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

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 (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, vetting, and connecting with 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.
- (Eventually, this established, capacitated, and tested nationwide local development network can serve other development needs beyond COVID.)

Options for engagement:

- Immediately, convene a national level coordination mechanism (as possible through an existing working group or other entity). This group can:
  - Represent local voices in national planning and policy development
  - Create a funding mechanism that enables rapid action that is also accountable
  - Co-design appropriate inclusive intervention mechanism that can address short-term immediate, mid-term; longer-term issues.