

# MERCY CORPS GENDER POLICY

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## Introduction

Mercy Corps recognizes that our programs more effectively alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression when women, men, girls and boys are equitably engaged as active stakeholders in every aspect of the work we undertake together. Based on these observations, we have developed a gender policy with a three-fold purpose:

1. To *confirm and communicate* that gender equity is essential to our mission and Vision for Change.
2. To *establish goals and principles* for ensuring that **gender equity** is addressed consistently in our programs and organizational culture.
3. To *provide guidance on implementing* our commitment to gender equity.

## Gender and the Vision for Change

Our **Vision for Change**, grounded in over 30 years of global relief and development work, states that secure, productive and just communities emerge when private, public and civil society sectors work together for peaceful change. This framework is guided by principles of *accountability* and *inclusive participation*, which oblige us to **use gender mainstreaming** as a means to achieve our mission and vision. While gender issues involve men, women, boys and girls, our **gender-sensitive** programming will frequently focus on addressing the unmet needs of women and girls.<sup>1</sup> In order to achieve sustainable, positive change it is vital that men and boys are actively involved in the process of helping women and girls claim their places as fully engaged community stakeholders.

Mercy Corps promotes the participation of men and women not only because our human rights perspective in the Vision for Change demands equal access, but also because we believe that unleashing the full potential of the communities in which we work will lead to more lasting and transformational change. Mercy Corps is committed to developing resources that improve our team members' capacity to carry out gender mainstreaming in our

activities. We will create and put into practice the training that is needed to help our team establish a common understanding of gender-sensitive programming. Mercy Corps recognizes that gender dynamics are fluid and context-based, and will provide our teams with flexible and culturally adaptable methods to pursue gender equity in their work.

## Critical Definitions

**Gender:** The social differences and relations between men and women, boys and girls. Ideas about gender are learned, changeable over time and can be different within and among cultures.

**Gender equity:** Fair treatment of males and females, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

**Gender-sensitive:** The ability to acknowledge and highlight gender differences, issues and inequalities in order to address them in strategies and actions.

**Gender mainstreaming:** A strategy for making females' and males' concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres such that inequity between females and males is not perpetuated.

**Sex:** The biological differences between males and females, especially as differentiated based on reproductive functions. Sex is based on biology, not culture.

<sup>1</sup> Gender Programming at Mercy Corps: Findings from the Global Gender Assessment, December 2010

## Gender Policy Goals

By implementing this policy and the procedures that accompany it, Mercy Corps aims to accomplish the following goals:

- All Mercy Corps team members share a common understanding of the relationship between our approach to gender equity and our mission;
- Communities where Mercy Corps works benefit from projects that engage women, men, girls and boys as agents of change;
- Gender stereotypes and gender-based discriminatory attitudes are challenged and changed; and
- Mercy Corps team members serve as role models for achieving gender equity in the communities where they work.

## Moving Forward

Our policy and procedures will be made available to all team members, both at headquarters and in the field. This policy will apply to all departments and areas of operation. Successful implementation of this policy will require organizational support for activities that advance institutional capacity and technical expertise. Success will require active participation from all team members and a solid commitment from senior leaders.

- Mercy Corps will facilitate increased awareness and understanding of gender equity among team members. Country teams will improve gender mainstreaming processes including strengthening their ability mitigate gender-based barriers to participation and identify different potential impacts of project design for men, women, boys and girls.
- Recognizing that cultural contexts vary, and opportunities for gender inclusiveness are not uniform, Mercy Corps will work with our country teams to establish locally appropriate gender mainstreaming procedures and to measure progress on the road to gender equity. We do not believe that fixed, absolute targets provide the best motivation to change.
- Understanding that gender-sensitive programming can strengthen our overall effectiveness, Mercy Corps teams will collect gender- and age-disaggregated data throughout the program cycle and use the data to ensure greater impact and gender-equitable programming.

## Guiding Principles for Organizational Culture

This policy will be carried out under the following guiding principles and within the context of Mercy Corps' organizational culture:

- Mercy Corps is an equal opportunity employer and maintains a harassment and discrimination free workplace.
- Where there is a meaningful underrepresentation of one gender within our global team or an individual team, Mercy Corps is committed to determining the potential causes and taking appropriate actions to encourage an increase in the underrepresented groups.
- Mercy Corps will ensure that gender issues are analyzed and addressed as appropriate in organizational policies and procedures.
- Mercy Corps will use external communications, where appropriate, to promote the agency's gender policy and principles, and to educate its supporters and partners about gender issues and our commitment to gender equity.

The Gender Policy and its accompanying procedures and appendices, created in 2011, will be reviewed and updated on a biannual basis.

Mercy Corps' perspective on gender is reflected in the following policies, manuals and procedures.

- Code of Conduct
- Field Administration Manual
- National Staff Policy Handbook
- Commitments to Accountability, Inclusion & Learning
- Expatriate Team Handbook
- Child Protection Policy
- Employee Handbook for US Based Staff
- Equal Employment Policy
- BRIDGE & Gender Mainstreaming: A Guide for Program Staff