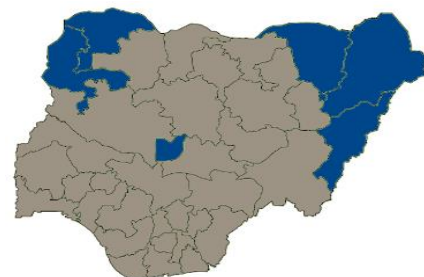


# Driving Resilience in Nigeria

## EVIDENCE FROM AN EX-POST STUDY

### Introduction

Rising threats, including climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, have plagued Northern Nigeria since the 1990s, displacing communities, destroying productive assets, and disrupting livelihoods. Building resilience, the ability to bounce back from and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth, is critical for households in the region. From 2013-2018, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and partners led the USAID-funded *Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods (FtF/L)* project and supported 54,787 vulnerable households to increase their agricultural productivity and income, improve their food and nutrition security, and strengthen their social safety net. In 2023, CRS and the Notre Dame University Keough School of Global Affairs Integration Lab partnered to conduct an ex-post study of the project’s lasting impact. The mixed methods research demonstrated the FtF/L project’s sustainable positive impact on household resilience and food security while revealing the importance of well-sequenced multi-sectoral programming. Evidence for the impact of governance interventions highlighted the benefits of working at the household and community level to develop resilience. This learning brief summarizes key study findings and implications; read the full report [here](#).



The ex-post study targeted the six states where FtF/L programming occurred, including the capital and Northwest as well as the three states in the Northeast where the project expanded in 2017 to support displaced and host communities progress from dependence on humanitarian assistance towards sustainable livelihoods.

### Project Summary

To support vulnerable households to rise above the poverty line and escape chronic malnutrition, the CRS-led consortium executed the graduation approach – a programming model including consumption smoothing support, an asset transfer, skills training, regular coaching and savings (employing CRS’ Savings and Internal Lending <SILC> methodology). Amongst a set of 20 multi-sectoral interventions, the project utilized cash transfers to help meet nutrition needs, recover assets, and overcome barriers to income-generating activities while assisting vulnerable families to move along the [Pathway to Prosperity](#). The project also strengthened the institutional capacity of government systems to implement poverty reduction programs and reinforce accountability between government and the citizens. The project successfully contributed to significant progress as detailed in the table below; the ex-post study was designed to test whether project endline results collectively translated into lasting resilience for participants five years later.

| INTERMEDIATE RESULT  | KEY 2018 ENDLINE RESULT   |
|--|---|
| 1: Households have increased agriculture production & productivity | Priority commodity yields increased by 60%  |
| 2: Households have increased income                                | Average household savings grew by 278%  |
| 3: Households have improved their nutrition status                 | Prevalence of children receiving a minimum acceptable diet improved from 13% to 44% |
| 4: Households have stronger social safety net                      | Four local government annual budgets included specific poverty reduction lines      |

## Study Methodology

The ex-post study deployed quantitative and qualitative resilience measurement frameworks to collect data across six states in northern Nigeria from June 1 – July 22, 2023. A household survey reaching 971 FtF/L participant households and 189 control group households was modeled on USAID and TANGO International’s light approach to measuring resilience. For each household, the quantitative survey produced scores between 0 and 100 for both Resilience Capacity Index (RCI), an objective measure, and the Self-Evaluated Resilience Score (SERS), a subjective measure. Additionally, the study team leveraged UNDP’s qualitative tool, CoBRA, to conduct focus group discussions with 24 households who identified model resilient households in their communities resulting in 24 household-level key informant interviews (KII). The team also conducted a series of 35 KIIs with local leaders and 7 implementing partner staff. Read the full study methods report [here](#).

## Resilience Strategies

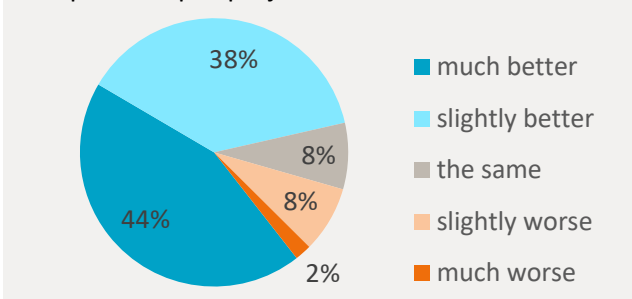
People undertake a combination of strategies when faced with shocks or stressors:

- **Absorptive** strategies minimize exposure to stressors and shocks or enable immediate coping
- **Adaptive** strategies reduce risks and increase preparedness
- **Transformative** strategies influence systems to create an enabling environment that provides the necessary conditions for systemic and structural change

## Key Findings

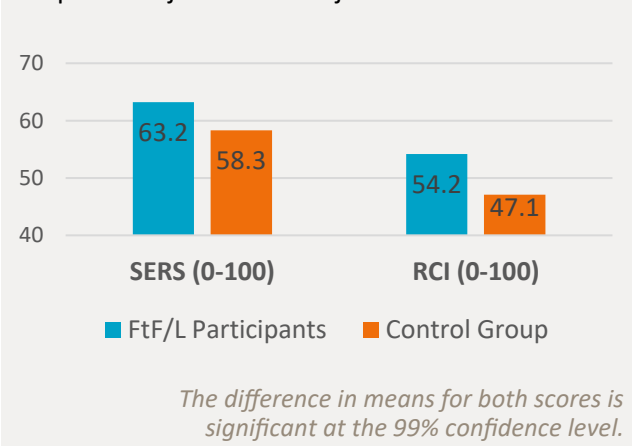
### THE FTF/L PROJECT HAD A LASTING IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING

Graph 1: Self-reported resilience today compared to pre-project



Over 80% of participants said that their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and adapt to shocks and stressors was better today than it was prior to the project. A comparison of project participants and the control group reinforced this finding: FtF/L participation had a positive and statistically significant impact on households’ RCI and SERS resilience scores (see Graph 2). Furthermore, the more project interventions a household participated in, the stronger their resilience today as measured by both RCI and SERS, reinforcing the importance of layered multi-sectoral programming.

Graph 2: Subjective and objective resilience scores



The FtF/L project also had a lasting, positive, statistically significant impact on household nutrition. Compared to the baseline household dietary diversity score of 4.3 on a scale of 0-12, project participants’ score was 4.9 in 2023 compared to 4.4 for the control group. Again, the more interventions a household participated in, the stronger their nutrition outcomes were five years post-project.

Neither participation in agriculture or non-agriculture income generation activities alone had a statistically significant correlation with higher resilience scores; however, participation in both interventions did, affirming the importance of income diversification for resilience and the positive impact of multi-sectoral programming to achieve this. Diverse farm and non-farm income streams enable households to overcome shocks and enjoy more consistent income across the year to mitigate periods of food insecurity.

### **SUSTAINABLE PROJECT APPROACHES CONTINUE TO REINFORCE RESILIENCE**

Over 50% of FtF/L participants reported continuing to practice a project-promoted skill at least monthly, with over 90% practicing a skill at least once annually. Over 90% of participants reported that these skills were relied upon during a shock since project closure. Participants noted turning to their SILC group as a first strategy for addressing a shock, demonstrating that this intervention has been successfully sustained by local communities and continues to reinforce participants' resilience. Participants noted that SILC both strengthens their financial management skills to navigate economic challenges and fosters cooperation and trust within communities, alluding to the importance of social capital for resilience.

In addition to employing FtF/L-promoted skills themselves to absorb and adapt to shocks and stressors, over 80% of participants reached by agriculture, income generation, and nutrition programming reported promoting skills acquired during these interventions amongst their neighbors, suggesting a positive spillover effect from targeted individuals to the wider community.



### **STRENGTHENING THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT ENHANCES HOUSEHOLD RESILIENCE**

Across the numerous multi-sectoral FtF/L activities, governance programming had the most substantial and statistically significant positive effect on household resilience. Participation in a village development committee or other community-based structure such as a women's or youth group was correlated with nearly a seven-point increase in household RCI scores. While community members drawn to participate in governance structures likely already possessed attributes which encourage resilience, this finding nonetheless points to the importance of governance programming to develop the leadership, networks, and social cohesion that underpin community-wide resilience. Qualitative data reinforced this finding. When asked to identify the interventions their communities needed most to build resilience, participants consistently prioritized systems strengthening efforts instead of activities which target individual households.

Amongst the systems strengthening efforts highlighted as critical for resilience, participants included peacebuilding. Anecdotes of investing resources towards protection efforts and away from livelihood strengthening underscored the impact of chronic insecurity on household resilience. Quantitative data reinforced this finding by framing its inverse: social capital (measured by one's ability to seek assistance from outside their village) was associated with statistically significant increases in household resilience (both RCI and SERS scores).

## Conclusions

- Integrated multi-sectoral programming is critical to support vulnerable communities facing multiple complex shocks to develop diverse sources of resilience. Development actors should support agricultural communities to enhance their productivity while also establishing non-farm income streams that smooth the impact of seasonality.
- To enable a sustainable escape from chronic food insecurity, well-sequenced graduation models support households to first stabilize consumption then build assets that enable income smoothing and growth. CRS' SILC approach helps members develop savings to enhance their livelihoods while providing access to loans that help prevent backsliding.
- Resilience building is a combination of all three strategies – absorptive, adaptive, and transformative – and solid governance programming is critical to developing the often challenging but crucial transformative component. In addition to pursuing higher level systems strengthening, development actors must be deliberate about engaging community level platforms as a programming entry point. Enhancing local governance gives community members essential opportunities to build the social capital associated with household-level resilience. By prioritizing local groups' service delivery capacity over direct work with households, programming can sustainably strengthen community collaboration to support one another during shocks.
- In contexts where humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) efforts are jointly pursued, peacebuilding must be prioritized to develop resilience. Households' absorptive and adaptive capacities may serve them to withstand some of the symptoms of chronic insecurity, but careful analysis of and response to the causes of conflict are vital to establish an enabling environment in which communities can effectively use the assets and capacities they have accumulated during a project and continue progressing along the pathway to prosperity.

## Additional research on CRS resilience programming in Nigeria:



A 2017 World Bank-conducted [impact evaluation](#) revealed that women receiving unconditional cash transfers from the FtF/L project worked more in their own businesses, spent more on consumption, were more food secure, and saved more than those who did not. These positive outcomes were not impacted by the cash transfer structure (monthly or quarterly disbursements).



2023 [participatory research](#) conducted with SILC group members from the CRS-led STaR project identified how innovative savings group programming enhances households' absorptive and adaptive resilience capacities.