

MARKETLINKS



Why do Social Connections Matter for Resilience and Recovery?

Presenters: Alex Humphrey, *Mercy Corps Research Manager*

Jeeyon Kim, *Mercy Corps, Senior Researcher*

Vaidehi Krishnan, *Mercy Corps, Researcher*

Facilitator: Laura Meissner, *USAID contractor*

Date: September 5, 2019

Laura Meissner

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, USAID



Laura Meissner is the Economic Recovery and Markets Advisor for USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), where she provides guidance on assessing, mitigating, and repairing the effects of disasters on local markets and vulnerable populations' livelihoods as well as on cash and voucher-based interventions. Prior to joining OFDA in 2010, Laura managed the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards initiative for the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion (SEEP) Network.

Alex Humphrey

Mercy Corps



Alex Humphrey manages field research programming for Mercy Corps in South Sudan. Before joining Mercy Corps, Alex worked as a Policy Associate with the Open Society Foundations on issues related to refugee and human rights policy. Alex has a Master's degree in Conflict Resolution from Georgetown University and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of British Columbia. Alex is the lead author of *The Currency of Connections: Why local support systems are integral to helping people recover in South Sudan*.

Jeeyon Kim

Mercy Corps



Jeeyon Kim is the Senior Researcher for Resilience at Mercy Corps, where she leads research related to resilience in fragile contexts. Her recent research focuses on social connectedness, food security, migration and linkages between resilience and women's empowerment. In her mandate, she works closely with practitioner, research partners, and policy colleagues, to design and implement actionable resilience research.

Vaidehi Krishnan

Mercy Corps



Vaidehi Krishnan (Vai) has a background in program management and technical support for Mercy Corps' cash and economic opportunity programs in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Vai is currently a Researcher for Mercy Corps' cash and markets in crises portfolio. She supports research initiatives in South Sudan, and in the Middle East, with a key mandate on operationalizing research evidence into new program design. Vai is a co-author of *The Wages of War research in Syria*, and a co-author of *The Currency of Connections*.



The Currency of Connections

Learnings from South Sudan

Alex Humphrey
Research Manager

Jeeyon Kim
Senior Researcher

Vaidehi Krishnan
Researcher



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Feinstein
International Center





Social connectedness is key to household resilience

Global evidence

Social connections play a crucial role in strengthening resilience to shocks and stresses*

Mercy Corps' research on social connections and resilience linkages:

- Ethiopia PRIME Project
- Nepal Earthquake Response
- Philippines Typhoon Haiyan



**Petryniak 2017; Bernier and Meinzen-Dick 2014; Dercon et al. 2011; Quisumbing, McNiven and Godquin 2012; Maxwell et al. 2016; Cutter et al. 2008; Bernard et al. 2017; Meehan and Mengistu 2016; Weingärtner et al. 2017*



South Sudan research sites and methods



“When the crisis started, I ran for safety. I found people in the bush who gave me food. I was lucky to have found good hearted people who gave me assistance and helped me emotionally. They advised me not to worry about my children and assured me that everything would be fine.”

-Returnee, Rubkona County



During crises, social connections are critical sources of economic and emotional wellbeing



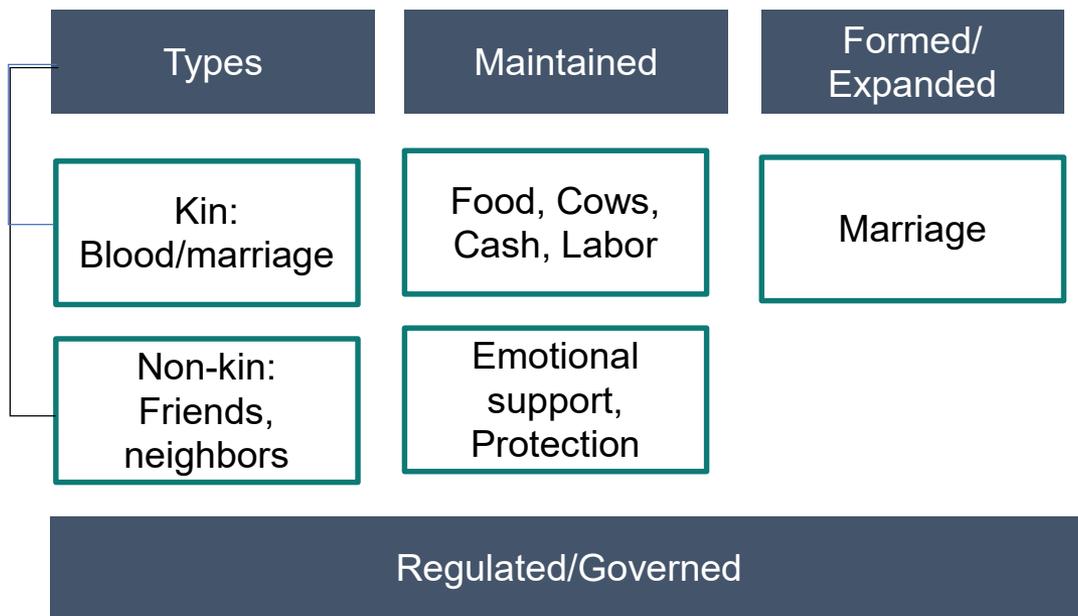
Social connectedness are important sources of economic and emotional wellbeing

Individual/Household-level connections



“Kinship is the most important thing. No matter how poor your family is, they can't turn away from providing support. We share what have together as a family.”

– Male research participant, Rubkona County

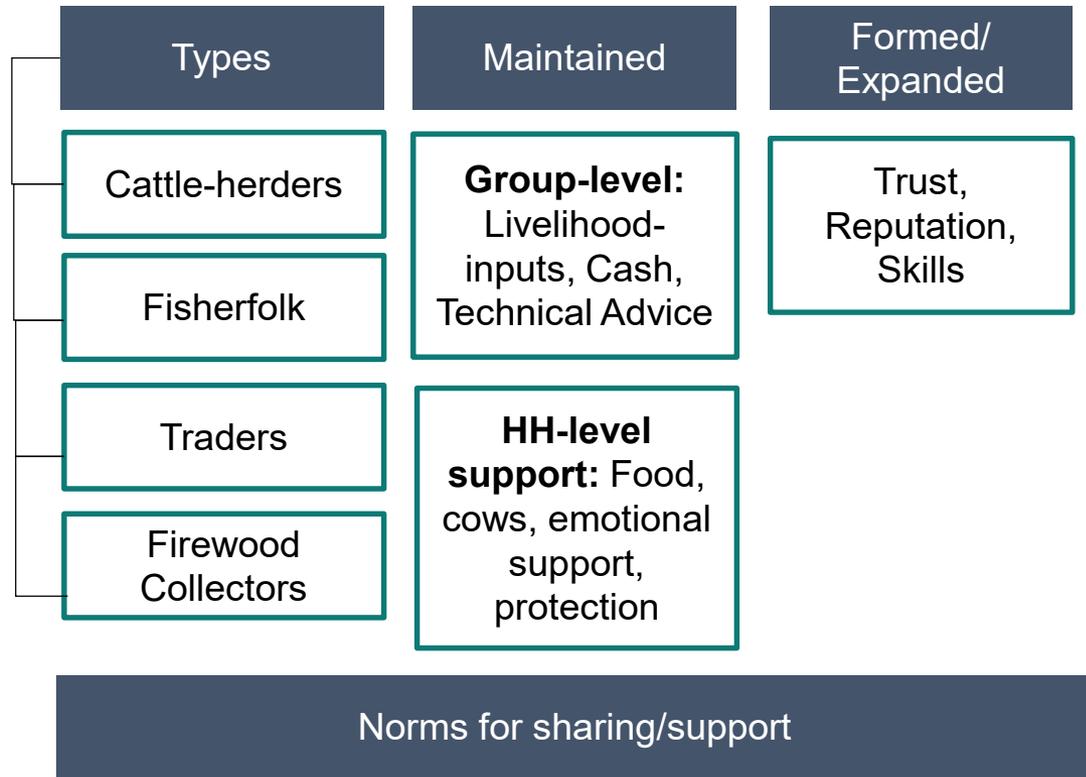


Social connectedness are important sources of economic and emotional wellbeing

Livelihood-groups

> *“In my group, we help one another by pooling assets in order to afford transportation costs. We all pool our assets together in order to hire a boat.”*

-Trader, Katieth market, Nyal





Protracted crises impact social connections and support systems



Protracted crises have an impact on these underlying support structures

Crisis-related changes

- Sharing aid to maintain social connections

- Expanding connections with IDPs from other counties
- Hardship has created strong bonds (especially women)
- Women-only livelihood groups
- Preference to educate daughters/girls

- Displacement = Lost connections/willful severing of social connections

- Cattle/kinship economies to cash

- Men becoming more isolated
- Breakdown of traditional roles of elders/youth carrying guns
- Early marriage to access resources



Social connectedness is not an inherently positive phenomenon



Social connectedness is not an inherently positive phenomenon

The darker side of social connectedness...

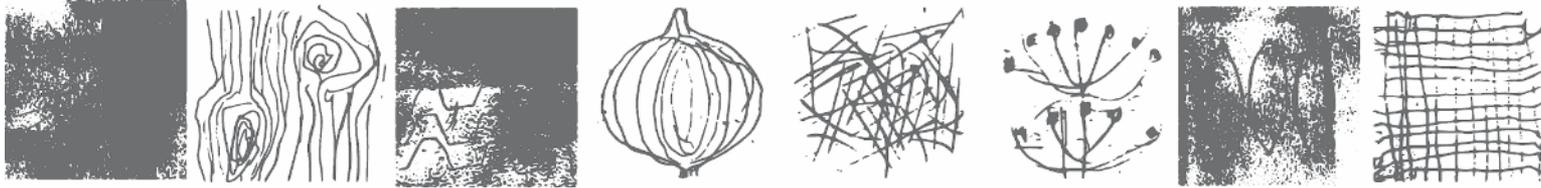
- May be a source of *vulnerability* due to sharing obligations
- Some households may be 'excluded' by design or default
- Efforts to expand networks during crisis may come at a cost



“People are divided based on the political parties they supported during the crisis. This has created a division in the community and has led those whose relatives are with the Government to be excluded, because they are not considered to be part of the community, and cannot share what they have with others.”

-Chief, Panyijar County

Measuring Social Connectedness



Conceptualization

Multidisciplinary evolution over time

- Quantity & quality of social networks
- Shared values, norms, & understanding
- Resources through reciprocity, cooperation, & collective action

Measurement

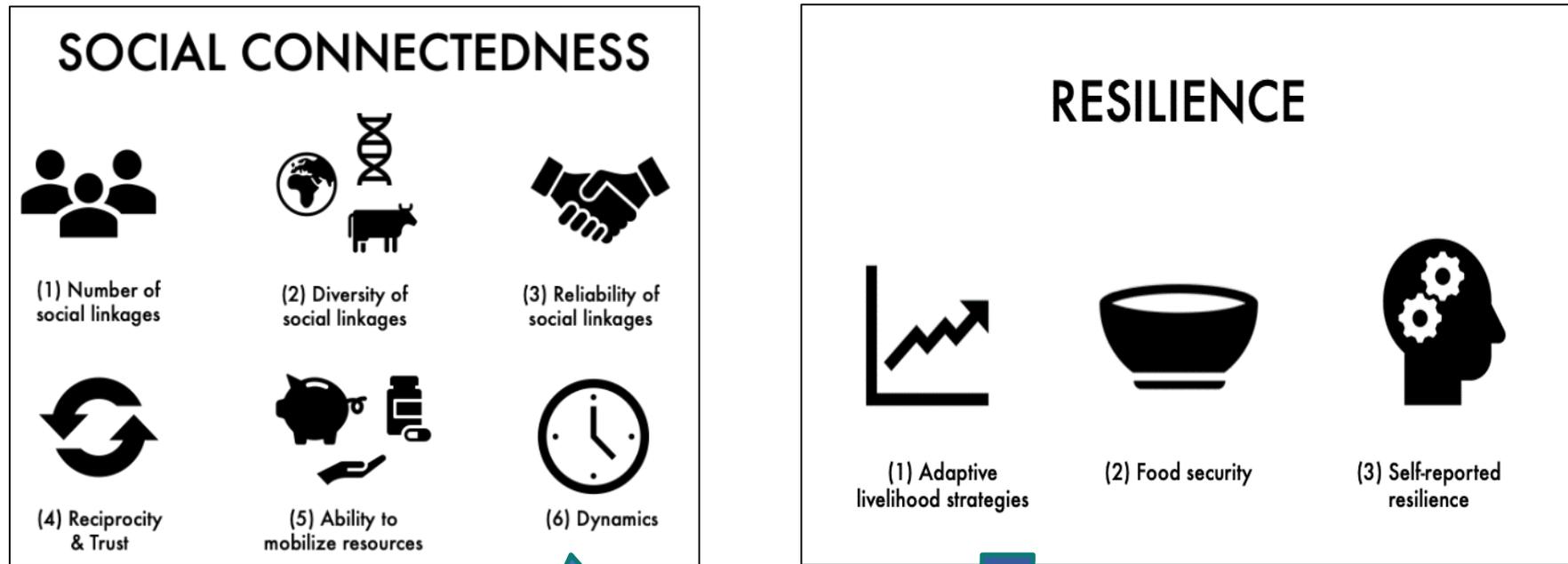
Structural & cognitive elements

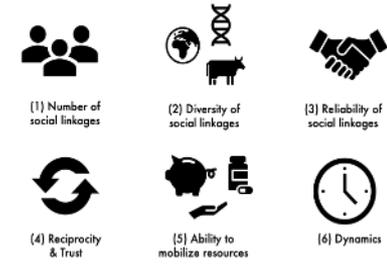
- Characterization of bridging, bonding, & linking relationships - as well as perceptions of trust and resources
- Instruments: surveys, FGDs, KIIs, & behavioral games



Challenge: local contextualization of social connections, especially how they relate to resilience

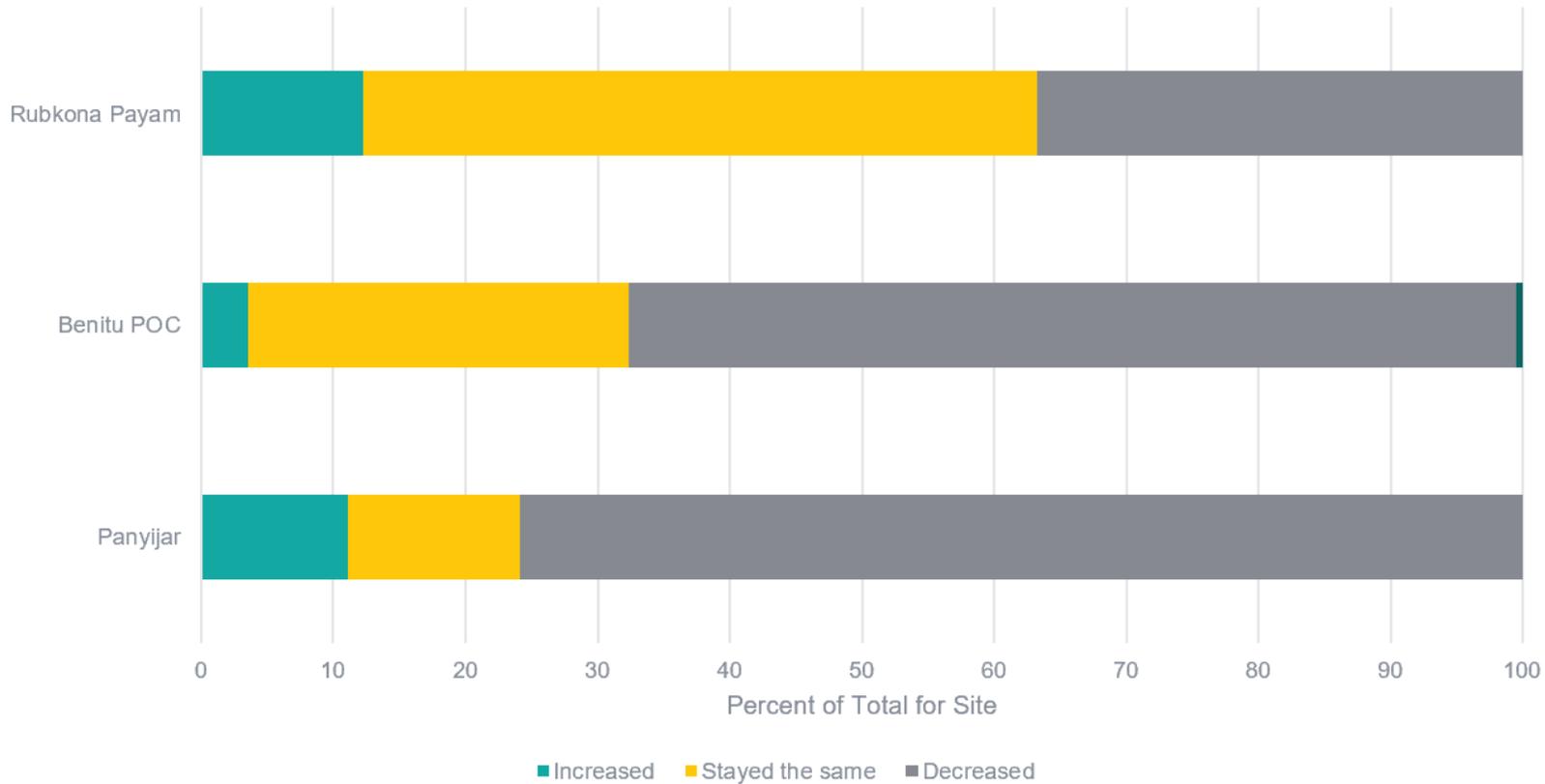
What are we measuring?

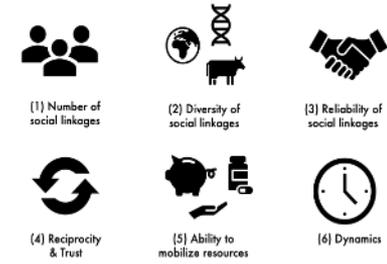




(1) Network Size

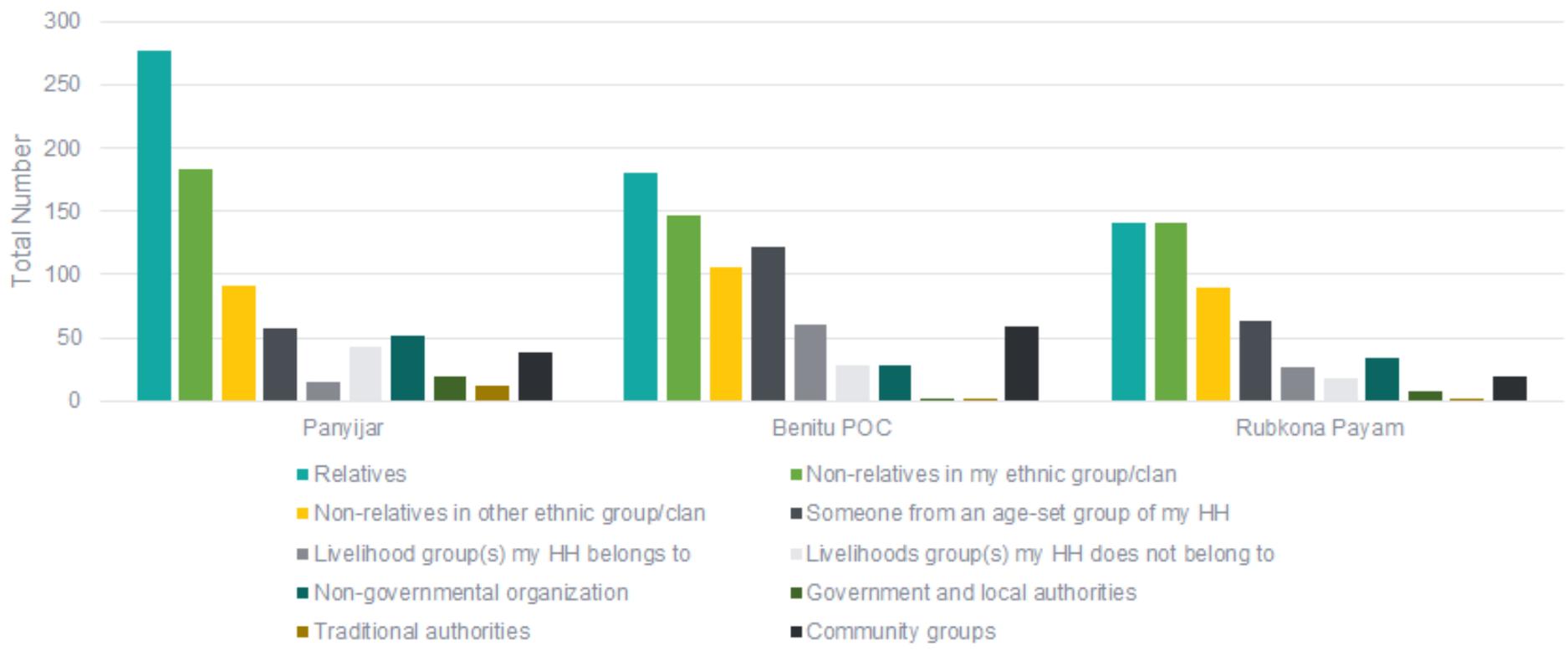
Change in Network Size Since Displacement





(2) Diversity

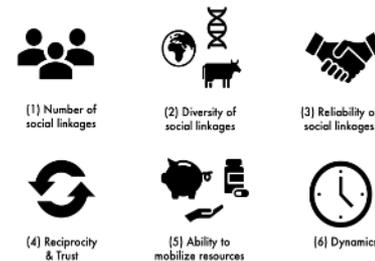
Who Inside POC/Boma HHs Turn to for Help





(3) Reliability

SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS



Confidence Getting Help Outside POC/Boma





Food Security



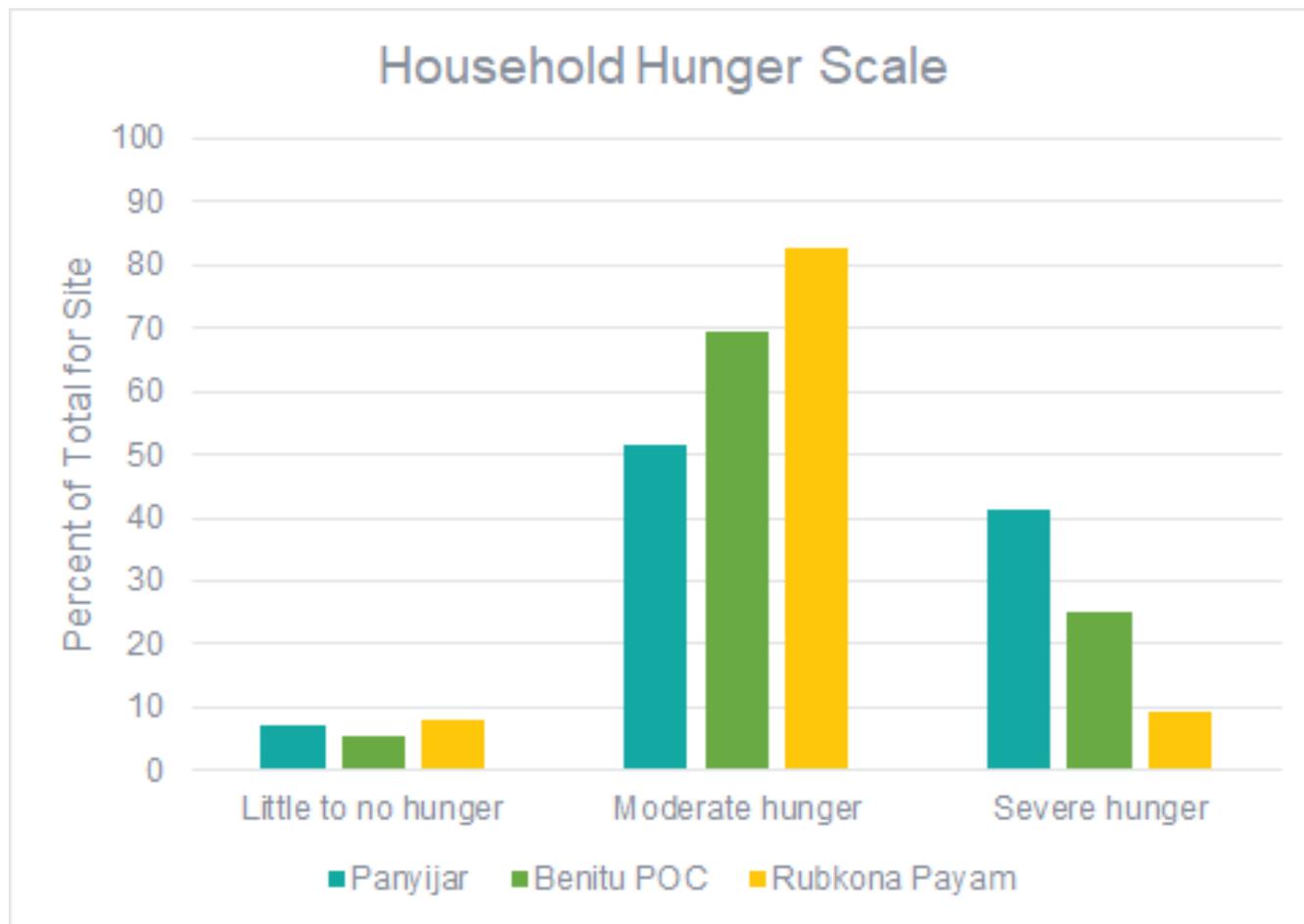
(1) Adaptive livelihood strategies



(2) Food security



(3) Self-reported resilience



Subjective Resilience



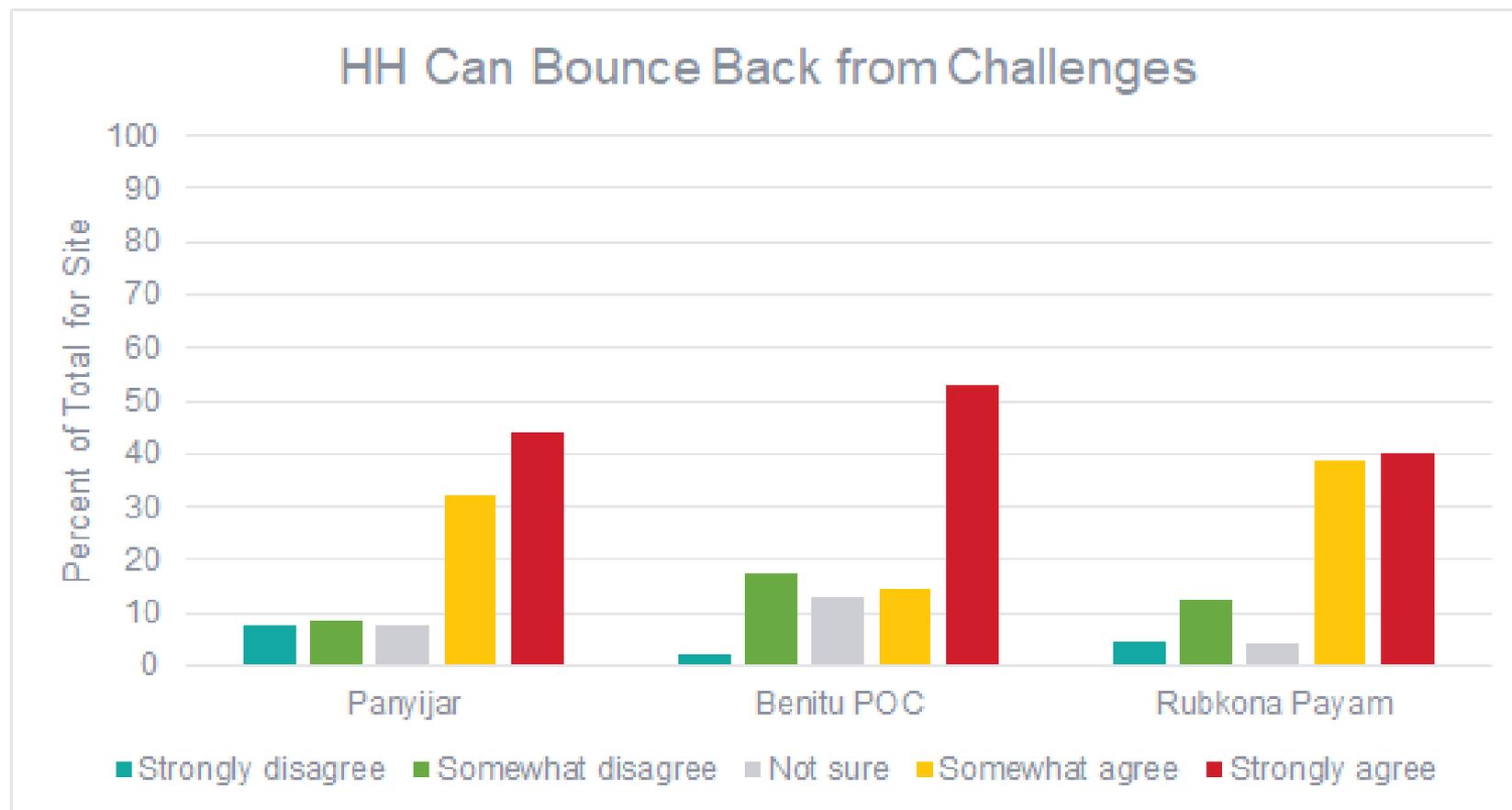
(1) Adaptive livelihood strategies



(2) Food security



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Subjective Resilience



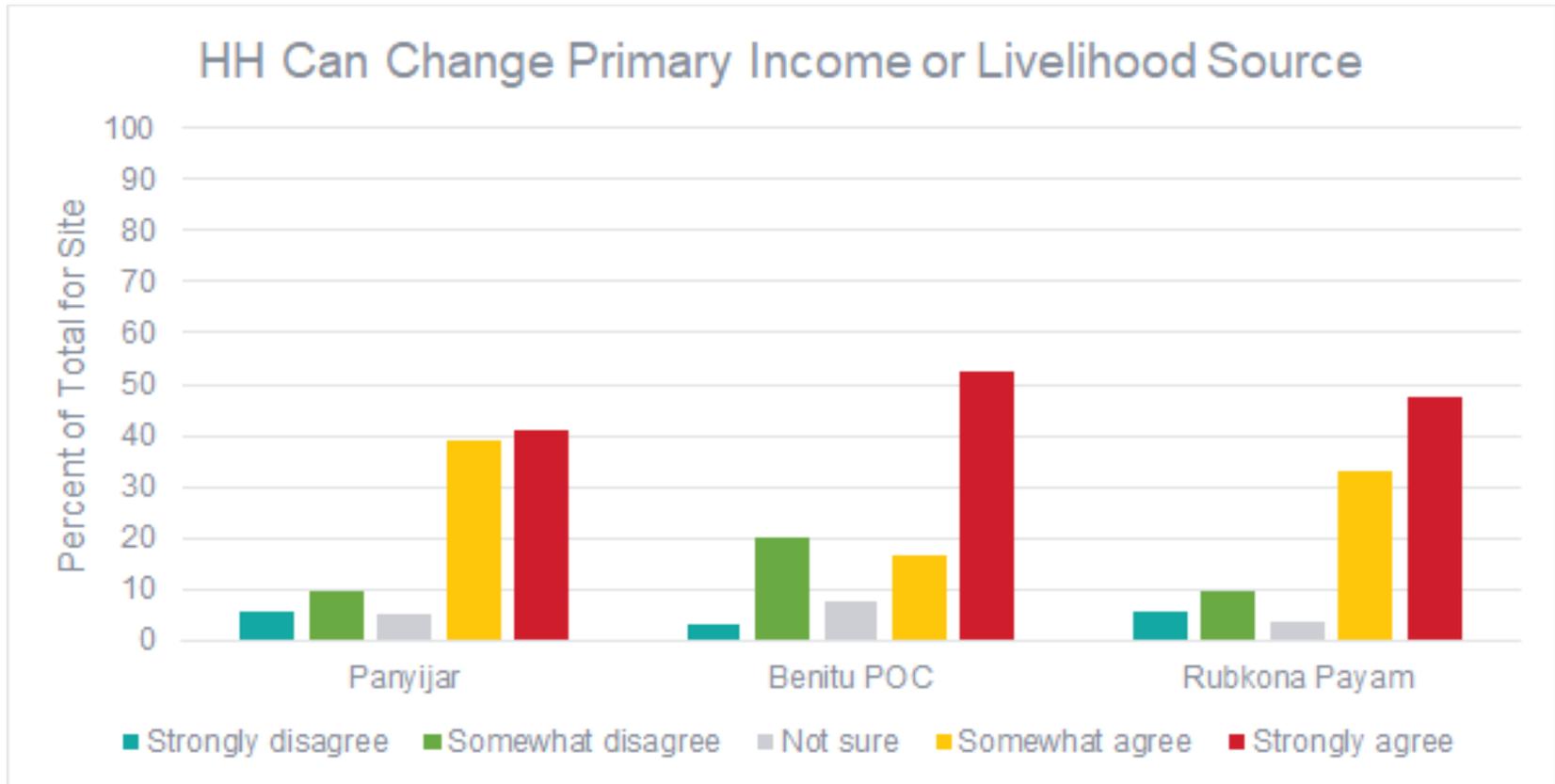
(1) Adaptive livelihood strategies



(2) Food security



(3) Self-reported resilience



Subjective Resilience



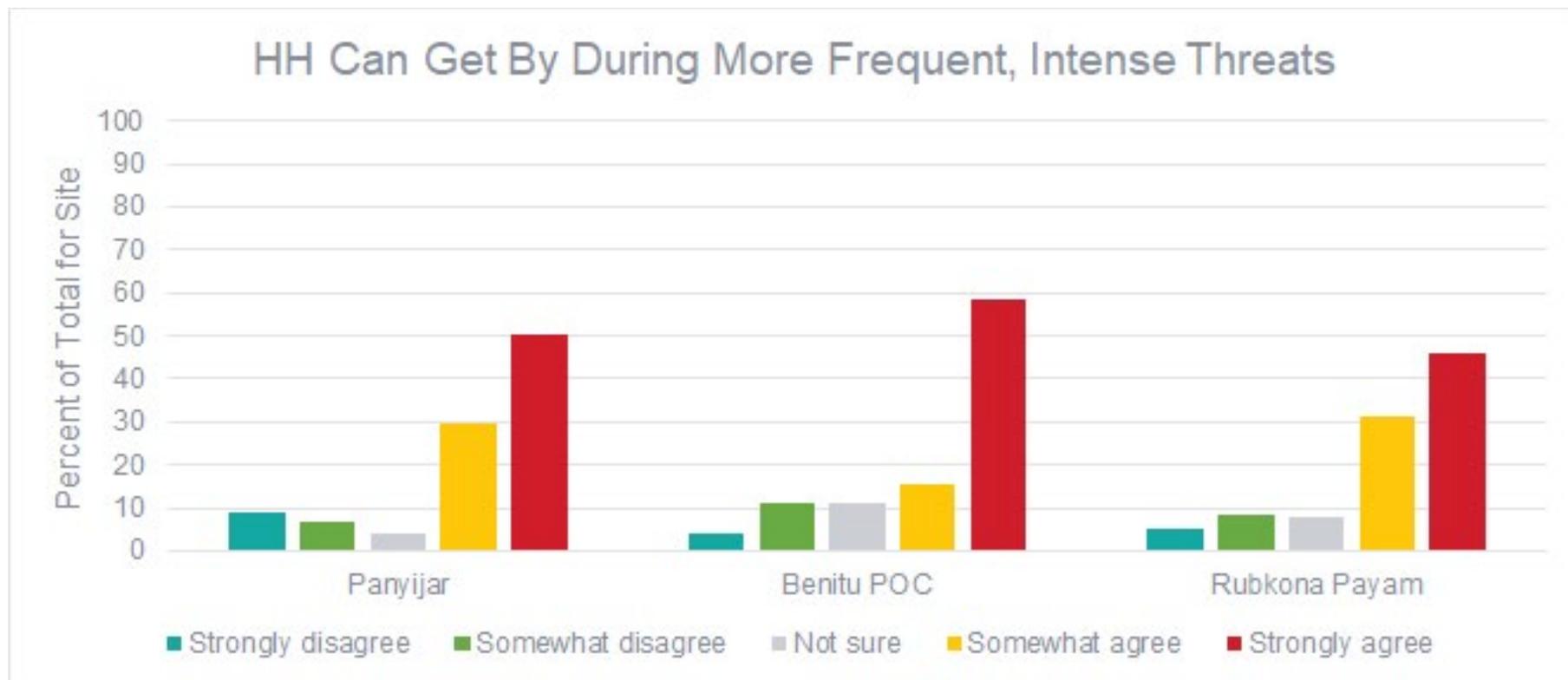
(1) Adaptive livelihood strategies



(2) Food security



(3) Self-reported resilience







*But does social
connectedness matter in
other contexts too?*



Understanding social connectedness can help us rethink aid impact

A few possible applications...

- Targeting
- Impact and sustainability
- Returns
- Do no harm





Key Takeaways

- **During crises, social connections are critical sources of economic and emotional wellbeing**
- **Protracted crises impact social connections and support systems**
- **Social connectedness is not an inherently positive phenomenon**
- **Efforts to examine social connectedness must be culturally-contextualized. Qualitative research which capture and honor the insights of the “community” are key to measurement efforts.**

Acknowledgements

A person wearing a white t-shirt with a logo on the back is walking away from the camera on a muddy, rutted path. The path is surrounded by tall grass and leads towards a body of water in the distance. In the background, there are trees and some traditional dwellings with thatched roofs. The overall scene is a rural, possibly agricultural or pastoral, setting.

- **South Sudan-based MC field team**
 - Nyuon Moses
 - Gabriel Gatjang
 - Pakita Gatliah
 - Kuerdiil Maziaw
 - Thompson Kulong
- **HQ-based MC team**
 - Jon Kurtz
 - Carly Schmidt
- **Feinstein International Center, Tufts University**
- **Key informants**
- **Men and women in Panyjiar and Rubkona Counties, including the Bentiu PoC, who took the time to share their experiences, challenges, and aspirations during surveys, focus group discussion, and interviews**

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