The Characteristics of Resilience Building

A discussion paper

Developed by an Interagency Resilience Working Group

PPA Resilience Learning Partnership Group

Bond Disaster Risk Reduction Group

Bond Development and Environment Group

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This paper outlines a **common understanding of resilience-building,** understood as resilience to any shock or stress that has the potential to do harm, hamper development and reduce social well-being, creating an environment where threats can be managed and opportunities realised. It lays out **common characteristics** of processes or programmes which work with communities to build resilience, underpinned and informed by core principles or values.

1. Background: problem and opportunity statement

We live in a multi-risk environment, facing slow and rapid onset emergencies, violent conflict, climate change and other global challenges such as pandemics and biodiversity loss, as well as chronic political, economic and societal fragility. Local risk landscapes are changing fast, with frequent and intense weather events, and societal and environmental stresses which are becoming increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Many current approaches have failed to adequately address the multiple challenges of these evolving contexts. More effective strategies are needed to enhance the abilities of vulnerable communities to counter the uncertain constellation of economic, social and environmental risks that they confront.

The resilience discourse, re-emerging through development and disaster risk reduction (DRR), recognises that communities themselves have an intimate knowledge of their local environment and are best positioned to observe, learn, experiment/innovate and respond to the changes they are facing. Therefore, it makes sense for support in building resilience to look to and start from the local level, where people are already developing strategies to deal with a complex array of risks and vulnerabilities.

The move towards resilience thinking and programming marks a collective recognition of the need for an urgent and fundamental change in all our work – to deal with complexity and work with longer time frames (linked to weather forecasts and long-term climate projections, for example). It recognises and works with the dynamic nature of integrated systems, framed from a socio-ecological perspective. It recognises that current approaches to managing risks in development planning, peace-building and humanitarian response are disjointed and that better cross-sectorial collaboration is required on analysis, planning, and implementing support for resilience-building. Typically, the international system responds to socio-economic challenges by developing different policy frameworks, *e.g.* DRR, poverty reduction, climate change, food security etc., all designed to alleviate specific economic, social and/or environmental "symptoms" or issues. Various discrete disciplines have emerged to address specific challenges, and donor funding has been configured into corresponding silos. Each thematic issue tends to be owned by an "institutional champion" who develops particular expertise, language and frameworks. Reducing vulnerability to both known risks and uncertainties, however, requires a more holistic approach to the multiple activities, interactions and relationships.

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[1] The Interagency Resilience Working Group comprises the Bond Disaster Risk Reduction Group; Bond Development and Environment Group; and the Programme Partnership Arrangement Resilience Learning Partnership Group

The resilience approach, outlined here, is premised on the need for integrated analysis and improved ways of working across multiple disciplines. Systems that can best adapt to complex changes in local circumstances tend to be collaborative, responsive and flexible. They have a high degree of autonomy/self-organising and enable learning, through strong feedback loops.

Increasingly, attention has turned to *resilience* for us as a working community of development, humanitarian and environment INGOs. Lengthy discussions about the nature of resilience and what it means in different disciplines have taken place; inter- and intra-agency roundtables and workshops have explored how we should engage with resilience and what it means for our work. As these discussions and the experience of agencies have shown, it seems useful to develop a shared understanding and language as to what enables vulnerable communities and the systems that they rely on to prevent, prepare, respond, recover and reorganise in the face of uncertainty and intensive and extensive risks. These discussions, along with our evidence base, our experience of implementation and engagement with communities, have informed this paper.

2. Purpose of this paper

The growing resilience discussion is a reflection of people's and systems' increasing levels of exposure to risk and uncertainty, the failure of current approaches and increased recognition of the importance of local capacities in effectively responding to these challenges. This requires us to improve flexibility in how we plan and fund both development and humanitarian response work with communities long-term, to enable and support them to manage risks and change most effectively and sustainably into the future. The purpose of this paper is to identify characteristics of the process of working with individuals, households, communities or systems (services, institutions, ecosystems, etc.) to *build* resilience that are common across diverse contexts. We aim to describe the common characteristics that processes or programmes should embrace wherever aiming to work with and support people to build their own resilience.

The common characteristics of resilience building are intended to be practical, to inform processes and activities which facilitate resilience-building. They also need to be measurable and how this can be achieved will be addressed in further work.

Underpinning these characteristics is a set of principles which guide programme development, ensuring certain core values and standards of good practice are adhered to. Many sets of principles exist to guide our work, and many are applicable to aspects of resilience-building. Rather than generating a new list, we have highlighted pertinent existing principles for sustainable development and humanitarian action, expanding them to address increasing change, risk and uncertainty.

We envisage this paper being used to support:

- Individuals and communities in decision making
- NGOs and CSOs to improve design and implementation of programmes
- Governments to guide policy and practice in national development plans and strategies
- Donors to inform investment decisions, evaluation of programmes and policy positions

3. What's new?

Building resilience is highly specific to the local context of a given place, its hazard profile, ecosystems, society and stakeholder groups. What may build resilience in one context or for one group may not work for others and could be detrimental in different contexts. There is therefore a crucial need to understand the complex system and interrelations between people and the environment, and the implications of varying practises before embarking on any specific resilience building support. Resilience building is not business-as-usual. We must not be tempted to 're-label' existing work as resilience building without addressing the characteristics outlined here, identifying what might be improved or done differently.
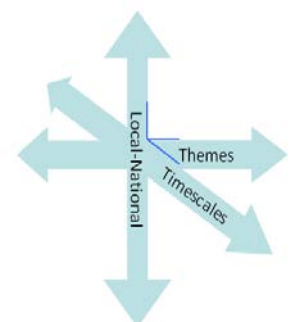
In essence, building resilience means changing *how* we programme rather than *what* we programme. It is about consciously recognising and addressing risk in analysis, decision-making and planning, and managing any trade-offs with this in mind. It embraces complexity, working with the dynamic nature of integrated socio-ecological systems, and thinks long as well as short term. It is also important to be clear to those with whom we work about the scope of our actions. It is not possible for any single actor or intervention to build resilience to everything, for everyone and forever, but by improving analysis and working together to ensure that resilience building programmes support community-driven processes, the breadth and sustainability of impact will be improved.

Building resilience into existing programming will take different forms in different contexts. In some cases, it can mean improving on-going activities (incremental changes), in others it can mean revising activities and doing things in a different way (reframing) and sometimes it may require doing new things, working in a radically different way (transformation). It is also about monitoring change, which could then lead to recognising opportunities through being prepared for or exploiting transformational shifts in systems. In all cases, it will mean supporting the positive aspects of resilience while avoiding reinforcement of negative manifestations, such as the resilience of unjust systems of governance. The overall objectives of what we do (*e.g.* poverty alleviation, peace-building, sustainable development) may remain the same, however how we do it may include new thinking and approaches.

So what about resilience is different?

A significant part of resilience is that it brings the notions of **dynamic change**, **risk, uncertainty and options** into development planning and implementation, alongside rights, needs and vulnerability. This enables programmes and interventions to be developed differently according to risk and vulnerability analysis; and to be ready to address known risks and vulnerabilities but also uncertain futures. This approach **encourages people to be ready for change, and is underpinned by the ability to undertake comprehensive monitoring and analysis, and to actively learn**.

The key part of the resilience shift is **understanding integrated systems and working with them across multiple scales**. Resilience-building requires us to take a systems approach, thinking holistically about governance, livelihoods, hazards and stresses and future uncertainty, working from *the local upwards to national*, *regional and international levels* (where appropriate, for example, addressing trans-boundary concerns) and across multiple disciplines (*political,*

social, economic and environmental). It also requires different *timescales to be recognised*, considering past activities (including traditional knowledge) and future projections for climate and society. It requires thinking and working both vertically and horizontally across socio-ecological systems to build resilience.

Resilience thinking necessitates a **convergence of approaches and sharing of skills and knowledge**. It encourages disciplines (*e.g.* health, gender, accountability, disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), nature conservation, conflict prevention etc.) to share approaches and work together to enhance resilience; protect and encourage sustainable development, to reduce poverty and support ecosystem functionality for the long term, building upon efforts to date towards a holistic way of working.

At risk or vulnerable people manage risk related to the security and wellbeing of their lives, livelihoods and assets on a daily basis. Therefore it is important to understand risk at the local level and put at risk or vulnerable people and their perspectives as a central part of building resilience. This needs to be situated within the wider social-ecological system and change context.

Resilience encourages **full use of available knowledge** (local knowledge and scientific knowledge in particular), and requires innovations of the development of new knowledge and practices through multidisciplinary working, active **learning including experiential learning and acting on feedback** – among at-risk and vulnerable people, relevant duty-bearers and practitioners.

Resilience looks at **impact beyond achieving project activities** to the longer term positive change and enhancement of adaptive capacity which may result over time. This includes engaging and empowering local communities to analyse risks and drive the process of responding to them. Continuous monitoring and response to impacts across social and conflict, economic and environmental dimensions, enables any negative impacts to be mitigated and managed throughout a programme lifecycle, as well as for change to happen (incremental - reframing - transformational) in a managed way or with least detriment. A critical determinant of this will be sufficient flexibility in funding and institutional arrangements to allow for adjustments to changes within the operating environment.

4. Developing common characteristics for resilience building – the process

The Interagency Resilience Working Group comprises members of the DFID PPA (Programme Partnership Arrangement) Resilience Learning Group, BOND Disaster Risk Reduction Group and BOND Development and Environment Group. It brings together agencies with a range of specialisms and mandates, including humanitarian response, conflict prevention, DRR, climate change, nature conservation, agriculture and livelihoods. Together, these groups make up a broad professional community of INGOs (predominantly UK-based) endeavouring to work with people and the systems upon which they depend (*e.g.* ecosystems, weather and climate systems, finance, economy and trade systems, conflict, affected and weak governance systems) to help build resilience to a range of shocks and stresses that have the potential to inhibit resilience.

The document also builds on a review of existing literature and policy on principles of development and humanitarian action as well as resilience programming. Primary sources underlying these discussions include: *A Resilience Renaissance? Unpacking of resilience for tackling climate change*

and disasters (Bahadur et al. 2010)[2], the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008), the Busan Effective Partnership for Development Cooperation (2011), outcomes from the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement principles for humanitarian action. After a process of discussion, analysis and consultation, five characteristics of resilience and seven principles for resilience were agreed on as broadly what we as agencies understand of resilience and would argue as necessary for resilience building in programmes, communities and systems contexts.

This paper has been developed from the perspective of striving to understand and improve our programming on resilience. It recognises that as actors we are only one part of much wider efforts to build resilience, which vulnerable communities themselves should drive and own. We recognise that there is a need to go beyond a description of the characteristics of resilience and to provide examples of what facilitating resilience through NGO programming with communities looks like in practice. A forthcoming interagency paper will address this need. In addition, there is a need for clear guidance for practitioners, policy makers and communities on how to build resilience through application of the characteristics and principles through development programming. This has begun through coalitions of NGOs and researchers (such as African Climate Change Resilience Alliance, Strengthening Climate Resilience) as well as through NGOs such as Practical Action (Vulnerability to Resilience Handbook). Our Working Group will continue this dialogue.

How we got there...

1. Discussion & Exploration

Inter-agency discussion based on evidence ending with eleven interconnected characteristics of "resilience"

Characteristics

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Exploration of existing sets of working principles and their relevance to resilience, based on earlier discussions about characteristics

Principles

Paris   SLA   DFID   IFRC

2. Analysis & Consolidation

Analysis and consolidation resulting in one **core characteristic** *of resilience and four* **enabling characteristics**...

1 2 3 4 5

...plus four **common principles** *for resilience based on the outcomes of explorations into existing principles*

1 2 3 4

3. Feedback & Revision

Consolidated feedback from agencies – resulting in some amendments to characteristics, and disaggregation of the common principles for resilience

1 2 3 4 5   **Characteristics**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7   **Principles**

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[2] Bahadur, A., Ibrahim, M., Tanner, T., (2010) A Resilience Renaissance? Unpacking of resilience for tackling climate change and disasters. First published by the Institute of Development Studies in September 2010

The Characteristics of Resilience building processes

A resilient system has the **capacity to respond positively to change, maintaining or improving function; this includes monitoring, anticipating and managing known risks and vulnerabilities to existing shocks and stresses whilst being able to address uncertainties in the future. Change and responses may be incremental or transformational**. These characteristics help build adaptive capacity in the face of future uncertainties. Here we set out five key characteristics, necessary for building resilience:

Core resilience building process characteristic:

1. Capacity to monitor, anticipate, respond to and manage known risks as well as uncertainties to inform effective decision-making

Flexibility is a core practical characteristic of a system's resilience. It is rooted in the ability to analyse all risks, based on a thorough understanding of the context and stakeholder relationships and drawing on information from various sources to inform decision-making and foster innovation.

Flexibility in the context of resilience may be seen as the ability of individuals, households, communities or systems (services, institutions, ecosystems, etc.) to be able to change the way they operate or function to respond to shifts in the context due to a range of political, social, cultural, economic and environmental shocks and stresses, to ensure that an acceptable level[3] of wellbeing, function and service delivery is maintained or achieved.

Key to flexibility are <u>DIVERSIFICATION</u> and <u>PREPAREDNESS.</u>

Diversification of skills, knowledge, resources and assets to ensure that in the event of anticipated shocks, stresses and challenges, both large and small, a number of options and strategies are available to prevent or reduce any negative impacts and to take full advantage of opportunities.

Preparedness of individuals, households, communities or systems (services, institutions, etc) to be able to monitor, anticipate, and plan appropriate responses to shocks, stresses or the cumulative impact of minor challenges in order to ensure that they can mitigate, respond and recover as quickly and efficiently as possible, recognising that individuals, households, communities, institutions and ecosystems have their own capacities which we should work with to strengthen for greater preparedness.

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[3] An acceptable level of well-being, function and service delivery should be determined by the community at risk themselves. A rights based approach to resilience programming will enable communities themselves to make the decisions on what the priorities are.

Enablers of effective resilience building:

2. Good Governance based on rights and decentralised and participatory decision-making with sound links between levels of governance

Based on rights, rule of law, access to just and equitable laws and policies, strong and responsible civil and governmental institutions, which allow for a means of redress, action and non-violent conflict resolution; proactive and responsive governments which are inclusive, representative, accountable to the people, respond to need and the priorities of the people they govern, and protect and secure the rights, interests and entitlements of marginalised, excluded and vulnerable groups, with a particular focus on women's rights, agency and empowerment as well as children, older people and the disabled[4]. Equitable entitlement to natural resources and their sound management is of particular relevance in building resilience.

3. Build trust through partnerships and collective action

Addressing resilience requires genuine multi-stakeholder partnerships and bringing different actors together as well as people from varying social and economic backgrounds to find equitable and sustainable solutions to building resilience. It is about managing trade-offs in a transparent manner, based on an understanding of values, motivation and vested interests. Building partnerships, trust, solidarity and collective goals across local people and civil society organisations and networks, government departments, private sector (where appropriate), media and academia. Learning from and work with local and traditional structures and processes that enhance resilience, e.g. traditional dispute mechanisms, how the community is organized and the way it supports vulnerable groups especially in times of stress.

4. Bring together local traditional knowledge with science and technology to enable learning and innovation

This contributes to accessible and useable information on risks and hazards, creates a culture of learning from experience and 'build back better' and supports capacity of local and national institutions. It requires innovation in knowledge and practices through multidisciplinary working and active learning including experiential learning, feedbacks and response. It uses scientific and local knowledge (including innovation through ICTs and media), to monitor change in any given socio-ecological system, support understanding of when and how to adjust actions to reduce risks and avoid or respond to change and tipping points, and it supports ability to capitalize on emerging opportunities in ways that continue to build resilience.

5. Working holistically across scales with a particular focus on socio-ecological systems

Ensuring strategies work from an individual and local level up to a national and international scale vertically and across political, social, economic and environmental systems horizontally is a

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[4] During interagency discussions a large number of governance and rights issues emerged, the key themes of which have been captured in this statement. However further specific articulation and exploration of this will be undertaken within work to identify *indicators to measure each of the characteristics of resilience*, which will be the second output of the PPA resilience learning partnership

central tenet – from building conflict resilience to ensuring the resilience, sustainability and health of ecological systems and people's natural resource base. Ensuring that people have fair access and decision-making power in the management and use of resources, and that their use and decisions balance current and future needs of people and the ecosystems upon which we depend. It also recognises the importance of individual resilience as underpinned by social and psychological wellbeing.

The Principles of resilience building processes

These principles should guide our programme development by ensuring that we adhere to, respect and exercise certain core values and good practices needed to incorporate the resilience characteristics into our work.

1. Socio-ecological systems-based

Resilience-building programmes recognise the interdependence of human and ecological systems, understanding and managing the needs of both, and addressing trade-offs in a way that builds resilience for people and the ecosystems people will depend upon into the future.

2. Conflict sensitive[5]

Resilience-building programmes understand the local power dynamics and the complex nature of risk in socio-ecological systems, understanding and managing risks, mitigating unintended negative consequences, and managing trade-offs in a clear, conscious and fair way. Specifically, resilience-building programmes improve people's social, ecological and economic assets and services base. Where possible, resilience building programmes aim to contribute to the prevention of violence and promotion of non-violent and participatory dispute resolution at all levels.

3. Inclusive

Resilience-building programmes activities and outcomes are based on context-specific analysis of the differential needs, vulnerabilities, expectations and existing capacities of all population groups, regardless of age, gender, religious affiliation, ethnicity or any other conditions of origin, and addressing inter- and intra- generational needs.

4. Enhance the agency of most vulnerable people

Resilience-building programmes are firmly anchored in local peoples' realities, perspectives and agency, acknowledging the power relationships and vested interests which impact upon that local context, and enhancing people's voice and ability to shape their own futures. They always include specific actions to strengthen women's agency, protect children and the rights of the most vulnerable including the disabled and elderly, recognising the fundamental differences between these groups. They take into account and analyse the power dynamics which drive and impact upon poverty and vulnerability.

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[5] Refer to the work of the Conflict Sensitivity Consortium: http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/

5. Accountable and politically engaged

Resilience-building programmes are accountable to participants in activities and recipients of aid, as well as more broadly to all stakeholders impacted by the programmes (including future generations). Resilience-building programmes must ensure adequate information is provided and transparent feedback mechanisms are available for people to fully exercise their right to accountability. Resilience-building programmes also promote and advocate for strengthened accountability across governance systems that leads to protection and realisation of rights. They are connected with, support and influence relevant national, regional and international institutions, frameworks and agreements in terms of policy development, technical support and financial aid mechanisms.
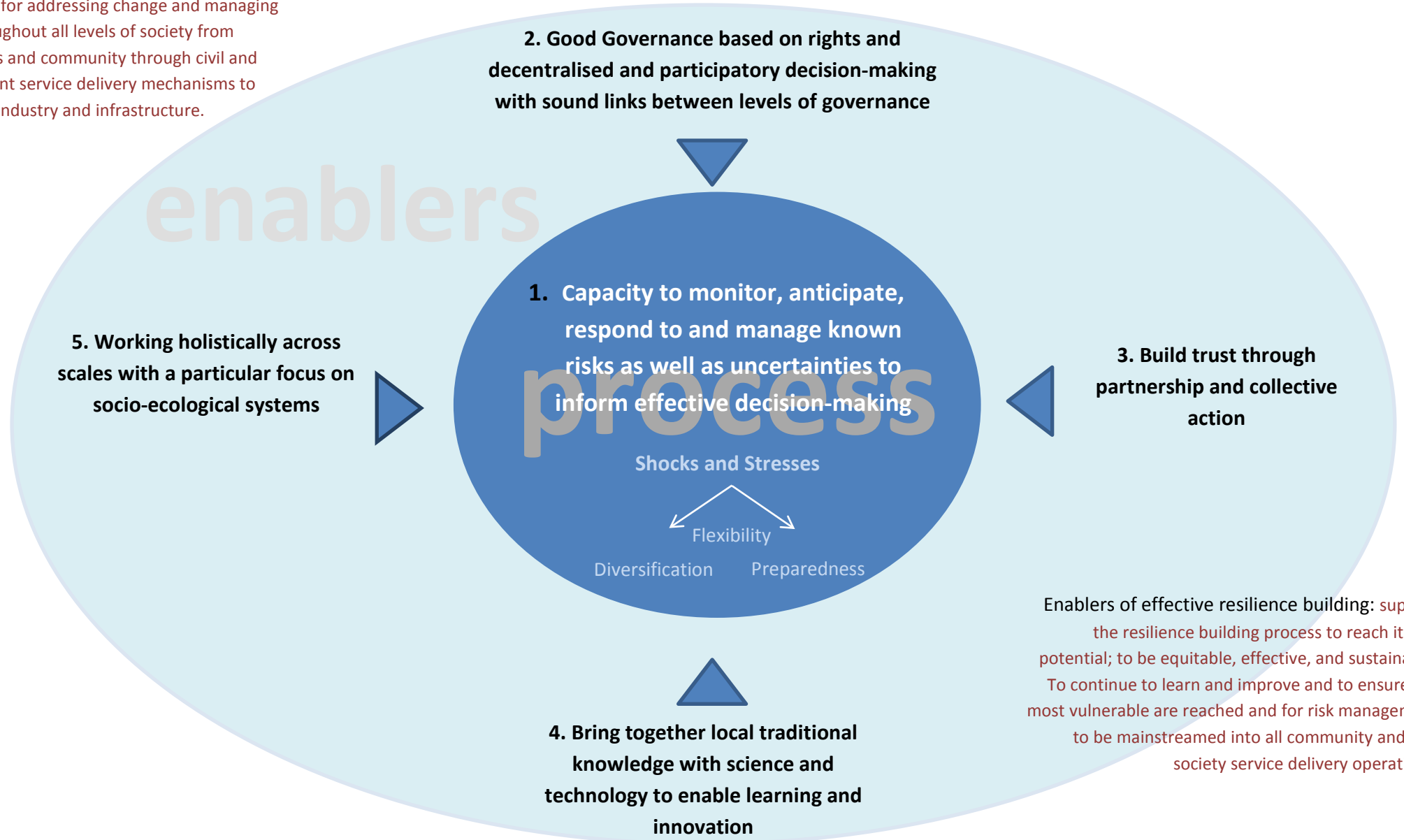
6. Conducted in partnership

Resilience-building programmes are conducted in partnership with local institutions, civil society organisations and networks, and the private sector (where appropriate to the principles and objectives). They reinforce the vertical and horizontal integration of systems and networks and build on local strengths and capacities, and routinely include multi-stakeholder cooperation, while recognising the realities of power dynamics and resources limits. They value and embrace different skills sets and knowledge bases, working cross-sector and trans-discipline. They promote community-wide inter-intra south-south solidarity.

7. Long-term

Resilience-building programmes invest in long-term relationships with local to global actors, remaining engaged and collaborative with communities for the long term. Forward planning, to anticipate the potential range of changes that might arise (*e.g.* through scenario planning) is important. They have flexibility (*e.g.* through active learning and adaptive management processes) so that as new impacts, risks, hazards, disturbances manifest themselves, actions can be adjusted to address them.

Characteristics of resilience

Resilience building process: allows for the identification of challenges and opportunities for development and the development of means and strategies for addressing change and managing risks throughout all levels of society from individuals and community through civil and government service delivery mechanisms to business, industry and infrastructure.

2. **Good Governance based on rights and decentralised and participatory decision-making with sound links between levels of governance**

enablers

5. **Working holistically across scales with a particular focus on socio-ecological systems**

1. **Capacity to monitor, anticipate, respond to and manage known risks as well as uncertainties to inform effective decision-making**

process

Shocks and Stresses

Flexibility

Diversification   Preparedness

3. **Build trust through partnership and collective action**

Enablers of effective resilience building: support the resilience building process to reach its full potential; to be equitable, effective, and sustainable. To continue to learn and improve and to ensure the most vulnerable are reached and for risk management to be mainstreamed into all community and civil society service delivery operations.

4. **Bring together local traditional knowledge with science and technology to enable learning and innovation**

Principles of resilience

Socio-ecological systems-based | Conflict Sensitive | Inclusive | Enhance the agency of most vulnerable people | Accountable and politically engaged | Conducted in partnership | Long-term