

MERCY CORPS
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT GROUP
FISCAL YEAR 2009 SECTOR UPDATE



Photo: Miguel Samper for Mercy Corps

Furthering our Mission

Mercy Corps works almost exclusively in high-risk conflict and post-conflict environments. We currently have programs in more than 40 countries; the vast majority of these (73%) fall into the category of fragile or critically weak states. In addition, over 92% of the places where we work are considered to be at a high or moderately high risk of instability.¹ While we recognize that these are difficult places to operate, we believe that transitional environments – countries affected by civil wars, economic and political crisis, or natural disasters – also offer tremendous opportunities for positive change.

Fiscal year 2009 was a period of extraordinary growth for Mercy Corps' conflict management and peacebuilding programs. We launched 21 new programs in 12 countries, bringing our total current portfolio to 34 programs in 16 countries. This builds on an exceptionally strong historical foundation. Since the late 1990s, we have implemented over 95 peacebuilding programs in 30 countries and regions, making Mercy Corps a true leader in the field.

Promoting Peaceful Change

Our approach to peaceful change is built on two core foundations. First, we work with local leaders and communities to help them gain the conflict management and negotiation skills they need to rebuild relationships and talk about the difficult issues that have led to violence. Second, we help our local partners implement development programs that address the challenges they uncover, whether that is competition over access to land or water, youth unemployment and alienation, or political and economic discrimination.

A hallmark of our work in 2009 was to deepen and expand the range of programs we implement. Our new projects span the spectrum of peacebuilding activities. These include projects that use economic assistance to build bridges across ethnic or religious divides (Indonesia, Uganda, Israel/Palestine), that strengthen ties between citizens and local government authorities through dialogue and community development (Sudan, Ethiopia), that re-knit the social fabric between young people and their communities through civic and economic engagement (Kosovo, Kenya, East Timor, Colombia), that bring religious leaders from many faiths together to work towards peace (Israel/Palestine, Sri Lanka), or that address competition over critical natural resources, such as land, water, or timber (Guatemala, Afghanistan, Somalia).

¹ Hewitt, Wilkenfeld, and Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2008*, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland, 2008.

In 2009 we have continued to implement our innovative approach of building (or rebuild) economic relationships across ethnic, religious, regional, or political lines of division. Conflict takes a heavy toll on economic life. It destroys economic infrastructure, disrupts trade, and distorts markets. In particular, conflict destroys trust between groups and without trust, economic transactions are virtually impossible. Many of our programs in conflict and post-conflict environments therefore focus on rebuilding economic relationships – and explicitly working to rebuild trust – between communities that have been torn apart by violence. While all community development projects can help bring divided groups together, we have found that economic projects – small savings and loan groups, road or market repair, or joint agricultural livelihoods projects – also offer important opportunities for forging mutually beneficial economic ties and helping groups understand that they stand to gain more from cooperation than from violence.

For example, Mercy Corps launched a new program in the Karamoja region of northern Uganda that will support negotiation training and reconciliation dialogues among the warring Jie, Dodoth, and Acholi ethnic communities. Following reconciliation dialogues, Mercy Corps will then help these groups identify and implement small livelihoods programs that ‘bridge’ lines of division and yield mutual economic benefit. This differs from many approaches in that we do not believe that economic development alone is enough to promote stability. Rather, we place emphasis on creating economic interdependence between groups and giving the groups the conflict resolution skills and space they need to rebuild trust.

Measuring the Impact of Peacebuilding Programs

Mercy Corps has a strong commitment to monitoring and evaluation and we are constantly seeking to develop more robust measures and approaches. This has been a strong focus over the past year and we are beginning to see dividends. We have developed a range of common indicators that we are incorporating into all of our new programs and the data are starting to show that our programs are having a significant impact in terms of resolving disputes and addressing underlying causes of violence. In addition, Mercy Corps also recently won a major research grant that will help us measure the impact of programs that are designed to promote stability through peacebuilding and economic development. The grant will help us move beyond an individual country focus and devote the resources necessary to test the impact of our programs across multiple contexts. Through the 18-month research project, we will articulate the theories of change that underlie our programs, develop robust measures for independent and dependant variables, improve data collection methods, conduct rigorous field tests in three countries, and share lessons broadly within the national and international peacebuilding community. These efforts represent an important first step to bring more rigor to our programs that are designed to promote peaceful change.

Conflict Management
Group Fiscal Year 2009
Portfolio Highlights

Number of peacebuilding programs	34
Value of peacebuilding programs	\$33,538,352
Number of land disputes resolved in northern Uganda	152
Number of land disputes resolved in Guatemala	188
Number of indigenous Guatemalans benefitting from access to land and economic opportunity	44,730
Number of traditional agreements negotiated between Somali clans	5

© 2009 Mercy Corps. All rights reserved.