



# CRS Resilience Framework

Created By:

Written by Austen Moore, Senior Technical Advisor for Resilience,  
with contributions by Julie Ideh, Veronica Gottret, Jessica Dittmar, Alice Chan, Lori  
Pearson, Marc Bavois, and Rebeka Martensen.

Cover photo by Stuart Tibaweswa.

©2023 Catholic Relief Services. All Rights Reserved. 2305-1103693

This document is protected by copyright and cannot be completely or partially reproduced in whole  
without authorization. Please contact [email@crs.org] for authorization. Any “fair use” under US  
rights law must contain the appropriate reference to Catholic Relief Services.



---

Catholic Relief Services  
228 W. Lexington Street, Baltimore, MD 21201, USA | [crs.org](http://crs.org) | [crsespanol.org](http://crsespanol.org)

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Agency and resilience in a volatile world .....	2
Conceptual framework for resilience .....	2
Theory of Change for resilience-building.....	5
Risk reduction and coping .....	5
Adaptation to changing conditions .....	5
Systems strengthening and transformation .....	6
Resilience monitoring and measurement.....	7



Mannan, 31, and his family in Monpura Union, a remote and underserved area of Barisal Division that experiences a high frequency of natural disasters including almost constant river erosion. CRS and Caritas Bangladesh have been implementing a disaster risk reduction project (MUKTE: Make Us Knowledgeable and Trained in Emergencies) between March 2014 and May 2016. [Photo by Ismail Ferdous for CRS]





# Agency and resilience in a volatile world

Communities around the world increasingly face severe, recurrent, and overlapping shocks, long-term stresses, and general unpredictability. Chronic poverty and food insecurity, climate change and extreme weather events, prolonged or sporadic conflict and instability, and health emergencies and pandemics are common challenges. Preparing people to face these challenges means building their individual capacities, assets, and agency, empowering them to be more prepared, able to cope with shocks, adaptive to longer-term stresses, and ultimately, become resilient. Addressing systemic factors and strengthening systems further removes barriers and creates an environment where vulnerability is reduced, and resilience can flourish.

## Conceptual framework for resilience

CRS defines resilience as **the ability to prepare for as well as to bounce back and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.**

CRS has a deep history of building resilience by helping individuals to address the challenges of recurrent shocks and chronic stresses while also strengthening systems. Doing so requires (1) understanding the consequences of different shocks and stresses on individuals, households, and communities, (2) building and maintaining the individual capacities/assets that people can use to address those risks and interact with systems and structures, (3) supporting the strategies and trajectories that are followed in the face of a shock or chronic stress, and (4) enabling outcomes that indicate improved well-being and stability. Resilience-building spans the level of individuals, households, communities, and systems, and should include interactions between these different levels/actors.

Catholic Relief Services' approach to resilience builds from CRS' [Integral Human Development](#) (IHD) Framework. The IHD framework places people at the center of development, promoting a holistic approach to well-being that includes multiple assets, as well as the ways in which people interact with and influence the systems and structures that impact their lives.

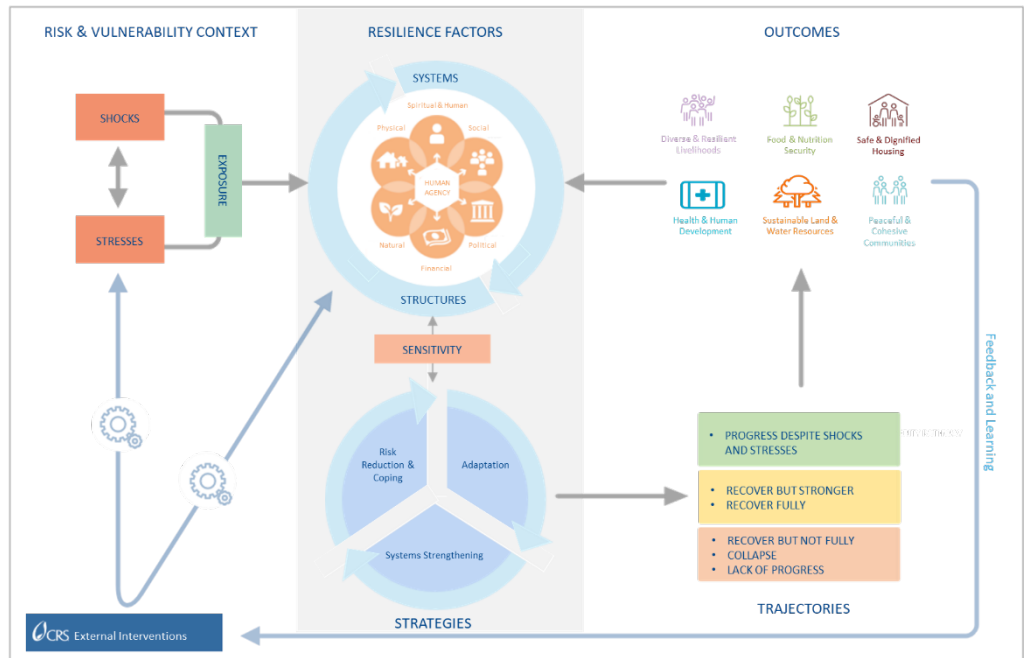
When influenced by shocks, stresses, cycles, and trends, people leverage and utilize their human assets, their financial assets and income streams, their social connections and the safety nets these connections provide, the physical assets that allow productive activities and diverse livelihoods, the natural resource base on which they rely, and the political capital to request and receive support services or to influence systems and structures. Stronger and resilient systems also enable individuals to access and utilize the capacities and assets they built to improve their well-being in tangible and durable ways. This process involves risk reduction, coping, and systems strengthening strategies, which culminate in well-being outcomes.

Building resilience also requires considering four key questions:

RESILIENCE FOR WHOM?	RESILIENCE TO WHAT?	HOW TO STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE?	RESILIENCE TO WHAT END?
Which people (individuals, households, communities, and larger systems) are targeted and in what context?	<p>What shocks and stresses affect individuals, households, communities, and systems?</p> <p>How do shocks and stressors affect different types of individuals and households?</p> <p>How do shocks and stresses create the risk context?</p>	<p>What assets and capacities enable resilience?</p> <p>How does this differ among different types of individuals and households?</p> <p>What strategies build, maintain, and effectively utilize assets and capacities?</p> <p>What interventions enable effective asset and capacity building, maintenance, and usage?</p>	What trajectories and outcomes will emerge or should be sought?

CRS’ Resilience Framework therefore captures the holistic development approach and design elements of the IHD model, considerations from the four guiding resilience questions, and programming experience across sectors and from diverse contexts.

**Figure 1: CRS’ Resilience Framework**



Under the CRS framework, the **Risk and Vulnerability Context** is determined by the (a) long-term trends or pressures that undermine stability — **stresses** such as erratic weather related to climate change, environmental degradation, social inequities, chronic insecurity, or market crises — or by

(b) short-term, negative deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people’s asset base or well-being — **shocks**, such as drought, flooding, natural disasters, or conflict. The level of **exposure** — severity, frequency, and duration — also influences the impact of both shocks and stresses.

People rely on **resilience factors** that influence their ability to respond to shocks and stresses. These factors include (a) people’s **access to and control over assets**, be those human/spiritual, social, political, natural, financial, or physical, as represented by the IHD framework, and (b) their **capacities to utilize those assets** effectively. Assets and capacities are influenced by **systems and structures**, which can help or hinder the development of these resilience factors but are also themselves influenced by people’s collective use of their assets and capacities. **Human agency** is placed at the center recognizing that people are agents of their own development.

When faced with shocks or stresses, people undertake a combination of **strategies**, driven by their **sensitivity** that results from the risk context, assets/capacities available to them, and systemic/structural factors. **Coping or absorptive actions** — such as moving to temporary shelter, selling assets, reducing consumption of goods and services, using savings or taking loans — minimize exposure to stresses and shocks or enable immediate recovery. However, as stresses or shocks continue, the capacity of people to cope is severely reduced unless they take proactive and informed steps to develop **adaptive responses** that reduce risks and increase preparedness. Examples include disaster risk planning, livelihood diversification, building savings, or strengthening social networks and safety nets. **Transformative strategies** — that influence systems to create an enabling environment through improved governance, equity and social inclusion, diverse and inclusive local markets, formal and informal social protection mechanisms, basic service delivery, and public policies that provide the necessary conditions for systemic and structural change — can require collective action and contribute to longer-term resilience.

Different **trajectories** illustrate how people move towards resilience **outcomes**, influenced by the resilience factors and available strategies utilized. Despite facing a shock or stress, some individuals, households, communities, and even systems continue to maintain stability and progress towards enhanced well-being outcomes, which leads them into a virtuous cycle of sustainable development. If they face a shock or stress that causes a reduction in their well-being but they can recover to their original situation or to a better one, this demonstrates a disruption but will not negatively affect their long-term development trajectory. However, if they face a shock or stress that causes a reduction in their level of well-being and are not able to recover to their original situation, this reverses progress towards sustainable development. These trajectories feed into well-being outcomes that can be at the individual or household level — such as food and nutrition security, livelihoods, health, or social cohesion — or pertain to the stability and development of communities, structures, or systems.

Implicit in the framework is that resilience is not linear but dynamic and comprised of cycles. For example, adaptive strategies that reduce risk limit the magnitude of coping strategies needed. Similarly, positive outcomes reinforce resilience by recovering and growing further assets, and therefore creating a virtuous cycle that contributes to integral human development. In contrast, lack of risk reduction or systems strengthening increases the challenge of effective coping, while negative outcomes result in the loss of assets and increases future vulnerability, creating a vicious cycle that hinders integral human development. Lack of attention to systemic inequities that create vulnerability similarly hinders sustainable resilience. Thus, the framework acknowledges a **dynamic process of change**.

The framework also recognizes the role of **external interventions** – from CRS and other actors – in influencing the risk and vulnerability context and the resilience factors. External intervention programming may be designed to build assets or capacities directly, or may engage the public and private sectors, or civil society and project participants themselves, to influence changes in their

behaviors, social norms, policies, or practices, with the aim of promoting change in systems and structures.

Finally, a deliberate investment in **feedback and learning** — both the practice of conducting resilience evaluation but also integrating findings into improved interventions — is reflected in the framework, allowing better programming to empower individuals, households, communities, and systems to mitigate and adapt to future or on-going shocks and stresses.

# Theory of Change for resilience-building

In recognition of the complex nature of resilience, **CRS' Resilience Theory of Change** states that IF individuals, households, and communities (1) reduce vulnerability to shocks and stresses AND (2) effectively utilize their assets and capacities to absorb shocks and adapt to longer-term stresses and changing conditions; AND IF (3) resilient systems and structures effectively support individuals, households, and communities facing the impacts of shocks, THEN individuals, households, and communities will sustainably increase their overall resilience.



Figure 2: CRS' Resilience Theory of Change

The Theory of Change also defines the approaches and interventions that lead to resilient individuals, households, communities, and systems. These approaches and interventions are distinct yet interconnected and demonstrate the key asset categories of the IHD framework, but also closely follow the absorptive (risk reduction and coping), adaptive, and transformative (systems) paradigm used across common resilience frameworks. CRS also emphasizes effective sequencing, layering, and integrating of interventions for building resilience. This allows multiple assets and capacity areas to be built simultaneously, in alignment with the holistic focus of the IHD approach.

## Risk reduction and coping

The first area illustrates how CRS builds preparedness, reduces risk and vulnerability, promotes effective coping, and strengthens absorptive capacities. Programming examples include Disaster Risk Reduction planning; savings groups and financial education/inclusion; physical health and psychosocial well-being; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and social cohesion strengthening and peacebuilding, among other intervention areas. Leveraging the financial, social, and productive assets built, such as the use of savings or inter-personal support structures, can then facilitate coping during times of need. Programming can also involve approaches like cash and voucher assistance following a shock to facilitate more effective coping in the moment.

## Adaptation to changing conditions

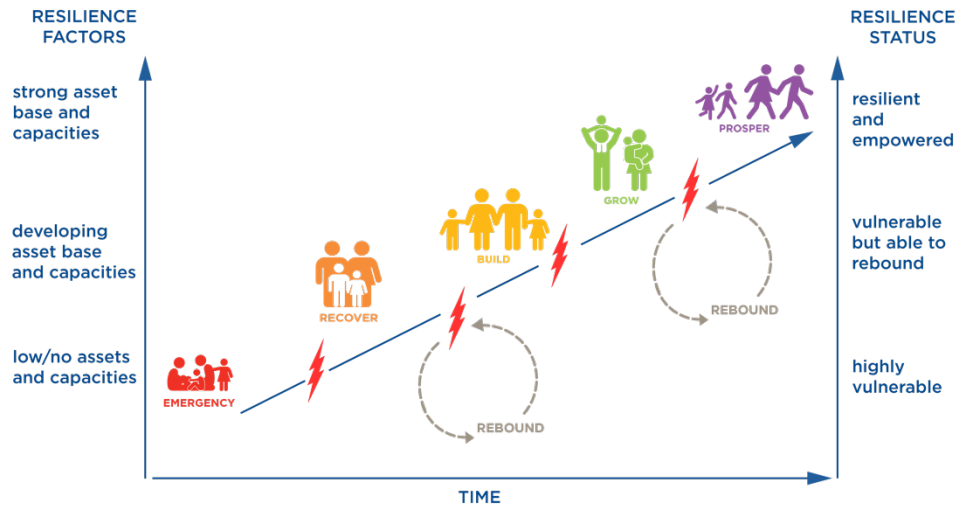
The second area promotes the development and use of strategies designed to address longer-term stresses, recurrent shocks, and changing conditions. Examples of programming include natural resource management and restoration along with livelihood strengthening and diversification. Approaches that promote climate-resilient agricultural production, build job skills, promote connections to clients/markets, and reduce systematic inequities also contribute to adaptation.



## Systems strengthening and transformation

The final area targets the systems and structures that both (a) help individuals, households, and communities to be more resilient, and (b) that need to be strengthened to be more resilient. Programming builds effective and resilient systems/governing structures; and strengthens the delivery of appropriate/timely services. Examples include market systems development with the private sector; strengthening social protection systems; promoting stronger and more equitable policies, and governance and organizational strengthening, among others.

**Figure 3: Resilience within the Pathway to Prosperity**



From a programming perspective, resilience-building may also differ depending on the phase of the Pathway. For example, from Recover to Build there is a stronger emphasis on developing the absorptive capacities and assets needed to cope and reduce further vulnerability. From Build to Grow, the focus is on building capacities of individuals and communities to adapt to recurrent shocks and stresses and implement risk management strategies. Systems change occurs at all levels, although systems at Emergency and Recovery phases may provide different functions than at Build or Grow phases.

At the level of individuals, households, and communities, there are different resilience trajectories that capture how people respond and manage shocks and stresses. Each trajectory reflects how people progress along the Pathway to Prosperity and is informed by the resilience factors but also the decisions they make both prior to and after a shock, or in the midst of multiple shocks and stresses. This affects their ability to rebound from a shock, rebuild their livelihood, and progress along the Pathway to Prosperity.

The same trajectories can be conceptualized for communities or systems, where shocks like natural disaster, conflict, lack of institutional capacity, or disruption to service delivery might affect larger risk and vulnerability contexts and people at scale.

- PROGRESS DESPITE SHOCKS AND STRESSES
- RECOVER BUT STRONGER
- RECOVER FULLY
- RECOVER BUT NOT FULLY
- COLLAPSE
- LACK OF PROGRESS

**Figure 4: Resilience Trajectories**

# Resilience monitoring and measurement

Delivering the most impactful resilience programming possible requires measuring different resilience dimensions – Resilience for whom? Resilience to what? How to strengthen resilience? Resilience to what end? – and using that evidence in design and implementation. CRS uses diverse resilience measurement approaches that track the impacts of interventions, uses predictive models to identify vulnerabilities and opportunities before shocks occur, disaggregates results for different types of individuals and households, and utilizes data for program planning and adaptation.

CRS has prioritized resilience measurement as part of its Global Results initiative, to gather and aggregate data from projects across our global portfolio. CRS’ agency-wide resilience indicator tracks both (1) levels of preparedness for shocks/stresses, and (2) coping trajectories after a shock has occurred by using food security as a proxy indicator of the existence/lack of resilience.

For more in-depth resilience assessment, CRS uses an approach built off of the narrative-based and qualitative SenseMaker [methodology](#). The approach involves providing respondents with a prompt about a shock/challenge faced and allowing them to articulate their own experiences and perspectives of important factors before, during, and after, shocks. The narrative approach allows respondents and evaluators to track whether respondents followed a Prosperous (prepared, minimal disruption from shock), Resilient (disrupted but bounced back), or Vulnerable pathway (disrupted and not fully recovered).

For recurrent resilience monitoring, CRS’ innovative Monthly Interval Resilience Analysis (or [MIRA](#)) approach is used to track exposure to shocks, coping strategies taken, and impacts on food security and well-being through the use of common indices (Food Consumption Score, Household Dietary Diversity Score, Household Hunger Scale, Reduced Coping Strategy Index). MIRA utilizes locally-based enumerators, monthly data collection, statistical analysis of trends and predictive machine learning to project vulnerable regions and households, and a feedback cycle where results are returned to participating communities via simple reports that allow collaborative response. Data is also shared with project staff, donors, and governments to help understand resilience trends and the effectiveness of different programming approaches, towards better development outcomes.

From these resilience measurement approaches, CRS uses data to tailor and adapt programming based on evidence. Recurrent monitoring systems like MIRA enable forecasting and adaptive management during implementation. Post-project or cross-intervention analyses enable evaluation of resilience impacts, prioritization of “best bet” approaches, and strategic thinking about sequencing, layering, and integrating interventions and approaches for resilience.

CRS also engages with communities (to share data back for local decision-making), with national-level partners and resilience-focused working groups (for shock response and strategic planning), and at the global level (for thought leadership around good practices for effective resilience building).