

Nutrition & Resilience

*Nutrition as an input to and an outcome of resilience*

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| Resilience is defined as the ability of children, communities and systems to withstand, anticipate, prevent, adapt and recover from stresses and shocks, advancing the rights of every child, with special attention to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.[[1]](#footnote-2) |

## Why do nutrition and resilience matter to each other?

Shocks and crises have increased both in frequency and intensity in recent years.[[2]](#footnote-3) The most significant increases have been in Sub-Saharan Africa – where the number of disasters per year more than doubled between 1990 and 2012 – and Asia, the world’s most disaster-prone region. Crisis-prone countries are often those with the highest prevalence of under-nutrition in young children[[3]](#footnote-4). Crises have a negative impact on nutrition outcomes while under-nutrition increases people’s vulnerabilities and undermine their inabilities to bounce back after periods of adversity. In other words resilience is necessary to prevent further deterioration of the nutritional status of crisis-affected populations and nutrition is a critical prerequisite to strengthen both community and individual resilience. They mutually re-enforce each other.

## What does resilience mean programmatically?

While improving nutrition in high burden and high risk areas should be central to resilience which requires a multi-sectoral approach, programs and strategies aiming to address and prevent under-nutrition should also have a resilience focus through being risk-informed.

Improving nutrition in crisis-prone areas will only be possible through a multi-sectoral approach. Humanitarian and development actors need to better work together to address underlying causes of under-nutrition through preventive and curative interventions. Resilience requires that such interventions be implemented before, during and after a crisis. Under-nutrition cannot be addressed in only a vertical manner or in a manner that merely addresses immediate underlying causes of under-nutrition. This has too often been the case in humanitarian situations. The continuum of care between prevention and treatment, short term and long term actions as well as humanitarian and development is critical.

In addition, nutrition programs and strategies need to have a resilience focus by being risk-informed. A better analysis of risks at community and system levels will help guide action to build capacities to adopt adequate and timely strategies, based on magnitudes of stress. These capacities can be classified into 3 dimensions (Bene et al, 2012): a) Absorptive capacity: households, communities and systems protect themselves from shocks and mitigate the impact on their lifestyle; b) Adaptive capacity: gradual adjustment of lifestyles and systems to the effects of stress or shock so as to be less vulnerable in the future; c) Transformative capacity: the capacity or ability to create a new system or change lifestyles when conditions require permanently adapting to a new or changing environment. Better risk analysis at the program design and monitoring phases will also ensure that programs are flexible and adaptable, in order to respond to changing and increasing needs during crises.

## What do we need to do?

Strengthening resilience is not about developing new, stand-alone projects. It is about developing better programs, strategies and policies that will bring humanitarian and development actors together, and bringing concepts of resilience into each step of program design and delivery resulting in a holistic approach.

### At situation analysis level:

* **Analysis of risks and causes of under-nutrition**. Strengthen risk and vulnerability analysis before developing or reviewing program strategies. Such analyses should look at: causes of under-nutrition; levels of capacities and assets (types of livelihoods, nutrition and health status, infrastructure, social services); types of shocks and stressors; potential impact and opportunities for response (mitigation, coping, adaptation strategies) at household, community and system level. Such analyses could be disaggregated by livelihood groups or other social categories and should take into account seasonality to improve on context- and population-specific interventions.
* **Information and early warning systems**. Integrate nutrition in food and agriculture information systems to better monitor threats and analyze situations. Strengthen early warning systems by incorporating indicators such as food consumption patterns. Such indicators will help to detect potential for deterioration in nutritional status in their early stages and define triggers that will help scale-up support and intervention.

### At program design and implementation level:

* **Program that aim to build both the nutrition and resilience of populations in crisis-prone areas**. Program design and strategies should be based on risk analysis and help communities and countries better withstand, anticipate, prevent, adapt and recover from stresses and shocks. In addition, programs in high risk areas need to address issues of under-nutrition in a holistic manner, through the scale-up of high impact nutrition interventions *at all times*.
* **Flexible programs**. Programs must be flexible to adjust to increasing scale and type of needs during crises. Program objectives should incorporate building long-term beneficial assets in normal times, but should also incorporate financial and operational flexibility to allow programs to switch quickly to relief operations when shocks hit.
* **Strengthening national institutions and service delivery systems and empowering communities**: Interventions should be designed and implemented with and through national institutions with strong participation from local populations and CSOs, to support their integration and sustainability. This could entail, for example, integrating the management of acute malnutrition in public health services and of nutrition-sensitive agricultural interventions in extension systems.
* **Monitoring nutritional impact**: Nutritional impact of programs that aim to strengthen resilience should be monitored and evaluated, using indicators of food consumption, nutritional outcomes, and key risk factors for under-nutrition in children (e.g. feeding and caring practices).

### At policy level:

* **Legislative and policy environments** should be strengthened to ensure that nutritional considerations are fully taken into account in developing resilience-focused programs and coordination frameworks; Make prevention, preparedness and response activities more nutrition-sensitive to reduce impact of shocks and threats on individuals’ and households' nutrition situations; Ensure that policies on resilience are using a multi-sectoral approach (building on or borrowing from the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement); Ensure that sector specific policies are resilience-focused.
* **Develop or strengthen** **national strategies for food and nutrition security** that are risk-informed and address immediate nutritional needs and empower institutions and individuals to prevent malnutrition.

1. UNICEF working definition, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. UN-OCHA: The World Humanitarian Data and Trends (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. UNICEF: The Global Nutrition Data Base (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)