



WATER SUPPLY, SANITATION & HYGIENE (WASH)

Mercy Corps' Approach¹

MARCH 2021

We work to improve access to safe, sustainable and affordable water supply and sanitation services, and facilitate uptake of hygiene behaviors to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities. We support public and private water and sanitation service providers, civil society organizations and communities to promote public health and development and prevent water borne and transmissible diseases.

Access to water and sanitation for personal and domestic uses are recognized by the international community as human rights². Sustainable Development Goal 6 aims to ensure access to potable water from a protected source within a 30 minute round-trip from home and a private, improved latrine or toilet for all by 2030. More broadly, WASH is a prerequisite for public health, wellbeing and community resilience. Yet, globally, one in three people do not have access to safe drinking water, two in five people do not have access to basic hand-washing facilities with soap and water, and more than 673 million people still practice

¹ For Mercy Corps' approach to broader water issues please see the separate approach document on Water Security and Productivity.

² UN Resolutions 64/292 from 2010 and 70/169 from 2016.

open defecation.³ Unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene directly contribute to child mortality; diarrheal diseases is still a leading cause of death in children under 5, with more than 1,300 children dying from this preventable disease each day.⁴ The consequences of limited access to water supply and sanitation disproportionately affect women and girls, as water collection is often the responsibility of females and children, requiring significant time, increasing school dropout rates, and increasing risks of sexual and gender-based violence.

Over the last fifteen years, Mercy Corps has implemented more than 500 WASH programs in conflict and disaster affected and fragile countries. In 2020, for example, Mercy Corps had 84 WASH programs in 25 countries under implementation. These programs reached over 9 million people with traditional WASH services including some 4 million with COVID-related services. These include a wide variety of interventions from the extension of piped water networks, to repairing boreholes and treatment stations, building latrines, and promoting handwashing and improved hygiene practices. As a leader in emergency response and early recovery, we swiftly mobilize local, national and international resources to re-establish disrupted water and sanitation services. We promote sustainability and resilience through service use and positive social behavior change to improve overall public health and facilitate the transition to recovery and sustainable development. Seeking lasting change, we aim to enhance community participation and equip communities with long-term water and sanitation solutions that create job opportunities, empower individuals and communities, promote broad development goals and improve resilience and capacity to withstand shocks.

Our Principles



Sustainability and accountability: Long run financial viability, minimal negative impact on the environment and the accountability of providers to their customers is integral to quality WASH services, and the capacity to leverage infrastructure investments to facilitate good governance and increased access to services. Mercy Corps supports communities, governments and civil society organizations in the design, management and oversight of WASH services, promoting feedback mechanisms and communication with service providers, to foster demand and improve services.



Systems strengthening: To address the root causes of poor health and malnutrition WASH interventions must be embedded within existing public health and local governance systems. Mercy Corps' WASH programs incorporate sustainable systems approach to its interventions, integrating resilience, do no harm, and disaster risk reduction approaches into planning and implementation of programs.



Efficiency and effectiveness: Water supply and sanitation systems are long-term public investments and therefore must adhere to standards of performance, quality and cost-effectiveness. Mercy Corps brings quality engineering, procurement and construction practices to the field, designing systems to meet local aspirations that are culturally acceptable and avoid creating parallel or unsuitable systems.



Equity and inclusion: WASH program planning must take into consideration the social dynamics that perpetuate and exacerbate conditions of vulnerability. Mercy Corps is responsive to the needs of all service users, with a priority for the most vulnerable, keeping gender, ethnicity, age, education, degree of mobility, and socioeconomic status at the forefront of shaping any program.

³ WHO & UNICEF.2019. Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, 2000-2017: Special Focus on Inequalities. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO).

⁴ UNICEF: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/>

Our Approach

Mercy Corps' integrated WASH approach seeks to support locally appropriate solutions, which emphasize safety and dignity through gender-sensitive stakeholder engagement, evidence-based learning and consensus building. Mercy Corps' program interventions are needs-based and context-specific, enabling us to deliver appropriate and market based WASH services in a wide range of emergency, recovery and long-term development scenarios in predominantly fragile, conflict-affected contexts, as well as for people who are vulnerable to climate related adversities.



MEET BASIC WASH NEEDS IN EMERGENCY & RECOVERY CONTEXTS

Increase equitable access to and use of WASH emergency services

In times of crisis, access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is one of the most critical needs. Mercy Corps delivers immediate humanitarian services in collaboration with government and community stakeholders and prepares communities to build back better and be more resilient.

Deploying Emergency WASH: We ensure first-line emergency response through water trucking, quick repairs to existing wells and water networks, small infrastructure installations such as hand-pumps and water points, emergency latrines, handwashing stations, distributing hygiene kits and materials for point of use water treatment, and disseminating hygiene promotion messages. Mercy Corps WASH programs provide adequate sanitary preconditions for food and malnutrition crisis response and infection control and prevention around the world, addressing infectious disease outbreaks of Ebola, cholera and more recently COVID-19 in countries as diverse as DRC, Somalia, Yemen and Haiti. In Iraq, Mercy Corps has been a lead WASH emergency actor throughout the humanitarian crisis, providing WASH infrastructure and services (e.g., hygiene promotion and hygiene kit distribution) in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Ninewa, Salah-al-Din, Kirkuk and Erbil.

Harnessing Markets and Cash: Mercy Corps strives to design market-based WASH activities, involving markets and private sector resources, water and sanitation authorities and the communities, aiming to create sustainable dynamics and perennial systems for operation and maintenance and even construction of water and sanitation solutions. Mercy Corps uses vouchers for water trucking and WASH items, including in Lebanon, Iraq, Haiti, Nigeria, and CAR, creates business opportunities for local markets and integrates cash for work into larger WASH infrastructure and emergency programs.

Strengthen WASH Capacities: Mercy Corps implements WASH interventions during the early recovery phase of acute crises, including rehabilitation or extension of water and sanitation infrastructure and revitalization or creation of WASH committees. Mercy Corps also develops management solutions for WASH services in disaster-affected communities and longer-term IDP/refugee camps and settlements, for example those in South Sudan, Sudan, DRC, CAR, Nigeria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon. Mercy Corps engages with WASH utilities and local municipalities to increase coverage and access to sanitation in target communities, and for schools and health clinics.

Hygiene Promotion: Hygiene Promotion is critical to ensuring positive impact and sustainability of WASH programs, and behavior change. Mercy Corps promotes participatory decision making and facilitates community-driven action plans and social accountability for reduction of infectious diseases such as diarrheas, Ebola, and COVID-19 in communities. In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Mercy Corps has adapted existing programs in many countries around the world to be safer, by building hand washing stations and providing them with water and soap, developing and disseminating strategic and targeted information and messages around risk of infectious

disease and hygiene promotion. Mercy Corps distributes hygiene materials/supplies in emergency settings to re-establish a basic sense of dignity to refugees and the displaced.



SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY SERVICES

Improving drinking water supply systems and fostering demand through integrated infrastructure, service delivery, governance and behavior change

Mercy Corps implements programs to improve sustainable and inclusive access to potable water, governance and management in poor urban, peri-urban and rural areas, leveraging investments in infrastructure to bring about positive lasting change. Our greatest impact on improved water access and health outcomes is in communities where Mercy Corps has an established presence, local knowledge and significant local influence, often gained through the transition from emergency to recovery.

Innovative Public Private Partnerships (PPP): Mercy Corps uses the PPP approach as a stepping stone to build transformative change towards improved, sustainable and equitable access to WASH services. For example, with the IMAGINE program, Mercy Corps has expanded the city water supply network in two cities in the DRC, Goma and Bukavu, and improved the management of safe public water services for 1.5 million people, with a priority for the most vulnerable focused on the poorest zones with highest rates of diarrheal disease. In collaboration with the Congolese authorities and civil society, the project has set up a water management company and developed the first PPP in the water sector in the DRC. With this five-year renewable performance-based service contract, the Goma water company is driving significant improvements in revenue collection, water quantity sold, transparency and financial management, as well as client satisfaction.

Piloting Innovative Technologies: Mercy Corps aims to contribute to the growing evidence base for cost-effective approaches in WASH through testing appropriate technology options for onsite sanitation, water and wastewater treatment and monitoring. For cost effective and sustainable WASH services, Mercy Corps focuses on identifying, testing and taking to scale smart technology solutions and evidence-based approaches. Innovations in digital technology such as mobile phones or embedded sensors can dramatically improve monitoring and functioning of water and sanitation systems and thus improve the overall management of water resources. Mercy Corps has worked with Syrian refugees in informal tented settlements to develop innovative sanitation technologies for individual households and small communities in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.

Scalable Infrastructure: Mercy Corps supports expansion of urban water systems during post-recovery periods through assessments, designs, tenders and construction. In the aftermath of hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas in 2019, Mercy Corps' response expanded to cover the entire Grand Bahamas island serving a population of nearly 400,000 with treated water. Mercy Corps and its partners Resolve Marine and the Grand Bahama Water Utility installed, operated and managed a large reverse osmosis plant for a year before the utility reassumed control.

Good Water Governance: Mercy Corps supports public and private service providers to promote efficient and transparent resource management, conservation and good governance of water infrastructure and public water services. Mercy Corps programs in Nigeria, DRC, Jordan and Iraq, in partnership with the relevant public and private service providers are working to: 1) reduce water stress among the community members; 2) help to reestablish trust between communities and service providers; 3) foster demand for improved services through source development, distribution, treatment, operations and management solutions; and, 4) support capacity-strengthening of regulatory bodies and community oversight mechanisms such as water committees.

Social and Behavior Change: Mercy Corps WASH programs aim to address the demand for, and use of, water services through community-based strategies. Our approach introduces community engagement processes focused at organizing and equipping communities with improved skills and systems to better operate and manage their facilities, and to install and manage cost recovery systems. This work also addresses key behaviors related to safe and efficient use of water as a precious resource. In Kenya and the DRC we are working with elected volunteer mothers of children under five as primary change agents (i.e., the Care Group approach) to maximize the health benefits from water supply improvements amongst their peers.



INCREASE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO & USE OF SAFE SANITATION SERVICES **Develop long term sanitation infrastructure and service delivery solutions for fecal sludge management and safe disposal of waste.**

Mercy Corps aims to strengthen the supply of sanitation products and services all along the sanitation value chain, as well as to increase demand. We aim to achieve this through applying evidence-based approaches such as Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), sanitation marketing and city-wide inclusive sanitation to new areas, using innovative products and infrastructure, attracting customers and suppliers to the market.

Piloting Innovative Service Delivery Solutions: Fecal sludge management systems have been chronically underfunded in urban areas particularly, with low demand for services; whereas on the supply side, waste containment, removal, transport, and treatment options are limited and of poor quality. Mercy Corps partners with local authorities and utilities to develop common vision and priorities for sanitation using the city-wide inclusive sanitation approach based on master plans and working together with industry leaders. IMAGINE's successor program LIFT will facilitate an effective pro-poor, long-term viable social business model tailored to local socio-cultural and environmental contexts for local service providers to contain, empty and convert human waste into valuable end-products like fertilizer, fuel or feed.

Sanitation Marketing to Increase Household Demand: Demand for sanitation services is deterred by a lack of consumer awareness of the importance of fecal waste management and low levels of interest in effective treatment of excreta, primarily because the removal cost is prohibitively high. Mercy Corps explores sanitation marketing opportunities, including building latrines and de-sludging service solutions. In Tajikistan, Mercy Corps implemented a strong sanitation marketing component that promoted and developed local enterprises specialized in manufacturing sanitation supplies and equipment, and providing quality construction and maintenance services to households in rural communities at affordable terms.

Advocating for an Enabling Environment: Responsibility for sanitation often falls within several technical sectors of government (health, environment, water, planning), so coordination and strong governance at both local and national levels are key for sanitation interventions to succeed. Mercy Corps prioritizes stakeholder engagement and advocacy at multiple levels of government, informed by tools such as political economic legal analyses, shit flow diagram (SFD), and stakeholder mapping exercises to help government actors analyze existing data, laws, and policies, as well as develop consensus around strategies to address priority concerns.

Solid Waste Management: Poor management of solid waste poses a serious environmental health risk to many communities, often compounding issues with fecal sludge and wastewater systems. A fundamental governance issue, solid waste is a visible and political problem. Mercy Corps aims to expand our work in waste management, and replicate successes of small pilot programs in Nigeria, Iraq, Yemen and Ethiopia, which worked with private sector actors to build refuse containers for households and communal waste disposal pits.

CONTACT

MUGUR DUMITRACHE
WASH Senior Advisor
Environment Technical Support Unit
mdumitrache@mercycorps.org

MANZOOR HUSSAIN
WASH Senior Advisor
Environment Technical Support Unit
mhussain@mercycorps.org

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.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org