Social networks in the context of the Haiti disaster

One case example in Haiti warns how social networks, in the aftermath of a crisis, can take on their own momentum and need mechanisms of accountability and independent assistance, to ensure equitable resource allocation and abuse avoidance. After the earthquake in January 2010 that rendered around 1.5 million people homeless, survivors built camps and formed management committees, mostly without external involvement. They became the "gatekeepers" for resource distribution in the camps and, at the same time, managed the registration of the displaced populations and resolved conflicts. Ewert explains how they were preferred over UN agencies or NGOs because resource distribution was tailored to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, whilst the former agencies strategy was "mass distribution". Months later, however, there were abuses of power in the management committees and rival committees formed, such that "by six months, most of them had spent their social capital and outlived their usefulness". It has been argued that government should have been more involved, but that "the state became completely paralyzed". He recommends that "in a different setting, a more rural setting, a community of disaster survivors might be able to recover and thrive over the long term without assistance. But in ultra-densely populated Port-au-Prince, true recovery is impossible without the assistance of state planning".

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Power relations, Social networks, Social control
Disaster Phases: Response, Recovery
Types of Actors Concerned: Active citizens, Government, UN and other international organisations
Hazards: Natural hazards

Recommendations:

- Limit cases of power abuse by protecting whistle-blowers and encouraging the formation of advocacy and/or pressure groups
- Foster social connectedness and the development of a strong sense of community, as these encourage citizens to help each other in disaster situations

---

Source

Deliverable D7.3 "Report on cultural factors and citizen empowerment" (page 47)