



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

RESILIENCE POLICY

June 2024



Participants from the Wanajmi Girls Improving Resilience through Livelihoods (GIRL) Group run a shop together.
Photo: Mercy Corps



Strengthening health systems help communities and countries build resilience against shocks. Photo: CARE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Executive Summary 2**
- Introduction 4**
- Vision and Goals 5**
 - Box 1: Resilience Policy Goal.....5
- Resilience Conceptual Framework..... 5**
 - Graphic 1: USAID’s Conceptual Framework for Strengthening Resilience6
 - Box 2 : Illustrative Examples of Shocks and Stresses.....7
 - Box 3: Illustrative Examples of Sources of Resilience.....8
- Operational Principles for Strengthening Resilience 8**
 - Principle 1: Use Evidence and Analysis to Better Understand Risks and Improve Resilience.....8
 - Principle 2: Employ Cross-sectoral Approaches.....9
 - Principle 3: Practice Adaptive Management and Shock-Responsive Programming..... 10
 - Principle 4: Strengthen Systems 11
 - Principle 5: Advance Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence 11
- Policy into Practice..... 12**
- Resilience Evidence..... 16**
- Conclusion..... 18**
- Endnotes 19**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

USAID affirms its commitment to strengthening resilience—the ability to protect and improve well-being despite shocks and stresses—as a common objective across our programming. Shocks and stresses are perennial features—and not unusual occurrences—that can affect all of USAID’s programming. Given this reality, this policy aims to strengthen resilience everywhere USAID works, with special attention to recurrent and protracted crises where it is essential for reducing humanitarian need. In light of the increasing pace of shocks and stresses challenging development progress and escalating humanitarian outlays, resilience is essential for human dignity and well-being in the face of adversity. It is also a necessary condition for reducing humanitarian assistance needs in the context of significant resource constraints facing USAID and other donors: resilience investments can save up to \$7 for every dollar spent.¹

As an update to USAID’s inaugural resilience policy (2012), this policy reiterates the goal of reducing humanitarian need in areas of recurrent crisis while also reinforcing resilience as an Agency priority across all USAID programming. The 2012 policy was developed on the heels of the devastating 2011 famine in East Africa, and, in response, it centered on climate-related shocks and stresses and their impacts on food security in areas of recurrent crisis. More than a decade later, the risk context that USAID is confronting has changed, defined now by pandemics, accelerated democratic backsliding, and rising conflict and violence, as well as the intensifying impacts of climate change.

USAID’s resilience agenda has evolved to meet these challenges. USAID long ago recognized that resilience is not simply a food security issue; it is essential for managing risks across a range of goals across the areas of climate, health, peace, education, democracy and governance, poverty alleviation, and economic growth. While earlier resilience efforts focused on community-level programming, this policy emphasizes that we are also now investing more in host-country and local systems², with an eye toward development diplomacy and policy solutions such as expanding social protection systems, enabling displaced persons to access jobs, and reforming national policies to better serve marginalized groups. As we seek to address an increasingly diverse set of risks and crises, we are also building the evidence base on effective interventions across specific shocks and for particular development goals. Finally, with this policy we are explicitly championing a Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) approach that promotes collaboration toward a common agenda that emphasizes prevention.

USAID’s Resilience Policy is elevated in USAID’s most recent Policy Framework, and its focal areas are reflected in the Agency’s forthcoming Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus Policy, 2022–2030 Climate Strategy, 2022 Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, and the U.S. Government’s 2022–2026 Global Food Security Strategy. HDP is a key part of the “how” in a resilience agenda; specifically, how different kinds of assistance can collaborate toward a common agenda such as reducing humanitarian need. This policy also reinforces USAID’s Climate Strategy and the Global Food Security Strategy, by focusing on a broader set of risks and outcomes while paying careful attention to, for instance, how climate shocks interact with other political, economic, and social shocks. Finally, the policy is closely tied to USAID’s Local Capacity Strengthening Policy, given the centrality of local systems and communities for managing risk and strengthening resilience.

1 The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that in Ethiopia, investing \$1 in anticipatory action led to more than \$7 in avoided losses and added benefits for beneficiaries. Other countries saved \$2.5 to \$7 for every dollar invested in anticipatory action. <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc7900en>

2 For example, following a severe drought in 2011, USAID worked with the Government of Kenya in the development and implementation of their Ending Drought Emergencies (EDE) framework for identifying and undertaking specific programs and activities to mitigate the impacts of drought-induced disasters in the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands. Between 2013 and 2023, Kenya complemented USAID’s substantial investments in this work by contributing more than \$8 billion of its own resources toward EDE.

In light of the increasing and sustained pace of shocks that threaten global prosperity and opportunity, this policy begins with the premise that it is a development imperative to take risk seriously through investments that strengthen the capacity of communities and systems to manage shocks and stresses.³ USAID strengthens resilience by analyzing and understanding complex risks and investing in sources of resilience that can manage these risks while improving the well-being outcomes USAID cares about. Equally important is how USAID does this: our resilience efforts focus on flexible and adaptive approaches that work across sectors and types of programming to shore up the ability of communities and systems to manage risks. USAID cannot act alone in making these investments. Our partnerships with other donors, host governments, and global and local partners are critical for driving investment in evidence-based interventions, local systems, and new policy solutions.

3 Shocks are external, short-term deviations from long-term trends that have substantial, negative effects on people's current state of well-being, including their abilities to withstand future shocks. Stresses are long-term trends or pressures that undermine the stability of a system and increase vulnerability within it.



Even during drought, Oldonyiro market in northern Kenya stays open so families can sell their livestock and buy nutritious food. USAID partnered with the Government of Kenya to revitalize the Oldonyiro market, attracting traders with better security, health and business services, a drought warning system, and a roof providing shade. Photo: Bobby Neptune for USAID.

INTRODUCTION

Put simply, resilience is the ability to protect and improve well-being despite shocks and stresses. Resilience is formally defined at USAID 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.”

We live in a world of increasingly frequent, severe, and complex risks, where shocks and stresses undercut development gains and overall human well-being. Global shocks such as COVID-19 or Russia’s invasion of Ukraine continue to generate ripple effects that impact countries and populations around the world. Hard-won development gains can easily be undermined by shocks and stresses and send people back into poverty.¹ Meanwhile, ongoing and compounding crises—from climate change and a global food crisis, to rising inequality and conflict²—are generating spiraling humanitarian needs while increasing fragility and poverty backsliding. Over the past decade, global humanitarian assistance grew by more than six times³ the rate of development assistance, yet humanitarian assistance is still not keeping pace with needs. More conflicts rage in 2023 than at any time since the Cold War, and displacement is at a record high.⁴

In addition to the human toll of these dynamics, the economic cost of inaction is severe. The rising trend of recurrent and protracted crises creates losses to livelihoods and local and regional economies and puts a significant burden on the global economy. The macroeconomic costs of conflict and violence now total at least \$14 trillion per year.⁵ Ten years after the onset of conflict, these economic costs amount to a 28 percent reduction in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), on average, in countries experiencing conflict.⁶

In the decade from 2010-2019, the cost of extreme weather and climate-related events reached nearly \$1.5 trillion in economic losses.⁷

USAID recognizes strengthening resilience is a national security imperative. Building sources of resilience and pursuing early intervention to mitigate the impact of shocks and stresses results in lower cost and risk to Americans and our allies and partners. The USAID/State Joint Strategic Plan highlights the importance of strengthening resilience abroad, which is “essential to protect communities, sustain growth, reduce world hunger, and prevent conflict and democratic backsliding.”

USAID has a unique role to play in advancing a resilience agenda,⁴ both within the U.S. government and globally across development and humanitarian actors. As the world’s largest humanitarian and development donor, we take seriously our responsibility to model and influence donor investments to take account of risk and strengthen the capacity of communities and systems to manage shocks and stresses. USAID recognizes that the challenges we seek to address are always cross-cutting, even if traditional solutions are not. We also recognize that complex crises need to be elevated as a development priority, because humanitarian assistance alone cannot resolve them.

USAID strengthens resilience by analyzing and understanding complex risks and investing in sources of resilience that can manage these risks while improving the well-being outcomes that matter most for promoting dignity, prosperity and security. Equally important is how USAID does this: our resilience efforts center on flexible and adaptive approaches that work across sectors and types of programming to shore up the ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to manage shocks and stresses.

4 In light of the increasing pace of shocks that threaten development gains and escalate humanitarian need, USAID’s resilience agenda aims to model and influence donor investments to take risk seriously and strengthen the capacity of communities and systems to manage shocks and stresses.

This policy highlights five specific principles to guide our work that reflect our evolving understanding of how to strengthen resilience:

- Use Evidence and Analysis to Better Understand Risks and Improve Resilience
- Employ Cross-sectoral Approaches
- Practice Adaptive Management and Shock-Responsive Programming
- Strengthen Systems
- Advance Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence

VISION AND GOALS

Reinforcing and expanding resilience investments in areas of recurrent and protracted crisis is more important than ever in the context of escalating humanitarian need and crisis duration alongside dwindling resources. At the same time, events such as widening climate shocks, pandemics, and a global food crisis demonstrate that no one is immune to the shocks and stresses threatening both short- and long-term development gains.

Box 1: Resilience Policy Goal

USAID's resilience policy aims to protect and improve well-being in the face of shocks and stresses everywhere USAID works, with special attention to recurrent and protracted crises where it is essential for reducing humanitarian need.

USAID envisions a future where resilient societies manage the shocks and stresses that come their way. They cope and adapt in the face of both major crises and routine stresses. They have the resources and capacity to develop resilient systems that serve all people, especially the most vulnerable who consistently shoulder the greatest hardships. While we cannot stop shocks from happening, USAID can—and must—do more to help people withstand them. Strengthening resilience is essential for securing human dignity and well-being in the face of adversity, and it is a necessary condition for reducing humanitarian need.

RESILIENCE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

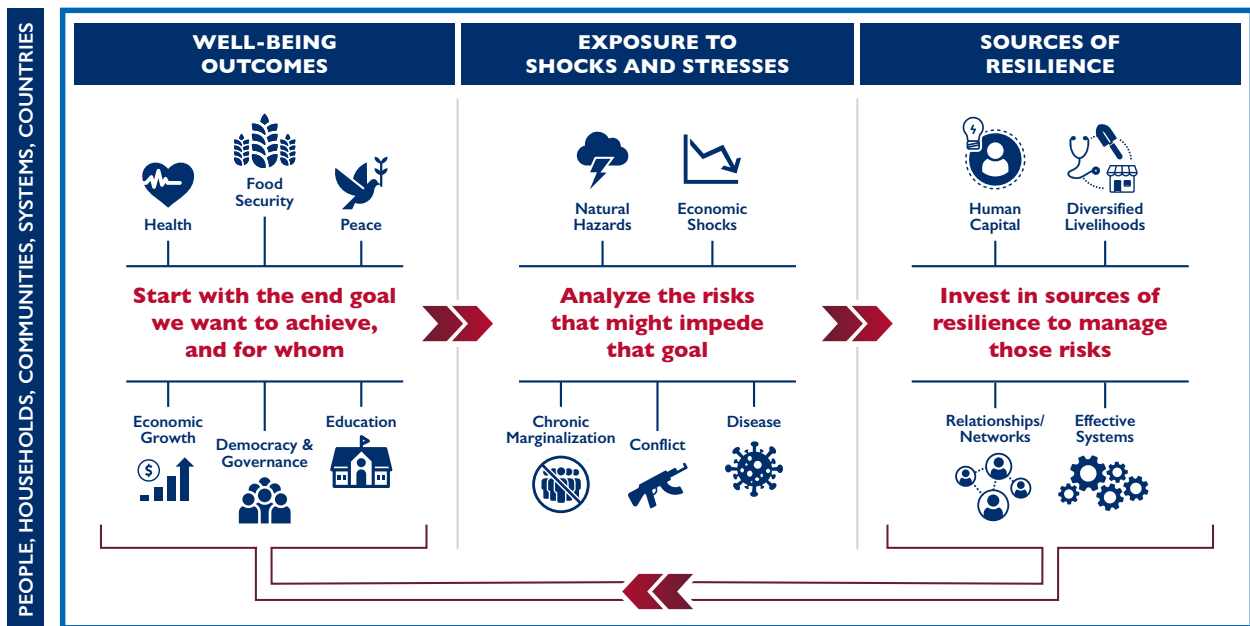
A set of key concepts underpin and guide USAID's resilience agenda. USAID's conceptual framework for strengthening resilience entails a three-step process that can be applied across sectors and across people, households, communities, systems, and country levels. The on-the-ground realities of implementing the conceptual framework shape the operational principles and recommendations discussed next, which collectively represent USAID's resilience agenda.

- The **first step** is to identify the end goal we want to achieve, for whom. This is the specific well-being outcome(s) we want to improve and protect for a specific target population. For example, this could be violence or poverty reduction for people in a marginalized, drought-prone region.
- The **second step** is to analyze the risks that might impede that goal. Specifically, which shocks and stresses are likely to hinder the ability to improve and protect the desired well-being outcome(s)? For

example, key risks that could undermine our well-being outcome of interest might be gang violence, corruption, recurrent flooding, or a currency crisis.

- Finally, the **third step** is to invest in sources of resilience to manage those risks. What can be done to strengthen sources of resilience to specifically manage key risks? Examples include investing in social cohesion and access to loans and insurance in the face of farmer-pastoralist disputes, or strengthening health systems and reducing social stigma in a neglected region facing rising HIV infection rates. The graphic below visualizes this three step process.

Graphic 1: USAID’s Conceptual Framework for Strengthening Resilience



Well-being outcomes: the end goals we want to achieve

Resilience always relates to an end goal—one or more well-being outcomes—that we want to protect and improve in the face of risks. USAID programming targets well-being outcomes ranging from poverty reduction, conflict prevention, and the promotion of human rights and democratic resilience, to greater food security and improved maternal and child health and nutrition. A key part of identifying well-being outcomes is to pinpoint who we plan to work with. For instance, USAID might tailor health programming to displaced people who have distinct needs compared to a nearby host community. Efforts toward the goal of poverty reduction could target debt relief at the national level or market expansion in a specific set of communities.

Risk context: the shocks and stresses that might impede progress towards goals

The risk context refers to exposure to multiple types of shocks and stresses as well as the anticipation of future shocks and stresses. Shocks and stresses can jeopardize the well-being outcomes that USAID is seeking to protect and improve. Analyzing the complex risks that are most likely to affect people, households, communities, systems, and countries is essential so that programming can plan for measures to mitigate current and future shocks and stresses.

Box 2 : Illustrative Examples of Shocks and Stresses

Shocks

- Environmental: severe weather events, e.g., droughts, floods, storms, heat waves, earthquakes, tsunamis
- Health: pandemics, e.g., COVID-19 and SARS, death or disability of a family member
- Political: civil war, gang violence, coups, regime change, mass atrocities
- Economic: price shocks, market collapse, rapid inflation, and supply chain breaks

Stresses

- Environmental: land/soil degradation, pollution, and biodiversity loss
- Social: population growth, urbanization, youth bulge, weak social cohesion, marginalization of women
- Health: chronic diseases, e.g., malaria and HIV/AIDS, weak health systems, malnutrition
- Political: persistent discrimination, poor service delivery, weak governance, crime
- Economic: chronic poverty, unemployment, debt management, poor fiscal and monetary policy

Covariate shocks and stresses affect many people at once, such as droughts, pandemics, or corruption, while idiosyncratic shocks and stresses affect specific individuals or households, such as by losing a job or a death within the family.

Shocks and stresses are typically compounding and reinforcing. For example, severe or recurrent droughts can shift pastoral corridors and intensify local conflict over resources, while price spikes can amplify frustration with government negligence and spur unrest. Stresses such as corruption and poor governance reduce the capacity of systems to manage shocks, e.g., record flooding or a pandemic. Meanwhile, shocks such as conflict or rapid inflation exacerbate stresses, e.g., chronic poverty and unemployment.

Sources of Resilience: Investments to manage risks

Sources of resilience are the specific assets, resources, strategies, relationships, institutions, and services that enable people, households, communities, and systems to manage shocks and stresses in a way that protects or improves their well-being. Common sources of resilience are listed in the text box below.

Box 3: Illustrative Examples of Sources of Resilience

- **Human capital factors** such as education, women’s empowerment, good health, and psychosocial factors such as aspirations for the future and self-efficacy.
- **Relationships and networks** such as social capital, social cohesion, and exposure to information through early warning systems.
- **Political factors** such as responsive and inclusive governance, effective service delivery, fair policing and the rule of law, civil-society capacity.
- **Economic factors** such as access to finance and insurance, diversified livelihood options, remittances, market access and debt relief, sound macroeconomic policy.
- **Systems and institutions** such as shock-responsive social protection and safety nets, local leadership, resilient market systems, and sustainable ecosystems and natural resource management.

Sources of resilience vary significantly across social groups and local contexts, depending on the unique shocks and stresses they face. For example, one household accesses crop insurance to cope with flooding, while another household cannot access insurance but relies on its social network for support, while yet another household is from a marginalized group without a social safety net and must sell off assets to cope with losses. It is essential to consider how sources of resilience vary in relation to different shocks and for different people—especially groups with a history of marginalization and exclusion such as women, LGBTQI+ persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. Sources of resilience often transcend sectors, which means that strengthening them often requires a holistic, cross-sectoral programming approach.

OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE

USAID’s resilience agenda starts with the conceptual framework for strengthening resilience and is reinforced by operational principles that emerge from the on-the-ground realities of implementation. The five principles below are a set of guiding rules that build on the conceptual framework and articulate how the Agency will achieve this policy’s goal.

Principle 1: Use Evidence and Analysis to Better Understand Risks and Improve Resilience

All USAID investments should be designed based on a deep understanding of the risk context and a robust evidence base. This is a necessary foundation for determining, for example, which investments are most cost-effective in managing particular shocks and stresses and in pursuit of specific well-being outcomes. It is also critical for informing shared strategies, joint planning, and anticipatory action in the face of compounding shocks and stresses.

Resilience evidence reviews should include impact evaluations of past interventions (i.e., evaluations that incorporate counterfactual analysis, preferably randomized evaluations that also incorporate cost information). This policy's evidence section provides more detail on how to approach a resilience evidence review.

Evidence exercises to understand risks are also essential and should include rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis of the risk context, including exposure to shocks and stresses, related sources of resilience, and policy analysis of key barriers and opportunities to strengthen resilience. There are benefits to leveraging readily available analyses from, for example, across the Mission, the Interagency, multilateral development banks (MDBs), and implementing partners, among others, although new risk analyses or deeper dives into specific dimensions may be necessary.

For example, in Bangladesh, the Mission conducted [a countrywide risk and resilience assessment](#) that helped to further prioritize resilience and informed how resilience was mainstreamed in the five-year Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) strategy as well as subsequent program designs. Evidence exercises on the risk context can also be leveraged for joint planning and anticipatory action. In Ethiopia, the Mission founded a senior-level decision-making body called the Strategic Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) to meet regularly, analyze new information about possible shocks and emergencies, and collectively make decisions on how to respond to shocks across its humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programming. Risk analysis and resilience evidence reviews should inform all stages of strategic planning, program design, and implementation as well as development diplomacy efforts.

Principle 2: Employ Cross-sectoral Approaches

The countries where USAID works face an array of compounding shocks and stresses that transcend sectors, and sources of resilience often transcend sectors, too. By assessing evidence on what and how cross-sectoral approaches⁵ are needed to strengthen resilience and achieve sectoral goals, USAID and its partners can pursue cross-sectoral approaches within a single activity, or by sequencing, layering, and integrating⁶ multiple activities targeting the same populations.

For example, in Nicaragua, another donor's activity combined cash transfers with either vocational training or a grant for investment in an economic livelihood. The activity highlights encouraging new ways of working cross-sectorally with an activity: vocational training enabled internal migration in response to weather shocks as well as increased wage work, the investment grant expanded income, and both diversified household income and protected households from weather shocks two years after the intervention.⁸ Mission portfolios can also be strategically structured to address cross-sector goals. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an agricultural activity promoting group farming and savings was layered with a peacebuilding activity to bridge conflict between rival groups by promoting economic interdependence through market opportunities and establishing a network of conflict listening centers, which are used to detect early signs of conflict and enable early intervention by peace committees and trained conflict mediators.⁷

5 Cross-sectoral approaches can include working across different development sectors and, in many cases, across humanitarian, development, and peace programming, as described in Principle 3.

6 **Sequencing** is the intentional order in which activities are implemented and actors are engaged to maximize program impact; **Layering** is when multiple interventions, including those at different levels, intentionally impact the same people to address a range of needs. **Integrating** refers to the intentional interaction between layered interventions, resulting in increased outcomes beyond the sum of what would be achieved if they were implemented in isolation.

7 <https://agrilinks.org/post/usaid-activity-uses-agriculture-restore-peace-and-build-resilience>. While an impact evaluation was not conducted to verify outcomes, USAID is dedicated to conducting impact evaluations to better understand sequencing, layering, and integration. For more detail, see p. 14.

Principle 3: Practice Adaptive Management and Shock-Responsive Programming

Adaptive management⁸ and shock-responsive programming approaches are essential for capitalizing on a refined understanding of the risk context to anticipate and respond to new shocks and stresses. Missions and partners should proactively anticipate and plan for shocks and context shifts, building in a high degree of flexibility to respond quickly and effectively. USAID's shock-responsive programming guidance offers practical ways to ensure flexibility through approaches such as shock-responsive programming, budget flexibility, scenario planning, and contingency planning and coordination with other donors.

For example, in Burkina Faso and through a USAID cooperative agreement, the partner designed their activity to anticipate a shock through contingency planning and additional resources that were triggered when needed during a significant 2019 conflict-driven displacement crisis. This shock-responsive approach provided new water points for more than 10,000 displaced persons and host-community members, facilitating access to safe drinking water while reducing tensions between host communities and displaced people amid ongoing conflict. In Somalia during the 2015 El Nino, an activity leveraged budget flexibility to supply sandbags to vulnerable villages facing imminent flooding. The low-cost intervention, assuming a counterfactual in which farmers engaged in no risk management themselves, saved \$28 in emergency aid and \$91 in future income for every dollar invested in vulnerable farmers.⁹

8 Per ADS 201.6, USAID defines adaptive management as “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context.”



USAID helped develop a new early warning system in Villanueva, Honduras, to make the community more resilient to natural hazards, such as flooding and landslides. Photo: Dakota Gardner/USAID.

Principle 4: Strengthen Systems

The most transformational investments to strengthen sources of resilience often take place through systems-level interventions. Investing in systems from local to global levels can strengthen resilience by bolstering comprehensive and enduring approaches to manage shocks and stresses.⁹ An example of an informal, resilient local system is receiving support from self-help groups in times of crisis, while formal systems include government social protection programs (e.g., cash payments or health services), national emergency management systems, physical infrastructure, healthy and well-managed natural systems and health systems, and local and national government that includes effective, legitimate policing and the rule of law. USAID and its partners must make sure these systems are resilient themselves by investing to ensure systems continue to function as conditions change.¹⁰ Locally led development is part and parcel of strengthening resilient systems. Local ownership and consultation, and co-creation with local representatives toward joint goals are essential for fostering sustainable results and our commitment to do “nothing about them, without them.”¹⁰ This is especially critical when it comes to strengthening the capacity¹¹ of host-country systems across levels and enabling countries to take the lead in their own development, through a process rooted in local systems and based on community needs.

From shock-responsive social protection systems and disaster risk financing, to inclusive governance and customary conventions, there are many entry points for USAID and its partners to invest in resilient systems. For example, in Turkey, home to the largest refugee population in the world, donors support the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), which provides more than 1.5 million refugees with reliable cash payments, enabling them to decide for themselves how to cover essential needs including rent, transport, bills, food, and medicine. The program also offered lifeline support to communities impacted by devastating earthquakes.¹² In Mali, humanitarian and development actors teamed up to build a disaster risk financing solution in the form of sovereign risk insurance to catastrophic drought during the 2021 and 2022 growing seasons in the Sahel, which resulted in 296,763 of the most climate-vulnerable Malians receiving cash transfers through social safety nets, along with anticipatory food and nutrition assistance to mitigate negative coping strategies such as selling off assets or taking children out of school. Finally, in the post-conflict Chittagong Hill Tracts area of Bangladesh, a Resilience Food Security Activity (RFSA) found ways to integrate traditional leadership into Disaster Risk Management (DRM) committees at the local and national levels, ultimately reforming national policy. This approach provided the DRM committees with legitimacy that improved local governance, democratic resilience, and DRM outcomes in a context where public trust remains very low. Each of these investments in systems requires a combination of assistance alongside diplomacy and policy tools prioritizing prevention and shifting away from long-term humanitarian assistance.

Principle 5: Advance Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence

HDP coherence is an approach¹¹ that promotes complementarity and collaboration across humanitarian, development, and peace programming toward a common agenda. It capitalizes on the comparative advantage of each pillar and aims to maximize programming impact while reducing the need for humanitarian assistance.¹³ HDP is a more specific part of the “how” in a resilience agenda; specifically, how different kinds of assistance can collaborate toward a common goal. It also emphasizes policy solutions and

9 A local system refers to those interconnected sets of actors—governments, civil society, the private sector, universities, individual citizens, and others—that jointly realize a particular well-being outcome or a set of outcomes.

10 Systems themselves must also be resilient to shocks and stresses. See: Vroegindewey, R., K. O’Planick, T. Pulido, J. Cissé, R. Van Der Merwe, L. Meissner, J. Lamm, and T. Griffin. 2019. *Guidance for Assessing Resilience in Market Systems*. USAID.

11 The U.S. government has elevated HDP coherence in various policies and strategies, including the *U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy*, the *United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, and the *USAID Climate Strategy*.

partnerships that will boost investment and collaboration to prevent conflict and establish development pathways out of crisis.

HDP coherence is essential and most relevant in areas of recurrent and protracted crisis, but it also applies in other settings. For example, USAID's programming should mainstream conflict sensitivity and prevent conflict, and supporting nationwide systems (i.e., social protection or emergency and disaster management) can mitigate the need for humanitarian assistance in the face of unexpected crises.

USAID Ethiopia, despite working to address the impacts of a devastating civil war and heightened levels of humanitarian need, demonstrates what HDP coherence can look like in practice. The Mission has developed an integrated Development Objective (DO) in its CDCS that sets a common agenda across HDP assistance. Staff foster cross-Mission coordination through the SAGE decision-making body, described earlier, as well as by having a dedicated Resilience Coordinator to support partners and operate across the HDP nexus and sectoral programming. The Mission has integrated activities across HDP assistance, such as by layering USAID livelihood diversification activities, drought insurance, and health insurance onto the national Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). The Joint Emergency Operation Program (JEOP), funded by humanitarian assistance and wrapping around the PSNP, also expands in times of crisis to reach additional beneficiaries and protect development gains. Across these activities the Mission integrates conflict sensitivity by developing local conflict analyses and related workshops to adaptively manage activities, designing shock-responsive programming, and training staff and partners on conflict sensitivity. Amid a challenging domestic context, these efforts are prioritizing prevention and investing in systems and interventions that can ultimately shift away from long-term humanitarian assistance.

These operational principles emerge from the resilience conceptual framework and represent five key ways USAID is promoting flexible and adaptive approaches that work across sectors and types of programming to shore up the ability of communities and systems to manage shocks and stresses.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE

The Resilience Policy's goals, foundational process, and operational principles constitute a shared Agency responsibility that depends on proactive Agency leadership and the contributions and collective commitment of the entire workforce. Delivering on these commitments means:

1. Building Operational Capacity Across All USAID Missions, Washington Operating Units (OUs), and Partners

Recommendations

- **Use Analysis to Better Understand Risk Context and Sources of Resilience and Inform Programming.** Strengthening resilience through USAID programming starts with asking questions based on the steps of the [resilience conceptual framework](#). These questions should be considered at key steps across USAID's Program Cycle, including Country/Regional Strategic Planning, Project Design and Implementation, and Activity Design and Implementation. Options for Missions and Washington OUs include: (1) conduct a self-assessment with readily available and existing analyses from, for example, across the Mission, the interagency, MDBs, and implementing partners, among others, as well as historical data and inventory on shocks; and (2) conduct a risk and resilience assessment, which can be conducted using existing [guidance](#) and support from USAID's Center for Resilience.

- Leverage Analysis to Inform Cross-Sectoral Activity Design and Portfolio Approaches:** Missions and Washington OUs should leverage the current evidence base on cost-effective approaches for strengthening resilience in the face of key shocks and stresses and in pursuit of the specific well-being outcome(s) of interest. This evidence base and related guidance will be elaborated on in depth in the Mandatory Reference for the policy. USAID strives to capture and organize diverse sources of evidence related to strengthening resilience.
- Intentionally Design, Procure, and Manage Activities for Collective Impact:**¹⁴ Missions and OUs should identify how USAID investments and partners can work in complementary ways to achieve collective impact. They should also design awards to maximize flexibility. The program office should coordinate across offices and consider when, where, and how to sequence, layer, and integrate flexible programming during design and implementation across partners and in line with host-country priorities and policies.
- Integrate Adaptive Management Tools Throughout the Program Cycle:** Take advantage of existing Mission structures and processes to continually assess shocks. Analysis is not a one-off exercise. While teams often benefit from detailed deep dives at critical planning junctures—i.e., strategy development, mid-course stocktaking, project design, portfolio review, and joint field visits—teams should identify periodic opportunities to examine how dynamics may have changed and the implications for programming, which can be done by convening stakeholders to collaboratively update and analyze changes. Shocks may affect different parts of the Mission portfolio at different times; Missions can use strategic points in the program cycle to assess the risks posed by shocks and stresses and strategize joint approaches.
- Leverage Mission Awards for Coordination, Joint Planning, and HDP Coherence:** Missions and OUs should leverage existing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) and Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)¹⁵ awards to facilitate light-touch coordination and joint planning with relevant stakeholders and activities (separate from monitoring and evaluation function). To support adaptive management and collaborative learning, OUs are also encouraged to invest in “backbone support” (i.e., assistance with planning, coordination, communication, and learning) mechanisms, which can be used to provide, for example, country-level synthesis of evidence on risk, workshops for joint planning, and coordination through efforts such as learning events or joint site visits. USAID can leverage support mechanisms to coordinate and ensure local feedback, particularly from marginalized groups, is integrated throughout the program life cycle.
- Pursue Development Diplomacy and Policy Solutions to Strengthen Resilience:** Missions and OUs should identify opportunities to elevate USAID’s policy voice, strategic partnerships, and influence across the interagency, in global fora, e.g., MDBs and international institutions, and within host countries to strengthen resilience. In specific countries, Missions and OUs should work with governments, the private sector, and other actors to advance policy solutions such as reforming social protections systems to include new shocks or enabling displaced persons to access job opportunities. Globally, they should engage in interagency and policy conversations through development diplomacy, for example, to promote collaboration to prevent conflict or to boost investment in crisis contexts.



USAID supports resilience in Niger through several initiatives, including women's entrepreneurship and savings groups. Photo: Ollivier Girard/ USAID.

2. Prioritizing Strategic Investments to Reduce Humanitarian Need in Areas of Recurrent Crises

Requirements

These requirements are specific to USAID's Resilience Focus Countries (RFCs), which are countries selected by USAID's Resilience Leadership Council (RLC)¹² for additional investment and support. The RLC aims to advance progress by strengthening resilience in areas of recurrent and protracted crises that have received persistently high levels of USAID humanitarian assistance over time.¹³ These requirements are in addition to the recommendations above.

- **Jointly Define the Challenge:** Missions must conduct a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary analysis of the factors creating large humanitarian caseloads year after year to inform strategic investment reducing humanitarian need. This analysis examines where large humanitarian assistance (HA) needs occur, why they persist, and what approaches USAID and its partners are employing or could employ. It also informs the selection of a subnational resilience focus zone (RFZ).

¹² USAID's RLC provides senior-level cross-Agency coordination on the 15 Resilience Focus Countries for multi-sector topic areas that require significant human and financial resources in more than one Washington OU to achieve the objective of building resilience to recurrent crises. The RLC is a cross-Agency, senior level decision-making body that is co-chaired by the Bureaus for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and Resilience, Environment and Food Security (REFS).

¹³ Currently, USAID has 15 RFCs: Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. There are four criteria for selecting RFCs and subnational RFZs: (1) areas of recurrent and protracted crisis with historically and persistently high levels of USAID humanitarian assistance; (2) measures of vulnerability; (3) enabling environment factors; and (4) comparative advantages. USAID is developing a mandatory reference to the ADS that will provide more information on RFCs and RFZs. Additional details can also be found at: <https://www.resiliencelinks.org/regions-countries>

- **Commit to a Common Agenda for Converging and Prioritizing HDP Programming in the RFZ:** Missions, in consultation with USAID’s RLC, must designate a subnational zone. The RFC documents their zone selection in a memo sent to the RLC for concurrence. The zone is then prioritized by the Mission and USAID Washington for investment across HDP funding and programming. RFC Missions manage existing activities and develop new activities in the RFZ to support their strategic vision. RFC Missions receive dedicated country support from USAID/ Washington through the Center for Resilience and the Resilience Technical Working Group.
- **Designate a Mission Resilience Coordinator and Cross-Mission Coordination Structure:** Each Mission is required to designate a Resilience Coordinator as the main point of contact with the RLC. Cross-office coordination structures, led by the Mission Director or Deputy Mission Director, must include representatives of different Mission Offices with programming in the resilience focus zone. The cross-office coordination structure should optimally include Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) and Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and the Agreement Officer’s Representatives/ Contracting Officer’s Representatives (AORs/CORs) or activity managers of the activities operating in the RFZ.
- **Design and Implement Resilience Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Approaches:** Resilience MEL approaches¹⁴ must be employed at both the level of activities operating in the RFZ and at the zone level. Activity MEL plans must incorporate standard indicators to measure relevant sources of resilience. They also must incorporate the ability to measure expected shocks and changes in activity well-being outcomes in the face of shocks. MEL at the zone level is also required, which tests if the Mission is achieving the strategic vision for the zone over at least a five-year period and tracks and measures important contextual changes. Impact evaluations, in particular randomized controlled trials, are preferred.
- **Report Achievements and Strategic Challenges and Opportunities:** RFC Missions must report to the Resilience Technical Working Group (RTWG) and RLC on plans, progress, challenges, and context changes in the RFZ. This will take place through both standard annual Agency processes such as the Operational Plan (OP) key issue reporting, Performance Plan and Report (PPR), and the annual RLC check-in process.

Recommendations

- **Consider Backbone Support for the RFZ:** Missions should consider designing an activity or combination of activities to assist with planning, coordinating, and MEL for activities in the RFZ. Backbone support could entail, for example, resilience learning, internal and external communications, coordination of actors for emergency response, and local capacity strengthening.
- **Pursue a Campaign Approach to USAID Institutional Barriers:** Building on USAID’s [Policy Implementation Assessment](#) of the 2012 Resilience Policy, USAID will work internally and with partners to identify and advocate for necessary reforms related to: (1) meeting staffing and capacity needs; (2) flexible resources, including minimizing legislative requirements; (3) more effective procurement and award management; and (4) coordination challenges and lack of incentives for collaboration, among other potential barriers to success.

¹⁴ USAIDs’ approach to resilience MEL includes frequent monitoring of (a) sources of resilience, (b) shock exposure, and (c) sensitive and relevant well-being outcomes to assess and understand effects immediately after shocks. Resilience MEL also prioritizes evaluations, preferably randomized evaluations with counterfactuals, to assess the relative success of programming designed to strengthen resilience. Finally, Resilience MEL seeks to generate and share evidence on best practices to inform Agency strategies and program design.



A student takes part in an agroforestry vocational training program as part of a livelihood diversification strategy. Photo by Will Baxter/Catholic Relief Services.

RESILIENCE EVIDENCE

An evidence-based resilience agenda requires multiple tailored evidence reviews in light of the diversity of shocks and stresses encompassed by this policy. This section identifies key principles and concepts necessary for conducting resilience evidence reviews.

Evidence reviews, guided by key principles for synthesizing empirical and theoretical sources, are most valuable for understanding which approaches tend to be effective, for whom, and under what contextual conditions. USAID and its partners should conduct evidence reviews that compare cost-effectiveness of alternative approaches to a particular problem. Cost-effectiveness measures how much a key development outcome changes in relation to how it would have changed without the intervention (i.e., impact), per dollar spent on that intervention, for a particular population. Evidence reviews, combined with stakeholder perspectives and locally driven lessons, should then inform overall strategy. Evidence reviews should:

- Prioritize studies with counterfactuals, in particular randomized evaluations, when recommending specific interventions for given contexts;
- Consider costs to compare likely impact-per-dollar of specific interventions;
- Focus on outcomes for specific populations (e.g., ultra-poor or displaced people);

- Consider durability of impacts; and,
- Encompass global evidence, i.e., should not prioritize USAID-funded evidence.

Drawing on the resilience conceptual framework (p. 4), resilience evidence reviews should identify credible and appropriate evidence based on the specific shocks, well-being outcomes, target populations, and other conditions of interest. With that focus defined, evidence reviews should then examine “resilience to shocks” in two key ways: **actual coping** and **ability to cope**.

To incorporate **actual coping**, evidence reviews should examine how interventions lessen the negative impact of a real-world shock on households and communities.¹⁵ Stated broadly, a resilient household is more able to maintain its plans for how much and what to spend irrespective of short-run income changes. For example, an intervention that improves household resilience in the face of a drought shock will help a household use other assets or income, or social networks, to minimize the reduction in food security relative to what they would have done without the intervention.

To incorporate **ability to cope**, evidence reviews should examine how interventions improve the means for households and communities to protect themselves from negative impacts of shocks that may or may not materialize.¹⁶ These reviews could either examine (1) broad changes that protect against a range of shocks, or (2) narrow changes that protect against specific shocks. For example, broad changes could include improved wealth, financial assets, income, and diversified income.¹⁷ Narrow changes could include insurance for specific shocks, drought-resistant agricultural technology, and social cohesion protecting from intercommunal conflicts.¹⁸

Clearly conceptualizing resilience through one of these two approaches is essential for synthesizing research as part of an evidence review that can then inform strategy, activity design, and evaluation.

Future Research Needs

Despite growth in the relevant evidence base, the global development community needs more evidence on the relative cost-effectiveness of resilience-strengthening efforts. For example, relative to food security and poverty well-being outcomes in the face of **environmental** shocks, we have less evidence on programming to improve resilience to **health, conflict, and security** shocks. We also need better qualitative and quantitative metrics of resilience, including those measured through surveys or geospatial analysis. For instance, social cohesion, social networks, and psychosocial well-being are important concepts to measure (both as sources of and impact from resilience).

15 For example: Balana et al., in a 2023 IFPRI working paper, “Anticipatory cash transfers for climate resilience: Findings from a randomized experiment in Northeast Nigeria,” find that anticipatory cash transfers (compared to cash transfers after a shock, as done via humanitarian assistance) reduce harmful coping strategies and can build future resilience. Also Hirvonen et al. (2023), “Do ultra-poor graduation programs build resilience against droughts? Evidence from rural Ethiopia,” *IFPRI Discussion Paper 2206* find that the primary means for protecting against a shock in a graduation program was through enhanced household savings.

16 For example: Ward et al., in a 2020 paper, “Drought-tolerant rice, weather index insurance, and comprehensive risk management for smallholders: Evidence from a multi-year field experiment in India,” in the *Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, 64(2): (421–454), use a randomized controlled trial to test the individual and combined impact of a drought-tolerant rice cultivar and index-based weather insurance on farmers exposed to recurring adverse monsoon conditions and how both products can complement farmers’ risk management.

17 For example: Kazianga et al. (2006) “Consumption smoothing? Livestock, insurance and drought in rural Burkina Faso,” *Journal of Development Economics* 79(2): (413-446) find that households with more wealth are more able to weather shocks.

18 For example: Emerick et al. (2016), “Technological innovations, downside risk, and the modernization of agriculture,” *American Economic Review* 2016 finds, in a randomized controlled trial, that promotion of an improved flood-resistant rice variety to protect against poor yields increases farm productivity in future years by encouraging other farm investments that expand production.

Future research should also address operational factors such as how to coordinate interventions in fragile and shock-prone areas (i.e., sequencing, layering, and integrating activities). For instance, under what conditions do the management costs of coordination efforts generate sufficient additional benefits to people to justify the additional expenditure, which might otherwise be used to include more people in the core activity? Future research should inform the necessary trade-off decisions made by program designers.

CONCLUSION

This Policy outlines how USAID can respond effectively to the risks and crises that people face globally and institutionalizes USAID's leadership in this space. It reiterates, guides, and reinforces USAID's steadfast commitment to championing its resilience agenda as part of a coordinated, whole-of-government effort with our partners on the ground.

Concerted action—across sectors, stakeholders, and the international community—is crucial for success. This policy is intended to serve as a catalyst for collective progress with our development and humanitarian partners to prioritize resilience everywhere we work.



USAID supports commercial livestock activities with the potential to create inclusive growth. Photo: Tine Frank/USAID.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview> or <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/resilience-and-poverty-escapes-3/>
- 2 <https://www.prio.org/publications/13513>
- 3 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Policy%20Framework%20%28V16%29%2005-04-2023_2.pdf
- 4 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/unhcr-global-displacement-hits-another-record-capping-decade-long-rising-trend>
- 5 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/conflict-costs-global-economy-14-trillion-a-year/>
- 6 <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2022/03/the-long-lasting-economic-shock-of-war>
- 7 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/10/climate-crisis-cost-global-economies/>
- 8 Macours, K., Premand, P., Vakis, R. “Transfers, Diversification and Household Risk Strategies: Can Productive Safety Nets Help Households Manage Climatic Variability?”, *The Economic Journal*, Volume 132, Issue 647, October 2022, Pages 2438–2470.
- 9 Concern Worldwide (n.d). “Value for Money Analysis: El Nino Flood Mitigation.”
- 10 https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/USAID_NPI_ALPGuideSeries-4_5-27-2022b.pdf
- 11 <https://www.usaid.gov/policy/local-capacity-strengthening>
- 12 <https://www.ifrc.org/our-work/disasters-climate-and-crises/cash-and-voucher-assistance/emergency-social-safety-net-essn>
- 13 From Programming Considerations for HDP Coherence: A Note for USAID’s Implementing Partners cleared and released by the Resilience Leadership Council in 2022.
- 14 https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z8N9.pdf
- 15 https://usaidlearninglab.org/system/files/resource/files/keyconcepts_twopager_8.5x11_v7_20160907_0.pdf



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20523

www.usaid.gov