

## **Resilience Building to Combat Hunger and Malnutrition**

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### **Executive Summary**

A natural disaster, surge in food prices or conflict can erode development gains, and over time undermine such gains through the cumulative effects of these stressors. Even in the absence of a disaster, these short-term shocks can have long-term consequences that are detrimental to development objectives and aspirations.

People dealing with the effects of hunger, poverty and displacement are often consumed with responding to these adversities. Underdeveloped institutions can be overwhelmed by shocks and unable to provide adequate services and disaster response. Even in high-income countries, shocks can overwhelm systems, which then require external support to reach those in need. The poorest and most food-insecure people are the most at risk.

Humanitarian responses to crises save lives and help restore livelihoods, but do not always address underlying vulnerabilities. A resilience-building approach to strategy and programming helps to mitigate the damaging effects of shocks and stressors before, during and after crises, thereby minimizing human suffering and economic loss.

### **I. Background**

Our world is characterized by increasing risk and fragility. Contributing factors include political instability, conflict, natural hazards, disease and volatile prices. Additional stressors such as unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation, water scarcity and economic uncertainty, as well as climate change and rapid population growth intensify and are exacerbated by the underlying fragility and risks.

In 2017, almost 124 million people across 51 countries and territories faced Crisis levels of acute food insecurity or worse (IPC Phase 3 and above or equivalent) and required urgent humanitarian action.<sup>1</sup> Conflict and insecurity were the main drivers of acute food insecurity in 18 of these countries and territories where almost 74 million food-insecure people are in

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<sup>1</sup> Source: *Global Report on Food Crises 2018*. Food Security Information Network. *The Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of tools and procedures that aims to provide a 'common' currency' for classifying food insecurity. It comprises 5 phases namely minimal, stressed, crisis, emergency and famine. The Crisis level or phase 3 occurs when 'even with humanitarian assistance at least one in five households in the area have the following or worse: food consumption gaps with high or above usual acute malnutrition OR are marginally able to meet minimum food needs only with accelerated depletion of livelihood assets that will lead to food consumption gaps'.*

need of urgent action.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, climate shocks, mainly droughts, were the main drivers of acute food insecurity in 23 countries and territories, rendering 39 million people food-insecure.<sup>3</sup>

Worldwide, nearly 52 million children under 5 (7.7 percent) were acutely malnourished (wasted, or too thin for their height) and 17 million (2.5 percent) were severely wasted in 2016. This is far off the internationally agreed global nutrition target to reduce and maintain childhood wasting below 5 percent by 2025. A significant number of the 52 million children with wasting live in countries where cyclical food insecurity and protracted crises exacerbate their vulnerability. In addition, and despite some progress in the last decade, 155 million children under 5 are stunted, facing an increased risk of impaired cognitive ability, poor school performance and death from infections.<sup>4</sup>

Humanitarian responses to crises have saved lives and restored livelihoods, but have not always addressed underlying vulnerabilities. Humanitarian funding needs in the four countries with the most severe food crises of 2017 (i.e. South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen) more than doubled, from US\$2.9 billion in 2013 to more than US\$6.5 billion in 2017 but 29 percent of humanitarian requirements remained unmet and longer-term investments were well below projected needs.

Development activities are difficult to implement in fragile contexts or those of extreme poverty where deep-rooted vulnerabilities result in recurrent crises. Furthermore, conflict and disasters that aggravate pre-existing food security and malnutrition vulnerabilities exacerbate poverty and reinforce gender inequalities and discrimination. Access to education, health centres, water, sanitation and hygiene is compromised during disasters, with women particularly affected.

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<sup>2</sup> *Conflict and insecurity were the major drivers of acute food insecurity in 18 of these countries and territories where almost 74 million food-insecure people were in need of urgent assistance. Eleven of these countries were in Africa and accounted for 37 million acutely food-insecure people; the largest numbers were in northern Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and South Sudan. Four countries affected by protracted conflict and with very high numbers of food-insecure people in Crisis conditions or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) were in the Middle East: Yemen had 17 million food-insecure people in need of urgent assistance, while Syria, Iraq and Palestine\*\* together accounted for over 10 million. In Asia, conflict, insecurity and climate disasters drove large numbers of people into acute food insecurity in Afghanistan and Myanmar.*

<sup>3</sup> *Two-thirds of these countries were in Africa, where almost 32 million people faced Crisis conditions of acute food insecurity or worse caused by climate shocks. More than 3 million food-insecure people were in Latin America and the Caribbean (five countries), while 3 million were in South Asia (three countries). Drought in East Africa damaged already strained livelihoods, destroyed crops and pushed up food prices, particularly in Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya. Food insecurity in other countries was also driven by factors such as population displacement and crop production shortfalls.*

<sup>4</sup> *In West, Central and East Africa, and in South Asia, stunting rates still exceed 30 percent and are as high as 36.7 percent in East Africa. Africa is the only region where the number of stunted children has risen – up by 17 percent from 50 million in 2000 to 59 million in 2016. While the number has fallen by 35 percent in Asia, the continent still has the highest number of stunted children at 86.5 million, which is 56 percent of all stunted children in the world.*

Early evidence shows that adopting a resilience-building approach to programming mitigates the damaging effects of shocks and stressors, thereby minimizing human suffering.<sup>5</sup> A long-term commitment to investing in resilience-building increases cost-effectiveness by reducing the financial, administrative and resource burdens of responding to recurrent crises and of missed opportunities in development.<sup>6</sup> Many believe that strengthening systems that enhance resilience will contribute towards inclusive development.

## II. Resilience Definition and Principles

### **Definition**

International humanitarian and development organizations have embraced resilience as an overarching theme. But what is resilience? The United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) defines resilience as:

*“The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions”.*<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing the importance of reducing risk and strengthening resilience, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme have developed a common approach to building resilience to improve food security and nutrition.<sup>8</sup> According to the three organizations collectively called the Rome-based Agencies (RBA), and whose programmes of work focus on agriculture, food security and nutrition, resilience is essentially about the inherent capacities (abilities) of individuals, groups, communities and institutions to withstand, cope, recover, adapt and transform in the face of shocks. This implies that all interventions must begin by identifying and building upon existing capacities and resources, and by primarily targeting those who are food insecure or at risk of becoming so. In most cases, this means individuals and groups living in extreme poverty or close to the poverty line in rural areas, as well as those living in fragile environments where conflict, natural disasters

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<sup>5</sup> Venton, C. and Majumder, S. 2013. *The Economics of Early Response and Resilience: Lessons from Bangladesh*. Department for International Development, London. Available at [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Hum\\_Response/61114\\_Bangladesh\\_Report.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/Hum_Response/61114_Bangladesh_Report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *Food and nutrition insecurity are significant constraints on economic growth, which is critical for sustaining development gains and lifting people out of poverty. A recent study indicates that the cost of hunger amounts to 11 percent of gross domestic product.* Martínez, R. and Fernández, A. 2008. *The Cost of Hunger: Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Central America and the Dominican Republic*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and WFP. 2014. *The Cost of Hunger in Africa: Social and Economic Impact of Child Undernutrition in Egypt, Ethiopia, Swaziland and Uganda*. Abridged report.

<sup>7</sup> *Strengthening resilience for food security and nutrition: A Conceptual Framework for Collaboration and Partnership among the Rome-based Agencies*. April 2015.

<sup>8</sup> FAO, IFAD and WFP. 2015. *Strengthening Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition: A Rome-based Agencies' Conceptual Framework for Collaboration and Partnership*. Rome.

or other major events can disrupt food systems or impede access to adequate and nutritious food for at least part of the population. The type of population group, its livelihood strategies and asset base, the institutional environment and the type of shock or stressor all inform the practical definition of “resilience” that applies in each context. They also inform the strategies that the RBAs, individually or together, are designing and implementing in each context.

### ***Principles***

The principles that RBAs have identified, and that are driving their cooperation in resilience-building are as follows:

**1. Local and national ownership and leadership:** People, communities and governments must lead resilience building for improved food security and nutrition. Government leadership is vital since it encourages inter-sectorial and intra-governmental harmonization of efforts, and fosters a holistic approach to programming. To ensure relevance and sustain gains, it is vital to respect the priorities and strategies of national and local stakeholders, including local communities, their members and organizations.

**2. Multi-stakeholder approach:** Assisting vulnerable people to build their resilience is beyond the capacity of any single institution. Covering the various dimensions of resilience building and reaching scale in a cohesive manner requires integrated multi-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Leveraging strengths and efforts across many different actors – including the RBAs –contributes to the overall strengthening of vulnerable people’s resilience.

**3. Combining humanitarian relief and development:** Planning frameworks should combine immediate relief requirements with long-term development objectives. Humanitarian responses and development initiatives are largely applied linearly – the former during a crisis or shock, and the latter once conditions have stabilized. Resilience building, however, is a continuous and long-term effort that addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability while building the capacity of people and governments to better manage risks in the future.

**4. Focus on the most vulnerable people:** Ensuring protection of the most vulnerable people is crucial for sustaining development efforts. The poorest, most vulnerable and food insecure people in the world typically have no access to social protection or safety nets. By providing a safeguard in the event of shocks, safety nets can be a vital tool to protect and build livelihoods, while assisting those most in need.

**5. Mainstreaming risk-sensitive approaches:** Effective risk management requires an explicit focus in the decision making of national governments, as well as enhanced monitoring and analysis. Countries require early warning systems that automatically trigger flexible response mechanisms at the appropriate scale when predetermined thresholds are exceeded. This requires enhanced coordination and links among institutions involved in food and nutrition security analysis, early warning and response. However, risk-sensitive approaches should also be mainstreamed into programming and initiatives at the sub-national level. Indeed, building

the risk-management capacity of vulnerable populations is part and parcel of strengthening their resilience.

**6. Aiming for sustained impact:** Interventions must be evidence based and focused on results. Resilience-building programming needs to be evaluated for its medium- and long-term impacts on food and nutrition security in the face of recurrent shocks and chronic stressors. Investment is required in establishing or strengthening monitoring systems, including baselines, and evaluation in order to generate rigorous evidence of what works most effectively and provides best value for prevention and for money over time.

### ***Strengthening Capacities***

The RBA conceptual framework for resilience aims to strengthen the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities of target populations and organizations. *Absorptive capacity* is the capacity to withstand threats and minimize exposure to shocks and stressors through preventative measures and appropriate coping strategies to avoid permanent, negative impacts. *Adaptive capacity* is the capacity to adapt to new options in the face of crisis by making proactive and informed choices about alternative livelihood strategies based on an understanding of changing conditions. *Transformative capacity* is the capacity to transform the set of livelihood choices available through empowerment and growth, including governance mechanisms, policies/regulations, infrastructure, community networks, and formal and informal social protection mechanisms that constitute an enabling environment for systemic change.

The framework recognizes that resilience must be supported at multiple levels (i.e. different levels and across a variety of livelihood systems); and should be grounded in a context-specific understanding of the people, the nature of their livelihoods and the shocks and stressors that threaten them.

### **III. Enabling Resilience-Building for Food Security and Nutrition**

A resilience-building approach to strategy and programming must promote coherence of actions to reduce vulnerability. It should be aligned with global policy on resilience, ensure that programmatic activities and related interventions complement the resilience-building programmes of other actors, and take into consideration the financial and resource implications of the planned actions.

*Coherence:* In line with the 2030 Agenda and its aim of reaching those in greatest need first while ensuring no one is left behind, resilience building policies and programmes for food security and improved nutrition must focus on the poorest and most vulnerable people, and they must articulate the importance of reducing vulnerability. They must enable the most vulnerable people to absorb, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks and stressors.

*Partnership:* Resilience requires partnership, and cannot be achieved by a single actor. To enhance resilience requires taking a strategic view on partnerships to achieve multi-

stakeholder impacts across sectors. It requires bilateral partnerships at the country level and multi-stakeholder partnerships at the country, regional and global levels.

Resilience building also requires long-term relationships with communities to enhance their awareness and ownership of assistance. It is crucial to listen to vulnerable and food-insecure people and bring their ideas and concerns to the attention of decision-makers as a means of fostering resilience to shocks and stressors.

Governments have the primary responsibility for food security and resilience building, and can foster comprehensive approaches that support national goals. Governments at the national and local levels provide the first response to disasters, which is a critical component of building resilience. As the providers of safety nets that support resilience, governments also create an enabling environment for change.

Regional and sub-regional partnerships are also essential to facilitate capacity development. Among other ways, this can be achieved through South–South and triangular cooperation; support for the development of national policies that support resilience; and the empowering of regional institutions for early warning, preparedness and disaster response to enhance national capacities to absorb shocks.

*Financial and resource considerations:* To enhance resilience, humanitarian responses and long-term development should be mutually reinforcing and responsive to evolving needs. The use of short-term, emergency funding for chronic needs addresses only symptoms as opposed to underlying risks. Integration and coherence of development and humanitarian financing mechanisms to secure flexible multi-year commitments is key to effective resilience building.

Evidence shows that a resilience building approach to programming can mitigate the damaging effects of crises and stressors while minimizing financial, administrative and resource burdens. Investing in resilience brings substantial returns in terms of averted need and developmental outcomes.

#### **IV. Resilience Building in Practice**

##### ***RBA Collaboration***

FAO, IFAD and WFP are working together on at local, national, regional and global levels to promote resilience building. They are supporting governments and partners and building absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities for resilience in Kenya, Niger, Guatemala and several other countries. The Rome-based Agencies are also supporting regional-level policy processes, with a clear focus on resilience, and they have established partnerships with governments and national institutions. This includes work with regional intergovernmental organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the Economic Committee of West African States (ECOWAS). Other partnerships are the Global Alliance for

Resilience Initiative (AGIR), the Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience (SHARE) initiative 2012–2020, and the Global Alliance for Action for Drought Resilience.

### ***World Food Programme***

WFP’s practical experience across its humanitarian and development mandate offers some comparative advantages in enhancing resilience through food security and nutrition. Many of WFP’s operations already include elements of resilience building, including its Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) activities that provide food or cash at times of needs, while enabling vulnerable households and communities to build or rehabilitate productive livelihood assets that strengthen resilience. In 2016 and through FFA operations in 52 countries that benefited 10.1 million people, WFP: i) rehabilitated 137, 300 hectares of land; ii) built 5,200 water ponds, shallow wells, and fish ponds; iii) constructed or repaired 11,000 kilometres of feeder roads; and iv) planted 8,100 hectares of forests.

WFP has developed a consultative approach to resilience building made up of three distinct but interrelated processes that take place at three different levels. The three-pronged approach (3PA) comprises: a) integrated context analysis which combines analysis of historical trends in food security and nutrition, shocks and stressors with assessment of exposure to risks at the national level; b) seasonal livelihood programming, a sub-national-level participatory tool that fosters coordination and partnership under the leadership of local government; and c) community-based participatory planning that identifies needs and adapts responses to local contexts through prioritization and community ownership of programmes. The approach has guided a joint initiative by WFP, FAO and the United Nations Children’s Fund in Somalia.

R4 Rural Resilience Initiative, a strategic partnership between WFP and Oxfam America, helps vulnerable rural households to increase their food security through community risk reduction, micro-insurance, livelihoods diversification, credit and savings. The R4 Initiative has been in place in Ethiopia, Senegal, Malawi and Zambia. Because there is currently no predictable, systematic financing available at scale to support action in response to climate shocks, WFP has developed the Food Security Climate Resilience Facility (FoodSECuRE) – a replenishable multilateral, multi-year fund to support community-centred action and build climate resilience.

At the regional level, WFP is supporting the New Partnership for Africa’s Development in defining the support African governments need to build resilience. The engagement has led to the establishment of the Africa Resilience Coordination Hub (ARCH), a platform that facilitates sharing of experiences in resilience building, productive safety nets and disaster risk management across the continent. WFP has supported the African Union in developing the African Risk Capacity, which provides cost-effective contingency funding for governments carrying out contingency plans in response to natural disasters and climate change. The initiative takes on the burden of climate risk to reduce its toll on governments – and the farmers and pastoralists they protect.

## Conclusion

In 2017, almost 124 million people across 51 countries and territories faced Crisis levels of acute food insecurity or worse (IPC Phase 3 and above or equivalent) because of conflicts, natural disasters and other stressors. Humanitarian responses to the ensuing crises have saved lives and restored livelihoods, but have not always addressed underlying vulnerabilities.

Evidence shows that adopting a resilience-building approach to strategy and programming mitigates the damaging effects of shocks and stressors, thereby minimizing human suffering. Building resilience for food security and nutrition requires new approaches to coping with shocks and managing risk. There is growing consensus that resilience interventions should be multi-level and systems-based, multi-sector, multi-stakeholder and context-specific.<sup>9</sup>

Resilience supporting interventions to improve food security and nutrition are promoted by the Rome-based agencies comprising the FAO, IFAD and WFP. They are increasingly collaborating and working with governments and partners to support food-insecure people, communities and governments in managing and reducing the inherent risks. Their resilience building activities and interventions are designed to be responsive to the stakeholder group's livelihoods, source of exposure and vulnerability, and gaps in the institutional context, asset base, and capacity to confront a particular type of shock.

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<sup>9</sup> WFP. *Policy on Building Resilience for Food Security and Nutrition*. WFP/EB.A/2015/5-C. 27 April 2015.