

# How to Talk to Private Sector Partners & Businesses

## Private Sector Engagement Toolkit - Tip Sheet #3:

NGOs and businesses often use a different technical language to describe their work and their sectors. It is crucial that we use appropriate language when talking to our private sector partners so they can clearly understand what we are presenting. Remember that the private sector may have misconceptions about Mercy Corps and think of us as just a “charity.” We may have to help a potential business partner understand we are talking about a business relationship not just a request for help.

### Tips for Talking with Private Sector Partners

1. Avoid technical development jargon they may not understand and avoid NGO terminology or use it very selectively ensuring it is understood.
2. Recognize and take the opportunity to discuss Mercy Corp's market driven approach and work within the private sector, both of which position us a strong program partner.
3. Use business language appropriately. For example, the people we call beneficiaries they may call clients or customers. Make sure everyone understands who you are talking about and that you are talking about the same people.
4. Use technical terms related to their specific business or sector accurately, or don't use them at all.
5. Be clear up front about what it is you can and cannot offer them.
6. Get to the point. The private sector, whether rural farmers or urban processors, are busy and do not have time for long, drawn out meetings.
7. Keep in mind what their motivation and interest is and frame your communication with that in mind. Find out what their incentives are (often income, but also could be social capital, reputation, or some combination of all of these) and incorporate them into your communication.
8. Give them an opportunity to describe their business. They know this quite well and will often feel comfortable talking about it (and perhaps proud of their accomplishments). Ask how their business is running. Try to understand what is working or not working in their business plan, market, external environment, etc.
9. Ask them about their other NGO experience if any. What has worked and failed in their relationships with NGOs in the past and use that to frame comparisons to us.
10. Familiarize yourself with the other actors in the sector within the city, country, etc, so you can refer to them in an informed manner.
11. If you are meeting them to make a business pitch (e.g. we propose you invest in training farmers and we think this will increase your quality), be specific about the business model you have in mind, how you think it will work, why they should do it. Be ready to say what you will offer (e.g. an initial co-investment to buy down their risk, capacity building, mediation with farmers, etc.).
12. If you are approaching them for a program partnership, be ready to talk to them as a business partner. They may expect financial support or orders for services, but if that is not your intention make that clear up front. Related to the "what's in it for them", be prepared to be direct about what you're there to offer them.
13. If a meeting or conversation reveals a partnership is not likely, try to find out why not. Try to keep the door open for future opportunities. Use this as an opportunity to explore connections to other private sector actors.

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