

Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) is the one of the biggest global efforts to build resilience locally, in highly vulnerable places, yet at scale. After four years of implementation, the BRACED Knowledge Manager has collated and synthesised evidence from project monitoring reports and four case studies, to understand how resilience has been built on the ground after an 18-month extension, referred to as BRACED-X.

What does the evidence tell us about resilience?



Sustainability, in resilience terms, is about the ability to adapt as things change. The uncertainty that comes with climatic change and extremes challenges the extent to which choices made today can reduce or exacerbate current or future vulnerability and facilitate or constrain future responses. Hence programmes need to think of sustainability beyond the continuity of activities and benefits, to the ability of people and institutions to positively adapt to an uncertain future.



Transformational approaches are not optional; they are fundamental to strengthening resilience.

To move beyond incremental changes in people's resilience, to support a more radical reduction in vulnerability, resilience programming has to tackle inequality directly as a central component of project design. Keeping gender and other forms of inequality an add-on criterion, targeted through blanket assessments of vulnerability and 'quick win' activities, is inadequate. Delivering adaptive capacity outcomes in the long term may also fall short if focus remains on activities, rather than on the linkages and processes that are critical to enable resilience as well.



Beyond policy content, it is the timing and sequencing of policy engagement work at multiple scales that is critical. If investments are to be sustained through policy change, a focus on knowledge-building amongst policy actors alone will not lead to substantially improved policies that benefit those at risk from climate shocks and stresses. Enacting policy change requires longer term engagement, driven simultaneously from the 'bottom up' and 'top down', with relevant, influential actors to be involved in supporting the process. Policy change must also be supported by a shift in attitudes of policy makers towards the needs and capacities of marginalised people and the inequitable structures that underpin their vulnerability.



Higher degrees of flexibility are needed both in the design and management of resilience programmes. Conventional project designs and contracts limit the scope for adaptive management that is critical for resilience programming. Making tactical tweaks for course correction in the short term is not enough. The technical elements of working in complex environments and issues around risk, failure and trust inherent in adaptive and resilient processes need to be embraced.



Phased approaches that layer and link processes and interventions across timeframes and scales should guide the way forward. A better consideration of timing, than just duration of programmes alone, is vital for projects to work in ways that support resilience. Ability to align with cycles of agriculture, or government planning processes that projects try to affect, and learn from experience and failure over time, can help improve project impact. A phased approach also re-focuses measurement from tracking and achieving activities and outcomes over a short period, to assessing the processes of change that interact to confer resilience and lay a foundation for sustainability longer term.

Implications for future resilience programmes



Sustainability requires a strategic focus from project design, with a clear definition from the outset. As such, more attention on social processes and types of thinking, behaviours or trust, through which durable changes are to be realised over time is needed. Resilience projects must be designed with both short- and long-term objectives and vision in mind, regardless of the duration. Donors could consider building 'sustainability funds.' This will enable projects that implement interventions with demonstrable impact, particularly to 'leave no one behind', to be continued while pursuing more robust transition, that will not leave resilience gains exposed. Plans should include coherent strategies and partnerships that support this, and, where appropriate, link results with subnational policies and national plans.



A transformative agenda must start 'within' donor agencies and organisations, with programmes to be much more precise on the role of gender, marginalisation and inequality in achieving (or preventing) resilient communities. Project design needs to include a combination of activities and strategies to tackle the root causes of social exclusion and inequality from the start. Gender and power analyses are required to identify and develop approaches to engage socially marginalised groups, which should also include consideration of disability, ethnicity and other types of diversity. Realistic timeframes about what can be achieved, and at what scale, within existing levels of funding and resources must be set. Specific budgets for social equality and inclusion should be allocated to support specific change pathways towards these objectives, with resilience programmes to allocate extra resources to ensure remote and underserved populations are effectively reached.



Working at multiple scales, resilience programmes should fund projects that develop a phased strategy for building resilience through policy, that includes both bottom-up community-level investments and top-down institutional change. Bottom-up investments are key for building credibility and legitimacy and for generating policy-relevant evidence, which can be leveraged to facilitate policy change. This needs to be considered and built in at design stage with work at different scales, not conducted in silos, but mutually reinforcing. Nested theories of change that are linked via policy change pathways between levels may be a useful way to ensure there is a link between them. As policy outcomes can also be subject to the vagaries of political change, particularly in the contexts in which BRACED has operated, a higher tolerance for risk of failure is necessary than is perhaps the norm for official development assistance funders.



Programmes need to balance rigour and accountability with agility and responsiveness to complexity that adaptive programming in contexts of resilience requires. This could mean, for example, that donor organisations should promote flexible reporting templates and timelines, freedom to reallocate funding and update budgets within a certain threshold and the ability to make decisions swiftly based on action, experimentation and rapid evaluation. In addition, donors must ensure investment in creating and enabling ongoing space for structured reflection and learning. This is to help partners deliberate, think creatively and use lessons learnt to feedback into and inform planning and strategic direction.



Donors need to reconsider conventional funding and implementation cycles and move towards phased approaches, as a reassessment of existing practice is needed. Practitioners and donors should adjust to a rolling planning mechanism, over longer timeframes and move away from shorter term project cycles. Reviews at the end of each phase would inform the next, together with active learning cycles, with identification of measurable actions to provide focus and direction. Rolling plans are to be reflected in budgetary procedures, with different accounting systems than those used in more conventional programmes to be potentially explored. Project managers should take the time to tailor their practices to best fit the needs of a phased approach, with Monitoring & Evaluation approaches to be designed around the phased project cycle, with ability to grow and evolve over time as projects develop.

