

Local Partnerships:

A guide for partnering with civil society, business and government groups



Be the change

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACCCRN	Asian City Climate Change Resilience Network (Indonesia)
BDS	Business Development Suppliers
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India and China
CBO	Community-based Organization
CaGi	Cardamom and Ginger program (Nepal)
CAP	Community Action Program (Iraq)
CDP	Capacity Development Plan
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled Persons Organization
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Organization
GDA	Global Development Alliances (USAID)
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IMARE	Inclusive Market Alliance for Rural Entrepreneurs program (Guatemala)
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
LGCI	Local Government Capacity Index
LINCS	Localizing Institutional Capacity in Sudan program
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OCI	Organizational Capacity Index
PG	Participatory Governance
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
RFA	Request for Application
ROI	Return on Investment
SKYE	Start Up Kashmir Youth Entrepreneur Development program (Kashmir)
SME	Small-to-Medium Enterprises
TPI	The Partnering Initiative
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene



Be the change

Mercy Corps helps people turn the crises they confront into the opportunities they deserve. Driven by local needs, our programs provide communities in the world's toughest places with the tools and support they need to transform their own lives. Our worldwide team in 41 countries is improving the lives of 19 million people. For more information, see mercycorps.org.

Chapter 1. Mercy Corps' Commitment to Local Partnership

1.1. Partnerships Lie at the Heart of the Vision for Change

Mercy Corps' Strategic Roadmap states that, "our Vision for Change... is that peaceful, secure and just societies emerge when the private, public, and civil society sectors are able to interact with accountability, inclusive participation and mechanisms for peaceful change." These actors are our partners. Mercy Corps collaborates with an increasingly wide and diverse set of partners at all levels of the public, private and civil society sectors to address the global challenges that drive our work.

Figure 1: Vision for Change



How we partner reflects our values, including local ownership of change, using funds responsibly, and working with long-term sustainability in mind. Our priority is to sustainably help create secure, productive and just communities. For each intervention in a country or community we must assess how to achieve this most effectively and most sustainably. This involves assessing local capacity to implement, weighed against urgency of need. This metric is equally important for our strategic partnerships, collaboration with international non-governmental organization (INGO) partners on specific programs, and commitment to local partnership development.

Mercy Corps has a 32-year history of working with local partners in over 113 countries. Our [Principles of Partnership](#), first established in 2003, serve to ensure clear and transparent working relationships with partners that are inclusive and mutually beneficial, based on equity and respect and leverage passion to have lasting impact. These principles can be found in the next section.

Through this experience, Mercy Corps has worked in some strong partnerships as well as those that have been deeply challenging. While there is no one right way to do partnerships, the collaborations that work well are intentional about the principles guiding their partnership. Even when partnerships have started out with major challenges, teams have found options for transforming the collaboration by revisiting the principles. In all situations, our priorities are: mutual accountability, honest feedback and mutual commitment to program excellence.

Who is a partner?

For many years when international NGOs talked about partners most meant only civil society organizations (CSOs). Our Vision for Change established early on that Mercy Corps considers local partners to be groups in all three sectors – CSOs, plus local business and local government groups. Increasingly all INGOs are defining partnership in this broader way. More information about each sector and different types of partners within each can be found in [Chapter 2](#). While this guide is focused on local partnerships, many of the topics and approaches are similar working with INGOs and other global partners.

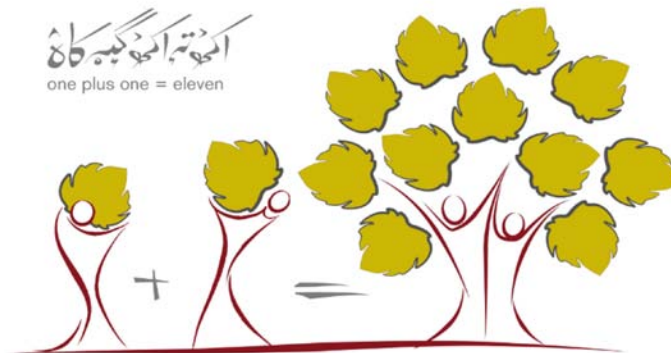


Photo: Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps, Kyrgystan, 2007

1.2. Why Work in Partnership?

The theory behind a partnership approach is summed up by the Kashmiri saying: “one plus one equals eleven.” In other words, the sum is greater than the individual parts. Such collaboration can ensure that development initiatives capture the creative potential of diverse actors for deeper impact, foster local ownership for sustainability, and are integrated for effectiveness in addressing complex problems or new opportunities.

Impact – Partnering takes full advantage of the knowledge, skills, reach, and experience that partners offer each other and means that, together, we can have greater impact than if we worked separately.



For example, local communities and other civil society partners can better understand, represent, and address the rights, needs, and aspirations of poor people. All partners, including government and the private sector, are central to creating the conditions and structural changes necessary for effective people-centered, sustainable change and development. For our part, Mercy Corps is most effective as a partner when we leverage our global best practices and networks, opportunities for taking good ideas to scale, and access to resources in order to support local partners to have greater influence. The programs and other work we do together can encourage and enable the real participation of people living in poverty, be more sustainable, and have greater impact.

What do our local partners want out of partnership?

A global study of local partners working with a variety of INGOs found that more than anything these groups want our support to: 1) have more influence in their communities and society and 2) be more independent. Planning with partners' goals in mind is fundamental to lasting impact.¹

Local Ownership – Mercy Corps strives to honor partners' experience, knowledge and leadership, in order to promote their positive influence in decision-making and strengthen their influence for positive social change. Our support can help foster: accountable, service-providing governments; mission-driven CSOs that effectively serve and represent marginalized and interest groups; active and diverse community-based organizations; and responsible businesses.¹

These roles require capacity on both organizational and technical levels. The best way to ensure that capacity is built and stays is to support partners to learn through doing at every stage of development, including planning, through implementation, monitoring and evaluation and into scaling up and policy level change. Ultimately ownership is about the partnership between citizens and states as they forge their development vision.

Aid Effectiveness – Mercy Corps chooses to work together with local partners across the world because we believe that this is the most effective way to assist the “bottom billion”² that have been profoundly left behind. By working together to share resources, knowledge and experience we can have greater impact in the short term and work to build stronger communities and institutions for the future.

Given USAID and European donors' stated goal of working more in direct partnership with local groups, there is a crucial window of opportunity to help shape these directions by sharing our experience with the capacity and value of local partners, as well as the need to reemphasize the centrality of partnerships in how we work.

¹ “Keystone Performance Surveys: NGO Partner Survey 2010. Public Report, January 2011.” Keystone Accountability.

<http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos>

² Collier, Paul. *The Bottom Billion*. Oxford University Press. 2007.

Measuring What Matters

Partnerships are an important component of Mission Metrics, a performance measurement framework built around Mercy Corps' Mission Statement. Mission Metrics' stated goal is "to more effectively serve our beneficiaries and better manage our performance by applying and acting on results from a set of measurement indicators that address mission-critical success factors." The mission themes and indicators articulate in practical, measurable ways how we contribute to building secure, productive and just communities and several themes address various facets of our partnership, especially:

Theme 5 – Communities are able to lead development for their own social and economic well-being.

Theme 8 – Government, civil society, informed citizens, and private sectors successfully interact together.

Theme 10 – Accountable and capable governance at local, sub-regional, or national levels.

Measuring our partnerships – as well as the work we do through partners - is critical to our ability to learn what works, and to document our successes.³ See also [Section 3.5](#) and Annex C about using Mission Metrics in partnership work.

1.3. Principles of Partnership

These broad reasons about why we partner inform *how* we partner. And regardless of the sector, core principles apply for the way we collaborate. Mercy Corps is guided both by the principles in the Vision for Change and also by ten more specific Principles of Partnership.

Principles of the Vision for Change

Participation is about meeting the interests of the whole community. When every member of a community has the chance, directly or through representation by local partners, to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of programs, there is a higher likelihood that the initiative accurately reflects their real needs and interests. Partners play an essential role in encouraging participation and ensuring different experiences, needs and capabilities of various groups in a community are heard, including those of women and men, youth and the elderly, persons with disabilities and the able bodied, ethnic/religious/language minorities and majorities.

Accountability is a two-way responsibility: among partners, between the program and donors, and the program and community. Partners are accountable to each other when they honor their commitment to communicate plans and are responsible for what they actually do. Accountability requires transparency. In a society that values accountability, people have access to their leaders and confidence in the "rule of law." This means a system in which laws, as well as administrative systems, rules and regulations are public knowledge, clear in meaning and apply equally to everyone.

Peaceful Change recognizes that by focusing on societies in transition, Mercy Corps is often working in conflict-affected contexts and those undergoing significant socio-economic change. Partnerships must take conflict dynamics and even positive tensions into account. *Which collaborations can best build on connections across communities instead of fuelling tensions?* Dialogue and transparency promote a certain degree of confidence and reduce friction. However, care must be taken to mitigate the potential negative impacts of partnerships. These are the main points of the "Do No Harm" concept and apply to all levels and kinds of partnering.⁴ It is Mercy Corps' responsibility to avoid the pitfalls of jealousy and competition over scarce resources, which can happen when aid or development opportunities are not carefully planned.

³ More about Mission Metrics can be found on the Digital Library at <https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dtl&q=mission+metrics>

⁴ Do No Harm. By Mary Anderson, 1999. www.cdainc.com

10 Principles of Partnership

There are three overarching principles agreed among many organizations as important for partners to be able to work together. Practicing these principles in concert provides a firm foundation upon which to build effective partnerships.

All partnerships are developed in service of helping to support the development of secure, productive and/or just communities, not to partner for partnership's sake.

1. **Equity** – all partners have valuable resources and expertise, as well as risks and benefits that lead to a complementary purpose and respect.
2. **Transparency** – A crucial factor to developing trust, a positive environment to collaborate and ensuring decisions are made in a socially responsible way.
3. **Mutual benefit** – including commitment to other partners as well as to the shared partnership, leading to deeper engagement.

Additionally, a number of operational principles contribute to effective working relationships among partners.

4. **Communities are the primary stakeholders** – Their opinions and contributions matter and must be a part of any interventions we conduct in their communities. We will work to ensure to every extent possible that all groups in the community participate and that the community takes ownership of the projects.
5. **Non-discrimination** – Development assistance should be targeted for those in need regardless of race, religion, gender, political affiliation, ethnicity or ability. Partners will strive to make sure that our programs do not discriminate against people for these or any other reasons.
6. **Fiscal responsibility** – Funds have been entrusted to partners for helping improve the lives of the most vulnerable. All partners have a shared responsibility to ensure funds are spent wisely and accountably both to our donors and to the communities we serve.
7. **Consistent communication** – Partners will work to maintain an open and professional relationship with each other. When problems or differences of opinion arise we will jointly work to solve these harmoniously and come to a mutual agreement of the best solution.
8. **Coordination** – In order to avoid duplication and inefficient use of resources while maximizing opportunities and effectiveness, partners commit to regular sharing of information from relevant programs and the context. This includes with each other and where possible and applicable with others working in the area.
9. **Learning** – Partners acknowledge that each has different experiences and by learning from each other we can enrich our organizations and the people we aim to serve. Additionally, in identifying shared interests and pursuing joint learning we build our relationship and the capacity of the partnership.
10. **Monitoring and evaluation** – Understanding the impact of joint work is an essential part of program development and design during which both Mercy Corps and its partners learn from the success and challenges organizations have in the field. Mercy Corps also agrees to establish and maintain a transparent monitoring system and its partners agree to cooperate with all monitoring visits conducted during and after implementation of the project.

Principles are guidelines. True partnership comes from making these principles a way of working together, not a check list. Flexibility is also important as teams learn what the principles mean for them practically and work with partners to integrate them in joint work.



Tip: Use the Principles of Partnership to have a learning conversation among potential partners or early in the groups' collaboration. They are a good way to discuss groups' values and aspirations, as well as jointly create language that will guide the partnership. Find out more tips, share your experience working with partners and ask questions to peers around the world on the [Partnerships Community of Practice](#).

Chapter 2. Types of Partnerships

Who are our local partners?

Mercy Corps' work builds on an ever-increasing diversity of relationships within countries and regions. Local partners, in contrast to other relationships, such as contracting or coordinating, should have a role in designing or managing programs or their components. They can include any local group working with us in this way, such as local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs), national, regional and local governments, microfinance institutions (MFIs), associations, networks and other individual businesses. Not only is it important for us to partner with local entities, it is critical that we link these entities together in order to build ongoing mechanisms for collaboration for positive social change.

Across this diversity, there are three broad groupings, though relationships may fit into more than one category at the same or different times and can evolve:

1. Project partnerships for a specific project with mutually agreed aims and objectives.
2. Strategic partnerships, working together over time with sufficient alignment of goals and objectives towards achieving a lasting impact on poverty.
3. Alliances with single organizations/groups or networks/coalitions of groups working together towards a specific goal, even though organizational/institutional mandates and long-term purpose may be quite different.

While different contexts may require different approaches (or a combination of approaches), we believe that the same principles of partnership apply to all activities and should be part of identifying and working toward common goals, looking to build on the distinctive contribution of all partners, and ensuring that our combined efforts bring change.



Tip: Remember that there is no 'one size fits all' way of partnering. Just as Mercy Corps looks for different types of partnerships for different situations and objectives, local partners are looking for different relationships with INGO counterparts for their own objectives. For example, CSOs are often concerned with ongoing funding for their projects. If INGOs know this interest of local partners, it can be taken into account in planning collaboration in a way that meets short-term program goals and long-term funding and independence goals. . If INGOs know this interest of local partners, it can be taken into account in planning collaboration in a way that meets short-term program goals and long-term funding and independence goals.

North-South and South-South Partnerships

In many places Mercy Corps is the lead organization implementing a program with one or a number of local partners. This model is effective as local partners build their capacity for full management of programs or where their interest is a specific aspect of a program, like service delivery, or they are responsible for a specific geography. In places where there is strong local capacity, such as the Middle East, we are increasingly pursuing program models in which local NGOs are in the lead with us playing a support role. For example, the Lebanese Transparency Association is leading a USAID-funded youth civic engagement program with Mercy Corps working on specific activities to help youth connect via new technologies.




Photo: N. Baroud/Mercy Corps, Lebanon, 2008

Mercy Corps can also play an important role helping local partners collaborate with each other. We do this through supporting the creation of or strengthening networks, providing forums for partners to join forces on advocacy efforts and introducing groups during trainings. In some cases partners ask Mercy Corps to stay involved and other times they find things to do together completely independently of us. An example is the group of disabled people's organizations (DPOs) in Iraq that worked together as part of Mercy Corps' Community Action Program (CAP) establishing a national and formalized PWD network, the Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations. For more information about cross-sector partnerships, see [Section 2.4](#).

Table 1: What Local Partners in Each Sector Offer to Joint Work⁶

	Civil Society	Public Sector	Private Sector
Primary Concern	Social systems	Political systems	Economic systems
Control Unit	Members	Voters and Officials	Owners
Primary Power Form	Traditions, values	Laws, security forces, fines, public expenditure	Money and products
Primary Goals	Social change	Societal order	Wealth creation
Assessment Frame	Justice, voice	Legality, elections	Profitability, social responsibility
Organizational Form	Non-profit	Governmental	For profit
Traditional Relationship Basis	Values	Rules, service provision	Transactions
Timeframes	Urgent needs and long-term sustainability	Election or budget cycles	Profit-reporting/business cycles

Table 1 charts the comparative roles and attributes of local partners in each sector. It is useful to identify what kind of elements are needed in a given situation or to address a particular goal – discussed further in [Section 3.3](#): Partner Identification and Selection – and choose partners from the relevant sectors to reach those goals.

 **Tip:** Stereotypes about CSOs, the government and business are well know and they come from somewhere, but are not always true for all groups. Mercy Corps constantly finds people and groups defying stereotypes, such as the CSO that refuses a subgrant because it would make them work outside their mission, the local government representative that forgoes a salary in order to serve the public good or the business person who independently funds an effort to bring clean drinking water to a community. It is good to be aware of patterns when dealing with different sectors to inform strategy. It is also important to think about partners individually since they may defy stereotypes.

2.1. Civil Society Partnerships

Civil society is made up of formal and informal groups outside of the private (business) and public (government) sectors where people associate to advance common interests. Mercy Corps works to support CSOs, ability as major actors in creating *more secure, productive and just communities and societies* through being *participatory, accountable* and working in ways that promote *peaceful change*. These principles are reflected in our Vision for Change.

CSOs include national level non-governmental organizations lobbying for specific issues such as the environment, small business associations providing business development services to local entrepreneurs, community-based groups working on social welfare such as domestic violence in a neighborhood or village, parent-teacher associations, and even social clubs that increase a sense of “belonging” and can act as forums for discussion and cooperation. Networks of CSOs often form to join efforts across geographies or across issue areas in order to address society-wide issues through public awareness-raising, or form coalitions to advocate for action by others such as policy-makers.

⁵ Adapted from “The Partnering Toolbook: An essential guide to cross-sector partnering.” The Partnering Initiative and the International Business Leaders Forum. 2011. See [Section 4.2](#) for more information on resources.

Communities in which Mercy Corps works have often been disempowered for decades due to chronic poverty, bad governance, protracted conflict or instability. In these contexts civil society leaders and organizations have often been the direct target of oppression, the space for their free association and voice limited by laws or intimidation, or actively excluded from decision-making. In other contexts, where communities have recently experienced a major shock that overturned social and economic systems and people find themselves in an unfamiliar new reality, CSOs have to adapt to new realities, including different needs of members and communities and changed relationships with the public and private sectors as well as the international community.

Civil Society Organizations

Mercy Corps' most common civil society partners are CSOs, including groups such as national level non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for specific issues such as the environment, small private sector associations providing business development services to local entrepreneurs, community-based groups working on social welfare such as domestic violence in a neighborhood or village, professional associations, labor or trade unions, faith-based institutions, research groups and even social clubs that increase a sense of community belonging and can act as forums for discussion and cooperation.

Most CSOs focus on one or more of the following six functions, which are important to consider when choosing, working with and supporting CSO partners.

1. **Representation** – organizations which aggregate citizen voice, such as trade unions or political parties.
2. **Advocacy and technical inputs** – organizations which provide information and advice, and lobby decision-makers on particular issues, such as legal aid centers providing legal information and services to women to exercise their land rights, associations of people with disabilities, or parent-teacher associations.
3. **Capacity-building** – organizations that provide support to other CSOs, including funding for associations of micro-finance organizations, civil society support centers.
4. **Service-delivery** – organizations that implement development projects or provide services, such as a free health clinic or women's shelter.
5. **Social functions** – organizations that foster collective activities, such as recreational youth sports clubs.
6. **Social change** – demonstrations, oversight or “watch-dog” functions and other activities aimed to change the status quo, such as community policing committees, human rights groups or neighborhood watch groups.

Figure 2: Types of CSOs



A caution on changing power structures. Mercy Corps' focus on societies in transition means our teams are often working where social uprisings, conflict or other shocks have shifted power structures. In the emotion of support for social change, it is easy to choose local partners identified as being on the “right” side of a movement or issue. In post-conflict Kosovo, for example, many INGOs focused on Kosovar-Albanian partners without acknowledging that Albanians too committed atrocities during the conflict. As a result, Kosovar-Serbs were distrustful of INGOs which impacted reconciliation and reconstruction efforts for years. This case was true for Mercy Corps in the early years after the conflict, but in the past decade the balance has been prioritized. The caution is to consider the relationship map and changes in power among local actors and compare that with program or country objectives when choosing partners. As power holders and the degree of power different groups hold can change quickly, context analysis and open dialogue with partners is essential to “do no harm.”

Are small business cooperatives civil society or private sector partners? The short answer is that it depends. Often cooperatives function like other civil society groups if their objectives are for their operating context, such as advocating for workers rights or policy change that affects members of the cooperative. If their objectives are more for joint efforts that raise profit margins they might function more like a business or other individual private sector partner. Either way, understanding their objectives and how business cooperatives relate to other groups in the community is important for how Mercy Corps partners. The rise of social enterprise is another blending of civil society and business that can be market sustainable. Get clarity at the identifying and building stage of joint work and remember that groups' objectives can change – so continue to check in over the course of partnering.

Mercy Corps works in partnership with individual CSOs as well as with networks of CSOs (see [Section 2.4](#)). Civil society networks often form to join efforts across geographies or across issue areas in order to address society-wide challenges through public awareness-raising or coordinated action.

Informal and Traditional Civil Society

In addition to formally organized civil society, Mercy Corps also often works with informal or traditional civil society groups. These include small, unregistered, community-level groups – often called indigenous organizations – as well as social movements that can be community or national in focus and scope.

Idir groups in Ethiopia are an example of informal civil society. Across the country, women in rural villages and even urban neighborhoods form small groups to provide various kinds of social-economic support for their members, such as credit or informal insurance coverage that can be used for children's school fees or a family member's funeral expenses. The leadership and purpose of each *idir* is selected by members themselves – some with written rules and procedures and others with oral agreements – so it is only the concept of *idir* that is common across all groups. Mercy Corps has collaborated with such groups since they often provide a forum for members to discuss community-wide problems and opportunities, mobilize community labor and resources, and exchange information.



Photo: Jenny Bussey Vaughan/Mercy Corps, Ethiopia, 2010

Social Movements

Social movements are a type of group action in which individuals and/or organizations focused on a specific political or social issue gather to have influence. Workers' movements or human rights movements are examples. Social movements are a popular expression of political dissent and in a number of situations, such as the workers' movement in Egypt, have been involved in massive political changes. As in Egypt, such movements often utilize the Internet and other technology to mobilize people locally and raise global awareness of their causes. Social movements also often have close ties with, or evolve into, CSOs or political parties. With CSOs, there can be common cause such as women's rights, or aligned interests in the case of general human rights, where CSOs focused on women's rights, disability rights and workers' rights are joined to demand laws that protect fair hiring practices. If no CSOs are directly addressing the specific issues of the movement, movements can transform into CSOs themselves, keeping the mission of the movement alive while formalizing their approach. Similarly, movements that want to directly influence political decisions may choose to become official political parties.

Emerging Civil Society

Since many authoritarian governments believe civil society is a threat to their power, those countries in or emerging from years of authoritarian control present specific challenges to working with civil society partners. Civil society leaders face a steep learning curve to rapidly develop capable and representative organizations for sustainable representation of their constituencies, as well as partnership with new governments and the private sector to ensure reforms are in the public's interest and inclusively determined. Simultaneously, civil society has a major role in educating the general population about the rights, responsibilities and opportunities that come with more open governance. This process cannot be manufactured by external actors, but rather supported to grow authentically. As such, the key roles of the international community at this critical juncture are to provide solidarity, lessons from regional and global transitions and access to information and expertise that supports the local leadership and influence of CSOs, social movements and other forms of citizen

expression and adjust to evolving needs in a rapidly changing environment - through skills transfers that they prioritize, funding to support their ideas and fostering innovation.

For example, in Tunisia, the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 ousted a 30-year dictator whose government had enforced harsh registration processes and oversight that severely restricted space and security for formal civil society. One of the early acts of the transitional government was to repeal these laws, opening the way for hundreds of CSOs to register. Programming in this fluid environment requires flexibility, ongoing analysis and learning with partners to inform necessary adjustments and taking advantage of new opportunities that emerge during the course of the program. It also requires support to partners' visions through tailored capacity strengthening, flexible grant making, technical assistance and support for independence and voice.

2.2. Local Government Partnerships

Collective responsibility is what good governance and effective governments are about. Effective partnerships are the basis for collective responsibility. Partners can collaborate to solve problems, exchange resources and services, and coordinate information. Relationships among partners can be short-term for time-bound projects or long-term for collaboration on broad issues of mutual interest. If the mutual interest is a just and productive community then the interplay of government and citizens' roles and responsibilities is needed.

Good governance relies on productive relationships between government and citizens, and amongst citizen groups. Therefore, partnerships where parties share common interests are a natural way to achieve governance goals.

Governments from developing countries like Indonesia and Kenya have proven the value of partnership for good governance and sustained development. One of the major challenges for government initiated community projects in the past has been their follow through, as most infrastructure projects fall into disrepair and government schemes for skills development are discontinued. This is often due to lack of ownership/acceptance and context. Helping citizens, citizens' groups (both civil society and private sector) and government function as partners in these public sector initiatives is a step toward better ownership and the potential for sustainability.

Types of public sector collaboration include:

- **Public Sector Education/ Capacity Building** – Government officials often look to INGOs for training in technical areas such as market-chain development or positive deviance for health programming, or for training in more general topics for skills-building, such as developing monitoring and evaluation skills and approaches. In places like Afghanistan, Mercy Corps has helped local level government officials learn skills for participatory rural appraisal so they can plan and implement more inclusive and appropriate services.
- **Service Delivery** – Many national ministries work with local CSOs and INGOs for more effective service delivery. This is often the case in remote locations, working with underserved ethnic or other marginalized groups or in other cases where insufficient government funds are the major challenges. In Tajikistan, partners have provided outreach programs including adult education, health programs and agricultural extension classes; activities that were beyond the capacity of ministries to provide, but relevant to their mission.

- **Accountability Partners** – Civil society and business associations often act as watchdogs of government, providing positive feedback on community development projects undertaken by government contractors or drawing attention to mismanagement of funds or other resources. An example is the Tea Board of India, which partners with the Darjeeling Organic Ekta, a registered NGO, to monitor the inflow of illegal tea from across the border with Nepal. Government entities all over India partners with such CSOs to help advance the National Employment Guarantee Scheme on which many rely on for their livelihoods.



Photo: Jackie Lee/Mercy Corps, Pakistan, 2006

- **Policy Consultation** – Civil society and private sector groups are often in important positions to advise future policy or suggest how existing laws may be implemented. For instance, Mercy Corps supported researchers in Colombia studying land degradation to inform future agrarian policy.
- **Public Outreach and Communication** – Government at all levels – from local to national – often needs help getting messages out to the public. This might mean accessing certain hard-to-reach groups, or creating legitimacy. In Ethiopia, Mercy Corps has teamed up with the government's Council of Nationalities and the Civil Society Resource Center Association to use local mass media for peace education. Together, this partnership has developed a series of radio programs that address diverse issues, including traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and instances of successful cooperation.



Tip: Mercy Corps' [Guide to Good Governance Programming](#) includes tools, case studies and more detailed descriptions of public sector partners Mercy Corps works with at the local, sub-national and national level.

2.3. Private Sector Partners

Private sector partnerships are influenced by business incentives. They identify and foster transparent, fair and effective business models. On the national and international level, engaging such business partners is particularly important with the changing trends of corporate philanthropy, social enterprise consciousness and growing corporate social responsibility. On the local level Mercy Corps believes that active and productive engagement with the private sector is a crucial element of market-driven solutions to complex relief and development problems.

In partnering with the private sector, the following characteristics are important to consider:

- **Balance:** We recognize the need to strike a balance between the development objectives of Mercy Corps and the commercial objectives of our business partners. Environmental protection versus larger profit margins is a common example, but creative partnerships find ways to accomplish one without compromising the other.
- **Incentives:** All partners require incentives to engage in development efforts; those incentives may differ for private sector actors.
- **Flexibility:** The private sector is necessarily dynamic, which enables it to respond to market shifts and opportunities. Our programming and structure requires maximum flexibility – as allowed by our project-based donor framework - to respond and evolve appropriately to that environment
- **Scalability/replicability:** We recognize that scalable programs are indispensable for most private sector engagements. This requires attention to efficiency, standardization, a smart use of subsidies, and a sustainability plan that does not usually include Mercy Corps in a direct delivery role.

Engaging the private sector helps programs be more sustainable and achieve greater scale, and brings leverage to our efforts.

- **Sustainability** is supported from the private sector's fundamental motivation towards profitability. If a partnership with other local partners or Mercy Corps offers an opportunity to achieve adequate profit or return on investment (ROI), private sector partners will be more likely to invest in it. ROI is not only financial profit but also includes meeting organizational and social objectives, enhancing the business' reputation.
- **Scale** can come from the financial resources the private sector can access. That scale can happen geographically with a program reaching beyond the intended community or region, or manifest as a scope expansion into complementary products or services. Scale is rarely achieved on the motivation of social responsibility only, but rather when the core business is engaged via shared value.
- **Leverage** happens when the private sector absorbs work or financial responsibility for activities that Mercy Corps would otherwise absorb. Another example is when the private sector contributes extra resources to a project that would not normally be available – this can be either in-kind resources like construction materials or services such as mobile phone plans. This is especially useful in the short term and directly supports us achieving scale we otherwise would not achieve.
- **Relationships:** Personal and professional relationships have an important role in engagement with the private sector and the best of those relationships take thoughtful effort and extended time to develop.
- **Collaboration:** Strong, effective collaboration between private businesses, the public sector, other civil society groups and Mercy Corps are fundamental to successful private sector engagements, and we understand the importance of collaboration to create win-win outcomes. A common end to partnerships with a business is caused by a change in ownership, leadership or point person within the business partner. This risk can be lessened greatly by creating shared value through collaboration. It can also be improved by creating redundancy in the relationship, for example, relying on more than one person or unit within the partner business. This is especially true of larger corporation partners.

Who Are Our Private Sector Partners?

There are two general categories of private sector entities that Mercy Corps partners with programmatically: individual private businesses or business groups. Individual private businesses include startup businesses seeking to get established or expand through their Mercy Corps engagement, and well-established businesses that are already functioning in the market. They may range in size and scale from micro-enterprises and small-to-medium enterprises (MSMEs), to local businesses and national companies, to multi-national corporations. Some of these businesses may also be double-bottom-line social enterprises combining commercial objectives with a social mission, while others are focused more on the potential for profitability and ROI.

An important sub-set of private businesses are those founded directly by Mercy Corps. Typically this happens when there is a gap in the market and an adequate private sector partner is not available. In that situation we may establish a new private business with a short-term objective of supporting our program and demonstrating the commercial viability of that business. Longerterm, our objective is to transfer ownership to a fully independent private partner, creating an autonomous locally registered business that will continue to support our pro-poor social goals.

Private sector partners are engaged in a range of areas that support our programming.

- MFIs provide credit and other financial services. An example of this is the Cardamom and Ginger (CaGi) program in eastern Nepal, where Mercy Corps partnered with a micro-finance institution to provide small loans for farmers to invest in and grow their businesses.
- Input providers supply materials that are used by our beneficiaries in agriculture and manufacturing enterprises, such as in the CaGi program where we partnered with private seed nurseries and agro-vet agents to provide their services.
- Information agents study and observe the market, gathering relevant data, and distribution agents ensure that information is available to the poor in a timely manner. In Afghanistan, this was done as part of the

Strengthening Market Chains for Afghan Raisins and Pomegranates program, which provided to farmers and traders reliable market price information on 25 commodities and agricultural inputs in 11 markets.

- Traders and wholesalers facilitate the connections between farmers and producers and the markets they serve, such as in our IMARE program in Guatemala, where wholesalers enable local farmers to sell their output at Wal-Mart stores in that country.
- Business Development Suppliers (BDS) provide technical training and support to startup and small businesses, and technical consultants provide specialized expertise and training in agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, etc. This is the core element of our Market Alliances Against Poverty in the Samtkse-Javakheti Region of Georgia project where we partner with training & extension providers to improve foodsafety and hygiene in the dairy and meat sector.



Photo: Ken deLaski for Mercy Corps, Guatemala, 2011

Business groups include cooperatives and business/trade association. A co-op is a business organization owned and operated by a group of individuals for their mutual benefit, often a group of farmers or trades people who have joined together to more effectively access or leverage their position in a market. A business/trade association is a membership organization that is typically supported by the business community and focused on collaboration between private firms in such areas as policy development, public relations, advertising, and product standardization.

 **Tip:** How we work with private sector partners is often dependent on how they are organized and registered, since this may limit what the group is capable of and legally permitted to do. It also has to do with how Mercy Corps is organized and registered; a major consideration in places like India, Indonesia and Sudan.

Developing Partnerships With the Private Sector

How Mercy Corps partners with the private sector is highly dependent upon the context and the time frame of the engagement. We have observed that the best program-level private sector partnerships are ones in which we have strong relationships with key private sector stakeholders, a deep understanding of the private sector in the community we are working, and a thorough understanding of how the private sector environment in that context fits with our strategic guidelines and annual plans. That understanding can take extended time to develop, so if the engagement is in preparation for future program opportunities, we may initially engage at a more informational and informal level (see box). However, if the partnership is in response to a specific call for proposals, then a deadline may dictate how we approach the partnership. In that situation, there is still great value and a need to map the private sector, assess the nexus between our strategic direction and private sector engagement programs, and consider our institutional program experience in this area; however those activities may be abbreviated.

Stages of engagement with potential private sector partners:

1. Understand the context and pre-positioning: In our private sector engagement program work, we have observed a benefit when we understand and map the private sector as it relates to the geographic, political and social environment, before engaging in a material way with that sector. Included in this is building relationships with key private sector actors, and investigating opportunities that may offer promise for future programming.
2. Consider how Mercy Corps' current Strategic Framework, the specific country goals and current programming, and our economic development principles/strategy complement each other.
3. Evaluate program strategies, the Mercy Corps role, and common characteristics in private sector engagement programs. Connecting the strategic perspective acquired above, and the types of program strategies, the

role Mercy Corps has played in past private sector engagement implementations, and some characteristics common to these engagements, fills out the internal understanding of the Mercy Corps private sector engagement experience.

4. Evaluate potential private sector partners and their motivation to engage. The next step is to understand which private businesses might be appropriate for a particular program, why a business is engaging with Mercy Corps and what are its motivations and interests for that engagement. Also determine when to engage with a multi-national corporation and when to engage with a local business.
5. Reach out to the private sector and start talking/engaging/designing a program. This last step may be more complex than anticipated and may take longer than expected, particularly if a multi-national is involved.

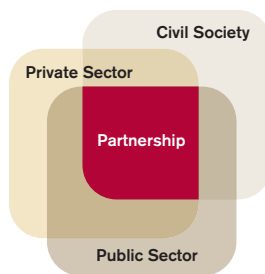
This section was drawn from Mercy Corps' Private Sector Engagement Toolkit, which supports our economic development strategy; this strategy focuses on operationalizing our Vision for Change through community-led, market-driven programs.



Tip: If the private sector partner you are engaging with is part of a multi-national corporation or foundation, you may want to inform Mercy Corps' HQ communications team. You can do this by sending email to AllCommunicationsTeam@mercy Corps.org. The team can provide you with press release template to announce the partnership locally, as well as general messaging to use when speaking with local media.

2.4. Cross-sector Partnerships

Figure 3: Cross-Sector Collaboration



Mercy Corps' integrated programming approach often means we are working in cross-sector partnerships with groups from civil society, the private and/or public sector in one program or as part of a country portfolio of programs. Cross-sector partnering acknowledges that groups in each sector have different strengths, interests and ways of working, yet there are often shared goals that can only be achieved by working together. This kind of collaboration helps to prevent activities being done in isolation, which can create unnecessary competition or duplication of efforts that wastes resources. It also helps to prevent groups blaming each other for situations that no one can be expected to solve on their own, such as lack of development progress after an emergency.

Benefits of cross-sector partnerships include:⁶

- Innovative approaches and integrated solutions to complex challenges.
- A range of mechanisms for each sector to share and to own specific competencies and capacities in order to achieve both common and complementary goals, and to transfer technical and partners' capacity building.
- Access to more resources by drawing on the full range of technical, human, knowledge, physical and financial resources found within all sectors.
- Increased social capital through dynamic new networks and relationships offering each sector better channels of engagement with the wider community and greater capacity for influencing policies and decisions.
- Greater understanding of the value of each sector – its attributes and drivers – thereby building a more integrated, stable society.
- Appropriateness, legitimacy and buy-in, leading to greater likelihood of sustainable outcomes.
- Spin-off activities for expanded opportunities and impact.
- Built-in accountability that comes from the engagement between sectors and the further development of relationships between actors; if actions are implemented by multiple partner types, the actions are more likely to be transparent and the actors are more likely to insist on or enforce some level of accountability

These benefits are most accessible when partners have strong capacity in their own right, are committed to working together and ready to share their respective resources and power. As Mercy Corps' Mongolia team discusses in its cross-sector work (box on next page) it is essential to have ongoing capacity building for all parties throughout the partnership, and also to continually nurture the process of working together.

⁶ Adapted from "The Partnering Toolbook: An essential guide to cross-sector partnering." The Partnering Initiative and the International Business Leaders Forum. 2011.

Cross-Sector Partnerships in Practice: Mongolia

Over the last five years the Mercy Corps Mongolia team has been implementing a cross-sector approach they call the “Tripartite Partnership Methodology” in civil society and economic development projects. This approach brings together civil society, private sector and government groups in dialogue about, and action for, local development issues. From an initial idea in one province, the approach has been adopted across the country and is showing impact on a wide range of issues.



Photo: Thatcher Cook for Mercy Corps, Mongolia, 2008

Although mechanisms for citizens participation in rural Mongolia existed previously in the form of Citizens' Khural, (local parliaments), many people felt the process was too politicized to represent citizens' voices. A group of CSOs took the initiative to create an informal network to research, represent and advocate on the issues that were of most concern to local citizens. With Mercy Corps' support, the group created the Triangle newsletter, which included opinions of community residents and educated the public about government spending and ways to participate in governance processes. In 2007, Mercy Corps and the CSO network proposed to the provincial government that they formalize the process of dialogue through creation of the Tripartite Partnership Forum to gather representatives of civil society, private sector and government to meet yearly on priority issues.

Public officials did not have a very welcoming attitude at the beginning. However, they quickly found the process benefited them by facilitating more effective use of limited resources, encouraging economic development and a way to work more effectively with civil society. The Forum began meeting many times a year and the process of collaboration built deep trust and an awareness of opportunities. For example, in 2010 the Uvurkhangaigai government, with the help of the Forum, identified the need to evaluate the quality of health service, assess the impact of social welfare grants, and understand the activities of independent mass media. Local CSOs were chosen to do the work and the government fully funded their research. The good and services procurements in health and education sectors grew from just two in 2007 to 57 in 2011 and are due to grow thanks to a new procurement law.

The Tripartite Partnership methodology has evolved and became part of local development planning in over 18 of Mongolia's 21 provinces, even where Mercy Corps is not involved. Public discussion and action has happened on a range of issues, such as: improving conditions for small businesses, improving health services based on customer views, monitoring the use of education budgets, introducing competitive procurement of hospital uniforms, and improving the quality of social welfare services for vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities.

For local business partners, the Tripartite Partnership method has led to guidelines for competitive procurement of government goods, and outsourcing of services by local government and CSOs. As a result, businesses have the opportunity to compete in transparent and fair ways for public contracts, such as with local schools and health clinics. Accordingly, their participation in and contribution to the local economy increased, as did company sales and locally created jobs.

In a Tripartite Partnership model, it is the role of all parties to implement commitments they make jointly, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of the partnership. In this way the Tripartite model promotes good governance, shared responsibility for development, and the healthy interaction among government, business and civil society based on the principles of accountability, participation, and peaceful change.

2.5. Partnership in Emergencies

Is it possible to take a partnership approach in rapid-onset emergencies like floods or earthquakes? Coordination is often chaotic, communication is challenging and resources are limited. At the same time, using resources and skills efficiently is all the more critical in emergencies, and collaboration can maximize impact. Emergencies are also an opportunity for local partners to lead in new ways.⁷

Rapid-onset emergencies affect existing relationships between Mercy Corps and local partners, and new relationships are created. Understandably, it is much easier to work with partners in contexts where Mercy Corps has been active before the emergency hits: teams are familiar with the context and the groups are well positioned to respond. This may include existing partners where there is already a level of trust and knowledge of each other, systems that makes it possible to quickly shift roles, as in the Pakistan example.

Pakistan: Leveraging Existing Partnerships

Mercy Corps began work in Pakistan in 1986, responding to the Afghan refugee crisis in Balochistan province. Long-term development activities with diverse government and civil society partners have often been interrupted by emergencies. In late July 2010, the worst monsoon-related floods in living memory hit the country, creating urgent needs for health care, clean water and sanitation. Existing partners were well placed to take on new roles. In the Swat Valley Mercy Corps' established partnership agreements, including joint management structures, and facilitated the quick creation of new MOUs responsive to the changed environment. With coordination support from Mercy Corps, the Department of Health was able to bring in trained staff and medication for health facilities in flood-affected areas. In Sindh and Balochistan provinces, civil society partners switched from organizing health fairs that provide communities with access to nutrition information and products to conducting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives in displacement camps and establishing mobile health units. National and international staff agreed that this speedy transition would not have been possible without a large core group of program staff with expertise in community mobilization and experience working effectively with local partners. For example, staff were able to identify the new skills that partners would need for WASH projects, such as procurement and teaching about hand washing, as well as the mobilization skills partners were familiar with in order to design training that built on partners' existing knowledge base. This accelerated learning and increased their confidence in taking on new activities.



Photo: Reuters/Adrees Latif/courtesy www.alertnet.org, Pakistan, 2010

It may be important to develop new partners if, for example, teams are working only at the local level. The information sharing and networks that local, district/governorate and central level groups bring to bear can help make our response faster and more appropriate, and can help us anticipate secondary issues after emergencies, such as disease outbreaks.

Too often, though, existing partnerships are put on hold as INGOs organize new, separate relief efforts and shift to coordination with other international actors. Local partners say that this is confusing and feels dismissive because it is regularly done without consultation or sufficient explanation. It also puts partners in a precarious position, not knowing the future of their relationship with INGOs at a very uncertain time in their country. In this way we risk compromising the partnership principles of equality and transparency.

- ◆ At a minimum, we owe partners an explanation of our choices in an emergency.

⁷ Adapted from "Partnerships in rapid-onset emergencies: insights from Pakistan and Haiti." Ruth Allen (Mercy Corps), *Humanitarian Exchange*, April 2011.. <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=3214>

- ◆ What's preferable is to discuss how the partnership could be adjusted to collaborate in the response.
- ◆ Best of all, programs operating in emergency-prone areas will have planned ahead. Meet as partners to understand strengths, skills, knowledge and interests if a disaster occurs. What would each group's role(s) be? What capacity building can happen in anticipation? Can a provisional MOU or clause in the overall program MOU address changes in the partnership if a disaster strikes?

Other partnership lessons apply in cases where Mercy Corps is responding to an emergency where we have not previously worked, such as Haiti. One is the importance of rapid actor and potential partner mapping to inform partnerships. Often there are a small number of prominent CSOs or obvious businesses equipped to play a major role in emergency response, but they quickly become overwhelmed by the number of partnership requests from INGOs and are given funds far beyond their capacity to manage. At the same time, there may be many more groups capable of playing important roles. Actor mapping can help teams new to the context find a programming niche that fits with their expertise. Mercy Corps tapped into this potential to help address the psychosocial needs of Haitian children in the 2010 earthquake response, choosing to work with over 120 small organizations – churches, schools and youth groups – instead of one large partner. Other partnering lessons from Mercy Corps' response in Haiti are in the box.

Haiti: Forging New Partnerships

In the weeks immediately following the January 2010 earthquake, Mercy Corps and many INGOs collaborated with informal community-based groups that emerged out of the crisis, such as IDP camp committees. For Mercy Corps, the goal with these and other temporary groups was to help them act as a points of contact for coordination with the UN, INGOs and the government on relief programming such as cash-for-work, but not to incentivize further formalization, which might work against the reintegration goals of communities themselves. Local government partners were also essential, in part because of the damage the earthquake inflicted on the central government. Because of massive displacement from Port-au-Prince, mayors offices of surrounding communities and *mairies* (neighborhood mayors) became key relief/recovery decision-makers. In towns like Tabarre, Mercy Corps partnered with mayors to identify the most vulnerable families and jointly operate and monitor aid distributions from public facilities. Communities commented that seeing government leadership working with INGOs on public services helped restore their confidence in local officials.



Photo: Joy Portella/Mercy Corps, Haiti, 2010

New contexts also offer opportunities to test new types of partnerships. Aware of the massive development challenges facing Haiti before the earthquake, Mercy Corps' early goal was to shift from relief and recovery programming to initiatives specifically aimed at addressing poverty. Not having an existing portfolio of programs gave us the flexibility to design programs and create partnerships that took both the pre- and post-earthquake context into account. One example is the partnership between Mercy Corps, Haiti's second-largest mobile phone operator, Voilà, and Unibank, a leading Haitian bank 'mobile wallets' to store savings and work like a debit card. When the earthquake struck, few people had bank accounts but 85% had access to a mobile phone so this was a life-saving way for people to pay for their needs.

Special Considerations with Partners in Emergencies

- **Securing Resources** – Designing programs and negotiating funding is one of the most time-consuming aspects of humanitarian response and something that local partners are often less well-equipped to manage because they have less experience with funding mechanisms and often do not have prior relationships with donors. By enabling local partners to fully lead program implementation, Mercy Corps can create opportunities for local partners to gain first-hand experience of financial management in emergency programs, including accountability, operational planning and budgeting.
- **Visibility** – Just as for INGOs, emergencies are a key moment for local groups to demonstrate legitimacy to communities, to donors and other partners. Given many local partners' long-term interests in taking full leadership for local development, visibility needs and planning should be part of capacity-building approaches well before emergencies. Consider ways to help partners be visible: in the media, presenting assessment findings to donors, or updating communities about efforts taken.
- **Cluster System** – Mercy Corps is often part of the UN cluster system and can influence whether and how national partners are involved. Their direct participation in clusters such as Health or WASH gives international responders critical local information for decision-making, and adds their skills to the collective capacity to respond.
- **Commitment to Learning** – Because learning is often thought of as something done at the end of a program or when there is time to reflect, it is rarely at the forefront of planning during emergencies. However, learning is one of the most consistent expectations of local partners, in emergencies and otherwise. Particularly with new partners and those that require significant capacity support, or when working among sensitive groups, such as in conflict situations, creating a culture of continuous, intentional learning is a basic part of a 'do no harm' approach. Establishing an expectation among partners that coordination will be results-oriented instead of purely operational is a first step and should include clarity about data collection and reporting expectations. It is equally important for Mercy Corps teams to get feedback from partners about their own performance. Regular and frequent feedback can help keep program on track or enable quick realignment, identify new opportunities and keep us accountable to beneficiaries.

2.6. Networks and Coalitions

In addition to working with individual groups, Mercy Corps often forms partnerships with networks and coalitions. The Principles of Partnership still apply, though the dynamics of collaboration can be different since networks and coalitions involve the common interests of several groups as well as their individual interests. The reasons to partner with networks or coalitions can include: wider geographic reach, an established or potential advocacy platform, public outreach capacity and/or the ability to mobilize large numbers of people.

Networks – Loosely-organized groups of organizations that share values and ideologies, and function primarily on the basis of information exchange. More organized networks, often called alliances, share specific common concerns, synchronize efforts and resources, and have a well-defined understanding about how they will work together. Examples are:

- Women's organizations and gender sensitive politicians.
- Umbrella organization at the national level to coordinate activities of network members and manage communication with relevant government bodies.
- Remote communication or cross-visits and other exchanges among Mercy Corps team members and local partners in other countries to learn their approaches to urban governance.

Coalitions – Temporary alliances or group partnerships that pursue a common purpose or engage in joint activities. Coalition-building is the process by which parties (individuals, organizations or nations) come together to collaborate. Through forming coalitions with other groups of similar values, interests and goals, members can share resources and act more powerfully together. When individual groups join a coalition, they often require new skills, attitudes and behaviors to face the demands of coordination. Where coalition members acquire these skills, they achieve a critical step in securing good governance.

Building a successful network or coalition involves a series of stages. The early steps involve processes where partners identify common goals and recognize compatible interests. Sometimes this happens naturally. On other occasions, those pushing for network-formation must persuade potential members that forming a network or coalition will be to their benefit. Members of networks and coalitions must then understand the opportunities they face to influence and change their environment.

Networks and coalitions can help:

- Achieve objectives that individual organizations could accomplish not on their own.
- Create a platform for joint action or advocacy.
- Attract other networks and/or funding.
- Learn collectively from good practices and unsuccessful tactics.
- Stay informed on relevant or emerging issues in other areas so that members can respond locally.

Donors as Partners? Yes!

Donors, INGOs and local partners have different power and resources, though often shared relief and development goals. Just as INGOs or local partners may need funding to operate, donors need others to implement. Donors often also lack access to communities due to security restrictions or limited personnel, so they depend on INGOs and local partners for information in order to make funding choices. For example, when a 2010 coup erupted in Kyrgyzstan with little warning, USAID and other donors reached out to implementing organizations – both international and local – to receive status updates about the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Similarly with policy, donors often collaborate with INGO and local partners on national reforms in aid recipient countries or work in separate but complementary ways to change laws and political attention in donor countries. This is a particular role for networks and coalitions of local partners. When thinking about partnership, don't forget to factor in the interests and potential roles of donors.



Photo: Fitria Rinawati/Mercy Corps, Indonesia, 2011

2.7. Global Partnerships

Mercy Corps' Strategic Roadmap includes our belief in the power of global and local partnerships.

We recognize that a new sense of global ownership and power sharing must occur if we are to meet the humanitarian and development challenges of our times. This clearly includes the so-called BRIC countries⁸ and the emerging Middle East and Gulf powers. The rise of China

*and India as major global players will profoundly impact the state of the world... Mercy Corps' challenge is to develop strategies that position us for the longterm as key players and in strong partnership in select countries... Change must come from within communities, and we must do all we can to nurture that process through our programs. But the government policies, corporate practices and consumer behavior of economically stable countries can profoundly help – or hurt – the people living in the world's most fragile states. Aid alone is not enough; we must expand the tool kit to include trade, private investment, human rights and new international standards for transparency and accountability in government and business. This will only happen if we, working with others, build an educated cadre of people who care about these issues and press for change. **Indeed the future success of relief and development will rely increasingly on partnership and network models that are more effective and more global than those in the past.***⁹

Global partners can include multi-national corporations, such as Tazo Tea, ITT or Chevron; collaboration with national governments for program opportunities or resources; and strategic alliances with other INGOs for deepening impact in key areas of work. The types of value such collaborations add include: a) capacity and expertise that complements our own capacity or reach, b) the opportunity to jointly develop ideas and c) access to new resources.

What's the link between local and global partnership? Local partnerships can introduce us to regional or global connections with influential thinkers, program partners, or donors. Such partners provide practical experience and local knowledge to 'ground-truth' ideas developed with global partners, considering established approaches that could be applied, adapted or should be rejected because of the culture, political context or environmental conditions in their community or country. We can also work with local affiliates of global groups as partners to pilot ideas we hope to take to more locations or countries. For their part, global partnerships give us access to big ideas, present models for scaling up initiatives, and open doors to new funding sources for us and for local partners.

“To fulfill our mission, to create the most impact or indeed simply to be relevant we must find points of confluence between the flows of aid and the flows of trade within the next five years. This is explicit in our Vision for Change, must be achieved pragmatically but without sacrifice to our core principals of our mission”.

– Mercy Corps CEO, Neal Keny-Guyer

“Our times demand a new definition of leadership – global leadership. They demand a new constellation of international cooperation - governments, civil society and the private sector, working together for a collective global good.”

– Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a speech at the World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland, 2009



Tip: When choosing local partners, learn about their larger networks. They may have previously worked with multi-national corporations, or have personal or other connections with government entities or membership in regional civil society forums that gives them useful influence, access or insights. Often local partners are also affiliates of global entities. Understanding local partners' relationships is an important step in context analysis and should be part of our ongoing conversation with prospective partners. This information should also be shared with relevant HQ teams in order to ensure coordination, avoid duplicating relationship building efforts, and optimize opportunities for collaboration on local and global levels.

⁸ Brazil, Russia, India and China.

⁹ Mercy Corps' "Strategic Roadmap: Fiscal Year 2012".

Chapter 3. Working with Local Partners

3.1. Framework for Partnering

Mercy Corps engages in a spectrum of partnerships that fall into four categories, although each relationship may include more than one type of partnership. Though these categories were originally designed primarily for CSO partnerships, they are applicable to government and business partnerships too.

1. **Complementary partnerships** – Mercy Corps and local partners play different roles to accomplish various aspects of a shared program or initiative.
2. **Convergent partnerships** – complementary partners, with added activities beyond the scope of the program (such as capacity building) complementary partners may also want to plan additional activities (not required for a program) that meet their respective capacity building, networking or other goals since these are often best be accomplished by learning from/working with existing partners.
3. **Creation** – establishing a new local partner group in the case that no partner is working on an issue or in an area. Mercy Corps' strong preference is to help existing groups expand their capacity or reach instead of creating new entities, except to meet local interest in establishing a network or association.
4. **Cooperation or consortium partnerships** – Mercy Corps and local partners share leadership, implementation and representation activities, and may choose to jointly pursue new business or grant funding (as co-implementers or with the appropriate group as the lead agency).

While each partnership is unique, there is a common process to how we work with most local partners and in all categories above and across civil society, the public and private sectors. The Partnering Framework in Figure 3 on the following page captures the typical stages – each is important for balanced partnerships that achieve objectives, though the exact sequence can vary. This chapter goes into more detail about activities within each stage.



Photo: Thatcher Cook for Mercy Corps, India, 2007

Figure 3: Partnering Framework

Local Partnerships Framework



Key: Using the Partnerships Framework

Phases: Each of the four phases, from identifying partners through sustaining outcomes, is important for strong partnerships, though the exact sequence can vary. In Phase 4, partners decide whether the partnership has come to an end or if they want to continue working together in the same or new ways, in which case the cycle restarts.

Context Analysis: Understanding the environment in which partnerships are formed and function is critical at every phase of collaboration. The context will evolve over time and can significantly affect partners' interests, the ability to work together or open new opportunities.

Cross-Sector Partnership: Mercy Corps' Vision for Change emphasizes partnership with the private, public and civil society sectors, as well as collaboration across these sectors in order to meet the complex needs of communities. Mission Metrics Theme 8 measures "government, civil society, informed citizens and private sectors successfully interacting together."

3.2. When to Work in Partnership

When weighing partnering as an option, it is important to take an honest look at whether or not the right pieces are in place to make collaborations successful.

Questions to ask about the value of the partnership:

- Does the partnership clearly contribute to achieving Mercy Corps' mission, strategic interests and country goals?
- Can the benefits expected through partnering be achieved in other ways?
- Do the benefits outweigh the costs of partnering (transactional costs such as staff time)?
- What will Mercy Corps do if we do not form a partnership with the potential group?

Questions to ask about Mercy Corps:

- Do we have clear understanding of a) what we want to get out of the partnership, both outcomes and outputs? and b) what we are prepared to put into it?
- Is there sufficient internal buy-in, commitment and understanding?
- Do we have the right human and financial resources, including:
 - A named person responsible for the partnership?
 - A second named person with sufficient knowledge for back-up if necessary?
 - Sufficient M&E staffing/expertise to manage information and M&E responsibilities, and/or build capacity?
 - Sufficient resource to manage and capacity build around finance and compliance?
 - Handover plan for changing personnel within Mercy Corps?
 - Sufficient partnering skills or can we build them in time?
- Is there a communication plan in place and functioning well to keep Mercy Corps informed about the partnership?
- How are we maximizing connections with other people and programs in Mercy Corps?
- Is there relevant management oversight so the partnership is mainstreamed?
- Do we have sufficient financial resources?
- Have we explored assumptions being made and possible risks?
- Do we have clear understanding of other partners' interests, priorities and experience?



Photo: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps, Nepal, 2011

Table 2: Barriers to Partnering	
For all the benefits of partnering, there are a number of obstacles that teams encounter often, including those below.	
Source or Barrier	Examples
General Public	Prevailing attitude of skepticism Rigid attitude about specific sectors or partners Inflated expectations of what is possible
Negative Sector Characteristics (actual or perceived)	Public sector: bureaucratic, corrupt and inflexible Business sector: single-minded and competitive Civil Society: combative, unorganized and territorial
Personal Limitations of Individuals Leading the Partnership	Inadequate partnering skills or belief in partnering Restricted internal/external authority Too narrowly focused role
Organizational Limitations of Partners	Conflicting priorities Competiveness within their sector Intolerance of other sectors
Program Requirements	Situations requiring urgent action, such as a disaster Inflexible schedule identified by donor Highly specific results or outcomes required
Wider External Constraints	Local social, political, economic climate Scale of challenges and speed of change Inability to access external resources

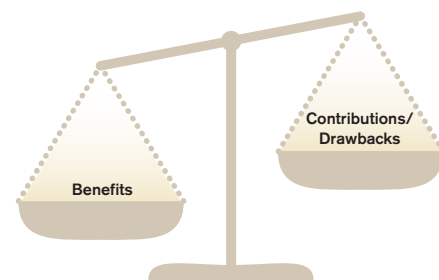
More broadly, factors like power imbalances, hidden agendas and a win-lose mentality can inhibit partnering. Understanding these issues and reframing them can allow you to still take a partnership approach, avoiding common problems, and meeting the three overarching principles of partnership from [Chapter 1](#).


- **Power imbalances** – There are different types of power and different leverage each partner brings to a collaboration. Acknowledging this among partners fosters respect and can help create equity.
- **Hidden agendas** – The fewer hidden motivations partners have, the more power the collective group has to minimize problems and maximize their potential. Circumstances and interests change; arrange regular check-ins among partners to ensure transparency and trust.
- **Win-lose mentality** – Balance is not only what a group puts into the partnership or what it risks by being involved, but what the group gets out of it, too. So if all parties enter a partnership with the goal of mutual benefit, individual and collective gains are more likely to be sustained.

When NOT to Partner

There are times when partnering is not the right approach for a number of reasons. Such circumstances may include:

- When Mercy Corps can not find a partner able to deliver equitably and honor other principles of partnership;
- When specific standards are required, such as engineering codes that necessitate licensed experts that do not exist in the country;
- In emergency contexts where partners are not established before a rapid-onset crisis or do not have the capacity to change roles in an emergency¹⁰; or
- When the program activities or affiliation with Mercy Corps or our donors could put the partner at risk, such as in some conflict contexts.



 **Tip:** Good partnerships can take a lot of work. This can sometimes mean a greater focus on the partnership than on the program or the reason for partnering. Keep in mind that partnering is a means to accomplish relief and development goals, not an end in itself.

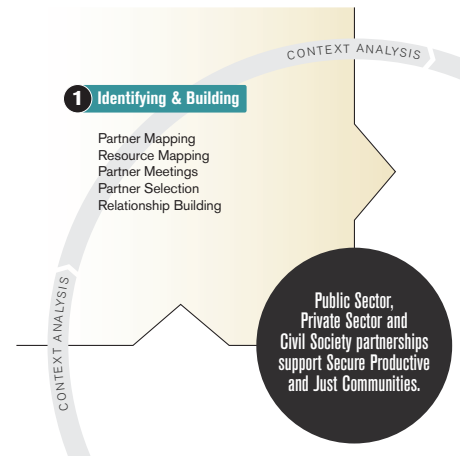
¹⁰ See [Section 2.5](#): Partnership in Emergencies for more discussion on this topic.

3.3. Identifying and Building Partnerships

This section focuses on Phase 1 of the Partnering Framework: local partner identification and selection.

It is no surprise that the strongest partnerships are those made up of the best matched set of partner groups. Knowing what the best matches will be requires careful consideration about what types of partners would add value and the range of options available - either through building on existing collaborations or developing new ones.


Partner Mapping – Discovering available partners can be done in a number of ways. Public sector entities have mandates and geographies that they are responsible for, so there is often one or a small number of relevant government partners to choose among. National or regional civil society networks or business associations, such as Chambers of Commerce, often have lists of organizations or businesses that can help you create an initial list of potential partners.



 **Tip:** See the [Stakeholder Mapping tool](#) to help analyze which potential partners might play a major role in a partnership.

To narrow the search, identify those groups whose actions are relevant to the project or other goals. Take time to gather as much information as possible about the best candidates, including reviewing reports and websites, visiting project sites and talking with others who have worked closely with them in order to get a full perspective. Learn about prospective partners by asking:

- What are their primary priorities and mission?
- Where do their financial resources come from?
- Have they successfully implemented any projects?
- Can they administer projects well? Do they have adequate systems and track record for managing finances and reporting?
- Do they have a system for managing information, or for monitoring and evaluating their work?
- Do they have the technical skills required?
- Would they value a relationship with Mercy Corps that was not based mainly on funding?
- Do they have the confidence of the communities they serve or wish to serve?
- Is their organizational culture similar or complementary to Mercy Corps'?
- Are there any hostilities among the partners' staff, local authorities or members, or with others externally?
- Do they have any political affiliations? Donors often require that we vet partners.¹¹
- What roles does the potential partner already play in the development process of its community or society?
- What role might Mercy Corps constructively play if partnering with the group?
- Do they effectively represent marginalized (e.g., gender, ethnic etc. groups)?

 **Tip:** Especially when considering partners for a new program that will rely on their expertise or assets, find ways to verify information they provide. For example, if they state that they have an office in a target city, talk with someone there to understand how that office functions so the program is realistically designed.

¹¹ See Annex B: Partnering Guidelines for Donor Governments.

Partner Meetings – In most circumstances, by the time our teams have identified between one and three prospective partner groups, it is time for us to arrange preliminary discussions with each one. These discussions can take place during the RFA process, and also at other times. The discussions should include people who would be directly involved with the partnership, as well as people in a decision-making role, if they are not the same people. Choosing to meet should not commit either group to working together; rather it offers both groups the opportunity to assess options at an early stage, to check information on the above questions and to decide whether or not to proceed.

Initial partner meetings are the right time to discuss any concerns, to clarify any potential conflicts of interest, to share Mercy Corps' approach to partnership and invite thoughts about partnership from the prospective local partner. They are also useful to assess the resources each group might contribute, based on a joint understanding of what resources will be needed for the program or other opportunity. This can be done through simple discussion if the requirements are straightforward, or in a workshop format where resources are brainstormed, organized and lead to program design ideas (see box). Many teams that at first thought this attention to process was unnecessary have found that it laid a good foundation of mutuality and gave them insight into partners that proved important to good working relationships.

What Can Each Partner Bring to the Partnership?

- Information
- Products
- Expertise
- Relationships
- People

Many local partners have worked with INGOs; others have not. If they lack a philosophy of partnering, or principles to guide collaboration, they may have had negative experiences. It can take time to convince groups of the rewards of working together, such as the professional development of key personnel, greater access to information or breadth of reach, improved efficiency or credibility and access to resources. One strategy that teams have taken is to demonstrate their approach by inviting potential partners to see current programs or jointly organizing an event. Ultimately, being consistent in how we work with partners will build their trust and help them see the potential rewards of working together.

Assessing Risks¹²

Mercy Corps, along with each potential partner, needs to assess the risks and rewards that may arise from working together. In fact, each partner needs to understand the potential risks and rewards of their fellow partners almost as deeply as their own if they are to really commit themselves to genuine collaboration and the principle of 'mutual benefit'. While it is common for each partner to believe the risks to their organization are greater than to any other, it is interesting to note that most categories of risk apply equally to all partners. Risks may arise in any of the following areas:

- **Reputation impact** – all organizations and institutions value their reputations and will rightly be concerned about whether that reputation can be damaged either by the fact of the partnership itself or by any fall-out in future, should the partnership fail.
- **Loss of autonomy** – working in collaboration inevitably means less independence for each organization in the areas of joint work.

- **Conflicts of interest** – whether at strategic or operational levels, partnership commitments can give rise to split loyalties and / or to feeling pushed to settle for uncomfortable compromise.
- **Drain on resources** – partnerships typically require a heavy front-end investment (especially of time), in advance of any return.
- **Implementation challenges** – once a partnership is established and resources procured, there will be a fresh set of commitment and other challenges for each partner organization as the partnership moves into project implementation.

Risk assessment is important and sometimes easily ignored in the enthusiasm for potential benefits from collaboration. Partners should encourage each other to undertake such assessments at an early stage of their collaboration and – wherever possible – find opportunities for addressing any concerns together.

¹² Adapted from "The Partnering Toolbook: An essential guide to cross-sector partnering." The Partnering Initiative and the International Business Leaders Forum. 2011.



Tip: INGOs often choose local partners that are well established, but that is not always an indication of their fit for the specific needs of a program or other reason to collaborate. Newer groups might be better placed to come up with innovative approaches, whereas more established groups may have better-established networks. Smaller groups may also be more motivated to invest heavily in the program and partnership, as they are less likely to be balancing multiple INGO partnerships and programs with limited resources. When selecting partners, think ahead about what skills and attributes are needed and select partners that have the right balance or multiple groups that play complementary roles.

Partner selection affects program implementation so much that this is a critical stage for proposal and program teams to put significant effort into. What we look for is a partner that is capable of helping the partnership achieve its objectives. Many times this is not fully the case when beginning a collaboration, but there should be sufficient potential – appropriate attributes, goal of improving capacity, belief in the partnership – and a commitment to helping each other reach this goal. [The Partner Decision Tree tool](#) is a step-by-step process for thinking about the factors that go into partner selection.

Interest-based Negotiation

Agreement among partners requires negotiation, not in the sense of bargaining over a business deal, but rather as an opportunity to understand the interests of all groups so that they can be met through the partnership in a complementary way. Partners going through this form of negotiation need to exercise considerable patience, tact and flexibility – but if just one individual demonstrates a willingness to do this, others will follow their lead. Mercy Corps has developed a number of tools and resources for interest-based negotiation. More resources on interest-based negotiation can be found on the Digital Library.

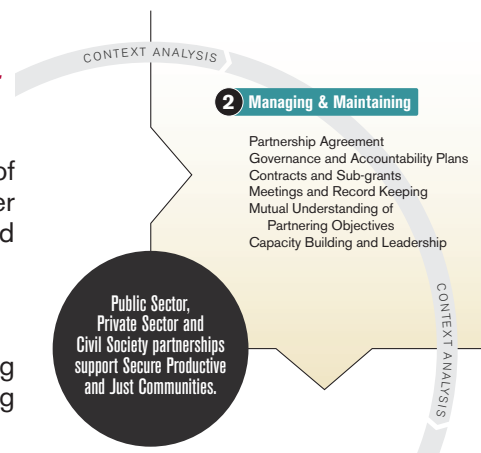
3.4. Managing and Maintaining Partnerships

This section focuses on Phase 2 of the Partnering Framework: getting local partners started and ongoing capacity building.

After partners are selected comes the phase of structuring the details of collaboration. This includes written partnership agreements and other formal processes, as well the equally important focus on trust-building and ensuring partners' mutual understanding of the partnership objectives.

Some best practices with partnership agreements include:

- Jointly develop MOUs or agreements so no partner feels something is being imposed. This process also helps develop the working relationship.
- Explicitly identify which principles of partnership are most important to the group and prioritize any others.
- Have agreements signed by country directors and heads of partner organizations to ensure ownership beyond individuals.
- Include objective criteria for measuring the partnership.
- Consider issues of confidentiality and exclusivity.



Exclusivity with Local Partners – Some donors require exclusive teaming agreements, and in competitive proposal processes where there are many highly qualified local partner candidates such agreements can help us stand out. Where possible, however, Mercy Corps leans toward non-exclusive agreements in order to not limit relevant local groups from getting to work on a funded program, whether we are on the winning bid or not. For more information on trends among major government donors, see Annex B. Mercy Corps may sometimes also be made to sign non-disclosure or non-compete agreements with corporate partners that must be assessed carefully.



Tip: Start small! Start early! Partnering does not have to begin with a major project or long-term commitment. Successful partnerships are often best developed over time, where all groups build capacity and trust through working together and gain confidence to take on more complex collaboration. Partnership agreements themselves can start by being broad and be made more specific over time as partners understand the dynamics and opportunities of working together.

North-South and South-South Partnerships

1. Who? – brief description of each partner, including legal status, overall mission and key people responsible for or involved with the partnership.
2. Why?
 - vision statement of the partnership
 - the main reasons for involvement of each partner
 - demonstration of shared interests
 - main objectives of the partnership (both those that are shared by all partners and those that are specific to each)
3. What?
 - context and target population of the partnership activities
 - resource commitments of each partner
 - roles and responsibilities of each partner
 - work plan or outline of activities, timelines and partnership indicators
4. When? – general timeframes
5. How?
 - Decision-making principles
 - Coordination and management arrangements
 - Financial arrangements, contracts to be developed, etc.
 - Analysis of risks and threats to the partners or partnership and how these might be mitigated
 - Measures to strengthen partner capacity to implement commitments
 - Procedures for transparency and on-going partner communications and information sharing
 - Timeframe and procedures for reviewing and revising the partnership
 - Indicators and strategy for monitoring the partnership performance against partners' objectives and shared objectives
 - Sustainability strategy for partnership outcomes
6. What if?
 - Grievance mechanisms to address differences
 - Process for individual partners to leave or join the partnership
 - Exit strategy for partnership as a whole
7. External Communications and Intellectual Property
 - Process for branding (using own, each others' or the partnership's) and other public profile of the partnership
 - Intellectual property and confidentiality agreement
 - Protocols for communicating with constituents and other stakeholders



Photo: Cassandra Nelson/Mercy Corps, Central African Republic, 2009



Tip: Partnering with networks or coalitions means working with an entity that represents multiple groups that have some common interests as well as separate interests. Partnering agreements should acknowledge this, including responsibility for communications and planning.

Governance and Accountability

Even at an early stage, partnerships will need to have governance structures in place to ensure that decision-making, management and development arrangements are appropriate and operate effectively. Partners often find themselves accountable to a number of different stakeholders, including:

- Partnership project beneficiaries;
- External (non-partner) donors, each with their own reporting requirements;
- Individual partner organizations, each with their own accountability and governance systems; and
- Each other as partnering colleagues.

It is likely that accountability is much more a driver of a partnership than is commonly recognized, and for this reason, governance and accountability procedures need to be agreed upon and put at the heart of partnering agreements. Partners may want to consider a range of options from completely informal arrangements (e.g., an ad hoc collection of individuals), to those that are highly formal (e.g., a new legally registered organization with independent governance and accountability procedures) before choosing the most appropriate for their needs. However informal a partnership, a partnering agreement is always useful to avoid later misunderstandings and conflict. Most partnerships start informally and grow increasingly formalized over time as programs become more complex and more resource intensive.

Contracts and Subgrants

Though not always, contracts are often a part of working with local partners. Whereas elements in partnering agreements such as timeframes and deliverables are broad, contracts and sub-grants are the place to get specific. They provide partners – Mercy Corps, other international and local partners – with legal commitment so that funding can be transferred between groups and hold parties accountable for specific, time-bound deliverables. Mercy Corps' [Subgrant Management Manual](#) is designed to assist teams in the process of providing program funds to local partners, including:

- Reviewing proposals from local partners;
- Preparing and awarding subgrant agreements to local partners;
- Policies and reporting procedures for local subgrantees;
- Financial management of local partner subgrants;
- Monitoring local partner subgrants; and
- Close-out for subgrants to local partners.

A number of contract examples and subgrant process tools are discussed in [Chapter 4](#).



Tip: A partnering agreement, in the form of an MOU or otherwise, is still a good idea even when a contract is to be executed. Partnering agreements make expectations explicit and create a framework for working together collaboratively, so they are different from and compliment contracts or funding agreements.

Managing Meetings

Especially in the early phases, partnerships rely on meetings – between individuals in key roles for partnering success, between Mercy Corps and each partner, with a consortium of partners, with partners and other stakeholders, etc. The number of meetings can easily become overwhelming and sometimes repetitive, making partners feel eager to get on with the 'real work'. Making meetings effective takes attention. Good meetings create a sense that everyone's input is valued and their constraints are respected. Focus on:

- Goals of the overall partnership and objectives of the specific meeting;
- Keeping all parties actively engaged throughout;
- Concluding all the items on the agenda;
- Allocating follow-up tasks and timetables for completion;

- Agreed decision-making procedures that will operate between meetings;
- Planning issues to be addressed at a future meeting;
- Summarizing all decisions taken; and
- Starting and ending on time.

At their best, meetings will also be able to operate as a partnership-building tool, through the way in which responsibilities for managing the meeting, such as chairing / facilitating / record-keeping, are shared. Other ways of making meetings meaningful and lively include:

- Allowing opportunities for social interaction;
- Brainstorming a new and topical issue;
- Inviting a very interesting guest speaker;
- Using monitoring or evaluation data in creative ways to examine progress, share learning, and ask relevant questions;
- Sharing a relevant experience – perhaps a visit to a project or holding the meeting at the premises of a new partner organization and seeing their work at firsthand; and
- Using the meeting for enhancing learning, by ending with a review of what worked well and what could be improved in the way the participants interacted.



Tip: If attendance at partner meetings begins to drop off, it should be taken as a sign that the meetings are no longer engaging or important enough for partners to make the effort to come. Check with partners about their reasons for not attending; don't assume to know. Jointly plan a different meeting schedule – less frequent, at a different time – or how to make meetings more effective for everyone.

Record Keeping

Keeping good records of meetings and of the partnership's progress is an art; that's why it is a bad idea to give the role of record-keeper to the least experienced or most junior person available. The great challenge is whether to record everything or simply the bare minimum. Each partnership will have to decide what it requires, but some basic considerations include:

- Deciding in advance who needs what kind of information and in what form and then adapting the information appropriately for different purposes;
- Reducing notes from meetings to a) decisions b) areas needing further discussion c) agreed action points;
- Keeping a lively record of the partnership's 'history' (including illustrations / photographs) so that newcomers to the partnership will be able to understand what has been achieved and how; and
- Making as many of the written records as openly available as possible so that the partnership is recognized as efficient and transparent.

Mutual Understanding of the Joint Work

Once partners are established, the partnership can start getting down to business. This is a significant transition from a focus on partnership-building to project development and implementation. Many groups are more comfortable with this phase because they like to get on with practical tasks and may have found the earlier phases frustrating. Others will be anxious that the partnership is not yet established enough to move from talk to action. It is important for Mercy Corps teams to be sensitive to these possibilities and that different partners may feel differently.

As with any program approach, developing the details and a clear action plan is important to give a framework and milestones that all can agree on. Many teams find that successful partnerships are those that are highly task-focused, where all partners are actively engaged in delivering tangible and practical results. Working together to understand the joint work to be done can include:

- Jointly assess the needs of the target population;
- Work together to design a project that meets the needs and enables the community to meet its own needs;
- Identify the proposed outputs or outcomes and indicators for measuring them;

- Conduct joint planning and program launch meetings that break down the project into manageable work packages with clear designations of responsibility;
- Seek additional resources for the project through community support or recruiting other partners (such as local businesses, government or other CSOs); and
- Do capacity building together – Mercy Corps and partner staff – as a way to build the relationship.

At this point it is useful to establish a facilitator or partnership manager to have an overview of the delivery process and to ensure that project staff *and* partners are fulfilling their commitments well and on time.

Leadership Within Partnerships

What is the role of a leader in a situation that is essentially collaborative and based on a principle of equity between the key players? How does leadership emerge without undermining the principle of shared responsibility? How do partners carry the necessary leadership roles on behalf of the partnership within their organization as well as the other way round? Mercy Corps teams find that at different stages over the course of the partnering process different partners will take a more proactive, more public leadership role – and will be responsible and accountable to their partner colleagues for their actions. What kind of leadership style is chosen at a given moment largely depends on the type of partnership, the complexity of the program or other initiative, and the personalities of the people involved.

Leadership roles that may be required of partners include:

- Acting as 'guardian' of the partnership's mission (internally and externally) and being prepared to stand up for its values;
- Coaching each other (directly and indirectly) in good partnering behavior and partnership / project management;
- Challenging each other's ways of looking at the world, of doing things, and of approaching difficult or contentious issues while fully understanding, respecting differences in motives, mission and methods;
- Empowering other members of the partnership to be pro-active, to innovate and to be allowed to make mistakes; and
- Creating hope and optimism when the process seems to be stuck.

In the early stages of the partnering process, it is useful to select an individual – either from one of the partner organizations or from outside the partnership – to act as broker or intermediary on behalf of the partners to build and strengthen the partnership. This person should have the ability to combine a compelling vision with day-to-day practical implementation, operating as a catalyst for change by guiding rather than directing.

Transparency to Trust

The way in which partners use language can make or break a partnership. The public sector, private sector and civil society are riddled with terms that can mean completely different things, even within the same culture! Not clarifying can cause confusion or make people feel left out. Partners need to be sensitive to how they are using language – consciously and unconsciously – and can find shared language to build connections and consensus. An example of language that can be differently understood is the word 'trust', which is difficult to define and convey. A more effective partnership-building word is 'transparency', which is defined in the Principles of Partnership in [Chapter 1](#). In practice, being transparent and encouraging transparency involves:

- Being clear on what the idea of the partnership means to each partner.
- Making the expectations of each partner explicit – some common and some unique expectations based on capacity, location, role, relationships, etc.
- Honestly discussing differences in power, resources and influence – among Mercy Corps, local partners, donors and other actors.
- Reaching a common vision for the partnership.
- Following through on early commitments in a timely fashion to reinforce expectations.



Tip: Tip: Not working out? Often rapid proposal processes or a feeling of being locked in to a partnership means teams commit to partners that are not a good fit or continue working with partners well after knowing that the problems cannot be solved through the course of the collaboration. It is important to have honest communication within Mercy Corps about partnership to enable an honest decision to be made at the selection stage – either choosing not to partner or planning for how the collaboration will manage the concerns.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is nearly always an element of Mercy Corps' work with local partners, and our commitment to mutual learning is included as one of our 10 Principles of Partnership. Capacity building goes far beyond training, including cross-visits and other approaches for partners to learn from peers, support to teach others in order to deepen partners' own learning, mentoring, joint implementation with intentional reflection to learn-by-doing, and others shared activities. In a recent study of what local partners wanted out of their relationships with INGOs, they overwhelmingly reported that they want support to have more influence and be more independent.¹³ That goal is reflected in our own vision for local ownership of development discussed in [Chapter 1](#).

Mercy Corps teams around the world have found numerous ways to support local partners, so as to understand their existing capacity, identify their goals over the short and long terms and design strategies for capacity building that will help them get there. A few of these approaches – capacity assessments, capacity development plans – are discussed here.

Build Partner Objectives Into Program Plans and Management. To ensure that partnership objectives such as capacity building are clearly defined and planned for, build the objective and indicators in to your logframe and/or M&E planning tools like program workplans and indicator plans. For example, “improve local partners' organizational capacity for managing projects and meeting local needs.” Note that tools for measuring such objectives should be mutually agreed upon. One source of guidance is Mercy Corps' Program Management Initiative, a supportive toolkit for effectively and efficiently managing programs from the Identification and Design Phase through End of Program Transitions. There are a set of minimum standards expected of all Mercy Corps programs which should also inform partner selection and capacity support. All resources are available on the [Digital Library](#).

Capacity Assessments and Indices

A number of tools exist to help understand the organizational and technical capacity of local partners. The tools are most useful when the partner is committed and open to real change. Otherwise, they might give Mercy Corps a glimpse into the inner workings of the organization but do not create a real platform for organizational development. [Examples include the Organizational Capacity Index \(OCI\) for CSO partners and the Local Government Capacity Index \(LGCI\)](#), which provides a picture of partners' capacities along five dimensions:

- Financial Resource Management: *Accountability, Operational Planning and Budgeting*
- Human Resources Management: *Personnel Management, Staff Development and Staff Participation*
- Strategic Leadership/Management: *Strategic Planning, Good Governance, Sustainability, Resource Mobilization*
- Information Systems: *Monitoring and Evaluation, Reporting and Organizational Learning*
- External Relationships: *Public Relations, Networking, Stakeholder Input (Participation) and Advocacy*

Such assessments and indices ask value-neutral (objective) questions that focus on accepted or standard organizational practices and systems, which, if in place, should set the local partners on a healthy, sustainable track. Since going through such a process can be new to some partners, it is useful to discuss thoroughly before starting to ensure partners understand they are not being tested. These tools can also be adapted to your local operating environment and made appropriate for a range of different organizational types and levels. They can also identify those areas most in need of improvement and targeted training or assistance.

¹³ A key finding of the “NGO Partner Survey 2010” by Keystone Accountability.
<http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos>



Tip: Community Mobilization approaches also use capacity assessments and development plans. More information on applying a mobilization element to partnering can be found in Mercy Corps' [Guide to Community Mobilization Programming](#).

Capacity Development Plans

[CDPs](#) can be created based on capacity assessments/indices or through simple discussion with partners to identify goals and move into more specific strategies for meeting them. They are a way for all to agree about goals and then plan strategies, including activities that will help partners meet their long-term goals. As part of capacity-building plans, program teams can establish a regular schedule for repeating the capacity index scoring process, or for using other tools for tracking specific performance areas (e.g., M&E skills, financial compliance, etc.). This helps track progress, builds partners' analytical and reflection capacities, and models effective and purposeful monitoring and evaluation tools and processes. They can also be used to generate information for partners to share their progress through reporting out to stakeholders or the broader public. CDPs can include both institutional and technical capacity and various methods of building that capacity:

- Skills training – either for individual groups or with multiple groups in order to also establish relationships useful for their common goals (including collaboratively identifying clear objectives, appropriate indicators, and tools for measurement);
- Networking support;
- Mentoring by Mercy Corps or other partners (note: budget for the required time);
- Cross-visits to model skills and approaches between partners; and
- Staff exchanges between Mercy Corps and local partners to learn organizational models and technical skills.



Photo: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps, Sudan, 2011



Tip: Over six years, Mercy Corps' Localizing Institutional Capacity in Sudan (LINCS) program developed a wealth of tools, training materials and assessment approaches specifically for capacity development of new and existing CSOs, including capacity development plans, which can be adapted for use with CSO partners. All can be found on the [Digital Library](#) in English and many have been translated to Arabic.

Individual Partnering Skills

Working in a partnership also offers the opportunity for individuals to develop their own capacities for leading partnerships: negotiating agreements, mediating between different partners or facilitating meetings and other processes. Mercy Corps teams find that partnering skills are most easily acquired by those who already have a level of self-awareness and self-management. In other words, effective partnering requires people who can read and control their own emotions, who are confident, and who embody qualities such as empathy, optimism, imagination, openness and modesty. Partnerships also crucially require partners who are good at taking initiative.

Managing Conflict and Partnerships Break-downs

“How do we deal with conflicts between local partners?” “What should I do if a partner accuses Mercy Corps of something?” “My finance manager and the head of our partner organization just don't get along and it's threatening the whole partnership!” If these statements sound familiar, you're not alone. Like any relationship, partnership is not always a straight, smooth path. The important thing is how we manage tensions among partners.

Here is some good advice about managing partnership conflicts from our teams that have extensive partnering experience:

1. Be consistent and professional – use the Principles of Partnership as a guide for both the smooth and the rough phases of collaboration. The Principles offer something for all partners to refer to when things are not working well. They can remind the partners that everyone committed to working together to make difficult conversations possible.
2. Anticipate sources of tension – build ways to manage conflict into partnering agreements, including opening this topic as a part of regular partnership meetings and creating a mechanism for more official complaints.
3. Address issues when they arise – use challenges that arise as an opportunity to refine communication and collaboration approaches in order to prevent conflict and strengthen the working relationship.

Serious break-downs happen for many reasons, such as misuse of resources, intentional misreporting of activities, or inappropriate communication with community members or other stakeholders. In the worst case, partners can end up in court with potentially expensive and reputation-damaging results for all former partners. The [Subgrant Management Manual](#) offers important guidelines for escalated situations involving partners that are Mercy Corps grantees.



Tip: Break-downs can occur during any stage of the partnering process and are a frequent, natural result of any challenging process. They can, however, be de-motivating for partnerships and are often seen as insurmountable or permanently ruining a good working relationship. A break-down is not necessarily a bad thing; you can view it as the interruption of a process which is trying to achieve something different. The challenge for partners is to see the opportunity to not only address the issues causing tension, but to strengthen the relationship. A good rule to live by is “no surprises” – capture issues while they are nascent so they can be managed instead of growing to threaten the otherwise good partnership.

Negotiation and Influence Skills

Initial meetings with partners to build the relationship can also involve skills training that will be useful for the collaboration and demonstrate our commitment to mutuality and learning. Mercy Corps, other INGOs or local partners knowledgeable in dispute resolution approaches can present some of the key theory and practical approaches that can help all partners build and maintain a solid relationship, getting the substantive relationships that all parties want. Many of Mercy Corps' negotiation and influence workshops include skill-building for negotiating with partners in practical situations such as disagreements about hiring practices. The emphasis is on raising perceptions about positions – Mercy Corps' and partners – and helping teams develop strategies for reframing options with partners. The joint training presents an opportunity for partners to learn about each other, practice working together and build common vocabulary and shared experience.



Tip: Mercy Corps' Negotiation and Influence Toolkit contains many other useful tools that can be used to negotiate and manage relationships with local partners.

Monitoring Partnerships through 'Health Checks'

Regular 'health checks' are a useful way to take the pulse of partnerships, surfacing, tensions so they can be addressed early. This is basically the simple process of discussing success factors for the partnership at kick-off and then periodically asking what is working well and what could be improved in the partnership. These 'health checks' can be built into regular monitoring plans to ensure that they happen regularly, and with an agreed-on schedule, people can anticipate these as times to ask questions, anticipate issues coming up and how to manage, as well as informally assess how well the partnership is meeting its stated objectives. More formally, checks can be used to collect data through interviewing staff at different levels of each partner group in order to get a cross-section of feedback on issues such as decision-making, progress toward objectives, trust and others. If there is a formal process, conduct joint analysis of the findings, diagnosing issues, and making recommendations to address them in order to ensure equity in the partnership. Such checks can be as frequent as partners find useful – quarterly or twice

yearly with shorter programs and new partnerships or annually over long-term collaborations. The goal is to always find ways to improve the relationship to achieve joint goals.

Other best practices for creating a context to manage potential tensions and conflicts that arise:

- **Decision-making Processes** – at the partnership building phase, spend significant time (half day at minimum) to establish how the relationship is going to be managed; protocols for decision-making and anticipated types of decisions; types of decision making roles (i.e., who votes, who can veto decisions, who is consulted and who is informed); who is responsible for making sure decisions are made and how to resolve when decisions are not followed.
- **Explore Assumptions** – Even when details such as communications processes or performance measures for the partnership are spelled out in the partnering agreement, discuss as partners to come to a common understanding of what commitments mean practically. This includes being explicit about ‘difficult truths’ – the different purposes, objectives, limitations, affiliations that all partners have can influence the partnership but may be hidden.
- **Requests Mechanisms** – How complaints will be managed should be a feature of any partnering agreement and it is useful to also create a way for partners to make requests of each other – things that they see important to change that are not at the level of major complaints. If there is only a way to complain, this can lead to unnecessary escalation of issues and animosity among partners. Instead, requests can be framed as problem-solving, creating an invitation to action.
- **Set Ground Rules** – Some simple rules agreed between partners can be very helpful when the partnership is new and different partners feel the need to assert themselves and their agendas at the expense of giving space to others. Some partners, from the business and public sector especially, may find it strange to set rules for behavior whereas their civil society colleagues are likely to think this quite natural and acceptable. Ground rules can also be written into partnering agreements as a way to make the Principles of Partnership more tangible. These can include things such as: active listening, not interrupting, dealing with facts not rumors, respecting those not present, etc. Typically, in the early phases partners may need to remind each other about the agreed ground rules – it can take a while to break behavior patterns! But over time the partnership will naturally adopt these new methods and the ground rules are simply there in the background as a gentle reminder. Newcomers to the partnership then quickly adapt to the way of working that they see working well.

Basics of Active Listening

Clear and consistent communication is a lesson program teams emphasize again and again when asked how they manage conflict with local partners. The key, according to a program officer in Georgia, is “Seek to understand, not only to be understood!”

- Stop talking (!)
- Use open questions mostly (ones that encourage more than a yes/no answer)
- Be encouraging
- Demonstrate empathy
- Acknowledge emotions (anger, frustration, pleasure)
- Reframe negatives into positives
- Play back in their words what has been said to show you are listening
- Summarize in your words to show you understand and ask if you are fairly representing their points



Tip: More information and approaches to [developing good communications](#) can be found on the Digital Library.

Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms

Modes for providing feedback are different in every culture and partnership, and raising complaints can be challenging when there are real or perceived power differences. Feedback or complaint mechanisms are processes an organization or partnership adopt to allow an aggrieved party – an individual, a partner group or other stakeholder – to alert another partner or the partnership as a whole to an allegation. This might include a feedback box or independent third-party (group or person) who can be contacted by phone or email. Often formal mechanisms are not created because it is assumed that there will not be any problems, but not doing so can allow resolvable issues to escalate and end otherwise good partnerships.

Effective feedback or complaint mechanisms are safe, confidential, transparent and accessible. They are also part of the partnership principle of accountability, because they give people confidence that if something does go wrong, there will be clear procedures to share the concern and an agreed process for follow-up.¹⁴ As well, having a complaints mechanism in place can be a deterrent to potential partners who might abuse them.



Tip: Having multiple ways that partners and community members can provide feedback to a partnership or to individual partners collaborating can increase the likelihood that people find a comfortable and appropriate means to do so. The [Humanitarian Accountability Partnership \(HAP\)](#) has compiled cases about, and models for, developing community-based and other complaints mechanisms.

3.5. Monitoring, Evaluating and Reporting

This section focuses on Phase 3 of the Partnering Framework, including approaches to measuring, reviewing and revising partnerships.

Throughout the program lifecycle, there are many ways to include and consider partnerships and partner organizations. An important distinction should be made, when considering these processes, between 1) shared M&E roles for project-related activities and outcomes, and 2) monitoring and evaluating the partnership itself. Strategies and tools for each are shared below. Both processes, however, start with design and planning. Clearly and collaboratively defining all objectives and indicators as early as possible and planning for their measurement will guide the process and ensure transparency throughout the program's implementation. Remember that many of the same principles and approaches for M&E work well with local civil society, government and business partners.



M&E for Project Activities and Outcomes

When working with or through partners, participatory strategies for M&E are particularly important. Since a central purpose of M&E is to provide information to people to make decisions, the more partners and other stakeholders are able to lead and participate in the process of information gathering and analysis, the more they will be empowered to act on it to improve programs. Evidence shows that increasing local stakeholder participation in M&E helps build ownership and enhances sustainability, leading to improved impact. Whether targeting the participation of partners in M&E processes, or working with partners to engage beneficiaries in M&E, these are powerful approaches to capacity building through teaching new skills and modeling best practices.

When to Build in Participatory M&E?

Stakeholders can be engaged through participatory M&E activities at any point during the program lifecycle. This includes:

- In the program identification and design phase. This could include local partner contributions to program design and project indicators. We can also build in language and objectives or activities relating to participatory M&E in the logframe and M&E plans (making sure that adequate time and budget allocations have been included).

¹⁴ This also reflects Mercy Corps' Code of Conduct that all team members sign.

- During the program initiation and planning phase. During the initiation period there is usually a workshop or series of meetings to plan activities and procedures. Project initiation and planning offers a great opportunity to build in participatory M&E approaches and clarify roles and responsibilities. Have stakeholders engage in project “re-design” such as defining vague objectives or indicators, developing a workplan/M&E plan, and agreeing on targets. Make sure key program documents like logframes, position descriptions, and MOUs are updated to reflect new understandings. See DM&E [Tip Sheet #7](#): DM&E at Project Kick-off.

Mery Corps Niger: Involving Partners in a Start-up Workshop and Baseline

The SKYE project in Mercy Corps Niger, focused on youth empowerment, held a 5-day M&E workshop with staff to revise the logframe and organize M&E processes. On the 6th day, they invited government partners and youth association members to discuss their roles in monitoring the peer education objectives and participating in baseline data collection. It was decided that youth peer educators would administer a before/after survey or pre- and post-test for each training module they carried out, as part of evaluating the indicator related to increased knowledge of basic life skills. They would also assist in collecting baseline data related to income and youth well-being, and analyze results with project staff and partners.

- **Participation in the Baseline Study:** Consider having stakeholders participate in the design of the baseline so that they fully understand the indicators and measurement mechanisms: Provide training to carry out surveys, focus groups and other monitoring methods, and/or to take on other roles such as data entry or management; and most importantly, support stakeholders to lead or be included in the analysis of results, through a participatory analysis workshop or results dissemination meeting.
- **During Program Monitoring and Analysis:** Be open to different methods, tools or technologies for collecting information. For example, some local groups may be more accustomed to paper-based or oral methods for data collection. Equally important, is jointly analyzing and reviewing the data collected. Ideally, regular analysis sessions would be led by the partners involved in collecting the data. Even if data is collected by Mercy Corps staff, participation of stakeholders in analysis meetings builds awareness of program progress or obstacles and enrolls them to contribute to solutions or measures to improve implementation.
- **Program Evaluation:** There are many different evaluation techniques that are geared especially for high participation of stakeholders. These include Participatory Impact Assessment, Self-evaluations, Peer Evaluations, Most Significant Change, Photo Voice, Outcome Mapping, and Appreciative Inquiry. More information about all of these methods is available through DM&E [Tip Sheet #14](#): Participatory M&E. Guidelines and examples can also be found in the DM&E [Clearspace site](#).

M&E for the Partnership

As noted earlier, jointly defining the objectives of the partnership and the strategy for measuring and monitoring them, and documenting this through the overall program logframe and M&E plans, is a critical first step. These objectives will most likely focus on capacity building, improved relationships, improved performance, or satisfaction with partner roles and performance. Some tools for measuring and monitoring these types of objectives include

- **Institutional or organizational capacity indices** – As described in [Section 3.4](#), these tools can serve assessment purposes, as well as establishing baseline and benchmarks for improvements. These can be used with government as well as civil society partners, and can be developed to address specific skill sets or areas in need of improvement.
- **Linkage Card** – This tool can help collaboration between a range of partners. The steps start with developing an MOU between partner groups that outlines commitments to the collaboration (or project). The groups then jointly hold a community meeting to present their agreement and take a baseline score of the ability to collaborate. Monitoring scores midway through the process and at program end can help reveal how well the partnership fulfilled commitments and objectives.

- **Report Cards** – Developed for partner participants (or beneficiaries) to rate perceptions of quality, adequacy and efficiency of partners' performance, these can be a simple way of getting feedback and documenting change over time.
- **'Health Checks'** – As described in [Section 3.4](#), these regular check-ins with partners – individually and as a group when you have more than one partner – allow participants to give each other regular feedback about the partnership, apart from the technical aspects of the project.
 - What did we do well together?
 - What could work better?
 - How can we improve? If possible get specific so that follow up is easy and expectations are clearly established.

Evaluating the Partnership

Each partner should assess the value of the partnership for themselves, at minimum at the mid-point of the collaboration and at the end of the program of work that started the partnership, even if the partnership is committed to continuing.

Table 3: Cost Benefit Analysis		
Benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of shared partnership objectives • Achievement of individual objectives • Unexpected or side benefits gained 	Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff costs • Other in-kind resource contributions • Financial contributions • Negative impact 	Organizational Aspects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of institutional buy-in • Degree of internal learning/ change • Delivery of commitments
Comparison with non-partnering alternatives		

Additionally, all partners should jointly reflect on the partnership as a whole.

Analysis of the Partnership Itself		Impact	Partnership Approach
Setup <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance or accountability structure • Compliance documentation • Partner buy-in • Sufficient resource from partners and externally • Clear division of roles and responsibilities • Right partners? • Appropriate objectives? • Reasonable balance of inputs/benefits • Clear process for review/evaluation 	Operations Fulfillment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner Relationship • Internal communications • Equity • Transparency • Individual and organizational satisfaction/confidence • Institutional buy-in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievements of objectives • Quality and sustainability of the solution/products • Other additional benefits and negative impact from project operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Side and transformational benefits to partners and society • Added value of partnership approach • Weighing benefits compared to costs

Beneficiary Voices – Local partners are often the link to hearing directly from community members and others who benefit from programs. They often have rich skills for learning from and sharing community views, but not always. Initiatives such as [The Listening Project](#) help inform how local and international groups can better learn from and respond to communities.

Representation and Reporting

As discussed in Phase 1, sharing information about the partnership is a task throughout any collaboration. In order to sustain outcomes, it is particularly important to follow up with stakeholders and others who the partnership (or individual partners) have been in touch with from the beginning, to report on what has been accomplished and the status of the partnership – whether it will continue, change in any way or end. Revisit partners' goals when planning representation and reporting activities. Consider:

- Who is the audience? Discuss which partner(s) will have the best rapport with the donor, stakeholders, public or other audience for representation or reporting as well as which partner(s) have the most to gain by being the lead or being involved in communications.
- What is the message? Agreeing among partners about the purpose of the representation or reporting activity and the key message(s) to convey helps clarify expectations among partners and confidence for communications outside the partnership.
- What is the format? An intimate meeting requires a different communication approach than a radio broadcast, just as an update memo is different from a formal quarterly report. Discuss whether each representation or reporting opportunity is something the partnership needs an experienced group to do, or whether it can be a skill-building opportunity.

External audiences can include donors, policy makers, other INGOs, local groups not in the partnership and the general public.

Donors have specific requirements of grant holders – and sometimes of all partners. Local partners often have fewer opportunities to understand first-hand what major international donors seek in grantee representation and reporting, or to build direct relationships with donors. Unless there are specific guidelines not to, or a problem with the partnership that necessitates the prime agency being the only interface with a donor, sharing reporting duties – both written and in-person communication – can be a way to embody the partnership principles of equity, mutual benefit and accountability. The communications checklist tool in [Chapter 4](#) is a helpful way to prepare for joint reporting with partners. With stakeholders and the general public, a communication style that makes the partnership and its work tangible is often most effective. This can involve presenting a case study (see the case study tool in Chapter 4) choosing a sub-set of indicators to illustrate inter-connected results, or other ways to “tell the story” of the partnership. Choose the best story-tellers from the partnership and consider collaborating with media sources that target communities use regularly, such as radio, TV or SMS messaging, to get the word out broadly. Local partners may be best placed to manage many of these representation and reporting activities and doing so can support their visibility and credibility.

And don't forget internal audiences such as community members directly involved with the partnership and staff who contributed but not have the full picture of what has been achieved and the status of the collaboration. There will also be important representation and reporting activities to do with senior managers within partnership organizations, many that can be done jointly to reinforce the working relationship and future potential. And sharing best practices and lessons learned from partnering and the partnership through internal Communities of Practice is helpful for global colleagues facing similar challenges and opportunities with partners.

Reporting on joint work or representing the partnership with others offers is a chance to identify what has been successful. This might include that the partnership is achieving its objectives, is having positive but unintended impacts that deserve attention or learning, is benefitting individual partners beyond the immediate partnership, or others. Learn what's special or unique and highlight those outcomes for internal and external audiences alike.



Tip: Remember that in addition to each partners' stakeholders, the partnership itself may have its own stakeholders. For example, partners may be working with local Ministry of Health offices in specific locations, but collectively the partnership is accountable to the national Ministry of Health. Which partner(s) manage communications with various stakeholders, and at which levels, should be planned in order to meet partners' representation goals, strengthen capacity and foster relationships beyond the immediate term.

Mission Metrics

The themes and indicators developed for Mercy Corps' Mission Metrics measurement framework include several references to partnerships, linkages, and relationships. In particular, there is Theme 5, community-led development, which offers an indicator (Mission Indicator 5.2) for measuring local partner organizations and improvements in their skills or knowledge. This requires measuring an actual change in partners' level of skills or knowledge, or ability to function effectively. There is another important Mission Metrics connection, however, to Theme 8 – sectors interacting. This theme and its sole indicator (Mission Indicator 8.1) relates closely to the bipartite or tripartite interaction between government, private sector, and/or civil society. The indicator language is “Linkages between private sector, government, and civil society are forged and/or improved.” Guidelines for measurement of both of these indicators are available in Annex C. No program-level indicators have been suggested for either of these Mission Indicators, as these types of results tend to be quite project-specific. Worth noting, however, is the fact that both can be measured through either 1) a specific tool measured at baseline and endline, with scores that can be compared and reported on (like capacity indices, pre-post tests, surveys, etc.), or 2) discrete examples of what has happened as a result of the partnership or relationship, or an illustration of what the enhanced capacity or changed relationships have resulted in. The latter does not have to be identified as a project indicator, nor measured through traditional means. Indeed some of these results or examples may emerge as unintended outcomes of the program or partnership. These may be discovered through focus groups at program end, a qualitative evaluation process like Most Significant Change, or other learning and listening processes. See the [Mission Metrics: Report on Draft Results for 2010](#) for examples of evidence for Mission Indicators 5.2 and 8.1.

Additional Resources

General

- Search the “Participatory M&E” tag in [DM&E Clearspace](#) site
- Participatory [M&E website portal](#)
- Participatory [M&E toolbox](#) (scroll down to M&E section)
- Participatory [Impact Monitoring](#)

Specific Methods

- Participatory [Impact Assessment Guide for NGOs](#)
- [Photo Voice](#)
- [Most Significant Change guide](#)
- [Appreciative Inquiry](#)
- [Outcome Mapping Learning Community](#)
- [Empowerment Evaluation](#) web portal

3.6. Sustaining Outcomes and Impact

This section focuses on Phase 4 of the Partnering Framework: approaches to scaling up partnership or moving on.

As discussed in Phases 1 and 2, transition strategies are essential to build in from the beginning – the choice to take a partnership approach and how relationships and processes are established so partners can meet the objectives of their collaboration. And from the efforts in Phase 3 to monitor, report on and learn from joint work, there are insights to further refine transition strategies. As is best practice for program management to revisit program workplans and create a “Final 90 Day” plan for close out, it is best practice for partnerships to revisit their partnering agreements and to chart a course for continuing, evolving or ending their relationship. This transitions phase should focus on sustaining the outcomes and impacts of the partnership, understanding what comes next for the group and for individual partners, and making as smooth a transition as possible. A number of factors to consider are discussed below.



Identifying, Recruiting and Introducing New Partners

If a partnership extends beyond a specific program or there is interest in scaling-up – adding in a new area of work or expanding to a new area of the country – local partners have good perspective on other groups that could contribute to the goals of the partnership, bringing additional resources, expertise or connections as the objectives of the collaboration evolve. Mercy Corps teams can work with established local partners to go through the same process described in [Section 3.3](#) on identifying and building partnerships and supporting them to take the lead in crafting new partnership agreements and bringing new partners into the joint work.

 **Tip:** Monitoring, evaluation, representation and reporting activities are also ideal ways for partners to build technical capacity in data analysis, tailoring communication for different audiences, and strategic thinking. See [Section 3.5](#) for more information on M&E for local partnerships.

Resources for Sustaining or Scaling-up

Many teams find that one of the biggest challenges to partnership sustainability is the issue of long-term resourcing. Many situations are dependent on external funding, and all have different resource requirements. Wherever possible, however, local and renewable resourcing arrangements should be put in place. It is common that local partners take on a program in a spirit of innovation and, once the work has proven effective, more permanent arrangements are made – with local government, public sector agencies, volunteer maintenance committees, civil society ownership and other arrangements.

Securing Wider Ownership

One transition strategy for many partnerships is building ownership of the goals of the partnership among a wider group than has been directly involved to this point. This could include institutionalizing approaches at strategic or policy levels, such as convincing a district education ministry to embrace teaching practices pioneered in partnership with several village schools. Another approach is to recruit operational organizations that are well placed to build on the initial success of a small group of partners. This happens in many programs that start with pilots where local partners do not have large geographic coverage. Securing the ownership of donors is also valuable. It can be in the interest of individual funders in the country, as well as private foundations and government donors, to have a more direct relationship with successful programs or activities of partners if it is a way to test a theory or visibly demonstrate their efforts.

Exit Planning

Mercy Corps teams consistently find that the end of program cycles or anticipating programs closing is a tense time among partners. There can be uncertainty about what comes next, hope for sustainability of good works, frustration that more was not accomplished, sadness about a relationship ending. Preparing early for close out is essential. Have open conversations with partners about their expectations and support them in thinking about what is next for individual partners since many have concerns about their own sustainability, as well as the partnership as a whole.

Build the exit strategy for the partnership into the initial partnership agreement, per [Section 3.5](#). This can include a strategy for building the capacity of local partners to take over aspects of the program or supporting new or existing maintenance committees. It should also include how the partnering objectives and partnership itself will be evaluated, in addition to the program deliverables. Even if the partnership is not successful – maybe it was not as thorough as desired or there was a poor relationship among partners – Mercy Corps teams must ensure there is an exit strategy that can be implemented. Doing so is a commitment to the communities and groups we serve, necessary for sustaining the outcomes that the program achieved and for honesty with donors who entrusted us with funding.

There are four typical ‘moving on’ scenarios that should be considered in exit strategy planning or which may emerge over the course of the partnership.

1. Individual partners leave the ongoing partnership – Requires succession planning to help the partnership survive departure of some groups, as well as to facilitate new partners joining and taking leadership.
2. Partnership disbands while work continues under one group – If one partner is best placed to carry the work forward independently the decision to do so should include agreement about transfer of any jointly held assets and/or relationships that were important to the partnership thus far. A smooth transition is often helped by having some members of the partnership continuing to have an advisory role.
3. New cross-sector or other entity created to maintain the joint work – If a partnership model is still useful, but the nature of the work has changed there might need to be a new managing or governing entity established to develop it.
4. Partnership is terminated – Some efforts are temporary from the beginning so termination is a natural part of the process and termination should be seen as a success. Others end because the partnership is not able to do what it set out to do. Circumstances change and it can become un-safe or impossible to continue, or there are irreconcilable differences among partners that make it undesirable. Partners owe it to themselves and to each other both to acknowledge achievements and to learn from what went wrong.



Tip: “Partnership brokers” – people external to the collaboration who are tasked with helping partners navigate through key decisions or phases of their joint work – are especially useful for creating smooth transitions after partnerships are established. Brokers play a critical role in managing the process in order to allow all partners to participate without having also to figure out how decisions are made. See [Section 4.2](#) for resources on this approach.

Debrief

Conducting a formal debrief of programs that involve partnerships is particularly important, given our Principles of Partnership around equity, mutual benefit and transparency. Debriefs can follow a similar process as the health checks discussed above – what has worked well, what could the partnership and partners have done differently, what is next in relationship with Mercy Corps. Debriefs are also a significant learning opportunity for Mercy Corps, so feedback from partners should be taken seriously by program, operations and senior staff so that processes can be adjusted and ways of working with future partners in the context can be better each time.

Often a missed step in debriefing is documenting what is learned and distributing those lessons to partners and stakeholders. The dual goals in documentation and dissemination are: A) accountability to the partnership, supporters (including donors), and each group’s own mission and goals; and B) learning in order to make the most effective use of partnerships in the future.

Linking Operations and Context

Local partners play a critical role in shaping their operating environment. Some of the challenges they face are directly related to the policy environment; as well, the impact of their work can be limited by issues like corruption. Yet, effective local partners are often busy and many feel that focusing on such larger context issues could distract from their mission or endanger their staff or members. INGO partners can play a role helping local partners make the linkage between their work and policy issues, find appropriate ways to get involved and, importantly, provide support so negative impacts are minimized.

Chapter 4. Tools and Resources

4.1. Tools

Mercy Corps' long history of working with local partners in diverse contexts around the world has enabled us to generate a number of tools. All tools listed here were either developed by program teams, especially Sri Lanka, Sudan and Iraq – or have been field tested by Mercy Corps.

Note: All tools listed below can be found on the Digital Library under “[Partnership Strengthening](#)”. Other tools are mentioned in the corresponding section in [Chapter 3](#), as well as in the external resources listed in [Section 4.2](#) below.

Phase 1: Identifying and Building

Tools and approaches for this phase help teams understanding the types of partners in a context, their capabilities, interests and potential opportunities.

- Staff Overview Training on Partnerships
- Pre-positioning with Partners
- Partner Identification Mapping
- Stakeholder Mapping Tool
- [Relationship Mapping Tools](#)
- Local Partner Tracking Matrix Tool
- Resource Mapping Tool
- Request for Application to Partners for Subgrants

Additional tools useful if scoping partners during new program design.

- Pre-RFA Assessment Interview Guide
- [Guide to Collaborative Relationships for US Government Proposals](#)
- [Teaming Agreement Template - Mercy Corps as Prime](#)
- [Sample Letters of Commitment - for Subrecipients](#)
- [Sample Letter of Intent - for Service Contractors](#)
- [Sample Letters of Support from Collaborating Agencies](#)

Phase 2: Managing and Maintaining

To establish strong partnerships, we rely on tools that help us communicate clearly and build collaborative relationships.

- Organizational Assessments and Indices
- Capacity Development Plans
- Partner Roles Tool: Decide, Inform, Consult Negotiate
- Partner Agreement Templates
- Partner Management Structure Templates
- Action Planning
- Partner Profile Summary Template
- Partner Project Forms
- Partner Proposal Forms
- Strategic Guidelines for Private Sector Engagement (toolkit)
- Cross-visit Tips
- Civil Society Resource Center Toolkit from the South Sudan LINCS Program
- Advocacy Toolkit
- Negotiation Tools

Sharing ‘Office in a Box’ with Partners

Mercy Corps' comprehensive package of tools and best practices for the start-up and management of field office operations systems is available to all partners to use and adapt to their needs. Orientation to relevant Office in a Box tools can be included in Capacity Development Plans or partners can access all the resources directly at: <http://www.mercycorps.org/fordevelopmentprofessionals/officeinabox>

Phase 3: Monitoring, Evaluating and Reporting

Many Mercy Corps M&E tools are relevant to working with partners, and many are recommended in [Chapter 3](#). The tools below can also help you monitor, evaluate and report on the partnership itself -- an important element of any successful partnership.

- Mercy Corps Scorecard for Partnerships
- Field visit report format and summary table
- Sample Monthly and Quarterly partner report format
- Project completion report
- Project summary sheet
- Partnership Review Template
- Case Study Template
- Communications Check List
- Applying Mission Metrics – Annex C

Phase 4: Sustaining Outcomes and Impact

A large part of sustaining outcomes and impact is a strong foundation, so revisiting tools and approaches in Phase 1 is important along with the tools below.

- Exit strategy Planning
- Considerations for Scaling up

4.2. Resources and Links

Updated versions of annexes to this guide can be found on the Digital Library.

- **Annex A:** Mercy Corps Capacity Statement for Local Partnerships\
- **Annex B:** Government Donor Partnering Guidelines - the current guidelines from US and European donors about working with local partners, plus trends and other information.
- **Annex C:** Measuring Partnerships Using Mission Metrics: Indicator Guidelines for Themes #5 and #8.

Mercy Corps Resources

Allen, Ruth. "Partnerships in rapid-onset emergencies: insights from Pakistan and Haiti." In Humanitarian Exchange. April 2011.

<http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=3214>

Focusing on humanitarian partnerships, this article compares Mercy Corps partnering approaches in rapid-onset emergencies in contexts where we have been active before the earthquake, flood or other disaster hits versus where our teams are also new to the context. Pakistan and Haiti provide examples.

Heiberg, Danielle. *Breaking New Ground via Partnerships between Smallholder Farmers, Agribusinesses and Financial Institutions*. Mercy Corps. 10 Nov 2010. <http://www.interaction.org/document/breaking-new-ground-partnerships-between-smallholder-farmers-agribusinesses-and-financial-i>

A presentation from Interaction Best Practices showcasing Mercy Corps programs in Central African Republic, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Somalia and Zimbabwe that combine value chain analysis and financial services. Best practices and lessons learned are highlighted.

Keystone Partners. *Partner Feedback Report: Mercy Corps US*. Keystone Performance Surveys: NGO Partner Survey 2010. <https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dt&q=keystone>
This report presents what Mercy Corps's partners said about Mercy Corps compared to benchmarks from across the whole group of 25 northern NGOs. It provides credible data on how well Mercy Corps carries out the core functions of partnership, as seen from the bottom up. Keystone surveyed 2,733 southern partners of 25 northern NGOs. Partners were asked to rate and comment on different aspects of the northern NGOs' performance. The survey was carried out by Keystone as an independent third party on an anonymous basis: the partners knew that the northern NGOs would not be able to identify who said what about them. See public report for the full cohort of INGOs below.

Mercy Corps. "Mission Metrics: Report on Draft Results for 2010."

<https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dt&q=mission+metrics>

The report about FY2010 reporting on Mission Metrics as part of Mercy Corps annual planning process identifies a measurement framework, including several references to partnerships, linkages, and relationships. In particular, there is Theme 5, community-led development, which offers an indicator (Mission Indicator 5.2) for measuring local partner organizations and improvements in their skills or knowledge and Theme 8, sectors interacting, which focuses on the cross-sector (bipartite or tripartite) interaction between government, private sector, and/or civil society.

Mercy Corps. "Sub-Grant Management Manual." 1998.

This manual was designed to assist field offices in designing and implementing programs by providing sample policies, procedures and forms.

Private Sector Engagement Toolkit. Mercy Corps. 2011.

The private sector sections of this guide were adapted from the Toolkit, which reflects Mercy Corps' economic development strategy focused on operationalizing the Vision for Change through community-led, market-driven programs. The Toolkit includes case examples, approach descriptions and numerous tools for diverse teams.

Results for Development Case Studies. Mercy Corps Indonesia. 2011. <https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dt&q=results+for+development+case+study>

Set of three case studies about partnerships with local health care groups.

"Study on Mercy Corps' Partnerships". Mercy Corps. 2006.

[https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin-library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dt&q=study+on+Mercy+Corps%27+partnerships](https://mcdl.mercycorps.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?a=q&r=1&hs=1&t=0&c=all&h=dt&q=study+on+Mercy+Corps%27+partnerships)

This survey took into account perspectives of numerous field and other teams to understand our best practices and opportunities to improve our work with local partners. It identifies a number of best practices and makes recommendations for a more consistent approach, which have been taken into account in creating this guide.

External Resources

Recommended Resources from The Partnering Initiative

In collaboration with the International Business Leaders Forum, TPI has created a recommended toolbox collection for various aspects of partnering. The organization also offers training on many of these topics and more information can be found at www.thepartneringinitiative.org

- *The Partnering Toolbox: An essential guide to cross-sector partnering* (2011) is a concise overview of elements for effective collaboration among civil society, business and private sector partners.
- *The Case Study Toolbox: Partnership case studies as tools for change* (2006) is designed to help groups create their own case studies more successfully.
- *The Brokering Guidebook: Navigating successful sustainable development partnerships* (2005) shows the critical role of process managers in multi-sector partnerships.
- *Talking the Walk: A communication manual for partnership practitioners* (2008) is a practical look at the realities of communicating in and about partnership.

Brehm, V.M. et al. *Autonomy or Dependence? Case Studies of North-South NGO Partnerships*. INTRAC. 2004.

<http://www.intrac.org/resources.php?action=resource&id=319>

This book explores the concept and practice of 'partnership' between NGOs in the North and South. Based on a rigorous four-year study, the book draws together the perspectives of a group of European NGOs and compares these with the experiences of a selection of their partners in Brazil, Cambodia and Tanzania. The authors look ahead to how partnerships are changing as networks and alliances of Northern and Southern civil society organizations join together to work on common issues.

Browa, Sylvain. *Ensuring Successful Partners Toolkit*. Interaction Africa. Nov 3, 2010. <http://www.interaction.org/document/ensuring-successful-partners-toolkit> also in French <http://www.interaction.org/document/ensuring-successful-partners-toolkit-french>

Originally developed as part of InterAction's Africa Liaison Program Initiative (ALPI) to foster relationships between USAID and NGOs in the US and Africa, the Ensuring Successful Partners Toolkit includes: a list of recommended commitments for organizations to make before beginning the partnership assessment process; the principles necessary to build and sustain successful partnerships; and an actual partnership assessment tool.

Gardner, Alison, Kara Greenblott and Erika Joubert. "What we Know about Exit Strategies: Practical Guidance for Developing Exit Strategies in the Field." C-Safe. 2005.

This guidance document provides insight on how to improve understanding and ability to develop and implement sound Exit Strategies from Developmental Relief Programs. It will be useful to field staff.

Heinrich, V Finn ed. *CIVICUS Global Survey of the State of Civil Society, Vol 1 & 2*. Kumarian Press: April & December 2007.

These two volumes look at factors such as civic engagement, democracy, corruption, social capital, gender equity and civil society's role in policy, and the overall health of each country's civil society. In most chapters, assessments are followed by policy recommendations. The result is arguably the most encompassing picture of civil society ever produced with 44 country profiles.

Hughes, Jonathan. Jeff Weiss. "Making Partnerships Work: A Relationship Management Handbook." Vantage Partners. 2001.

A set of conflict management tools and other aides for relationship managers, those developing new business and others working closely with counterparts from other organizations and companies.

Interaction. *Foreign Assistance Briefing Book: Developing Effective Donor Partnerships for Achieving the MDGs*. Interaction: 17 Jan 2011. <http://www.interaction.org/document/foreign-assistance-briefing-book-developing-effective-donor-partnerships-achieving-mdgs>

Recommendations and actions in the areas of trade, debt, and partnerships for the US to support achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Keystone Partners. *Public Report*. Keystone Performance Surveys: NGO Partner Survey. Jan 2011. <http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos>

This report presents findings and analysis from the 2010 Keystone Partner Survey, carried out with 25 international NGOs based in Europe and the US. It summarizes the views of over 1,000 southern partners who work with them.

Malena, Carmen ed. *From Political Won't to Political Will: Building Support for Participatory Governance*. Kumarian Press: Oct 2009.

The book presents contributions by participants from CIVICUS' 2008 conference on building political will for PG. Representing the perspectives of both civil society and government actors, they propose a number of strategies and lessons such as demonstrating the benefits of PG to governments, complementing formal democratic institutions, building trust, supporting PG champions and using strategic political timing.

Naidoo, Kumi. *Civil Society at the Millennium*. Kumarian Press: Sept 1999.

This book supports a clearer understanding of the role of civil society as a legitimate actor in public life. It examines civil society's role in the context of: governance, youth participation, women and leadership, volunteerism, indigenous peoples, religion, and more.

Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness. *Consultation Outreach Toolkit*. April 2010. In English, French, and Spanish. <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/-outreach-toolkit,039-.html>

The Outreach Toolkit was developed as a resource to support the Open Forum's consultations. It structures discussions on CSO development effectiveness and guide contributions of CSOs operating at local, country, regional and international levels, North and South, as well as globally, towards defining the elements for a global development effectiveness framework.

Sen, Amartya. *Social Exclusion: Concept, Application and Scrutiny*. Social Development Papers No. 1. Office of Environment and Social Development. Asian Development Bank. June 2000.

A short piece commissioned through ADB, exploring the origins of the concept of "social exclusion" and its utility in ending poverty, where poverty is defined as a capability impediment. Focused on Asia but with global applicability.

Smille, Ian. *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*. Kumarian Press: June 2001.

A study of capacity building through various local perspectives including case studies from Mozambique, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Haiti, and Guatemala.

Taylor, Rupert. *Creating a Better World: Interpreting Global Civil Society*. Kumarian Press: Sept 2004.

This book presents examples of groups within civil society--from the Seattle and Genoa protesters to transnational grassroots movements, such as Slum/Shack Dwellers International--that are creatively meeting the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interconnected world. The contributors believe civil society's global networks can effectively create a free, fair, and just global order.

USAID. *Global Development Alliance Website*. For an specific sector partnership guides (Agriculture, Democracy, Economic Growth and Trade, Education, Emergencies, Energy, Extractives, Health, Microfinance & Microenterprise, Water, Workforce Development), navigate to menu on right from this page: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_partnerships/gda/

Global Development Alliances (GDAs) are USAID's commitment to change the way USAID implements development assistance. GDAs mobilize the ideas, efforts and resources of governments, businesses and civil society to stimulate economic growth, develop businesses and workforces, address health and environmental issues, and expand access to education and technology.

Wohlgemuth J, Roberto. *Compendium of International Legal Instruments and other Inter-Governmental Commitments Concerning Core Civil Society Rights*. Civil Society Watch Programme, CIVICUS. Updated January 2010. http://www.civicus.org/content/Compendium_Jan2010.pdf

A useful overview (regularly updated) of relevant international legal instruments and international agreements on core civil society rights, including an overview of major international and regional organizations and their commitments and role in civil society rights protection.

Toolkits for Specific Social Groups

Cook, Philip, Blanchet-Cohen, Natasha & Hart, Stuart. *Children as Partners: Child participation promoting social change*. Save the Children Sweden. International Institute for Child Rights and Development, Victoria: 2005. <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/children-partners-child-participation-promoting-social-change>

The report triangulates background information from the following three sources to produce a participation-partnership framework in synthesizing key Children as Partners findings: An annotated bibliography covering key academic and NGO literature findings on child and adolescent participation from both the developed and developing world; a detailed discussion of participation in light of current evidence on children's evolving capacities, Children's Evolving Capacities and Participation: Partnerships for Social Change (Lansdown); an in-depth retrospective process of young people's reflections on partnership drawn from the collective experience of the Indian NGO Concerned for Working Children, "Bhima Sangha and the Makkala Panchayats – Chroniclers of our own history."

Eurodiaconia. Toolkit on Social Inclusion. 12/12/2008. <http://www.eurodiaconia.org/files/Anti-Poverty%20and%20Social%20Inclusion/Working%20links%20EURODIACONIA%20TOOLKIT%20ON%20SOCIAL%20OMC.pdf>

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A Mobility International USA-sponsored manual to support inclusive development for people with disabilities. See also: Mobility International USA. Inclusion Checklist. <http://www.miusa.org/idd/resourcecenter/hrtoolbox/checklistforinclusion.pdf>

Malloy, Dr. Tove H. *The Aspect of Culture in Social Inclusion of Minorities...Intercultural Indicators*. European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). 17 Oct 2006. http://www.ecmi-eu.org/uploads/media/Inter-Cultural_Indicators.pdf

A Power Point presentation on how to measure social inclusion of minorities in Europe, including a listing of basic indicators used for in Dr. Malloy's research.

On integrating inclusive principles for People with Intellectual Disabilities: *Make Development Inclusive: A Practical Guide and Concepts and Principles*. http://www.inclusive-development.eu/index.php?option=com_rockdownloads&view=folder&Itemid=20&lang=en

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Cuepens, Bambi and Peter Geschiere. 'Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe' *Annual Review of Anthropology* Ontario Council of Universities Libraries: 2005.

Fowler, A. "NGDO-donor relationships: Partnership in an Era of Disrupted Continuity", in Potter, R. and Desai, V. (eds), *The Companion to Development Studies*, pp. 534-538, Mathew Arnold, London. 2008.

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