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FROM RISK TO RESILIENCE

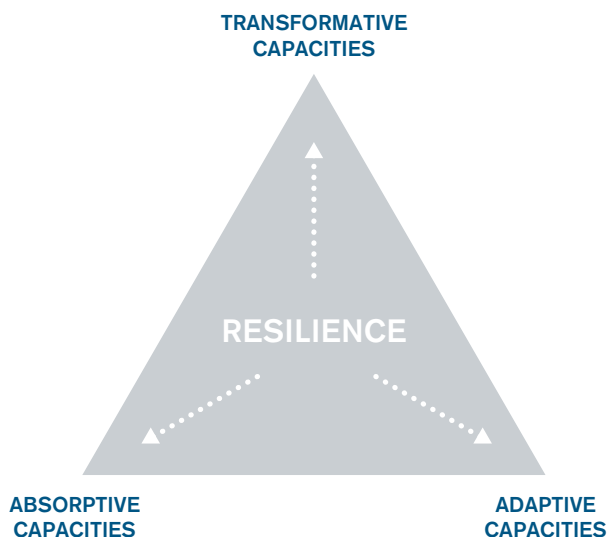
Resilience is now recognised as a core development concept. Broadly speaking, resilience refers to an ability to recover from a shock and to adapt to a disturbance.

Resilience has proved a useful concept for breaking down silos between the disaster and development communities, and promoting multi-disciplinary interventions across different sectors. Resilience thinking requires an understanding of the system (e.g. a community or country) and an acknowledgement that the system is exposed to several types of simultaneous risks – disasters, climate change, conflict, economic crisis, political changes – and that many of them are interconnected across different scales.

In this topic sheet we discuss what resilience is and how it is reflected in Helvetas' work. The aim is to provide a common framework and conceptual clarity.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

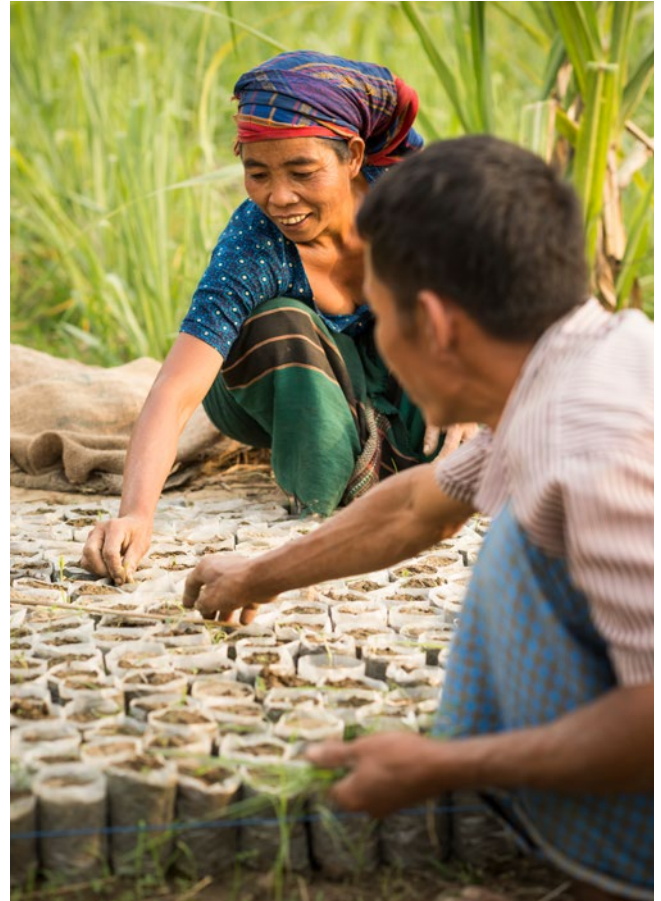
In everyday language resilience refers to the ability to recover quickly from an unfavourable event. There are many academic definitions of resilience, which reflect its multi-disciplinary history and how the term has evolved over the last decades. Resilience was first understood to be about “bouncing back” or “coping”, implying a return to a previous state (status quo). Later, the definition was broadened to include improvements to systems after a shock. The latest definition highlights a capacity for reorganisation and transformation and takes into account both “events” (shocks) and “disturbances” (trend). The shift from assuming that environments are stable to recognising that they are dynamic is relevant, as global trends such as urbanisation and climate change confirm that “change” is the new normal and “bouncing back” is insufficient. Resilience is therefore an ability to manage change in the context of dynamic systems and a means to achieve a goal, such as food security, health status, etc.



ABSORPTION, ADAPTATION AND TRANSFORMATION

To better understand how resilience means more than “bouncing back”, it is useful to think of resilience as a characteristic made up of three capacities: absorptive, adaptive and transformative.

ABSORPTIVE CAPACITY is the ability to cope with and absorb the effects of shocks and stresses without sustaining permanent harm or damage. Examples of this capacity are preventive measures and coping strategies such as improved access of rural households to financial backing (e.g. savings, micro-finance services) and social networks that provide support and informal safety nets.



Medicinal plant nurseries, Samriddhi-Project in Bangladesh, 2014.

ENHANCING RURAL PROSPERITY IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has made considerable progress in narrowing the gender gap since independence in 1971. Rural women still faced constraints, however, due to a paucity of financial assets, limited mobility, low self-confidence and knowledge, limited decision-making powers, and physical weakness (which may be ascribed to poor nutrition and limited access to health care).

To address this situation – and to contribute to the sustainable well-being and resilience of poor and extremely poor households – Helvetas implemented the “Samriddhi” project (“prosperity” in Bengali) in parts of northern Bangladesh. The project adopted a “Making Markets Work for the Poor” approach to promote farm and non-farm value chains and markets. The project provided women with a wider range of income opportunities by engaging them in poultry rearing, bull fattening, growing medicinal plants and work in the garment industry. The collaboration with the private sector to establish garment-manufacturing sub-centres and medicinal plant collection points has been especially successful and has helped women to increase their income. Women can now decide how to spend their own money, and their status in the household has improved.

ADAPTIVE CAPACITY is the ability of individuals or societies to adjust and adapt to shocks and stresses while still functioning in broadly the same way overall. Some examples of this are activities related to livelihoods diversification, climate-change adaptation, skills development, agroecology, etc.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN BOLIVIA

Bolivia is already experiencing the negative effects of climate change and weather-related disasters such as droughts, hail and frost, threatening the agriculture and water sectors. The project for Disaster Risk Reduction (PRRD), launched in 2005 by the Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Helvetas, aims to increase resilience to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards in order to ensure sustainable livelihoods. The main focus of the project has been on strengthening the capacities of local and regional authorities to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate-change adaptation principles into municipal and departmental planning processes. The project is currently working with the authorities in the water and agriculture sectors – from municipalities to deputy ministries – to build climate-resilient infrastructure and develop guides and tools for integrating CCA and DRR principles into their regulations. As a result, it is expected that 10,000 rural families will reduce their vulnerability to food insecurity, and that post-disaster reconstruction costs will be reduced by 20% (compared to the recent 10-year average).



Councillor at women's caucus meeting, Ethiopia, 2014.

TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITY is the ability to change the system fundamentally when its current modus operandi is no longer viable. It refers to systemic changes that overthrow the status quo and expand the boundaries of the system. A classic example is rural-urban migration, but other examples are mechanisation, the use of mobile phones for rural services and changes in the energy sector (from fossil energy to renewables).

CAPACITY BUILDING OF COUNCILS IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is administratively divided into regional states, zones, woreda (districts) and kebele (wards). At each level, basic Ethiopian law provides checks and balances through elected councils, which are responsible for overseeing and monitoring the executive government. The regional council of Amhara National Regional State is well equipped to execute its duties, but zonal, woreda and kebele councils often lack the capacity to carry out their tasks efficiently and effectively. The reasons for this include their limited knowledge and experience, inadequate tools and procedures, a lack of basic facilities and budgetary limitations. Together with the Amhara National Regional Council, Helvetas is implementing a project to strengthen the capacities of the elected and executive councils. Training sessions and awareness-raising activities are providing local communities and council members (men and women) with the necessary skills to handle their local development affairs. Executive councils are learning and applying appropriate approaches to address peoples' concerns and needs, and suitable systems, structures and processes are being institutionalised and taking hold in woreda and kebele councils. By ensuring that council members have the skills to carry out their core duties, communities have become more involved and have a voice in local governance processes. This will lead to enhanced performance by local governments and proper service delivery. Changes to the governance system improve the living conditions of the people in the region.

Because systems are exposed to simultaneous shocks and stresses of different kinds, intensities and scales, the three types of capacities are complementary and interdependent. Strengthening resilience is not about choosing one particular capacity, but about diversifying options and enhancing the ability of communities to choose the right combination. Helvetas' Panii Jibon project in Bangladesh works in all three dimensions, analysing the key issues and interventions as shown in the table below.

	Issues	Interventions
Absorptive capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to lives and livelihoods by tidal floods and cyclones • Scarcity of safe drinking water • Intrusion of salt water • Low sanitation coverage • Health impact on (young/pregnant) women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government and community based disaster management structures and capabilities • Public awareness for disaster preparedness • Access to safe WASH through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Household level rainwater harvesting ◦ Promotion of communal sand pond sand filter systems ◦ Sanitation products & services
Adaptive capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declining soil fertility • Decreasing land productivity • Reduced income and employment from agriculture • Deteriorating food security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient water use management • Saline tolerant agricultural technologies and diversification of production • Nutritional diversification • Capacity building for local service provision (extension, input/output markets)
Transformative capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralised disaster management structures and processes • Limited access of poor women and disadvantaged communities to water and agricultural services/extension/research • Lack of participation and ownership of women and youth in local governance affairs (WASH) • Low level of investments • Poor governance and lack of downward accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased social capital of communities to manage disasters • Local/regional and national level WASH budget tracking (advocacy) • Women empowerment in WASH • Productive investments and new skills and know-how from seasonal migration (asset diversity) • Greater voice and accountability

Table 1: Selected actions to enhance absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities of coastal communities in Bangladesh: The Panii Jibon Project approach. Source: Helvetas Bangladesh, 2017



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Household level rainwater harvesting as one intervention to strengthen the absorptive capacity of coastal communities in Bangladesh, 2014.



Building resilient infrastructure: Family in front of their new, earthquake-resistant house in Nepal, 2016.

CURRENT SALIENCE IN DEVELOPMENT

COOPERATION

In recent years, several donors and development agencies have embraced resilience as a concept and now support resilience-building initiatives and projects. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), the World Bank (with its Pilot Program for Climate Resilience PPCR) are some of the organisations that support resilience actions. Furthermore, major international NGOs and alliances have incorporated resilience into their programmes. Various governments are increasing their budget allocations to resilience programmes such as the Drought Disaster Resilience Sustainability Initiative in Africa.

Currently, the concept of resilience is being applied in disaster risk management, climate-change adaptation, conflict prevention and natural resource management. Its influence is also expanding to other thematic areas such as health, education, social protection, food security, conflict and fragility, gender and agriculture.

ENTRY POINTS TO RESILIENCE FROM DIFFERENT THEMATIC AREAS

The concept of resilience with its three capacities offers multiple entry points and linkages to a broad range of thematic areas including the five working areas of Helvetas. To give a few examples:

Sustainable management of natural resources ensuring the provision of ecosystem services, better provision of water services, improved incomes and financial inclusion of communities and disadvantaged groups increase the absorptive capacities of systems; so do diversified vocational skills of people and efforts to make governments more accountable. The adaptive capacities of systems are enhanced by introducing more drought tolerant crops and other changes of farming practices to adapt to the effects of climate change, more efficient water use or innovations in production. Changes in livelihood strategies, building up entirely new skills sets, migration and the introduction of new technologies support transformations of systems. Empowering people as citizens to effectively participate in decision-making, increasing the voice of stakeholders and re-negotiating rights of disadvantaged people and communities to resources equally has transformative effects.

RESILIENCE, SUSTAINABLE

DEVELOPMENT AND THE SDGS

Sustainable development and resilience are complementary concepts. Given the current global changes (e.g. urbanisation, climate change) a development strategy is not sustainable if it is not resilient. Thus, resilience can be considered a pre-condition for sustainable development. By understanding how a system can use and combine its three types of resilience capacities, communities are more likely to achieve the desirable goal of sustainable development.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a set of 17 goals, targets and indicators that all UN member states use to frame their agendas and policies to end poverty – aim “to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path”. Resilience has been explicitly included in the following six goals and implicitly in additional goals and targets:



CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Resilience is an intuitive concept, which helps to build common ground where different working fields and stakeholders can work together. Nevertheless, there is a risk that resilience means something different to each actor with the result that efforts towards increased resilience are not aligned.

Another major challenge is measuring, monitoring and evaluating resilience. This is attracting increased attention, and several organisations are developing measurement and monitoring frameworks.

FURTHER READING

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