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Youth Engage Initiative: Developing Best Practices

Analysis, Recommendations, and Implementation
Roadmap to Institutionalize Y-ENGAGE and
Develop Best Practices

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Photo Source: Mercy Corps

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides actionable recommendations for advancing, institutionalizing, and scaling Mercy Corps' Y-Engage Initiative. The recommendations are tailored to Mercy Corps' Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic Levels and draw on four months of research conducted by the SIPA Team. This research included interviews with Mercy Corps leadership, Youth Champions, staff members, and peer organizations in Uganda and Ethiopia, providing valuable insights into the Initiative's current state and areas for improvement.

In the **Findings** section, data from interviews and internal documents was analyzed to identify major organizational trends within Mercy Corps. The key findings at the **Organizational level** include limited involvement of young employees in decision-making and program design, limited entry-level positions, lack of follow-through on youth engagement ideas, and insufficient budget and resources for the Y-Engage Initiative. At the **Employee level**, findings suggest that the e-learning platform has been beneficial, but there is a need to expand the internship program, provide more capacity development opportunities, and increase the representation of young people in senior management positions. At the **Programmatic level**, there is a lack of consensus on levels of youth involvement in programming, a lack of accountability measures to institutionalize feedback and make adjustments, and a perception that programming is designed from the top down.

The **Recommendations** section presents suggestions for the Y-Engage Initiative based on primary and secondary research conducted by The SIPA Team. The section is organized into five horizontal areas of improvement, including Communication, Incentives, Accountability, Structuring, and Funding, and four vertical areas of work: Organization level, Programmatic level, Employee level, and Y-ENGAGE Initiative. The recommended improvements for the **Organizational level** include creating communication channels centered around youth, implementing measurement frameworks for youth contribution, and designing leadership positions for youth. The **Employee level** recommendations suggest enhancing cross-departmental and cross-country opportunities, formalizing a mentorship program, and supporting higher education for employees. For the **Programmatic level**, the recommendations are to set targets for the number of youth-focused programs and involve youth in program design. Finally, at the **Y-Engage Initiative level**, recommendations include establishing accountability from country leadership and formalizing the Youth Champion position by tying incentives to the role.



The **Implementation** section features an Implementation Guide (Figure 3.1) that indicates the How, Who, Why, and When of each recommendation. The guide is divided into **short-term, medium-term, and long-term recommendations**, and includes the department responsible for implementation, and the rationale for each sub-recommendation. Out of the 28 sub-recommendations, 6 are short-term, 14 are medium-term, and 8 are long-term. Five medium-term and three long-term recommendations require a budget, while none of the short-term recommendations do.

The **Scaling Recommendations** section provides **tools** to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Y-Engage Initiative at all three levels of Mercy Corps: Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic. The recommendations are divided into three categories: Scaling Y-Engage Initiative Structures, Scaling Partnerships, and Scaling Y-Engage Visibility. Scaling structures includes creating positions for a Y-Engage Manager and Regional Managers (Figure 3.1), developing communication plans which can be tracked through a 360-degree feedback tool (Figure 3.2), and establishing Y-Engage Working Groups to enhance cross-country communication and collaboration. Scaling partnerships suggests collaborating with partners to create career development opportunities and youth-led solutions (Figure 3.3). The section aims to improve the Initiative's cohesion and efficiency by offering tools and mechanisms that can be implemented across all levels of the organization.

Overall, this report provides Mercy Corps with practical recommendations to advance and institutionalize the Y-Engage Initiative, enabling it to better engage with young people in its programming and decision-making processes.

Key Terms:

Youth/Young People: While definitions vary based on culture, location, and working conditions, when the paper refers to youth, it is using the Mercy Corps definition of populations of Young People from the age of 10–24.
Market Systems Development (MSD): Mercy Corps' economic development approach. It centers on the establishment of financial systems and the creation of market systems to advance development goals.
Internal Youth Engagement: Youth engagement that takes place within an organization's policies and operations (for example, hiring practices, workplace culture, mentorship opportunities, etc.).
External Youth Engagement: Youth engagement that takes place through an organization's programming activities (for example, peacebuilding activities, job corners, education programming, program youth advisory councils, etc.).

Acronyms : The following table describes the significance of various acronyms used throughout this paper.

ACRONYMS	MEANING
Y-Engage	The Youth Engagement Initiative
CARM	Community Accountability Reporting Mechanisms
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Diversity and Social inclusion
KPI	Key Performance Indicators



BACKGROUND

Photo Source: Mercy Corps

BACKGROUND

FRAMING

The demographic profile of the 40+ countries that Mercy Corps serves is relatively young. These countries have an average age of 23 and a median age of 21. Twelve countries served by Mercy Corps have a median age of 18 or lower.¹ This positionality of youth suggests a need for evaluation of organizational structures and program development strategies to ensure young people are at the forefront of organizational framing. Increasingly, NGOs and Nonprofits worldwide are restructuring their youth-engagement strategies to ensure that youth have meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making and pursue career development.² While historically, actors incorporated these practices within the framework of social-emotional learning outcomes and associated them with education opportunities; experts are progressively linking them to communities' economic- civic- and social well-being.³ Additionally, organizations are finding possibilities for new financing as a result of institutionalizing a youth engagement strategy. This practice allows organizations to tap into external funding opportunities from donors who have earmarked resources for youth development. Thus, presenting The Y-Engage Initiative as a business model will enable Mercy Corps to develop a sustainable funding structure and secure long-term support.

¹ World Bank. 2021. "Population, Total | Data." Worldbank.org. 2021.
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

² OECD. 2018. "Youth Engagement and Empowerment."
<https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/youth-engagement-and-empowerment-report.pdf>.

³ United Nations. 2019. "YOUTH DEVELOPMENT and PARTICIPATION."
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2020/10/WYR2020-Chapter2.pdf>.

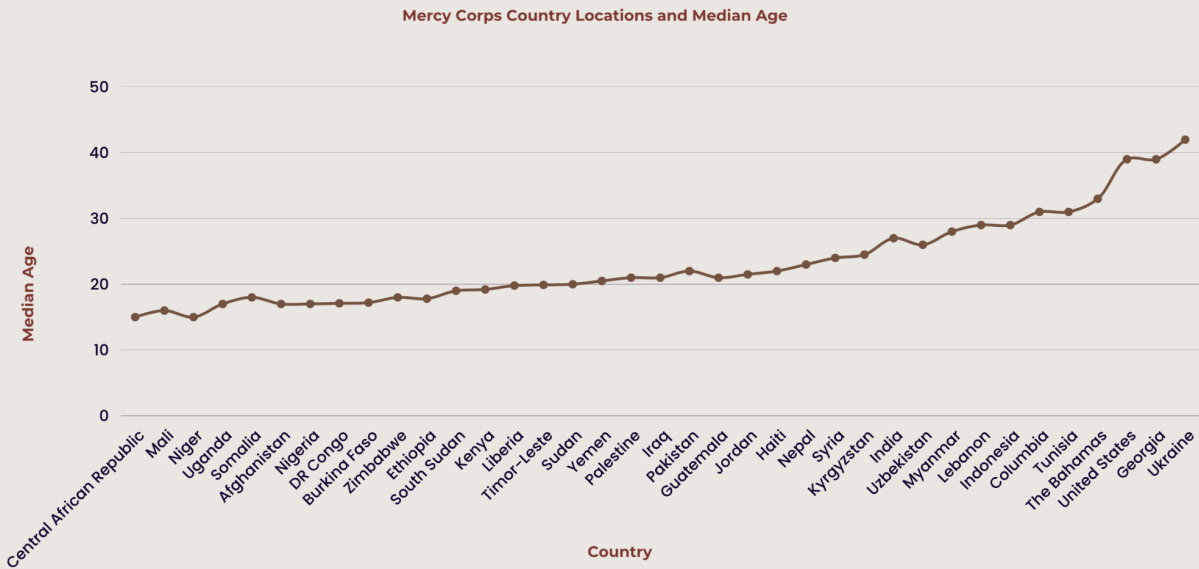


Figure incorporates median country age data from the World Bank⁴ for each country with an active Mercy Corps office (listed on the Mercy Corps website).⁵

To frame these efforts, it is critical to invest in the skills and expertise of youth that are often overlooked in humanitarian and economic development activities. Youth are highly vulnerable to social instability, economic shocks, and the consequences of armed conflicts.⁶ Young people are statistically less likely to have the opportunity to participate in governmental or organizational decision-making processes.⁷ Young people in such circumstances are frequently referred to as “disconnected youth.” This term refers to young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). These young people often exist in environments that push them towards entry into the informal economy, the unskilled labor force, alternative education programs, or none of the aforementioned choices. Consequently, they end up in a state of stagnation and dependency on either family, community, or the government. These different levels of disenfranchisement hold implications- not only for young people- but also for the communities to which they belong.

⁴ World Bank. 2021. “Population, Total | Data.” Worldbank.org. 2021. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

⁵ Mercy Corps. n.d. “Where We Work.” Mercy Corps. <https://www.mercycorps.org/where-we-work>.

⁶ Bendavid, Eran, Ties Boerma, Nadia Akseer, Ana Langer, Espoir Bwenge Malembaka, Emelda A Okiro, Paul H Wise, et al. 2021. “The Effects of Armed Conflict on the Health of Women and Children.” *The Lancet* 397 (10273): 522–32. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(21\)00131-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(21)00131-8).

⁷ OECD. 2022. “Delivering for Youth: How Governments Can Put Young People at the Centre of the Recovery.” OECD. March 17, 2022. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/delivering-for-youth-how-governments-can-put-young-people-at-the-centre-of-the-recovery-92c9d060/>.



Youth disconnection results in communities missing out from much-needed perspective and societal contributions from younger residents, leaving them increasingly vulnerable to politicization and demonization.⁸ Beyond social implications, youth disconnection is broadly associated with increased financial costs to communities, businesses, and governments.⁹ Simultaneously, the population presents a remarkable opportunity to bolster social and economic outcomes at both the local and national levels.

To effectively combat youth disengagement, marginalization, and disinvestment, the internal, external, and employee-level structures of organizations that work with populations with high levels of youth need to be reviewed with the particular experiences of young people in mind to limit exclusion. Youth engagement is critical in building more prosperous and stable communities worldwide, and Mercy Corps is well-positioned to take an "inside-out" approach to embrace young people in their work.

MERCY CORPS BACKGROUND

Mercy Corps is a global humanitarian organization that has been dedicated to helping vulnerable communities worldwide for over four decades. Mercy Corps' goal is not only to meet the basic needs of communities affected by conflict and poverty but also to achieve lasting transformational change at an international scale. The organization's fundamental framing is in supporting Inclusive and Resilient Communities, often emphasizing their work in Market Systems Development. Mercy Corps also recognizes the crucial role of youth as they represent 1.21 billion of the world's population.¹⁰ About 90% of these youth live in developing countries to increase their engagement and build more sustainable and thriving communities across the world.¹¹

In 2022, Mercy Corps introduced its 10-year organizational strategy called Pathway to Possibility. The strategy aims to meet urgent needs and develop long-term solutions to help communities cope, adapt, and ultimately thrive in the face of conflict, poverty, climate change, and other compounding threats. The 10-year strategy is guided by Mercy Corps' five commitments: Climate Smart, Evidence Driven, Innovative and Creative, Locally Led, Safe, and Diverse and Inclusive.¹²

⁸ Maclay, Christopher, and Alpaslan Ozerdem, 2010, "'Use' Them or 'Lose' Them: Engaging Liberia's Disconnected Youth through Socio-Political Integration," *International Peacekeeping* 17 (3): 343-60.

⁹Zaff, Jonathan F., Kei Kawashima Ginsberg, Michelle J. Boyd, and Zenub Kakli. 2014. "Reconnecting Disconnected Youth: Examining the Development of Productive Engagement." *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 24 (3): 526-40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12109>.

¹⁰United Nations, *Youth Social Entrepreneurship and the 2030 agenda for youth*, United Nations. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2020.html>

¹¹Youth Unemployment: The facts Report. UNICEF Global Development Commons. <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/youth-unemployment-facts>

¹² Mercy Corps, "Pathway to Possibility," 2022. Mercy Corps, <https://www.mercycorps.org/pathway>.



With an operating budget of \$550 Million, Mercy Corps is dedicated to meeting the basic needs of communities to achieve lasting, transformational change at an international scale.¹³ Considering the demographic profiles of the countries that Mercy Corps serves, young people comprise one of the largest constituencies of stakeholders that the new plan supports.

Although Mercy Corps has already empowered young people both inside and outside the organization through various programs and initiatives, the Y-Engage Initiative launched in 2019 reflects a new priority for Mercy Corps. It seeks to increase youth engagement within the organization and empower and support young staff members to promote greater youth engagement in Mercy Corps programming. Thus, the success of the Y-Engage Initiative will play an integral role in harnessing the power of young people to ultimately reach the goals set by Mercy Corps as an organization.

THE Y-ENGAGE INITIATIVE

The Y-Engage Initiative is a program that aims to increase youth engagement within Mercy Corps at the Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic levels. The Y-Engage Initiative is designed for three key purposes geared toward the Youth Champions: Learning, Leadership, and Career Development. The initiative recognizes that youth are critical stakeholders and influential agents of transformative change. Thus, its success is vital to leveraging young people's potential toward achieving Mercy Corps' organizational objectives.

The Y-Engage Initiative seeks to enhance the participation of young people and Youth Champions in country-level decision-making processes and equip them with the necessary skills to assume leadership positions in programs aimed at youth. The Y-Engage Initiative leverages the expertise of senior leaders within the organization to facilitate learning sessions for Youth Champions while also utilizing tools like the Readiness Assessment to evaluate youth engagement levels and identify areas for improvement at both the country and program levels. Youth Champions are also required to develop quarterly reports to provide updates on progress made on their developed Action Plan.

The Y-Engage Initiative faces various internal challenges in promoting youth participation and involvement in decision-making and program design. These challenges include but are not limited to: misalignment in perception of youth participation in decision-making, limited uptake of available tools, insufficient accountability for tool utilization, and inadequate follow-through on proposed actions resulting from tool implementation. In addition to the internal challenges facing the Y-Engage Initiative, youth also face external challenges based on their location. For example, in conflict zones, young people may face increased barriers to participation and involvement with the Initiative. Challenges such as limited access to resources and communication hinder young people's ability to adequately engage in country level decision-making, implement Y-Engage tools such as the Action plan, and carry the Initiative forward.

¹³ *Mercy Corps launches new 10-year strategy.* Mercy Corps. (2022, July 19). <https://www.mercycorps.org/press-room/releases/pathway-to-possibility>

OUR PROJECT

The aim of this report, conducted by **The SIPA Team** (hereinafter referred to as “**The Team**”), is to analyze the current processes, practices, and structures within Mercy Corps to identify gaps and barriers, and develop strategies to increase youth engagement at three levels: Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic Levels. This structure reflects our conceptualization of the Y-Engage Initiatives' interactions with different elements of Mercy Corps.



**ORGANIZATION LEVEL
(INTERNAL)**



**EMPLOYEE LEVEL
(INTERNAL)**



**PROJECT/PROGRAM LEVEL
(EXTERNAL)**



Organization level

This level constitutes youth engagement at organization level, i.e., ‘inward-looking youth engagement’. This section is concerned with issues such as organizational strategy regarding youth employees and organization processes which inhibit or foster youth engagement, among others.



Employee level

This level constitutes engagement of youth at an individual employee level. This level is concerned with issues such as career development and challenges faced by youth employees at an individual level.



Program level

This level constitutes engagement of youth in Mercy Corps programs and projects as well as how youth employees and program participants who are youth are driving youth engagement in programs.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Photo Source: Mercy Corps website

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Phase I: Information Gathering

This phase involved the following steps focussed towards project scoping:

- Meetings with Mercy Corps senior team
- Meetings with Mercy Corps Youth Champions and youth employees from Uganda and Ethiopia
- Reviewing materials sent by Mercy Corps

Phase II: Secondary Research

This phase involved a literature review in the following areas of research:

- Youth demographic in Ethiopia and Uganda and characteristics of the demographic
- Independent research into Mercy Corps
- Youth Development Theory
- Region-Based Approaches to Youth Programming
- Youth Development Best Practices
- Organizational case studies
- Youth Engagement Results Framework

Phase III: Primary Research

This Phase involved the following steps pertaining to primary research:

- Development of Key Research questions. The Key Research questions are mentioned below:
 - What is the scope of youth engagement within Mercy Corps (internal initiative) and in Mercy Corps programs (external initiative)?
 - What is the status of the Y-ENGAGE program and what are the barriers to its success?
 - What are the key barriers to youth engagement?
 - How can youth engagement be improved throughout the organization?
- Development of questionnaires for Key Informant Interviews (KII). The questionnaires are linked in Appendixes 3 through 8.
- Development of Interview Protocol
- The primary research constituted 1 week of on-ground in-person research in Uganda and Ethiopia Mercy Corps offices conducted by two teams of three SIPA students each. See **Figure 1.1** for a breakdown of all interviewee respondents. The following tools of data collection were used:
 - Key Informant Interviews (A total of 36 interviews in person and 3 interviews via online meeting were conducted)

- Focus Group Discussion (One Focus Group discussion was conducted in the Ethiopia office)
- Peer organization Interviews (Restless Development, Hope of Children and Women Victims of Violence (HOCW), AMREF)

Phase IV: Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted by following the steps given below:

- Cleaning of interview transcripts
- Development of head codes and sub codes for qualitative data analysis
- Data from all the cleaned transcripts was coded as per the codes generated
- Once the coding was completed, insights were generated for each sub code. This included quantification of insights. For example, x% of interview participants mentioned/suggested y.

Phase V: Synthesis and report generation

The findings from the data analysis were structured into the different sections of this report. This research report has the following **limitations**:

- All interviews were semi structured interviews and were organically modified during the fieldwork as per the evolving understanding of the context. Owing to this, not all questions were answered by all interviewees. Readers must keep this in mind while reading the report.
- The Team did not conduct any interviews with Mercy Corps Ethiopia field office staff.
- The research team was not able to directly interview program participants

Figure 1.1: Interviewee Respondents

Total number of respondents	39
Mercy Corps Office	
➤ Ethiopia	16
➤ Uganda	17
➤ HQ	03
Position Level	
➤ Intern	01
➤ Program Level	22
➤ Youth Champions	03
➤ HR/People and Culture	02
➤ Senior Management	05
Adjacent Programming	
➤ Ethiopia	01
➤ Uganda	02



FINDINGS

FINDINGS

The following section features an analysis of The Team’s Primacy Research, which consists of interviews from the Ethiopia and Uganda Mercy Corps offices, as well as interviews with HQ employees, as depicted in **Figure 1.1**. This analysis is also connected to major organizational trends within Mercy Corps that have been sourced from internal documents and meetings with leadership. Findings are divided into three major sections: the Organizational level, the Employee level, and the Program level. Sub-sections highlight overarching findings, barriers, and suggestions **proposed by Mercy Corps employees**. Many suggestions posed by interviewees are expanded upon in the Recommendations section.



Organizational Level Findings

Interviews suggest that while young staff are encouraged to grow professionally, there is still room for improvement. There are limited entry-level positions available for young staff, as many job descriptions require a minimum of two years of work experience. Additionally, once working for Mercy Corps, young staff members face significant challenges to advance to higher-level positions.

“I feel young people are pulled behind...There are not many avenues for growth. There are some, but they are really limited and for only a limited number of people. Sometimes a job opens and they need ONLY Program staff. If you don’t fit the open position, there isn’t space to grow.”

- Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

Interview data shows a divide among **perceptions** of youth staff leadership and participation. **Of 11** Program Level staff, **six** indicated that youth employees are not involved in decision-making and program design, while **five** indicated that they are. Contrarily, all interview participants from Senior Management, Youth Champions, and Human Resources expressed that youth are not involved in decision-making and program design. These findings highlight the need for further investigation and action to promote youth participation and involvement in decision-making and program design. The data suggests that the divide in perception is rooted in the fact that young staff members are present in leadership roles but without a deliberate focus on youth engagement.

Barriers and Interviewee Suggestions

At the organizational level, several barriers hinder youth engagement, such as a lack of inclusivity in meetings and insufficient space to participate. In some cultural contexts, a hierarchical age-based system can also present a challenge. Another barrier is the lack of follow-through on youth engagement ideas. The automatic allocation of positions to those with more years of experience, without fairly distributing the job posting, is another issue. **The most commonly cited theme was the lack of budget and resources.** Participants suggested that including a section on engaging young staff within job descriptions could improve commitment and accountability. This will vary based on position and country office. Addressing these barriers is critical for creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace that encourages youth participation and engagement.

“Most of these meetings have set agendas, and there isn't space to speak openly or express concerns. They are also very infrequent. Even at the current country conference, the agendas are set, and people are lined up to speak.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

“The problem is that the people who are leading projects are having meetings together. All the communication is happening between the same people. It could be used as open time to share updates about Youth Champions.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

“...when they do have open positions, they don't share it with everyone.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

To address the barriers to youth engagement, interviewees provided a variety of recommendations:

- Support from someone whose job description is centered around the Y-Engage Initiative was mentioned **seven** times; **four** of those times were unprompted. This recommendation was also emphasized in the Ethiopia focus group session. This role could be an expert, youth advisor, or mentor.
- One Senior Management employee suggested that either the Program Director or Head of Programs position in each country office would be ideal to oversee the Y-Engage Initiative. These positions are a part of the Senior Management Team, meaning they can both set objectives for Y-Engage and oversee country engagement.
- Mercy Corps can add Youth Engagement to its meeting agendas and participate in events outside the organization, such as youth champion days, youth forums, and youth debates, as well as partner with universities.

*“We need to hire a person to make this work. without a dedicated person- it will be challenging.”
- Mercy Corps Program Level Employee*



Employee Level Findings

The findings at the employee level suggest that young employees at Mercy Corps face challenges primarily related to their **career development**. Interviewees mentioned the e-learning platform offered by the organization has supported the professional growth of employees, along with coaching, guidance, and training from senior staff. In Uganda, young employees have benefited from the graduate trainee program, which enables them to explore different departments and identify their interests. However, there is a need for a formal mentorship program, as the current opportunities are ad-hoc and voluntary.

Internship and mentorship programs were mentioned the most. Interns were mentioned 21 times out of 38 interviews, specifically suggesting hiring more youth interns. Interview respondents viewed hiring more interns as a way to improve youth engagement at Mercy Corps. The organization has an existing internship program in Ethiopia, which has focused on bringing more women into the organization. Currently, there are 20 interns, but the target is to have 38 interns. Respondents suggested lowering the experience requirement for the internship. The internship program in Ethiopia also includes a built-in mentorship program, which can be replicated in other offices.

“I think the mentorship and internship program are important steps. They have meaningful responsibilities. We are seeing a lot of movement from these areas.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

Barriers and Interviewee Suggestions

The interviews also revealed several barriers to career development for young employees at Mercy Corps. Respondents mentioned a lack of growth opportunities, which is further compounded by a lack of communication and movement between departments, the absence of young people in senior management, lack of capacity development opportunities due to budget constraints. Some respondents also mentioned age discrimination, lack of space for young people to contribute to meetings, and a lack of support for employee education. These barriers call for Mercy Corps to take action to address the challenges faced by young employees in their career development.

“There is no support in professional development opportunities. It's in annual reviews, but there is no budget to allocate capacity building to staff. It would be a good strategy to invest in someone's education, then have them return and work for X years.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

The following suggestions to enhance career development opportunities **were particularly salient among our respondents:**

- Creating more mid and high-level positions within the organization to enable internal upward mobility.
- Engaging young employees in project development and business activities to provide them with practical experience and skills.
- Supporting young employees in pursuing higher education to enhance their qualifications.
- Offering interdepartmental career opportunities to promote movement and growth within the organization.
- Providing third-party professional training opportunities to enhance employees' skills and knowledge.
- Establishing internship programs in country offices where they don't currently exist.
- Implementing structured graduate training programs to provide young employees with systematic training and development.
- Creating more visibility for youth employees to recognize their contributions and promote their career advancement.

The suggested strategies can enhance the engagement of young people in Mercy Corps operations, aligning with the significant representation of youth in the populations that Mercy Corps serves. Moreover, these strategies will establish a conducive and encouraging work environment for young employees, equipping them with the necessary tools and opportunities to advance and flourish in their careers within the organization.



Program Level Findings

While there is a broad understanding among Mercy Corps staff that young people play an essential role in their programming efforts, the exact nature of their engagement is the subject of debate. Across all employee levels, interviewees indicated that, despite the fact that youth engagement is not an explicit goal of Mercy Corps programming, youth participants are often a critical component of the organization's efforts in the field. The age distributions of both countries support these findings. Despite this understanding, there is a lack of consensus on the degree to which young people are involved in the development and execution of programming.



A contributing factor to this gap in understanding may be the new organization-wide 10-year strategy, "Pathway to Possibility," which Mercy Corps released in July of 2022.¹⁴ The plan provides the fundamental framework for conceptualizing, designing, and executing all programmatic efforts. The first significant pillar of the Pathway to Possibility strategy is the organization's "Five Commitments."¹⁵

Commitments

These five commitments underpin all that we do – regardless of programming interventions or context – and challenge us to be more accountable and to continuously push the boundaries of what is possible:

1. **Climate Smart:** We take bold action to meet the urgency of the climate crisis.
2. **Evidence Driven:** We use data, evidence, and analytics to drive impact, scale what works, and influence others.
3. **Innovative and Creative:** We innovate and work with change-makers to test, co-create, and scale more effective solutions.
4. **Locally Led:** We are intentional about sharing and ceding power, building meaningful partnerships, and centering communities' voices in all we do.
5. **Safe, Diverse, and Inclusive:** We help create a culture of inclusion for all people that protects, enables, and elevates diverse community members and groups.

The second pillar of the new 10-year strategy is the organization's four key outcomes.¹⁶

Outcomes

We work towards four connected and reinforcing outcomes that determine people's wellbeing and support them to cope, adapt, and thrive:

1. **Food Security:** People are well-nourished at all times, with access to sustainably produced, safe, and nutritious food.
2. **Water Security:** People have equitable and sustained access to clean and safe water to meet their everyday needs.
3. **Economic Opportunities:** People grow and sustain their assets and income.
4. **Peace and Good Governance:** People reduce or prevent violence, contribute to advancing sustainable peace, and participate meaningfully in inclusive and responsive governance systems.

Data from our interview process found that different staff members conceptualized young program participants' roles in these frameworks differently. For example, at the Uganda office, an interviewee in a senior management position reported that youth are "not mentioned" in the strategic plan.

¹⁴ Mercy Corps, "Pathway to Possibility," 2022. Mercy Corps, <https://www.mercycorps.org/pathway>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

On the other hand, at the Ethiopia office, a program-level staff member suggested that youth development is implied by the language included in the strategic plan, specifically citing that commitment 4 (Locally Led) and commitment 5 (Safe, Diverse, and Inclusive) are intrinsically linked to youth development needs.

While connecting young people to programming efforts in some undertakings requires digging into program outcomes and reverberating effects, interviews with Program Level staff members suggested that in other program settings- youth take center stage. For example, youth development is enmeshed in Mercy Corps' peace-building endeavors along Ethiopia's western border. In this setting, the organization's work to engage young people in the peace-building process relies entirely on the organization's ability to meaningfully connect with youth. Similarly, the organization's work to create job corners, establish references, and connect young people to opportunities for employment and financial well-being are explicitly linked to youth development and even to the Market Systems Development lens that Mercy Corps employs. Even beyond these examples of explicit links between programming and youth development, interviewees frequently cited the large number of young people that interact with programming generally. Their shared understanding is supported by the demographic profiles of the countries served by Mercy Corps. With this fact in mind, the Mercy Corps' commitment to "local leadership" paired with Mercy Corps country's demographic tendencies should position youth as an essential element of the Pathways to Possibility plan.

Barriers and Interviewee Suggestions

Because there are inconsistent levels of understanding of how exactly youth engagement connects to Mercy Corps' programming goals, our data suggest few substantive efforts to use programming as a catalyst to target youth issues. That said, while this fact may be a barrier to youth engagement, it may not hinder Mercy Corps as a whole. In an interview with a staff member in senior management, the interviewee explained that Mercy Corps is not an education-centered organization and that because of this positionality, its work does not and should not target factors typical of education organizations (for example, school access).

Even expanding beyond the positionality of Mercy Corps as an organization, a host of other factors could serve as barriers to incorporating youth engagement into the programming structure. First, interviewees suggested that a large number of program participants are highly mobile, frequently relocating in pursuit of long-term accommodation and economic opportunities. Interviewees cited this as a consistent challenge, particularly in programming linked to youth development. Take, for example, "job corner" programs that provide young people with references and resume-building services to participate in the formal economy. Many of these participants fall through the cracks without a consistent location or means of communication.

Another barrier can be connected to buy-in problems as it relates to leadership's interest in youth engagement. Interviewees overwhelmingly suggested that the bulk of programming is designed with a top-down approach.



Because the existing iteration of the Y-Engage Initiative centers the Youth Champions (early career professionals) as the sole arbiters of ensuring that youth engagement is considered a factor in programming efforts suggest that there would be limited opportunities for them to substantively affect programming.

When asked about pathways to better incorporate youth engagement into programming (through both staff and participant participation), 8 of our respondents referenced Mercy Corps' priority to listen to and adapt based on feedback without specific prompting from the interviewer. That said, because of funding and staffing limitations, respondents often suggested a gap exists in the organization's ability to measure its impact on youth development issues. Similarly, while the organization has instituted several mechanisms for collecting feedback (CARM), toll-free lines, WhatsApp, survey administrations, and in-person feedback), there are no accountability measures in place to institutionalize the feedback review process and make adjustments to programming. The list below features suggestions that respondents frequently gave on pathways to improve youth engagement in programming.

- **Four program level respondents** suggested that involving young program participants and representatives from grassroots organizations would support better youth engagement in programming.
- **Three program level respondents** suggested involving program officers in the program design process would better connect programming with youth engagement outcomes, as program officers work the closest to program participants..
- **Two program level respondents** suggested allocating funds for the explicit purpose of enhancing youth engagement.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Photo Source: Mercy Corps

The following section features **The Team’s recommendations for the Y-Engage Initiative** based on collected Primary and Secondary research. Recommendations are consolidated in **Figure 2.1**, which is structured along five horizontal areas of improvement: Communication, Incentives, Accountability, Structuring, and Funding; and four vertical areas of work: Organization level, Programmatic level, Employee level, and Y-ENGAGE initiative. It is imperative that recommended formal structures are supported by Mercy Corps strategy documents and that appropriate financial and human resources are allocated for relevant activities.

Figure 2.1: Recommendation Overview

	Improving Youth Engagement at the Organizational Level	Improving Youth Engagement at an Employee level	Improving Youth Engagement at the Programmatic level	Improving the Y-ENGAGE initiative
Communication	Design channels of communication which center around youth			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase awareness about the Y-ENGAGE initiative within Mercy Corps
Incentives		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross departmental and cross country opportunities Formalizing a mentorship program 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalize the Youth Champion position by tying incentives to the position
Accountability	Create measurement frameworks to account for youth contribution and engagement			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish accountability from country leadership
Structuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formalize youth hiring practices Design leadership positions for youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross departmental and cross country opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set targets for number of youth focused programs and youth participation within those programs Involve youth participants in program design 	
Funding		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the Internship program Support Higher Education for youth employees 		

Figure: 360 degree overview of areas of improvement across areas of work ¹⁷

¹⁷ Please note that the recommendations often overlap between two or more areas of improvement (horizontals) and they are placed in the cell that best indicates the nature of the recommendation.

The *horizontal*s are understood as follows:

1. Communication

Communication refers to structured and unstructured channels of communication within the organization which facilitate everyday tasks for individuals and teams. Research findings indicate a need for strengthening communication channels as one of the first pillars for improving youth engagement at Mercy Corps. Since the Y-ENGAGE initiative originated at headquarters, Mercy Corps employees in country-level offices are still unaware of the initiative or have a low level of understanding. The role of youth champions is poorly understood even by the managers of the youth champions. Additionally, youth employees express the desire to have their voices heard in senior leadership meetings.

2. Incentives

Incentives refer to monetary or non-monetary perks for employees, teams, or departments designed to galvanize action from those who receive the incentives. Research findings indicate there is a need for strengthening and building incentives as a pillar to drive youth engagement within the organization. For example, the Youth Champion position is on an entirely voluntary basis which may disincentive employees from applying for the position. Other forms of incentive include skill development, mentorship, and leadership positions for young employees.

3. Accountability

Accountability means employees/teams/departments are responsible for their actions, behaviors, performance, and decisions. In the context of the Y-Engage Initiative at Mercy Corps, accountability falls upon both young and senior employees as well as departments such as the HR department, to follow through on commitments. Currently, there is a lack of accountability measures within the Y-ENGAGE Initiative. Our research findings, as well as Y-ENGAGE action plans, suggest that action items and responsibilities were not followed through by senior leadership. As the Y-Engage Initiative continues to grow, larger accountability frameworks will need to be instituted to ensure the program achieves its stated objectives.

4. Structuring

Structuring or restructuring refers to those efforts which require changes in the processes, hierarchies, team, and department structures. In other words, it requires systemic changes in the way Mercy Corps works. Examples of such structuring include creating opportunities for cross-department movement for employees, involving youth employees in program design, and including program participants in program design. This structuring is necessary to enhance youth engagement in Mercy Corps.

5. Funding

Funding refers to the monetary allocation of budget for a specific activity or department focused toward youth engagement. Since the Y-ENGAGE Initiative currently proceeds without any funding, it faces limitations and risks such as low interest in youth champion positions, extra work burden on existing Youth Champions, and slow progress of work. The Human Resources team has a budget for professional development for staff (e.g. the Next Leadership Program). However, this budget is not specifically for the Y-ENGAGE Initiative. An increase in budget would support other Y-Engage Initiative activities such as creating leadership positions for youth, instating internship programs, etc.

The four **Vertical** work areas are elaborated on below:



Improving Youth Engagement at the Organizational Level

*“Almost 75% of total employees in the Ethiopia and Uganda offices are under 35 years of age”.*¹⁸ This implies that youth engagement is taking place organically throughout the organization outside of the Y-ENGAGE initiative. Youth employees throughout Mercy Corps are interacting and adding value to various aspects of the Mercy Corps system without a structure to recognize and measure these contributions. An organization-wide youth strategy is imperative to institutionalize youth engagement. Currently, the only youth initiative in Mercy Corps is the Y-ENGAGE initiative which is not as effective as it could be because it is led by a handful of individuals and not built into the foundation of the organization and its programs. To facilitate youth contributions at an organizational level, the Team recommends the following:

Formalize Youth Hiring Practices

While youth employees form a majority share in Uganda and Ethiopia offices, Mercy Corps can benefit from having a formal baseline requirement for youth hiring. This can be built into the organization’s strategy to have a targeted number of youth hired every year. Additionally, good practices regarding youth hiring should be established within the organization, such as monitoring the number of years of experience required for entry-level positions as well as leadership positions so that more youth can move up to leadership positions. The Addis Ababa office has already taken steps toward this practice by establishing a memorandum of understanding with select universities to encourage well-qualified youth to apply to positions at Mercy Corps.

Additionally, country offices should conduct an age breakdown of staff which will enable a comparison of youth representation in Mercy Corps to the youth population in that country. For example, 50% of the country’s population is youth, while 35% of Mercy Corps country staff is youth. This data could feed into strategy discussions and enable Mercy Corps to become more youth-centered.

Design Leadership Positions for Youth

It is not enough to hire youth without having a designed career trajectory within the organization. Mercy Corps employees expressed stagnation in salaries and promotions after a few years into the organization.’

“They’ve had the same salaries and positions for 3 years now. I find that shocking.” - Mercy Corps Senior Management Employee

¹⁸ Field Interview, Mercy Corps Ethiopia employee

Mercy Corps needs to design more leadership positions for youth by either reserving positions in country leadership teams, senior leadership teams, and positions in advisory boards. This can also be done by creating new positions specifically to facilitate youth voices, for example, creating leadership positions within youth working groups. More information on youth working groups is provided in the Scaling Section.

Create Measurement Frameworks to account for youth contribution and engagement

Beyond performance evaluations, the organization lacks formal channels for recognizing the efforts of youth employees. To acknowledge their valuable contributions, youth employees have expressed interest in speaking at senior team meetings and participating in decision-making processes.

“While position descriptions and performance reviews are important for accountability, they may not necessarily motivate people to do their best work. We could consider creative ways to highlight and celebrate the amazing work that our staff are doing in youth engagement” - Mercy Corps HQ Employee

One of the current operating programs in Ethiopia is the Gender Equality, Diversity, and Social Inclusion Cohort Initiative (GEDSI), which can provide important learnings and insights to support the Y-Engage Initiative. The GEDSI program follows a specific framework to measure inclusivity, diversity, and gender metrics at the country office level. To develop a successful youth engagement strategy, it's important to establish measurement frameworks that track country-level outcomes and targets, as well as the teams and individuals responsible for achieving them. The GEDSI framework can be an effective model for guiding this process. This translates to including youth-focused indicators, such as key performance indicators (KPIs), into country-level strategies and results frameworks. This can increase visibility and accountability for the Y-Engage Initiative. By having youth-relevant KPIs in measurement frameworks, organizations can more effectively track progress, identify areas for improvement, and demonstrate the value of their youth engagement efforts.

Design channels of communication which center around youth

Currently, there is a lack of formal communication channels open for youth participation. The following channels can be created by MC:

- Involve field office employees in strategic/leadership meetings .
- Identify youth representatives at a field office level for representation at senior leadership meetings.
- Quarterly meetings between all youth employees and country leadership providing an open platform for discussion and concerns.



Improving Youth Engagement at an Employee level

One of the ways to strengthen Youth Engagement throughout Mercy Corps is by starting at the smallest unit of the organization - an individual youth employee. Youth, as well as senior employees throughout the Uganda and Ethiopia offices, reflected upon the lack of career development opportunities for youth. Career development for youth employees is mutually beneficial for employees and the organization. By providing the right opportunities and platforms, Mercy Corps carves out the way for youth’s voices to be heard and youth leadership to form. Career development for youth employees can be improved in the following ways:

Expanding the Internship program

While the Ethiopia office has rolled out the internship program, Uganda and other country offices still do not have one. Once the Internship program is systematized, it will ensure a continuous flow of youth employees into the organization. This can be achieved through tying up with local universities in each country. Mercy Corps can also design the journey of an intern through the organization for a period of years. For example:



Cross-departmental and cross-country opportunities

Mercy Corps employees across both offices expressed frustration due to stagnation of position and learning. After reaching a certain position, employees do not have promotion opportunities. This issue can be countered to some extent by creating learning opportunities by facilitating movements across departments in the same country or being stationed in another country.

“Mercy Corps needs to give us the opportunity to implement what we learn. For example, I’m in finance...if Mercy Corps gave me some flexibility to explore other avenues...I could move areas” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

Formalizing a mentorship program

Employees report receiving mentorship from their immediate supervisors, but this is not happening across the organization for each employee; some youth employees are receiving direct support from their supervisors while some are not. Mercy Corps can create a low-maintenance channel for mentorship which is managed by the HR department. With an initial rollout, employees can sign up to become mentors and mentees and match with each other as per their needs. After this, it is up to the matched pair to continue the communication. This network will create organic cross-country communication and learning opportunities.

Support Higher Education for youth employees

Youth employees expressed the desire to pursue higher education for upskilling and moving up the hierarchy within Mercy Corps and the additional support they require from Mercy Corps regarding this.

“Case in point, is the study leave. In the year you can only take 7 days (you cannot work and study). If you're away from your duty station, you cannot travel and study. It's impossible within that time frame. It is something but not enough.” - Mercy Corps Program Level Employee

Mercy Corps can explore the following recommendations to solve for this:

- Provide the option of a longer study leave for National staff.
- Provide the option to switch contracts to part-time for a certain amount of time (e.g. six months) to allow staff to focus on their studies.
- Promote online higher education opportunities or hybrid courses which do not require physical presence.
- Fund a part of staff’s education on the condition that they continue with the organization for a certain number of years
- Tie up with educational institutions to provide fee subsidies scholarship to Mercy Corps’ top employees.



Improving Youth Engagement at the Programmatic level

Set targets for the number of youth-focused programs and youth participation within those programs

Since Mercy Corps works in countries that typically have a majority youth population, many of Mercy Corps programs have significant youth participation. However, field research indicated that there are only a few programs that are specifically designed for youth, such as the Girl-H program in Uganda, which targets adolescent girls. Mercy Corps has an annual participant count, which collects data on the number and kind of participants reached. Mercy Corps should set yearly targets on:

- Percentage of total number of programs targeting youth.
- Percentage of youth participation in each of those programs.
- Disaggregate youth program participants by age and sex to assess who is and who is not being included.

Once the annual participant data is collected, it is worthwhile to analyze this data and compare it to the yearly targets set and address gaps. For example, if the yearly target is to reach x number of youth across all MC Uganda and the actual participants reached is y, then what can be done to reach the targets set? It is worthwhile to note that numbers do not necessarily indicate meaningful engagement - an awareness program can reach hundreds and thousands of participants fairly easily, while a behavior change intervention will reach fewer participants but have a deeper and more meaningful impact on the participants. These considerations should be kept in mind while setting targets.

Involve youth participants in program design

The Team's field research indicates that feedback and inputs from youth participants is already being collected through the CARM mechanism. However, there is currently no mechanism for involving youth participants in the initial stages of program design. Creating such mechanisms will have multiple benefits:

- Documentation of this information will ensure that it becomes part of organizational knowledge and not lost from year to year.
- This documented information can be considered when designing new programs with the same community.
- Greater engagement of program participants in the activities due to increased ownership.
- Programming is more aligned with the expressed needs and interests of youth participants.



Improving the Y-ENGAGE initiative

Establish accountability from country leadership

The most frequent recommendation from the analysis of field interviews is to generate greater accountability from country leadership. Our research findings, as well as Y-ENGAGE action plans, suggest that action items and responsibilities were not followed through by senior leadership. This links to an earlier recommendation of creating measurement frameworks to track youth engagement. Within these accountability frameworks as well as in country strategies, Key Performance Indicators can be tracked for youth engagement which senior/country leadership is responsible for. This would be an integral part of measuring each country office's performance.

Increase awareness about the Y-ENGAGE initiative within Mercy Corps

The second most frequent recommendation is to increase awareness regarding the initiative within the organization. This can be done through a variety of means, such as Youth Champions presenting their work in front of the country staff on a quarterly basis. More specific recommendations regarding increasing awareness about the initiative are given in the Implementation and Scaling sections.

Formalize the Youth Champion position by tying incentives to the position

The third most recommended action is to formalize the youth champion position by building the position into existing roles. For example, 20% of the personnel's time (say, Program Manager) will be dedicated to Youth Engagement work. This will ensure the following things:

- Youth Champion's manager will be aware of the time distribution and the Youth Champion will not be overworked.
- The 20% time allocation will mean there is an automatic budget for the position, and extra funds do not need to be allocated.
- This budget will be reflected in the organization's finances which will create more visibility and transparency for the position and initiative.

IMPLEMENTATION

The following section features **The Team’s Guide on implementing recommendations for the Y-Engage Initiative**. The **Implementation Guide** is consolidated in **Figure 3.1**, which indicates the department responsible for implementation, the rationale for each sub-recommendation, and the proposed time frame for implementation: short-term, medium-term, and long-term. Short-term recommendations are either relatively easy to implement or require urgent attention. Short-term recommendations should be completed within six months. Medium and long-term recommendations may require additional resources and time for implementation. Medium-term recommendations should be completed within two years, while long-term recommendations may take two plus years. Out of the 28 sub-recommendations, six are classified as Short Term, 14 are classified as Medium Term, while the remaining eight are classified as Long Term. Additionally, 5 out of the 14 Medium Term recommendations and 3 out of 8 Long Term recommendations require a budget while none of the Short Term recommendations require a budget.

Figure 3.1: Implementation Guide

Recommendation	How	Who	Why	When
Improving Youth Engagement at the Organizational Level				
Formalize Youth Hiring Practices	Set a minimum global target for the number of youth to be hired every year.	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to work for Mercy Corps. To increase the number of youth employees in Mercy Corps globally. 	Short Term
	Set a country level target for the number of youth to be hired every year, that might differ from the global target, based on local circumstances.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to work for Mercy Corps. To increase the number of youth employees in Mercy Corps country offices. To accommodate country differences. 	Short Term
	Look for opportunities to reduce the number of years of experience required for leadership positions.	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to work for Mercy Corps. 	Short Term
	Set a country level requirement of years of experience required for entry level positions, that might differ from the global requirement, based on local circumstances.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to work for Mercy Corps. To accommodate country differences. 	Short Term
	Look for opportunities to reduce the number of years of experience required for leadership positions.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. 	Medium Term

Recommendation	How	Who	Why	When
Improving Youth Engagement at the Organizational Level				
Design leadership positions for youth	Set a minimum percentage of young people to be in Senior Management Team positions.	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. 	Long Term
	Set a minimum percentage of young people in Country Leadership Team positions.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. To accommodate country differences and represent the country's demography. 	Long Term
Create measurement frameworks to account for youth contribution and engagement	Replicate GEDSI initiative by appointing Y-ENGAGE advisors for each country office. <i>*Budget required</i>	Headquarter/ Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accountability, ownership, and visibility of the initiative. To ensure specifically designated funding. 	Long Term
	Include youth focused indicators (KPIs) within country level strategies and results frameworks.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accountability, ownership, and visibility of the initiative. 	Long Term
Design channels of communication which center around youth	Create monthly meetings between all youth employees and country leadership providing an open platform for discussion and concerns.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the young employees and leaders. To increase the youth engagement. 	Short Term
	Reserve a spot for young employees in strategic Senior Management Team/Country Leadership Team meetings.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the young employees and leaders. To increase the youth engagement. 	Medium Term
	Reserve a spot for young people who work at field office level in strategic Senior Management Team/Country Leadership Team meetings.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the young employees and leaders. To increase the youth engagement. 	Medium Term
	Reserve a spot for Y-ENGAGE Advisor in strategic Senior Management Team/Country Leadership Team meetings.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the initiative and leaders. To increase the awareness of the initiative and youth engagement. 	Long Term

Recommendation	How	Who	Why	When
Improving Youth Engagement at an Employee level				
Expanding the Internship program	Design the journey of an intern through the organization over a period of years. *Budget required	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility. It provides incentive and creates a pathway for young people to work for Mercy Corps. To ensure budget availability. To accommodate country differences. 	Medium Term
	Establish a partnership with universities in each country to offer internship opportunities to their best graduates. *Budget required	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase accessibility and provide incentive for young people to work for Mercy Corps. To ensure budget availability. To accommodate country differences. 	Medium Term
Cross departmental and cross country opportunities	Allow employees to shift departments in the same country. *Budget required	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create learning opportunities. To provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. 	Medium Term
	Open cross country job exchange programs/opportunities. *Budget required	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create learning opportunities. To provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. To solve the imbalance of employee structure across countries. 	Medium Term
Formalizing a mentorship program	Create a mentorship program in all offices, including across departments and offices mentorship.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To catalyze the learning process and provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. To accommodate country differences. 	Medium Term
	Open recruitments for employees to voluntarily become mentors, including across departments and offices mentorship.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create learning opportunities. To provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. To accommodate country differences. 	Medium Term
Support Higher Education for youth employees	Explore work study options for young employees.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create learning opportunities. To provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. 	Medium Term
	Provide scholarships for young employee's education on the condition that they continue with the organization for x number of years. *Budget required	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create learning opportunities and accelerate employee's learning process. To provide incentive for young people to build their careers in Mercy Corps. To ensure budget availability. 	Long Term

Recommendation	How	Who	Why	When
Improving Youth Engagement at the Programmatic level				
Set targets for number of youth focused programs and youth participation within those programs	Set a percentage of the total number of programs targeting youth.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the youth engagement at the programmatic level. 	Medium Term
	Set a percentage of youth participation in each of those programs.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the youth engagement at the programmatic level. 	Medium Term
Involve youth participants in program design	Create a program feedback mechanism that is customized to youth. For example, use tools which they preferred, such as social media. <i>*Budget required</i>	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the youth engagement at the programmatic level. 	Long Term
Recommendation	How	Who	Why	When
Improving the Y-ENGAGE initiative				
Establish accountability from country leadership	Add Youth Engagement as a KPI that each country office will be evaluated on.	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure accountability measures of the initiative. 	Long Term
Increase awareness about the Y-ENGAGE initiative within Mercy Corps	Youth Champions present their work and progress in front of the country staff on a quarterly basis.	Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the initiative and leaders. To increase the awareness of the initiative and youth engagement. 	Medium Term
	Create a periodic Youth Champions online/in person meeting across countries, attended by the Senior Management Team. <i>*Budget required</i>	Headquarter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To strengthen communication channels between the initiative and leaders across countries. To increase the awareness of the initiative and youth engagement. 	Medium Term
Formalize the Youth Champion position by tying incentives to the position	Allocate dedicated time budget for youth engagement.	Headquarter and Country Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the awareness of the initiative and youth engagement. 	Short Term



SCALING RECOMMENDATIONS

Photo Source: Mercy Corps

SCALING RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section features **The Team’s recommendations to scale the Y-Engage Initiative**. As the Initiative formalizes its structure and routinely meets goals set in each Country Office, HQ must be prepared to oversee not only the expansion of the initiative into countries around the globe but also the expansion of the scope of the initiative itself. Unlike long-term recommendations, the scaling recommendations offer tools and mechanisms that operate across all three levels of Mercy Corps—Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic - thereby increasing the Y-Engage initiative’s cohesion and efficiency. These recommendations fall into three categories: Scaling Y-Engage Initiative Structures, Scaling Partnerships, and Scaling Y-Engage Visibility. Most of the following recommendations hinge on Mercy Corps allocating a budget to the Y-Engage Initiative.

Scaling Y-Engage Initiative Structures

Building from our initial recommendation to formalize youth engagement structures, as more Mercy Corps countries engage Youth Champions, the structure must scale along with the number of Youth Champions. **Figure 3.1** depicts a **potential future structure**, including a “lead” Youth Champion for each country, and assumes Youth Champion representatives in field offices. The horizontal structure is intentional, as perspectives from Field Office Youth Champions, Head Youth Champions, Regional Managers, and the overarching Manager should all be incorporated in each meeting. **Regional hubs** should develop their own structure for consistent communication, including tracking plans of each country’s action plan.

Communication will continue to be an imperative piece of the success of the initiative as it scales. Each country’s action plan should include **specific feedback and evaluation plans**, which can be implemented using a method of **360-degree feedback**. This is a process where feedback is collected from Field Youth Champions, Head Youth Champions, Regional Managers, the Y-Engage Manager, and a self-assessment. A model is provided in **Figure 3.2**. Each country’s action plan should incorporate communication mechanisms for the Country Leadership Team and Youth Champions to build strong relationships. Accountability of the relationship can come from two areas: Country Leadership Team evaluations, as their engagement with Youth Champions should be included in their job descriptions; and/or Regional Managers of those Youth Champions. For example, if more than two meetings in a row are canceled, Youth Champions will report this in Regional meetings as they update their activity trackers, and Regional Managers can reach out to Country Leadership Teams when necessary.

While regional meetings may be the most frequent, **cross-region communication** will be a unique opportunity to share ideas. Ideas that Youth Champions are interested in may fall into specific themes, and the Y-Engage Initiative can utilize a **Working Group framework**, as depicted in **Figure 3.3**. Each large circle is for a specific theme that Youth Champions are interested in pursuing.

Youth Champions from across the world can join their preferred group (if any), with one person as the facilitator. The facilitator does not necessarily need to be a Regional Manager. This type of format will encourage cross-country communication without requiring a large budget. It can also foster greater creativity and engagement and unlock the full potential of projects and programs in each country. These themed areas may be in-line with the rest of the Youth Champions job descriptions or be a separate area of interest. **Figure 3.3** is a general framework, and it can be updated to include names of Youth Champions, differentiate between Field Office Youth Champions and Head Youth Champions, and the like.

Once the Y-Engage structure is solidified and has high levels of engagement, the focus can shift to engaging **program participants** at a higher level. This will look different based on country-context, but should be included in each country's action plan. Consider how **Field Youth Champions**, who have the greatest exposure to implementation and program participants, can engage participants on developing new programs. If certain participants are particularly passionate about engaging at a higher level, they can and should be **included in Y-Engage Working Groups (Figure 3.3)**. This opportunity would be a unique work experience for these young people outside of Mercy Corps, encouraging their passions and creativity.

Figure 3.1: Future Y-Engage Initiative Structure



Figure 3.2: 360 Degree Feedback Model

Being evaluated:	Field Youth Champions	Head Youth Champions	Regional Manager	Manager
Evaluating:				
Field Youth Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance Contribution to regional meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management style Team building Feedback implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management style Team building Feedback implementation Meaningful representation of their region's Youth Champions and Field Youth Champions in decision-making spaces. Ensuring career development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meaningful representation of their region's Youth Champions and Field Youth Champions in decision-making spaces. Perception of Y-Engage sustainability
Head Youth Champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program design Community Engagement Engagement with program participants Contributions to media campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idea generation / engagement Relationship strength with their Country Leadership Team Engagement with their Field Youth Champions Partnership engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management style Team building Feedback implementation Resources and capacity building Ensuring career development opportunities Country Leadership Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources and capacity building Perception of Y-Engage sustainability Ensuring career development opportunities
Regional Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting attendance Engagement of program participants Referring program participants to partner programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management style Team building Referring program participants to partner programs Partnership engagement Country Working Group representation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions Working Group representation Media campaign contributions Resources and capacity building Career development opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback implementation Support / Leadership strength Adaptability Perception of Y-Engage sustainability Resource allocation Partnership engagement
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant feedback collection Engagement in program design Referrals to partner programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Country working group representation Leadership style Partnership engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions Working Group representation Media campaign contributions Resources and capacity building Career development opportunities Feedback implementation Management style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self assessment Meeting KPIs Engagement with regional managers, Head Youth Champions, and Field Youth Champions Partnership engagement Exploring novel funding opportunities Sustainability of the Y-Engage Initiative

Figure 3.3: Y-Engage Working Groups

- Group Facilitator
- India Youth Champion
- Regional Manager
- Program Participants
- Uganda Youth Champion
- Ethiopia Youth Champion
- Georgia Youth Champion
- Group is not open to join



Scaling Partnerships

There are powerful youth initiatives around the globe that offer Mercy Corps valuable partnership opportunities as Y-Engage scales. Youth Champions should lead each partnership relationship with the support of Regional Managers. The experience of collaborating with partners to develop and implement youth-led systems and solutions will be a unique career development opportunity for Mercy Corps' Youth Champions. These partnerships may take a wide variety of forms, such as co-creating programs, participating in each other's programming, and integrating partnerships into future Y-Engage Working Groups, among others. Three potential partnerships are highlighted below, with suggestions on partnership value-add, and there are many more partnerships worth considering.¹⁹

1. **International Youth Foundation (IYF)** has been connecting young people with opportunities to transform their lives for 30 years. The Foundation focuses on education, employment, entrepreneurship, and social innovation. They have three strategic objectives: strengthening youth agency, expanding economic opportunity, and ensuring systems are more youth inclusive and responsive. IYF works with partners to build effective, sustainable and scalable initiatives that drive change around these three objectives. The Foundation's success has hinged on partnering with all members of the youth development ecosystem: corporations, multilateral organizations, youth-serving organizations, local leaders, communities, and young people. IYF plays the role of the connector and convener. One of their longest-standing initiatives is Passport to Success[®], which equips young people with skills to help them stay in school and be prepared and confident to succeed in both life and the workplace.²⁰ This program is a potential opportunity for Mercy Corps program participants. Many other IYF initiatives would be beneficial for Youth Champions themselves.²¹ For example, The Advancing Economic Mobility with Skills (AEMS), which helps organizations digitally deliver skills-based training.²²
2. **Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE)** is a global program that brings together donors, governments, foundations, private sector companies, NGOs, and youth to support programs that enable young people to engage in productive work. S4YE has made an explicit commitment to long-term solutions and maintains that they will work for at least 15 years to achieve their objectives. The program believes the timeline is proportionate to the magnitude of the challenge of employment faced by young people around the globe. Their approach focuses on piloting innovative grassroots solutions in collaboration with private and public partners, including Plan International, Google, Facebook, and the International Youth Foundation. This partnership presents an opportunity for Mercy Corps to implement youth-developed solutions before developing its own structures that enable youth-developed programs from within.

¹⁹ Additional Potential Partners: Young African Leaders, Young African International, YALI Network, youngafrica.org

²⁰ "Passport to Success[®] (2007–Present)." n.d. International Youth Foundation. Accessed April 25, 2023.

<https://iyfglobal.org/initiatives/passport-success>.

²¹ ""All Programs."" n.d. IYFGlobal.org. Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://iyfglobal.org/all-program>.

²² "Advancing Economic Mobility with Skills (AEMS) (2021–2022)." n.d. International Youth Foundation. Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://iyfglobal.org/initiatives/advancing-economic-mobility-skills>.






Additionally, Mercy Corps could serve as a peer organization or learning partner to S4YE in the youth employment sector. This collaboration has the potential to strengthen the work of both organizations and create a more significant impact on youth employment globally.²³

3. **Private Sector Partnerships** can drive the Y-Engage Initiative to the next level. The private sector provides 9 out of 10 jobs in developing countries; thus, it plays a vital role in global youth employment. Mercy Corps may consider developing a Private Sector Advisory Council, which would consist of senior-level representatives from various companies to connect with Youth Champions and Regional Managers. This Council is an opportunity for increased networking opportunities, mentorship, and guidance for Youth Champions. Considering the budgetary constraints within Mercy Corps, Private Sector Partnerships can provide career development opportunities at a low cost. For example, companies may provide skill-building workshops for young staff. Similarly, for country offices that lack the capacity for an internal mentorship program, private-sector partnerships can bridge that gap. Lastly, these partnerships can enhance visibility and credibility to attract new stakeholders to scale the Y-Engage Initiative.

²³ “Connect | Solutions For Youth Employment.” n.d. S4YE. Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.s4ye.org/connect>.

Figure 3.4: Scaling Partnerships

Name	Their work	How can Y-engage partner
 <p>INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FOUNDATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three strategic objectives: strengthening youth agency, expanding economic opportunity and ensuring systems are youth inclusive and responsive. • They partner with: corporations, multilateral organizations, youth-serving organizations, local leaders, communities, and young people. • Passport to Success® Initiative equips youth with skills to help them stay in school, learn life-skills, and career preparation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Champions or Mercy Corps Employees can guide program participants to relevant IYF programs (i.e. Passport to Success). • Youth Champions to collaborate with IYF on youth programming ideas or program development • Certain IYF initiatives beneficial for Youth Champions themselves (i.e. The Advancing Economic Mobility with Skills (AEMS).
 <p>SOLUTIONS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT (S4YE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring together donors, governments, foundations, private sector companies, NGOs and youth to support programs which facilitate opportunities for meaningful employment. • Their approach focuses on piloting grassroots innovative solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for Mercy Corps to implement youth-developed solutions before developing internal structures that enable youth to develop their own programming. • Mercy Corps could serve as a peer organization or learning partner to S4YE in the youth employment sector. • Potential to strengthen the work of both organizations to increase youth employment.
 <p>PRIVATE SCETOR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides 9/10 jobs in developing countries, thus very important to leverage partnerships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking, mentorship and guidance opportunities for country offices without the capacity. • Connect Youth Champions to new fields and sectors. • Private Sector Advisory Council to bring together various senior-level representatives and young people, encouraging skill development.

Scaling Y-ENGAGE Visibility

While partnering with pre-existing organizations that are structured around youth engagement is a perfect opportunity to learn and scale, Mercy Corps also has an opportunity to create and hold large spaces for youth voices within the organization. The recommendations below should also be seen as additional forms of feedback collection. Hearing from youth voices across various platforms increases their visibility and enables them to be heard more publicly and candidly.

Regional Youth Conferences offer Mercy Corps a unique opportunity to showcase the impact of its youth engagement initiatives on a larger scale. The conferences bring together Country Leadership Teams, HQ employees, Youth Champions, program participants, and Regional Managers to present the successes of programs and projects led by young people in the organization. By acknowledging countries with high levels of Youth Champion engagement, these conferences incentivize further engagement and motivate other countries to increase their efforts in youth engagement. In addition, the conferences facilitate cross-learning and collaboration between regions, allowing participants to exchange best practices and develop innovative solutions for youth engagement. This knowledge sharing can deepen participants' understanding of the challenges and opportunities in youth engagement. Furthermore, these conferences provide a platform for youth to showcase their skills, expertise, and potential, leading to increased visibility, recognition, and opportunities for career growth and advancement within Mercy Corps.

Podcasts and Webinars provide a consistent, relatively low-pressure space to listen to the stories of young people and learn from them. Podcasts are an accessible option to incorporate stories and experiences from a wide range of perspectives, such as Program Officers and program participants discussing their experience in program design or Youth Champions highlighting their experiences with the Y-Engage Initiative's new partnerships. If podcasts are not accessible within certain contexts, Mercy Corps may consider radio shows instead. This should not only be used as a space to praise the work of Mercy Corps and Youth Champions but also as a space to be constructively critical and identify areas of improvement. Webinars provide an effective platform for Youth Champions to share their program experiences and knowledge with others, showcasing the skills they have gained through the Y-Engage Initiative. These webinars offer valuable insights that can inform the future direction of the initiative. To ensure maximum accessibility, it is recommended that the webinars be recorded and made available on Mercy Corps' e-learning platform.

Blogs or Social Media Accounts can effectively promote the work done by Youth Champions in each country. They can showcase Mercy Corps youth conferences, new partnerships, and the projects of Youth Champion Working Groups, increasing the visibility of the Y-Engage Initiative. Instagram posts can link to a more detailed Y-Engage Initiative blog, providing a comprehensive narrative of shared content. This strategy is particularly advantageous for low-budget organizations, as social media platforms offer user-friendly tools for creating and sharing content, such as posts, stories, and live streams. Online communities can be created through social media accounts, promoting the Y-Engage Initiative and providing opportunities for feedback and collaboration. Overall, leveraging blogs or social media accounts is an accessible and cost-effective way to showcase the work of Youth Champions from various countries.



CONCLUSION

Photo Source: Mercy Corps website



CONCLUSION

After a promising start, the Y-Engage Initiative faced setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, limited resources, and challenges in scaling across Mercy Corps' 40-country network. However, with the launch of Mercy Corps' new 10-year plan, there is an opportunity to integrate the Initiative into the organization as a key component of development outcomes.

This capstone project has aimed to support Mercy Corps' commitment to human-centered development by placing a focus on youth at the Organizational, Employee, and Programmatic levels. Through the development and implementation of a series of organizational structures, implementation, measurement, accountability standards, and scaling plans, The Team hopes that the Y-Engage Initiative can serve as a catalyst to enhance Mercy Corps' impact on youth engagement.

The recommended changes promote development outcomes for youth who are frequently overlooked in development efforts. The findings of this project demonstrate that there is both a willingness and a practical path forward for further developing the Initiative. However, this requires a clear intention to support youth and a commitment from Mercy Corps' leadership to consider and act on the recommendations presented, as well as feedback from young staff members.

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**All pictures included in this report are from the Mercy Corps website.*

APPENDIX

The Appendix is in the following order:

1. Opening protocol
2. Closing protocol
3. Focus group discussions interview protocol
4. Senior Manager (Country Leadership) interview protocol
5. Program Level Staff interview protocol
6. Hiring Managers interview protocol
7. Youth Champions interview protocol
8. Peer Organization Representatives

1. Opening Protocol:

“Thank you for taking the time to chat with us about Mercy Corps as an organization as well as youth engagement throughout the organization. Our ultimate goal is to understand the structures in Mercy Corps that either support or hinder youth engagement, and specifically understand the progress of the Y-Engage Initiative so far. We are here to support you and gain a deep understanding of your values. Your contributions will help us advise Mercy Corps on the next steps to take for the Y-Engage Initiative. The findings from this interview will be used anonymously and your name will not be used anywhere. If we decide to use a specific quote from this interview, we will contact you first for your consent. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or you would like to stop, please let us know. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?”

2. Closing Protocol:

“Thank you so much for your time. Before parting ways, we were hoping to have your phone number and email address. This will only be used to send you any updates, if we have important additional questions, or to share with you our final report. Also, if you think of anything, whether an opinion, piece of information, or document, that you feel would be beneficial for us, we would welcome you to send us a message via email or whatsapp. The final report will be completed by May 5th, and we will be distributing it to both the Uganda and the Ethiopia offices. Thank you again and have a wonderful rest of your day!”

3. Focus Group Discussions:

- 1) What are the outcomes that you would like to see from the initiative?
- 2) Let’s explore the GEDSI connection. Do you feel that youth engagement could or should be viewed similarly to gender diversity in the office and the field?
- 3) Who do you think should be the drive of the initiative? Is it too much as an extra job?
- 4) What are we missing? Is there a question we haven’t been asking that we should be?
- 5) On decision-making power, do you feel there needs to be youth input with the Country Leadership Team and Senior Management Team? What would be the best pathway for this input to be provided?

4. Senior Management (Country Leadership):

- 1) General Information
 - a) Who is filling out this form? (SIPA team member)
 - b) Country
 - c) Interviewee Name
 - d) Interviewer(s) Name(s)
 - e) Job Title/Department
 - f) How long have you been working for MC? How did you make your way to this position?

- g) Could you describe your work from day to day?
- h) Notes

2) Understanding of Y-Engage Initiative

- a) How do you define youth?
- b) Have you heard of the Youth Engagement Initiative?
- c) Follow up: If yes, what does it mean to you?
- d) Follow up: If no, please explain.
- e) Could you describe any interactions you've had with the Y-ENGAGE initiative?
- f) What does youth engagement mean to you in the Mercy Corps office?
- g) What does youth engagement mean to you in Mercy Corps programming?
- h) Notes:

3) Internal and Organizational Level

- a) Do you feel like young people play an important role in the direction of Mercy Corps?
- b) Follow up: In your opinion, how does Mercy Corps support young people in the organization?
- c) Follow up: What role do you play in this support?
- d) Are you ever responsible for hiring decisions?
- e) Follow up: If so, what do you look for in candidates?
- f) Follow up: What qualities do you believe make an effective Mercy Corps team member?
- g) Notes:

4) Internal and Employee Level

- a) Do you have any youth staff or Youth Champions within your team?
- b) Follow up: If so, what are the tasks and responsibilities you assign to fellow youth employees within your team?
- c) What is the best way for a young person to advance their career with Mercy Corps?
- d) Follow up: Are volunteer opportunities important?
- e) What kind of career development does Mercy Corps offer? Did you participate?
- f) Follow up: If so, did you feel like it helped your career?
- g) Notes:

5) External and Programmatic Level

- a) In your programming, how does Mercy Corps engage with young people?
- b) Follow up: Do they get to make meaningful decisions?

- c) Follow up: Do you follow up/ask for feedback with key beneficiaries of your programs that involve youth?
- d) Follow up: How do you reach out for feedback? (For example, paper surveys, conversations, Google Forms, etc.)
- e) How many youth beneficiaries would you estimate interact with your programming?
- f) How many current projects have a youth engagement element?
- g) Notes:

6) Measuring Success

- a) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps programs in the field?
- b) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps initiatives within the organization?
- c) What barriers are there to the success of a new program?
- d) Do you believe that the Y-Engage initiative has faced any problems in reaching its full potential?
- e) Follow up: Do you believe any of these problems are unique to the Ethiopia / Uganda office?
- f) Follow up: How could Mercy Corps HQ support you to help take the initiative to the next level? (for example, more time, compensation, etc.)
- g) Is there anything you feel is consistent across all Uganda/Ethiopia programming? Across all Mercy Corps programming?
- h) Notes

7) Manager Evaluation / Motivators

- a) Who are you accountable to? What are you evaluated by? (KPIs?)
- b) How frequently do you report to who you are accountable to?
- c) What is your main motivator in your work?
- d) Notes
- e) Interviewee Email

5. Program Level Staff:

1) General Information

- a) Who is filling out this form? (SIPA team member)
- b) Country
- c) Interviewee Name:

- d) Interviewer(s) Name(s):
- e) Job Title/Department
- f) How long have you been working for MC? How did you make your way to this position?
- g) Could you describe your work from day to day?
- h) Notes

2) Understanding of Y-Engage Initiative

- a) Have you heard of the Youth Engagement Initiative?
- b) Follow up: If yes, what does it mean to you?
- c) Follow up: If no (give short explanation)
- d) Could you describe any interactions you've had with the Y-ENGAGE initiative?
- e) Has youth engagement played a role in your work?
- f) Notes

3) Internal and Organizational Level

- a) Do you feel like young people play an important role in the direction of Mercy Corps?
- b) Follow up: In your opinion, how does Mercy Corps support young people in the organization?
- c) Follow up: What role do you play in this support?
- d) Follow up: What qualities do you believe make an effective Mercy Corps team member?
- e) How would more young employees in MC improve your grant writing experience?
- f) Notes

4) External and Programmatic Level

- a) How highly do you believe Mercy Corps programming prioritizes youth engagement?
- b) Do you collect feedback from program participants? If so, how?
- c) How many youth participants would you estimate interact with your programming?
- d) How many of your current projects have a youth engagement element?
- e) From a grant writing perspective, would increased youth engagement give you access to more grants?
- f) Notes

5) Measuring Success

- a) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps programs in the field?
- b) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps initiatives within the organization?

- c) What barriers are there to the success of a new program?
- d) Do you believe that the Y-Engage initiative has faced any problems in reaching its full potential?
- e) Follow up: Do you believe any of these problems are unique to the Ethiopia/Uganda office?
- f) Follow up: How could Mercy Corps support you to help take the initiative to the next level? (for example, more time, compensation, etc.)
- g) Is there anything you feel is consistent across all Uganda/Ethiopia programming? Across all Mercy Corps programming?
- h) Notes
- i) Interviewee Email

6. Hiring Managers:

1) General Information

- a) Who is filling out this form? (SIPA team member)
- b) Country
- c) Interviewee Name:
- d) Interviewer(s) Name(s):
- e) Job Title/Department
- f) How long have you been working for MC? How did you make your way to this position
- g) Could you describe your work from day to day?
- h) Notes

2) Understanding of Y-Engage Initiative

- a) Have you heard of the Youth Engagement Initiative?
- b) Follow up: If yes, what does it mean to you?
- c) Follow up: If no, please explain.
- d) Could you describe any interactions you've had with the Y-ENGAGE initiative?
- e) How do you define youth?
- f) How do you feel HR processes have shifted since the Y-Engage Initiative (i.e., is it mentioned to new young hires? Is it a part of onboarding?)
- g) Notes

3) Internal and Organizational Level

- a) Do you feel like young people play an important role in the direction of Mercy Corps?

- b) Is promoting youth engagement considered when developing job descriptions?
- c) What role does HR play in supporting youth employee professional development? Is this a priority / do you face many obstacles with these ideas?
- d) What qualities do you believe make an effective Mercy Corps team member?
- e) What role does previous experience play in choosing team members? Do you require a certain number of years?
- f) Notes

4) Measuring Success

- a) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps initiatives within the organization?
- b) What barriers are there to the success of a new program?
- c) Do you believe that the Y-Engage initiative has faced any problems in reaching its full potential?
- d) Follow up: Do you believe any of these problems are unique to the Ethiopia/ Uganda office?
- e) How could Mercy Corps support you to help take the initiative to the next level? (for example, more time, compensation, etc.)
- f) Notes
- g) Interviewee Email

7. Youth Champions:

1) General Information

- a) Who is filling out this form? (SIPA team member)
- b) Country
- c) Interviewee Name:
- d) Interviewer(s) Name(s):
- e) Job Title/Department
- f) How long have you been working for MC? How did you make your way to this position
- g) Why did you become a youth champion?
- h) What was the process you went through to become a Youth Champion?
- i) Follow up: What are the requirements to become a Youth Champion?
- j) Could you describe your work from day to day?
- k) Who is your direct supervisor?
- l) What programs/initiatives/portfolios are you working on?
- m) Notes

2) Understanding of Y-Engage Initiative

- a) How do you define youth?
- b) What does youth engagement mean to you?
- c) Follow up: What does it mean to Mercy Corps?
- d) How does youth engagement show up in programming?
- e) In your day to day work, who do you collaborate with most often?
- f) Follow up: Do you feel heard?
- g) Follow up: Do your teammates know that you are a youth champion?
- h) Notes

3) Internal and Organizational Level

- a) Do you feel like young people play an important role in the direction of Mercy Corps?
- b) Follow up: In your opinion, do you think Mercy Corps supports young people in the organization?
- c) Follow up: What role do you play in this support?
- d) What do you think stood out about you when you applied to join the Mercy Corps team?
- e) Follow up: What qualities do you believe make an effective Mercy Corps team member?
- f) Follow up: What do you think Mercy Corps is looking for in new team members? (for example, experience, passion, education, etc.)
- g) Notes

4) Internal and Employee Level

- a) Do you have other youth peers within your team?
- b) Follow up: Why do you believe they have not become youth champions?
- c) What is the best way for a young person to advance their career with Mercy Corps?
- d) Follow up: Are volunteer opportunities important?
- e) What kind of career development does Mercy Corps offer? Do you participate?
- f) Follow up: If so, did you feel like it helped your career?
- g) Notes

5) External and Programmatic Level

- a) How does Mercy Corps engage with young people in their programming efforts?
- b) Follow up: Do they get to make meaningful decisions?
- c) Follow up: Do you follow up/ask for feedback with key beneficiaries of your programs that involve youth?

d) Follow up: How do they reach out for feedback? (For example, paper surveys, conversations, Google Forms, etc.)

e) Notes

6) Measuring Success

a) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps programs?

b) How do you measure the success of Mercy Corps initiatives within the organization?

c) What barriers are there to the success of the Y-Engage initiative?

d) Follow up: Do you believe any of these problems are unique to the Ethiopia office?

e) Follow up: How could Mercy Corps support you to help take the initiative to the next level? (for example, more time, compensation, etc.)

f) Is there anything you feel is consistent across all Uganda/Ethiopia programming? Across all Mercy Corps programming?

g) Do you have any interaction with other Youth Champions?

h) Follow up: Do you feel like all youth champions have the same opportunities?

i) Notes

7) Motivators

a) What do you feel you are accountable for, and who holds you accountable for these measures? (i.e. KPIs, Organizational growth, etc)

b) What is your main motivator in your work?

c) Notes

d) Interviewee Email

8. Peer Organization Representatives:

1) General Information

a) Who is filling out this form? (SIPA team member)

b) Country

c) Interviewee Name:

d) Interviewer(s) Name(s):

e) Job Title/Department

f) How long have you been working for your organization? How did you make your way to this position?

g) Could you describe your work from day to day?

- h) What programs/initiatives/portfolios are you working on?
- i) Notes

2) Understanding of Youth Initiative

- a) How do you define youth?
- b) Do you have a Youth Initiative?
- c) Follow up: If no, please explain.
- d) Follow up: If yes, what do you call it?
- e) Could you describe this Youth Initiative?
- f) Could you describe your organization's central approach to youth development both internally (in your office) and externally (in your programming)?
- g) What does youth engagement mean to you in your organization? The organization's programming?
- h) Notes

3) Internal and Organizational Level

- a) Do you feel like young people play an important role in the direction of your organization?
- b) Follow up: In your opinion, how does your organization support young people in the organization?
- c) Follow up: What role do you play in this support? / If you had support, what else would you do to engage young staff?
- d) What is your organization lacking in regards to support for the youth?
- e) Are you ever responsible for hiring decisions?
- f) Follow up: If so, what do you look for in candidates?
- g) Follow up: What qualities do you believe make an effective team member in your organization?
- h) Follow up: What role does previous experience play in choosing team members? Do you require a certain number of years?
- i) Notes

4) Internal and Employee Level

- a) Do you have any youth staff or Youth Champions within your team?
- b) Follow up: If so, what are the tasks and responsibilities you assign to fellow youth employees within your team?
- c) What avenues do young people have to advance their career with the organization?

- d) Follow up: Are volunteer opportunities important?
- e) What kind of career development does your organization offer? Did you participate?
- f) Follow up: If so, did you feel like it helped your career?
- g) Notes

5) External and Programmatic Level

- a) In your programming, how does your organization engage with young people?
- b) Follow up: What are the different kinds of decisions youth employees are involved in?
- c) Follow up: Do you follow up/ask for feedback with key beneficiaries of your programs that involve youth? If so, how?
- d) Follow up: How do you reach out for feedback? (For example, paper surveys, conversations, Google Forms, etc.)
- e) Notes

6) Measuring Success

- a) How do you measure the success of your organization's programs in the field?
- b) How do you measure the success of the Youth Initiative within your organization? (Does it create impact?)
- c) What barriers are there to the success of a new program?
- d) Do you believe that your youth initiatives have faced any problems in reaching its full potential?
- e) Follow up: Do you believe any of these problems are unique to the Kampala/Addis Ababa office?
- f) Is there anything you feel is consistent across all organization programming? (regardless of unique office circumstances)
- g) Notes

7) Manager Evaluation / Motivators

- a) What do you feel you are accountable for and who holds you accountable for these measures? (i.e. KPIs, Organizational growth, etc)
- b) How frequently do you report to who you are accountable to?
- c) What is your main motivator in your work?
- d) Notes
- e) Interviewee Email

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