

Local Capacity Building Summit - Paper Submission

Capacity Development Area: Monitoring and Evaluation

**Macro-level Measurement of Local Capacity Development and Partnerships:
Mercy Corps' Experience with the Mission Metrics Initiative**



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Collaboration with local partners is central to Mercy Corps' Vision for Change¹ and approach to working with civil society, public and private sector groups around the world. Measurement of partnerships is thus essential to our understanding of local capacity development in terms of the health, impact and potential of the collaboration. It is also used as a learning tool with local partners. What is unique in our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach is that Mercy Corps *also* takes measurement to a global platform through our 'Mission Metrics' initiative, enabling evidence-based choices for better local capacity building.

Mission Metrics, now in its second full year, is Mercy Corps' approach to bringing program-level M&E into an agency-wide framework to understand the sum of its parts. This year's results are from 166 programs in 32 countries, with data that meets rigorous quality standards. We believe that findings, when aggregated across multiple countries, can offer new insights into the impact and opportunities of partnering that may not be captured when only viewed from the project, program or country levels.

This paper reviews measurement of local partnerships and capacity development through the Mission Metrics system, and will: 1) Describe Mercy Corps' approach for selection of local capacity development indicators feeding into a globally aggregated M&E system; 2) highlight new approaches and techniques that can be utilized in scaling up local measurement, including participatory approaches with local partners; 3) discuss application of the data and key challenges; 4) highlight trends and new findings; and 5) outline next steps.

Indicator Selection: For Mercy Corps, development of our Mission Metrics initiative was a lengthy, reflective and collaborative process. To enable us to understand our achievements in terms of our Mission Statement, we first very clearly defined components of our Mission Statement, subsequently determined a set of mission-critical 'success factors' that we call Mission Themes to make these components tangible, and then developed measurement strategies for each theme called Mission Indicators. These Mission Indicators serve as categories for linking different contextual indicators to a broader, aggregate level, and provide a unifying force for identifying standard, best practice program-level indicators. Currently, the two Mission Indicators by which we measure local partnerships – and the ways in which Mercy Corps' defines "secure, productive and just communities" globally – are: 1) *Local partner organizations with increased capacity to address community needs*; and 2) *Linkages between private sector, government, and civil society are forged and/or improved*.

Approaches and Techniques Utilized: In measuring these types of indicators globally, several qualitative and quantitative tools have proved beneficial. We have utilized qualitative techniques such as the Most Significant Change methodology, 'health checks' and others to solicit feedback – all approaches easily learned by diverse program teams and adaptable to different country contexts. We also work through quantitative data generated by baseline/endline scores of Organizational Capacity Indices, pre/post tests, 'report cards', progress against benchmarked plans, and surveys. The Mission Metrics framework for reporting and analyzing data allows for a mix of these kinds of qualitative and quantitative results while also creating platform for

¹ Mercy Corps' Vision for Change starts with our mission *to support secure, productive and just communities* and examines the principles by and actors with which we work, as well as the enabling environment our programming aims to strengthen.

analysis across programs. Mercy Corps has also participated in multi-agency research to inform our approach to local capacity development, including the Listening Project,² which links INGOs to beneficiary voices, and the Keystone Development Partnership Survey focused on local organizations' capacity development goals.³

Application of Results and Key challenges: Mission Metrics reports are used in planning for specific programs, regional strategies and agency resources to support targeted local capacity development. For example, measurement data contributed to a recent program design for large-scale civil society strengthening in Iraq placing heavier emphasis on long-term mentoring. And Mercy Corps' FY13 budget prioritizes technical staff skill development in partner brokering and cross-sector partnering to more effectively support new types of local partners. Mercy Corps is also still learning about the challenge of indicator measurement at a global level. Fitting organic and multi-layered systems - *such as partnerships* - and difficult concepts to measure - *such as local capacity development* - into a global paradigm is complex. The Mission Metrics pilot helped revise indicator descriptions so that data reported can be more consistent and comparable across country teams

Trends and Findings: Measuring the 'value of partnerships', not only the outputs of partners, is an unsolved challenge, yet fundamental to designing for sustainable impact. Mission Metrics is helping us get closer with an evidence-based approach. So far, we have found that understanding how partnerships at a global level feed into local partners' ability to have influence – something that is consistently flagged as a priority output by local groups - is a central component of also understanding the impacts of local capacity development and influences Mercy Corps' next steps. As partners work together, we find that the type of collective action taken jointly – be it training or advocacy or joint activities - correlates with sustainability. We also find that there is room to grow in terms of leveraging the private sector in partnerships and capacity development.

Next Steps: In taking forward this approach, we are now focusing on new global indicator development, better local measurement, and continued engagement with partners on joint measurement. First, recognizing the need to better measure the partnership aspect of local capacity development – beyond the two indicators currently aggregated through Mission Metrics – Mercy Corps is creating a specific global indicator that captures that value of relationships that are built through partnerships specifically and the factors that play into a strong partnership. By identifying these key factors, we hope to understand how to scale-up approaches, adapt to changing local/regional contexts and better deliver on development objectives. Second, given the agency focus on partnerships as a core value, we found that data lagged behind goals. For example, in 2011, only 23% of the programs reported results focused on linkages. We are actively working with country teams to develop indicators that enable programs to better 'measure what we treasure' in terms of our collaboration with local partners. Finally, we view joint measurement of results with partners as a way to support partners' own capacity development goals, a means to inform their own understandings of impact, and a tool partners can use to directly communicate with constituents and influence local policy makers and donors. This approach is aligned with the USAID Forward initiative and Mercy Corps will continue to learn from and prioritize joint measurement planning as a key 'learn by doing' local capacity development tool.

² More information about the Listening Project at <http://www.cdainc.com>

³ Keystone Accountability surveyed over 3,000 local partners on behalf of Mercy Corps and 27 other INGOs
<http://www.keystoneaccountability.org/services/surveys/ngos>