

Sharing to Survive: Investigating the Role of Social Networks during Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis

Discussion Notes

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Event materials located [here](#)

Speakers:

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- Moderated by Dr. Jessica Anderson, USAID

Main Discussion Points

Social connections: overlooked opportunity for humanitarian assistance

Evidence suggests that connections within social networks are far more important than humanitarian assistance. Socially connected households share food, money (including through crucial remittances), shelter, information, and emotional support and advice with one another as coping mechanisms during protracted crises. Psychosocial factors are critical to building resilience and should not be overlooked.

However, social networks are strained by new and recurring shocks and stressors, including pandemic restrictions. Given its ability to both bolster and further strain social connections, external assistance should better understand and account for household social connections and informal support networks. Opportunities for external assistance to include social connections include: integrate questions on household social connections in program monitoring and evaluation, design programs to support social protection networks, and meaningfully partner with informal local initiatives.

Main implications for humanitarian interventions

This report is a wake up call to effectively engage the community in ways that support informal social protection. Humanitarian assistance in Yemen has often left out marginalized groups and thus eroded trust in humanitarian groups. These negative effects can be mitigated through interventions that understand and work within informal social networks in context.

Growing out of an attempt to better understand household resilience and coping strategies when faced with extreme crises, this study has led to recommendations on humanitarian reform. Concrete recommendations include allowing for more flexibility and being less prescriptive about targeting and what to do with resources after distribution. For instance, the common conditions on sharing that come with humanitarian assistance are counterintuitive given these findings.

Why has assistance failed to harness informal social networks in Yemen?

There are multiple reasons behind the failure of the international community and local NGOs to harness informal social networks in Yemen:

- ▶ The length of the conflict (8 years) has changed attitudes/perceptions of international and local humanitarians.
- ▶ There is a disconnect between those who work for organizations (salaried in USD), those affected by the conflict, and warlords who are benefitting from conflict.
- ▶ An increasing number of salaried local humanitarian actors are burnt out, disillusioned, and losing motivation.
- ▶ The economy and purchasing power in Yemen continues to deteriorate, placing stress on social networks.
- ▶ Remittance rates into Yemen have declined. Most remittances to Yemen come from Saudi Arabia. Due to the nationalization of labor markets in Saudi Arabia, many Yemenis are losing their jobs and are unable to send as much in remittances.

Barriers to including social connections in programming

The political economy of aid at a local level is often overlooked, but should be considered, especially in targeting in order to mitigate further marginalization of some groups. Decision making is often made outside of Yemen and far away from affected communities. Insufficient communication and accountability do not allow for Yemeni voices and perspectives to be taken into consideration and lead to confusion (about selection criteria, for example).

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