

MERCY CORPS
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
SECTOR APPROACH
2009



Photo: Cassandra Nelson/Mercy Corps

INTRODUCTION

Mercy Corps helps people in the world's toughest places turn the crises of natural disaster, poverty and conflict into opportunities for progress. Driven by local needs and market conditions, our programs provide communities with the tools and support they need to transform their own lives. Our worldwide team of 3,700 professionals is improving the lives of 16.4 million people in more than 40 countries. In recognition that youth engagement in relief and development is integral to the success of lasting change, Mercy Corps currently operates 36 youth development projects in 18 countries worth approximately \$55 million. These projects help young people develop market-driven capabilities and access opportunities to achieve three goals: (1) secure income; (2) develop a sense Responsibility, Identify, Creativity and Hope (i.e. RICH of confidence); and (3) engage as global citizens and agents of change. Ultimately, Mercy Corps empowers young people to build secure, productive and just communities around the world.

Today, half the world's population is under 25 – the largest proportion of young people ever recorded. 80% live in developing countries where economic, civic and social opportunities are insufficient to address the diverse needs of transition to adulthood. The International Labor Organization (ILO) predicts that in the 2009-2015 period, around 300 million new jobs will have to be created just to absorb the growth in the labor force¹. Global peace and prosperity will be determined by how well this youth bulge is integrated into both the labor force and social fabric. Because employment alone cannot absorb such a surge in labor supply, youth energy must be channeled towards other productive activities in their community. Our greatest challenge today is to provide young people with the capabilities and opportunities they need to drive and sustain development. Fortunately, young people are hungry to make a difference and represent an extraordinary window of opportunity to propel profound change in the world.

Our youth development programming applies years of research on Positive Youth Development (PYD) in complex and fragile transitional environments. Building on a cross-sectoral approach to leverage our expertise in economic development, conflict management and climate change, we optimize engagement with government, the private sector and civil society to establish solid institutional foundations. This document outlines how Mercy Corps frames its comprehensive approach to help young people unleash their potential.

¹ Worldwide, the labor force (economically active population) of 3.3 billion is growing by some 45 million new entrants each year (ILO, May 2009).

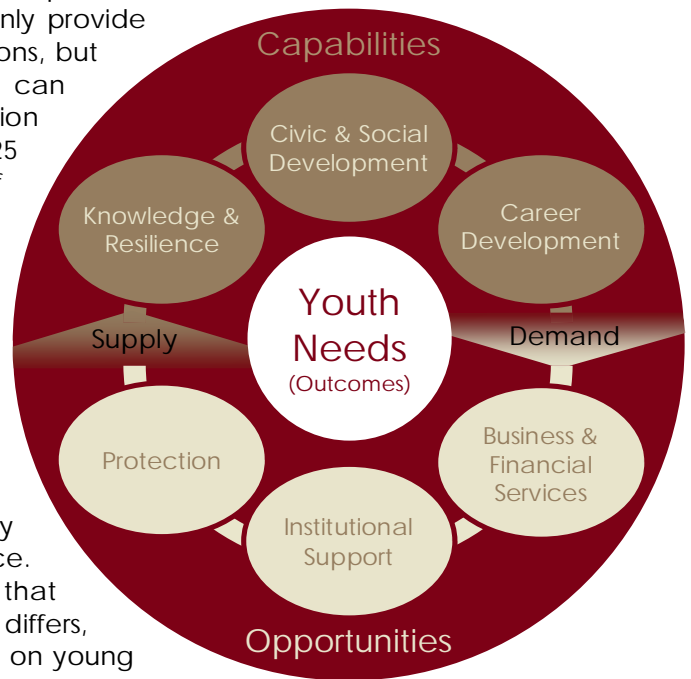
MERCY CORPS' YOUTH APPROACH

Youth Sector Goal

Mercy Corps helps young people develop market-driven capabilities and access opportunities in order to secure income and develop a sense of Responsibility, Identify, Creativity and Hope (become RICH). Ultimately, our goal is to see young people transition into global citizens who are responsible for and capable of building secure, productive and just communities at home and around the world.

Youth Transformation Framework™ - A holistic view of youth needs as they transition to adulthood

Mercy Corps empowers young people by building their capabilities and creating access to opportunities for engagement. We not only provide education and training relevant to social and market conditions, but also help local actors create spaces where young people can evolve and contribute meaningfully. Our Youth Transformation Framework™ (YTF), built from research across disciplines and 25 years of field experience, provides a comprehensive view of youth needs in complex transitional environments. The framework always presents both perspectives critical in youth development: the 'demand' for skills and behaviors (i.e. capabilities) from society and the 'supply' of accessible opportunities required to meet such demand.



The following diagram illustrates the six transformational assets that must be built locally in order to help young people transition into empowered and responsible global citizens. Overall, these assets comprise 75 program outcomes representing youth needs to help practitioners better identify the most important drivers of peace, productivity and justice. Such a youth lens facilitates cross-sectoral programming that optimizes future contributions to society. Because context differs, certain youth programs target 10-year olds while others focus on young adults up to 30.

Within this wide range, the identity seeking period often called “waithood” before transition to work/parenthood is critical because (1) attitudes and behaviors learnt during youth are easier to adopt; (2) likely to last a lifetime; and (3) unsatisfied needs increase vulnerability to negative influences. Engagement in violence is often triggered by simple “pull factors” which are the appeal exerted by terrorist groups or gangs. Because the importance of each need varies by individual, it is critical for youth programming to provide a diverse range of positive outlets that channel youth energy of multiple aspirations. Youth engagement in economic, civic and social activities that foster livelihoods, political participation and youth-to-youth connections can prevent risky behaviors while fostering positive youth development.

BUILDING YOUTH CAPABILITIES

To minimize the risks or consequences of conflict, poverty and injustice, young people must develop relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors (i.e. capabilities). Unfortunately, families and schools in transitional environments are often overstretched and trapped into habitual patterns that prevent progress. Mercy Corps breaks vicious circles by building critical capabilities that fundamentally transform the way young people see their role and responsibilities in the world. Providing academic or vocational skills alone is insufficient to ensure effective transition to work or productive and respectful citizenship. Young people from poor communities also need life and soft skills to take care of their health, make informed decisions, develop relationships, solve problems, etc. Adult support from role models, coaching and encouragement are often lacking despite their importance in youth development. Enabling young people to learn, express themselves and interact in structured settings has significant impact on their self-confidence and intra-personal skills, which in turn, increases their ability to contribute productively to their development and that of their community.

Knowledge & Resilience

Develop life skills to foster healthy and productive living through education (formal, informal and non-formal) and psychosocial support.

Summary: In areas where Mercy Corps operates, conflicts, disasters or extreme poverty have often prevented young people from acquiring basic education, vital information and the capacity to cope with necessary changes. As a result, youth are vulnerable to manipulation, negative influences and emotional damages that can multiply consequences if not addressed with sufficient care.

Program activities: Mercy Corps works with local institutions to increase healthy living, information access and well-being. Program activities vary greatly from life skills (e.g.: HIV/AIDS, nutrition, hygiene) to psychosocial support; education; coaching (support from role models); sports for change; multimedia (Radio, newspapers, mobile phones, internet); drama; dance; summer camps and global connectivity.

Program outcomes:
Knowledge and Care

- 1 Literacy (Reading & writing)
- 2 Numeracy (Personal finance)
- 3 Adult care & expectations

Healthy Living

- 1 Hygiene
- 2 Nutrition
- 3 Reproductive health
- 4 Sexual Education & STD prevention
- 5 Prevention of drug/alcohol abuse
- 6 Sports & athletic activities

Psycho-Social

- 1 Sense of normalcy
- 2 Well-being (Reduced anxiety)
- 3 Sense of hope
- 4 Sense of belonging

Civic & Social Development

Develop and connect global citizens by inspiring and equipping young people to tackle the challenges of poverty, conflict and injustice at home and around the world.

Summary: Research has long established a link between certain attitudes/behaviors (e.g.: civic responsibility, trust beyond family boundaries) and economic development. Although such system of beliefs in a society is difficult to change, positive community experiences early in youth's development can establish the foundation for important progress. Additionally, individual and social needs during the identity-seeking period should not be under-estimated even in resource-constrained environments. If young people cannot address their needs in existing structures, they are vulnerable to regrettable decisions/actions. Structured youth-to-youth interactions are powerful because they provide diverse positive outlets that channel the energy of multiple learning styles and aspirations. Youth development increases when learners have opportunities to make choices, express themselves, and take an active role in the world around them. Positive learning experiences, especially those that lead to mastery of a skill, challenge, or complex ideas like global citizenship, help young people see themselves as capable. A strong sense of self-efficacy in turn, enables people to initiate greater challenges and not be discouraged by setbacks.

Program activities: Mercy Corps develops inclusive programs that target social structures and community interactions to affect multiple outcomes. For example, both responsibility and pride can be addressed through community services projects if emotional rewards are properly addressed. Some skills are internalized using a peer-to-peer educational model across socio-economic lines, which also build social bridges. Cross-cultural dialogues and participation in community affairs are other activities often integrated into field programs.

Program outcomes:
Civic Engagement/Attitudes

- 1 Civic Responsibility
- 2 Political Voice
- 3 Justice & Community Protection
- 4 Economic Responsibility
- 5 Environmental Responsibility
- 6 Global Citizenship

Constructive Social Behaviors

- 1 Initiative & Creativity
- 2 Reliability
- 3 Empathy (Understanding others)
- 4 Tolerance (Respect for diversity)
- 5 Self-confidence (Self-efficacy)
- 6 Perseverance
- 7 Trust
- 8 Pride
- 9 Integrity

Soft Skills

- 1 Leadership
- 2 Negotiation
- 3 Communication (verbal, non-verbal)
- 4 Teamwork (Collaboration)
- 5 Goal setting & action planning
- 6 Decision making & problem solving (critical thinking)



Career Development

Integrate market-driven skills training into employment and entrepreneurship programs to foster access to sustainable income.

Photo: Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps

Summary: To be effective, workforce development programs must address the misalignment between supply of training and demand from both labor and consumer markets. Unfortunately, an increase in the number of trainees (graduates) does not necessarily lead into (self-) employment. Few training institutions have the capacity to assess demand for skills (depth and breadth) by types of employment, or to follow-up with graduates to evaluate placement rate by program. Therefore, the recruiting mix, teacher qualifications and curriculum are too often misaligned with employment opportunities. This misalignment leads to waste of resources and useless sacrifices for young people. To secure eventual income, industry value chains and demand trends must be analyzed. This market information should feed planning of training programs and adaptation over time.

Program activities: Workforce development begins with an understanding of current market demand by sector, function and location. Once sectors of economic growth are identified, it is easier to map the skills needed by categories of employment. Mercy Corps use this information to help local training providers align their courses with market demand. Activities include: market research; value chain analysis; vocational training; apprenticeships; entrepreneurship and leadership skills; computer literacy; languages; multimedia, etc.

Program outcomes:

Experience, Information & Communication

- 1 Career information
- 2 Practical experiences
- 3 ICT (Information, Comm. & Tech.)
- 4 Language proficiency

Entrepreneurship Skills

- 1 Market understanding (idea generation)
- 2 Ability to obtain funding
- 3 Business Skills

Market-Driven Skills

- 1 Agribusiness/agronomy
- 2 Vocational skills (e.g. Mechanics)

BUILDING YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

In developing countries, there are insufficient opportunities to develop/utilize relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors effectively/productively. Educational institutions tend to endorse rote-learning approaches with limited open dialogue. This older approach inhibits critical thinking and creativity and stifles effective communication, leaving young people inadequately equipped to navigate through the social, political and economic realities of the 21st century. New forms of engagement are therefore required to not only channel youth energy, but also to establish the foundation for caring and productive communities. Mercy Corps creates linkages and relationships among civil society, government and the private sector to optimize synergies that benefit youth in short and long term.

The lack of employments to meet the surge in labor supply is alarming. Youth unemployment will continue to increase as the youth bulge unfolds worldwide which will aggravate helplessness, insecurity and frustrating dependency. Large youth investments must therefore be focused on creating the conditions for innovations, entrepreneurship and employment creation. Industries with high growth potential must be identified based on value chain analysis with a perspective on employment creation for young people. Bottlenecks should then be removed and the workforce prepared accordingly. Given the scope of the demographic challenge ahead, all sectors must see youth development as a strategic priority for a more productive future.

Business & Financial Services

Provide access to youth-friendly financial services and markets to foster local economic development.

Summary: Young people from underprivileged areas need access to financial services for critical purposes: (1) to buy basic tools required to perform the work they have been trained for (e.g.: hammer, welder); (2) to travel to or lodge during school/training; (3) to buy books and school supplies; (4) to survive (food and water). However, quality education is expensive and scholarships are scarce. Entrepreneurs also start at disadvantages compared to their peers in the West: Equity or angel investors with their high level engagement, management expertise and networks are inexistent; loans (if accessible) can be 10 to 50% more expensive; and bankruptcy laws are not there to provide a second chance - asset and reputation losses for a poor young entrepreneur discourage any innovation or risk taking. To foster economic activities, innovative financial and non-financial products are required for both young and adult entrepreneurs who will create employments. Research found that providing business training to microfinance clients leads to not only improved business knowledge and revenues for clients, but also improved repayment and client retention rates for the microfinance institution - generating greater net revenues than marginal costs of training. Additionally, young entrepreneurs need help in identifying business opportunities to avoid replicating existing enterprises and address gaps between supply and demand. They also need coaching to improve goal setting, action planning and address the competing demands of personal and business lives. Mentors can provide invaluable benefits leading to problem solving and perseverance, which is critical during early stages of business development.

Program outcomes:

Youth Financial Services	
1	Business Loans
2	Educational loans/scholarships (tuition/subsistence)
3	Equity or business grant
4	Savings
5	Other financial products (Remittances, insurance, etc.)
Market Access	
1	Market linkages and development
2	Mentorship

Program activities: Mercy Corps and its affiliates operate individual credit programs; group lending schemes; and agricultural lending projects designed to promote sustainable micro-businesses. Currently, 13 active programs reach over 146,000 borrowers with over \$105 million in outstanding loans. 25% of active clients are young entrepreneurs. Other programs and research include loan guarantees, savings, small start-up grants and mentorship (see www.micromentor.org).

Institutional Support

Build the capacity of government, civil society and the private sector (including educational and health institutions) to ensure inclusive access to opportunities and services.

Summary: The availability of resources or services should always be assessed with a youth perspective on accessibility. Institutional support means building the capacity of various service providers to address quality, youth-friendliness, distance, safety, etc. This may also include working with the private sector to foster work readiness and local employments. The most important is to build the capacity of educational or training institutions to better align their service offerings and recruiting processes with the demand for (self-) employment.

Program activities: Mercy Corps mobilizes the government and civil society to find integrated solutions that address problems at the community level. We analyze overall processes and tools to improve effectiveness, efficiency and transparency.

Program outcomes:

Government	Private Sector	Civil Society	Academic (Schools, Universities)	Healthcare (Hospitals/Clinics/Health Workers)
1 Policies & programs supporting youth	1 Youth recruiting	1 Youth ass./CSOs	1 Primary education	1 Access (costs, distance, schedule)
2 Labor market regulations	2 Corporate social responsibility	2 NGO programs supporting youth	2 Secondary education	2 Service relevant to youth (type & quality)
3 Good governance	3 Industry development	3 Operational efficiency and effectiveness	3 Training institutions/universities	3 Water and Sanitation
	4 Professional development			

Protection

Protect all young people from the harsh consequences of poverty and disaster (human or natural).

Summary: After emergencies, food, water and shelters might be insufficient to fill basic needs and safety. Youth are therefore vulnerable to abuse, social exclusion and important losses especially when displaced outside of their village. In some areas, minorities and girls are totally excluded from public services with no laws or community support to address oppression and violence.

Program activities: Mercy Corps builds on its 30 years of experience in food security and community mobilization to establish safer and more inclusive environments for young people. Rehabilitation programs for those affected are designed based on local context to ensure relevance and reintegration into communities without alienating others.

Program outcomes:

Safe and Lawful Places

- 1 Legal rights
- 2 At work (including migration)
- 3 In Community (street safety, school)
- 4 Food Security

Inclusion and Rehabilitation

- 1 Support for minorities and girls
- 2 Reintegration and second-chances
- 3 Support for people with disabilities (PWDs)

Emergency Education

- 1 Appropriateness
- 2 Accreditation/Certification
- 3 Disaster risk reduction

IMPLEMENTING OUR APPROACH

The Youth Transformation Framework™ (YTF) enables a comprehensive approach to youth development at each step of the programming process. The YTF captures the cause and effect relationships between change in youth's internal and external environment (program outcomes), and greater development during adulthood (long-term impact on peace, productivity and justice). Such a holistic view of youth needs "blueprint" established from research can be used as a frame of reference to: 1) assess the situation across sectors through youth lenses; 2) design programs based on priorities highlighted during the assessment; 3) select appropriate implementing tools (e.g.: curriculum, methodology, etc); and 4) monitor and evaluate results over time. Although the systematic progression of the approach is recommended, the YTF can be used at any step to train staff, communicate with donors or brainstorm ideas thereby reducing risks of omissions and optimizing results in the long term.

Assessment

Mercy Corps believes in assessing youth issues across sectors by looking at two dimensions: the demand for capabilities (knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviors); and the supply of opportunities (services, support, protection) available locally. The YTF describes 75 youth needs with detailed benchmarks into a professional diagnostic tool that covers both dimensions. Such tool provides a process for gathering and interpreting information on the situation of young people in their environment: We collect questionnaires from diverse stakeholders, use benchmarks to interpret data, and draw a score for each of the 75 needs. This systematic scoring system facilitates comparison across demographics and prioritization before program design.

Design

The 75 needs in the YTF capture the critical factors driving not only positive youth development, but also conflict prevention and economic development. Implementing program activities that directly affect unfilled needs in the YTF predictably leads to greater contribution to community development as young people transition to adulthood. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of gaps between supply and demand across youth needs optimizes program design in light of the context in each community. Such complete picture helps donor and staff identify strategic targets as program goals (outcomes). Because the YTF integrates research findings across sectors/disciplines, youth programs can be designed with relative assurance of long-term impacts on peace, productivity and justice worldwide.

Implementation

In order to deliver transformational youth initiatives, Mercy Corps developed specialized curricula that reflect its core competencies in five subjects: 1)Global citizenship, 2)Life skills; 3)Negotiation and conflict management; 4)Psychosocial support; and 5)Social entrepreneurship. Each subject includes multiple lessons that can be implemented in various types of youth programs (e.g. sports, online connectivity, vocational

training, etc.) separately or in blocks based on local needs and program objectives. Most lessons have been designed to minimize requirements for teaching qualification and use an activity-based learning approach to engage young people in the learning process. Each module for each subject stands on its own with guidelines for assessing learning and adaptation to local context:

- The “Youth Conflict Management” (YCM) curriculum provides an approach to conflict prevention and mediation. Based on the Program for Young Negotiators, which has been used to train over 20,000 young people in the United States, Canada, Argentina and Israel, the curriculum helps youth learn the interest-based negotiation methodology. Mercy Corps has used similar curriculum with youth in Timor Leste, Nepal, Kosovo and Central Asia and with larger populations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and West Bank/Gaza.
- The “Comfort for Kids” (C4K) curriculum on psychosocial support builds resiliency of children, youth and adults to foster family stability and the emotional support system needed for everyone to rebuild their life and society. C4K has trained over 10,000 professionals, paraprofessionals and parents in the United States, Latin America, China and Gaza in support of disaster or conflict affected children and youth.
- The “Global Citizenship” curriculum was used to inspire and educate thousands of young leaders in the United States, Scotland and Middle-East countries. Some lessons focus on cross-cultural understanding and empathy while others are more issue-based with processes to internalize information related to root causes and consequences of problems such as Conflict; Poverty/Hunger; Health/HIV-AIDS; Human Rights; Climate Change/Water; Access to Education.
- The “Life Skills” curriculum includes multiple aspects of young people’s life and was implemented across multiple types of programming including sports for development in Africa and schools in China.
- The “Social Entrepreneurship” curriculum builds on Mercy Corps’ strategy around market-driven and community-based development by engaging young people to identify market needs in their community and define concrete plans for addressing them in a sustainable manner. Through the process, young people develop management skills required to allow individual and collective ownership for building secure, productive and just communities. Mercy Corps also provides guidance through participatory industry value chain analysis to align local projects with income generating opportunities.

Pedagogy - These lessons are designed as student-centered inquiry based activities in which students develop questions about global issues based on their own interests. For this method to succeed, students are encouraged to share their ideas openly and freely, so that they can have an opportunity to reflect on their own knowledge and opinions, and those of their peers. These lessons also employ cooperative learning, in which students are responsible for working collaboratively with a group of peers and independent of immediate direction from teachers. In addition, students will use their peers as resources to explore opinions and ideas from various perspectives in a forum that encourages open debate.

To transform awareness into understanding, knowledge into skills, and actions into social impact at the local and global levels, however, an emotional connection with the world must be created throughout the learning continuum. That is the power of deep interactions youth-to-youth and youth-to-community. When young people feel the value of their new knowledge and are rewarded emotionally for the progress they made, the learning process deepens and sticks longer. This can happen through community service projects (service learning) or learning-by-doing (experiential learning) which Mercy Corps favor through its activity-based lessons. Innovations in Information, Communications and Technologies (ICT) have also made possible relationship building and empathy among peers of diverse cultures which create new opportunities for global engagement.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

In addition to standard indicators used to monitor outputs, Mercy Corps measures the change in youth *capabilities* such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors using a well defined pre- and post-test with numerical values to facilitate analysis. The cause and effect relationship between change of attitudes and behaviors during adolescence and life outcomes during adulthoods (defined as a better contribution to self and society and lower engagement in violence) has been well established through longevity studies in the United States². Based on these results and research findings from Mercy Corps’s Youth Transformation Framework, we designed different indexes that measure change in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors for different subjects such as Global Citizenship, Conflict Management, Life Skills and Psychosocial Support.

²Dr. Richard M. Lerner and colleagues, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (IARYD) at Tufts University

These research-based indexes suggest that a small percentage increase today will lead to more productive citizens tomorrow, resulting in greater peace, productivity and justice. Most importantly, these composite indicators allow program managers of each country to compare and analyze results across locations. Finally, the baseline scores established through the youth diagnostic tool during the assessment can also be used to evaluate change in access to opportunities. Using these qualitative and quantitative evaluative processes, Mercy Corps is able to monitor, evaluate and report results to ensure continuous improvements and accountability.

YOUTH TRANSFORMATION ONLINE – REACHING SCALE

Global Citizen Corps (GCC) is a multi-country leadership program that uses online engagement and community actions to address multiple needs across the Youth Transformation Framework at scale. Through digital-stories, structured dialogues across continents, and leadership opportunities, young people discover peaceful ways to learn, communicate and contribute. Now in its seventh year, www.globalcitizencorps.org uses a web 2.0 portal that aggregates educational and user-generated content from mobile and other digital media into a single, youth-friendly platform. These tools offer a powerful avenue for mobilizing others to take actions worldwide. Every year, over 3,000 trained GCC Leaders in eight countries mobilize more than 10,000 peers in their action projects and reach million others worldwide. The goal is to inspire and equip an expanding international network of young leaders to take informed actions that build secure, productive and just communities around the world.

Essentially, GCC Leaders develop an understanding of global issues from those directly affected, share with those who they motivate to act, and address problems collectively. Global citizenship education across countries allows diverse youth to build trusting relationships, explore cultural differences and find common ground around peaceful change in a process of “talk global and act local.” This program is part of a long-term strategy in the Middle East to rebuild the foundation for a knowledge-based transformation while reducing digital divides and social isolation.

The GCC program currently has physical presence in six countries to facilitate training, video conferences and youth gatherings. In the United States, two hubs were established to leverage the innovative museum-style “Action Centers to end World Hunger” www.actioncenter.org in New York City (near the 09/11 memorial), and in Portland (Oregon). Mercy Corps invested in global engagement to demystify international development and radically alter the way people think about the world and their role within it.

Watch a short video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLwUyGnWDZU>



What is Global Citizenship?

The right and responsibility to engage in Civic, Economic, Social, Technological and Environmental activities in order to live in a secure, productive and just world.

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You must be the change
you wish to see in the world.

~ Gandhi

Appendix – The Youth Transformation Framework – a holistic view of youth needs as they transition to adulthood

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Mercy Corps™

Youth Transformation Framework™

6 assets, 75 youth needs (ie. program outcomes) = Capabilities and opportunities (ie. Supply & demand)

Empowered citizens capable and responsible for building secure, productive and just communities around the world