

Good Governance Impact Example Series

Southern Sudan: Rights and Responsibilities for Good Governance

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Over the past 30 years, civil war and major social upheaval have shattered and distorted many of southern Sudan's governance structures. With the peace agreement of 2004, CSOs in southern Sudan are now doing their part to get involved and encourage civic engagement at the community level as a basic element of good governance, the foundation for a just and lasting peace. Yet, for civic engagement to affect change, local government has to show receptivity. With a mission to match responsiveness with voice, Mercy Corps has developed an integrated approach for programming in southern Sudan.

Key governance themes: civic participation and voice, public service delivery, participation, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, inclusion, access to information

“Mercy Corps is building links and bridges”

As a first step, the Localizing Institutional Capacity in Sudan (LINCS) program supports CSOs through technical assistance, networking dialogues, access to information and civic education. Spanning seven regions and 27 counties across southern Sudan and the transitional areas – contentious areas in Sudan's ongoing north-south tensions – LINCS constitutes the largest initiative in Sudan that helps citizens realize their civic duties and construct robust governance structures from below.

Building on LINCS' foundations, Mercy Corps is now also enhancing the capacity and credibility of nascent government institutions through the Building Responsibility for the Delivery of Government Services (BRIDGE) program. With support from BRIDGE, public officials are developing avenues to engage with communities. They are also acquiring the skills to strengthen local government mechanisms for delivering concrete improvements in livelihoods, education, health, water and sanitation.

This dual approach reinforces practical linkages across multiple levels of government, between government and civil society and among the myriad stakeholders within communities. Together, LINCS and BRIDGE unite community voices with government initiative to deliver tangible services.

“This information does not belong to us only, but to our country”

Since 2005 Mercy Corps has supported 114 diverse CSOs through LINCS. At the heart of this process, is the creation of fora for CSO members to share knowledge, engage in community dialogues and support women's meaningful participation and leadership in public discourse.



Community leaders trained by the LINCS program dialogue with officials from the Government of South Sudan about education issues during the conference “Strengthening Women's Participation and Leadership in southern Sudan and the Three Areas.”
Photo: R. Ordonez/Mercy Corps. Sudan, 2007

“There are too few role models for women who think about participating in community action to follow, but once they realize their actions can have effects, they gain confidence and continue to achieve. I didn't want to be paid; I just wanted to make a change in my community.” – Sarah Nyanath Elijah, Program Director, Gender Empowerment for Sudan Organization

Protracted civil war and inequalities in traditional power structures mean southern Sudanese women face some of the poorest quality of life indicators in the world. Over 60% of households in southern Sudan now have a female head, meaning that women's families and communities are also affected by their precarious position. Women's involvement in CSOs has had an important effect in challenging traditional roles. LINCS has been vesting women with the skills and confidence to stimulate this trend and develop diverse CSOs.

For example, Mercy Corps has partnered with the National Democratic Institute to prepare citizens for elections through coalitions that work closely with local authorities, such as chiefs, elders and county officials, to provide public information on both the process of elections and the issues. In most areas of southern Sudan, it is taboo for women to stand up in front of men and address them. However, the election coalitions have found creative and culturally acceptable ways so that women have avenues for civic engagement. Through LINCS' peer-to-peer methods, women coalition members deliver election messages to grassroots women and the elderly deliver messages to elderly people. This approach has enhanced inclusion.

LINCS is also convening dialogues that build CSO networks as well as secure participation from local officials. Dialogue meetings impart skills to members from diverse regions so they can manage electoral processes, voter registration and constructive campaigning. Such events serve as sparks for CSO leaders to return to their communities and share skills. As one civil society member and event participant from Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal asserted, "If we don't pass this information along, it will present a great challenge to us and to our community; this information does not belong to us only, but to our country".

Mercy Corps recognizes that information-sharing provides the cement among people and the diverse layers that govern them. So that southern Sudan's citizens and officials have permanent avenues for discourse, LINCS is working with partner Internews to establish community radio stations. LINCS trains reporters and volunteers, who in turn work with civil society partners to help them use airtime to spread their messages. The reporters develop programs in response to community demands so that stations broadcast the opinions of Sudanese civil society while engaging listeners in healthy debates. Community radio stations are also becoming an essential way for government officials to give updates and address topics of national concern in the context of local communities.

Teresa Deng: Building Civil Society for Good Governance

Teresa Deng is among the many women now leading CSOs across southern Sudan. Her organization, Dot Baai, is supported by LINCS – initially through trainings, then through grants that she successfully applied for. Dot Baai is committed to helping the most vulnerable women living in Juol Jok, a village in the middle of the Abyei area – one of the most politically sensitive in Sudan. Carving out a role for women in this fragile environment is Teresa's challenge. Dot Baai provides a means for upward economic mobility and a political voice for local women, many of whom are war widows. "Civil society organizations are important," Teresa says, "because they are the eyes of the community" and a link between citizens and their government. "Women have power when they speak as one group."

Teresa's office *tukul*, a round mud hut with conical straw roof that is common in this part of Sudan, is next to the school supply warehouse that represents the origins of Dot Baai. "One day," Teresa recalls, "I saw children sent out of school because their mothers couldn't pay the fee." After discussions with teachers and destitute mothers, Teresa spearheaded a community volunteer team that donates material and labor to build the warehouse in exchange for the school fees owed by 16 children. The project galvanized Teresa to start Dot Baai.

Today, Dot Baai operates on similar principles of giving back: new members provide a five-kilo bag of sorghum or a mosquito net that is donated to a family in need. Teresa says that Mercy Corps has taught her the basics of running an organization through seminars in budgeting, management and proposal writing. She has flown to places in Sudan she had never before visited to attend Mercy Corps networking conferences, where she met organizational leaders doing similar work in other regions, as well as government officials, whose cooperation is critical to her success.

Due to her respected role in the area, Teresa is now among the civil society leaders collaborating with local government through the BRIDGE program. As one official from the newly formed Abyei Area Administration said during a September 2009 workshop at which he and Teresa were joined by 20 other leaders to advise the BRIDGE program, "We need to hear from the people, but that is hard if people do not understand government. Civil society can help. She [Teresa] is strong and can tell us."

This Good Governance Impact Example is one of a series included in Mercy Corps' Guide to Good Governance Programming. For more information, please contact Ruth Allen, Director for Community Mobilization, Governance and Partnerships at rallen@bos.mercycorps.org

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