with 65% of male respondents saying they use a gender approach "always," or "frequently," compared to 41% of women.**

When asked how often they feel encouraged to use a gender approach, about 60% of Mercy Corps survey respondents reported "always," or "frequently". When disaggregating responses are disaggregated by sex, we found that male team members reported "always" or "frequently" at a rate of 67%, compared to 48% among female respondents.

However, when participants who responded positively were asked to describe how they incorporate a gender approach, only 2.5% of respondents articulated an approach that reached beyond women's basic needs and fully addressed the imbalance of power and access to resources between men and women. About 40% of responses, the largest category, had no discernable association with a gender approach. This means that responders did not address either sex or gender in their written answer.

Monitoring and Evaluation. Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation allows programs to measure success of equitably reaching community members and capture best practices and lessons learned.

> **Responses about gender disaggregated data collection suggest that it is not viewed as supplying planners and implementers with important information for program activities.** This hypothesis is supported by survey participants selecting lack of capacity and lack of prioritization as their main reasons for not collecting disaggregated data. FGD participants in country offices and at both headquarters also reported feeling that gender disaggregated data is collected for donors and not to improve program quality.

The survey asked respondents how often they collect gender disaggregated data about their beneficiaries. Men again responded more positively, with more responses of "always" and "frequently" than their female colleagues.

Participants who responded positively were asked to explain <u>why they do collect</u> this type of information. **The most commonly selected option was that gender disaggregated data is collected because it is "required by donors", with a selection frequency of 98.** The next most commonly selected option was it is "required by country leadership," with a frequency of 57.

Respondents who answered negatively were asked <u>why they do not collect</u> it. **The most frequently selected reason was a lack of training on how to do so. The second most frequently selected response was that it is not a priority for the respondent's team.**

B.1.3. ATTITUDES

Measuring attitudes towards gender-sensitive programming allows strategic planners to understand if there is political will and support for gendered program approaches in the agency.

More than 95% of team members said it is important to include gender considerations in all aspects of the project cycle. The high number of positive responses, and the fact that male and female respondents were aligned, and corresponding reactions during FGDs seem to express a strong desire for considering gender approaches in Mercy Corps programs.

There is significant evidence that gender integration and women's programs are seen by some as an "extra" step in program implementation instead of an integral step to ensure participation and inclusion of community members in activities, per our Vision for Change.

The survey asked team members what their motives are for applying gender-sensitive approaches such as collecting gender disaggregated data, whether or not they think it is important, and if they feel encouraged to do so. The most commonly selected response among both managers and non-managers was, "donors require it" followed by "country leadership requires it".

Thinking of gender disaggregated data collection as a donor driven activity and not integral part of program design, implementation and monitoring also emerged during qualitative data collection. One field based key informant said, "We need to do this not because its donor requirements but because this is something that would add value to our programs."

The survey followed up with a more specific question, asking team members if they feel it is important to include gender considerations while planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating any project or program.[x] **More than 95% of male team members and 100% of female team members said they "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that it is important to include gender considerations in program and project planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.** Similarly, the majority of FGD participants also said that gender sensitivity is important and should be considered in programs.

However, during FGDs, **some participants said they do not feel supported to integrate gender sensitivity into programs.** Others said that women focused programs are not prioritized, as the FGD quotes on this page illustrate.

Iraq 2010 – Mercy Corps

Donor Driven Activities

"One of the ways we go about gender programming is to see what the funder wants in gender programming."
– Portland, HQ team member

"We are more likely to push back (to donors) when we know what is important. If you have done your homework and know, we can influence more. You make a case in the proposal. When you don't have that knowledge or strategy, you are just mirroring what they want."
– Portland, HQ team member

"As EC demands gender inclusion in programs, perhaps this means that Scotland is better at getting these issues addressed."
– Edinburgh, HQ team member

Attitudes

"There is no way we can do programs on Maternal and Child Health if some of our male program managers do not support women's equality."
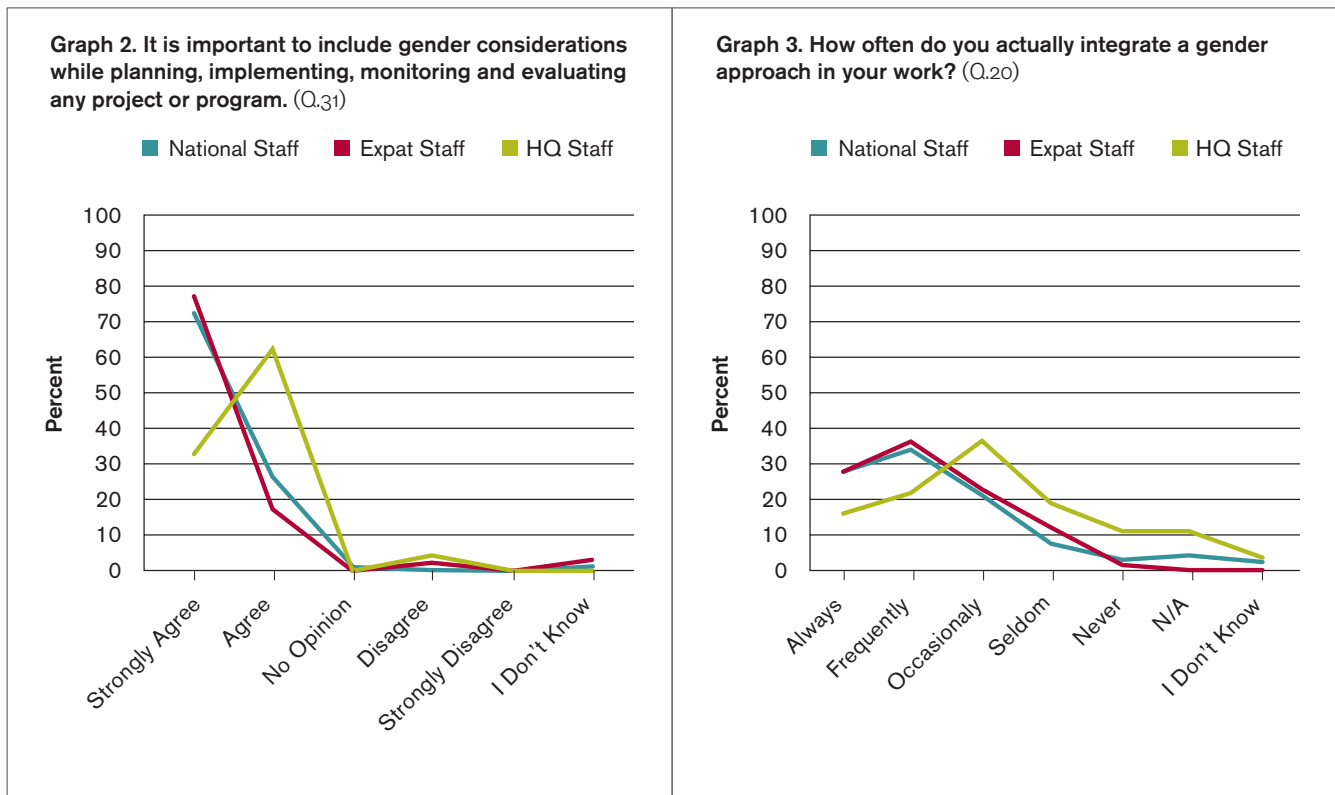– Tajikistan, male team member

"Mercy Corps team members are not excited about gender projects. They are not a priority for male national team members."
– Iraq, female team member

B.2. Team Perceptions of Gender and Program Relevancy

In order to establish an understanding of how relevant team members feel their programs are in relation to gender sensitivity, responses to two survey questions (below) were compared to gauge perceived importance versus actual integration.[xi] Responses were disaggregated by national, expatriate and headquarters team members in order to see if there is a difference in perception of gender integration and/ or importance based on geographic locations and background.

Graph 2. It is important to include gender considerations while planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating any project or program. (Q.31)

■ National Staff   ■ Expat Staff   ■ HQ Staff

Graph 3. How often do you actually integrate a gender approach in your work? (Q.20)

■ National Staff   ■ Expat Staff   ■ HQ Staff

National and expatriate team member responses tell us Mercy Corps' programs could be more relevant in responding to the gendered needs of beneficiaries. While more than 70% of field participants reported that incorporating gender considerations into programs is important, only about 50% reported "always" or "frequently" doing so. The same conclusion is even more strongly supported by headquarters responses. About 90% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" incorporating a gender approach is important, compared with less than 15% reporting gender considerations are "always" or "frequently" incorporated in aspects of the project cycle.

Survey responses suggest that more than nationality, **geographic location in the agency (field versus headquarters) plays a large role in how important team members perceive a gender approach to be. The significant difference is the *degree* of the response, with field-based participants expressing much stronger support for gender integration than headquarters based participants.** This finding is supported by the FGDs, where the majority of participants said that all programs should address gender dynamics overtly in program goals and objectives and at all points in the project cycle.

In Graph 3, field-based team members were much more likely to report that they currently integrate a gender approach to programs. Given the wide variance in responses from team members and their difficulty in describing how they are encouraged to incorporate a gender approach, it seems likely that **team members do not have a common understanding of what a gender approach is, how often it is integrated into programs or what constitutes encouragement to do so.**

Graphs 2 and 3 show a close alignment of responses from field team members, both national and expatriates. By comparison, headquarters team member responses' vary dramatically, both in assessing whether it is important to include gender considerations and in reporting how often a gender approach is incorporated. Note that in Graph 2 there is a **significant disconnect – nearly 40% – between field and headquarters team members who "strongly agreed" that it is important to include gender considerations in all aspects of project and program activities.** Both national and expatriate field-based team members valued gender considerations in programs more strongly than headquarters colleagues.

B.3. Gender and Capacity Building Needs

In addition to inquiring about program quality and relevance, the assessment asked program team members if they felt they would benefit from capacity building in integrating gender approaches in programs, and how they would prioritize capacity building needs.

> Higher expressed needs for capacity building in project planning or implementation corresponds with the difficulty team members had in qualitatively describing how they are encouraged to incorporate a gender approach to programs and the broad range of answers to questions about whether male and female beneficiaries should be treated the same way. The needs for training in monitoring and evaluation correspond with over one-third of survey respondents saying that they do not collect gender disaggregated data because they do not know how.[xii]

If we combine requests for "significant training" and "some training or other support":

- **77% of respondents feel the need for training or support in project planning or implementation;**
- **80% in monitoring and evaluation; and**
- **62% in basic gender concepts.**

B.4. Challenges to Integrating a Gender Approach

Leadership

Graph 4. The following statements are about specific support you feel you need for integrating a gender approach into your work. Please mark how much training or other support you need for each type. (Q.29)


> The most effective program design is context specific. However, the assessment findings indicate that access to the training and resources needed for field staff to design gender-sensitive programs requires support from senior leadership. Similarly, due to the many responsibilities and heavy work load field teams carry, unless gender integration is identified as an integral part of ensuring program quality and following Do No Harm principles, assessment findings suggest gender integration will continue to take place in an ad hoc manner.

Key informant interviewees and FGD participants from all groups expressed a desire to see headquarters and senior leadership promote gender integration. One Washington, DC based senior team member said, "…just by helping folks to understand, we are not talking about another new framework, it is deeply embedded with V4C. You cannot think of the inclusion without thinking how men and women participate in changing their lives. We need to present opportunities for team members to see this."

In Niger, some team members specifically wanted to see Mercy Corps leadership promote creating program goals for increasing gender equity. They felt such a move would help program leaders encourage other team members to use gender-sensitive approaches. Participants in Tajikistan, Niger, and Iraq requested headquarters follow-up on the Gender Assessment with more trainings and tools for gender and programming. Headquarters FGD participants requested gender analysis models, gender mainstreaming tools and clarity from senior leadership on whether or not gender responsive programming is important.

One Portland based senior team member said, "We need it recognized as strategic priority and then a strategic pathway… But this has to be agreed upon in the agency rather than forced policy. A question is how does ethos of inclusivity in community balance with gender focused programming." **Field and headquarters FGD participants alike said that the lack of prioritization of gender from headquarters makes it difficult to develop long term goals or build team capacity on gendered program approaches.**
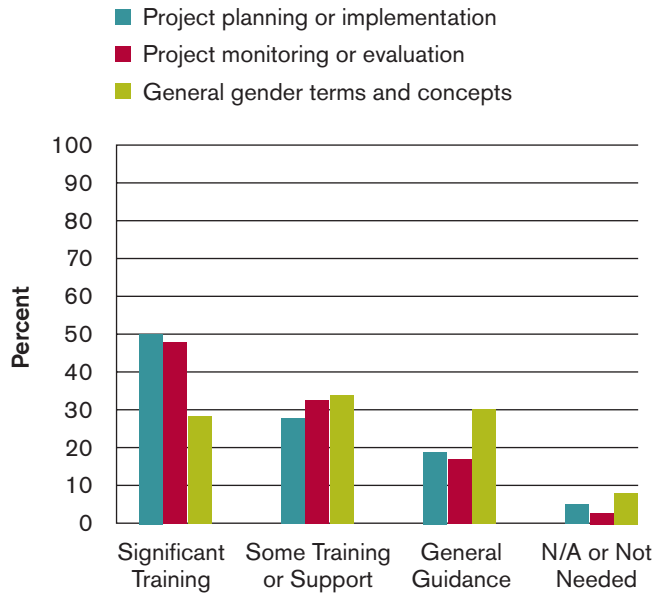
Graph 5. Below is a list of obstacles to incorporating a gender approach in program/project planning, implementation and evaluation. Check all that apply (Q.30)
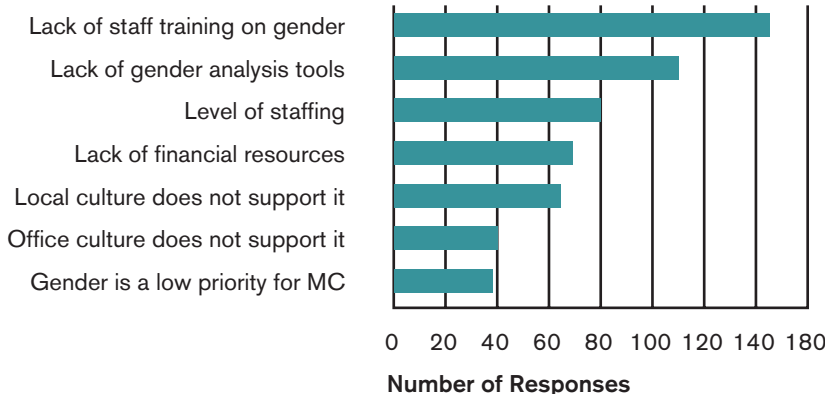
Capacity

Survey participants were given the opportunity to prioritize perceived obstacles to integrating a gender approach in programs (Graph 5).[xiii] A lack of training and gender analysis tools were the two biggest obstacles identified.

Technical Support

Nearly half of survey respondents did not know who within Mercy Corps could help them integrate gender in programs. Mercy Corps' six field-based gender specialists received 20% of responses from staff who could identify resources (Table 1, below), indicating that when gender technical support is available, team members do utilize it. Similarly, the GWG received a high percentage of responses considering that it is a small, informal group only accessible to staff through Clearspace of referrals from program managers. Regardless, the broad spread of responses sends a clear message that gender technical support lacks a specific home within the agency, and support if given, is often provided on ad hoc basis, to the best of the abilities of available team members.

Table 1. List 3 persons or groups that could provide support in gender programming. (Q.28)

Category	Percentage
Programs	25.1%
Senior Team members	24.3%
Gender Specialist[xv]	20.0%
Gender Working Group	15.7%
M&E	6.7%
HR	2.0%
Government Office(s)	1.2%
Senior Leadership Team	1.2%
Colleagues	0.8%
NGOs/CBOs	0.8%
TSU	0.8%
Country Gender Working Group	0.4%
Digital Library	0.4%
MC Global Team	0.4%
Support Team members	0.4%
Total	**100%**

The survey gauged awareness of internal Mercy Corps resources and how to access them.[xiv] Nearly half (45%) of respondents said they did not know who within Mercy Corps could help them integrate gender into programming. The 55% who said they did know where to find assistance within the agency were asked to list three individuals or groups who they would approach for assistance with gender programming. Responses ranged widely, with no clear gender point person or team known agency-wide.

FGD participants in CAR, Niger and Tajikistan did not know who could help them with gender programming. Field FGD participants requested more contact with headquarters and a person or team available to help them develop proposals and use gender approaches during implementation.

Resource Materials

Survey and FGD findings confirm that many team members are not aware of or accessing gender resource materials. Resource tools – frameworks for gender analysis, examples and ideas of how to mainstream gender sensitivity into programs and provide techniques for ensuring beneficiary engagement is both equitable and culturally sensitive – can all help program staff do their jobs and deepen impact.

Many field and headquarters FGD participants were not aware that resources for gender and programs exist. Others knew of their existence, but said that because they were only available online or in English that they are not useful.

Staffing

It many contexts, identifying female team members requires specific methods of recruitment and additional capacity building for hiring managers and others involved in bringing new team members on board. It is not a coincidence that the contexts where it is most challenging to hire female program team members are also often the contexts where male program team members have difficulty engaging female community members due to cultural norms. **In a number of the focus group countries, staff cautioned that by not ensuring their program teams included women, they had by default missed opportunities to engage female beneficiaries in transformative ways.**

FGD participants and qualitative survey responses both said a lack of female program team members negatively impacts Mercy Corps' ability to access women in communities and implement gender-sensitive programs.

C. Gender and Program Impact

Despite a lack of data, the following cases exemplify the positive impacts that can result when team undertake gender analysis, consist of well-balanced teams (male and female) and prioritize gender inclusion as a programmatic outcome.

The box below highlights an example from Tajikistan where data collection resulted in capturing unintended positive impact achieved through gender-sensitivity in program implementation.

Impact

"We often do not sit down and look through the gender lens and say… 'is there anything here that will negatively impact women?'"
– Portland, senior team member

The Positive Impact of Program Team Gender Capacity in Tajikistan

During FGDs in Tajikistan, team members referred to a 2009 Mercy Corps learning document that investigated an unintended impact found in the final evaluation of a large-scale food security program, namely measurably increased gender empowerment and social capital among women and communities that participated in the program. One of the key findings was the critical role of a gender balanced staff field coordinators and program volunteers and their high capacity for: a) effective training and teaching techniques highly localized to maximize women's participation, b) technical expertise on health topics and agricultural practices, and c) ability to gain, sustain and leverage community trust, particularly among male leaders. Gender Assessment focus group participants said that understanding how strong staff capacity promotes greater than anticipated program impacts has been motivational for their current program approach to staff capacity building.

Collecting gender disaggregated data also often leads to more purposeful and gender-sensitive programming. In Guatemala, women were consistently underrepresented in land conflict programming. To address this issue, the team undertook a gradual process of reflection and gender analysis that identified key barriers to women's involvement in land conflict resolution. As a result of this prepositioning work, the team won a competitive global RFA from USAID's Women in Development. A fully funded program now targets women's participation in land conflict and agrarian issues.

In Sudan, a separate, country specific gender assessment identified risks of negative program impacts, such as increased workload burden on women, reinforcement of gender inequalities by allowing – and thus reinforcing – male dominated decision making structures and reported cases of families not allowing their adolescent girls to go to school in order to participate in Mercy Corps programs.

III. Conclusion

Mercy Corps' 2010 Gender Assessment responded to an agency need to better understanding our work with women and on gender dynamics in the communities where we operate, the nature of support needed in order to take advantage of growing opportunities, and concrete ideas for strategic planning. While the assessment brings the picture into sharper focus, it is simply the first step. Pursuing the recommendations through collaboration with diverse teams across the agency will further actualize Mercy Corps' commitment to gender inclusion, an embedded and essential piece for achieving our Vision for Change.

For more information on the assessment and Mercy Corps' gender inclusion programming, please visit https://clearspace.mercycorps.org/community/cops/gender or email the Gender Working Group at gender@mercycorps.org

Notes

[i] See Annex 3 for information on the Gender Working Group (GWG) or visit https://clearspace.mercycorps.org/community/cops/gender

[ii] 34.8% of international team members are women.

[iii] Mercy Corps Gender Assessment Concept Note. Nov 2009. https://clearspace.mercycorps.org/docs/DOC-7417

[iv] 2005 edition. https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/docs/DM-E%20FINAL%20Guidebook%203final.pdf The 2010 BRIDGE Gender Mainstreaming Guide could provide a starting place for this resource development https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/docs/BRIDGEGenderMainstreaming.pdf

[v] The FY2011 Annual Plan from the Community Mobilization, Governance and Partnerships team provided rationale for a "new FTE position responsible for supporting inclusion and rights programming, including gender and disability issues." This is based on the number of such programs and corresponding requests for technical support from across all Mercy Corps regions. The lack of dedicated headquarters technical support on gender and disability was reiterated again at the September 2011 Africa Regional Meeting in the context of the Gender Working Group not being able to provide in-country support that was requested in 3 countries' 2011 annual plans.

[vi] This information was provided by Dana Benasuly, BRIDGE Gender Advisor. The BRIDGE program recently completed a program-wide gender assessment and has instituted the collection of gender mainstreaming examples as part of regular program monitoring.

[vii] As data on beneficiary demographics is not readily available at an agency-wide level, the survey asked team members to report on their perceptions of who their programs target, disaggregated by age groups and sex.

[viii] Responses to this question suggest that team members feel encouraged by managers, but this was not explicitly asked in the question. Further investigation is required to understand what elements are required to create an environment where team members feel encouraged to use gender approaches.

[ix] See footnote 5 for the definition of gender disaggregated data provided in the survey.

[x] Survey question 13.

[xi] Survey questions 20 and 31.

[xii] Survey question 14.

[xiii] Survey question 30.

[xiv] Survey question 27.

[xv] Two of the six gender specialists are active members of the GWG. Sahar Alnouri, Iraq Gender Program Manager was identified by survey respondents 19 times and Dana Benasuly, Sudan BRIDGE Gender Specialist was identified 10 times. If they had been placed with the GWG instead of in the "gender specialist" category it would have made the Gender Working Group the highest category with a frequency of 69 a selection rate of 27 %. Another three of the six gender specialists are members of the GWG, but they cannot participate regularly.

[xvi] Mercy Corps. Thirsty for Knowledge: A Case Study of Women's Empowerment and Social Capital through a Development Assistance Program. Rasht, Tajikistan. 2009. This case study was researched and written by consultant Amy Spindler.

[xvii] This USAID 2010 Sudan Gender Assessment, March 2010, by BRIDGE Gender Advisor Dana Benasuly was completed as a priority program activity for the Sudan BRIDGE team. https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdl/docs/USAID2008SudanThreeAreasBRIDGEGenderAssess2010.pdf