Building Resilience to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) is the biggest global effort to build resilience locally, in highly vulnerable places. After three years of implementation, the programme was extended by a further 18 months (BRACED-X) to build on results and work towards sustained outcomes. We have synthesised the evidence from the final evaluations of nine projects, looking across a range of contexts, to understand how resilience is being built on the ground.

Resilience Results: Building resilience through the BRACED-X projects

Resilience is the ability to anticipate, avoid, plan for, cope with, recover from and adapt to (climate-related) shocks and stresses. This lays the foundations for transformation and transformative change - fundamental changes to systems, institutions and the 'rules of the game'.

Projects have built individual and household resilience, carrying out a combination of activities to support different points in pathways towards change

- The projects continued to influence contexts to create conditions for change. For example, addressing food insecurity means people have resources to invest in resilience-strengthening activities. Providing services to meet basic needs, such as the provision of clean water, frees up time for people to invest in productive activities. 'Time-saving' acts as a mechanism for further change and therefore is part of the whole process of building and strengthening resilience.

- Access to appropriate financial services was a key building block on the pathway to resilience in a range of contexts, helping to diversify income-generating activities. This relies strongly on people trusting formal and informal financial institutions (such savings groups and insurance providers). Market development also paid a vital role in making sure there were opportunities to increase incomes.

Forging links and relationships between key national-level stakeholders and institutions foster a more sustainable environment to support resilience policy-making

- Linking across institutions from local to national levels helps bring local knowledge into decision-making. In some cases, this changed the mindsets of national policy-makers and key decision-makers about issues like pastoralism and cross-border mobility; motivating them to make resilience-building changes to policy and implementation processes.

- Interventions that spoke directly to stakeholders' needs were perceived as valid, created new partnerships and allowed changes to be made to the way things are done. This helped lay solid foundations for further change and sustainability.

Building capacities of women can improve their status, but transformation needs power shifts

- Where projects increased women's income, women also gained control over some elements of household decision-making, such as deciding how income is spent, signalling small shifts to gendered norms at household level.

- Success in gender and inclusion requires shifts in power for more transformative change in gendered power structures.

Developing and strengthening institutions for climate information has great potential to build resilience, but this takes time

- Achievements have been made in establishing structures for disseminating climate information, for example through community groups or radio. The impacts of this on resilience will emerge only over time.
- Access to information needs to be sustained beyond the life of projects, both to engender trust and to ensure resilience in the longer term.

Responding to need mobilises stakeholders, but it is not always clear whether 'needs' match what is required to build resilience

- Interventions at the community level largely work to shore up and improve strategies reliant on natural resources and vulnerable to climate risk. There is some evidence of fundamental differences to the way people are earning incomes, through diversified livelihood activities in sectors with much improved market connections. For example, value chain support for essential oil in Nepal and camel milk in Kenya means these activities are now a viable source of income.
- However, it is not evident how sustainable outcomes would be in the face of longer-term, changing climate-related risks and opportunities, or whether diversification is adaptive enough to be resilient.

What difference has BRACED-X made?

More time provides more opportunity to appropriately link and sequence activities

- Longer 'timeframes' due to the programme extension provided important, additional space and time to sequence and stage activities effectively. For example, there is evidence that access to financial services needs to go hand-in-hand with interventions directly supporting productive activities, so that people are supported and ready to invest in activities that work.
- Projects need to change the context within which they are operating – creating an 'enabling environment' for change to happen – for example through building trust or addressing food security concerns. We also see this in the outcomes that act as mechanisms for further change. For example, a number of projects dealt with basic needs before moving on to a more commercially-oriented focus.
- Resilience is therefore about creating the key elements in the change pathways, as well as the links between them: the outputs, intermediate outcomes and processes that take us closer towards resilience outcomes.

Working with 'champions' and policy moments gets resilience on the agenda

- Work to bring about policy change emphasises the importance of champions (both local and national), for gaining access to policy arenas and a 'space at the table'. Projects need to identify and work with the right people within and outside national institutions: those with the mandate and resources to deliver change. This was particularly effective when working with credible and respected higher-level formal institutions (such as meteorological services, academic institutions, relevant ministries) with recognised expertise and a 'presence', including secondments between projects and relevant institutions.
- Influencing and advocacy play a strong role in creating action, especially at higher institutional levels, working to align climate concerns with existing policy needs and demands to generate/internalise the need for change among the key actors.

- Tapping into windows of opportunity or policy 'moments' increased the likelihood of timely policy changes in favour of local community resilience. A synthesis of the experience of the five policy IPs shows the importance of making connections between the local and higher institutional levels in order to demonstrate the value of local knowledge for decision-making processes. BRACED-X offered the opportunity to invest more time in building relationships with key regional and national actors, as an important springboard for further change.

Transformational change relies on resilience-building actions instigated by the projects being embedded and internalised within local and national processes.

- Impressive progress was made during BRACED-X to secure the foundations for transformational change. These foundations lie with changes in mindset, political will and commitment to taking the actions necessary to build and support adaptation and resilience. It also needs sustained capabilities and resources to see things through.
- Challenges remain. Examples include social norms that continue to exclude women from important decision-making and priority-setting processes and continued mistrust in formal institutions by marginalised people (and vice versa) that prevent systemic change in marginalised people's access and inclusion. These ultimately hinder resilience.
- Resilience building programmes need to be able to drill down into and overcome barriers entrenched within systems to bring about transformational change. This means, fundamentally, that programmes need to understand the context at a highly sophisticated level.

Realist Evaluation Approach

We supported the projects to use a realist approach while collecting their final evaluation data, and in their analysis, to help us answer the synthesis question:
What difference did BRACED-X make, how, why, for whom and in what circumstances? In realist evaluation, context is understood as the most important influence on whether an intervention succeeds in activating a change process (often referred to as a 'mechanism') that will cause an outcome. Causation in realist evaluation therefore rests on understanding the influence of context on 'mechanisms' and outcomes, as well as the mechanisms themselves.

For more detail about the learning from the BRACED extension final evaluation, see Resilience Results:

BRACED extension final evaluation – synthesis paper
Leavy J., Sladkova B., Hepworth C., and M. Punton (2019)
'Resilience Results BRACED Extension Final Evaluation'.
BRACED Knowledge Manager Synthesis Report. Brighton Itad.

BRACED-X Projects, Main Implementing Partner and Country Focus

Anukulan-X
IDE (International
Development Enterprises)
Nepal

CMESA-E
Christian Aid
Ethiopia

MAR-X
Farm Africa
Ethiopia

PROGRESS-X
Mercy Corps
Kenya & Uganda

WYL (Ric4Rec)
Blumont –IRD (International
Relief and Development)
Mali

SUR1M-X
CRS (Catholic Relief Services)
Niger & Mali

DCF
NEF (Near East Foundation)
Mali & Senegal

BRES-X
WHH (WeltHungerHilfe)
Burkina Faso

BRACED-X-LM
AFL (Acting For Life)
Senegal, Niger, Mauritania,
Mali, Burkina Faso