

ENHANCING THE LINKS BETWEEN RESILIENCE AND NUTRITION

Nutrition and resilience are strongly interlinked: nutrition is both an input to and an outcome of strengthened resilience. Reducing malnutrition is crucial to strengthening resilience because well-nourished individuals are healthier, can work harder, and have greater physical reserves. Households that are nutrition secure are thus better able to withstand external shocks. Conversely, households that are most affected by shocks and threats face the greatest risk of malnutrition (Dufour and Egal 2012; Justino 2012). Thus, strengthening resilience is essential to efforts to reduce malnutrition.

Resilience, as defined by Béné and colleagues (2012), has three dimensions, namely absorptive capacity, adaptive capacity, and transformative capacity. Absorptive capacity refers to coping skills by which households and communities buffer themselves or moderate the impact of shocks to persist with their existing way of living. Adaptation, a term now often used in the context of climate change, refers to incremental adjustment to the impacts of a stress (for instance, adjusting planting schedules or shifting to drought-resistant crops), while transformation refers to the ability to create a fundamentally new system (or way of life) when conditions require it. The concept of resilience is leading humanitarian and development organizations to review the way they design their programs, in particular by developing integrated strategies composed of various interventions designed to strengthen households' absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities (FAO 2012).

NUTRITION AND RESILIENCE: THE COMMON GROUND

At the programming level, the concepts of nutrition and resilience clearly share key principles. Effective resilience and nutrition programming both require the following:

- **A systemic approach** (multisectoral, multilevel, and multistakeholder). Both the nutrition and the resilience of an individual or community result from a combination of interlinked factors that can be influenced across various sectors at different levels and by a wide range of stakeholders. Consequently, there is no one sector or one response option that can effectively and sustainably build resilience and tackle malnutrition. Resilience and nutrition demand thinking across silos.
- **A twin-track approach**, linking emergency and development. Fighting malnutrition in a comprehensive way and strengthening resilience require addressing acute needs in emergency situations and crises alongside investing in long-term responses to tackle the root causes of vulnerability and malnutrition.

- **A context-specific approach.** A successful nutrition or resilience-building intervention in one country or livelihoods zone may not be replicable in another context. An in-depth understanding of populations' and individuals' existing coping mechanisms, food systems, and nutrition needs, as well as environmental and social synergies, is a key starting point to contextualize the intervention.
- **Strong local, country, and regional ownership and political leadership.** Political leadership is a prerequisite for successful complex programs requiring multisectoral, multilevel, and multistakeholder approaches. A strong political leadership enables creation of a favorable policy environment and facilitates integration of resilience-building and nutrition programs across ministries (agriculture, health, trade, and so on).

The resilience agenda therefore represents an opportunity to improve the way nutrition programs are designed, funded, and implemented through addressing the root causes of malnutrition and food insecurity, as well as the symptoms. The reverse is also true: the use of nutrition tools and approaches can support resilience programming.

References

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