

MERCY CORPS
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
SECTOR OVERVIEW
2009



Photo: Miguel Samper for 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

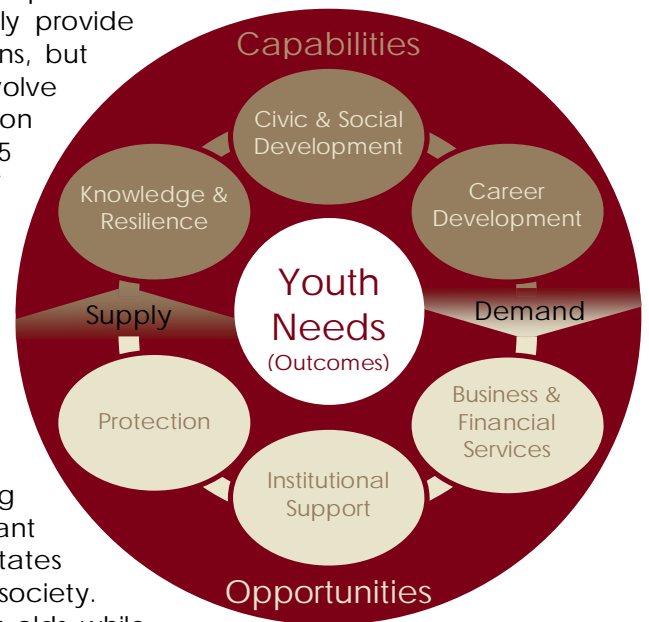
Youth Sector Goal

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.



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.

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.

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.

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.

Career Development

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

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.

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.

Business & Financial Services

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

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.

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.

Protection

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

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.

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. It also

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.



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