

A photograph showing a group of men sitting on a patterned rug in a room, engaged in a discussion. One man in a dark suit and tie is pointing at a document on the rug. Other men are wearing traditional or casual attire, including a turban and a leather jacket. The scene suggests a formal meeting or negotiation.

# MERCY CORPS' INTEREST-BASED APPROACH TO MANAGING CONFLICT

Negotiation and Mediation Capacity Statement | December 2014

Iraq — ACT Photo Contest/Mercy Corps

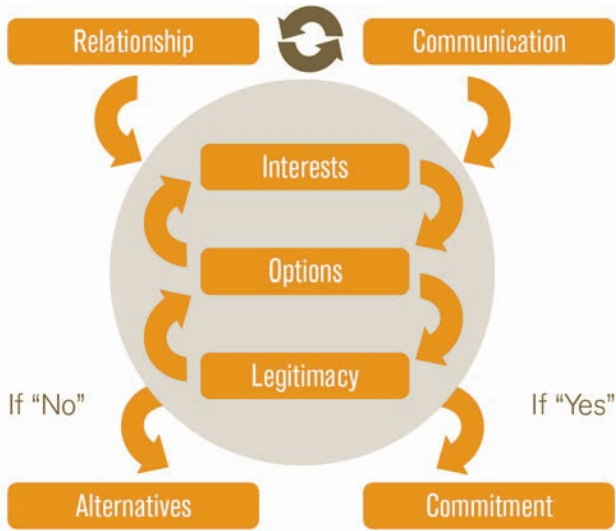
Mercy Corps' Conflict Management team leverages our interest-based negotiation and mediation expertise and global peacebuilding experience to empower communities in fragile or critically weak states to take advantage of tremendous opportunities for positive change. Our peacebuilding efforts center on two complementary approaches: 1) to **prevent conflict** by building relationships, increasing social cohesion, and addressing long-term underlying drivers of conflict, and 2) to **manage conflict** by strengthening the effectiveness of local peacebuilding institutions and enhancing the capacity of mediators to mitigate tensions and resolve disputes in their communities and regions.

## Our Interest-Based Negotiation and Mediation Framework: The Seven Elements

Most of the conflict situations in which we work require substantial negotiation. Our efforts often involve a third party assisting parties to negotiate an agreement (i.e., mediation). Our systematic, interest-based approach to negotiation and mediation first gained widespread prominence with the 1979 publication of the bestselling *Getting to YES: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, written by Professor Roger Fisher, who founded the Conflict Management Group, a spin-off of the Harvard Negotiation Project that Mercy Corps merged with in 2004.

The approach is based on the **Seven Elements of Negotiation**. We help leaders in high-risk conflict and transitional environments use the Seven Elements to prevent and manage conflicts, thereby increasing security and reducing violence.

## The Seven Elements of Negotiation



We introduce key negotiation and mediation concepts during multi-day experiential workshops and subsequently provide leaders with opportunities for reinforcement of key learning. The most effective negotiation and mediation programs offer refresher courses and opportunities for practice, application, reflection, and coaching. For example, the *Inclusive Natural Resource Management Program (INRM)* in Myanmar features quarterly exchange meetings for local community, civil society, and government leaders to reinforce their conflict management learning, share natural resource dispute resolution experiences, and network with other leaders.

### PREVENTING CONFLICT

The theories of change that underlie our conflict prevention efforts suggest that bringing parties together and building relationships enable parties to negotiate a range of solutions (e.g., land use, rehabilitation of roads and schools, joint businesses) that address underlying causes of violence, and that implementing those agreements, in turn, strengthens relationships. The adoption of an interest-based negotiation approach enables people in high-risk conflict and transitional environments to understand their and others' core needs and work to satisfy them by collaborating on joint development initiatives.



*Kashmir:* In our *Promote Trade to Foster Peace* program in contested Kashmir, Mercy Corps contributed to peace and stability by enhancing the joint problem-solving capabilities of Indian and Pakistani members of chambers of commerce, trade associations, and trade authorities. Local traders used their negotiation and mediation skills to engage government officials and trade unions, manage tensions, advocate for border policy changes, and promote trade across the Line of Control. Trade fairs helped build commercial relationships between local producers and local traders and between Indian and Pakistani officials. Improved relationships translated into increased cross-LOC trade, which grew from \$6.34 million to \$12 million over the life of the program. The expanded economic activity contributed to greater peace and stability in Kashmir.



## MANAGING CONFLICT

Our efforts to manage conflict rely on contextually-appropriate mediation efforts. We **strengthen the effectiveness of local peacebuilding institutions, and leaders use mediation to resolve issues**, thereby reducing the risk of violence and improving opportunities for local governments and humanitarian actors to address needs of the local population.

*Kenya:* In the *Local Empowerment for Peace* program in Kenya, Mercy Corps strengthened the capacity of local, district, and provincial groups to address underlying causes of post-election violence and promote sustainable peace and reconciliation. In particular, we introduced interest-based negotiation and mediation approaches to district peace committees (DPCs) responsible for resolving disputes in the Rift Valley. In two years, the DPCs resolved 39 disputes — dealing with issues such as cattle raiding, land, and politics — and conducted emergency meetings with representatives from multiple ethnic communities to prevent the escalation of violence following mass evictions and complaints of government favoritism in aid distribution. Near the end of the program, more than 70% of program participants said strong local mechanisms for peace were in place.



*Iraq:* The Iraqi Center for Negotiation Skills and Conflict Management reduces violence across Iraq and the Middle East by developing the interest-based negotiation and mediation skills of leaders and community members to promote good governance and resolve conflicts peacefully. The Center grew out of the Network of Iraqi Negotiation Experts established through Mercy Corps' *Governance Promotion through Conflict Management in Iraq* and the *Iraq Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation* programs. The Center provides negotiation and mediation training, mentoring, and support to a network of 350 Iraqi leaders who have worked together across

regional, political, and religious lines to resolve more than 900 major disputes, including sectarian conflicts over land, tensions between citizens and government over services, and disputes over elections. The network of leaders includes women and men, Sunni and Shia, Arabs and Kurds, Christians, tribal elders, religious leaders, government officials, politicians, and civil society representatives from every region of Iraq.

### A MERGED APPROACH: *BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND RESOLVING DISPUTES*

In addition to implementing programs that prevent conflict and intervening elsewhere to manage existing conflict, our efforts often take the form of a merged approach, as building relationships and promoting social cohesion enable more effective dispute resolution, which strengthens relationships.

*Nigeria:* Our peacebuilding efforts in Nigeria aim to reduce violent conflict between pastoralists and farmers through a merged approach that focuses on improving relationships and resolving disputes. Two concurrent three-year projects, *Conciliation in Nigeria through Community-Based Conflict Management and Cooperative Use of Resources* and *Inter-religious Peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria*, enhance the capacity of 700 local leaders to resolve community conflicts inclusively and sustainably. Leaders have resolved dozens of conflicts, including land, cattle rustling, and domestic disputes. The leaders also use these skills to help communities understand each other's interests and design joint community initiatives to prevent future conflict. Communities have collaborated on natural resource management activities and joint economic activities such as cassava processing, beekeeping, and biomass briquette production. These economic and natural resource initiatives have strengthened relationships and promoted collaboration across conflict lines.



## Measuring Impact

Having implemented more than 100 conflict management programs in over 40 African, Asian, Middle Eastern, Balkan, and Latin American countries since the late 1990s, Mercy Corps recognizes the importance of measuring impact. While measuring the impact of conflict management efforts has long been a significant challenge in the peacebuilding community, we have invested significant resources in monitoring and evaluation to become a recognized leader in this area. Our impact measurement efforts focus on the impact of dispute resolution on security and livelihoods in the areas where we work.

### Tracking mediation outcomes

We have developed a dispute resolution database (see excerpt in figure below) to track the resolution of disputes and assess the impact of mediation efforts. Beyond simply helping the parties get to ‘Yes,’ mediators strive to ensure the parties reach sustainable agreements that will satisfy their core interests. We therefore capture not only the type of disputes and the demographics of disputants, but also mediation outcomes and the durability of agreements. We use this data to determine what adjustments to make to our conflict management approach.

DISPUTE DETAILS					AGREEMENT LENGTH				AGREEMENT IMPACT				
Disputant 1	Disputant 1 Ethnic Group/ Religion/ Group	Disputant 2	Disputant 2 Ethnic Group/ Religion/ Group	Primary Dispute Type	Dispute Resolved?	Agreement Start	Agreement End	Status	Economic Impact of Incident	Incidents Before	Incidents After	Male Beneficiaries	Female Beneficiaries

### Measuring overall impact

To evaluate the impact of our negotiation and mediation interventions, we measure the number of reported violent incidents, the percentage of people who avoid traveling to certain areas because of insecurity, and the percentage of people who believe their communities are peaceful, safe, and secure. This data enables us to assess whether, and to what extent, negotiation and mediation capacity reduce violent conflict and improve security at the community level.



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