CONCERN worldwide

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

A Concern Worldwide discussion paper

ENDING EXTREME POVERTY WHATEVER IT TAKES

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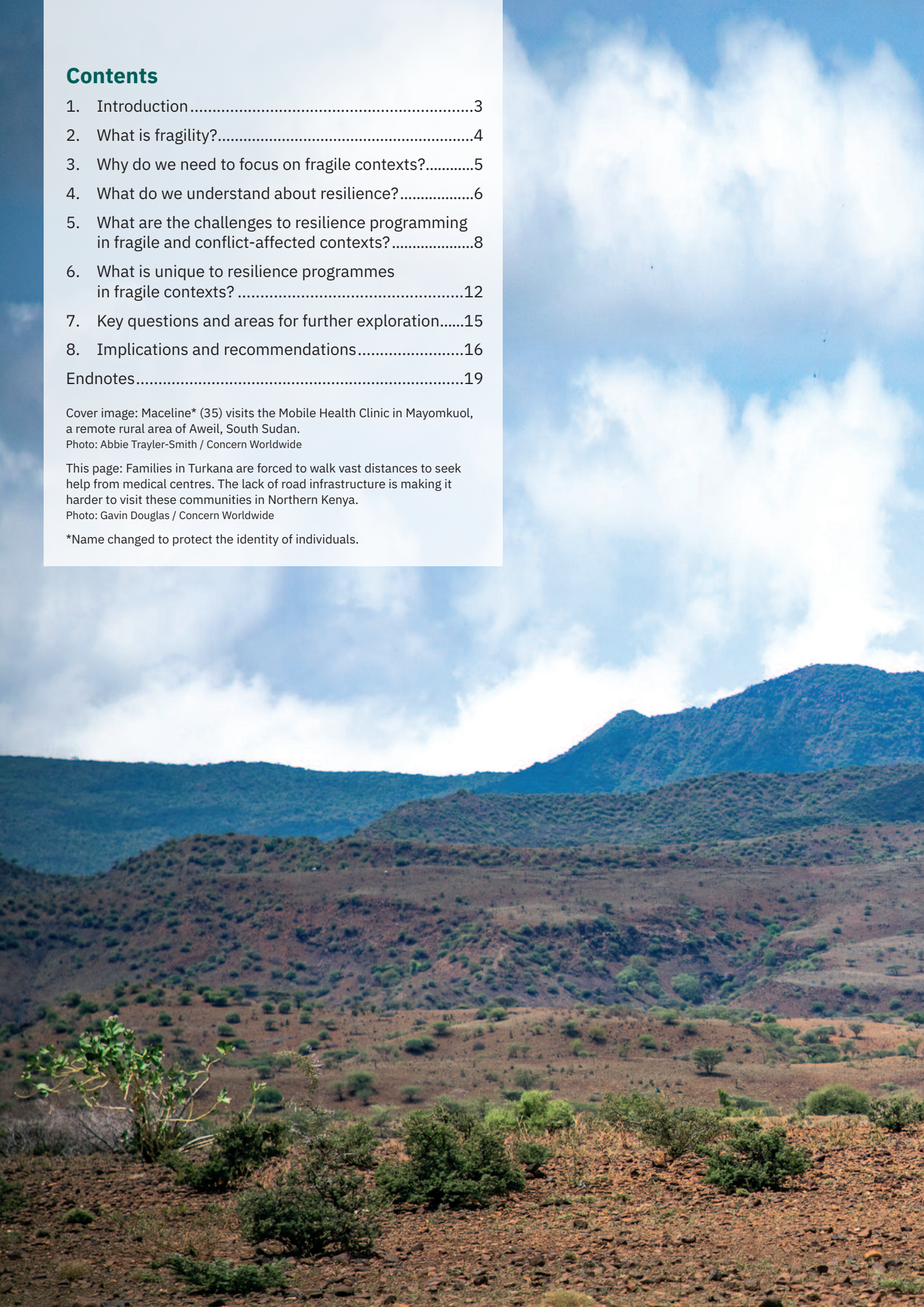
Contents

Cover image: Maceline* (35) visits the Mobile Health Clinic in Mayomkuol, a remote rural area of Aweil, South Sudan.
Photo: Abbie Trayler-Smith / Concern Worldwide

This page: Families in Turkana are forced to walk vast distances to seek help from medical centres. The lack of road infrastructure is making it harder to visit these communities in Northern Kenya.
Photo: Gavin Douglas / Concern Worldwide

*Name changed to protect the identity of individuals.



1. Introduction

Over the last decade there has been a growing focus on the concept of building resilience. This stems in part from the increasing consensus around the need to shift from responding to disasters to addressing the risks of disasters before they happen, focusing not only on emergency response but also on the root causes of disasters and extreme poverty.

Resilience programming has come about in response to recurrent crises. Where crises are predictable, such as droughts or floods that occur on a cyclical basis, building resilience is intended to reduce the need for repeated and expensive humanitarian assistance. In the context of climate change, which will increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, resilience programming aims to strengthen systems that help vulnerable people to withstand and mitigate the negative impacts of recurrent crises, and adapt to new and evolving climatic patterns.

Although resilience programming has gained traction in relation to weather and climate-related hazards, there is increasing recognition of the need to address a wider range of risks, from conflict to social and political shocks; building resilience in fragile contexts where there are multiple dimensions to the drivers of vulnerability. There is also an increasing focus on areas where the crises may be protracted as well as cyclical.

Eradicating extreme poverty in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is a major challenge. There is still much to understand about how to do it, practically, within a broader policy and funding environment that is not aligned to the specific needs of these contexts. However, at the same time, there is increasing recognition of the issues and the necessity to change the way we work and the way the international system operates.

Box 1

What we mean by 'resilience'

Concern defines resilience as the ability of all vulnerable households, or individuals that make up a community, to anticipate, respond to, cope with, and recover from the effects of shocks, and to adapt to stresses in a timely and effective manner without compromising their long-term prospects of moving out of poverty.

In addressing the challenges, the experience of organisations working in these contexts will be essential to ensure solutions are grounded in reality.

Concern Worldwide implements a number of resilience programmes in fragile contexts. As we continue to prioritise working in these areas we aim to draw on our existing experience to:

- Strengthen the evidence base around effective approaches to building resilience.
- Acknowledge and address gaps in our understanding.
- Ensure we are innovative in our programming.
- Address the challenges and opportunities to generating impact at scale.

This paper sets out why it is important to work on resilience in fragile and conflict affected contexts. It discusses the approaches that we see as central to effective resilience programming and outlines some of the lessons from Concern's resilience programmes in fragile contexts. It then explores the areas where there is still much to learn, identifying the questions that we need to address as organisations and as a sector in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is intended to spark discussion and reflection on the way that we work.

2. What is fragility?

Fragility is the opposite of resilience; when one system collapses (for example, the environmental system), other systems also collapse, or cannot cope (for example, the health system). Some of the features of fragility exist in most countries to differing degrees and can fluctuate over time. Fragility can also exist in different forms within a state, and can involve transnational or international dimensions.

Fragility is multidimensional and takes many forms. It can be categorised broadly into the groups of[1]:

- Political
- Societal
- Economic
- Environmental
- Security

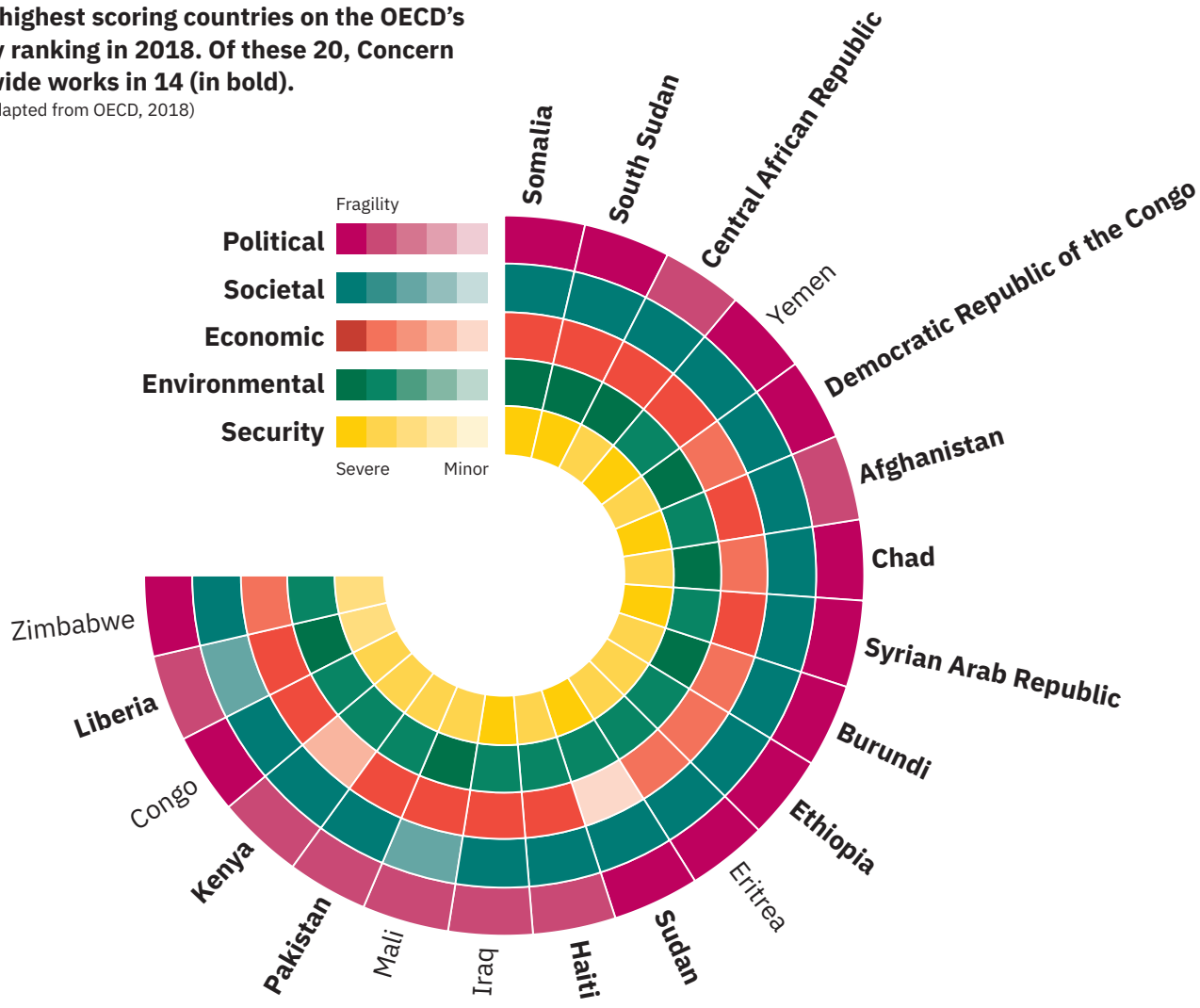
Defining the exact features of fragility is controversial and involves subjective choices about which features are to be included.

There are limitations inherent in any attempt to categorise[2]. However, many of the countries in which Concern works score highly in various fragility indexes. The OECD annually scores countries for levels of fragility across the five categories; Concern works in 14 of the 20 most fragile countries (see Figure 1). These countries can also be categorised as experiencing protracted or cyclical crises, or a combination of both.

Fragile states often exhibit the type of characteristics that drive, perpetuate, and compound vulnerability: low levels of transparency; accountability; democratic participation and access to justice; high levels of corruption and inequality; weak institutions; ineffective public administration; weak social and environmental protection; and low levels of equity in the use of public resources. Civil and political rights may be suspended when states of emergency are in force and the state may itself be a party to a conflict, raising questions about its legitimacy and limiting its potential to act as a neutral partner.

Figure 1

The 20 highest scoring countries on the OECD's fragility ranking in 2018. Of these 20, Concern Worldwide works in 14 (in bold).
(Source: adapted from OECD, 2018)



3. Why do we need to focus on fragile contexts?

We are leaving people behind

Globally, progress has been made on reducing mortality from disasters. However, this progress has not been universal. Today, 58 per cent of deaths from disasters occur in the top 30 most fragile states[3]. For decades global hunger has been reducing, but the last few years have seen an increase in the number of people going hungry, driven largely by conflict and climate change[4].

Investment in resilience-building in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is critical if the global targets laid out in Agenda 2030 and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction are to be achieved. Without action, more than 80 per cent of the world's poorest people will be living in fragile contexts by 2030[5].

An investment gap

Only 35 per cent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) goes to countries where 75 per cent of the world's poorest live[6]. Since the food security crises in the Sahel and Horn of Africa in 2011-2012, international donors have made significant investments in resilience programming. Despite this, countries affected by crisis receive less development funding than they would without the crisis[7], and humanitarian funding often struggles to fill the gap:

- When a crisis occurs, the drop in development funding is often not fully made up for by humanitarian assistance; funding can decrease at a time it is most needed[8].
- Middle Income Countries receive 10 times more ODA per person living in extreme poverty than Low Income Countries[9].
- Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) spending in fragile and conflict affected contexts is a fraction of that spent in other countries; in fragile and conflict affected states, for every $100 of emergency aid spent after a disaster, just $1.30 is spent on DRR before[10].
- Many of the countries that will be worst affected by climate change are also fragile and conflict-affected. Yet climate finance has thus far struggled to flow to those most in need; at present the Least Developed Countries receive only 18 per cent of global climate finance[11].

An ineffective international system

It is widely recognised that the international aid architecture does not effectively deliver for people living in protracted crises. Discussions on Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) have attempted to address the gap and negative impacts of the different ways in which the humanitarian sector and development sector work for a number of decades. In the last few years, these LRRD discussions have been replaced by a focus on the "triple nexus" of humanitarian, development and peace-building.

As part of these nexus discussions, the New Way of Working process has been set up by the UN to look at how it can change its mode of operation across the multiple agencies that make up the UN system. Within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development the nexus has also risen up the agenda, with Development Assistance Committee members committing to a set of recommendations. These aim to provide a framework for support, incentivise and implement more collaborative, coherent and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts[12].

The role of resilience programming in fragile contexts

Resilience programming seeks to address the underlying causes of vulnerabilities and strengthen people's ability to cope, adapt and transform; moving from responding to disasters to addressing the risks ahead of time. When it comes to the triple nexus, this means ensuring that policies and practices put in place across the three sectors are mutually supportive in addressing underlying drivers. In recognition that the links between the three are not linear, it also means having a system that is flexible enough to respond early to changing contexts and risks.

Programming that seeks to enhance resilience is a key part of responses to the trends of increasing conflict and ever more protracted and cyclical crises. In a context where an increasing concentration of people living in extreme poverty will be in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, we need to understand under what circumstances, and with the support of which interventions, resilience can be built most effectively. Fragility will look different in different contexts and a thorough understanding of the local expression of fragility is central.

There remains a significant information gap around how best to build resilience in these contexts. There is a lack of robust evidence on programming in conflict-affected contexts generally, and on how to effectively pursue resilience building in conflict-affected contexts specifically. There is a separation of practitioners addressing humanitarian response, development and conflict which prevents the dialogue needed to create a shared understanding of what a blending of resilience, humanitarian action and peacebuilding approaches could look like.

4. What do we understand about resilience?

There are many elements that enable people to be resilient. A person or community's resilience is dynamic and influenced by economic and natural resources, social networks, entitlements, institutions and governance, human resources, and technology. There is increasing evidence of the importance of building personal resilience and transforming individual attitudes alongside strengthening social networks and social capital in developing and sustaining resilience gains. In countries where the capacity of government is weak, reinforcing a culture of self-reliance is hugely important.

Access to financial services and financial literacy alongside increasing human capital, strengthening gender equality, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management are all emerging as key aspects of effective resilience building[13]. Resilience programmes should work across and aim to strengthen three broad categories of system: economic and financial, risk management, and basic services (see Box 2).

Principles of Concern's resilience programming

There are a core set of principles which can be applied as lenses when designing programmes[14]. These can be applied in all contexts, including those that are fragile and conflict-affected:

- ***Focus on the drivers of vulnerability (not the hazard).*** Vulnerability is rarely due to a single cause. Rather, it is the product of intersecting social processes that result in inequalities in socio-economic status and income, as well as in exposure to hazards[15].
- ***Focus on systems.*** A contextual analysis should examine the underlying causes of vulnerability from the household back up through the community, the local area, and up to the national level, attempting to understand the political economy that maintains the status quo. Programmes should be designed to address the obstacles and opportunities identified in the analysis at different levels.
- ***Policy and advocacy are core parts of programming.*** Some of the obstacles identified in the context analysis will need to be addressed through changes in the wider system in which the people we're working with live. New laws or policies may sometimes provide the solution, but in other cases the 'advocacy' component may look very different; it may mean finding ways to change the incentives of powerful actors in a manner that benefits the most vulnerable.
- ***A focus on sustainable solutions that will have a lasting impact after the programme has finished.*** A good litmus test of whether a project or programme is properly designed to build resilience is an analysis of the extent to which all of its interventions are focused on lasting solutions. We must be able to describe the system that a particular intervention is designed to change, and to articulate how that change will come about and be maintained.
- ***Manage risk and protect development gains through innovative solutions.*** Incentives must be provided for people to adapt their practices, giving them confidence that they can continue to improve their wellbeing in the face of future threats. For example, in some cases strengthening traditional savings and insurance models like seed banking and warrantage schemes have shown positive results.
- ***Build in contingency funds and plans to enable adaptability.*** A core element of any resilience programme must be to plan for setbacks identified in advance through risk analysis and effective community-centred early warning systems. These should be linked to contingency funds or 'crisis modifier', which is flexible and easily accessible.
- ***Layer, link and sequence interventions.*** Given the complexity of addressing vulnerability, thought must be given to the relationship between activities and the sequence in which they will be implemented. This has implications for programme management and the types of partnerships that may be required.

Box 2

Pillars of resilience programmes: a checklist

When designing resilience programmes, specific actions will be required across the three different systems: economic and financial; risk management; and basic services. The specific objectives will depend upon the local context and analysis. The list here serves as a 'checklist' of the possible programme objectives.

a. Strengthened economic and financial systems

- Diversified livelihoods that are less susceptible to climate variability and other potential sources of livelihood shock, such as insecurity.
- Reduced vulnerability of agriculture and/or livestock production to climate variability and other shocks and stresses at the farm level. At the same time, strengthening agricultural systems related to inputs and service.
- Sustainable solutions identified for facilitating market access for producers.
- Development of entrepreneurial and employment skills.
- Financial inclusion increased, ensuring that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – transactions, payments, savings, credit, and insurance – delivered in a responsible and sustainable way. Village Savings and Loan Associations, for example, have been shown to have a very positive impact on the financial well-being of vulnerable people.

b. Strengthened risk management systems

- Development of disaster risk management plans at community and local levels, integrated across all relevant thematic areas.
- Strengthened local and national systems for early warning and response.
- Enhanced sustainable natural resource management at local, regional and national level.
- Strengthened social protection systems that are linked to disaster risk management. Resilience programmes that incorporate safety nets/crisis modifiers should be designed in a way that facilitates handover of these systems to local ownership and ensures their sustainability.

c. Strengthened basic service systems

- Strengthened local health systems, ensuring they are better able to respond to and anticipate increases in demand for treatment services.
- Effective individual and collective practices that improve health, nutrition and hygiene outcomes before, during and after a crisis.
- Increased access to water services that are governed in an ecologically and financially sustainable way.
- Educational systems that equip children and young people with the skills and knowledge needed to improve and expand livelihoods options.
- Strengthened governance and local ownership through decentralisation of decision making and budgeting. The decision-making processes for prioritising actions and assigning budgets should be made in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity i.e. as close as possible to the lowest administrative level.

5. What are the challenges to resilience programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts?

The requirement for resilience programming to reduce vulnerability, strengthen systems and build sustainable solutions raises particular challenges in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The central challenge is the capacity and/or willingness of the state itself to support and maintain a governance and regulatory environment for addressing inequality, risk management, and economic development.

Fragile contexts have a number of characteristics that make it difficult to implement resilience programmes. They can be affected by conflict and displacement and are often compounded by recurrent crises as a result of natural hazards which can routinely undermine people's livelihoods. Weak governance systems, or cases where government does not control all areas of the country, can make it very difficult to link the community and national level, and can undermine the long-term sustainability of programmes. Volatile security situations make access difficult, high risk and logistically expensive. The impacts of conflict can have impacts far beyond the areas immediately affected.

Resilience programming in protracted crises can be complex and challenging, especially when working with people who have been displaced. Their displacement may have been triggered by a combination of insecurity and recurrent drought, for example, but as they are no longer living in their home areas (and may not wish to return), it is often no longer possible to address the drivers of vulnerability that led them to migrate.

As outlined above, conflict is just one aspect of fragility. However, its impact on people's resilience is currently poorly understood, as are the differences in approaches to building resilience to conflict, compared with other shocks and stresses. In areas of acute conflict, severe insecurity limits movement and in some cases, leads to near-total dependence on aid. Even in more stable areas conflict can profoundly affect communities through localised violence, economic crisis and as an impact multiplier when disasters occur[16].

Many of the countries that will be worst affected by climate change are also fragile and conflict-affected. Though difficult to consistently measure, the balance of evidence suggests that disasters exacerbate pre-existing conflicts. In conflict-affected contexts, the consequences of extreme weather events such as drought, and in particular their impact on population movements, can contribute to conflict among divided communities. In addition, conflict worsens the negative impacts of climate change. A key finding from Concern's reports "Conflict and Hunger"[17] and "Breaking the Cycle"[18] is that conflict is a threat multiplier in contexts of climate change. Disasters, climate change and conflict individually and collectively compound communities' vulnerabilities, erode coping strategies, and undermine long-term recovery and sustainable development.

Economic fragility can have impacts across programming from speed and cost of procurement to project activities. Political and economic uncertainty can also affect the scope for private sector engagement and partnerships, and take up the time and attention of government stakeholders.

"Disasters, climate change and conflict individually and collectively compound communities' vulnerabilities, erode coping strategies, and undermine long-term recovery and sustainable development."

Box 3

Case study: Building links between the community and national level through the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium[19]

To illustrate more concretely some of the challenges referred to in Section 5, here we explore some of those faced by the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium (ARC) in linking community and national level actions.

More than 30 years of conflict, combined with poverty, inequality and social and economic pressures such as migration, unemployment and land tenure practices, have made people more vulnerable to disasters and forced them to live in more disaster-prone areas. Each year, on average around 200,000 people are directly affected by hazards such as droughts, floods, landslides, avalanches, earthquakes and extreme weather. Over 295,000 people have been affected from January to October this year[20]. The 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview estimated that 6.3m people, roughly one sixth of the population, would need humanitarian assistance over the year[21]. A significant driver of humanitarian needs has been a continued spread and deepening of conflict.

The ARC was established in 2014 as a partnership between Afghanaid, ActionAid, Concern Worldwide, Save the Children and UN Environment. The ARC took a holistic approach, recognising that conflict and environmental degradation can exacerbate the impacts of natural hazards. It aimed to support communities and improve ecosystem management in order to reduce the risk of disasters and build adaptive capacity to climate change.

ARC worked with communities and with government institutions to build operational capacities for effective emergency planning and response at all levels. Government counterparts were involved in the steering and monitoring of the programme, with the main government counterpart being the Afghanistan National Disaster Risk Management Authority (ANDMA). Despite significant interest from ANDMA in participating and taking ownership, there were a number of challenges in making the link between the community and national level.

A principal challenge is that the central government is not in control of all of the country. In addition, the 2019 external evaluation of the ARC programme[22] highlighted some barriers:

- Low levels of policy enforcement in rural areas and limited decentralisation, which meant that sub-national government was not well-positioned to raise citizens' awareness and listen to their concerns.
- Where public services have low pay, varying staffing levels and skewed recruitment and promotion criteria, it can lead to low levels of motivation. That said, officials who participated in the programme were generally open to the objectives and enthusiastic in sharing their experiences.
- Security risks are faced by district and government officials travelling to the field; officials expose themselves to significant security hazards when travelling overland.
- Capacity to plan for and respond to disasters in Afghanistan is constrained by heavy dependence on donor-funding, donor preferences and security concerns. ANDMA is one of the smallest government departments, with limited funding.

The community level remains the most significant for collective action and service delivery for many people in Afghanistan. Strengthening community level self-help capacities to plan for and respond to natural hazards therefore remains valuable. Making the links between the local and national level is also necessary; but improved policy and capacity at national level will not automatically result in improvements at the local level.

Natural Resource Management Council leaders and children in Chermay Korshed village, Chaab district, province of Takhar, Afghanistan.
Photo: Rosaleen Martin / Concern Worldwide

6. What is unique to resilience programmes in fragile contexts?

The elements of resilience programming outlined in Section 4 are not unique to fragile contexts. What then is different about building resilience in fragile and conflict affected contexts? Our experience has highlighted several elements that need special consideration.

a. Timeframes and approaches to risk

A focus on trust building and cooperation between different stakeholders is critical. This takes time and energy, which needs to be factored in. Building resilience is possible but the starting point is different in different contexts and will likely take longer[23]. A more nuanced understanding of progress relative to the starting point is needed. Resilience building in fragile states requires long-term investment.

Zero tolerance for risk in highly complex and difficult-to-work contexts will reduce the ability of different actors to deliver resilience programmes. While compliance procedures and counter-terror measures are necessary, excessive focus on fiduciary risk over other risks[24], and excessive risk aversion can have a negative impact on ability to achieve the overall goal of aid in fragile contexts.

b. Conflict sensitivity analysis

Conflict is a key driver of uncertainty and can often prevent adaptation and investment in resilience. The strongest available evidence indicates that conflict undermines adaptive capacity among affected households and past exposure to violence affects long-term decision-making (including investment and planning)[25]. In addition, while many crises reconfigure social relationships and behaviours in their aftermath, violent conflict has a profound and potentially irreversible effect on some forms of social capital, an essential component of resilience.

Beyond social relations alone, the strategies adopted by households to cope with risk in the face of conflict may differ to those adopted in peacetime in response to other disruptions. This may be because the consequences of conflict differ, where the destruction of livelihoods and assets and mass forced displacement are not always effects of other shocks. It may also be because strategies that contribute to bolstering resilience to environmental shocks – for example the accumulation of assets or investment in human capital – can be liabilities in conflict. Vulnerability to shocks in conflict is a function not only of vulnerability to poverty, but also vulnerability to violence, which are not always the same. In many contexts, the accumulation of physical or financial assets is risky because it can attract looting or predation by armed groups. Equally, the targeting of wealthy households or elites in violence points to dangers associated with investing in human capital.

In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, conflict sensitivity analysis is critical. Prevention of the deepening of social fissures is essential, but resilience programming would ideally go beyond this. Resilience programming should be designed in a conflict-sensitive manner that strengthens opportunities for dispute resolution and addressing grievances. Where possible, the strengthening of conflict management systems at community and local levels should be integrated into resilience programming. Conflict considerations should be integrated through thorough and regular gender-sensitive conflict analysis into contextual analysis, needs assessments, programme design and annual/multi-annual review.

c. Taking a systems approach

A core element of resilience building is looking at the different elements that lead to vulnerability, and creating system changes to enable impact at scale and address these underlying drivers.

When it comes to taking a systems approach, the term 'system' should not be understood as referring solely to 'the state'. The system is not merely the set of public institutions holding a form of legitimate authority under relative stability. A system will usually be made up of both formal and informal actors, rules, and institutions.

In fragile contexts, imbalances of power exist, as they do in less fragile contexts. Sound contextual analyses will identify entry points and opportunities to influence changes in power and in systems that involve a range of actors. When working on system strengthening, programmes should work with local entry points and existing formal and informal systems. These may be different in fragile contexts, and locally specific strategies may be required, but there should be no assumption that resilience building is impossible in these contexts – just that the starting point may be different and that it may take longer to demonstrate results.

It can be challenging to identify the most appropriate interventions where the state is a driver of vulnerability, for example in authoritarian states. Actions should avoid strengthening the status quo and therefore prolonging those vulnerabilities. A strong context analysis is fundamental to ensuring that activities do not legitimise actors, processes and systems that are drivers of vulnerability.

Different forms of government (often based on a colonial legacy) will shape the way in which systems function (or not) in a particular place. Building resilience requires an understanding of this so that we can make a judgement about how to engage with the state (if at all). There is a lack of evidence, but there are opinions on how we should try to build resilience in fragile contexts. Some believe we should always support the strengthening of existing national systems, while others believe we should work 'from the periphery towards the centre' – this means building on what is already there, but placing more emphasis on strengthening civil society and the private sector. The context is crucial in determining the extent to which you would pursue one strategy or the other, and it may be more of a continuum.

Finally, more emphasis on the policies at the local, national and international level that enable resilience is needed if we are to change the environment in which people live; programming alone is not enough. The targeting and implementation of effective advocacy is more difficult the more fragile the context, whether by conflict or poor or repressive governance. However, if we are serious about strengthening systems, influencing-related aims and activities must be embedded into programme design.

d. Flexibility and adaptability in programmes

In fragile contexts, where the situation is constantly changing, sometimes dramatically, an adaptive management approach is necessary, including with in-built contingency funds where feasible (see Box 4 for an example). Adaptable management approaches can also ensure accountability to the communities we work with. Better integration of monitoring and evaluation with intervention programmes, particularly during the planning and development phases, can help to ensure that programmes can be dynamically adapted to best suit the needs of the target community and therefore have the greatest impact.

During the lifetime of a resilience programme, contingency plans and funding mechanisms should be in place to respond early when signals of a crisis emerge, but a resilience programme should also seek to strengthen local and national governance systems that can sustain this function in the absence of external support.

"More emphasis on the policies at the local, national and international level that enable resilience is needed if we are to change the environment in which people live."

e. Working in partnership

To deliver the multi-component and multi-level programmes required to support resilience building, and to achieve sustainability of impact within complex and changing environments, partnerships are essential. No one organisation has all the skills necessary to tackle a specific problem and with the challenge of resilience building in complex environments, multiagency consortia are seen as the best approach to building resilience in practice. There are different forms of partnership in consortia and choosing the right people and organisations to work with is crucial. Knowing how to structure the partnership at the planning stage as well as creating strong synergies among partners throughout the programme lifetime is challenging.

For sustainability and long-term impact, working with national or local partner organisations is important. For example, having a national research partner leading on research components can enable the programme's research to be used in policy making. When planning and setting up resilience programmes, it is important to support local organisations that are achieving positive impact at the grassroots level and to connect with organisations that have a wide reach, to increase the collective impact. It is also important to map out where to make best use of existing capacity, identifying complementarities and synergies.

Box 4

Case study: Building in adaptability through contingency funds and early warning early action systems in Somalia

An effective Early Warning Early Action (EWEA) system plays a key role in building the resilience of disaster-affected people. Helping people anticipate and prepare for shocks, including through mechanisms such as early warning systems, contingency planning and stock prepositioning, is central to Concern's resilience approach. So too is delivering a timely emergency response when circumstances require it and local capacity is overwhelmed. Effective EWEA brings these two essential elements together to ensure we act quickly to adapt our programming in response to warning signs, reducing the potential impact of a disaster.

EWEA is a central part of the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) programme, which Concern is implementing together with the Norwegian Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, ACF and CESVI. It systematically monitors early warning indicators in its programme areas and includes a mechanism to trigger a rapid localised response when signs of a potential crisis emerge. Ahead of the 2016/17 droughts in Somalia, this approach appears to have worked to allow Concern to respond ahead of time, mitigating drought-related displacement[26].

Most of Somalia depends on two annual rainy seasons for agriculture and livestock production. When, in 2016, there were signs that the April to June Gu rains were not performing well, BRCiS began responding with cash transfers of $30 per month to 803 of the poorest households in Gedo. In November, as the subsequent Deyr rains appeared to be failing and the probability of disaster had therefore increased, Concern increased the amount to $50 per month and doubled the number of recipient households to 1606, now including the poorest 20 percent of households. By January 2017, with the failure of the rains confirmed, Concern was able to increase the cash transfers to $60 per month with newly accessed emergency funds from DFID and ECHO. Despite the crisis, markets continued to function and food remained available for purchase, minimising displacement to urban centres.

Our approach to EWEA meant that by the time the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit – the leading source of food security and nutrition surveillance in Somalia – indicated the possibility of famine in Somalia for the first time in a report published on 16 January, 2017 Concern's BRCiS Programme staff had already been responding to that possibility in half of its target communities for seven months through support for fodder production and cash transfers[27].

Discussions with the BRCiS target communities and observations by Concern field staff suggest that, as a result of this early action, the villages in which BRCiS operates fared considerably better than might have been expected. Despite high displacement levels across the country, none of the BRCiS villages experienced significant numbers of people leaving due to the drought. In fact, even though BRCiS communities were originally targeted as the most vulnerable in their respective areas, most became hosts to displaced people from nearby and previously "better off" villages.

The second phase of the BRCiS programme included a Crisis Modifier contingency fund; this was activated for drought impact mitigation in June this year, following a failed Deyr 2018 season and a late and erratic Gu 2019 season. Granular early warning data from BRCiS intervention areas was triangulated with district and regional-level data to trigger early actions in the worst affected areas of Somalia, preventing the deterioration of the humanitarian situation during the lean season months from July-September.

The experience of incorporating early warning early action mechanisms into long-term resilience programming has resulted in many valuable lessons, and the BRCiS programme will continue to innovate and apply new approaches. From the initial pilot, the following lessons which are being incorporated into the next phase of programming are useful to highlight:

- Harmonising early warning systems across areas and organisations operating is necessary to ensure standardisation and enable strategic decision-making.
- To ensure that triggers for shocks lead to early action, develop clear definitions of different shocks, set thresholds per shock of interest, and identify relevant context-based measures to be carried out in case thresholds are reached.
- Properly working EWEA is resource intensive and needs to be considered in the design phase. Members within BRCiS had to make resource adjustment decisions within the implementation phase to address unprecedented contextual changes that required swift action; this destabilised the existing design and needed justifications that took longer to be validated by the donor. The second phase of BRCiS programme therefore set aside a Crisis Modifier contingency fund for early action, activated earlier this year[28].

Above: Local women attend a community meeting in Mogadishu, Somalia.
Photo: Marco Gualazzini / Concern Worldwide

7. Key questions and areas for further exploration

There are no easy answers to the question of how to build resilience in fragile contexts. Despite progress in Concern's and the sector's understanding, there remain many gaps and questions as to how to most effectively build resilience. Here we outline our three key priorities for further exploration:

a. Strengthening systems for the long-term

A core element of resilience building is creating system changes to enable impact at scale and address the underlying drivers of vulnerability.

- How do we need to work and who do we need to partner with to work at systems level?
- How do we build and leverage national safety net systems as a springboard for resilience in fragile contexts?
- What approaches can influence structural processes towards greater downward accountability, changing broader social norms, and/or sector-wide resilience?

b. Adaptability and flexibility of programming

To be responsive to the constantly changing nature of fragile contexts, we need to look at our own ability to work in that environment. How do we need to change how we operate as organisations, and as the broader development, humanitarian and peace-building sectors, to ensure adaptability? This encompasses a broad range of issues; operations; logistics; technical skills; reporting; risk management; flexible funding; coordination; preparedness; and principles and standards.

c. Conflict and resilience

Experiencing conflict can have an impact on how people will respond to risks, and on what programmatic elements will be effective for building resilience where people face multiple risks. Despite the implications for programming, the evidence on the impacts of conflict on resilience remains weak[29]. Core questions for us remain:

- How does conflict affect the different elements that contribute to a person's resilience?
- What are the implications for resilience programming?
- How to go beyond conflict sensitivity to conflict prevention, without having an adverse effect on the principles that underpin our humanitarian work?

8. Implications and recommendations

We are not currently on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. If they are to be met, development, humanitarian and peace-building actors will need to better understand and address the unique challenges of building resilience and sustainable development in fragile contexts.

Resilience programme implementers

The relative neglect of conflict in resilience studies is particularly clear in approaches to measuring and monitoring resilience outcomes. An understanding of the distinct impact of conflict on resilience is important and may suggest programming and policy approaches that are more relevant, effective and sustainable.

Recommendations:

- Implementers should seek to address the evidence gap on resilience and conflict links, and assess the potential implications for resilience programmes.
- It is essential to apply conflict sensitivity approaches when working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts as a minimum.

> **"Long-term system strengthening in fragile contexts will require new forms of partnership, including donors and local organisations and civil society."**

The development, humanitarian and peace-building sectors

Many of the lessons from operating and implementing resilience programmes in fragile contexts have implications for the broader development and humanitarian system.

Fragile states are typically characterised by a high dependence on ODA; on average, ODA makes up around 30 per cent of international finance flows to countries in protracted crises, compared to roughly three per cent for other developing countries[30]. The way the development system operates matters for fragile contexts.

Long-term system strengthening in fragile contexts will require new forms of partnership, including donors and local organisations and civil society. Given the rapidly changing context and scale of the challenges, cooperation – rather than competition – is likely to be the most effective way of delivering resilience.

Discussions on the humanitarian, development and peace-building nexus need to move beyond theory to practical steps. To do this, discussion and exchange is needed at a practitioner and operational level, as well as at international level.

Recommendation:

- For the nexus discussion to effectively deliver, the experience of organisations operating in fragile contexts should inform the process of shifting the ways of working in the international system.
- Communities of practice are needed, bringing together practitioners from across the humanitarian, development and peace-building sectors to share opportunities, best practices and challenges for more joined-up working.
- Funding mechanisms must incentivise collaboration with local and national partner organisations, as well as full involvement and accountability to vulnerable people.

Funders of resilience programmes

The tendency for development assistance to decrease when a crisis hits, combined with the shortages in humanitarian funding, means that it is difficult to plan for and finance long-term resilience programmes in contexts where there are huge immediate needs. Given the increasing proportion of people living in extreme poverty in fragile contexts, to deliver the Leave No One Behind principle of the SDGs, investment in resilience building in these contexts must be significantly scaled up.

Building resilience in fragile contexts also takes time; funding for resilience must take into account the significant time investment required to build resilience in the long term. It requires patience and must be set up to adapt to the inevitable and sometimes rapidly changing context.

Recommendations:

- In the context of limited ODA, existing international assistance must be better targeted to those countries which are least able to fund their basic services – donors must strive for better aid effectiveness.
- Increased investment should come in the form of predictable, flexible, multi-year funding to integrated resilience-building programmes which address current needs and tackle the root causes of vulnerability.
- Contingency funds should be built into longer-term programmes, linked to plans to enable early action in response to predictable crises.
- The true costs of operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts must be recognised, for example, the additional costs associated with dealing with insecurity, unpredictable economic and political conditions, weak institutional capacity and poor infrastructure.
- Donors and fund managers must have a good understanding of the context and the programme. Trust between the implementers and donors is needed, based on established relationships and open communications. This is essential as fewer, rather than more, procedures are needed in order to allow the adaptability necessary in rapidly changing contexts.

For Concern Worldwide

Working in fragile contexts will remain a priority for Concern. As we continue to prioritise working in these areas, we are committed to innovating in our programming and strengthening the evidence base around effective approaches to building resilience.

We also recognise that we are not alone in seeing the importance of putting the hardest to reach first; many actors are increasingly focusing on fragile contexts. We will actively collaborate across sectors and actors to ensure learning is shared and utilised.

“Building resilience in fragile contexts also takes time; funding for resilience must take into account the significant time investment required to build resilience in the long term.”

Image: Chaab district, Takhar province, Afghanistan. (See Box 3 on page 9)
Photo: Rosaleen Martin / Concern Worldwide

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