Sustainable and effective development is dependent on ensuring the strength of local partnerships and facilitating good governance. In every country and sector, Mercy Corps takes integrated approaches to foster local ownership of relief and development programming and reinforce the factors essential for sustainability. Mercy Corps has a 32-year history of working with thousands of local partners across civil society and public and private sectors in 114 countries. Our Principles of Partnership guide clear and transparent working relationships with partners that are inclusive, mutually beneficial, based on equity and work toward impact only possible through collaboration.

Good governance emphasizes the partnership between citizens and government for the common good, specifically addressing how mechanisms, processes and institutions facilitate citizens and groups to articulate their interests; exercise their legal rights; meet their responsibilities; and mediate their differences. For Mercy Corps, good governance is both a programming goal and condition for all other development initiatives to be sustainable. Many of our largest programs in the world include government partners and have good governance goals, including over $150 million in programming in six countries. An additional 300 programs across 30 countries have governance objectives or reflect the deep integration of governance as a central approach for all types of relief and development efforts.

Focus on Partnerships: Mercy Corps’ believes that peaceful, secure and just societies emerge when the private, public, and civil society sectors are able to interact with accountability, inclusive participation and mechanisms for peaceful change. These actors are our partners. Mercy Corps collaborates with an increasingly wide and diverse set of partners at all levels to address the global challenges that drive our work. We are recognized leaders in our field in deepening the influence and independence of local partners as effective development actors.¹ In some countries, strong national groups are ready to take leadership of grants as Mercy Corps positions itself in a support, facilitation or partner brokering role, as we have successfully done from Lebanon to Guatemala to Indonesia. Elsewhere there is still significant work to help most local groups prepare to manage funds and lead implementation. And partners at the village

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¹ See the Keystone Accountability Partnership Survey referenced in the External Partnerships section below.
or neighbourhood level are critical for community mobilization approaches. All scenarios require a deep commitment to true partnership.

**Focus on Governance:** When it is good, governance has the power to facilitate and accelerate sustainable development. Conversely, poor governance undermines stability and can rapidly reverse development gains. Mercy Corps recognizes this dynamic, citing **poor governance as the top contextual factor in the most current annual plans.** In places such as Iraq, where Mercy Corps' large-scale local governance programs build on years of capacity support through community mobilization, our efforts have never been more relevant. The Governance and Partnerships technical team is also a key part of the agency's Africa and Middle East strategy as we respond to chronic challenges of governance and new opportunities opening with the Arab Spring. Even as the international focus remained on humanitarian response, Mercy Corps anticipated issues that would surely follow and invested in a major governance assessment in Libya and created a civic engagement program in Tunisia.

**Our Strategic Goals and Approach**

The goal of Mercy Corps' Governance and Partnerships team is to **ensure local ownership and sustainability of all relief and development programming through all country, regional and technical teams having the skills, tools and relationships to fully integrate good governance and local partnership approaches.** A critical success factor for the team is a focus on social inclusion and mainstreaming women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, displaced persons and others into governance and civil society participation.

Mercy Corps' Governance Framework focuses on 1) supporting citizen participation and voice, 2) strengthening public service delivery and 3) facilitating accountable decision-making.

Mercy Corps' Local Partnerships Approach emphasizes cross-sector collaboration in civil society and public and private sectors, inclusion mainstreaming and consistent principles with the agency’s global partnerships with multi-national corporations, new donor governments and INGOs based in the Global South.

**Major areas of work for the Governance and Partnerships team include:**

- **Inclusive and integrated New Program Development,** including collaboration with diverse Mercy Corps teams in all regions to build good governance principles and strong partnerships into new initiatives, with priority areas of integration being economic development, peace building and climate adaptation.
• **High quality technical support** that improves program quality; strengthening the capacity of Mercy Corps’ team members and partners on governance; supporting local partnerships and community mobilization; aiding evidence-based research in these challenging to measure areas; and providing new resources for social inclusion mainstreaming.²

• **Representation and outreach for innovation and impact** with INGO, university, donor and other partners to challenge our field to constantly improve outcomes for communities and to raise Mercy Corps’ profile regarding governance, partnerships and social inclusion.

### The Approach In Action

In **Iraq**, Mercy Corps is implementing the **Community Action Program** (CAP) for which the US Congress approved a third round of funding in 2009. CAP fosters grassroots democracy and better local governance by working with Iraqi community groups to design and lead programs that engage them in democratic processes. CAP I and II directly served almost 3 million Iraqis, and CAP III helps them take advantage of the recent stability gains in their country. Over the course of CAP II, participants completed 453 community-led projects; community stakeholders then took responsibility for the projects, and ensured their sustainability in cooperation with local government. Mercy Corps partnered with 185 community action groups, which benefited from the over $115 million Mercy Corps has been awarded to implement CAP projects since 2003.

In **Indonesia**, a number of urban community mobilization programs have built on years of experience implementing mobilization approaches. For example, the primary component of the **Jakarta Flood Management 2** program focuses on community leadership in flood risk management for the city of Jakarta through non-structural measures, including micro-drain cleaning and maintenance and solid waste management improvements. Community Working Committees play a central role in decision-making about all aspects of projects and will be responsible for their sustainability. Funding for the 18-month program was provided by a private corporation from the Netherlands.

In **Mongolia**, the **Market Opportunities for Rural Entrepreneurs** (MORE) program has a competitive outsourcing of government services component, in which tripartite relationships with government, CSOs and the private sector help operationalize a national policy to support local procurement of government goods and services; improve the transparency of that process; and improve the economic well-being of herders and ex-herders. To date, the program has resulted in capacity-building activities for over 9,000 participants and the issuance of 500 contracts to local bidders worth nearly $2 million.

In **North-eastern India**, Mercy Corps helped form the Organic Ekta small farmers association to incentivize established tea estates to collaborate on lobbying the Government of India to bring about policy changes to benefit the farmers and the tea industry. As a result, the India government’s Tea Board has set forth new standards for land registration/usage, taxation, price fixation and marketing of small farmer produced tea. As of 2011, the project is directly benefitting

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² Including serving on InterAction’s Disability Inclusion Working Group and close collaboration with Mercy Corps’ Gender Working Group.
over 4,000 farmers. This program has established the importance of public-private partnerships in a country like India, which still has an entrenched and bureaucratic public sector and very disengaged private sector.3

Key Partnerships

The Governance and Partnerships team works closely with a number of long-term and strategic partners.

**Keystone Accountability Partnership Survey:** In 2011, Mercy Corps joined 25 US and European-based INGOs in inviting our global local partners to let us know what they appreciate about collaboration with us and where we could improve. Mercy Corps ranked 6th overall among peers, with positive feedback about our focus on partners' goals for increased independence and influence; we also learned how our systems and communication could be streamlined. The survey positioned Mercy Corps as a global leader in how we work with partners and provides us with a benchmark against which we can continually improve and innovate. [http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos](http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos)

**Libya Governance Assessment:** In July–August 2011, Mercy Corps and The Governance Network (TGN) teamed up to carry out an assessment of the immediate governance issues facing Libya. Combining Mercy Corps' experience in civil society capacity building and local governance with TGN's expertise with governments in transition and public sector development, the assessment aimed to identify areas where international assistance would be of use in Libya and to examine the greatest potential barriers to success of internationally supported interventions. The collaboration with TGN deepened the analysis of critical themes and practical opportunities for Libyan and international actors' focus beyond-Gaddafi. [http://www.mercycorps.org/countries/libya/25657](http://www.mercycorps.org/countries/libya/25657)

**Research and Strategic Partnerships:** The governance and partnerships team has cultivated relationships with numerous universities in order to deepen our analysis capacity in areas such as political economy analysis and M&E for governance, including the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, the Hauser Canter for Non-Profit Management that Harvard's Kennedy School, the Goldman School of Public Policy at the University of California-Berkley, and MIT's Poverty Action Lab. Additionally, we are developing standing strategic partnerships with key INGOs that complement areas of Mercy Corps' work, such as disability, human rights and other social inclusion programming in order to be well-positioned to respond to new opportunities.

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3 See also private sector partner examples and private sector engagement approaches in the Economic and Market Development sector overview.