Local communities are critical to the COVID response, in partnership with governments, donors, and others

Community-led frameworks and approaches can mobilise quick, targeted, and effective responses to this crisis, while building trust in Government and supporting social cohesion.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having deep and far-reaching impacts on the social, cultural and economic fabric of African societies. Policy measures implemented by many governments have been fast and effective, saving lives by preventing spread of the disease. However, there is no avoiding the medium and long-term impacts that the pandemic and the global economic recession will have in future.

“Due to avoiding meeting we no longer have the way to solve community problems” - Female community leader from Kinyababa village, Rwanda

Protecting African people’s lives, livelihoods and culture is a top priority for everyone, and requires coordination and comprehensive efforts from government, development partners, and civil society. The role of civil society is crucial to fast track an effective social and economic recovery.

“How are we going to survive without going to job? Once done with this pandemic we will start the life from zero” - Man from Ruli village, Rwanda

Community-led programs and approaches which prioritise participation, civic engagement, and local decision-making will support recovery through:

➔ Addressing immediate economic, social, and health impacts for the poorest
➔ Addressing community-level impacts over the medium term
➔ Building social resilience for future crises and development efforts

Activated Communities are already powerfully in place.

Reputable local groups, organizations, networks, projects—including formal and informal, traditional and modern, faith-based and secular, sector-specific and integrated—are needed because they:

1. Protect and care for women, children, & anyone at risk of hunger, violence, neglect, mental and physical illness
2. Are local, known, trusted, based personal accountability and transparency in disbursing aid and more.
3. Have real-time knowledge of who needs help most—used for taking action and supplying data
4. Can credibly convey up-to-date information and guidance from government, others
5. Can partner with local government and private sector
6. Help keep the peace, and keep morale up
Four immediate offerings in this crisis.

Communities can:

1. Get life-saving help to those who need it NOW
2. Share credible news - train community members in new practices, & combat misinformation
3. Supply local data and insights
4. Support and inform local government and other development efforts
5. Set up community-based social support mechanisms (cognizant of protection measures, e.g. mobile phone use)

How to mobilize the grassroots across a country.

Work through a national-level civil society mechanism that will:

- Link the grassroots efforts to subnational and national government and other efforts by identifying, and vetting existing programs, projects, and appropriate and trustworthy groups.
- Address specific needs of vulnerable/marginalised groups not reached by government or relief programs.
- Amplify and reinforce government communications and outreach by disseminating tailored information and guidance (including in local languages) directly to local actors, en masse.
- Bolster relevant capacities e.g. set up and orient local persons on data verification and validation forums, provide online training, coaching, peer support, encouragement.
- Collect and share data subnationally and nationally
- Quickly disburse funds boost rural liquidity
- Monitor to ensure accountability, and to combat fraud and waste
- Set up and support subnational networks as appropriate
- Keep the connections and activity up and running throughout the pandemic, including future surges.
- (In the future...the established, capacitated, and tested nationwide local development network can serve other development needs beyond COVID, aligned with the global localization agenda.)
The Movement for Community-Led Development

Options for engagement

National Chapters of the Movement for Community-Led Development can support one or more elements of the following as needed in each country or region:

Enhance civic engagement in the response: Facilitate rapid and targeted data collection, and two-ways flows of information to collect feedback on effectiveness, and engage people’s voices in decision-making in transparent and efficient ways.

- Represent community voices in local and national response, planning, and policy development, sharing community perspectives with policy-makers, including updated data direct from communities.

- Amplify and reinforce government communications and outreach by disseminating tailored information and guidance directly to local actors, en masse.

- Data:
  - Collect and share subnationally and nationally
  - Identify gaps and set up mechanisms to fill gaps.
  - Monitor new trends and patterns of new emerging priority needs that require mitigation to enhance effectiveness; including needs that require specialized attention e.g. violence, new vulnerabilities, etc.

- Combat fraud and waste: monitor COVID related aid to communities to ensure it reaches who intended for, and to enable learning and fixes along the way.

Expand and accelerate response efforts: Working with development partners to mobilise CSOs to take rapid action, that is accountable to Government and the public.

- Address specific needs of vulnerable/marginalised groups which may not be reached by government or relief programs

- Address critical issues outside the scope of national programs, such as land rights issues for small holders, safety of groups vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, or exclusion (especially women), and protecting livelihoods of at-risk groups.

- Quickly disburse funds to boost rural liquidity

Offer grassroots expertise: Co-design appropriate inclusive intervention mechanisms that can address short-term immediate, medium-term, and longer-term issues, including preparation for future waves.

- Bolster relevant capacities e.g. set up and orient village leaders on data verification and validation forums, provide online training, coaching, peer support, encouragement.

- Contribute extensive experience and expertise to design of various response programs to ensure they’re suited to target groups and addressing most vital needs of people.
The Movement for Community-Led Development