How do Mutual Aid and Solidarity Networks Work during COVID-19?

Worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic and “stay-in place” orders changed the dynamics of everyday household economies, momentarily allowing for mutual aid and solidarity networks to take on a more prominent role in maintaining urban households. These networks aim to mitigate harms associated with diminished public health services; unemployment and reduced economic income; massive layoffs; reduced access to basic services; and inequalities in access to the Internet and communication technologies. This research focuses on urban areas of Ecuador to analyze the adoption and movement of these solidarity networks during the stay at home orders of COVID-19. The questions driving this project are: What do these mutual aid networks look like and how do they operate across different urban communities in Ecuador? How have ways of providing for the home been altered? How, and through which methods, are people receiving/offering help to others? We answer these questions through interviews in urban areas of Ecuador (Quito, Esmeraldas, and Manta) during the period of August and November 2020, when stay at home ordinances were enforced. Qualitatively decoding these interviews allowed capturing the larger themes at play in how solidarity and mutual aid work and how these complex networks support urban households. By developing a rich database using our defined data structure, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative material from the interviews, we note patterns and draw insights on the intricacies and dynamism of mutual aid networks across urban areas of Ecuador.