



RESILIENCE PROGRAM START-UP

How Five Years of Rich Learning through PAHAL Can Help Future Programs Start Strong

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LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

SYNTHESIZING FIVE YEARS OF LEARNING FROM USAID’S PROMOTING AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, AND ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS (PAHAL)

Five years ago, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded its first development food security activity (DFSA, formerly development food aid program) that focused specifically on resilience. Implemented in Mid- and Far-West Nepal, Promoting Agriculture, Health and Alternative Livelihoods (PAHAL) was a \$25 million investment in understanding how to maintain progress toward food security in regions where shocks and stresses have long trapped vulnerable communities in cycles of poverty and hunger.

Remote and rugged, Nepal is susceptible to a diverse set of interconnected risks—heavy rains, hailstorms, flooding, drought, landslides, earthquakes, human disease, crop pests, and stress-based migration, among many others—all of which are intensifying and/or accelerating with climate change. In Nepal, and across the world, decades of humanitarian and development programming have faltered in delivering sustainable change, either by failing to consider increasingly complex risks, or by relegating those risks to the assumptions column of logframes. Resilience programming attempts to address these risks head on, acknowledging that shocks and stresses can and will undermine progress if they go unaddressed. In designating PAHAL as a resilience-focused DFSA, USAID, Mercy Corps (the program lead), and their partners put risk front and center with a clear imperative: the pathway to sustained wellbeing outcomes must include building resilience to shocks and stresses.¹

The PAHAL team, its partners, and program participants innovated and adapted their approaches throughout the program to take advantage of big opportunities for learning. Their work has yielded rich lessons about how to build resilience toward food security. Most, if not all, of these lessons reinforced the critical importance of strategic investments in resilience during program start-up. This document aims to translate lessons learned from PAHAL and other large, complex, multi-sectoral programs across Mercy Corps’ portfolio into clear guidance for integrating resilience into existing start-up standard practices.

USING THIS GUIDE

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF THESE PROCESSES

This guide is designed for humanitarian and development teams (including practitioners; partners from public, private, and civil society sectors; and participants) who are working within large, multi-sectoral programs. When applying a resilience approach, practitioners are not starting from scratch; they are building on a foundation of existing standard practices that comprise good program management. As illustrated in Figure 1 (next page), this guide includes five chapters, each of which provides a high-level overview of how to apply a resilience lens to a standard practice (resulting in a **resilience standard practice**) that is especially critical to resilience program start-up.² These are not the only standard practices where it is critical to apply a resilience lens during program start-up, but they represent a strong start for any team looking to invest in resilience from the beginning of the program. Teams who are already implementing their programs can also use this document to adapt their programming. In essence, it’s never too late to reflect, learn, and adapt. Adaptive management is at the heart of resilience.

Here is a brief description of each resilience standard practice:



Chapter 1: Risk-Informed Contextual Analysis

Assessing shocks and stresses that affect program participants as part of contextual analysis (referred to here as **risk-informed contextual analysis**) allows teams to glean a good-enough understanding of how risk functions within systems, including how shocks and stresses are connected, who is most vulnerable and why, and a preliminary understanding of the capacities that are critical to ensuring shocks and stresses do not undermine wellbeing progress. This step is essential for risk-informed program design.

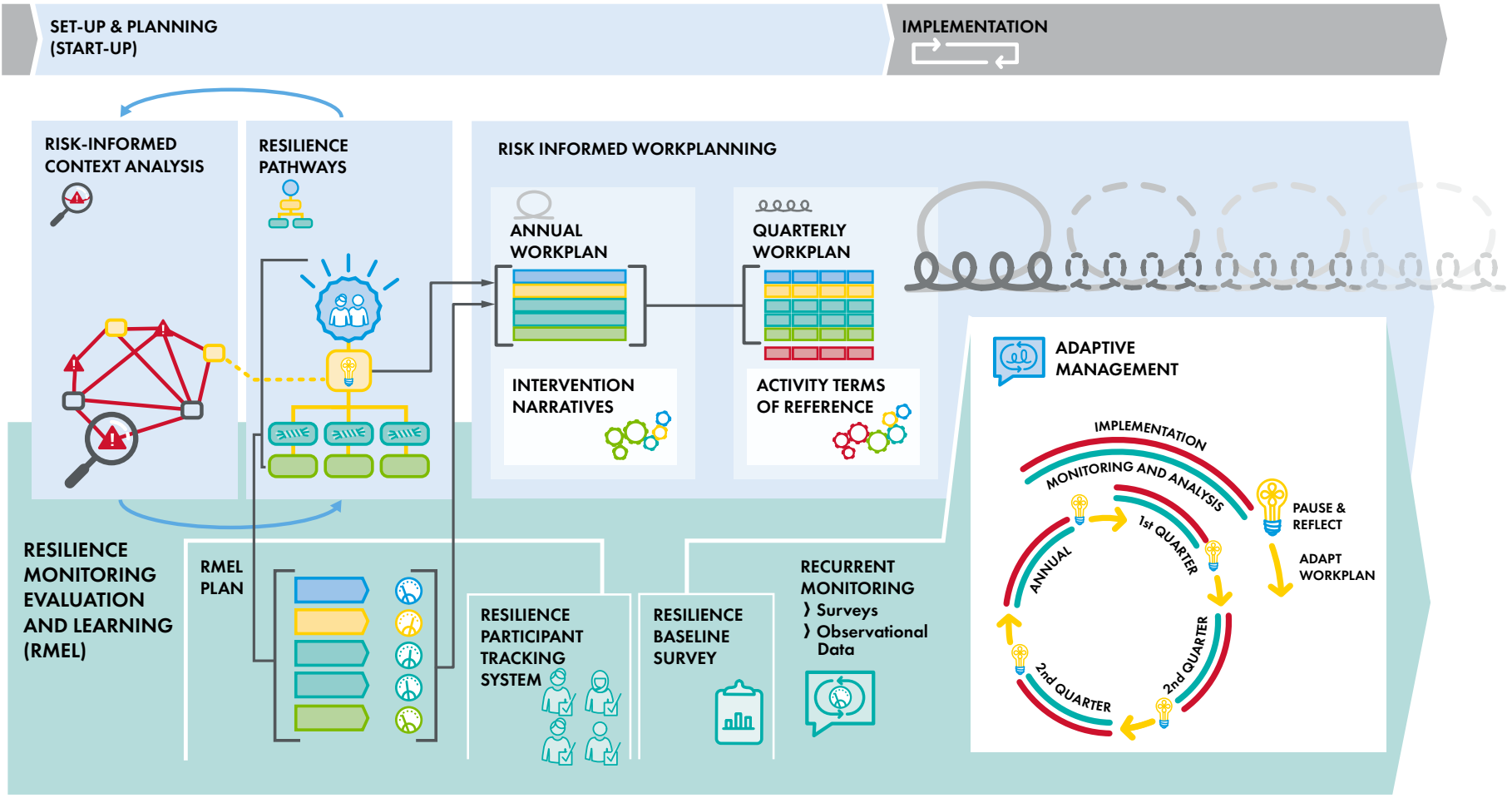
1 This guidance uses the term “risk” interchangeably with “shocks” and “stresses” to describe the kind of threats that can undermine or derail a target group’s progress toward wellbeing outcomes. It is not used here (as it often is in development literature) to describe risks to the program itself.

2 Chapter 5, which focuses on resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning (RMEL), actually covers a set of monitoring and evaluation standard practices where it is critical to apply a resilience lens.

FIGURE 1

PROGRAM CYCLE

IDENTIFICATION & DESIGN SET-UP & PLANNING (START-UP) IMPLEMENTATION END-OF PROGRAM TRANSITION

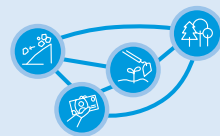


PREREQUISITE



RESILIENCE FOUNDATIONS

CROSS-CUTTING CONSIDERATIONS



LAYERING SEQUENCING INTEGRATION



GENDER & INCLUSION



Chapter 2: Resilience Pathways

Resilience pathways help teams articulate how the program's results chains and theories of change will address risks and safeguard wellbeing outcomes. Building on the risk-informed contextual assessment, teams identify the resilience capacities and systemic barriers to access and use of these capacities. They then sequence and layer these resilience capacities into an integrated chain that illustrates the program's resilience logic: how interventions can build resilience and systemic change for the purpose of protecting wellbeing outcomes.



Chapter 3: Risk-Informed Annual Work Planning & Intervention Narratives

Risk-informed annual work plans serve as a high-level outline of the intervention areas (and perhaps some activities) that should build specific resilience capacities and lead to specific resilience outcomes. Within (or linked to) the annual work plans are **risk-informed intervention narratives** that justify how a connected set of interventions builds resilience toward wellbeing outcomes, who the intervention is targeting and how it is addressing vulnerability, and who (which partners or systems actors) is best positioned to facilitate the resilience-building.



Chapter 4: Risk-Informed Quarterly Work Plans & Activity Terms of Reference (ToRs)

While the central team has created a basic compass for the work ahead (in the form of annual work plans and intervention narratives), they do not plan out every detail. This is because the central team cannot predict the exact activities that field teams will need to implement nine months away, nor can they know how conditions will vary across implementation areas. With the risk-informed annual work plans and intervention narratives in hand, field teams need a tool that helps them answer the question: what are the first steps? **Risk-informed quarterly work plans** and **activity terms of reference (ToRs)** or concept notes are designed to help field teams plot this initial work and the incremental steps that follow. Both quarterly work plans and activity ToRs are adaptive management tools that support field teams in navigating the dynamic contexts in which they are implementing, ensuring they can probe the context, test initial activities, and then observe, reflect, learn, and shape the activities as they go.



Chapter 5: Resilience Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (RMEL) Plan

Resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning (RMEL) standard practices allow teams to track the program's ability to build resilience and ultimately safeguard wellbeing outcomes. A strong RMEL system requires teams to apply a resilience lens to all monitoring, evaluation, and learning standard practices throughout the program cycle. This guidance will highlight how to apply a resilience lens to several of these standard practices: the monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan; the participant tracking system; recurrent monitoring (and baseline) surveys; the routine monitoring system; and regular review and reflection meetings.

Each of these chapters will include the following:

- **Rationale:** A definition of and rationale for applying a resilience lens to the good program management standard practice that serves as its foundation.
- **Participants:** Differences in team size, composition, program type, and organizational structure, among other factors, will dictate who engages in a resilience standard practice within a given program. To help teams plan who will participate, this guidance uses two general levels (illustrated in Figure 2, and replicated throughout

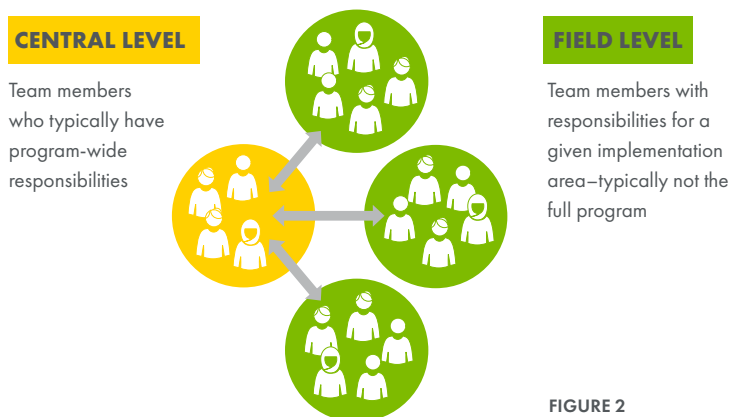


FIGURE 2

the document) of team members: **central level** team members (often with program-wide responsibilities), and **field level** team members (often with responsibilities for a distinct implementation area). Table 2 explores these two levels in more detail.

Level	Common Position Characteristics	Example Roles @ This Level
Central Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program-wide responsibilities • May be more specialized in program focus (e.g., technical /sector orientation) • Often have some managerial responsibilities • Typically hired earlier in the program cycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior management team • Monitoring and evaluation leads • Technical or sector leads
Field Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May work in only one section or area (e.g., district, ward) of a much larger program area • Front-line implementers • May be generalists (i.e., responsible for implementation across sectors) or be more specialized in program focus (e.g., technical/sector orientation) • Typically hired later in the program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social mobilizers • District coordinators • Regional agricultural leads

TABLE 1: TWO COMMON LEVELS OF TEAM MEMBERS WITHIN PROGRAMS

- **Timeline:** Each chapter summarizes when each process typically takes place during the program cycle, using the language of **program management stages** (see Figure 3).³ This guidance focuses on the second stage of four, **program start-up** (highlighted in Figure 3), with the goal of laying a solid foundation for implementation.



FIGURE 3

Each chapter walks through how to apply a resilience lens to a given standard practice (or, in the case of RMEL, a set of standard practices).

- **Process:** Each chapter walks through how to apply a resilience lens to a given standard practice (or, in the case of RMEL, a set of standard practices).
- **PAHAL's Experience:** Each chapter offers a summary of the PAHAL's experience relevant to the resilience standard practice.
- **Resources:** Each chapter concludes with links to one or more resources that may be helpful to teams when completing the resilience standard practice.
- **Other Approaches and Cross-Cutting Considerations Critical to Resilience:** Finally, each chapter will address (as signaled by the corresponding icon on the next page) how the resilience standard practice enhances the team's ability to manage adaptively, integrate program components, and increase gender and social inclusion.



Adaptive Management: Systems thinking requires teams to acknowledge that contexts are constantly changing, requiring practitioners to regularly revisit, assess, and adapt a program's design to ensure interventions remain relevant in the face of constant change. Adaptive management processes help teams, partners, and program participants make systematic, iterative, and timely decisions throughout

³ This guidance draws its language from Program Management at Mercy Corps (PM@MC), our good program management standards which are aligned directly with Program Management for Development Professionals (PMD Pro), the industry standard for program management.

the program cycle. Thus, each chapter will illustrate how the resilience standard practice sets teams up to manage more adaptively.



GENDER AND INCLUSION

Gender and Social Inclusion: The concept of differential vulnerability is central to resilience. Taking a resilience approach requires teams to assess how different groups are vulnerable (exposed and/or sensitive) to shocks and stresses and why. An understanding of what is driving vulnerability enables teams to identify the systems change (e.g., transforming social and gender norms) and resilience capacities critical to safeguarding progress toward resilience. Each chapter will highlight where the resilience standard practice supports teams in assessing and planning for differential vulnerability, and in turn gender and social inclusion.



LAYERING SEQUENCING INTEGRATION

Intentional Integration through Layering and Sequencing: Resilience program integration refers to the intentional layering and sequencing of multi-sectoral interventions and the coordination of actors in order to prevent or reduce the drivers and effects of shocks and stresses that undermine the program and the long-term wellbeing. Resilience requires teams to address risks across social, ecological, and economic systems, and their ability to integrate programming is extremely important. The principles of integration support teams in communicating, coordinating, and collaborating across sectors and technical areas, bridging the silos that often separate program components. Each chapter will highlight how the resilience standard practice contributes to the intentional integration of program components, supporting resilience building.

ESTABLISHING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF RESILIENCE BASICS

Finally, as a prerequisite to pursuing resilience standard practices, the guidance offered in these pages encourages programs to establish a common understanding of foundational resilience concepts among teams. Resilience approaches, and even the language used to describe resilience, are still very new. As practitioners' understanding of what works when building resilience evolves, it becomes increasingly clear that being a competent resilience practitioner is not just about the knowledge one possesses. Competent resilience practitioners—and the actors and program participants they partner with—must also be able to think and operate effectively within complex and ever-changing systems. Thus, programs must work to establish a common resilience language that will ensure their teams, partners, and participants can collaborate, innovate, and adapt their approaches successfully.

Program start-up is a critical time for establishing this common vocabulary for resilience, one that should be shared with new team members as they are hired. Mercy Corps uses a resilience foundations course, designed for all team members regardless of their expertise or

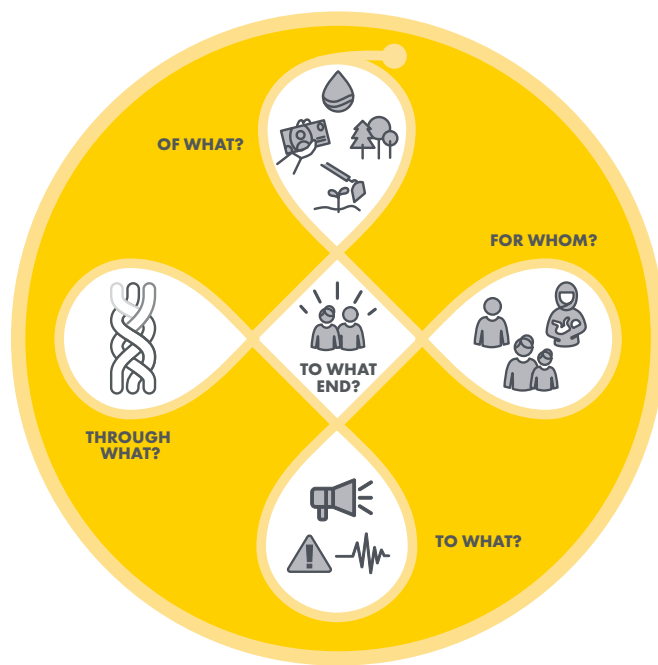


FIGURE 4

experience level, to explore basic resilience concepts and how they represent a departure from business as usual. These concepts, which Mercy Corps refers to as the five guiding resilience questions (see Figure 4), enable teams to innovate, collaborate, reflect, learn, and adapt using a common language.



Resilience to What? *Risk, Shocks, and Stresses*

A **risk** is anything that endangers or undermines progress toward wellbeing outcomes. Resilience requires us to consider how and why risk impacts groups, institutions, and systems differently. Understanding these **risks** helps teams plan for and address (e.g., anticipate, prevent, cope with, minimize the impact of, adapt to) them.

This guidance divides risks into two groups:

- **Shocks:** These are either sudden or slow-onset events that are time-bound and usually of a limited duration.
- **Stresses:** These are slow-onset events, changes, or dynamics that are often not clearly time-bound. These disruptions can be high impact (similar to shocks), but generally occur over a longer period.



Resilience of What? *Systems, Systems Thinking, and a Systems Approach*

A **system** is an interconnected collection of elements that are often self-organized in patterns or structures that change frequently. Everyone (i.e., all of the communities, institutions, organizations, and any other entities that a program partners with) relies on and is embedded within complex systems.

Systems share basic characteristics that help teams understand them:

- They are made of **many interdependent parts**, meaning that a change in one part can have a profound impact on many other parts
- They are **dynamic** and **always changing**, and this makes it impossible to ever fully understand them
- They are **nonlinear**—there is not a clear start or end
- They show **emergent behavior** or **patterns**—if teams study the parts, they can begin to describe how the system behaves, even if they cannot ever fully understand it as a whole
- They are **self-organizing**—they have no single, central control even when they show some emergent behavior or patterns
- They are **multi-scale**, meaning that systems exist at multiple levels and are often nested within each other; one system often contains multiple other systems

Systems thinking simply describes the ability to think about and be aware of the work teams do in the context of larger systems, and a **systems approach** describes teams' ability to apply this thinking and awareness to their work.



Resilience to What End? *Wellbeing Outcomes*

Wellbeing outcomes are the high-level, overarching goals (e.g., food security, income or economic security) that the program and all the partners and participants within that program are trying to achieve. By anticipating and addressing shocks and stresses, resilience is a pathway to achieving and sustaining **wellbeing outcomes**, also referred to as development goals.



Resilience for Whom? *Differential Vulnerability, Exposure, and Sensitivity*

Different groups experience the impacts of shocks and stresses differently based on certain factors like identity (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, social norms), where they live, or their socioeconomic status. This concept is called **differential vulnerability**.

When determining how and why a specific group is vulnerable, teams attempt to determine their:

- **Exposure:** This is a measure of a group's **exposure** to the shock or stress. It describes the magnitude (how large the impact was), frequency (how frequently they experienced it) and duration (how long they experienced it). There is typically a physical dimension to **exposure**. For example, if a fire broke out in a room, the person closest to the fire would be most **exposed**.
- **Sensitivity:** This is a measure of how severely a group is impacted by the shock or stress, typically because of some attribute, characteristic, or behavior. For example, someone who has asthma may be more **sensitive** to the fire, even if they are located farther away than the person who is most exposed.

Determining a group's vulnerability requires an understanding of both exposure and sensitivity.



Resilience Through What? *Resilience Capacities*

In the simplest terms, **resilience capacities** are resources (things a target group has) and strategies (particular ways the target group uses them) to address (e.g., anticipate, plan for, prevent, reduce the impact of) shocks and stresses and safeguard progress toward wellbeing outcomes.

A subset of these **resilience capacities**, typically referred to as transformative capacities, describes the systemic changes in the enabling environment (e.g., transformations in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, or perceptions, a change in informal or formal rules) that are required to ensure inclusive access to and use of the capacities described above.

Additionally, Mercy Corps' resilience foundations course helps teams visualize what resilience can look like within their organizations and participant communities, and identify simple steps they can take to begin to apply resilience thinking and action within their work. Building this common understanding of resilience concepts is a prerequisite for completing the resilience standard practices that follow. Yet, each resilience standard practice also presents opportunities for capacity building. Teams would be wise to ensure these processes provide team members with opportunities to learn and practice resilience thinking, and that the products are well documented and highly accessible, so that all team members (including subsequent hires) feel comfortable referring to, reflecting on, and adapting them frequently.



WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

Early attempts to convey basic resilience material to new PAHAL team members helped clarify which resilience concepts are most foundational when onboarding practitioners. Attempts to share this information through more traditional methods (e.g., brief PowerPoint presentations, short report documents) also reinforced the importance of hands-on learning experiences in helping teams fully understand the material. Recently, Mercy Corps translated lessons from experiences onboarding staff through PAHAL and other large, multi-sectoral programs into a two-day

participatory course. The first iteration of this resilience foundations course ([participant workbook available here](#)) is designed for team members and their partners working in fourteen African countries, and the agency will soon recontextualize the curriculum for teams working in the Middle East and Asia.

CHAPTER 1: Risk-Informed Contextual Analysis

Strong program design has always required a thorough contextual understanding, but resilience puts risk at the center of these analyses and assessments. Even within highly dynamic contexts, applying a resilience lens to contextual analysis allows teams to glean a good enough understanding of how risk functions within systems, allowing them to design programs that better account for the shocks and stresses that consistently derail development progress.

Process

Whether conducting a separate risk and resilience assessment or considering risk and resilience within other planned assessments (e.g., market or gender and social inclusion assessments) during start-up, teams should consider including the following kinds of activities, separated here into four phases (see Figure 3). These phases are often completed concurrently or iteratively, and will vary significantly based on the program and context.

SCOPE PHASE

This step requires teams to set the scope and terms of the assessment (or assessments in the case of a joint process). At a minimum, teams should consider the following:

- Outline the scope of the assessment(s):** To kick-off the assessment (or set of joint assessments), the team must begin outlining answers to several key questions that will form a baseline understanding of what the team hopes to accomplish with the assessment(s). These include: 1) what is/are wellbeing outcome(s) that resilience building should protect?, 2) what geographic area and key systems will the assessment cover?, 3) which groups will the assessment (and larger program) target?, 4) which shocks and stresses should the assessment (and program) prioritize?, and 5) what preliminary background research is needed to fill knowledge gaps identified when responding to previous questions? In some cases, the proposal and/or agreements with donors will dictate responses to these questions (e.g., a donor mandates working with market actors), but others will require team deliberation. These questions require only preliminary responses, as the team may continue to hone their responses throughout the assessment and well into resilience pathways and work planning processes. Ideally, teams convene a diverse group of stakeholders, including

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO CONTEXTUAL ANALYSES

Standard Practices:
Contextual Analysis

Resilience Standard Practice: *Risk-Informed Contextual Analysis or Risk and Resilience Assessment*

Who: *Central level team members, though all team members should eventually have hands-on opportunities to apply risk-informed contextual analysis skills. (Fig. 1)*

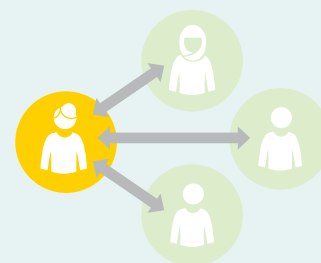


FIGURE 1

When: *Risk-informed contextual analyses should begin during program start-up (either during proposal development and/or after the program is funded). All staff will practice this core skill set throughout the program as contexts change and understanding evolves. (Fig. 2)*



FIGURE 2



FIGURE 3

individuals who represent perspectives across sectors (and from different scales) and who can engage throughout the process, to answer these questions together, often in the form of a workshop. Participatory exercises can foster consensus, buy-in, and serve as a capacity building exercise for future partners.

- **Conduct and synthesize background research:** Next, teams conduct background research, typically in the form of light desk reviews of existing assessments or studies relevant to the target area. This research helps teams begin to flesh out some of the big gaps in understanding outlined during preliminary scoping. Teams should then summarize any findings in a digestible format so they are easy to share with decision makers.
- **Refine the scope of the assessment(s):** Now the team (ideally the stakeholder group originally convened for preliminary scoping) can reflect on the synthesized research findings and refine their earlier decisions, typically also in the form of a workshop. After confirming or modifying their development vision (or wellbeing outcomes), it is useful to conduct systems mapping and differential vulnerability exercises. Through these participatory processes, teams create a more detailed systems map that identifies the connections between shocks and stresses (across social, ecological, and economic systems), including what is driving them, what their effects are, and how these interactions might drive vulnerability among the target group(s). Through this exercise, teams can refine their priority list of shocks and stresses, as well as preliminary evaluations of how and why target groups are exposed and sensitive to these risks, and create a preliminary list of resilience capacities critical to addressing shocks and stresses and maintaining progress toward wellbeing outcomes.

Teams close the scope phase by summarizing exercise findings in preparation for the inform phase.

INFORM PHASE

The purpose of this phase is to collect enough information at different scales and from different perspectives to fill information gaps and answer the key questions identified during the scope phase. Teams should begin by determining which data they need to collect, which will typically include information from the following areas: trends, systems dynamics, and systemic constraints; shocks and stresses; differential vulnerability; preliminary resilience capacities; and additional resilience research questions that may prove useful. Next, teams identify how and when they plan to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The most common methods include:

1. **Literature and secondary data review:** This is a formal review of the available literature and relevant data collected or identified as needed during scoping. Often compiled through a combination of internet searches, expert interview leads, and partner discussions, literature review and secondary data sources vary widely and can provide useful data around such topics as migration, price or climate trends, or relevant social science findings on cultural practices.
2. **Expert interviews:** Often teams are unable to identify physical or digital sources for a significant amount of information. To fill these gaps, teams can conduct a series of semi-structured interviews with a range of local experts and key informants across disciplines and at various scales with the goal of: 1) building a more nuanced understanding of the situation on the ground, and 2) understanding community-based perceptions. (These interviews will likely also lead to sources of secondary data.)
3. **Community data collection:** Community data collection can be useful in deepening understanding of how shocks and stresses impact different types of target groups, as well as which capacities they should employ (or could employ) to address these shocks and stresses. When determining the best sample, teams should consider: how many communities, which type of communities (i.e., communities with specific characteristics such as geographic location or specific livelihood strategies), and who within the community to sample, being careful to ensure information is unbiased and all groups have the opportunity to contribute.

WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

In the spring of 2015, members of Mercy Corps' technical support unit joined PAHAL team members and implementing partner organizations for the kick-off workshop, the first major convening of the STRESS process. The PAHAL team began by mapping the social, economic, and ecological systems within the Mid- and Far-West regions of Nepal, identifying connections between shocks and stresses and who was most vulnerable and why. With initial systems maps complete, they began identifying the resilience capacities different groups would need to learn, cope, and adapt in the face of shocks and stresses.

Two major realizations during this exercise helped shift how Mercy Corps now frames resilience. First, the team moved away from time consuming (and often semantic) efforts to arbitrarily squeeze a resilience capacity into absorptive, adaptive, or transformative categories. Instead, the team refocused their energy on describing specifically how the resilience capacity would be used to address a given shock or stress (actions which often fell into multiple categories at once, e.g., absorbing and adapting), as well as how capacities connect to (and reinforce) each other. Second, they began to see how communities' ability to absorb and adapt to shocks and stresses often depended on more transformative changes in governance or social systems. Previous to the PAHAL assessment, Mercy Corps often prioritized building absorptive capacities first and adaptive capacities second, often delaying efforts to foster the transformative systems change that underpinned all other resilience building. This new understanding of capacities became foundational to the team's understanding of how systems functioned in the target area.

Soon after the scoping phase, Kathmandu was hit by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, which killed 9,000 people. The team transitioned immediately into humanitarian aid, shortening their available window for reviewing literature and collecting data before June's monsoon season arrived. Exhausted, the team returned to work one month later and doubled down on assessment tool development, partnering with Mercy Corps' South and East Asia Regional Resilience Director to create and/or refine tools in four key areas: 1) vulnerability analyses, 2) preparedness and response, 3) resource access and



Photo: E. Rex, Mercy Corps/2019

control, and 4) networks and institutions. Despite the constraints, teams managed to conduct 64 focus group discussions and 81 key informant interviews with community members, market actors, and government and institutional representatives, resulting in a robust sample of the 14 districts PAHAL planned to target.

The monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) team began analyzing the data in late-June, a challenging process that revealed a need for more robust analysis guidance and skill development in data management. Nevertheless, the team was able to combine analyzed data with staff observations and reflections to produce findings that would inform the development of Mercy Corps' first resilience-focused theory of change. This critical product connected resilience capacities with wellbeing outcomes, illustrating how interventions can prevent shocks and stresses from derailing development progress. PAHAL's theory of change and the deeper contextual understanding that resulted from the STRESS process represented a critical first step in Mercy Corps' understanding of how to design a resilience program. Read more about PAHAL's experience conducting a STRESS and its impact on the program in this USAID Resilience Analysis, Evaluation and Learning (REAL) award-funded [case study](#).



Data needs and availability will vary based on the context and the risks teams are assessing, and some types of data may be more accurate than others. For example, when assessing disaster risks, collecting experiential data on past shocks and stresses through participatory exercises may be less accurate ultimately than scientific climate projections, though good data for the latter may not be available. Using a mixed methods approach will ideally allow teams to find a compromise that yields a good enough understanding of the context to continue planning.



ANALYZE PHASE

In this phase, teams analyze and synthesize the information collected during the inform phase to again refine the program's understanding of key program components: development trends, systems dynamics, and systemic constraints; shocks and stresses; differential vulnerability; and resilience capacities. Again, these phases only serve to describe a certain type of activity, and teams—particularly during the inform and analyze phases—can complete them iteratively. Common outputs from the analyze phase include:

- Visual maps and narratives characterizing development trends, including contributing drivers and how they are linked;
- Visuals and narratives summarizing the refined development vision and wellbeing outcomes;
- Hazard profiles characterizing each of the priority shocks and stresses;
- Vulnerability profiles outlining the shocks and stresses impacting each target group and the factors influencing their vulnerability;
- Capacity analyses characterizing key resilience capacities; and
- Any additional narratives summarizing responses to additional research questions or research syntheses intended to better digest and present dense findings for stakeholders.

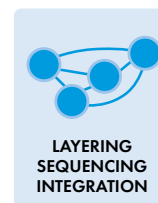
STRATEGIZE PHASE

With this clearer picture of how risk functions within systems, teams can build outputs to develop a measurable and context-specific theory of change for resilience. This work often begins by convening stakeholders, ideally the same group that participated during the scope phase, to reflect on, validate, or suggest modifications to the analysis outputs. Teams can use this feedback to create the theory of change, re-articulate the key contextual characteristics, and refine the preliminary resilience capacities.

Again, these four phases are often iterative. Because we can never fully understand dynamic, constantly changing systems, teams work toward a good enough understanding of systems in the time allowed. This work of formal and informal observation and analysis will continue throughout the program as teams test, reflect, learn, and adapt program interventions.

Intentional Integration

If the shocks, stresses, and other systemic constraints driving vulnerability are dynamic, interconnected, and interdependent, teams must build integrated interventions that reflect and anticipate (and help target groups plan for) this complexity. In helping illustrate these connections, risk-informed contextual assessments lay the foundation for integration, layering, and sequencing. As teams move into design and planning exercises, they can consistently refer back to the systems maps, shock and stress profiles, and vulnerability profiles, among other outputs, to assess how to layer interventions across target groups. Understanding cause and effect chains, factors driving vulnerability (especially systemic constraints), feedback loops, and other assessment takeaways can also be critical to sequencing of resilience capacities, interventions, and activities.

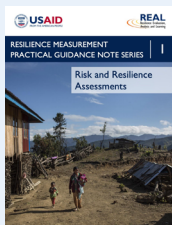


Adaptive Management

Above all, risk-informed assessments deepen teams' understanding of the relationship between the five guiding resilience concepts—wellbeing outcomes, systems and systemic constraints, shocks and stresses, wellbeing outcomes, and resilience capacities—in context. These concepts will serve as a foundational reference point for review and reflection throughout the program, helping teams ask through formal and informal observations: How do our current observations of the context compare to our original contextual analysis? How has our understanding evolved? Where were our assumptions incorrect? How should we update our contextual understanding, and where do we need to adapt our approach?

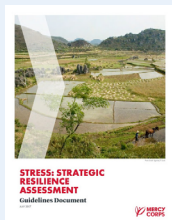


RESOURCES



Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Series, Guidance Note 1: Risk & Resilience Assessments

This first guidance note in the Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Series walks through the key elements and value of risk and resilience assessments with links to additional resources for continued learning. The document aims to increase understanding around: 1) the risk and resilience assessment's purpose and potential scope; 2) processes for conducting the assessment and overlap with resilience measurement principles, and 3) the importance of the assessment in developing theories of change⁴ and measurement frameworks that link resilience-building strategies to humanitarian and development program outcomes. The guidance note does not cover best assessment practices which are already well covered elsewhere.



STRESS: Strategic Resilience Assessment Guidelines Document

This document provides step-by-step guidance for conducting Mercy Corps' risk and resilience assessment: the Strategic Resilience Assessment (STRESS). In four phases, the guide provides a framework for both the process' design and methodology, as well as the key outputs at each stage. To see the process in action, visit [Mercy Corps' STRESS page](#), which includes a library of completed assessments, as well as several other resources designed to break down the methodology for new users.

⁴ As discussed above, this learning document will make a similar case for the critical importance of risk and resilience assessments (or other risk-informed contextual analyses) to resilience results chains or resilience pathways, often a more detailed version of theories of change.



CHAPTER 2: Resilience Pathways

After conducting contextual assessments (which ideally account for risk and resilience), teams typically develop theories of change, often at a strategic level. Teams often jump from this general understanding straight to work planning and activity design, missing an essential opportunity to map out the logical flow of events that should lead to the desired outcomes. This sequence of events—often referred to as **results chains**—helps bridge this gap, illustrating a pathway from interventions and activities to wellbeing outcomes. Adding a resilience lens requires teams to consider how to address shocks, stresses, and vulnerability as part of the results chain, a process called **resilience results chains** or **resilience pathways**.

Resilience pathways can draw on the risk-informed contextual analysis (see Chapter 1: Risk-Informed Contextual Analysis) to build out a series of resilience capacities that outlines the causal logic between interventions and outcomes. Teams then layer and sequence resilience capacities into integrated chains. As illustrated in Figure 3, teams can also develop resilience pathways speculatively, drawing on minimal risk-informed contextual analysis (e.g., proposal analysis). They can then conduct a risk-informed contextual analysis to validate the assumptions made during the pathways process. In some cases, teams may pivot between risk-informed contextual analysis and resilience pathways, conducting several iterations to refine both their analyses and pathways. Teams can review pathways as part of quarterly and (most importantly) annual review and reflection meetings (see Chapter 5 for more details) based on data and reflections from the field. These data should either validate the logic within the pathway, or signal a need to pivot and modify the logic.

Process

Teams can employ a number of resilience pathways approaches depending on the time and resources available, donor requirements or flexibility, and how far they are into implementation, among other factors. Imagine three scenarios: a donor requires a new program to stick closely to its original proposal design;

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO RESULTS CHAINS

Standard Practices: *Results Chains*

Resilience Standard Practice: *Resilience Pathways or Resilience Results Chains*

Who: *Central level team members, though all team members should eventually understand how and why the resilience pathways were constructed, as they form the core resilience logic of the program. (Fig. 1)*

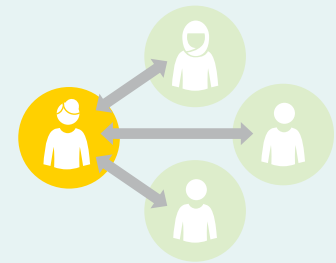


FIGURE 1

When: *Programs may begin the resilience pathways process during the program identification and design phase (after the program is funded), though it most often begins during the set-up and planning phase. (Fig. 2)*



FIGURE 2

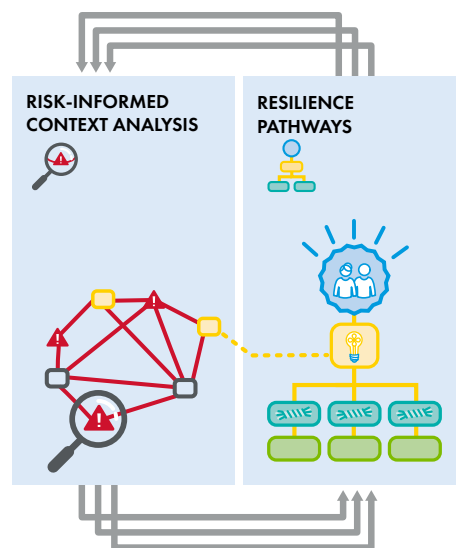


FIGURE 3

2) a donor provides funding for an inception phase that allows the team to invest in deep risk-informed contextual analysis, and reimagine the program outside of the constraints of the original proposal; 3) a third program is halfway complete and needs to revisit its program logic. The following guidance outlines a process for teams with a large amount of flexibility (i.e., scenario two), but teams can strategically incorporate existing commitments (e.g., proposal, scenario 1; or implementation design elements, scenario 3) into this more flexible process.

Starting Place	Pros	Cons
Risk-Informed Contextual Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds out solid, common foundation of contextual understanding to start the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot incorporate research questions that surface during the resilience pathways exercise Cannot be used to validate/modify resilience pathways based on these questions
Resilience Pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes a clear logic first, and teams can use assessments to validate this logic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No common foundational understanding of context; pathways may be constructed mostly based on assumptions and require significant modification after contextual analysis

TABLE 1: DECIDING WHETHER TO START WITH RISK-INFORMED CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OR RESILIENCE PATHWAYS

PREREQUISITE: REVISITING RISK-INFORMED CONTEXTUAL ANALYSES

Step 1: Risk-informed contextual analysis review


As discussed above, it is possible to conduct either resilience pathways or risk-informed contextual analysis first, and then proceed with the other. If teams begin with resilience pathways, they should revisit any existing risk-informed contextual analysis (e.g., completed during the proposal process, completed during start-up if teams are already implementing, existing desk review) to ground their understanding of risk and systems dynamics, including reviewing:

- Which **wellbeing outcomes** the program is working toward;
- Which **systems** (in addition to cross-cutting considerations of ecological, economic, social systems) the program may need to focus more attention on (e.g., a market systems development program working in the agriculture sector may need to focus more attention on a specific crop market, though it will still address the social and ecological systems concerns within this market);
- Which **shocks** and **stresses** are impacting wellbeing outcomes, for whom and why, how these risks are connected;
- Assessments of **differential vulnerability** among groups, often in the form of vulnerability profiles which help teams identify factors driving vulnerability (e.g., access to land, identity factors such as gender or caste), which they can then integrate into systems mapping exercises; and
- Any preliminary **resilience capacities** (often appearing in a theory of change) identified through the analysis.



Step 2: Problem tree analysis/systems mapping

Systems maps can help teams visualize the connections between shocks and stresses (across social, ecological, and economic systems), their drivers and effects, vulnerability factors, and wellbeing outcomes. They also present an opportunity to

 **Differential Vulnerability Profiles Template** included in the resource section at the end of this chapter.

integrate the findings of the risk-informed contextual analysis review with any new information (e.g., participant experiences/ observations, recent data and observations for programs already in implementation). Teams can begin with a problem tree analysis, but the visual will quickly transition into a systems map as teams make more complicated connections and identify feedback loops. For example, if teams begin with flooding as a shock, they might identify “poor investment in agricultural practices” as a driver and “distress sale of assets” as an effect. The effect may eventually decrease ability to invest in agricultural practices in the future, thus creating a feedback loop more characteristic of systems mapping. Teams should integrate factors driving vulnerability, as identified through vulnerability profiles or other means, to specific shocks or stresses within the systems map. For example, **limited access to arable land** makes subsistence farmers highly vulnerable to drought or crop pests/ disease given the high risk for total crop loss.

The resulting map should help teams visualize the chain of events or circumstances, including feedback loops and other patterns, that lead to negative impacts in wellbeing. Teams’ ability to trace these impacts through the systems map will help them prioritize where the program can and should intervene. (Note that this type of systems mapping is a part of the risk-informed contextual analysis process covered in more detail in Chapter 1.)

PART 1: BUILDING RESILIENCE CAPACITIES

Step 1: Prioritizing entry points

When teams identify connections through systems mapping, they can highlight which drivers, effects, shocks and/or stresses are having the biggest impact on wellbeing outcomes. Teams should have clear criteria for prioritizing entry points. For example, a program with food security as its primary wellbeing outcome might have the following criteria for prioritizing the drivers of shocks and/or stresses or their effects: 1) overall impact on food security (i.e., access, availability, and utilization); 2) impact on (how much the factor is driving) shock/stress; 3) degree to which it is creating more effects, or drivers; 4) program’s ability to actually address it (e.g., targeting “climate change” as a driver is likely too large for the program scope). These become the ultimate entry points for the resilience pathway exercises.

Step 2: Translating drivers or effects into resilience outcomes

Teams are then able to translate the negative impacts of drivers, effects, shocks, and stresses into a positive intermediate goal, which we refer to as **resilience outcomes**. For example, Figure 4 illustrates one section of a much larger systems map. The team in this case has prioritized two entry points to ensure that landslides (a major shock) do not undermine progress toward food security: 1) a **driver**: slope destabilization; and 2) an **effect**: poor soil fertility. In creating resilience outcomes, the team translates the driver into “increased soil stabilization to prevent landslides” and the effect into “increased soil fertility despite ongoing land degradation and landslides.” Both become primary results in the resilience pathway, indicating that the team has successfully addressed a driver or effect of a shock/stress that has historically undermined wellbeing.

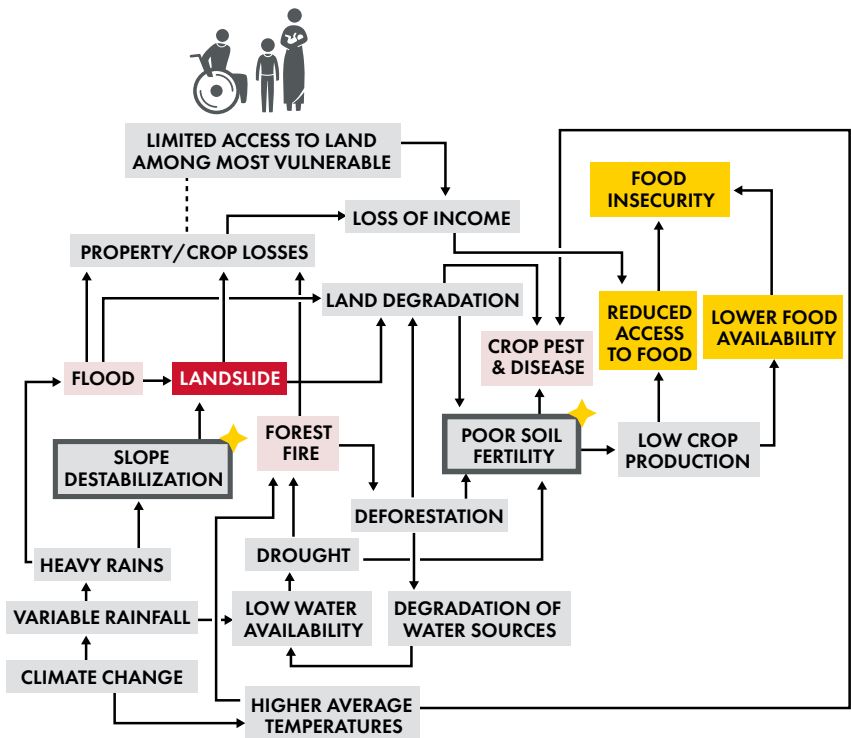


FIGURE 4

Step 3: Build out preliminary resilience capacities

Teams begin this section with a prioritized set of the drivers, effects, shocks, or stresses that have the highest potential to undermine wellbeing. Their next task is to identify which resources, often referred to as the five capitals (e.g., social, human, natural, physical, and financial), the target group needs in order to address (e.g., adapting to, coping with, preventing) these drivers, effects, shocks, or stresses. The team must then describe how the target group should: 1) access the resource and 2) use it (specifying how it will be used, often referred to as the strategy) to address the driver or effect of shocks or stresses, and thus build resilience. This description of the resource, how it should be accessed, and how it should be used is the **resilience capacity**.

Figure 2 provides several examples of resilience capacities for use by two different target groups at two different levels. The first set, designed for community forest users (but also of interest to community members looking to mitigate disaster risks) states the need for access to and the ability to use a set of slope stabilization strategies, as well as the tools and labor required to prevent or reduce the risk of landslides (a major shock originally identified in Figure 4’s systems map). Because teams are working across sectors, they may see an opportunity to build out another set of capacities for younger Dalit farmers whose small plots are consistently devastated by drought, crop pests, disease, and other shocks and stresses. These subsistence farmers may be interested in an alternative livelihood opportunity: growing broom grass on community forest land. This new livelihood opportunity provides them another source of income and simultaneously stabilizes the slope. The team then works across sectors to develop a set of capacities for these farmers, outlining access to and use of land (i.e., proper planting and harvesting) and income-generating, slope-stabilizing plant varieties. Each of the capacities is both reducing the risk of landslides and helping the land-poor farmers adapt to the impact of shocks/stresses on their limited crops.

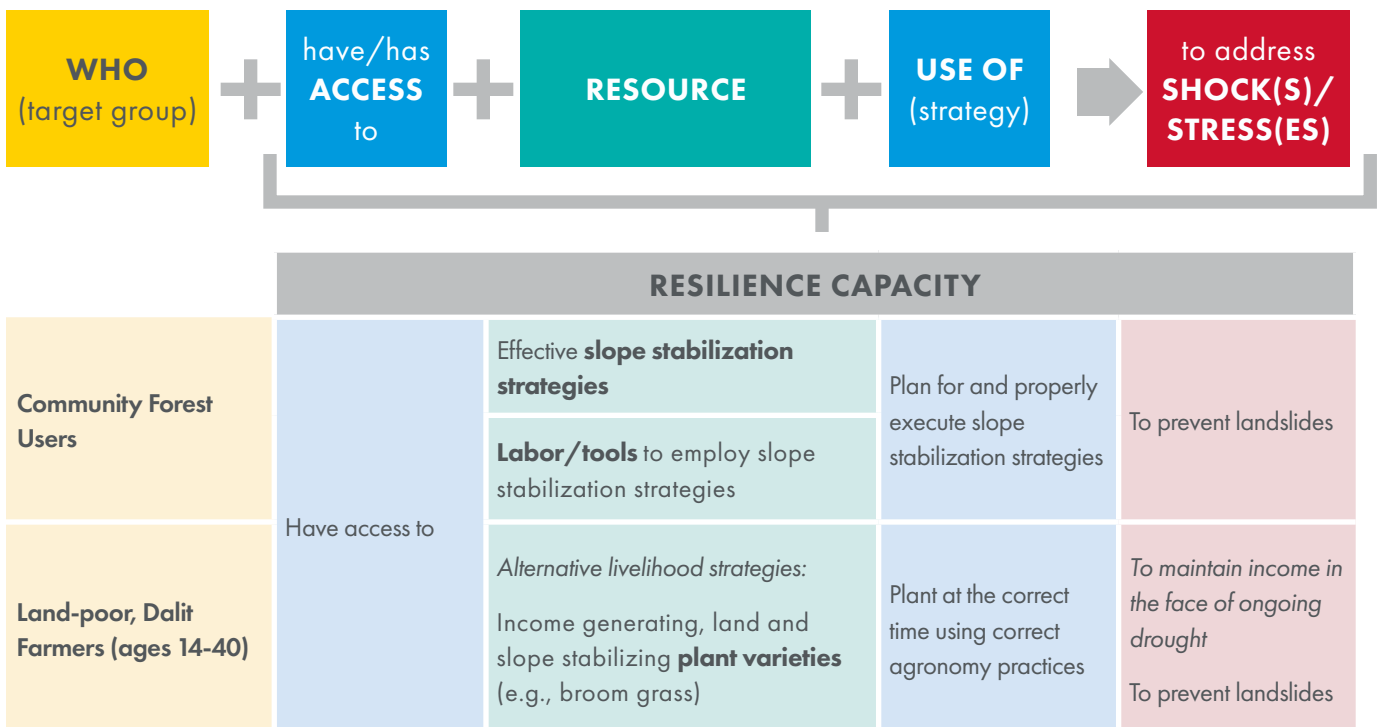


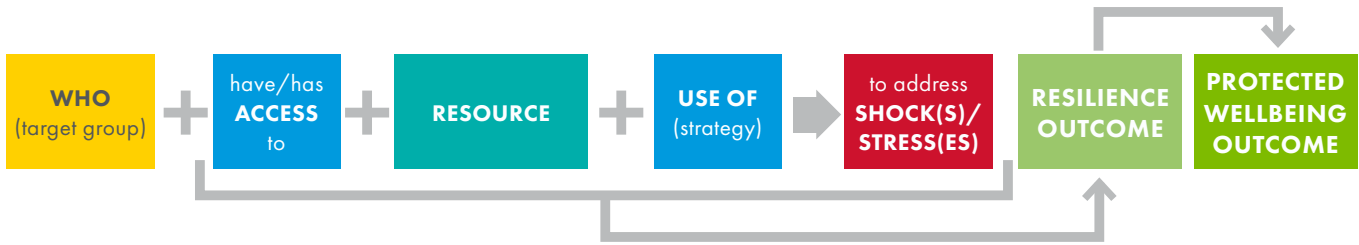
FIGURE 5

Step 4: Connect to resilience outcomes and wellbeing outcomes

Teams should then reiterate how addressing the driver or effect (of the shock or stress) increases resilience (e.g., in Figure 5, slope destabilization/landslides and indirectly crop losses on scarce land due to multiple shocks). This is expressed through the resilience outcome: the intermediate results that demonstrate resilience-building has measurable positive impacts. Figure 6 lists some of these positive results, the first of which matches the original resilience outcome outlined by the team: slope stabilization (i.e., the opposite of the original driver: slope

Building Resilience Capacities Template included in the resource section at the end of this chapter.

destabilization). The increased access to alternative income sources (that are less vulnerable to landslides) positively restates another effect in the systems map: loss of income. Both are results the program would want to see if the target groups were successfully employing resilience capacities to address the shocks and stresses, ultimately protecting their food security.



RESILIENCE CAPACITY						
Community Forest Users	Have access to	Effective slope stabilization strategies	Plan for and properly execute slope stabilization strategies	To prevent landslides	Slope stabilization + Increased income (from alt sources)	Protecting food security
		Labor/tools to employ slope stabilization strategies				
Land-poor, Dalit Farmers (ages 14-40)	Have access to	Alternative livelihood strategies:	Plant at the correct time using correct agronomy practices	To maintain income in the face of ongoing drought	+ Increased income (from alt sources)	Protecting food security
		Income generating, land and slope stabilizing plant varieties (e.g., broom grass)		To prevent landslides		


FIGURE 6

Step 5: Build out transformative capacities

In this next step, the team asks themselves a critical question: why doesn't the target group currently have access to and/or the ability to use this resource to ensure the shock or stress does not undermine progress toward wellbeing? To answer this question, teams assess which systemic constraints might be undermining a target group's access to or use of a resource. **Systemic constraints** are underlying factors that negatively influence how a system functions, including formal or informal rules, regulations, or policies (e.g., a lack of land tenure laws); social norms (e.g., societal expectations regarding gender roles); and perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (e.g., a distrust in government services).

To do this, teams can refer back to the vulnerability profiles and systems map to identify any potential factors obstructing access or use. They can also conduct an additional **systemic constraints analysis** (often referred to as a why-why-why analysis) that supports teams in probing the root causes of a target group's inability to access or use a resource. Once identified, teams can translate these systemic constraints into positive enabling conditions, forming a new layer of transformative resilience capacities. Table 2 outlines a potential systemic constraint that could undermine access to or use of the resources outlined in Figures 5 and 6, and provides a translation into positive enabling conditions or **transformative capacities**.

The program must plan to support these transformations in systemic constraints before (or during the process of facilitating access and use—as transformation takes time) they facilitate the resilience capacity building outlined in Figures 5 and 6. Importantly, the transformative capacities outlined below do not say how the program will facilitate this transformation (e.g., for example 3 in Table 2, the program conducts a market analysis to



Building Transformative Capacities Template included in the resource section at the end of this chapter.

prove a demand for broom grass products, effectively building trust among Dalit farmers), as teams will determine this when identifying the intervention areas.¹



Example 1: Community forest regulation preventing planting/harvesting of crops for profit

The regulation prevents the planting of broom grass (which stabilizes slope) for income generating purposes, eliminating incentives for Dalit farmers who are willing to plant grass.

Community forest regulation allows planting/harvesting of crops for profit if they benefit community forest priorities (e.g., slope stabilization)

Example 2: Dalit community members prevented from using a specific water source (used by other community members) to irrigate slope stabilizing crops

In some communities, there is a traditional, unjust belief that Dalit community members should not be allowed to use the same water sources as other community members. This could make it challenging for Dalit farmers to irrigate young and drought-vulnerable broom grass plants.

Dalit community members granted access to water source (used by other community members) to irrigate slope stabilizing crops

Example 3: Dalit community members do not trust there is a market for broom grass

Through their analysis, team members uncover a general distrust among Dalit farmers toward new business opportunities, as previous opportunities did not come to fruition. If the farmers believe there is no market for the broom grass, they will be unlikely to participate in the activity.

Dalit community members trust there is a market for broom grass

TABLE 2: EXAMPLE SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS TRANSLATED INTO TRANSFORMATIVE CAPACITIES

PART 2: INTENTIONAL INTEGRATION, LAYERING, AND SEQUENCING INTO RESILIENCE PATHWAYS

At this point, teams should have built out a number of resilience capacities under each resilience outcome. To arrange the resilience capacities into a clear, logical, and intentionally integrated resilience pathway, teams should consider the following:

Step 1: Sequencing

Resilience capacities are often dependent on each other; in other words, a target group may not be able to build one resilience capacity until another is in place. To properly sequence capacities, teams should ask themselves: How are

¹ Note that throughout Part 1, teams may begin to identify entities (e.g., traders, government agencies, agrovets, finance institutions, religious leaders) that are critical to the target groups’ access to or use of the resources they need to address shocks and/or stresses. This may be because these entities--referred to in Chapter 3 as systems actors (can you bold systems actors here)--either are critical in providing access to or enabling use of these resources (e.g., a trader offering a critical product at market) or they might play a role in the systemic constraints that undermine access or use (e.g., a religious leader who reinforces men as sole decision makers in the household). Identifying these entities or systems actors is not critical to the creation of resilience pathways, but team members should be sure to document them if they do come up, as these entities become critically important during the systems actor analysis (again, discussed during Chapter 3).

resilience capacities reliant on each other? How should this reliance determine which resilience capacity will come first? Table 3 outlines several rules of thumb that dictate the logical order of pathway elements. Figure 7 provides an example of

PATHWAY ELEMENT		NOTES ON ORDER
WELLBEING OUTCOME		The wellbeing outcomes will always be on top, as these are the ultimate goals the program is working toward.
RESILIENCE OUTCOME		Resilience outcomes—the result demonstrating the resilience capacity has been accessed and/or used—will come next (in the same logical place as intermediate outcomes). These results should indicate whether resilience building is working in addressing shocks or stresses.
RESILIENCE CAPACITY	↑ Use of (Strategy)	Resilience capacities require the target population to both access a critical resource and use it in a particular way (employing a strategy) to address a shock or stress. This work must occur before we see the resilience outcome. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pathway separates access and use because: • Access does not automatically lead to use; access is critical, but some systemic constraints may undermine use of a resource even though the target population already has access • Access and use are exclusive events, each of which can be measured: resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems can and should measure both access and use of a resource though they will often do so separately, as access often precedes use.
	↑ Access	
	↑ Transformative Capacity	Finally, transformative capacities are conditions (e.g., positive norms, beliefs, attitudes, or improved policies and regulations) that enable access to and/or use of a resource necessary for addressing a shock or stress. Because they are critical to access and/or use a resource, transformative capacities often precede access and/or use in the resilience pathway.

TABLE 3: COMMON SEQUENCE OF ELEMENTS WITHIN A RESILIENCE PATHWAY

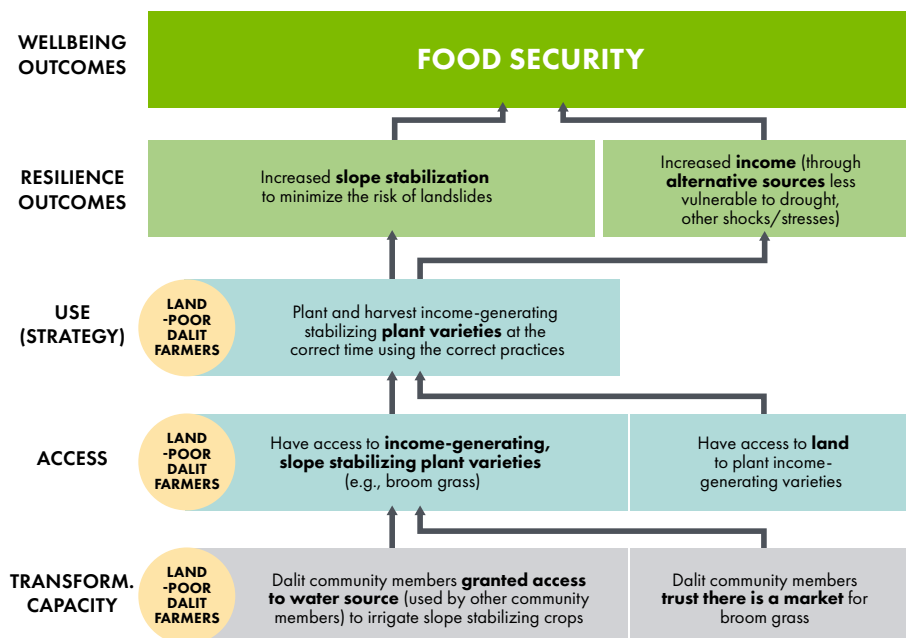


FIGURE 7

how these rules of thumb play out using the slope stabilization capacities discussed earlier.

As illustrated in Figure 8, the process of sequencing becomes more complicated as the team begins to arrange more capacities under one or more resilience outcomes. But the guidelines listed above still apply within a capacity or set of capacities: use always follows access (within a given capacity) and the transformative capacities underpin a target group’s ability to access and/or use a resource critical to addressing a shock or stress. Note that a transformative

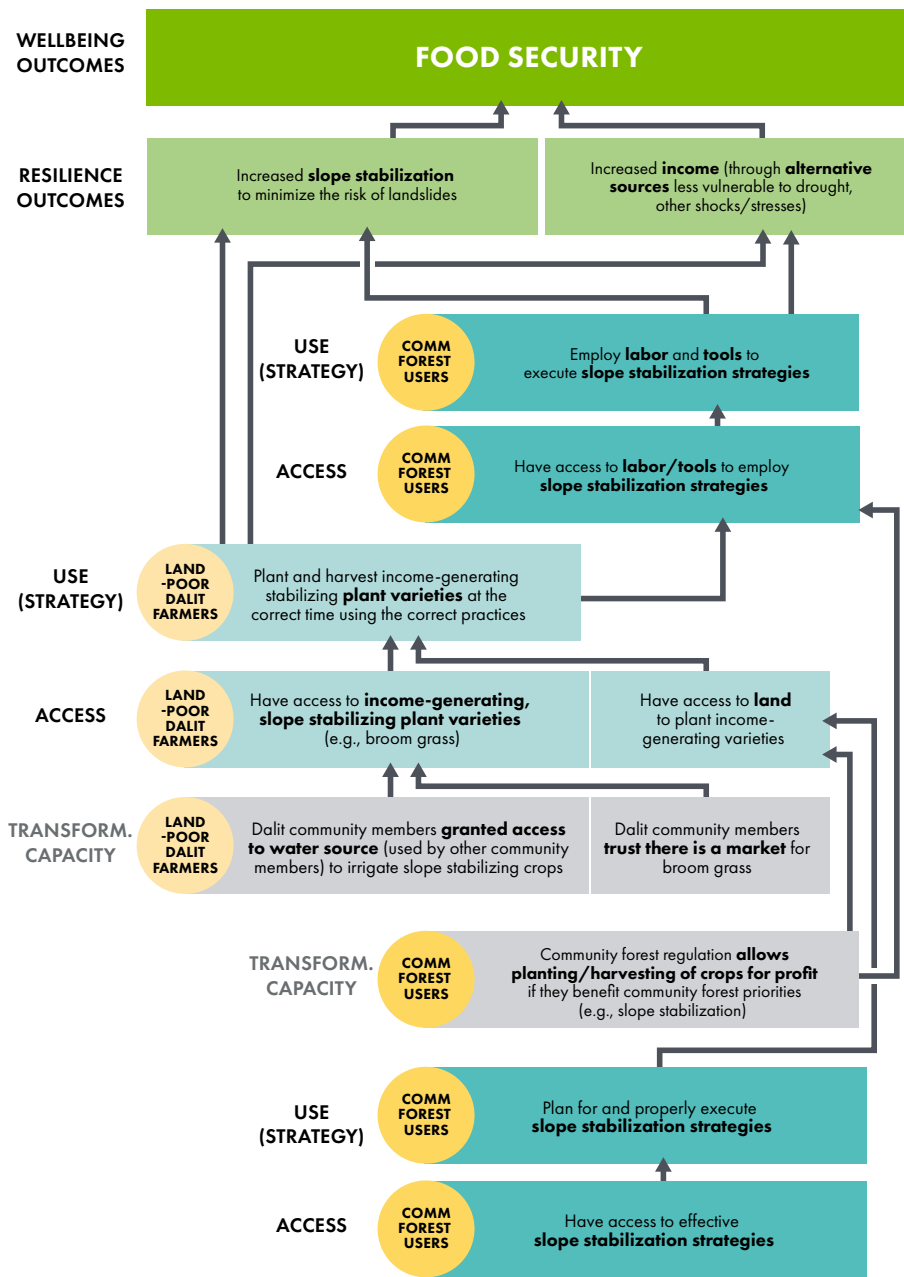


FIGURE 8

why? The team should identify and note any places where the program will target the same group(s) or area with multiple resilience capacities, as these will be important places for coordination and communication across sectors and at different scales.

Figure 8’s example could be a starting point for multiple instances of layering. For example, the community leaders coordinating disaster risk preparedness may want to build this innovative partnership with farmers into their planning. They may also want to coordinate with community forest users to ensure farmers are at low risk of the slope being unstable while they are planting. Similarly, there is an opportunity to pair income-generating activities with a financial services component that supports farmers in saving and investing their broom grass revenue.

capacity could easily follow access, but come before use, if that transformative capacity addresses a systemic constraint that only undermines the target group’s ability to use the resource (e.g., time poverty or social norms that prevent some groups from using resources in a certain way). Ultimately, all the events must follow a logical order.

For instance, land-poor Dalit farmers are able to provide their labor in exchange for a place (land to which they previously would not have access) to plant broom grass, which both stabilizes the slopes and generates income. The community forest users must first have a strategy in place (ideally created in coordination with farmers), then farmers get access to the correct plants and land, which in turn secures a fair labor agreement between the community forest users and the farmers.

Step 2: Layering

In layering resilience capacities, teams should ask: Who are these resilience capacities targeting and how should they overlap to further catalyze resilience building? Should capacity building efforts overlap within a given area, and if so, how and

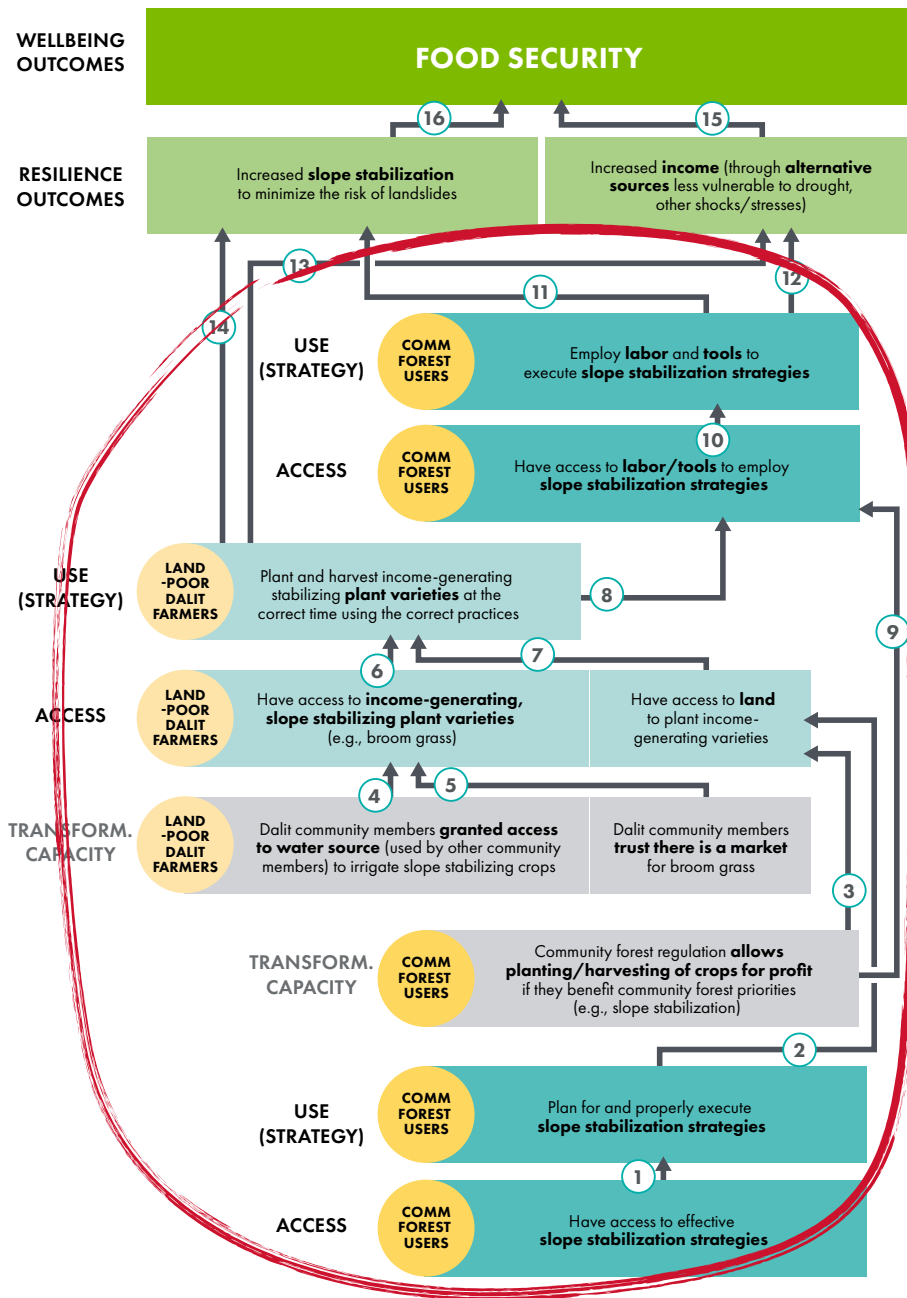


FIGURE 9

Intra-program integration opportunities may emerge later in the planning process where structures for disaster risk (e.g., existing local disaster risk reduction committees) or financial service providers (e.g., previously established local financial services cooperatives) are already in place, and the program can facilitate strengthening these existing services. In order to identify these kinds of opportunities to layer capacities, teams must look across sectors and geographical scales and understand communities' unique assets. This work begins with pathways, but will continue throughout annual and quarterly planning.

Step 3: Naming and describing linkages and connections

With a clear layering and sequencing logic established, teams should number (see Figure 9) and describe the linkages they have made. These descriptions should illustrate how one event leads to or underpins the next. Describing these linkages may help a team to clarify their logic in sequencing and layering the capacities. If teams have a hard time describing a linkage, this may be a signal that the sequencing is not logical, requiring them to rearrange the chain.

For example, linkage #3 might be described as: *in order for land-poor Dalit farmers to begin generating revenue from broom grass, this regulation must be addressed.* This may include mobilizing the community or engaging in advocacy efforts around the issue. This subsequent regulatory shift, which ideally allows planting for profit when it benefits community forest priorities (and slope stabilization is a high priority), helps push this potential partnership forward.

Step 4: Grouping capacities into coherent intervention areas

At this point, the team has sequenced, layered, and integrated resilience capacities within and across resilience pathways, creating a logical roadmap for resilience building. They must now look across pathways to group capacities into coherent

intervention areas. The intervention areas are high level statements that describe a common theme that ties two or more capacities together. Ideally, intervention areas will be relatively sector neutral, allowing more than one technical lead to understand their relevance to the intervention area.

The red line around Figure 9 illustrates how all of the capacities (plus any additional relevant capacities identified during layering and sequencing) could be grouped into one intervention area (e.g., facilitate access and use of slope stabilization strategies) because they all relate to the larger theme of slope stabilization. Multiple technical leads can look across sectors (e.g., alternative livelihoods/employment, disaster risk reduction, natural resource management, potentially financial services) to see the relevance of their technical expertise to slope stabilization strategies. Other example intervention areas might include: facilitate access to/use of longer-term land rental or ownership, or facilitate access to/use of climate smart agriculture inputs.

This is a critical starting point for teams as they transition into annual work planning and the development of intervention narratives (discussed in Chapter 3) which will flesh out the basic mechanics of these intervention areas. As the team’s understanding of what works best when building resilience evolves through work planning, implementation, and adaptation, they should continue to revisit and update their resilience pathways to reflect the resilience logic that best leads to the desired resilience and wellbeing results. As explored in Chapter 5, updating the pathways is also critical to ensuring the team is measuring resilience accurately and effectively.

WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

While PAHAL’s strategic resilience assessment (STRESS) helped the team create a high-level theory of change, it was not detailed enough to provide the clear roadmap the team needed to move into annual and quarterly work planning. This lack of detail had several unintended outcomes:

- **Challenges to collaboration and coordination across sectors:** *First, technical leads at the central level were not fully able to visualize how specifically resilience capacities should be layered and sequenced to form the program’s resilience logic. This made it challenging for them to collaborate across sectors and make connections between program components. For this reason, implementation remained highly siloed.*
- **Overly detailed work plans:** *Second, without a detailed understanding of the program logic, technical leads had to prepare field teams for implementation, and technical staff made up for the lack of detail in the resilience pathways by creating overly detailed work plans. Unfortunately, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, field teams interpreted these as direct orders for implementation that needed to be followed in all districts despite differences in local context or new knowledge and learning about what works when building resilience.*

- **Lack of clear resilience indicators:** *Finally, the team struggled to develop clear resilience monitoring and evaluation indicators. Because they did not have resilience pathways, they could not clearly illustrate the chain of resilience results that should lead to protected wellbeing outcomes.*



Photo: E. Rex, Mercy Corps/2019

In year three, PAHAL leadership decided to conduct a series of resilience pathway exercises that helped the team break the program down into a clear, logical, and layered sequence of resilience capacities that linked to clear intervention areas, interventions, and activities.

RESOURCES



Resilience Pathways Template Set

This set of templates is designed to help teams work through some of the key exercises in the resilience pathways process outlined in this chapter. Each is designed as a stand alone resource. The set includes:

- Template 1: Differential Vulnerability Profiles
- Template 2: Brainstorming Resources for Resilience Capacities
- Template 3: Building Resilience Capacities
- Template 4: Building Transformative Capacities



CHAPTER 3: Risk-Informed Annual Work Plan & Intervention Narratives

Risk-informed annual work plans should illustrate how the program is building resilience capacities and helping target groups better cope with, adapt to, and prevent shocks and stresses through a clear set of **intervention areas**. Teams do this by incorporating the key resilience results (outlined in the resilience pathways) into the tables often included in work plans, including: 1) **resilience outcomes**—the positive, intermediate results the team aims to see when the target group successfully gains access to and the ability to use resilience capacities to mitigate shocks and stresses; and 2) **resilience capacities**—access to and use of resources critical to addressing shocks and stresses and the systems changes that support vulnerable groups’ access and use of these resources. It is essential to include these resilience outcomes and capacities in annual work plans in order to ensure that teams are monitoring and evaluating resilience outcomes as they implement interventions.

Despite teams’ best efforts to introduce resilience capacities, outcomes, and program goals in risk-informed annual work plans, a work plan table cannot fully describe the logic behind the intervention, how it will function, and its relationship to resilience pathways in detail. Teams use accompanying **intervention narratives**, often called intervention standard operating procedures (SOPs), to illustrate how the intervention area should work to build resilience. For each intervention area,

teams create a narrative to outline how they will layer or sequence a set of interventions (and often high-level activities) to deliver the resilience results outlined in the risk-informed annual work plan. Teams also identify what they expect these results to look like by describing indicators and observations that will suggest the program is moving in the intended direction. They also describe key stakeholders, including which systems actors are best positioned to facilitate resilience building sustainably.

Importantly, these intervention narratives are not detailed process documents focused on activities. Instead, the narratives provide high-level guidance that enables field teams to hone and adapt interventions and activities based on new learning and variations in context. Under the supervision of central-level technical leads, field teams use annual work plans to guide their development of risk-informed quarterly work plans and activity terms of reference (ToRs), the program’s incremental planning tools for detailed, everyday implementation. While quarterly work plans and activity ToRs may vary based on the program implementation area, annual work plans and intervention narratives stay consistent across the program, providing a common reference point when field staff come together to share lessons across sectors, areas, and scales. (Chapter 4 digs deeper into the relationship, and differences between, annual work plans and quarterly work plans.) Annual work plans and intervention

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO ANNUAL WORK PLANS & INTERVENTION NARRATIVES

Standard Practices: *Annual Work Plans/Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP—for USAID DFSAs); Intervention Narratives or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)*

Resilience Standard Practice: *Risk-Informed Annual Work Plans; Risk-Informed Intervention Narratives*

Who: *Program/central level team members, though field team members must understand and be able to use both. (Fig. 1)*

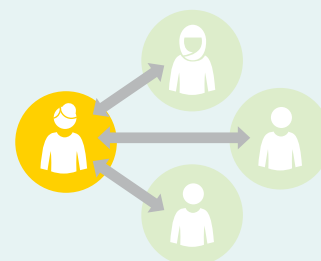


FIGURE 1

When: *Programs create their first risk-informed annual work plans and intervention narratives during the set-up and planning phase, but they will revise or create new versions yearly throughout program implementation (typically on a yearly basis, at a minimum). (Fig. 2)*



FIGURE 2

narratives also help the team monitor if the program is moving in the right direction: if the logic articulated in the narratives is not manifesting in implementation, teams must pause, reflect, re-evaluate, and adapt this logic as part of annual planning process.

Process

The resilience pathways exercise should provide clear guidance as to where resilience outcomes and resilience capacities should fit into the annual work plan table, illustrating the chain of results that should lead to sustained wellbeing in the face of shocks and stresses. Resilience outcomes are typically articulated in annual work plans as intermediate results (often referred to as sub-purposes), or as outcomes. Resilience capacities can be expressed as either intermediate outcomes or outputs. Capacities should be stated positively (e.g., climate-smart agricultural inputs available and used to adapt to low water availability, emergency savings used to cope with flooding), reinforcing the target group's ability to both access and use the resources critical to addressing a shock or stress.⁵



ADAPTIVE
MANAGEMENT

WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

From the beginning of the program, PAHAL teams were in the practice of creating annual work plans, but they often did not reflect the resilience outcomes expected as a result of intervention areas. When PAHAL developed its resilience pathways during year three, the team finally had a clear set of resilience results (in the form of resilience outcomes and resilience capacities) to include in their (now risk-informed) annual work plan table. This was an important step in clarifying how interventions should build resilience, but (as discussed later in Chapter 4) teams still faced major challenges in implementing annual work plans.

First, leadership realized that field teams felt they needed to replicate every intervention and activity listed in the annual work plan. This rigid interpretation often led to blanket application of all sectoral components in every implementation area. With overly prescriptive annual plans, field teams missed opportunities to tailor interventions and activities to the local context, and to learn and adapt as they went along.

In response, leadership decided to make two big changes. First, they transformed risk-informed annual work plans into higher level guidance documents, outlining the basic resilience results an intervention area should yield, but leaving detailed intervention and activity planning up to the teams who could

learn from and adapt everyday planning based on the dynamic contexts of the implementation areas in which they were working. Secondly, as discussed in Chapter 4, they built out tools for field teams to incrementally plan, learn, and adapt: risk-informed quarterly work plans and activity terms of reference (ToRs), which fed into monitoring, analysis, and regular review and reflection meetings.

These adaptations went a long way in supporting the planning process, but leadership realized there was still one major issue: the team still lacked a program-wide



Photo: R. Radix, Mercy Corps/2019

understanding of how the intervention area should function. As field teams began using their quarterly work plans and activity ToRs to learn and adapt, their understanding of what worked in their implementation

⁵ Teams can break the access and use of a resource into two separate outcomes/outputs, especially where programs may need to build (and thus can show progress toward) access first. Similarly, demonstrating progress towards use may be contingent on a shock or stress occurring. For example, it may be easier to demonstrate that "emergency savings are accessible in the event of a flood" both earlier in the program and in the absence of a flood. "Emergency savings are used to address the effects of a flood" requires both a flood to test resilience (i.e., through recurrent monitoring surveys—see Chapter 5) and potentially more implementation time given the target group's use is dependent both on positive enabling conditions (e.g., trust and investment in cooperative/savings) and behavior change (e.g., follows through and takes out savings for flood relief).

areas deepened. Yet, when they convened at the end of every quarter to reflect, they lacked a common understanding of how the intervention should function across the full program, including major points of integration across intervention areas. This realization

led to the recommendation that programs develop risk-informed intervention narratives to ensure that teams always have common, high-level guidance to which they can refer.

The remainder of this section will focus on intervention narratives, which provide teams with a critical space to clarify how a given intervention builds resilience toward wellbeing. When creating the narrative, teams should begin a discussion of how the intervention should function. They should be sure to articulate the following:

- **Resilience justification and monitoring and evaluation indicators:** Teams must reinforce the resilience logic outlined in the annual work plan with a clear narrative about how the intervention area should work to build resilience. At a high level, teams must explain how the interventions (and even activities) might be layered and sequenced to achieve the intended resilience results and wellbeing outcomes. Teams should be clear which results (including the resilience results above, typically derived from the resilience pathways) within the annual work plan the intervention connects to, including articulating the indicators used to measure these results.

- **Resilience for whom:** The narrative should clearly identify the target group(s) for the intervention area. In justifying why the target group was chosen, teams should refer back to differential vulnerability profiles, articulating how the group is exposed and sensitive to shocks and stresses. They should then explain how the intervention area will increase the target group’s (or groups’) access to or use of resources to address these specific shocks or stresses (or lead to systems change that helps ensure their access or use).



- **Systems actor analysis:** One of the primary goals of intervention narratives is to articulate how the program is creating systemic change to ensure vulnerable populations have access to resilience capacities as part of its program logic. Through the resilience pathways exercise, teams established *what* target groups need (or may already possess) to build resilience and *how* (the collection of capacities that make up an intervention) to get there. In traditional models, programs directly support resilience building among target groups, but resilience requires teams to ensure target groups have access to and use of resources critical to addressing shocks or stresses well after the program ends and as contexts change. This means taking a **facilitation approach** by working through **systems actors**:

any entity across any sector (e.g., public, private, civil) with the potential to help facilitate (e.g., provide a service or expertise, advocate for, help organize) the target group’s resilience building long-term. As illustrated in Figure 3, teams should work through systems actors who will be in place long after the program ends, providing more direct support to target groups only where systems actors may not be ready to facilitate

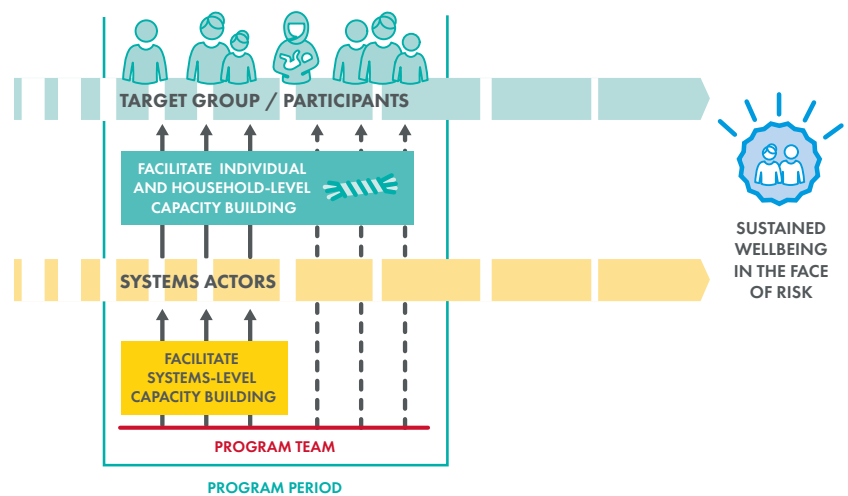


FIGURE 3

capacity building (with a clear plan to transition to systems-level change as soon as systems actors are ready). The **systems actor analysis** helps teams consider *who* is best positioned to support resilience building among target groups. However, systems actors operate within the same complex systems as target groups and may be uniquely vulnerable to risks, including the shocks and stresses affecting the target group. Resilience requires us to pay special attention to risk when evaluating which systems actors are best positioned to support sustained change. Teams should document the two outputs of systems actor analysis (i.e., a preliminary prioritization of systems actors and a preliminary set of systems-level resilience capacities) within the intervention narrative, ideally both narratively and visually. As mentioned above, teams may want to update resilience pathways to include preliminary systems-level resilience capacities.



Systems Actor Analysis Templates included in the resource section at the end of this chapter.

- **Resilience/systems approach and sustainability/end-of-program planning:** Building on the systems actor analysis, teams should articulate how the intervention area employs a systems approach (e.g., articulating how the program is facilitating change through systems actors, illustrating how the intervention considers risk across multiple systems at multiple scales). The team should also articulate how the intervention directly (and in concert with other interventions) contributes to sustained wellbeing, details which can feed into shared or common sustainability (or end-of-program transition) planning.
- **Layering, sequencing, and integration:** Teams should reexamine their original layering and sequencing and reconfigure as necessary to account for systems-level resilience capacities (capacities designed to help systems actors address risks), which the program may need to prioritize before the systems actors are able to facilitate resilience building among individuals or households.
- **Preliminary activity design:** Teams can develop initial guidelines for activities that they believe will be essential to their ability to implement intervention areas. It may also be appropriate to propose a preliminary list or menu of anticipated activities. Note Chapter 4 will provide guidance on the detailed activity design process.
- **Learning agenda:** Finally, teams should articulate how this intervention connects to the larger research and learning agenda.



RESOURCES



Systems Actor Analysis Templates

This resource provides more background on the systems actor analysis process. It includes a series of exercises aimed at identifying: 1) which systems actors can facilitate resilience building among target groups, and 2) the capacities critical to strengthening systems actors’ ability to facilitate resilience building among target groups sustainably.



CHAPTER 4: Risk-Informed Quarterly Work Plan & Activity Terms of Reference (ToRs)

At this point, the central team has created a risk-informed annual work plan, which serves as a high-level outline of the intervention areas (and perhaps some activities) that should build specific resilience capacities and lead to specific resilience outcomes. Within (or linked to) the annual work plans are risk-informed intervention narratives that unpack the basic mechanics of the intervention area, answering questions such as: How will the interventions in this area facilitate systems change and resilience-building among vulnerable target groups? How do the interventions lead to the results in the resilience pathway? Which systems actors are best suited to facilitate this change sustainably?

The central team has created a basic compass for the work ahead but knows the annual work plans and intervention narratives cannot and should not plan out every detail. The central team cannot predict the exact activities field teams will need to implement nine months away, nor can they anticipate the contextual variations in each unique implementation area. With the risk-informed annual work plans and intervention narratives in hand, field teams need a tool that helps them answer the question: what are the first steps? Risk-informed quarterly work plans and activity terms of reference (ToRs or concept notes) are designed to help field teams plot this initial work and the incremental steps that follow. Both are adaptive management tools that support field teams in navigating the dynamic contexts in which they are implementing—ensuring implementers can probe the context, test initial activities, and then observe, reflect, learn, and shape the activities as they go.

Process

Field teams begin the risk-informed quarterly work planning and activity ToR process with the high-level narratives for how interventions should function. But, the central level teams who create these annual work plans and intervention narratives cannot anticipate how exactly this work can and should play out because the systems that communities rely on are dynamic and teams must learn by doing. This section outlines the considerations for teams developing their first risk-informed quarterly work plan and activity ToRs, then some strategies for ensuring that both continue to serve as adaptive management tools throughout implementation.

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO QUARTERLY WORK PLANS & ACTIVITY TORs

Standard Practices: *Primary: Quarterly Work Plans; Activity Terms of Reference (ToRs); Secondary: Stakeholder Register, Work Breakdown Structure*

Resilience Standard Practice: *Risk-Informed Quarterly Work Plans; Risk-Informed Activity ToRs*

Who: *Sub-program/field level team members, though program/central level team members play a strong advisory role, in addition to helping by sharing promising intervention and activity planning ideas across field teams. (Fig. 1)*

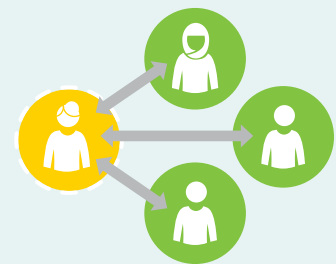


FIGURE 1

When: *Field teams create their first risk-informed quarterly workplans and activity ToRs during the set-up and planning phase, but they will revise, adapt, and/or create new versions throughout the program implementation (revisited on at least a quarterly basis). (Fig. 2)*



FIGURE 2

WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

In its first three years, the PAHAL team did what many programs do: when it was time to create quarterly work plans, field teams and their local non-governmental organization partners would simply break the tasks from the annual work plan into quarters. The work of the year was suddenly locked into place, and field teams became more focused on keeping pace with what was on the page than observing, reflecting, and learning what was working best in the local context and as dynamic systems (and the shocks and stresses that impact them) changed.

With reflection, PAHAL leaders believe this happened for several reasons. A mid-program investment in integrating activities helped leadership understand how annual work plans had become too detailed. At the central level, technical leads had mapped out interventions and activities thoroughly. This had an unintended effect: regional, district, and field staff attempted to implement all activities, interpreting them less as a compass and more as marching orders that they had to follow. (Technical planning at the central level was also siloed by sector, which decreased integration across sectors within the quarterly work plans as well.) However, it soon also became clear that even if field teams had felt more autonomy, the tools that may have helped them manage their work adaptively (quarterly work plans and activity ToRs) were not serving that function.

In conjunction with the development and rollout of their integration monitoring tool (IMT), leadership set out to make several significant changes to address these issues:

- **High-level, integrated annual work planning:** Drawing on a series of participatory, resilience pathway and planning exercises conducted during redesign, technical teams were able to identify overarching points of integration across sectors. These integration opportunities allowed technical leads at the central level to plan across sectors and systems, developing high-level, risk-informed annual work plans that provided general direction but left the real maneuvering to field teams. (See Chapter 3 additional details.)
- **Detailed, risk-informed quarterly work plans and activity ToRs:** With a compass (in the form of annual work plans) for guidance, field teams could develop incremental quarterly work plans that allowed them

to assess local conditions (with special attention to variability in shocks, stresses, and differential vulnerability and how that influences the resilience capacities required) and test which interventions and activities best build resilience. Field teams recorded activity concepts in the ToR, which they could adapt as their understanding evolved.

- **Monitoring and analysis:** Quarterly work planning became an iterative process, where leadership encouraged teams to monitor and analyze their progress both formally and informally through the three-month implementation period. The IMT provided more frequent monitoring data on integration progress, the monitoring and evaluation team was collecting regular data, and the recurrent monitoring system gave teams at least two key data points during this redesign period. (See Chapter 5 for additional details about resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning and PAHAL's experiences.)
- **Review, reflection, and adaptation:** Leadership also instituted quarterly (and annual at the fourth quarter) review and reflection meetings where field (including regional and district staff) and central teams could convene to discuss and synthesize their formal and informal observations together. Teams also had the opportunity to learn from promising practices surfacing across in other districts. Finally, technical experts were there to help teams translate this learning into their next work plans, outlining how to enhance successful resilience building efforts, and adapt where there were opportunities for growth.



Photo: R. Radix, Mercy Corps/2019

DEVELOPING THE FIRST QUARTERLY WORK PLAN

If the risk-informed annual work plan is a compass, the first quarter’s work plan must both chart the very beginning of the route and include plenty of stops along the way to ensure the team is on the right track. (Table 1 explores this transition from annual to quarterly work planning.) In short, the field teams must translate the general direction in the risk-informed annual work plans and intervention narratives into straightforward activities for the first quarter. These first months should include activities that help them engage participants, systems actors, and other stakeholders in planning; deepen their understanding of the local context; and start to visualize what resilience building activities should specifically look like. Participatory exercises, community meetings, consultations with key stakeholders, and other mobilization activities are common during this period.

	Risk-Informed Annual Work Plan (and Intervention Narratives)	Risk-Informed Quarterly Work Plan (and Activity Terms of Reference)
Primary Purpose	High-level compass, providing general technical guidance (in the form of intervention areas) on a yearly (or more frequent) basis.	An adaptive management tool, allowing teams to plan, act, observe/monitor, reflect on, adapt, and contextualize activities incrementally on a quarterly (or more frequent) basis.
Level	Typically created by technical leads at the central level , in coordination across sectors and systems	Typically created by field teams , under the advisorship of central (often technical) teams
Interventions	Provides general outline for the intervention area , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How technically the interventions in that area should work to build resilience • Potential resilience indicators for measuring progress • Who (which systems actors) may be best placed to facilitate intervention and what resilience capacities they may require • Major integration points with other intervention areas, including opportunities for layering and sequencing 	Activity ToRs include detailed plans for specific intervention areas/interventions and specific activities (or a set of activities, even sub-activities) , including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How each activity will technically build resilience in the specific context • The specific resilience indicators for measuring progress • Who (which specific systems actors) will facilitate the intervention/activity and the resilience capacities they require • Integration points with other specific activities, including how they will be layered and sequenced
Activities	Annual work plans and intervention narratives may outline general activities critical to implementing intervention areas.	
Connection to Resilience Pathway	Illustrates pathway: how intervention areas lead to resilience capacities lead to resilience outcomes .	Illustrates pathway: how specific activities lead to specific interventions/intervention areas lead to resilience capacities lead to resilience outcomes .

TABLE 1: HOW DO RISK-INFORMED ANNUAL AND QUARTERLY WORK PLANS COMPARE?

Each of these spaces presents an opportunity for field teams to probe deeper and begin to tailor their work to the specific context in which they are implementing activities. This means revisiting and refining the considerations scoped out in the risk-informed intervention narratives:

- Five resilience questions:** While the program’s wellbeing outcomes will remain constant, there will most certainly be local variations in the other resilience considerations: the incidence, intensity, and frequency of specific shocks and stresses; which groups are most vulnerable and why; and which systemic factors are constraining access to and use of resources critical to addressing shocks and stresses. Local nuances in shocks and stresses, differential vulnerability and systemic constraints, and systems dynamics will influence which resilience capacities are critical to a given target group in a given area. And, even within a given area, these dynamics—as within all systems—will change over time. This makes it essential for teams to continue to ask and answer the five resilience questions, deepening their understanding of emerging and changing patterns that ensure they can facilitate target groups’ ability to anticipate, plan for, and address risk.
- Systems actors:** A systems actor is any entity across any sector (e.g., public, private, civil) with the potential to help facilitate (e.g., provide a service or expertise, advocate for, help organize) the target group’s resilience building long-term. While the intervention narratives identified preliminary systems actors, field teams must ensure activities reflect their evolving understanding of the contextual factors that may affect systems actors’ ability to facilitate resilience building sustainably in a given area. This means assessing which shocks, stresses, and other risks systems actors face and how these risks might undermine their ability to support resilience building among the target group. These factors will likely influence the resilience capacities systems actors need to ensure they can facilitate systems change and resilience building among target groups in the face of shocks and stresses.



DEVELOPING THE FIRST ACTIVITY TORs/CONCEPT NOTES

Activity ToRs are a central part of the quarterly work planning process, helping answer critical questions about the mechanics of an activity: How does the activity work? How is it integrated, layered, and sequenced with other activities? What results does the team expect to see during and at the end of the activity, and how will they monitor this progress formally and informally? Who will be responsible and what are their roles? What is the budget? Applying a resilience lens requires teams to also address the following:

- Resilience justification and monitoring and evaluation indicators:** As with intervention narratives, it is critical to articulate how the activity will feed into the resilience pathways: 1) **intervention**—how is the activity contributing to the larger intervention area?; 2) **resilience capacities**—how will the activity support systems/transformational change or increase access to or use of a resource critical to addressing a shock or stress?; 3) **resilience outcomes**—how will the activity contribute to positive, intermediate results that teams aim to see when the target group successfully gains access to and the ability to use resilience capacities to address shocks and stresses?; and 4) **wellbeing outcomes**—how will this ultimately protect progress toward wellbeing?

- **Gender, social inclusion, and differential vulnerability:** The activity ToRs should make clear whom the activity is designed to reach, how this group is vulnerable to shocks and stresses, and how the activity will build their capacity to address these risks.
- **Resilience/systems approach and sustainability/end-of-program planning:** The team should also address how this activity is part of a larger systems approach (e.g., articulating how the program is facilitating change through systems actors, illustrating how the activity considers risk across multiple systems at multiple scales). This will help teams then articulate how the activity contributes to sustained wellbeing, details which can feed into shared or common sustainability (i.e., end-of-program transition) planning.
- **Layering, sequencing, and intentional integration:** The team should articulate integration points with other activities, including: 1) **sequencing**—how the activity builds on, must be conducted in conjunction with, or leads to another activity; 2) **layering**—how the activity should overlap, typically geographically or in the targeting of a specific vulnerable group with another activity; and 3) **intentional integration**—how the sequencing and layering of the activity (as outlined above) might require additional communication and collaboration across field teams and components/sectors, who might need to be involved, and how this increased coordination should play out.



While quarterly work plans reference distinct activities, the activities themselves often last for multiple quarters, and teams may continue to adapt the same ToR over this time period. Central teams will play an essential role in advising field teams as they flesh out activity ToRs. Field teams can often share ToRs across implementation areas and scales, dedicating the majority of their time to tailoring ToRs to a given context. Ultimately, central teams’ support throughout the process is essential, as field teams will be focused on implementation.

SYNERGY WITH OTHER RESILIENCE STANDARD PRACTICES

Most importantly, field teams should be prepared for things to change as their understanding of the context increases and as conditions also change. This is why risk-informed quarterly work plans and activity ToRs are designed for incremental and iterative action, observation and monitoring, reflection, and adaptation. Though nearly all quarterly work planning will take place during implementation, the start-up phase (the focus of this guidance) is a critical time for ensuring teams will be able to use these work plans as adaptive management tools. Risk-informed quarterly work plans feed into several other resilience standard practices (discussed in Chapter 5) as part of a larger system for adaptive management:



- **Resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning (RMEL) system:** As appropriate, teams should take advantage of collected RMEL data to help monitor their progress. This is especially true of recurrent monitoring survey data. Where necessary, teams may also need to establish temporary (or more frequent) indicators (and collect data on them) through routine monitoring.



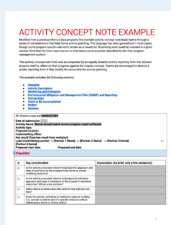
Photo: R. Radix, Mercy Corps/2019

- **Regular review and reflection meetings:** With well established practices around data collection and regular observation and analysis, teams are well positioned to review and reflect on their progress at the end of the quarter. Regular review and reflection meetings provide critical opportunities for teams to pause and reflect across sectors, scales, and geographic areas to assess their progress. Together, field teams can synthesize learning into shared lessons that can inform the adaptation and/or advancement of their next quarterly work plan.

Explored in more depth in Chapter 5, these resilience standard practices are critical to establishing a culture of adaptive management and learning that encourages teams to be deeply curious, act strategically, fail safely, reflect, and adapt as needed.



RESOURCES



Activity Concept Note (ToR) Example

Modified from a Mercy Corps program, this example activity concept note leads teams through a series of considerations that help frame activity planning. The language has been generalized in most cases, though some program specific elements remain as a means for illustrating what could be included in a given section. Note that the program which developed this concept note form accompanied it with an equally detailed activity reporting form that allowed program staff to reflect on their progress against the original concept. Teams are encouraged to develop a similar reporting form if they modify this document for activity planning.



CHAPTER 5: Resilience Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

Resilience monitoring, evaluation, and learning (RMEL) describes a set of resilience standard practices that help teams track progress toward building resilience for the purposes of protecting wellbeing outcomes in the face of shocks and stresses. The design and set-up phases provide many opportunities to apply a resilience lens to foundational MEL standard practices. This section will highlight a handful of practices that are both critically important, and if unaddressed, can significantly undermine efforts to monitor or evaluate resilience progress throughout the program. Because extensive how-to guidance already exists for these foundational MEL practices, this section will focus solely on the additions required to measure resilience.

Resilience Monitoring, Evaluation, And Learning (MEL) Plan

To apply a resilience lens to the MEL plan, teams should:

- Ensure that, at a minimum, the results and/or logical framework reflect each of the levels addressed in the resilience pathways including wellbeing outcomes, resilience outcomes, resilience capacities, and interventions. For additional guidance, see Chapter 2: Resilience Pathways.
- Reference (and ideally include) the narrative that explains the links between all results (i.e., resilience outcomes, resilience capacities, and interventions) in the resilience pathways.
- Include indicators that measure the results in the resilience pathways, including access to and use of resilience capacities, shocks and stresses, and other outcomes. See the section directly below for more guidance on selecting resilience indicators.
- Describe how additional monitoring and evaluation activities, such as recurrent monitoring surveys, shock and stress monitoring, and other routine monitoring tools help teams track progress against the results anticipated in resilience pathways.
- Develop a robust research plan (or integrate the following elements within an existing plan) that includes key questions and/or hypotheses regarding which interventions matter most for resilience in the face of a particular set of shocks (e.g., conflict, market failure). This should describe the methodology required to answer each question. See below for more guidance on developing resilience research and learning plans.

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO THE MEL PLAN

Standard Practices: MEL Plan (i.e., indicator plan exists)

Resilience Standard Practice: Resilience MEL (RMEL) Plan

Who: While a MEL manager at the central level typically leads this process, MEL (RMEL included) is everyone’s job, and most central level team members will weigh in on this process. Field team members at the subprogram level should be deeply familiar with this plan, even if they are hired after its creation. (Fig. 1)

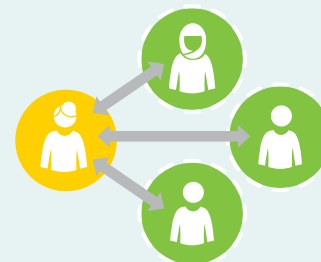


FIGURE 1

When: This process often occurs during set-up and is informed by the resilience pathways (i.e., resilience results chains) exercise. (Fig. 2)



FIGURE 2

SELECTING RESILIENCE INDICATORS

As discussed in Section 1.2, each level of the resilience pathway (e.g., wellbeing outcomes, resilience outcomes) corresponds to a result. Teams must assign an indicator to each of these results in order to ensure they can track progress toward the achievement of that result. However, indicators are usually identified in the proposal phase before the team has had the opportunity to articulate the program’s resilience logic through the resilience pathway process. To ensure the team can still integrate resilience indicators into the MEL plan, teams should follow the steps below:

- Map the existing indicators (from the proposal) to the results levels in the resilience pathways.
- Identify indicators that are not measuring any results in the resilience pathways and propose removal of these indicators from reporting requirements to donor (if possible).
- Identify results (from resilience pathway) not measured by existing indicators and propose the addition of new resilience indicators (to the indicator plan) for reporting and/or internal use.

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE RESEARCH AND LEARNING PLANS

Ideally, teams should develop resilience research and learning plans shortly after going through the resilience pathway process. The resilience pathways process will help to narrow the scope of the research and learning questions, ensuring teams are testing the most important assumptions and hypotheses in the program logic. In developing the plan, teams should engage a diverse range of program stakeholders, including country team leadership, program and MEL staff, partners, and program participants (if possible).

The resilience research and learning plan includes many of the same elements as a typical research and learning plan, including: research objectives that explain the overall research goal, how the research and learning plan relates to the program’s or portfolio’s theory of change, and what knowledge gaps the research and learning plan is addressing. The plan should also include a methodology strategy for each question, as well as a research uptake and learning strategy. Applying a resilience lens requires teams to ensure the research and learning plan also includes targeted research and learning questions and hypotheses that test key assumptions in the resilience pathway.

Resilience Intervention Participant Tracking System

Participant tracking helps the team understand who the program is reaching with interventions and activities. It also allows the team to track how participation in different interventions contributes to results in the resilience pathways. Resilience-focused programs typically implement interventions at multiple scales (e.g., individual, household, community, institution, market actor). Program participants also engage with a program through multiple activities, often across multiple interventions, and at different points throughout the program cycle. Because of this, teams must register participants on a rolling basis, give them unique identifiers and track these identifiers in a relational database that accounts for

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO THE PARTICIPANT TRACKING SYSTEM

Standard Practices: *Suggested: Participant Tracking System*

Resilience Standard Practice: *Resilience Intervention Participant Tracking System*

Who: *The MEL manager (central level) also typically leads this process with significant engagement from other team members at both central and field levels. (Fig. 3)*



FIGURE 3

When: *This process typically occurs during set-up, often in conjunction with the RMEL plan and risk-informed annual workplan. (Fig. 4)*



FIGURE 4

variation (i.e., engagement at different scales, engagement with different interventions, and engagement at different times).⁶ The program should procure participant tracking system software during the start-up phase, though system set-up may extend into implementation.

In addition to the normal identifiers (e.g., name, geographic location) recorded through participant tracking systems, recording participants’ sex and age is also a minimum standard. Teams should also collect data on participant characteristics that are related to vulnerability wherever possible. For example, a program might target smallholder farmers generally, but design specific activities for sub-groups such as land-poor farmers or young women agrovets. Including this information in participant tracking systems can set the team up to measure the success of resilience building among the most vulnerable groups.



Recurrent Monitoring Surveys & Resilience Baseline Survey

Large, multi-sector programs nearly always operate in highly dynamic contexts where target groups are vulnerable to shocks and stresses throughout the year. To measure resilience-building effectively in these contexts, programs often turn to recurrent monitoring surveys. An essential component of RMEL, these surveys follow the same households and/or individuals (although often a smaller sample size) to unpack the connections between frequent shocks or stresses, responses to them, and shifts in wellbeing.⁷ There are two typical recurrent monitoring survey (RMS) models: one where teams collect data in response to a shock, and a second which relies on data collection at regular intervals (e.g., dry or monsoon seasons) likely to coincide with shocks and stresses (e.g., flooding, landslides). Note that, in the absence of a shock or stress during the program, measuring the target group’s access to and use of resilience capacities will demonstrate participant’s “readiness” to respond. ([Guidance Note 6: Recurrent Monitoring Surveys](#) provides extensive background on RMS.)

In resilience-focused programs, the baseline survey—conducted during start-up—serves as the first round of data collection for RMS which follow the same individuals and households overtime. The baseline should be population-based and include a large enough sample size to compensate for uncertainty about the interventions in which households might ultimately participate. The baseline survey must also track how individuals and households respond to shocks and stresses as they are happening and how this impacts their wellbeing over time. Depending on the research and learning plan, programs may also need to identify and interview comparison households as part of the baseline survey planning. Ultimately, it is critical that teams plan and budget for subsequent surveys during start-up to ensure the program has these tools at their disposal during implementation.

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO RECURRENT MONITORING SURVEYS AND THE BASELINE SURVEY

Standard Practices: *Key program monitoring and evaluation events—at minimum, baseline, evaluation, and routine monitoring—have been carried out, and reports of these events exist*

Resilience Standard Practice: *Resilience Baseline Survey*

Who: *The MEL manager (central level) typically leads this process in conjunction with team members at both central and field levels. (Fig. 5)*



FIGURE 5

When: *This process typically occurs at the end of the set-up phase leading into (or at the beginning of) the implementation phase because it will inform monitoring and evaluation throughout the program. (Fig. 6)*



FIGURE 6

⁶ CommCare is the recommended digital data collection platform for tracking participants.

⁷ Scantlan, J., Sagara, B., Frankenberger, T., and Griffin, T. (2019). Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Note Series 6: Recurrent Monitoring Surveys. Washington, D.C.: The Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award.



WHAT DID THIS LOOK LIKE FOR PAHAL?

Resilience Recurrent Monitoring Surveys

As with many Food for Peace (FFP) programs, PAHAL conducted its baseline during the first year through a third party. This population-based baseline survey assessed key FFP and project indicators (including some resilience indicators) before implementation began. However, in year four, PAHAL went through a redesign process, integrating intervention approaches and reducing the number of communities the program targeted. With these changes, the 2015 baseline survey was no longer representative of the PAHAL participant population, nor did it include baseline measures for some of the new resilience indicators.

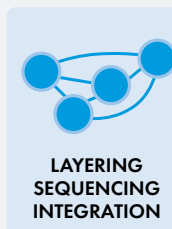
To ensure the program was still able to monitor progress in years four and five, PAHAL launched its recurrent monitoring surveys (RMS). The RMS included three rounds of data collection from 2018 to 2019, including data for all new (and relevant old) resilience indicators. Among these resilience indicators, PAHAL prioritized measures that would be easier for the team to track, understand, and reflect on. These rounds were timed with major shifts in seasons: during the dry season, before the monsoon (also the end of the dry season), and after the monsoon season. This allowed the team to monitor resilience capacity building around shocks and stresses that often spiked seasonally (e.g., higher frequency of flooding

and landslides during the monsoon season). Given the redesign in year four, the first round of data collection for the recurrent monitoring survey (in 2018) served as the new baseline measure against which PAHAL tracked its progress.

The Integration Monitoring Tool (IMT)

In year four, PAHAL created its Integration Monitoring Tool (IMT) to measure (through 14 indicators) how integrated its activities were, and whether this integration had an impact on resilience building. The team began the process with a series of participatory exercises, convening stakeholders (both community members and community user group leaders, all of whom were program participants) to discuss: 1) the shocks and stresses most impacting their communities, 2) how they address (currently or in the future) these shocks and stresses through user group activities, and 3) how they might rely on other groups in pursuing these activities and/or contribute to others' efforts.

These conversations ultimately surfaced points of mutual reliance and/or integration opportunities within communities. For example, stakeholders within a given community may determine that community



forest user groups can allocate land to landless or marginalized community members. Under this allocation, landless and marginalized community members could engage in economic activities (e.g., planting broom grass) on community land which serves the dual purpose of providing income and stabilizing the forest slopes, ultimately decreasing the likelihood of landslides. In this way the community forest user group, landless or marginalized community members, disaster risk committee members, and the farmers who work below the forest slopes (and were typically vulnerable to landslides) all had something to gain. Their communication, coordination, and collaboration increased their shared incentives, and ultimately strengthened the resilience-building potential of the activities. These integration points, characterized by mutual reliance and incentives among the parties, emerged naturally from discussion.

PAHAL teams and stakeholders shared their conversations with local government leaders, who helped to identify public sector contributions and served as the foundation for a ward level plan for coordinating activities around these integration points. Concurrently, the PAHAL monitoring and evaluation team used the outputs from these conversations to develop 14 high-priority measures of resilience-building integration (e.g., community forest user group allocates land for landless and marginalized individuals). District coordinators used these indicators (in the form of monthly self-evaluations) as well as the ward-level plans, to measure community progress toward integration of resilience-building activities, data which they subsequently used to inform review and reflection and adaptation of their work plans and activities.

Resilience Routine Monitoring System

The Recurrent Monitoring Survey (RMS) may not serve all data collection needs for monitoring. Because of this, teams should also develop routine monitoring tools that can collect data more frequently on activity and output-level results in the resilience pathways (e.g., indicators that measure early implementation of a given activity or intervention). For example, teams may want to track membership or recruitment rates to monitor early progress in the establishment of financial cooperatives. Teams should build resilience routine monitoring into annual and/or quarterly work plans. Ultimately, in allowing teams to observe systems dynamics on a regular basis, resilience routine monitoring can provide teams new ways to learn during day-to-day implementation which is critical for adaptive management. The program should begin establishing good routine monitoring practices during start-up and explain these efforts in the resilience MEL plan.

APPLYING A RESILIENCE LENS TO ROUTINE MONITORING

Standard Practices: Key program monitoring and evaluation events—at minimum, baseline, evaluation, and routine monitoring—have been carried out, and reports of these events exist

Resilience Standard Practice: Resilience Routine Monitoring System

Who: Team members at both central and field levels engage in routine monitoring, with field teams playing an especially critical role in regular data gathering and observation. (Fig. 7)

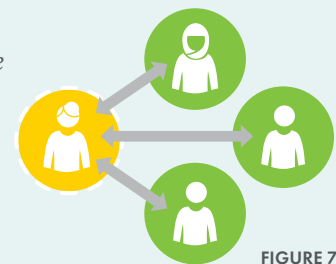


FIGURE 7

When: Teams should establish a robust system for resilience routine monitoring during program set-up, laying the groundwork for regular formal and informal data collection throughout implementation. (Fig. 8)



FIGURE 8

Regular Review and Reflection Meetings

RMEL standard practices—especially recurrent and routine monitoring—are critical to a team’s ability to manage the program adaptively within dynamic contexts. As illustrated in Figure 9, review and reflection meetings create a structure for teams to regularly pause, reflect, and synthesize both formal and informal observations and RMEL data, which they then translate into quarterly work plans (see Chapter 4) and annual work plans (see Chapter 3). Themes central to review and reflection meetings in resilience-focused programs include:

- Access to and use of resilience capacities:** It is critical for teams to reflect on data regarding whether participants are accessing and using resilience capacities (identified in the resilience pathways) to anticipate, prepare for, and/or respond to shocks and stresses on an ongoing basis. For example, were they able to easily access the resources critical to addressing shocks and stresses? Are they using the capacities in the way the team expected they would? If so, how, and if not, why? Are they using alternative strategies, and if so why?
- Integration, layering, and sequencing in strengthening resilience building:** How successfully (and intentionally) has the program layered and sequenced activities? For example, how well are systems actors working across multiple activities communicating, coordinating, and collaborating to layer and sequence their work with target groups? When a target group participates in multiple activities, do individuals and households have increased access to and the ability to use the resources they need to address a shock or stress? Does good communication and coordination among systems actors increase the effectiveness of activities (and interventions) in building resilience? Is the sequence of activities effective in, for example, transforming systemic constraints (e.g., social norms around caste) first to ensure a given group (e.g., traditionally lower-caste Dalits) has access to and can use resources critical to addressing a shock or stress?

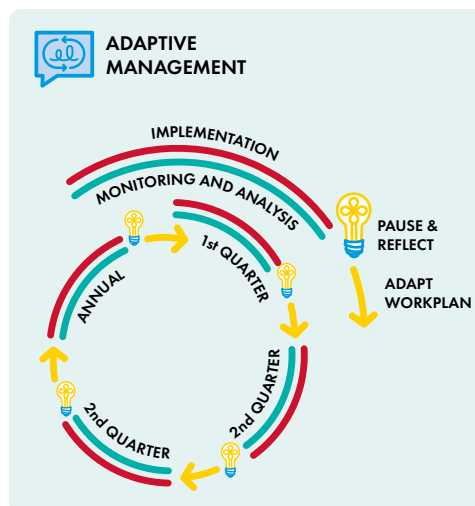
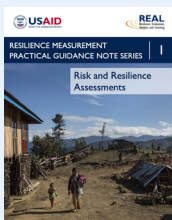


FIGURE 9



When coupled with RMEL standard practices, regular review and reflection meetings help foster a thriving culture of curiosity and learning where teams view day-to-day implementation activities as opportunities to observe, reflect, and learn what is working. Insights and lessons learned from review and reflection meetings should be documented and shared with program stakeholders; when appropriate, teams should also incorporate followup points into their quarterly workplans.

RESOURCES



Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Series:

- [Guidance Note 2: Measuring Shocks and Stresses](#)
- [Guidance Note 3: Resilience Capacity Measurement](#)
- [Guidance Note 4: Resilience Analysis](#)
- [Guidance Note 5: Design and Planning for Resilience Monitoring & Evaluation at the Activity Level](#)
- [Guidance Note 6: Recurrent Monitoring Surveys](#)

In translating technical processes into concrete guidance, the Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Note Series helps practitioners integrate key elements of resilience measurement at critical points during the program cycle. In six parts (Guidance Note 1 is not included here, but is referenced in Chapter 1), the series introduces key concepts and guides practitioners through the process of resilience measurement, from assessment to analysis. Ultimately, the series aims to support relevant stakeholders to:

- Understand and apply key principles and tools for resilience measurement, assessment, and analysis across various contexts and scales; and
- Use the data and evidence generated to inform program design (through both assessments and evaluations), and manage and adapt programs during implementation (through monitoring, evaluation, and learning).

Resilience Indicators

For a list of resilience-focused indicators, see Oxfam’s [resilience indicator search tool](#)⁸ and an [annex of example resilience indicators](#).⁹

8 Accessed at <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/kycat07zw36r3uw749fphg73q2vi9ixm>

9 Accessed at <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/vums5pwgu92sgmfdvsczkxwsvk8jaert>

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