



**United
Nations**

Executive Summary

**UN Common Guidance
on Helping Build
Resilient Societies**



**UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GROUP**



UN Common Guidance on Helping Build Resilient Societies

Why is there a need for a UN Resilience Guidance?

The COVID-19 pandemic and other large-scale disasters have shown that risk has become increasingly interconnected, with the impacts of shocks and disasters cascading across systems and sectors. This requires comprehensive and joined-up efforts to build resilience that can transcend a range of risks, sectors and stakeholders.

While there are positive signs of increased cross-sectoral collaboration, resilience is still largely built in institutional silos, focusing on specific types and drivers of risks, be they violent conflict, natural hazards, climate variability and change, gender inequality, poverty, human-induced hazards, epidemics or displacement. This Guidance aims to heal this fragmentation and to strengthen coherence in United Nations (UN) resilience-building efforts

at country level in support of governments' sustainable development objectives. A resilience lens is a prerequisite for achieving the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Resilience is a common thread across the three United Nations (UN) pillars of development, human rights, and peace and security.

What does the UN Resilience Guidance offer?

The UN Resilience Guidance offers a flexible approach that can be tailored to country contexts and needs. It is not a blueprint but complements ongoing resilience-building efforts at country level by addressing gaps and bottlenecks towards a more comprehensive and joined-up action.

It provides a UN-wide reference on building resilience for delivering the 2030 Agenda that is embedded in the UN reform and the Secretary-General's Prevention Agenda. It is an operational guidance for practical application at country level that promotes a common understanding of

resilience based on shared principles. It explains the process for building resilience together for the UN System and its partners and includes a rich annex of practical tools and methodologies.

Who is the UN Resilience Guidance for?

The primary audience of the Guidance are UN Teams, whom the Guidance seeks to help in their work to better equip governments at national and subnational levels to lead on resilience-building.

It does this by bringing the UN together around a common understanding and operational approach on risk-informed programming across sectors. It can support the new generation of UN Teams in mission and non-mission settings and be a valuable resource for Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators. It can outline important partnerships with the Heads of political and peacekeeping missions as well as Heads and Deputy Heads of UN

entities and strategic planners – particularly in settings where UN Security Council mandate frames UN activities under an integrated triple-hatted Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. In addition to this primary target audience, the Guidance is also a useful reference for government and partners at country, regional and global levels.

How was the UN Resilience Guidance developed?

The drafting of the Guidance was informed by existing policies, initiatives, programmes, tools and operations, including the UN Chief Executive Board (CEB) Paper on Risk and Resilience. Through an extensive consultation process, country-level practices and

experiences were condensed and translated into a step-by-step approach that can be flexibly followed and adapted to foster resilience in different contexts and situations and at different points in a country's development path.

How is resilience defined?



Resilience is the ability of individuals, households, communities, cities, institutions, systems and societies to prevent, resist, absorb, adapt, respond and recover positively, efficiently and effectively when faced with a wide range of risks, while maintaining an acceptable level of functioning without compromising long-term prospects for sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and well-being for all.

What are the dividends and benefits of resilience-building?

Investing in resilience helps prevent and curtail economic, environmental and human losses in the event of a crisis, thereby reducing human suffering and protecting development gains. Building resilience can also stimulate risk-informed economic activity through the diversification of investments in businesses, households and livelihoods. Investments

in resilience are beneficial even if there is no crisis and can bring co-benefits across many of the Sustainable Development Goals by focusing attention and resources where risks intersect. A resilience lens helps those who are most vulnerable and marginalized, ensuring that no one is left behind on the path towards sustainable development.

In which contexts is resilience-building relevant?

Resilience-building is relevant in a range of humanitarian, development and conflict-affected contexts and crises. Countries may experience a combination of these contexts in the same or several locations, making an integrated, whole-of society and whole-of-government, multi-sectoral and systems approach to resilience-building even more important in:

- i. countries with great exposure and vulnerability to natural, biological and technological hazards and climate change impacts;

- ii. countries that are at risk of entering conflict, that are in it or that are emerging from it;
- iii. countries with protracted and/or recurrent humanitarian crises; and
- iv. regional contexts that experience trans-boundary risks, where challenges to resilience do not adhere to political and geographic boundaries.

What are the key elements of resilience-building?

Regardless of whether UN Teams are working at local, subnational, national, regional or global level, building resilience requires four elements for sustainable development, peace and security, human rights and the well-being of all:

- i. Understanding of the context and the multiple and interconnected dimensions of risk. Risks that can disrupt social, economic and environmental systems at local, subnational, national or regional levels, must be understood and analysed within specific political, socio-economic, and environmental contexts;
- ii. Recognition of how systems are interconnected. Resilience-building requires a systems approach based on the understanding that many adverse events are occurring across global,

regional, national, subnational and local scales, with cascading effects among interconnected social, governance, economic, ecological and physical systems;

- iii. Inclusion of multiple stakeholders in a gender-responsive manner. Involving all relevant stakeholders guarantees that a broad range of perspectives on risk informs the process and ensures that the needs, including those of the most vulnerable, are addressed;
- iv. Presence of capacities for resilience. Systems, institutions and people are considered 'resilient' when they have absorptive, adaptive, anticipative, preventive and transformative capacities and resources to cope with, withstand and bounce back from shocks.

What are the shared principles for resilience-building?



The resilience-building efforts of UN Teams are led by several common principles that will guide assessment, planning, implementation, coordination, partnering

and learning. Each UN Team needs to be accountable for the consistent application, monitoring and evaluation of the principles for resilience-building:

1. Leave no one behind and reach those most in need and at risk in a gender-responsive manner.
2. Ensure equality, non-discrimination and a human rights-based approach.
3. Be accountable for pursuing inclusive partnerships.
4. Do no harm.
5. Engage and commit over the long term in a flexible, yet strategic approach.
6. Pursue context-specific and tailor-made approaches.
7. Act early to prevent or mitigate crises.
8. Build on local and national capacities for ownership and leadership.

How can joined-up programming for resilience-building be achieved?

The Guidance explains the process by which UN Teams can achieve joined-up programming for building resilience and

highlights specific considerations when applying a resilience lens while programming together.

Assessment

Common understanding of risks and contexts.



It is not always necessary to collect primary data on risk and resilience, which can be a time- and resource-intensive exercise. UN Teams can collect existing assessment results and evidence-based data sets. The analysis must be inclusive, highly participatory and gender-sensitive and engage all key stakeholders to ensure that a full range of perspectives is considered. The assessment needs to comprise: (i) the main hazards that may affect people and systems in the location considered; (ii) the relevant contextual factors

and underlying economic, social, political and environmental drivers of risk in the location considered; (iii) the key systems at risk in the location considered and how the manifestation of risk in one system can have cascading impacts across others; and (iv) the population groups most at risk of being left behind. The results of the analysis should be based on a consensus that substantively drives UN Teams' planning processes.

Planning

Joined-up planning for collective outcomes.



Joined-up planning requires a broad, pragmatic and inclusive partnership-based approach to ensure that UN resilience-building efforts complement each other and come together in terms of location, beneficiaries and risks, including through sequencing and layering interventions across different sectors. Current UN planning tools and processes should form the starting point for UN Teams' efforts to strengthen resilience. A coherent approach to resilience programming that spans development, human rights, humanitarian and peace interventions requires a shared vision and articulation of collective outcomes by a wide range

of partners, including UN and non-UN actors. The risk and context assessment provides the evidence and the foundation for planning and should be jointly reviewed by UN Teams in order to reach consensus among humanitarian, development, human rights and peace stakeholders on the priority risks and ensure that there are no gaps in the assessment. UN Teams can then agree on a shared problem statement and on collective outcomes that are strategic, clear, quantifiable and measurable. A range of tools, including the Theory of Change (TOC), can help to formulate collective outcomes and results chains.

Implementing

Acting together for building resilience.



Assessing, analysing and understanding multiple risks across and within systems are crucial for driving collaborative implementation of programmes and projects and for supporting national and local policy-setting. Working together on

shared analysis and planning processes helps to forge synergies and partnerships between different actors in one location or one sector or several interconnected systems (e.g., food security, water and health).

Monitoring

Measuring the impact of resilience-building.



Monitoring resilience is best pursued as part of the UN's wider M&E efforts that are fully integrated into SDG-related monitoring and reporting. M&E frameworks should take stock of any changes in risk patterns and resilience of people and economic, social and environmental systems using quantitative and quantitative indicators. Monitoring also needs to move beyond conventional methods and approaches and consider some specific elements, including the facts that:

i. the impact of resilience-building support may not be apparent for decades;

- ii. the causal linkages between resilience-building support and the observed change are unlikely to be linear; and
- iii. there are difficulties in measuring the impact of an intervention in the absence of a hazard or threat. Depending on the type of indicator chosen, different data collection methods for monitoring resilience are available, including quantitative, qualitative, objective and subjective approaches.

How can we partner, coordinate and finance for building resilience?



Resilience-building is most effective when multi-agency actions are layered and sequenced across multiple sectors. It is important to involve communities and

Partnering

Partnerships for resilience-building are essential for developing joined-up solutions and a shared understanding of risks and contexts, for motivating collaboration and for learning and adapting



Coordinating

Coordination for resilience-building should be under the leadership or co-leadership of the government authority. Coordination for resilience-building is best integrated into already-existing coordination forums, platforms or clusters in order to avoid redundancy of mechanisms and to save



Financing for resilience

A major obstacle to accessing finances for resilience is the fragmentation of international funding, which lies beyond the direct influence of UN Teams. Nevertheless, the UN can make a substantial difference: Its \$26 billion funding for operational activities can, if risk-informed, help secure the \$2.5 trillion needed annually to meet the SDGs by 2030. UN Teams can choose a broad variety of actions, such as:

- i. fostering greater understanding of the costs and benefits of resilience-building;
- ii. helping governments build their capacities to unlock public and private sector financing that is risk-informed;

local actors as well as the public and private sectors and to allow for converging efforts of humanitarian, development, and peace and security sectors.

together. UN Teams need to know how to leverage their respective agencies' expertise, which additional stakeholders to involve and what their respective roles in building resilience are.

time and resources. Since resilience-building needs to occur across scales, sectors and regional, subnational, local and urban coordination mechanisms must be identified and strengthened. In many country contexts, several coordination mechanisms can coexist.

- iii. advocating with donors on the importance of funding resilience-building across humanitarian-, development- and sustaining peace-related activities;
- iv. helping countries to mobilize and align all financing flows with national sustainable development priorities, in a risk-informed manner, through Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs);
- v. partnering with other stakeholders to access pooled funds in support of comprehensive resilience-building efforts;

vi. engaging with IFIs and other donors to embrace flexible funding mechanisms such as 'crisis modifiers' and multi-year humanitarian/emergency funds; and

vii. supporting forecast-based financing in support of early action, preparedness and pre-planned community and other action before an emergency occurs.

What is the way forward for the UN Resilience Guidance?

Innovation is crucial for resilience, equality and forging forward-looking and risk-informed policies and strategies in the context of COVID-19, the climate crisis and the broader risk environment at local, national, regional and global levels.

Users of the Guidance should develop new thinking and approaches and share their experiences within and across sectors or systems. This can establish a community of practice on resilience and help the UN System to facilitate research, learn and adapt to advise and support resilience actions at scale

and in most-vulnerable locations for sustainable development impact, peace and prosperity for all. The Guidance is considered a living document that may need further adjustment to benefit from country-level innovation and new solutions to resilience-building.



Quality assurance checklist for joined-up programming to build resilience*

General

- ☑ Ensured that the principles for resilience-building have been adhered to in all stages of programming
- ☑ Ensured that resilience-building support does not generate new risks or impact negatively on systems and stakeholders

Understanding multidimensional risks and context

- ☑ Jointly identified, analysed and prioritized from a comprehensive range of risks, vulnerabilities and capacities for a given system in target location(s)
- ☑ Jointly analysed overall trends in development or humanitarian situation, and enabling environment
- ☑ Jointly analysed, in an inclusive manner, the power and inequality dimensions that are driving risks, and the differentiated vulnerabilities and capacities of different groups (women, men, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, minority groups, etc.) as part of a given system at risk

Supporting resilient systems

- ☑ Ensured that support establishes linkages across and within sectors and related systems (e.g., natural resource management, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, governance of land, women's rights and leadership)
- ☑ Engaged people, groups and stakeholders at different levels (individual, household, local, district, city, regional, national, international) that are part of a given system (e.g., livelihoods system)

Strengthening resilience capacities

- ☑ Ensured that the approach provides a good mix of interventions that build absorptive, adaptive, anticipative, preventive and transformative capacities across and within sectors, as well as managerial/leadership skills
- ☑ Ensured actions to raise risk awareness and knowledge among different groups
- ☑ Considered different timescales of interventions that address the most urgent humanitarian needs, drivers of risk, and root causes of vulnerabilities with medium- to long-term development and investment interventions

Involving multiple stakeholders, coordination and partnerships

- ☑ Considered human rights, access to basic services, and livelihood options for different groups through people-centred approaches that enhance diversity and flexibility
- ☑ Ensured inclusive and collective processes, coordinated action and partnerships among multiple stakeholders and different groups to agree on joined-up actions and build partnerships
- ☑ Included action to support different groups of people and their organizations to take the lead in resilience-building activities, and hold government and/or private sector actors to account for their actions or lack of actions in resilience-building

Learning and adapting

- ☑ Catered for spaces for learning and adjusting resilience-building activities and strategy with partners and with other stakeholders
- ☑ Fostered new visions, relationships, networks, ideas and understandings of resilience-building

* Adapted from Action Aid, 2016; and Oxfam 2017.



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