

MERCY CORPS GLOBAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT

FY19: Part I

NOVEMBER 2019

From our Interim CEO

This, Mercy Corps' first safeguarding report, provides an overview of our agency-wide approach to safeguarding as well as our case numbers for FY19 (July 2018-June 2019).

This report is published as Mercy Corps is conducting a thorough re-examination of our approach to safeguarding. That review has been prompted by recent revelations that the daughter of Mercy Corps' late co-founder, Ellsworth Culver, brought details of sexual abuse perpetrated by him to the attention of Mercy Corps in the early 1990s and again in 2018.

Mercy Corps' response in this case did not live up to our commitment to survivors, and we have taken swift action to address this failure. As CEO, Neal Keny-Guyer took ultimate responsibility for the organization's failure to respond in a survivor-centered manner and resigned his position. I accepted the role of Interim CEO with a total commitment to leading the process of internal change needed to enable Mercy Corps to become a stronger ally for survivors of abuse and proactively live our safeguarding values. I believe we can be better.

The Mercy Corps Global and Europe Boards of Directors have initiated an independent, external review to examine the organization's handling of information related to the case in 2018, as well as Mercy Corps' safeguarding policies and accountability.

In light of this independent review, we will be publishing our annual safeguarding report for FY19 in two parts. This first part provides an overview of our safeguarding figures for FY19. The second part, which will follow in mid-2020, will focus on measures we are taking as an agency to improve our safeguarding processes and practices, following the outcome of the independent, external review. We are committed to learning from our failures in this case and determined to turn these lessons into action.

When issues do arise, I am determined that Mercy Corps will put survivors first, and provide them with the support they need. I am committed to ensuring transparency with donors, local communities and team members, and to taking corrective action, be it at the local level or within our global systems. These are the right actions to support survivors, and to ensure safeguarding practices are embedded in our delivery of programs globally.

Beth deHamel
Interim CEO
Mercy Corps



Our Commitment to Safeguarding



The safeguarding triangle illustrates the key elements of Mercy Corps' approach: Prevention, Response, and Reflect & Adapt.

Mercy Corps is made up of a global team of humanitarians who partner with individuals, communities, corporations, and governments seeking to transform lives around the world.

Our mission is to alleviate suffering, poverty, and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities. Our diverse global team, 5,900+ strong, work with communities in over 40 countries; 85 percent of our team is from the countries where they work.

As a global humanitarian organization serving the world's most vulnerable communities, we take our responsibility to program participants, donors, and team members across the countries in which we work seriously. At Mercy Corps, we aspire to create an inclusive and safe work environment, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

Our Approach

To be survivor-centered means the safety, well-being, and the rights of survivors are our principal concern. Lack of a survivor focus, in our sector and beyond, has exacerbated the legacy of harm caused by exploitation and abuse; it has led to distrust in reporting systems and justifiable fear of further harm as a result of raising concerns. We have seen this and the damage done when survivors are not listened to, not believed and not treated with care and respect. As we move forward, we are committed to ensuring that we provide survivors with a safe, supportive, and confidential place to come forward, where their needs will be our first priority. In so doing, we aspire to help promote recovery and ensure survivors are able to identify and express needs, wishes and concerns at all steps of the process.

Safeguarding Data for FY19

JULY 2018 - JUNE 2019

At Mercy Corps, we define our safeguarding cases as those that involve one or more of the following:

- › Sexual exploitation and abuse: Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse of participants in our programs and community members, including actual or attempted abuse of position of vulnerability, power differential, or trust for sexual purposes; profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another; exchange of assistance for sexual or romantic relations; sexual abuse of program participants or community members; and paying for sex or sexual acts.

- › Sexual misconduct: Instances of sexual misconduct in the workplace, including sexual harassment (quid pro quo or work environment) and sexual assault.
- › Child safeguarding: Including allegations of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or otherwise putting children at risk of harm.

Our policies apply to the following:

- › Team members: All team members globally, including Mercy Corps' Boards of Directors, executive officers, management, employees, seconded employees, temporary staff, interns, and volunteers;
- › Partners: Sub-grant recipients, partner organizations, contractors, outside experts, consultants, agents, representatives, and any other organization or individual that acts on Mercy Corps' behalf or at Mercy Corps' direction; and
- › Visitors: Visitors to Mercy Corps facilities, including photographers, filmmakers, journalists, researchers, donors and prospective donors, and anyone else hosted by Mercy Corps or visiting Mercy Corps' implemented or financially supported programs.

In fiscal year 2019, Mercy Corps received 44 safeguarding-related allegations, including 13 against partners and the remaining against Mercy Corps team members. As of June 30, 2019, 31 of these cases have been resolved (either closed or pending closure); of the 13 remaining under investigation, 4 allegations are against partners.

Of the 31 closed investigations, 15 were unsubstantiated, 15 were substantiated, and one was inconclusive. All substantiated cases resulted in disciplinary action, including seven terminations of employment or partner contract and eight disciplinary actions other than termination. In all substantiated cases involving exploitation or abuse of a participant or community member, the team member or partner was terminated and is ineligible for rehire or renewal of contract. That ineligibility will be shared with prospective employers when asked.

Of the total substantiated cases, nine involved cases of internal sexual misconduct (team member to team member) of varying degrees. One case involved non-sexual child safeguarding. The remaining five cases involved sexual exploitation or abuse, which includes procuring commercial sex.

Over the past fiscal year, we have seen submissions through our reporting mechanisms increase, due to enhanced awareness and understanding of our processes and systems. Throughout our sector, it is widely noted that as organizations work to build awareness of safeguarding and ensure people feel safe coming forward, the numbers of reported incidents will rise in the short-term.

Our focus now is on the continued reinforcement and messaging around zero tolerance for exploitative or harassing behavior, and making clear that allegations of such conduct can and will be safely investigated. Learning from all reports, including those that are ultimately unsubstantiated, will help inform our efforts to educate team members about behavior in order to avoid even the perception of misconduct.

Given Mercy Corps' recent failure in sufficiently investigating the claim against our co-founder, we know we have work to do to rebuild trust and confidence in our reporting and investigation mechanisms.

Looking Forward

Mercy Corps recognizes the need for additional investment to ensure our safeguarding, reporting and investigative practices and organizational culture are genuinely survivor-centric and live up to our values. Part II of this report (to be released in Spring 2020) will outline the specific steps we are taking to reinforce all aspects of our safeguarding processes in more detail. We anticipate these steps will result in a continued increase in reporting as team members become more aware, and trusting, of our reporting systems and as we build the capacity of our country-level Safeguarding Focal Points. Maintaining a culture of physical and psychological safety within our teams will take continuous effort.

Finally, Mercy Corps recognizes that we, in collaboration with our peer agencies, need to continue to advocate for sector-level reforms that address the systemic power imbalances that perpetuate violence and abuse, particularly through strengthening social inclusion and gender-based violence prevention programming.

We will continue to engage in safeguarding communities of practice and share our lessons with peer, donor, and partner organizations in an effort to contribute to sector-wide efforts to improve safeguarding.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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