

# Communication about Private Sector Engagement Programs

## Private Sector Engagement Toolkit - Tip Sheet #15:

There are unique communication challenges about our engagement with private firms because they operate in the competitive marketplace and also because of the potential impact of a Mercy Corps partnership on the market.

**Confidentiality:** Private sector partners may have very specific expectations about the confidentiality of their business and the details of our relationships. This extends beyond just protection of their brand. They may believe that the way they conduct their business is what gives them a competitive advantage in the marketplace and therefore will be very protective of information related to that. As such, it is always better to be cautious about protecting information they might consider private.

### Tips for addressing confidentiality issues

1. Assume that you may not use the private sector partner's name or logo unless it has been specifically stated otherwise or you obtain permission to do so.
2. Assume that the details of our engagement with a private partner are confidential and you may not publically reveal the particulars of our relationship.
3. Assume that the business model and business plan of the private partner are confidential and cannot be publicly discussed or documented.
4. Refer to the partnership MOU (if one is in place) to see if there is clarity around use of the partner's name or logo or discussion of the business model or engagement details.
5. If an MOU is being developed to guide a new private sector engagement, consider including language around these issues.
6. Analyze what the unintended impacts of disclosure - or non-disclosure - of a private partner's identity might be on a program results, the market, or Mercy Corps' reputation. If those impacts are significant, outline a plan for addressing them.

**Branding:** Private sector partners, and especially multi-national corporations (MNCs), may have political or marketing priorities that lead to sensitivity and restrictions about the use of their name or their logo, their "brand." In some circumstances they may want acknowledgement in our public communication or our marketing materials because they believe there is value in getting that recognition. In other instances they may want complete confidentiality. They may feel that revealing their involvement could

compromise their brand or more importantly, inadvertently lead to disclosure of what they consider proprietary information.

Understanding what is appropriate can be challenging and confusing and may be dependent on the situation; the same partner may be OK with having their name associated with a program in some communication but opposed in others. Two examples of this follow:

- An MNC, who typically wants acknowledgement about their Mercy Corps partnership, was dismayed when we publically acknowledged their role in a program that addressed female literacy because they believed it raised the question to their customers as to why workers in their supply chain were illiterate.
- Another MNC partner was upset when their name was not printed on signs posted in the community where their program was operating. They were displeased because many of the beneficiaries of the program in that community were employed in their commercial operation and they wanted to get credit for their support to that community.

**Market Distortion:** The public use of partner names and logos can also lead to market distortion; disclosing or advertising the role of a private sector partner, particularly a MNC, may have unintended impacts on the market or the community where the program is being executed. This concern also applies to disclosing the role of Mercy Corps or the support of specific donors. One unintended impact is that it may make a program seem like charity when the private sector partner and Mercy Corps want the public relationship to be purely commercial. For example, on many loan guarantee programs we do not want beneficiaries to know that Mercy Corps is guaranteeing part of their loan.

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09-14