

MERCY CORPS
COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION
SECTOR APPROACH
2009



Photo: Thatcher Cook 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 14.5 million people in more than 40 countries. In recognition that community mobilization is integral to the success of lasting recovery and development program impacts, Mercy Corps currently operates upwards of 50 projects with major community mobilization components in over 30 countries worth approximately \$300 million dollars.

Communities in which Mercy Corps works have often been disempowered for decades due to chronic poverty, bad governance, protracted conflict or instability. In other contexts, communities have recently experienced a major shock that overturned social and economic systems and people find themselves in an unfamiliar new reality. Involving community members in a way that promotes their ownership over decision-making and builds the knowledge and skills to carry out those decisions is a complex task. Yet Mercy Corps' experience leads us to believe that it is an essential component of supporting rapid recovery and lasting change. Empowering people to be their own agents of change is the underlying goal of 'community mobilization.'

Mercy Corps believes that a community-led initiative is one that originates from and is managed by community members. Mercy Corps, as the catalyst, is wholly accountable to that community in order to achieve their vision. **Community mobilization is the process of building community capacity to self-identify priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change.**

From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, and across sectors like health, natural resource management and peacebuilding, Mercy Corps applies community mobilization approaches to facilitate the process of citizens organizing for positive social change. Sustained mobilization takes place when communities remain active and empowered after the program ends. Final evaluations from a decade of implementation experience and post-program research help us understand the community-level transformation and what changes last.

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION VALUES

Community Mobilization Sector Goal

Community mobilization is the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change.

Participation

With community mobilization, participation is about meeting the interests of the whole community. When every member of a community has the chance, directly or through representation, to participate in the design, implementation and monitoring of community-level initiatives, there is a higher likelihood that the program accurately reflects their real needs and interests. The approach takes into consideration the different experiences, needs and capabilities of various groups in a community – women and men, youth and the elderly, persons with disabilities and the able bodied, ethnic/religious/language minorities and majorities. Rather than “passive participation,” we aim to inspire “self-mobilization”, where communities organize and take initiative independent of any external actors.

Accountability

Accountability is most basically the process of sharing information about actions or intentions. Groups and individuals in relationships, such as in communities, are accountable to each other when they honor their commitment to communicate plans and are responsible for what they actually do. In community mobilization, every community and all citizens have the right to know the procedures, decision-making processes and financial flows of the programs Mercy Corps implements, as well as the specific community-led projects. Mercy Corps and local partner organizations sign contracts, have open selection criteria and processes for projects, and require documentation and tracking of all information to keep exchange of information open. Transparency helps ensure that decisions that affect the community are made in a socially responsible way – that particular groups, such as ethnic minorities or persons with disabilities, are not excluded from the benefits of projects or activities.

Good Governance

Governance in general relates to the process of decision-making and how those decisions are implemented. Accountability is an essential characteristic of good governance, where leaders are accountable for their decisions to people affected by those decisions. When these processes are institutionalized they become a system of government. Governance is good when it is accountable, transparent, just, responsive and participatory. Good governance is a goal of community mobilization, plus a condition for all development initiatives to be sustainable. In a country like Indonesia, established and functioning government structures exist throughout the country. Long-term programs work with local government or national agencies as full partners in all Mercy Corps-Indonesia mobilization programs. By contrast, in Somalia, where there is not a functioning government presence in much of the country, Mercy Corps works closely with local leaders acknowledged by the community for the role they play in decision-making. Mobilization activities in these contexts can build the foundation for good governance.

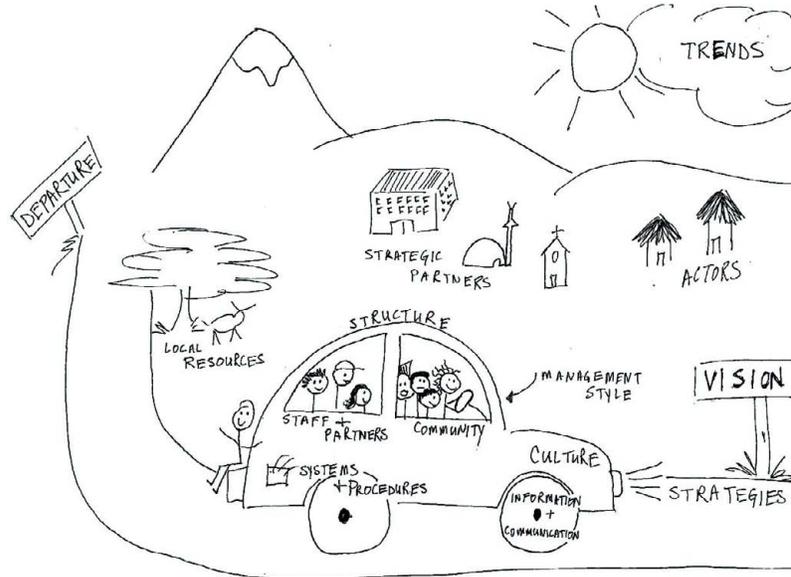
Peaceful Change

By focusing on societies in transition, Mercy Corps is often working in conflict-affected contexts and those undergoing significant socio-economic change. Community mobilization efforts must take conflict dynamics and even positive tensions into account. *Which projects can best build on connections across communities instead of fuelling tensions? How does a project impact perceptions of disparity and access? What precautions do we need to take?* Dialogue and transparency promote a certain degree of confidence and reduce friction. However, care must be taken to mitigate the potential negative impacts of all community mobilization activities. These are the main points of the “**Do No Harm**” concept¹ and apply to all communities. It is Mercy Corps’ responsibility to avoid the pitfalls of jealousy and competition over scarce resources within communities, which can happen when aid or development opportunities are not carefully planned and communicated.

¹ *Do No Harm: How aid can support peace – or war.* By Mary Anderson. 1999.

MERCY CORPS'S COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION APPROACH

Community Mobilization ensures that communities are in the driver's seat of any change process. The image below is of a flipchart drawn for a community mobilization activity in Ethiopia.



The Benefits of a Mobilized Community

A number of Mercy Corps and external studies have shown that community mobilization can help meet the challenges of societies in transition by changing attitudes, norms, practices and behaviors of individuals as well as groups. As a result, communities are able to better assess their needs, identify options for addressing them, prioritize, leverage resources and create solutions. Often such processes lead to structural changes within communities, a critical transformation that supports lasting change. The diagram on the next page and the chart below further illustrate this change process and some of the many long-term benefits of community mobilization.

Community mobilization....	And the long-term benefits can be...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases participatory decision-making processes by bringing diverse stakeholders into a common process Expands inclusion of often marginalized populations, such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and religious or ethnic minorities Depends on local resources, both human and material Fosters stronger relationships between local government, businesses, community members and CBO/NGOs Ensures local ownership of development Promotes a more active and informed citizenry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities reduce their dependence on outside aid, as they become adept at identifying and solving their own problems Communities can better prepare for or respond to disasters and crises because they have relationships with decision-makers and experience in quickly identifying communal needs and priorities Local governments gain greater credibility with their own constituencies and can better lobby national level decision-makers because they are truly aware of local needs and have local support A more stable foundation for breaking cycles of inter-group tension and achieving lasting stability

The community mobilization methodology, which easily adapts to diverse local contexts, calls for community elections of representatives to work with Mercy Corps and its partners in assessing needs and responding to them through participatory project implementation and monitoring. Community mobilization programs aim to move people across the spectrum of participation by engaging them in the leadership of the overall program throughout its implementation and by strengthening their capacity and confidence to take on increasing levels of responsibility with each new project.

VISUALIZING OUR COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION APPROACH

Between start-up and handover, there are a number of components to community mobilization. The diagram below illustrates the relationship among these components, which create an overall framework. Each of the components can inform any program using mobilization methodology. The arrows represent the general sequence of activities, with room for great variety in implementation given the objectives of programs and priorities of communities. The spiral at the center indicates the multiple cycles of programming – from planning to agreements to implementation, capacity building, and monitoring and then repositioning for the next cycle and new community-led projects. The community plays an increasing role throughout the cycle with Mercy Corps' involvement eventually transitioning out.

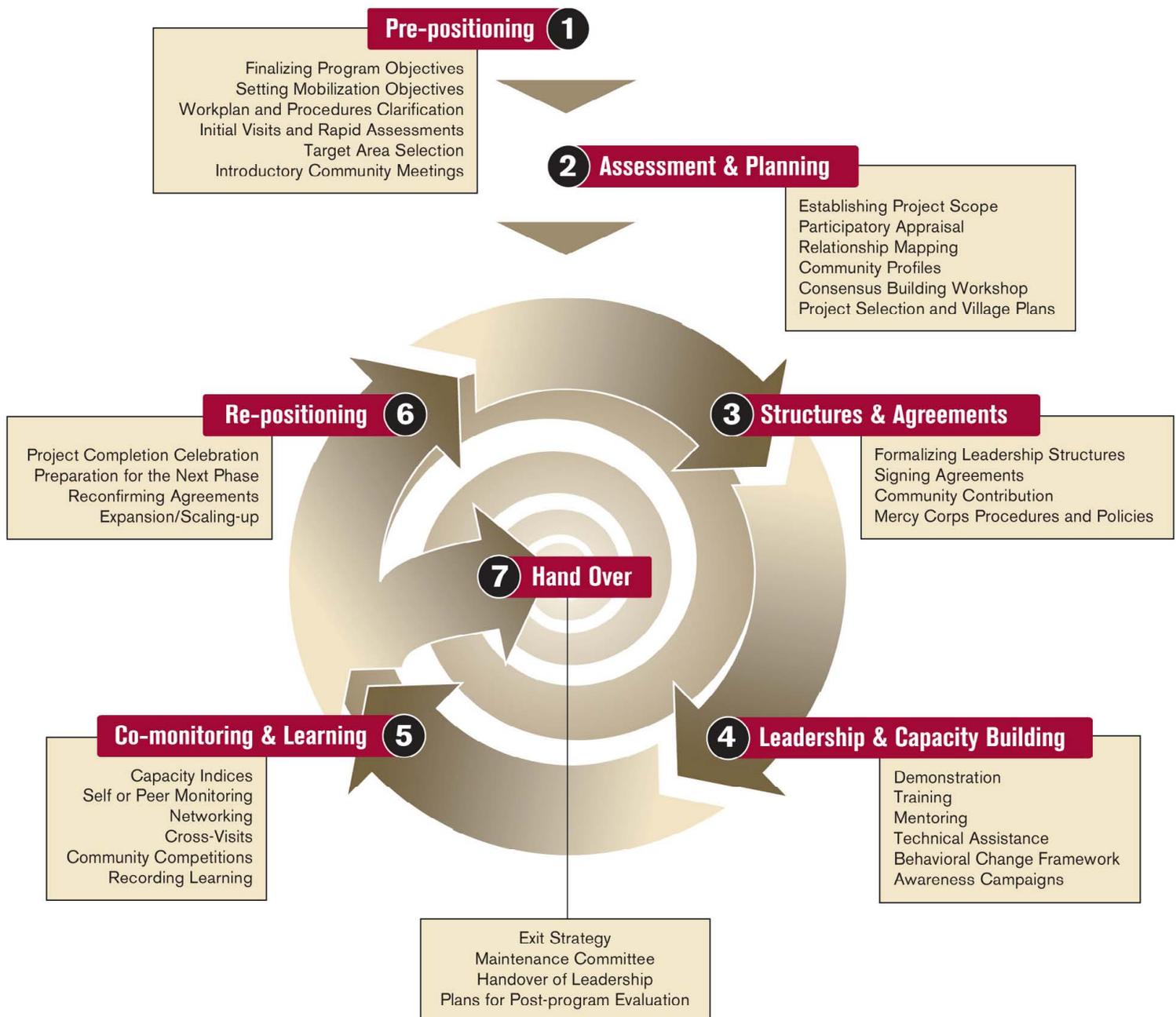




Photo: Thatcher Cook for Mercy Corps

Elements of the Framework

- **Assessment** – Getting to know potential communities, partners and the context begins before communities are even selected through initial interviews and data gathering.
- **Community Selection and Community Action Group Formation** – Assessment findings help determine with which communities programs will work. Through inclusive decision-making, communities select a representative group or groups to guide project prioritization and lead implementation.
- **Action Planning** – An assessment of the current situation, brainstorming options and drafting the implementation processes of potential community projects.
- **Project Selection and Verification** – At this phase the options prepared through the action planning process are presented for selection by the larger community and documentation captures how consensus was reached.
- **Project Formulation and Contract Signing** – Establishment of a Community Action Group facilitates project preparation and responsibilities. Details are approved by program staff, contracts between all partners are official, and documentation made available to the whole community.
- **Project Implementation** – Communities mobilize their own resources and lead implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Over time, Mercy Corps material and organizational inputs decrease to the point of full handover.
- **Project Completion and Celebration** – The Community Action Group seeks and receives completion approval from the wider community and Mercy Corps, and an event is held to commemorate the project.
- **Repositioning or Preparation for the Next Phase** – If Mercy Corps is continuing collaboration with a community, reconfirmation agreements and new project plans are created and Community Action Groups prepare to take on increased leadership.
- **Handover** – Mercy Corps works with Community Action Groups and other relevant actors to implement the exit strategy, provides final support to Maintenance Committees and works with partners to plan for post-program evaluation.

Leadership, capacity building, monitoring, documentation and learning occur throughout all phases.

LEVELS OF MOBILIZATION

Every community is different and so are their mobilization needs. Knowing where a community is starting from and progressing toward is helpful for program staff to work appropriately with the community, while always challenging them to take their leadership to the next level.

The matrix in the following table identifies seven levels of mobilization and includes some sample elements of a mobilization program.² This diagram has evolved over several years and has been applied in many countries. Before every mobilization stage or major activity, Mercy Corps assesses the progress of mobilization efforts and the evidence that contributes to the assessment using this matrix or another process. From our initial analyses, we then check our conclusions with the community and use them to inform upcoming activities or setting new targets with CAGs.

² Originally created for Mercy Corps' Georgia Field Study (2004) and adapted by Mercy Corps' Eritrea (2006) and Indonesia offices (2009).

Assessing Levels of Mobilization

Level 1-3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
External factors and/or poor site selection prevent good project implementation and community mobilization.	Community focuses on project implementation rather than on overall goal. Community has little or no comprehension of mobilization principles.	Community implements strong projects, understands and appreciates mobilization principles, but may not have sufficient skills to continue. Community needs continued external support to stay mobilized. (knowledge/attitude change)	Community is mobilized to the degree envisioned by the program. (behavior change)	Community moves beyond the expectations of the program. (sustained behavior change)
----- Successful Mobilization -----				

Elements of Mobilization	Project	No appropriate priorities are identified or consensus reached. If implemented, project quality is poor. No participation in social campaigns.	Infrastructure projects may be good, but have little or no participation, accountability or transparency.	Infrastructure and other projects may be good – CAGs promote participation, accountability and transparency.	Good projects – CAGs promote participation, accountability and transparency. Often additional resources are mobilized.	Strong projects – CAGs promote participation, accountability and transparency and carry out far more than planned with project.
	Process	Nothing happens despite frequent meetings facilitated by Mercy Corps.	Community relies heavily on Mercy Corps to drive the process.	CAG is transparent and accountable, (for example, publishes budgets).	CAG is hungry for additional information beyond what the Mercy Corps program can provide.	Community adapts and develops its own mobilization tools and/or processes.
	Maintenance	No community ownership of infrastructure and other long-term projects. Maintenance is poor.	No maintenance plans are in place – maintenance is on an ad hoc basis.	Maintenance rests with individuals or government.	Maintenance plans are in place and acted upon/overseen by a community group.	Maintenance plans are in place and acted upon/overseen by a community group.
	Community Action Group (CAG)	CAG is unable to unite the community. No natural leaders (or too many leaders competing) emerge within the community.	Autocratic leadership prevents participation or lack of leadership prevents CAG from forming effectively.	CAG relies on one or two key leaders or government.	Multiple CAG members are active. CAG is truly representative of community (including by age, gender, ethnicity etc.).	Multiple CAG members are active. Community members actively and voluntarily engage in the process.
	Community Contribution	CAG finds it difficult to raise community contribution.	Community completes the projects with the required contribution.	Community completes the projects, meeting or exceeding community contribution requirements.	Community gets resources from government and/or other donors and is able to assess its own resources.	CAG uses advocacy to obtain more resources for itself and others, and to advocate for rights.
	Advocacy	Advocacy does not take place.	Community has limited understanding of advocacy. Committees secure permissions and use of existing resources from government.	Community actively requests government permission to use resources, assign staff etc.	Community lobbies government and private businesses for new resources.	CAGs advocate at a district, municipal or provincial level for rights, access or other society-wide issues, including changes in budget allocations. They often form alliances and coalitions in order to advocate for common issues.
	Future	Nothing happens without Mercy Corps driving the process.	Community probably does not implement projects on its own.	Community implements small scale projects on its own. May or may not continue to use participatory methodologies.	CAG looks for new projects and activities and involves the community in decision-making.	Community implements independent projects using strong mobilization processes.
	Action Steps	Mercy Corps will usually make the decision not to work with the community after preliminary meetings.	The current project phase is completed, but Mercy Corps may choose not to fund additional phases.	Every stage requires supervision.	First and second stages need careful supervision.	Later projects can be carried out almost independently.
	Mercy Corps supports communities as they identify priorities, implement new projects, and acquire new skills. Active input decreases as communities gain confidence and experience.					

APPLYING THE APPROACH – INDONESIA

Mobilizing Urban Communities

With over half of the global population living in cities for the first time in human history, community mobilization in urban settings is becoming an increasingly important issue for Mercy Corps and our partners. The Indonesia team has significant experience supporting community mobilization in rural areas like Maluku and Aceh. In recent years the team has found success adapting those lessons to programming in “urban villages” of Jakarta, one of the largest and fastest growing cities in the world.

Community mobilization has long been an important aspect of Mercy Corps’ behavior change programming in Indonesia. In the case of a large urban nutrition program, the approach was specifically used to increase diverse participation and strengthen people’s sense of community for collaboration on long-term development.

Mobilizing Urban Communities in Jakarta

Mercy Corps-Indonesia’s experience in rural and urban programming suggests that sustained mobilization is equally likely in cities as in villages. However, each setting has its own challenges and opportunities regarding mobilization and behavior change. For example, understanding the roles and relationships among business, government and civil society stakeholders in a community is important for any mobilization effort; it is more complex in urban communities like those in Jakarta because there are so many more stakeholder groups.

One experienced mobilizer reflected that the community mobilization approach is quite straightforward in places where community structures are relatively linear. However, the layers of structure in urban areas – such as how neighborhoods or regions of a city have different relationships to each other and the city government – makes mobilization much more complex. “In Jakarta this method is creating confusion. There is a lot of formal community structure – so Mercy Corps’ committee adds to confusion... [In order to avoid confusion] we have to carefully map the community structures and then use these structures as the working place. If the structures are not working, make a plan to make sure they are working” and then work through those groups to implement.

Key Differences of Community Mobilization in Urban and Rural Settings

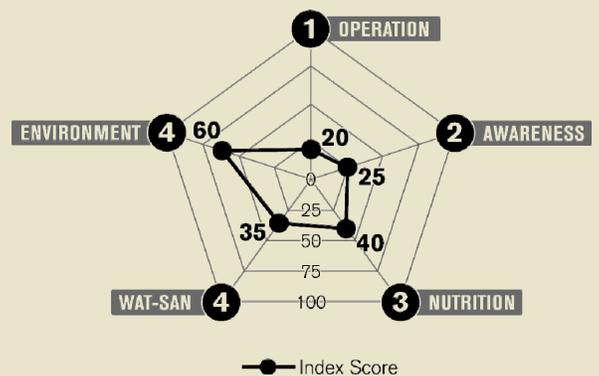
1. Identity and New Ideas: In rural villages of Indonesia the sense of community unity and solidarity is strong because their remote location and lack of attention from government have meant that they must cooperate to meet people’s needs. However, concepts of participation and inclusion or the introduction of new processes often take more time to communicate and absorb in rural areas. Urban communities in Indonesia, on the other hand, are often more educated and more easily able to grasp new ideas, but lack identity as a collective unit.

2. Focus: Rural communities in Indonesia tend to mobilize a broad range of people from diverse professions and backgrounds and from across a village. Projects address a range of different sector issues during the mobilization project cycle. By contrast, urban communities in Indonesia initially tend to mobilize around an institution, such as a school or a water user’s association, which may or may not affect as broad a range of community members. However, the need to work with other institutions or groups in the community can organically emerge (as in the profile below).

Approach in Practice

Between 2004 and 2008, Mercy Corps implemented an urban nutrition program in over 30 areas of **Jakarta**. Community committees (CCs), with assistance from Mercy Corps, created a unique capacity index to measure progress of established CCs in target communities in five different dimensions: operation, awareness, nutrition, water and sanitation, and environment. Data was collected systematically during the project period and plotted into a “Spider Graph” that allows the communities to clearly see their progress towards the index targets.

Community Index Spider Graph



As the graph shows, there was a substantial increase in overall performance. In less than four years, nearly 10,000 children benefited, over 11,000 adult community leaders were trained and hundreds of peer groups channeled messages about behavior change activities.



Photo: Thatcher Cook for Mercy Corps

3. Access to resources: Urban communities in Jakarta have greater access to cash, while rural communities in Indonesia have greater access to materials and skilled labor. Urban populations are usually more easily able to advocate and press both business and government to release resources for particular needs. However, overall, rural communities are able to mobilize a greater total contribution, including labor, possibly because of greater feelings of solidarity among community members.

Mobilizer Profile

Anna Manurung has served her North Jakarta community for 19 years as a midwife and community leader "and for that long I never managed to find [a] solution on how to change children's incorrect eating habits, which has been a big problem for all of us here." However, after Manurung attended a Mercy Corps-organized seminar about a behavior change approach for improved nutrition, her frustration melted away. "I was so sure that this program is the answer we've been looking for to solve to our problem." Going home from the seminar, she committed to mobilizing community members in her neighborhood to do projects.

Manurung's community mobilizing skills led to excellent results. Not only did she succeed in mobilizing people in her own neighborhood, she demonstrated the impact and convinced the head of her area in North Jakarta to replicate it in other neighborhoods. Another part of Manurung's recipe for success is her commitment to including local "thugs" and drivers, who call her *bunda* (mother). "I usually go to their hang out places, make small talk and check out if they're having any health problems... I advise them on how to keep their health. Next time when I ask them for a sack of rice or cooking oil for [the project], they are more than happy to help".

To maintain the sustainability of the projects, Manurung recently started mobilizing kindergarten teachers. "They are the crucial players in maintaining the replication we have made." Together the teachers and public health workers identified the need to work with food vendors. "It's difficult to tell people not to eat in food stalls. What we can do is to teach the owners about healthy food and the impacts for the people," Manurung explains. Together these somewhat unlikely allies are successfully collaborating for the health of their neighborhoods' children.

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS

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You must be the change
you wish to see in the world.

~ Gandhi