



## Enhancing resilience to food and nutrition insecurity

### 1 The relevance of enhancing resilience for sustainable food and nutrition security

**Overlapping or recurring crises** jeopardise progress made in advancing development. Increasingly frequent extreme weather events (such as droughts or floods) that are triggered by climate change have a significant impact on people's food and nutrition security, as do violent conflict, epidemics and sharp spikes in food and energy prices. In fragile contexts, the effects of crises exacerbate already difficult living conditions and are the cause of the (renewed) rise in the number of people suffering from hunger and food and nutrition insecurity.

Food and nutrition insecurity is also often heightened by **permanent stresses** such as chronic water shortages, soil degradation, the loss of biodiversity, unresolved land issues, pollution, a lack of income opportunities, shortfalls in knowledge and unhealthy eating habits. The combination of complex risks and low resilience threatens livelihoods, exacerbates poverty and limits the development of entire societies.

To cope with often foreseeable food and nutrition crises in globalised food systems, it is therefore essential to build the **resilience capacities** of people, communities and societies in the long term. This goes well beyond the scope of acute humanitarian crisis response.

” *Being resilient means having options for protecting peoples' lives, livelihoods and future prospects in the face of crises. Peoples' capacity to act increases the more informed they are, the more diversified the options open to them and the stronger their capacities to use these options and the information available to them to help themselves.*

Resilience emphasises the ability of people and communities to dynamically and appropriately respond to, buffer against, and recover and learn from different acute crises and/or chronic stresses. Learning can mean that those affected and those responsible adapt to new, changed circumstances or that they change the structure of systems that are threatened by recurring crises. This also includes people and societies preparing themselves for recurring crises and increasing their **capacity to act**.



The focus here is on **four resilience capacities**: Anticipatory capacities, absorptive capacities, adaptive capacities and transformative capacities. Strong resilience capacities allow us to mitigate against the negative consequences of crises, transform them through structural change and therefore permanently overcome them. Unlike risk concepts, resilience concepts focus on the potential of people and systems.

Many approaches have already been successfully tested in the area of food and nutrition security, but it is only by linking measures from different sectors (agriculture, health, education and social protection) in a **multi-sectoral** approach with interventions at **different levels** (household, community, sub-national and national) that people's resilience to food and nutrition crises can be successfully strengthened.

## 2 Resilience analysis as a project design instrument

The resilience concept enables us to identify and strengthen the capacities that are already inherent in people and communities – or that are lacking and need to be strengthened – in order to overcome acute and recurring crises and chronic stresses, and that make local and national food and nutrition systems more resilient in the long term.

**In project design**, the objective of **resilience analysis** is to establish projects in fragile contexts in a way that takes account of risks and crises, so that the strengths, potentials and skills (resilience capacities) of vulnerable people and

decentralised and national structures are strengthened. A qualitative resilience analysis enables a comprehensive understanding of (i) existing risks and crises, (ii) the affected and responsible actors and structures and their inherent strengths, potentials and skills for dealing with and for preventing risks and crises, and (iii) the needs and opportunities to further strengthen these capacities. Measures to strengthen resilience are then operationalised in the given context, based on this analysis. Policy advice can be provided where required to assist in translating the findings of the analysis into political strategies and action plans.

### 3 Successful approach to building resilience to food and nutrition crises

GIZ's Global Programme on Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience adopts a multi-sectoral approach that has proven successful in strengthening the resilience of target groups to food and nutrition crises. Initial surveys conducted as part of standardised household interviews showed that the diet of women and their children who have been supported by the programme had improved significantly compared to those from similar households who have not. And although the overall food and nutrition situation has deteriorated in recent years due to an increasing number of multiple crises, the crucial aspect of diversity is better in the diet of the global programme's target groups than in households that received no support. This means that they are more resilient to food and nutrition crises.

The measures of the multi-sectoral, multi-level approach therefore aim to strengthen the different resilience capacities

**Anticipatory capacities** enable people to assess risks and reduce the probability of imminent crises occurring in the first place, e.g. by improving their ability to plan ahead and draw up emergency plans. Improved anticipatory capacities include early warning systems that provide people, communities and institutions with timely and relevant information about risks and anticipated crises so they can make informed decisions and take appropriate action to mitigate against the fallout. Appropriate laws and policy frameworks are required to reduce risk, as well as well-resourced crisis response plans that enable people, communities and authorities to work effectively should a crisis occur. Crisis-sensitive social protection mechanisms



of people, households and government institutions to food and nutrition crises. The following sections outline each of the four resilience capacities, illustrating them with concrete examples from the global programme's implementation.

are able to alleviate chronic stresses and cushion against acute crises. It is also important to build up reserves in a targeted manner to provide for people in times of crisis. Supporting good governance at all levels – supranational, national, sub national and local – is crucial.

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” *Through advice to savings groups, the programme helps women in Togo to build up modest reserves to cushion them in times of need or to make small-scale investments in agricultural activities or other income-generating measures. This allows them to diversify and improve their sources of income. The groups receive training in self-administration and the basic financial literacy, they get connected with microfinance institutions and receive advice on how to open and manage savings accounts.*

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**Absorptive capacities** enable people affected by acute crises to satisfy their basic needs and ensure that important sub-national structures remain operational. They enable the use of individual and collective reserves, social protection programmes, temporary cash and food transfers, collective loan and savings schemes and insurance. They allow households to meet their quantitative and qualitative food and nutrition needs and cover important expenses during and in the wake of a crisis, without jeopardising their livelihoods. Absorption includes systems to protect natural

resources (such as soil and forests), physical infrastructure (such as houses, roads, paths and water systems), and health and education facilities.

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” *To facilitate a quick response to specific food shortages in the wake of the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine, the programme provided cash transfers to support vulnerable households in Malawi, combined with advice on climate-smart agriculture (Cash+). This helps to ensure that households facing specific crisis situations do not have to adopt coping strategies that jeopardise their long-term livelihoods.*

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**Adaptive capacities** enable people to adjust to long-term changes and modify their livelihoods accordingly, and provide additional positive options for action. Capacities are strengthened primarily through newly acquired knowledge and skills that enable people and communities to make their livelihoods more resilient to crises. As regards food and nutrition security, the development of capacities for diversifying food crops, establishing small scale and community gardens, increasing the efficiency of irrigated agriculture, and for storing, processing and preserving food is particularly relevant. The introduction of technological and social innovations (such as adapted seed varieties, climate-smart and resource-saving agricultural practices) and

the development of new forms of partnerships can play a role in successfully adapting to living conditions that have been changed by crises and risks. These strategies enable people to switch to livelihoods that are less prone to crisis and tap into new sources of income.

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” *In the Indian district of Sheopur (in the state of Madhya Pradesh), which has been hit by increasing and prolonged droughts, people in the communities supported by the programme have started to dry produce from their vegetable gardens (vegetables and seeds) and store it over long periods. They now also use drought-resistant and seasonally adapted seeds, enabling them to produce vegetables twice a year (also using greywater for irrigation).*

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**Transformative capacities** enable people to analyse the underlying causes of crises and the resulting negative impacts, and to accelerate structural change to create sustainable, more resilient livelihoods. This may involve a fundamental shift in the political, economic and socio-cultural structures that cause and sustain food and nutrition insecurity and poverty. To support the change, context-specific food and nutrition security approaches must be anchored in decentralised and national structures. Appropriate multi-sectoral coordination mechanisms, cross-sectoral budgeting of activities related to food and nutrition, the development and implementation of strategies to improve nutrition and the dissemination of related skills should be supported. The successful transformation of food and nutrition systems is closely linked to a change in social values, for example with regard to power structures in the household,

in communities and at the institutional level, in terms of the organisation of work and the distribution and control of resources. Participatory and inclusive approaches are therefore key. They support ownership, responsibility and commitment and present realistic options for action..

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” Mali has been part of the AGIR Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative, which strengthens resilience in the Sahel, since 2012. All AGIR member countries define a national resilience strategy for policy making, structured along the four pillars of social protection, food and nutrition, food production and income generation, and governance. Mali adopted its national strategy in 2020. Like the social protection and the nutrition policies, the resilience strategy comes under the umbrella of Mali’s food and nutrition security policy. The global programme supports Mali’s Government in operationalising the resilience strategy and ensuring that it is coherent with the relevant policies mentioned above. In the medium to long term, this is expected to transform the food and resilience systems.

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It is important to understand that simply increasing food production, for example, will not necessarily lead to better nutrition. Knowledge transfer alone will also not automatically change eating habits. Resilience to food and nutrition insecurity can only be successfully strengthened if different sectors and hierarchical levels work together in a well-coordinated and targeted manner. Accompanying social

protection programmes can increase the effectiveness of the approach in terms of reliably absorbing shocks in the event of a crisis. To reduce vulnerability to food and nutrition crises in the long term, food and nutrition systems need to be transformed to provide reliable and sustainable support structures.

#### Further links

BMZ 2021, Resilience analyses  
GIZ 2019, Multi-Country Resilience Study  
OECD 2014, Guidelines for Resilience Systems Analysis

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Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+36 53113 Bonn, Germany T +49 228 44 60-0 F +49 228 44 60-17 66	Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5 65760 Eschborn, Germany T +49 61 96 79-0 F +49 61 96 79-11 15
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E [info@giz.de](mailto:info@giz.de)  
I [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

**Programme:**  
Global Programme Food and Nutrition Security,  
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**Author:**  
Barbara Abbentheren

**Responsible:**  
Claudia Lormann-Nsengiyumva, Maren Lieberum, Asha Stindl, GIZ

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