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# RESILIENCE MEASUREMENT PRACTICAL GUIDANCE NOTE SERIES

## An Overview



### About the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award:

REAL is a consortium-led effort funded by the USAID Center for Resilience. It was established to respond to growing demand among USAID Missions, host governments, implementing organizations, and other key stakeholders for rigorous, yet practical, monitoring, evaluation, strategic analysis, and capacity building support. Led by Save the Children, REAL draws on the expertise of its partners: Food for the Hungry, Mercy Corps, and TANGO International.

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## Background and Rationale for a Guidance Series

Resilience is a compelling concept for development assistance and humanitarian actors because it highlights the positive capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and recover from shocks and stressors to prevent households and communities from suffering long-term adverse consequences. Moreover, applying a resilience lens to program strategy and design has the potential to reduce humanitarian need and protect development gains for populations experiencing recurrent crises, as well as foster sustainable escapes from poverty. The increased investment in resilience as a programming approach has sparked a great need for resilience measurement approaches that present rigorous, yet practical, methods for assessments, monitoring and evaluation. Resilience measurement efforts are essential to generate the knowledge necessary to foster learning, and ultimately, to improve development and humanitarian assistance outcomes. Specifically, there are two main knowledge needs:

- 1) To better assess and understand what contributes to resilience – i.e. why some households, communities, and systems fare better than others in the face of shocks and stresses
- 2) To evaluate the impacts of interventions focused on resilience to understand what works, for whom, and under what conditions

USAID's Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance series synthesizes existing technical documents into pragmatic "how to" guidance needed by practitioners to integrate core aspects of resilience measurement into their program assessments, design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning. This overview document lays out the background and purpose of the Guidance Note (GN) series, introduces core concepts, and previews the content of the Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance series. The series is an important component of a larger suite of efforts focused on building capacity for resilience measurement, including existing USAID resilience training courses, such as the Introduction to Resilience at USAID and Beyond<sup>1</sup>, training events, field support, webinars, and a forthcoming e-learning series from USAID's Center for Resilience.

The GN series builds on the strong foundations of the rapid and still growing knowledge base on resilience measurement done to date. As this body of knowledge evolves, This guidance series will be regularly updated as living documents. Box I below provides a sample of frequently cited resources that provide some context for this Guidance Note series. These resources illustrate the diversity of thought leadership in this field, including academics, research institutes, donors, implementing agencies, and consortia of all of the above. These resources also provide some indication of how the field has evolved over time, from largely independent primary research to concept notes and technical guidance. This Guidance Note series goes one step further by drawing on this body of literature to put technical guidance into practice.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://agrilinks.org/training/introduction-resilience-usaid-and-beyond>

## **Box I: Select Resilience Measurement Approaches and Applications**

### **Technical Notes and Working Papers:**

- Béné's "[Towards a quantifiable measure of resilience](#)" (IDS)
- Conostas and Barrett's "[Principles of Resilience Measurement for Food Insecurity: Metrics, Mechanisms, and Implementation Issues](#)" (Cornell)
- The Resilience Measurement Technical Working Group's [Technical Notes Series I-7](#) (FSIN)
- Béné, Frankenberger and Nelson's "[Design, Monitoring and Evaluation of Resilience Interventions: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations](#)" (IDS)
- FAO's [Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis Approach](#)
- Mercy Corps' [Urban Resilience Measurement: An Approach Guide and Training Curriculum](#), prepared for USAID

### **Primary Research:**

- Alinovi, D'Errico, Mane, and Romano's "[Livelihoods strategies and household resilience to food insecurity: An empirical analysis to Kenya](#)" (FAO)
- Vaitla, Tesfay, Rounseville, and Maxwell's "[Resilience and Livelihoods Change in Tigray, Ethiopia](#)" (Feinstein International Center, Tufts)
- Petryniak, Kurtz, and Frischknecht's "[What's Next for Nepal? Evidence of what matters for building resilience after the Gorkha earthquake](#)" (Mercy Corps)
- Smith, Frankenberger, Langworthy, Martin, Spangler, Nelson, and Downen's "[Ethiopia Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion \(PRIME\) Project Impact Evaluation Baseline Survey Report](#)" (TANGO International)

## **Purpose, Users, and Learning Objectives**

The purpose of the Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Series is to develop resilience measurement expertise through brief and practical guidance materials. To start, Guidance Notes will be developed around the following topics:<sup>2</sup>

1. How to Assess Resilience
2. How to Understand & Measure Shocks & Stresses
3. How to Understand & Measure Resilience Capacities
4. How to Conduct and Interpret Resilience Analyses

This guidance series provides an introduction to, and foundational understanding of, these resilience measurement topics. The Guidance Notes is concise, intuitive and resource-rich documents no longer than ten pages, with each GN's topics related to others across the series. As such, these

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<sup>2</sup> Additional guidance on measuring resilience across/between scales and project monitoring and evaluation are currently under consideration for development, this overview only describes guidance notes confirmed for production in 2017.

guidance pieces are not lengthy and dense technical notes; instead, they synthesize core concepts and provide a robust list of resources for users seeking details that are more technical.

The intended users of this series are staff from USAID Missions, implementing partners and other field practitioners, and host governments. The Guidance Notes will include content relevant for senior leadership, program managers, field practitioners and monitoring and evaluation specialists, among others. Additional resources will be provided for experts who are looking for more technical materials on resilience measurement.

The objectives across the Resilience Measurement Practical Guidance Series are to support relevant stakeholders to:

1. Understand and apply key principles and tools for resilience measurement, assessment and analysis across various contexts and scales; and
2. 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).

The following section provides an introduction to the resilience measurement conceptual framework, within which the core concepts and application of each of the Guidance Notes are designed.

## Resilience Measurement Conceptual Framework

USAID defines resilience as “the ability of people, households, communities, countries and systems to mitigate, adapt to and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.”<sup>3</sup> Fundamental to this definition is that resilience is shaped by a set of capacities that enable people to absorb and recover from shocks and stresses, while adapting and transforming their communities and livelihoods to withstand future events. Important to measuring resilience is that these capacities are used in the face of shocks and stresses, and measured against well-being and other core development outcomes of interest. Components of a resilience analysis are described below and visualized in Figure 1.

1. **Capacities** that people, groups, or systems draw on to manage or adapt to shocks and stressors – such as livelihood opportunities, social networks, or access to and use of essential services.
2. **Shocks and stresses** that individuals, households, communities or systems are exposed to – such as droughts, conflict, food-price spikes, or illness.
3. **Development (or well-being) outcomes**, such as food security, improved health or reduced poverty that people seek to maintain or quickly recover when faced with a shock or stress.

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<sup>3</sup> USAID Resilience Fact Sheet. <https://scms.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/06.30.2015%20-%20Resilience%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf> Accessed Dec. 6, 2016.

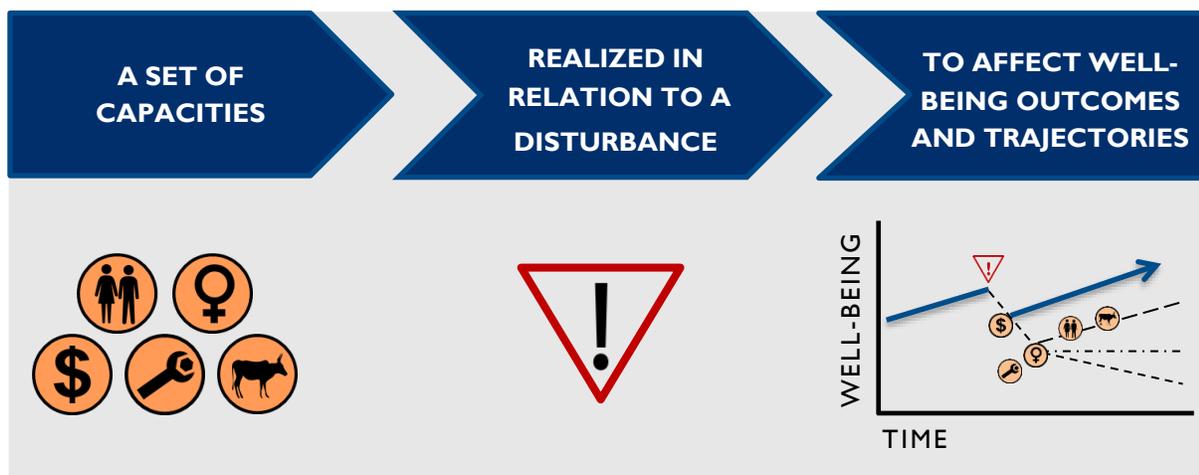
**Figure 1: Simplified Resilience Measurement Framework.**

Figure 1, adapted from Mercy Corps' resilience framework, illustrates how resilience capacities, when measured in connection with a shock or stress, can help us understand programs' impacts upon development and well-being outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Measuring resilience is different from measurement of other program objectives or concepts in several key ways. As such, the Guidance Notes will be grounded in the following core concepts:

### **Concept 1: Resilience Demands a Contextualized, Systems Approach**

Resilience measurement requires understanding the dynamic, complex and interrelated social, ecological, political, and economic systems within which communities exist. As such, practitioners will need to appropriately identify, understand, measure and address the specific shocks, stresses and resilience capacities across and within systems.

### **Concept 2: Resilience is Not an End**

Typically, when evaluating impact changes in well-being and development outcomes (such as poverty, nutritional status, educational attainment, or health) are tracked over time. Resilience, in contrast, is not a well-being outcome in and of itself. Rather, resilience is an ability, driven by certain capacities, that shapes how and why outcomes change over time, specifically in the face of shocks and stresses.

### **Concept 3: Resilience as a Set of Capacities and Responses**

Operationally, sources of resilience are captured by the context-specific capacities and responses that individuals, households, and communities use in the face of shocks and stresses. Resilience capacities are resources, strategies, and behaviors that include:

- proactive actions taken in advance of a crisis to help mitigate its effect (*adaptive capacities*),
- strategies taken in the midst of a crisis to manage it when it occurs (*absorptive capacities*), and
- fundamental shifts to the enabling environments for individuals, households and communities to strengthen social, environmental and economic systems in the face of shocks and stresses (*transformative capacities*).

<sup>4</sup> Adapted Mercy Corps' Resilience Framework presented in: *Our Resilience Approach to relief, recovery and development*. Mercy Corps (2016)

## Concept 4: Measuring Resilience is a Long-term Commitment

Programmatically, strengthening resilience is a long-term commitment that cannot be achieved within a single project cycle; it must be a coordinated effort across a portfolio of activities spanning multiple project cycles. Resilience measurement efforts must therefore respond to this programmatic demand by making analyses both holistic and context-specific within and beyond project timelines. To this end, resilience measurement captures dynamics between shocks, responses, and effects over time, ideally across multiple scales of analysis (individual, household, community, etc.).

### Guiding Questions for a Resilience Measurement Process

Resilience measurement should aim to develop in-depth understanding of the complex risk environments in which we operate, as well as the factors that help individuals, households and communities manage and adapt to risk. To that end, there are five critical guiding questions that facilitate resilience measurement across assessment, monitoring and evaluation:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Resilience for Whom?*: The target populations and their attributes that include location (urban, peri-urban, rural), demographic factors (sex, age, ethnicity) and livelihood (agriculture, trade, unskilled labor).
2. *Resilience of What?*: The enabling environment, including formal and informal institutions, infrastructure, social, ecological and economic factors that impact the target population's ability to anticipate, absorb and adapt to risks.
3. *Resilience to What?*: The complex and compounding shocks and stresses that impact people's capacities to achieve development outcomes.
4. *Resilience Through What?*: The absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities that strengthen the ability of target populations to mitigate risk.
5. *Resilience to What End?*: The primary wellbeing or development outcomes for which we want to build resilience.

Each of these questions frame the content for the series of Guidance Notes.

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<sup>5</sup> Mercy Corps (n.d.) The STRESS Process at Mercy Corps. Retrieved from: [https://d2zyf8ayvg1369.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/STRESS\\_Doc\\_R7%20%28I%29.pdf](https://d2zyf8ayvg1369.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/STRESS_Doc_R7%20%28I%29.pdf)



## 1. Risk and Resilience Assessments

The first guidance note explains the process of a resilience assessment and provides guidance on how to:

- Design a resilience assessment process that informs and guides strategy development
- Operationalize the resilience assessment process
- Understand how to apply the outputs; i.e., how an assessment leads to doing work differently

## 2. Shocks and Stresses Measurement

The second guidance note explores the concepts of shocks and stresses, enabling practitioners to:

- Define and describe the major shocks and stresses in a program context (understand scale, frequency, etc.)
- Identify data sources/indicators to measure these shocks and stresses and describe how this data will be analyzed
- Understand how to incorporate such data into program design and adaptive project management

## 3. Resilience Capacities Measurement

The third guidance note offers guidance on adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capacities on how to:

- Understand the role of resilience capacities as part of a resilience Theory of Change
- Define context-relevant resilience capacities
- Identify indicators and data sources for measuring resilience capacities, and when and how to collect data

## 4. Resilience Analysis

The fourth guidance note supports practitioners to analyze resilience data, guiding them on how to:

- Define and prioritize analysis objectives (e.g., hypotheses or questions) that are testable and answerable through resilience analysis
- Understand the main analytical approaches used in resilience analysis including when and why to use them (e.g., what type of questions they can answer, what users can infer)
- Understand how to interpret and synthesize data in a way that informs and guides program design and adaptation

## 5. Resilience Measurement Design and Planning at the Activity Level

The fifth guidance note focuses on monitoring and evaluating resilience in the field, specifically on how to:

- Integrate resilience measurement into activity M&E plans based on activity size, scope, and complexity
- Understand when and what to monitor/evaluate for resilience programming in the context of a shock or stress; as well as in the absence of a shock or stress
- Select, adapt, or develop indicative questions, tools, and methodologies for monitoring and evaluating resilience based on the resources available

All the Guidance Notes can be downloaded from the REAL webpage at: [www.fsnnetwork.org/REAL](http://www.fsnnetwork.org/REAL)