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Social Capital and Resilience

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Social Capital and Resilience: Informal Policy Brief for the World Humanitarian Summit
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1. Summary

Despite regular claims about the importance of communities and crisis-affected individuals, the humanitarian aid system remains in many respects a top-down, centralized system which too often overlooks the power of social networks and social capital among crisis-affected people. We show how social capital serves as a critical resource for those in crisis and illuminate the lack of research and programmatic focus on this resource in conflict situations in less developed countries (LDCs)--where the large majority of the world's humanitarian needs and aid occur. We believe that the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) can serve as a focal point for scholars, institutions and practitioners for collaborating on research and better integrating social capital into policy and programs as a source of resilience. There is good reason to suppose that modifying aid approaches to build on social capital's potential effects would produce important gains in the effort to address the major humanitarian crises of today and tomorrow--and finding such gains is the core objective of the WHS.

2. Why the WHS emphasizes empowerment of disaster-affected people and communities

The extensive WHS consultations, from the grassroots of affected people and civil society to high levels of governments and international organizations, have consistently emphasized that humanitarian action has to re-focus on the affected people themselves. This is for two reasons. First, in the complicated latticework of interested and interacting parties and institutions in a major humanitarian response, the affected people find themselves almost vying for attention. The parties have to respond to many vectors of influence and accountability. In this tumult, affected people's own priorities for aid, and their actions and capabilities on their own behalf, are too often lost. Second, the WHS consultations have recognized that affected people and their concentric circles of social relations and civil society are themselves, in many senses, the most important humanitarian actors--the first to respond, the most knowledgeable, the most motivated and efficient. They instinctively take a strategic view of their situation, and they know which aid inputs would strategically help them survive, establish security, retain dignity, and recover. (In the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, for example, affected people consistently said that they needed primarily only two things to get through: jobs, and emergency education for their children.) Top-down aid, as indispensable as it can be for rapid response based on estimate and experience, should quickly yield to aid designed and delivered in partnership with affected people. With these recognitions, the question arises--with WHS' emphasis on achieving concrete advances in humanitarian action in the short and long terms--of how to put them into action. Some of the tools are already at hand and spreading by themselves: modern communications technology is revolutionizing the possibilities for affected people to communicate--not just with formal aid institutions, but with each other and their networks. Affected people, using cellular communication and social media alongside older means, can and do now call on relatives, diasporas, politicians and more to attract and shape aid. But humanitarian aid institutions, even though they have caught on to these advances, generally do not apply a strong conceptual foundation that can guide them in re-designing their methods so as to capitalize on affected people's energy, knowledge, improvisations and social relations. The time is ripe to bring in an area of

¹ Although on the staff of the WHS secretariat, Dr. Smith contributes to this manuscript in a personal capacity.

social science research, policy guidance and practice that parallels closely with the idea of empowering disaster-affected people and communities: social capital.

3. Social capital theory and frameworks

Around the world, we rely on the connections and ties that to others on a daily basis. Young people find jobs through connections and family friends. Small business owners raise money directly from acquaintances or from neighbors in their community through rotating credit associations. Fishermen receive information about prices for their catch through their colleagues in nearby communities while farmers gain insights into new crop raising techniques from members of collective or cooperative groups. These connections allow more than the sharing of information - they also create shared norms and behavior. Research has shown that we lose weight, stop smoking, visit doctors, and take up other health promoting behaviors based on the actions of our friends and family. Social scientists have labeled these connections as “social capital” and recognized that with these ties come information, trust, norms, and accurate expectations about how our other will behave. Experts have categorized social capital into three different forms: bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital describes the relationships between people who are quite similar. These may be family members, neighbors who share similar values, language, and education, or extended kin. Bridging social capital describes connections to individuals who are different in critical ways but share an institution or interest. For example, a public school in India may bring together people from very different caste and linguistic backgrounds; a soccer club in Afghanistan may link new immigrants with longtime residents. Finally, linking social capital involves vertical ties between regular citizens and decision makers. In Indonesia, farmers may be able to reach out directly to NGOs through SMS texts or emails to provide localized needs assessments; in Mali, some laborers may have direct ties to village chiefs and be able to warn them of drastic fluctuations in grain prices. Survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami living in coastal communities in Tamil Nadu who had access to outside organizations were better able to receive both domestic and foreign aid in the search and recovery process. Regardless of the form of social capital, like other forms of capital, including human and economic, it can be measured and deepened. Social scientists generally divide measures for social capital into cognitive/associative and behavioral. Cognitive investigations of social capital ask people about how much trust they have in neighbors and decision makers, how they would solve problems in a crisis, and about their sense of belonging and place. In other words, it measures perceptions. Behavioral questions instead look to see how often they interact with friends and neighbors, volunteer, give blood, and participate in communal and political activities--in other words, measurements of actual behavior.² Studies which have used both cognitive and behavioral measures of bonding, bridging, and linking ties have identified a number of ways that social capital improves welfare outcome.

4. Evidence of social capital's influence on welfare outcomes

A great deal of research has demonstrated how social capital can positively affect welfare outcomes in developing nations in the areas of safety, health, and economic outcomes. Social capital can improve human security most broadly by creating shared values between ethnic, religious, or racial groups which may otherwise be in conflict. Studies by scholars such as Ashutosh Varshney showed how “mohalla” (peace) committees in India helped reduce conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in a number of urban settings including Mumbai, Gujarat, and Bhiwandi. During periods of tension between groups, these peace committees brought together community leaders who could share critical information and then help spread it believably back in their own communities. Such committees served as bridges between the two

² See Christiaan Grootaert, Deepa Narayan, Veronica Nyhan Jones, and Michael Woolcock, *Measuring Social Capital An Integrated Questionnaire* (World Bank Working Paper No. 18 2004)

ethnic groups and dampened potential violence. Beyond reducing violence, individuals and communities with stronger social ties have better mental and physical health outcomes in urban and rural communities; this may be because individuals who share norms can positively influence network members to engage in healthier behaviors and because of the greater amount of trusted information shared. Strong social ties also help alleviate anxiety on the individual level and provide a safety net (such as babysitting and resource sharing) even for the poorest communities. Beyond health and safety, social capital's ability to overcome barriers to collective action and facilitate mobilization has allowed communities with stronger social ties to improve their economic standing. Rotating credit associations, or RCAs, are built on social capital and use microcredit and microfinance to help people escape poverty. The well-known Grameen Bank in Bangladesh uses social ties to help ensure repayment of microloans among the very poor and facilitates the recruiting of new members through network ties. Its incredibly low loan default rates have spurred a massive investment in microcredit across the developing world. A similar mechanism is found in the often informal tontine savings organizations in West African countries like Senegal which operate through group savings. More broadly, studies of communities Indonesia, Bolivia and Burkina Faso have shown that stronger social capital contributes to household welfare.³

5. Evidence of social capital's influence on disaster recovery

A growing body of evidence has illuminated that these social connections play a critical role during and after disasters in mitigating risk and in accelerating recovery. Strong social capital brings with it at least three benefits during crises. First, individuals who have bonds to neighbors can receive mutual aid or informal insurance at a time when many private and public sector service providers remain out of action. People can receive food, a place to stay if their own home is damaged, and information on safe routes for evacuation. Scholars have shown that people who have more connections have a better chance of being able to receive assistance, goods, and services when compared to those who are more isolated.⁴ Next, cohesive communities can overcome barriers to collective action and work cooperatively to stop looting, clear debris, provide essentially medical care, and make their needs known to outside agencies. After the earthquake in Haiti, for example, some neighborhoods set up crime patrols and impromptu soup kitchens for the displaced. Finally, individuals with stronger ties to community are less likely to move away from damaged areas and more likely to return to work tirelessly to rebuild. Across time and place, individuals and communities with more ties have done better during catastrophe. During Chicago's 1995 heat wave which killed more than 700, for example, social ties were the best predictor of survival (and mortality). Socially isolated individuals who had fewer connections and friends to check on them and encourage them to find air conditioned shelters were more likely to perish.⁵ Another study used qualitative and quantitative data from four megadisasters over the 20th century (the 1923 Tokyo earthquake, the 1995 Kobe earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina) to show how social capital proved critical in each at accelerating repopulation and recovery.⁶ Scholars have found similar

³ See Christiaan Grootaert, "Social Capital, Household Welfare, and Poverty in Indonesia" Washington, DC: The World Bank (Local Levels Institutions, Working Paper No. 6, 1999) and Christiaan Grootaert and Deepa Narayan "Social Capital in Burkina Faso" Washington, DC: The World Bank (Local Levels Institutions Study, 1999)

⁴ J. J. Beggs, Valerie Haines, and J.S. Hurlbert, The Effects of Personal Network and Local Community Contexts on the Receipt of Formal Aid during Disaster Recovery, International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters (1996)

⁵ Eric Klinenberg, Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

⁶ Daniel P. Aldrich, Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012)

roles for social capital in post-World War II Japan,⁷ during Hurricane Katrina⁸, and in China's 2008 Sichuan earthquake.⁹ A recent study of mortality during the 11 March 2011 compounded disasters in Tohoku, Japan showed that communities with more social ties had lower mortality than similar communities without such trust and collective action.¹⁰ In all of these areas, individuals and neighborhoods with more bonding, bridging, and linking social capital suffered less damage from the crisis and rebounded more quickly after it.

6. Social capital's role in prolonged crises in LDCs

As WHS discussions have reiterated, year in and year out the large majority (80% by some measures) of people in humanitarian need, and of the effort and resources to help them, are in conflict situations. In 2014 for example, the three most costly humanitarian responses for conflict--the Syria crisis, South Sudan and Iraq--absorbed 35% of worldwide international humanitarian funding.¹¹ The only non-conflict disasters on a similar scale of funding in 2014 were the West African Ebola outbreak (16%) and the aftermath of the November 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (4%). Conflicts tend to have the severest and broadest effects on people, forcing prolonged displacement, subjecting them to insecurity, theft and violence, cutting access to aid, and impairing their normal sources of basic social services and commerce, among other effects. Moreover, conflicts create the toughest conditions for aid deliverers: physical insecurity for staff and materials, poor information, political sensitivities, the need to make arrangements with non-state armed actors (which nearly every current conflict features, intra-state conflict having almost entirely replaced inter-state conflict), the complexity of doing no harm and not inadvertently feeding the conflict or its belligerents, or playing into their military or political strategies. These conflict caseloads would benefit from stronger social ties precisely because conflicts collapse formal institutions, fray political and social relations, and disrupt and displace communities for extended periods of time. When famine, violent extremism, and civil war disperse members of a community, aid agencies must simultaneously provide for immediate health and welfare needs (water, food, medical care) while managing long term recovery and integration concerns. Yet all of the evidence underscores that long term recovery and effective human security require social cohesion and strong social networks. Because the aid sector is now overwhelmed by the scale of need in the world's conflicts, it urgently needs new tools for helping those in conflict, and social capital is at least part of the answer: agencies should look to deliberately restore or facilitate social capital when helping conflict-affected communities. As described above, social capital can bridge gaps between ethnic and religious groups, allow for collective action and political decision making, and provide a safety net for the displaced who may have very few, if any, material resources.

There is much that aid agencies, NGOs, and national governments can do to stimulate the growth of existing networks and prevent their deterioration. At the very least, aid agencies must "do no harm" when responding to long term crisis by inadvertently further weakening existing social ties. For example, when

⁷ Rieko Kage, *Civic Engagement in Postwar Japan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

⁸ Emily Chamlee-Wright and Virgil Storr, "Club goods and post-disaster community return" *Rationality and Society*, 21 (4) (2009), and Robert L. Hawkins and Katherine Maurer, *Bonding, Bridging and Linking: How Social Capital Operated in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina*, *British Journal of Social Work* (2010)

⁹ Chun Wing Tse, Jianwen Wei, and Yihan Wang, *Social Capital and Disaster Recovery: Evidence from Sichuan Earthquake in 2008* (Center for Global Development Working Paper 2013)

¹⁰ Daniel P. Aldrich and Yasuyuki Sawada, "The physical and social determinants of mortality in the 3.11 tsunami," *Social Science & Medicine* 124 (2015)

¹¹ UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service, https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=search-reporting_display&CQ=cq300715234643pEiZUi3KkV&orderby=USD_commitdisbu&showDetails=

providing “temporary” shelter for the displaced, agencies must recognize that random placement into housing breaks apart existing networks and may place individuals alongside those from traditionally hostile ethnic groups. Allowing existing networks to move simultaneously and deliberately into neighborhoods can do much to ensure continued interactions and strong ties. Recent news stories from displaced persons camps into the Middle East have described how individuals and families have literally moved their own temporary shelters - often without official permission - to be closer to friends and kin. The growing pattern of displaced people shunning camp settings and instead finding their way into host communities (increasingly cities), within their country or outside it as refugees, also has strong implications for how they restore social capital and how aid actors can help them do so. Beyond merely maintaining ties, randomized control trials in developed and developing nations alike have shown that social capital can be deepened and strengthened. Proven methods for increasing social ties include community currency and time banking, regular meetings between residents, and neighborhood design and village planning that increase the frequency of social interactions. Through programs which encourage the formation of cross-ethnic committees, reward volunteerism with tangible benefits, and ensure that even temporary shelters have communal work and place spaces, aid agencies can do much to assist their target populations.

The bottom line is that there is strong reason to think that aid interventions designed wholly or in part to stimulate or restore social capital within and among disaster-affected communities can bring new efficiencies and effectiveness to humanitarian action--quite possibly to a scale that would make it a significant part of the equation for humanitarian methods fit to meet the challenges of the near future.

7. Key research gaps

Despite the evidence for the importance of social networks, much of the existing qualitative and quantitative research on the role of social capital in crisis has focused on quick-onset events, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis. Further, much of the research on social networks in disaster setting comes from fieldwork and observation carried out in developed countries. Much less empirical research exists on precisely how social connections aid refugee communities in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.¹² Gaps include:

- 1) While studies of internally displaced people from the natural-technological disaster at Fukushima have underscored the power of social capital in reducing mental health problems and anxiety, we have little research on the role of social ties in slow-onset, long-duration events in LDCs.¹³
- 2) For NGOs and aid providers, it is unclear which forms of social capital - bonding, bridging, or linking - should be emphasized in a conflict zone, displaced person camp, or displaced populations in host communities.
- 3) While many have argued that vulnerable communities should be encouraged to form more linking social capital with local authorities, best practices for doing so remain unclear.¹⁴
- 4) Some key studies have yielded important insights about the interaction between physical infrastructure development and management and social infrastructure, but much remains to be done. One study of community managed schools in Burkina Faso showed how increased participation in the institutions generated higher levels of social capital in a mixed-ethnicity, low

¹² William T. Story, Social capital and health in the least developed countries: a critical review of the literature and implications for a future research agenda. *Glob Public Health* 8(9):983-99 (2013)

¹³ Keiko Iwasaki, Yasuyuki Sawada, and Daniel P. Aldrich, “Determinants of Mental health after a Natural-Technological Disaster,” Center for Resilience at Northeastern University Working Paper

¹⁴ YCare International, “The Role of Social Capital in Disaster Resilience (Myanmar),” 2014

political freedom setting.¹⁵ Scholars have also demonstrated that localized development programs, such as irrigation systems in Sri Lanka, can enhance social ties and trust.¹⁶ Whether deeper involvement in infrastructure projects consistently yields higher connections remains unknown.

- 5) The aid and research sectors do not know the scale, spectrum and results of current aid practices that may enhance social capital in large protracted crises even without consciously applying the concept or body of evidence.

8. Conclusion

Modifying aid approaches to build on social capital's potential effects would produce major gains in the effort to address major humanitarian crises. Such an investigation deserves a place in the WHS deliberations and outcome. There are several vectors through which the WHS could serve as a platform for community-centered, social-capital based programming:

- 1) Have the WHS create a formal network of social-capital-in-disasters researchers who currently have no formal ties to each other across disciplinary and country boundaries (despite a plethora of disciplinary-based organizations). Additionally, use the WHS as a forum at which they can meet and work with institutions like OCHA, the World Bank, and WHO to provide funding to ensure annual meetings to exchange ideas and best practices.
- 2) Set up at least one, large-audience shared panel presentation with social capital in disaster researchers at the 2016 WHS event itself as a way to spread information to attending aid organizations and country level representatives.
- 3) Use the platform of the WHS to disseminate ongoing studies from various donor agencies, think tanks, and participating institutions which bring empirical evidence of the role of social capital focused approaches to resilience. Encourage scholars and institutions to share data through online repositories such as the Harvard University DataVerse and the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research; such transparency allows for replication and advancement in the field.
- 4) Help set the research agenda for scholars and aid agencies alike in the field through convening a working group on the topic comprised of experts and representatives from NGOs.

As we enter the 21st century, the simultaneous events of anthropogenic global warming and increased forced migration patterns are creating an era when long term crises and natural disasters will intensify the need for humanitarian aid. Frameworks based on a recognition of the power of social capital can provide some of the necessary tools for handling these protracted crises.

¹⁵ Yasuyuki Sawada and Takaharu Ishii, "Do Community-Managed Schools Facilitate Social Capital Accumulation? Evidence from the COGES Project in Burkina-Faso," JICA Research Institute Working Paper No.42 (2012)

¹⁶ Keitaro Aoyagi, Yasuyuki Sawada, and Masahiro Shoji, "Does Infrastructure Facilitate Social Capital Accumulation? Evidence from Natural and Artefactual Field Experiments in a Developing Country," JICA-RI Working Paper No. 65 (2014)