WHY DO SOCIAL CONNECTIONS MATTER FOR RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY? WEBINAR

PRESENTATION TRANSCRIPT

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Laura Meissner:	I'm the economic and recovery market contact there. I work with global markets helping vulnerable populations getting back to restoring their livelihoods and begin new ones, and I also work on cash and voucher interventions.
	We have three terrific speakers working with us today working with Mercy Corp. We have Alex Humphrey, the lead author of the currency connection report that we'll get into today. He manages programming for South Sudan, and up until recently was based there in South Sudan.
	We have Jeeyon Kim, she works on topics related to empowerment, migration, social connections and food security.
	Last, certainly not least, we have Vaidehi Krishnan, a researcher working on Mercy Corps 'program and cash programming, particularly in the Middle East and in Syria. She's a coauthor of the currency connection report and also a wages of war report in Syria. Assuming everybody can hear very well? I think I'll turn it over to my colleagues at Mercy Corps, and they'll get right into the currency of connections.
	We're particularly excited about this research for a number of reasons, particularly it really challenges and gives nuance and meaning to how vulnerable people manage to survive and thrive in times of crisis, and has useful applications for how we may want to think through response and recovery programming, particularly in terms of targeting or understanding the economy, thinking about how we redefine vulnerability and what people have access to. Thinking of things in a pure sort of household, economic unit model, as you'll see, doesn't necessarily make full sense and really people do use all types of communities. I think it is very helpful to learn how those communities and connections are affected by crisis and how they persist through them.
	I will stop with the spoilers and turn it over to my colleagues now.
	Thank you.
Alex Humphrey:	Thank you so much.
	Can I do a quick soundcheck? Is everybody hearing me?
Laura Meissner:	.
Alex Humphrey:	Fantastic! Thank you.
	I'm Alex Humphrey. I work with Mercy Corps and I was involved in writing the currency of connections report as Laura mentioned. We're so happy to have all

of you here today. Thank you for the interest and for the great turnout. Thank you to Laura and market Links for giving us the platform and the authors for making the research possible.

As Laura mentioned, the last year or so, Mercy Corps and Tufts University has been doing research in South Sudan hoping to understand the ways in which households are socially connected to each other and also how they rely on the connections for support during difficult times or crisis.

Before we dive into some things that we're learning, implications that we have for all of you right now I think, we have a bit of background on what the existing research says on the topic and why we wanted to pursue this research in South Sudan.

One of the most important things that the literature on this topic says is that a social connectedness lens or a view of resilience through social connectiveness is really appropriate and applicable in lots of different context. It is relevant in emergency context, it is relevant during early response, it is relevant in development context and in South Sudan as we learned it is relevant in times of conflict as well.

One of the interesting pieces of research that kind of inspired us to do this work, it was connected by our colleagues that involved Jeeyon Kim at that time, she's now at Mercy Corps, that lifted the role that social connections play in household resilience during famine in Somalia. The study showed when actors failed to understand how households are socially connected and how they cope on their own terms in crisis you can undermine the local support systems that households rely on.

Those support systems are very often based on the social relationships or connections that people have with one another. Another really interesting thing that that study showed is that during crisis, social connections change, they evolve. As that crisis worsened in Somalia, as the famine got worse, the types of social connections that people relied on changed and the nature of the connections changed as well.

The lesson there for us, is that social connections are dynamic, they change in the course of a crisis. We certainly are seeing that in South Sudan too and we'll talk about that in a little bit.

Briefly, in Ethiopia Mercy Corps found throughout households, they commonly relied on socially extended networks to access important resources, especially with regards to their livelihood continuing or adapting livelihood.

In Nepal, following the 2015 earthquake there as well as in the Philippines after the typhoon Haiyan Mercy Corps found that households with certain social connections tended to do better in terms of food security and they were also more often able to find quality housing or shelter more quickly after the earthquake, for example.

So those are some of the reasons we wanted to look at this. That's why we think it is important. Our research has confirmed our hypothesis and we'll get into a little bit more specifics later. Before we move on, I just wanted to make a quick note on terminology. Many of you are probably familiar with the term social capital, and indeed much of the literature that I just referenced uses the term social capital, but you may notice that instead I'm using the term social connectedness. That's because we want to adopt a more holistic perspective of this concept with this research. We want to acknowledge that connectedness is not necessarily a positive thing like the term social capital often implies.

So, you know, for example sometimes social connectedness for certain people may actually mean marginalization or exclusion for other groups. So we want to use the term social connectedness in our research and hopefully add more nuance to the conversation. For the most part, when we say social connectedness, we're referring to what you understand as social capital.

So, before we kind of go any further, I wanted to give you some more specifics on the nature of our work in suite Sudan. In South Sudan, we want to build on the existing evidence-base I described, and while most of research in this field is retrospective in in nature, that means after the crisis has ended, looking back, we're measuring and researching social connectedness in an ongoing human crisis in South Sudan. It allows us to look at what happens before aid reaches a community and how do these dynamics change in a crisis and after aid has been provided.

In South Sudan, we're connecting research in a couple of different program sites. The first, it is located in southern unity state, right in the middle of the country. That area is an opposition-controlled area, it is very rural. It was protected from the worse of the fighting because of the protection of civilian sites, whip is located at the far and northern tip of the country. And it this effectively is an enormous camp that houses over 100,000 civilians still within the confines of a U.N. peace keeping base that was present there before the current war. Finally, connections in the community that's immediately adjacent to that area, it is interesting, it is home to many returnees or people that left that community and are now coming back either from the POC or from elsewhere in South Sudan. Each of the different program sites are unique and we selected them because we want to understand, how does social

connectedness differ in different contexts? Through this research we talked to IEPs, to hosts, returnees and we're trying to understand how social connections differ within the different populations and why are they important for the communities, often in different ways?

So really briefly, I'll tell you about the methodology we used, and we'll get on to more exciting stuff.

So, this research was qualitative and quantitative. On the qualitative side we conducted extensive household interviews and focus group discussions in all of the research sites, and really importantly we talked to as many people as possible, men, women, lots of different ages, of different livelihood, socioeconomic statuses. And we did that because we want to understand how social connectedness is important in different ways for different people. We wanted to talk to a cross-section of the community to get a really holistic perspective about the lived experiences of the people in these communities. That's really important, especially for the quantitative aspect of the research. We want to ground all of the research instruments into the lived experiences that people have in all of our different research communities.

I won't tell you anymore about the quantitative methodology, I'll leave that for Jeeyon Kim later on in the presentation.

With that introduction, I want to turn it over to Vai now and she'll give you an overview of the specific ways in which social connectedness is linked to resilience in South Sudan.

Vaidehi Krishnan: I have the pleasure to present the exciting things. Normally we would make you wait to the end to talk about key takeaways and we thought we would switch it around. For every section you will see a picture like this, and a key take away. When we're talking through what we found, it will help you better situate how that information relates to the takeaway. Another thing I would urge all of you to do is think about the ways in which social connections matter in your own personal life in the last month, did you reach out to a friend, a family, someone on Facebook to ask for information or support, and think about how important these are in our own lives. Then think of us with multiple resources, how important these connections another, think about how important they are in the context of where we work with the research.

There are multiple ways in which households in South Sudan are connected. We wanted to talk about two, one is the way in which individuals in-house holds are connected to one another. The main types of these connections, one is kin, relatives, people related to you by blood or marriage. The other category, being non-kin, friends, neighbor, acquaintances, et cetera.

While friends and neighbors and acquaintances are also important in in South Sudan context because they are people that may live right next door. If you have a short-term need, you could go to them for support. Kin ship connections in South Sudan play a particularly important role because the kin support is obligatory. Individual and household Level connections, they're governed and regulated by informal rules around sharing and support, but kin support is obligated. While friends and neighbors may support you when you have a need, kin cannot refuse no matter how severe the crisis.

Given how important these connections are, in South Sudan, they use strategies and share resources as a way of maintaining the relationships and these relationships are reciprocal in nature: If I help you, you help me. People do share a small amount of cash, they often share labor, for example, clearing farmland, harvesting crops, et cetera. Food and cows play a central role in the life of those in South Sudan.

In our research we heard a lot of respondents talk about -- most of the quotations, it was something around food. They would say something like, you know, we share our resources, we don't eat alone. If someone was trying to describe the individual or the people in the family, her family, they would say these are people that share my cooking pot. I noticed some of you said you're going to South Sudan, this is -- you know, you will find it interestingly in some assessments in South Sudan a definition of a household, it is people that share the same cooking pot. It is an interesting side note for those of you that are in South Sudan or heading to South Sudan.

I wanted to talk about this sort of marriage, this is where capital plays an important role. Marriage is a crucial way of diversifying one's social network. It is a way of mitigating your risk or to ensure the system. So, this is not just a transaction, the groom and the bride side of the family, they come together, they often have multiple rounds of negotiations about how many cows need to be paid, who in the bride's family is eligible to receive the cows. Sometimes they determine the time and the color of the cows that need to be paid. This is not just the bride's immediate family, not just her father, brothers, in her immediate family that are eligible to receive the cows, this could include vast kin ship networks that travel from other adjacent counties. Once the negotiation process is finished, the groom will gather all of the relatives, sometimes close friend, and these people then contribute the cows towards the marriage. This entire process of giving and receiving cows means that these families are now connected as kin and an obligation to support one another in times of crisis comes back into play.

The other type of connection I wanted to talk about, it was those around livelihood. Some of you I noticed in the poll mentioned types of social connections were ag cooperative. This is an important one. In South Sudan, people that share similar livelihood activities will come together as a group. This could include fisher folk, traders, so on, so forth. Members come together as a group, and they elect their own leader, they have informal rules that involve sharing and support among members and the leader is the person who will enforce the regulations or penalize someone who refuses to share.

This is interesting because they share resources in two different ways, one at the group level, they share resources like economic input and advice. If I as a herder have lost my cows or cattle either through raiding or death or disease, other members in my group will contribute a few cows from their own herd and they'll help me to restock my herd. The risk is that I as a member, my family has -- doesn't have enough food, maybe some of the crop I planted failed, the members in my group will come together and provide resources. It could be a cow, could be cash, other types of resources to help me get through this crisis.

The reason the groups are so important for us to consider, it is because these are entirely self-formed and there is absolutely no aid intervention, it is not aid actors mobilizing the groups, they're self-formed groups and this has always happened in South Sudan and continue to do so. Those getting involved in economic recovery types of programs, it is important to consider how we might work through these groups so that we can actually be more effective in our intervention. Rather than selecting a few different individuals from the community, they may all belong to the same group. Working through the groups means you are more effectively distributing the aid resources; but also within the groups, the resources may be shared or they may be given to someone deemed particularly vulnerable. So, you're doing less harm in that case, and you're also making sure that these groups continue to maintain their cohesion and sharing and support. It is important to think about this.

As Alex noted, you know, during this research in the context of an ongoing crisis, it means that we're able to see what existed before aid actors arrived as well as during the crisis how have the connections changed, and they have changed. And that's the nature of the connections, the type of support that they're able to offer one another.

Particularly in this crisis, it has changed. I want to talk about just two main types of changes. The first one, it is around sharing aid.

I noted earlier food and capital plays an important role in the role of those here. In the context of the crisis, many people, you know, they are not able to farm,

they're not able to produce enough food, they don't have any -- too many of their own resources to be able to share. A lot of people share food aid that they receive with a wider cross-section of their community, people who are there, combine this as a way of maintaining these important reciprocal support systems.

What that tells us, one, how important the connections are within even a crisis where resources are people -- the resources are short, they'll share pressure food aid with other people to maintain the connections, but also as aid actors, we have now become somewhat intrinsically involved in the social connections just because of the fact that aid is being shared. The second one I want to talk about, it is how the South Sudan community in our research sites have moved from a capital, kin ship economy more to cash. Let me explain, earlier I described how capital is a way that is used as a strategy to diversify one's connections. In the context of the crisis, a lot of people have displaced, lost their herd and people fear being -- becoming targets if they have a lot of cattle. People are disposing of their livestock, but also, you know, even within weddings, occasions like marriage, people prefer that the bride is now paid in cash as opposed to cattle. Cash offers a certain level of protection in that sense. The fact that cash can be concealed is also having negative implications for the connections or underlying sharing systems, so people said now, you know, cash is -- you know, cash is not visible. One could go to a relative before, and because of the fact that cattle was visible, they could -- they knew that this person was wealthy and could provide them with support, but now because cash in the context of the crisis, a lot of people are not able to access that because they're not able it approach them. In this context, cash is having a negative impact on people's underlying connections.

I have to admit that for me, learning this, it was, you know, I kind of choked on this when I found out about this, I'm a huge cash opponent. Learning that cash has a negative impact on this context was difficult to swallow.

I'll drink some water to relieve my throat choking, I'll hand it over to Alex to talk through some of the other sections.

Thank you.

Alex Humphrey: Thank you, Vai.

So, as we mentioned, we use social connectedness rather than social capital. A reason for that relates to the next key message that we have for you today, and that is that social connectedness is not an inherently positive phenomenon.

To the extent that social connectedness or social capital is concerned in program design these days, it is usually considered in simplistic terms which tend to lack nuance or conceptual considerations, and it is often assumed to be an inherently desirable outcome. That's not always the case.

I would like to take a moment now to mention a few of the darker sides of social connectedness that emerged from our research.

The first one that I want to mention is that when it comes to social connectedness, it is not just a matter of the more the better. That's because extensive kinship networks like the ones that Via described, meaning networks of family, whether related by blood or by marriage, they tend to be accompanied by really strong sharing obligations. So, meaning, you know, if you have a lot of relatives, you're expected to share with them.

While that sharing is reciprocal, meaning that the relatives will share in return, that -- that is not one to one. Meaning it is very common for some households to share more than they receive and return.

So, situations arise where some households are expected because of the extent of their kinship networks to share a lot. Their obliged to share a lot. If they fail to share a lot, they risk being marginalized or excluded from the community. They're not getting the same amount in return.

In that sense, in some ways extensive kinship networks can be a source of vulnerability for some households. Another kind of dark side of social connectedness relates to the fact that some households find it easier than others -- or others find it more difficult is probably better to say it -- to build or diversify the social connections. And as a result, those households that find it more difficult may struggle to access some forms of support.

This can be a result of either active or purposeful exclusion, or maybe more kind of passive exclusion that happens in the background as a result of gender norms, cultural, social norms. One example of this exclusion, again, it relates to marriage. Some households, they may not have the cash or cattle to marry. And like Vai said, it is an important way to maintain or expand social networks in a crisis. If you don't have the necessary assets to marry, you may not be able to access the support networks. This is especially true during crisis when households' assets are often depleted.

Another example of possible exclusion relates to gender. We know including from lots of other research that women tend to have difficult times establishing relationships with marketplace actors or creators, and those are important sources of small loans or livelihood inputs in a crisis.

Thirdly, this is pronounced in South Sudan, political allegiances have in many ways divided communities, and even destroyed kinship networks. This is lending to the intentional marginalization or exclusion of certain households within communities. For example, in Panjiyar County many respondents explained if someone has relatives that sided with the government during the war for whatever reason, the household will be excluded from social networks and the community will refuse to share with them. Then finally, just to mention, some households often employ kind of harmful strategies to expand their network, social network especially times of crisis. For example, child marriage or forced marriage, maybe practiced   as a means of expanding a network, accessing a bride, things like that.

These are just a few examples which I'm telling you to try to challenge the dominant assumption that social connectedness is always a positive outcome. Sometimes social connectedness can have a darker side to it. At the end of this presentation we'll briefly mention some of the implications that these considerations might have in the way that aid actors design and implement interventions. For now I want to flag this, we want to start to get beyond this rather simplistic way of understanding what others call social capital tore what we call social connectedness. Now we would like to turn it over to Jeeyon Kim. Jeeyon Kim will provide more details about the quantitative aspects of our research and she will give you Pointers on how to begin to think about measuring social connectedness in the context of your own programming.

Laura Meissner: I think she's having trouble connecting to the audio. We'll give her just one second to try to reconnect if everyone doesn't mind. If not, then we'll have Alex. Give us one moment.

Jeeyon Kim: I called in, carrying on where Alex Humphrey and Vaidehi Krishnan left off, we have found a social connectedness, the connections, they're critical and they change during crisis and that as Alex has node, it may not be inherently positive. We're taking this qualitative information and then we're examining the dynamics, measuring how the connectedness and the linkages to the Resilience. Conceptually, previous efforts to measure social connections are more frequently as the term throne around, social capital or cohesion focuses on quantity and quality of social connections, shared values, norms, understanding. And then the norms that are underpinning the social connections, the resources, reciprocity, the cooperation, the actions, into the resilience phase. As some of you are familiar, much of the focus is on the bonding, bridging, the linking social capital and on the economically versus mobilized such relationships. It reflects some of the findings that Alex and Vai shared in previous slides.

These dynamic or concepts were measured in household surveys, and those that are qualitative records, such as interviews, social groups, political science, often for behavioral change. The challenges remain in terms of how such efforts are conceptualized to reflect people's lived experiences and the nuances and the dynamics that were noted in the social connections and especially terms of how they relate to resilience.

 With that background in mind in honoring our intention efforts to have more of a holistic effort to examine social connections, developing a culture and a household survey and we depended in this effort to reflect the lived experiences of men and women who came in interviews, focus groups and informative research by speaking with context experts. Relying heavily on the rich literature that currently exists that explores the critical, complex social connections in South Sudan in our field survey.

It is important so that it allows us to change over time in the same household. In the next few slides we'll share some preliminary descriptive summaries, but please note that they are plea limb neural and we're not trying to say there are associations yet. As we're going through the graphic, Alex will jump in here and there to provide nuance to these findings and draw from our qualitative insights.

Through that effort, we identified 6 dimensions of culture connectedness and operationalized resilience in three ways, as you see on the slides here. First, looking in terms of resilience, the strategy, if and how people are able to adapt livelihood strategies, household food security status and the self-reported resilience, one measure of resilience is building off of the work from ODI for those of you that may be familiar.

Looking at the fixed dimensions on the slide right now in social connectedness we identified six that resonated with the people we spoke to and formative research. The first is a number of people, the household could turn to, called upon during a time of need. The second is a diversity of social connectedness, those that are responding that he or she can call upon or be called upon during time of need. Here are dimensions that are really reflected in different varieties of different groups of people that can turn to, including relative, ethnic groups, livelihood groups NGO, et cetera. We'll get into that in more detail in a few slides.

Third dimension is the reliability of the social linkages, the competence in his or her ability to rely on the people in time of need, this is resources both in material and non.

The reciprocity, the competence in his or her ability to rely on social linkages, identify the mobilized resources in time of need.

And then fifth, it is the ability to mobilize resources.

Then the last, which is critical, it is the dynamics of how these dimensions change over time.

Those of you that are familiar with the social capital measurements will see that these six dimensions build on existing efforts and are embedded within that is the bonding, bridging, linking of social capital that you often see in previous efforts.

Recognizing that the social connectedness and resilience are dynamic, and in turn, there are linkages, we wanted to capture changes over time. In quantitative efforts we are conducting a panel survey that is following up with the same household over multiple time points, earlier this year, in the springtime we surveyed a total of 933 respondents and in November about six months from the first round we plan to track the same households through a repeat survey, doubling the sample size, this is important so it allows us to see what change over time in the same households.

In terms of network size, the first dimension that I mentioned, many respondents noted that the network size decreased, you see the bar in grey since displacement. Many others reported that it either stayed the same or increased in some cases. While this graph plays up the assumption that in crisis and development that social connections or the number of people that you can turn to decreases in difficult times, it is important to keep in mind that the nuances that maybe hidden -- in stern quantitative graphics. I'll turn to Alex here to add more nuance to see what we're seeing here graphically.

Alex Humphrey: Like it was said, it is clear in the chart, we see generally in the course of displacement, the size of people's social networks seems to shrink. That may be true. It is also important to note that households do take very proactive measures and strategic measures to try to rebuild their social networks. It is to reestablish the social connections. This is really a testament to the perceived importance of the networks, to the individuals.

So, for example, in the area that's home to many like I mentioned before, we heard many new arrivals in the community would take specific steps to try to grow social connections with members of the host community. For example, they would often share non-food items which IDPs seem to receive more often than host communities would. It is kind of a desirable and very strategically chosen commodity to be shared. Interestingly, hosts often explained that they

tend to share resources with IDPs, and they do that also for strategic reasons, they do that to try to expand the geographic scope of their support networks. That's because they know that eventually the IDPs are likely to return to their communities of origin, and when they do the host communities will as a result of having shared with them, grown in social connections, they'll have a broader geographical social network basically.

You know, just to say that while this chart shows that networks tend to decrease in size as a result of the displacement, that's not to say that IDPs are idly standing by or just letting this happen, it is not a desirable outcome, it is something that people tend to try to mitigate using strategic, savvy measures.

Back to you.

Jeeyon Kim: Thank you.

Next dimension we identified, we find that while households still report they turn to most of their kin, relatives by blood, relation, by marriage in times of need, we are finding there is a diverse group of social connection or people who households turn to in times of needs. This is especially stark in the POC where many report that they're relying on connections beyond their kinship, that's kind of playing up the finding that sharing qualitatively, households rely on livelihood group associations and community groups. Alex will jump in now to share a bit about the shifting nature of the social connections, especially the POC.

Alex Humphrey: I don't have much to say on this one.

In the POC, we do hear that livelihood, informal livelihood associations are extremely important sources of resilience for households. The livelihood associations, as mentioned before, it is important to note, they're organic or self-forming, they're not the functions of aid interventions. We'll talk a bit more about the implications of that later. As mentioned, these groups, and other sources of support and social networks from non-kin are especially important in the POC as a result of kinship networks being broken down, eroding as a result of displacement, households are separated during flight, perhaps they lose track of relatives for other reasons. Yes. In the POC diverse sources of social connectedness that do not often involve kin, it is very important.

Jeeyon Kim: And the lens in the next slide, looks at an indicator of the third dimension, reliability.

We find that in some research sites the majority of the respondents, they're somewhat or very confident about their ability to get help outside of the area.

However, in the POC, more people are less confident, if that makes sense. This plays up qualitatively as Alex noted where many respondents share that with displacement, many were disconnected from people and over time as years passed, they were unable to reach out. A quote that comes to mind and resonates this point really well, it is a respondent that shared if they don't hear from you, they feel dead about you.

Looking at one Resilience indicator, while we have the association between social connectedness and food security, despite the connection we have seen in the previous slide, the majority of households are reporting moderate to severe levels of food insecurity. We're not suggesting here and I really want to empathize that, that social connections are linked to food insecurity, but however it does -- this line does -- this shows potential negative implications that the social connections could have where the sharing of resources could maybe be a detriment. We're looking to unpacking these a bit and looking forward to sharing the dynamic findings with you. I want to flag that as it quantitatively flushes out the potential negatives that Alex and Vai have mentioned.

Shifting gears to another measure of resilience, it is the three suggested resilience measures I mentioned earlier, it is from the work from ODI, on the other hand, it paints a different picture. Across the three Resilience questions households were asked to the extent they disagree to statements about the capacity to bounce back from future challenges, many agree or strongly agree to the fact that they can bounce back from challenges, that they can change primary income and livelihood or that they can get by during more frequent and intense threat across the three sites.

These three indicators relate to the broader discussion, the resilience sphere of the growing interest and capturing households own understanding of their Resilience taking into account all of the conditions and characteristics and vulnerabilities reporting back rather than the questions themselves and posing what Resilience is needed to households. It also showcases in conjunction with the food security, potential reflecting results, overall challenges are being able to capture and make sense of a multifaceted measure of the tangible measures of Resilience. When we have the second round data, we plan to look at the linkages between the social connections and the three operational ideas of Resilience. We look forward to sharing those results with you when they're more flushed out after the second round.

In conclusion, wrapping up the quantitative session, our Ford's is to develop the survey involves many steps to ensure that the households were contextually

socialize -- socialized contextualized. For those that didn't engage in such preparatory procedures, there are still lessons to be learned by the efforts.

First, it is the importance of reflecting the local context, the lived experiences of men and women in our research sites; second, it is being informed from the inside relying heavily on the local insights of the local team members; third, it is not reinventing the wheel. There is extensive literature, and certainly that's the case in Sudan and likely in the context that you're operating in, and the efforts on unpacking the dynamic would benefit much from the existing knowledge and expertise of your local staff members and the context experts.

All of the things, however, it is the need to be really self-critical and reflective in the effort to really unpack and develop the household survey. You pick up dynamics on the exclusion, marginalization and the existing dynamics that exist within literature as well as what's being played out in experts you're relying on and the local staff members, avoiding perpetuating or worsening the social, local support system that you're trying to unpack.

With that background in mind, I'll turn it back over to Vai and Alex to draw some findings for other context.

Vaidehi Krishnan: That would be me.

So just trying to come back to the takeaway, a lot of you in the polls said you were looking for applications in the context. For example, someone said therapy in Haiti, some are going to South Sudan.

What we wanted to do, it was what we're going to use, some of the learning, the examples from South Sudan, but we're going to try and broaden out the applicability of these in your own context.

I'm going to take a crack at the first few, and then Alex will do the others.

Let's think about targeting. When going in a crisis context, we spend a lot of time developing the individual or household level criteria to identify who are the most vulnerable, who is eligible to receive food, cash, so son, so forth. It is for a finding that once we provide people with the aid, they turn around, they share it with others. That's the strategy for maintaining the social connections which is so important for the longer-term recovery and we may want to think about how do we rethink. This, do we have to spend the time with the individual criteria, do we want to have more transparent discussions within the can community to be able to provide aid?

Related to that example, and thinking about impact and sustainability, we think of humanitarian aid, whether food or cash as a short-term relief. If we know

people share their aid to further these factors, how does it help us to make a stronger case for humanitarian aid intervening in or supporting the longer-term recovery or Resilience measures but also how does it help us to think about what evidence we need to gather. We may be thinking about providing food aid, let's capture how people have food coping strategies, household nutrition may increase but we don't see those results because the food is being shared. The fact that food is being shared to us, the longer-term recovery and Resilience, we have to be able to rethink that and think about how are we as humanitarian aid actors having a long-term impact on sustainability in the communities we intervene.

I'll hand back over to Alex.

Alex Humphrey: Thank you.

Aid actors may want to think of how to help facilitate dignified, of course, voluntary returns. So, during displacement we know that it is very common for social networks to be disrupted, even destroyed.

This can happen when people are separated from one another during flight, or perhaps their purposely -- maybe they purposely, intentionally cutoff communication with friends and relatives back home to avoid harm. You know, you can imagine the situation perhaps when an IDP is seeking shelter in a government-controlled area, but his family is back in an opposition-controlled area. That's when the communication can potentially bring harm. For a number of reasons, that's to say, you know, social networks tend to, as we showed before, breakdown to some extent in context of displacement.

In South Sudan, at least we know one of the main barriers that IDPs face in returning is a lack of trustworthy information about safety and security back home. One of the reasons for that, it is that the social networks have eroded and communication is no longer possible. S,o understanding a bit more about how displaced communities are socially connected to people back home or not, maybe a really helpful entry point to start thinking about taking concrete steps to help IDPs make informed and voluntary decisions around returns. So, you know, there is a number of concrete ways to think about doing this, one, it is as simple as potentially reading cellphones, airtime, helping people reestablish the connections or maybe something more nuanced around partnering up with family initiatives, et cetera.

Finally, just to kind of round this out here, the last kind of potential application for adopting a social connectedness lens, it helps aid actors better to ensure that they do no harm. Aid actors need to be really proactive in seeking to understand local power dynamics and identifying potential reasons for social

exclusion or marginalization and the social connectedness approach is a pretty we think innovative, helpful way of going about that. Critically, we need to make sure that our own program activities are not inadvertently undermining how people establish connections with one another or the support that they provide to one another.

Vai mentioned this before, this may be especially important when doing cash programming, cash can play a particularly disruptive role in terms of social connectedness. We need to think critically, especially the context of cash programming. So, a key takeaway from this research, it is really just the importance of being hyper reflective, self-reflective in the ways that the programming is interacting positively and negatively, potentially negatively with the local dynamics around social connections and support systems.

Just to kind of summarize again here, we talked about the fact that social connections are really important during crisis, that sources of economic, social well-being, I hope we have convinced you of that now. If not, please do tell us why. The second thing, we know that in protracted, extended crisis social connections change, these are dynamic systems. The third thing is that social connectedness is not always a positive outcome. We need to be nuanced and critical and acknowledge some of the darker sides of social connectedness. Then as said, when we go about it measuring the social connectedness, qualitatively and quantitatively especially, we need to be really, really careful to capture and honor the local context and the insights of the community.

Those are the key takeaways we hope to leave you with today. Before going over to Q and A, I wanted to take a second to acknowledge specifically our South Sudan research staff, our field team who have just been incredible assets to us as we're called in South Sudan as outsiders, they have been incredibly patient in explaining the dynamics to us. We're grateful. It has been a Joy to work with them.

With that, I think we'll turn it over to the Q and A. I'll leave the key takeaway slide up for now. I'll turn it over to Laura I think to bring on the questions.

Laura Meissner: Thank you so much for the presentations. We have some questions for all of you actually. I will get started. I think there are a couple of questions particularly about the South Sudan experience, and then there are more broader questions. Let's start with the South Sudan experience.

There was one question with religious, a social of connectedness, and another question particularly about the South Sudan case, was there differences from the results in location? For example, one not having much of a decline in social connectedness or others having a higher proportion of concern, any of those

	contextual differences between the locations. I will pause there, and we'll do another round of questions. This is open to any of you who wish to respond.
Vaidehi Krishnan:	Jeeyon Kim, you want to take the one about religious observations being a variable? That is something that you may be able to answer in our quantitative collections.
Jeeyon Kim:	Sure.
	Alex is probably better poised with his field insights, we did include religious -- we chose not to include religion affiliation as part of the quantitative efforts given the qualitative research indicated for the most part, given that within the example, that our sample, the people who were included, they were largely from the same ethnic group and linked religious background.
	Alex, do you want to build on that?
Alex Humphrey:	Sure. Like Jeeyon said, threshold alerts is not variation within the religion affiliation in the sample. We didn't include that in the quantitative measurement. That's not to say, however, that religion is not necessarily an important source of social connectedness or support to the respondents. It is just that because it is -- it is homogenous across the sample, it wouldn't be a helpful indicator for us on the quantitative side, but speaks more to the dynamics around religion and social connectedness for sure.
	We hear oftentimes when we're asked why do people support each other, why are they willing to provide the support which is described in -- it is often explained in religious terms. So there is obviously a religious tradition underpinning the sharing, I don't want to overemphasize that component of that.
	As Vai carefully explained, there are other reasons why people support each other around norms and obligations and other local dynamics. Certainly religion is an important piece of this puzzle so I hope that answered part of your question.
	Trying to remember what the other question --
Laura Meissner:	The second question was around --
Vaidehi Krishnan:	Go ahead. Please.
Laura Meissner:	It was just about if there were differences in results by location based on some of the contextual factors like the one not having as much of a decline in social connections or others having more people concerned or other differences

	between the three locations, if there were lessons that were pulled out from there. Perhaps not if it was not a large sample in a sense.
Alex Humphrey:	Do you want to take that? This is in reference to the --
Jeeyon Kim:	Sure. I'm a little hesitant to draw too many conclusions given the fact that the data analysis is still preliminary. One thing that we did not mention or go in greater detail, our sampling was conducted by the displacement centers in order to capture the different resident status and the potential different ways in which displacement status may be impacting or effecting the disconnectedness. I'll hold that and whet your appetite for the second round. We do -- the hypothesis was that we did state there may be differences in social connectedness but Alex or Vai, qualitatively you saw differences across different sites. Any insights you want to share from that qualitative side?
Vaidehi Krishnan:	I can just say, I think -- we may have forgotten to mention, POC stands for the protection of civilian sites, I apologize if that came across of people of concern, the humanitarian sector, we have multiple applications. Alex may have briefly noted this, the number of social connections, decreasing in the POC, not wanting to make any conclusion remarks there, people within the displacement sites, this is a large camp site kind of thing, people have considerable mobility restriction. A lot of people said that they had either lost communication with their relatives or other locations, it is a cellphone access issue, network issue, it is quite common in South Sudan. The other thing is also Alex briefly mentioned the role of political allegiances, a lot of political crisis means that people have willfully severed connections with their relatives who may be living in government-controlled areas or even within opposition-held areas, some factions are breaking off and joining the government. So, people are willfully severing connections because they fear being perceived as government loyalists, particularly in towns that are full of people that have fled during the crisis. They're unable to access their kinship network outside. Their connections, they're now all within the camp site. They form new connections with the people from other counties, but it is now limiting their connections, their kinship connections with people outside of the POC because of the -- again, back to what was said, we're trying to understand what effect the situations have had on people's ability to draw on the kinship networks and this is an important quality I wanted to note.
	Alex, Jeeyon, anything to add? Otherwise I think we could try to take more questions.
Laura Meissner:	Let's move on. There are quite a lot of questions and comments around programming. Let's talk about targeting. So, there is a question about how do

we take into account the fact that people will redistribute assets on their own, but we still do and probably should target people by vulnerability? What sorts of considerations might we want to do, any sort of practical real world tips, and then I had a question which is particular to cash program, Vai brought up, it is that you were finding here, that cash can in some respects make you more vulnerable because it is something that you have to share widely or make you be seen as more wealthy. In other research it has been found, for example, that food is shared more widely than cash which tends to be more held closely at the household level.

You know, is this something that could be specific to South Sudan, something that we should think about more from a targeting perspective or a modality perspective.

From there, maybe Vai, maybe Jeeyon, if you want to talk about the targeting and sharing, they're sort of intertwined and then after that round, we have more questions on applications of the programming.

Vaidehi Krishnan: We'll start with the cash question and go to the targeting question and give you a bit of a break.

When talking about cash, I did want to follow-up to say that there is a larger move towards a cash-based economy in South Sudan because of the crisis. We're not specifically talking about cash aid, but cash aid is unfortunately a part of that system. Particularly if you think about the economy where humanitarian actors may inject cash, we're a part of that system where we're fueling that transition. As an indirect result, any negative consequences that go with it. That's an important one to remember. What I did want to say, is that I don't know if this is generalized to our circumstances outside of South Sudan. We know that cash is an important, effective modality and people want cash. Right. So, I will keep my answered top what we know within the South Sudan context. This is why it is interesting. In South Sudan, cash doesn't have the same effect as it does in other economies. In this case, because it is very much a barter-based system people always relied on capital or sharing of food. People do need cash in the context of this crisis. It is not a matter of need. So people do want and they do need cash aid. But they -- even if they do share cash, let's consider this, the amount of cash provided is based on people being able to get a certain amount of food. Cash can be used for other things, if people need cash and they need multiple needs, for example, they may be more reluctant to share. The other side of this is some respondents said because I was chosen for cash aid and cash is so much in need in the community, my relatives no longer want to support me because they think I'm more or less self-reliant, that's the other side of it. We need to -- it is not so much about food or cash or the type

of humanitarian aid but if we're finding out that people are sharing or there are obligations to share --

Laura Meissner: Vai, still there? We lost her for a moment.

We're not hearing at the moment.

Do you have anything else to add to that particular question? If not, we can put a hold on it and come back to Vai when she rejoins us. I don't know if either of you had a question to respond on targeting, how do we address that we know people will share and we wish to target the most vulnerable. Jeeyon, could you perhaps take that?

Let's talk about on the part program implications. There were a couple of suggestions. One, it is on how to hire local sociologists to have on the team, to be a consultant during Program it design and program implementation to make sure that the local context as far as social connectivity is taken into consideration. There was another question or suggestion, it was that maybe when we see the most vulnerable having to share some resources that they get in humanitarian assistance, maybe that can be viewed in some regards, still as a positive outcome because that's a way that they're building social connections or maintaining connections and that that is something that they may be able to use in the future to rely upon.

I would just note myself to editorialize that a bit, that's backed up by some other research, for example, there is research on cash and voucher assistance a few years back that observed sometimes people would use assistance to contribute to someone's funeral expenses or to buy a friend a coffee, it a meal, and they saw it as a with a way to repay the assistance they have been given and remain taken that connection in the future.

So just two perspectives there. No need to respond unless you wish.

Additionally, there were a couple of questions, Mercy Corps, regarding the programming, did you have the flexibility to adjust to the local dynamics or were you locked into the donor preferences about what sort of aid and how to provide it? More generally speaking could we talk about how could programs have the flexibility to look at the programming response in connection to the local social connectivity. The second question maybe, it would be sort of how -- should we try to engineer or manipulate the social connections? How much should we do it? There was a comment I think from Vai on being hyper reflective on the ways in which our programming does affect social dynamics since it does one way or another. Positively or negatively.

So, you know, are there any tips maybe about how to be observing about this on a world day-to-day basis and when may we want to be intentional in creating or maintaining the social connections. I can think a lot of humanitarian, development interventions, they do actually do this if we say trying to help create an informal association of traders or of vocational training, classmates, if nutrition side, creating mother to mother support groups, this is something that we do as outsiders trying to create ourselves, of course we're having the implications as well. Any reflections, observations from either of you, and hopefully Vai will join us in a moment.

Jeeyon Kim: Sure. Just taking Diane and I were having a conversation in the chat box, I'll stand on the point there, absolutely, the point earlier in the chat box and what was reiterated, it is not new that social connections matter, that they're important and that they're critical. I think what is a little bit less done is being very thoughtful and internal about how those things come into account or how to take into account the designing of programs and being more explicitly aware that program activities are complementing, not undermining the dynamics. The point of having an anthropologist, sociologists, I would love that, within the funding retransition plan, the reality of the programs, that's not often allowed. A takeaway from this exercise I hope is that programs and implementers elsewhere can start to recognize that it is important in their day-to -day programming to be thoughtful in the ways in which their activities are being -- are effecting or are interacting with local support systems and in a way that does not necessarily have to be as vigorous or as in depth as our efforts here, but that it is done so intentionally on a continual basis.

Alex, anything to add on there?

Alex Humphrey: No. I completely agree with that. I did want to just -- there were two kind of similar questions that came at the end.

With regards to, you know, should we think about designing program explicitly to try to respond to, or at least reflect, the local social connections and those dynamics, and there was another question, to what extent do we manipulate the social connectedness.

So these are kind of similar questions in the sense that what we envisioned was that these social networks can be to some extent leveraged for impact, you know, innovative targeting strategies, by recognizing that the informal livelihood groups exist and targeting through the groups to reach more people and then allowing those groups to distribute that assistance on their own terms based on kind of local understandings of vulnerability that exists that often are shaped by the degree to which households are socially connected.

So to that extent, yeah, let's think about programming in ways that reflect these local dynamics, but manipulating these dynamics needs to be done, if at all extremely carefully given that, you know, for example, the livelihood groups are completely self-founding, self-forming, they are not functions of aid interventions. As a result, you know, interacting with them, trying to change the way that they operate may really prove to be destabilizing or constructive. Despite the fact that there are potentially not necessarily an appetizing aspect to the groups such as the fact that they, you know, are dominated by men only in many cases, you know, seeking to change that may actually result in negative outcomes in the long term.

There are these darker sides to social connectedness that aid actors need to be aware of and can start to think about, you know, programming around, and trying to manipulate those darker sides in a sense. You know, thinking about targeting in ways that ensure that people with extensive kinship, sharing obligations, trying to help them out a little bit to meet the obligations and remain socially connected, things like that. So, manipulate yes, but very carefully and only to address some of the darker sides of the social connectedness, program around and through these social networks, absolutely. But carefully.

I think there may have been a couple of other questions. Is -- did I see -- no. I didn't see her come back.

Okay.

So, I'll leave it there.

Laura Meissner: We may have lost Vai for the rest of it. We'll see.

I'm glad you brought up the dark side of social connectedness. There were a couple of comments and observations on this. William from CRS certainly said it is good to bring this up because it is an underappreciated area. It is important to bring it front and center. Carly also had an observation that thinking about which level of social acceptance, the resilience for whom, it could be important that for example having to share might be bad for the household and individual resilience and maybe better at the level of the larger group or the community. I think it looks like we do have Vai back but only on the phone.

That's wonderful. I think she's just -- Vai, if you press star 6, that should unmute you.

Hopefully that will work.

We will figure this out.

In the meantime, I think I had one question about the dark side of social connect activity, in your research, did you find that people would readily admit this, is it something that you had to get from key interviews is, are people willing to mention that they're considering marrying off one of their children or that if they got any assistance that they have to share a certain percentage of it, is it something that people tend to be forthcoming about or did you have to use other research methods to try and capture this.

Alex Humphrey: This is a real struggle that we often encounter, trying to conduct pure research as aid actors, many times we're assumed to be doing some form of needs assessment or targeting exercise when, of course, we're not. To some extent, people are relatively forthcoming with this information. In order to build the relationships, we rely heavily on our local research team who are members of the communities in which we are conducting research, who are aware of the dynamics very well themselves, and who are in a position to build relationships of trust with our research participants. We work with them carefully to ensure that they are fully aware of kind of research ethics and informed consent and then once we have done that, we encourage them to pressure our participants to share freely, remind them this is not a needs assessment and the way that -- the information they provide us, it is not going to shape the extent of the assistance they receive from Mercy Corps or other agency it is. By doing that, we have found that people are quite forthcoming with us about some of the darker sides of social connectedness, especially with regards to kind of the political aspect of this. I was actually quite surprised by how candid people were about intentionally excluding others from their community who were suspected to have even distant political affiliations with the government, not even the immediate household buddy at that point relatives may be suspected of being sympathetic to the government and people were candid about that. To answer your question, it is a process that we put a lot of thought into and we rely on our local team. People tend to be quite forthcoming.

Laura Meissner: Thank you for that.

I have a bit of a question going back to the theme on if you're able to be flexible and adaptive to this or if you feel locked into donor requirements which is obviously at Mercy Corps,   they're active in response and the Resilience and Recovery plan in South Sudan and elsewhere. Has this work changed how you're approaching what you do in South Sudan or elsewhere and if it hasn't yet, then how might it change in the future?

Alex Humphrey: I can take that one and then Vai is back, we would love to get her back in here again.

We're to be clear still conducting the research. We're still trying to understand what this really means for our programming and we're looking forward to continuing to communicate with many of you who are here today to understand the implications that this has for our programming. We'll rely very heavily on that sort of communication to unpack some of this. We have started to think about and implementing to some extent the findings from this research and the programming in South Sudan. One way that we did that, we recently conducted a market systems assessment in a different context in South Sudan, and we incorporated qualitative questions based on the research to investigate some aspects of social connectedness and to ensure that our future interventions would do no harm and to identify leverage points especially around kind of informal livelihood groups where we may be able to increase our impact as a result of using some of the social connectedness learning. You know, we asked questions around who do people turn to in times of need and their own communities, you know, who comes to them and how does this differ based on gender. We try to identify specific livelihoods which are conducted in informal groups and think about how a market system approach may interact with the groups positively and negatively. Again, this is as much as doing no harm as well as maximizing impact. So yeah. Through market assessments, we're starting to look at -- starting to look at implementing some of the learning. Vai may have more to say about this I suspect, and I would like to bring her back now that she's on the phone.

Vaidehi Krishnan: Yes. I'm back. I apologize for -- that was my get out of jail free card, my Internet connection.

I was trying to make a point, I was able to pick up, sorry, Alex, I think you covered the market system question you were talking about.

I do want to in interest of time go back about the quality question and as I was saying earlier, food aid, for example, before the biometric, people may have been getting more aid than they deserved but it also meant that they were able to share and maintain the social reciprocity system that's so important to them. Now the system, a lot of people say, we receive just enough for our own households, so we're not able to share. In that sense while the biometric system is important for us to able to provide value for money, being more effective, it also has then in this case harmed those, the efficacy people to share, and the support system that they rely on. Same true for cash, when we think about humanitarian aid, it is about saying if people are sharing this what -- the sharing systems, they're important for longer term recovery, how can we rethink the amount of money we give people or the amount of food that we provide people to continue that crucial sharing system. The other question you had, it is around vulnerability and servicing, and the aid actors, yes, we do

go through the motions and if we know that -- the definition of vulnerability, the context in South Sudan, it is quite different, Alex talked earlier about these sharing obligations. So, as a man, as an example, I may now be required to support far more households because some of my male relatives have died. As a woman, I may have fewer people that can support me, or I may have fewer kinship connections that I can turn to for support. So, vulnerability in the context of the countries we operate, it could be quite different. We may think about it very much around, you know, how much -- how many apples do people have, how much do they earn, do they need support? The vulnerability in this context, it looks very of quite different. Working through community structures, not just community leaders because there could be some captures there. But going out to the rest of the community, understanding what is the context, it actually helps you be more efficient and effective in how you think about vulnerability and who you target as part of this aid.

That's all I'm going to say.

I apologize if I dropped off partway through my rant earlier. I hope I have answered some of your questions. Of course, we're still available post if you would like to send an email or set up a side chat.

Laura Meissner: Wonderful.

I'm glad you were able to join us again.

Looking at the time it is just about 11:00 here on the East Coast. We're going to wrap up.

I would like to say to you each thank you, thank you to Vai, Jeeyon, Alex for presenting and sharing all of your experiences and insights. I would also like to thank all of the participants, especially those of that you posted questions. I know we didn't have time to get to everybody. I'm glad we were able to have such an engaging discussion.

And as always, a huge thank you to everybody on the Marketlinks side, Charlin and Shira, that they helped make this happen.

Have a wonderful morning, rest of your evening depending where you are. Don't forget to fill in the poll questions, share your feedback and we have sent the web links, to the reports, they're on the left and had there will be a transcript and reporting of the slides up fairly shortly.

Thank you so much, everybody.

[End of presentation]