Supporting Informal Social Protection Networks During Protracted Crises
Three Lessons and Recommendations for Aid Actors

During protracted crises—when aid continues long after its intended duration—informal social protection networks take center stage. These networks become increasingly important as local capacities and formal systems dwindle. Understanding and working with informal social protection networks presents a unique opportunity for aid actors to leverage existing networks and synergies to increase local resilience and respond to humanitarian needs.

**Informal social protection networks** are local and informal mechanisms through which households and communities help each other during times of need. These networks may include community-based organizations, informal welfare groups, religious organizations, or any other type of local or informal organization that helps individuals or households through social networks.

**Lesson #1:** Measure informal social protection networks as a key asset and trigger indicator

1. **Define** informal social protection networks in assessments and monitoring activities, using a “top-down” approach to identify, and apply learning systems, as humanitarian conditions deteriorate. The ease by which aid actors can engage with and assess informal social protection networks may vary from one context to another, depending on factors such as the level of existing social networks, the extent to which aid actors have an understanding of local social hierarchies and power dynamics, and the level of competition among local actors.

2. **Identify** and support existing informal initiatives that households rely on during times of need. Networks are often the first responders in a crisis, and aid actors are often the last to arrive. Aid actors can support and strengthen existing social networks by identifying and building partnerships with local organizations or networks. This can include providing training or technical support, or even simply sharing information about how to provide assistance.

3. **Disseminate** early warning data—including information on conflict and climate-related shocks—to socially isolated groups. In the immediate term, this can help aid actors identify sources of households’ vulnerability, while also highlighting their coping strategies and sources of resilience. When combined with informal networks, this data can help aid actors anticipate how households may use informal networks to provide assistance.

**Lesson #2: Design targeting and community engagement strategies to support informal social protection networks**

1. **Include** community-based organizations, trusted information, and informal social networks as key components of targeting strategies. The success of targeting strategies depends on the extent to which they build on existing social networks and the extent to which they involve local communities. Aid actors can use informal social networks as a tool for targeting, by identifying and engaging with trusted information providers, community-based organizations, and informal social networks.

2. **Establish** clear and consistent messaging to the community about how aid will be distributed and monitored. Aid actors should communicate with local communities about how aid will be distributed and monitored, and how it will be used. This can include sharing information about how aid will be used, and how it will be monitored, and how it will be distributed.

3. **Monitor** for changes in informal social protection networks. Aid actors should monitor for changes in informal social protection networks, and take action to address them. This can include monitoring for changes in informal social protection networks at the household level, and at the community level.

**Lesson #3: Seek out and invest in opportunities to partner with informal social protection networks**

1. **Identify** and support informal social protection networks as a critical resilience capacity that can help aid actors achieve long-term goals. Aid actors can work with informal social protection networks to achieve long-term goals, such as decreasing poverty and increasing social inclusion. Aid actors can work with informal social protection networks to achieve long-term goals, such as decreasing poverty and increasing social inclusion.

2. **Maximize** impacts as you look to do more with less. Aid actors working with informal social protection networks can help maximize impacts as they look to do more with less. Aid actors working with informal social protection networks can help maximize impacts as they look to do more with less. Aid actors working with informal social protection networks can help maximize impacts as they look to do more with less.

3. **Invest** in informal social protection networks at the very least, to support and strengthen informal social protection networks.

Aid actors partnering with informal social protection networks:

- Can help ensure aid efforts are aligned with local needs and priorities.
- Can help ensure that aid efforts are effective and sustainable.
- Can help ensure that aid efforts are inclusive and that the voices of local communities are heard.
- Can help ensure that aid efforts are efficient and cost-effective.

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