ResilientAfrica Network Resilience Themes

Background

The Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) is a partnership between USAID and seven world-class universities to create a constellation of Development Labs. This network harnesses the ingenuity and passion of university students, researchers, faculty, and their innovative partners to incubate, catalyze and scale science and tech-based solutions to the world's most challenging development problems.

The ResilientAfrica Network (RAN), a partnership among Sub-Saharan African and American Universities led by Makerere University is a HESN member. The RAN is co-directed by Tulane University and includes Stanford University, the Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS), and four regional Resilience Innovation Labs (RILabs) located in Ghana, Ethiopia, Uganda and South Africa. The RAN is supported and funded by the United States Agency for International Development's Office of Science, Technology and Innovation (USAID). Its goal is to strengthen the resilience of people and systems in Africa by leveraging the knowledge, scholarship and creativity that exists across the RAN to analyze vulnerabilities, define resilience dimensions and apply innovative solutions. To this end, the RAN will incubate, test and scale innovations that strengthen individual and system-wide capabilities and reduce vulnerabilities defined and measured by a scientific, data-driven and evidenced-based resilience framework for Sub-Saharan Africa.

The RAN is based on the belief that faculty, students, researchers and development experts working together can define and analyze specific resilience dimensions using a set of innovative approaches to engage with local communities. Targeted interventions can then be designed and applied to help build resilience. Evaluating the impact of these interventions will help to inform policies, programs, and resource allocations. Through USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network, Makerere University in Uganda is empowering partner universities across Africa to develop, adopt and test its Resilience Framework. In collaboration with Stanford University, Tulane University, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the ResilientAfrica Network is equipping 18 communities and local stakeholders to more effectively recover from and respond to complex challenges by finding or catalyzing successful local solutions, sharing them with other vulnerable communities, and building a ground-breaking community of practice and platform for collaborative learning.

The Challenge

Countries and communities across sub-Saharan Africa face acute and chronic shocks and stresses with limited resources to respond. These range from floods and droughts to disease to the debilitating social impact of chronic poverty. While some communities are able to recover, adapt, survive and thrive, others struggle, suffer, or even collapse. What makes the difference? How can we learn from successful community responses, and help to build resilience through sustainable interventions?

A possible way forward is to promote and scale-up interventions that increase resilience by enhancing the ability of people and communities to reduce their risk and vulnerability over time. While there are several definitions of resilience, they all tend to share three common elements: (i) the capacity to recover quicker and stronger after a shock; (ii) the capacity to adapt to a changing environment; and (iii) the transformative capacity of an enabling institutional environment. To guide the work of the RAN, the following definition of resilience was developed by RAN partners:

"Resilience is the capacity of people and systems to mitigate, adapt to, recover and learn from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces vulnerability and increases well-being."

Resilience-based programming thus requires a deep understanding of resilience dynamics and dimensions. Given the complexity of resilience dynamics, there are a number of analytical issues that need to be examined when undertaking resilience-based programming and measuring impact:

1) When it comes to measurement, resilience is not observable *per se,* as it is the result of a series of variables that make a household or a system more or less resilient to a given shock.
2) Resilience needs to be placed in relation to a given outcome (i.e. resilience to climate variability, food insecurity, conflict, etc.).
3) Resilience needs to be related to shocks and stresses.
4) Resilience can be measured at different levels, from individual/household to national and regional levels.
5) The influence of organizational and human culture and behavior need to be understood to determine how negative impacts on resilience can be mitigated while capitalizing on the positive ones.

In practice, resilience is the process that allows and explains the dynamics of recovering quicker and stronger once a system has been affected by a shock. With respect to this idea, resilience is therefore essentially a matter of capacities.

Resilience programming therefore needs to focus on strengthening capacities of systems, at all levels, and designing interventions that are built upon existing organic processes and institutions and this needs to be supported by proper analysis in order to identify priority actions.

The Innovative Approach

To guide this process of resilience-based programming in Sub-Saharan Africa, RAN has developed a resilience framework that consists of a four-step process that starts with analyzing the context, understanding and prioritizing resilience dimensions, developing relevant interventions, and evaluating their effectiveness in increasing resilience and wellbeing.

RAN's goal of strengthening systems' resilience is to ultimately improve their wellbeing. This necessitates an understanding of contextual factors, resilience dimensions and adaptive strategies, and how to design interventions that build on systems' existing capabilities to strengthen their resilience. To accomplish this, the RAN framework involves a four-step process that starts from analyzing the context, understanding and prioritizing resilience dimensions, developing relevant interventions and evaluating their effectiveness in increasing resilience (**Figure 1**).

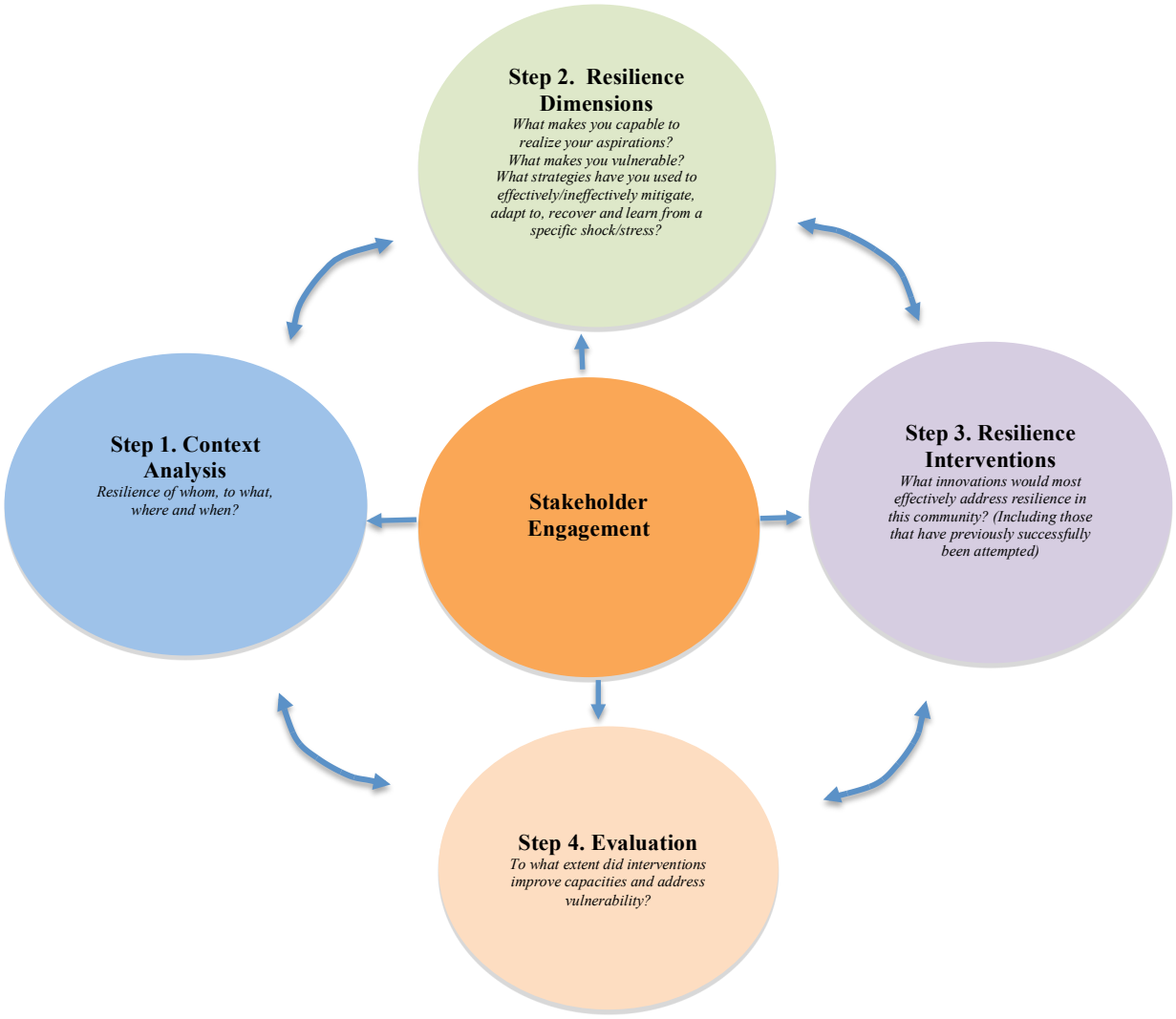


Figure 1: RAN Resilience Framework

Four Resilience Innovation Labs (RILabs) have been established at universities regionally situated across sub-Saharan Africa, each with a specialized focus.

The Eastern Africa RILab located in Uganda examines community resilience in the face of chronic conflict and displacement – for example, comparing two northern Uganda communities that recovered from civil war at different rates. It also examines climate change and variability – governance challenges, and communities' ability to adapt. The lab has established strategic partnerships with universities in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The West Africa RILab based in Ghana focuses on population growth and urbanization, from fast-growing cities and low-income settlements to refugee camps, working to understand local adaptive capacities. The lab has partnered with universities in Ghana and Senegal.

The Horn of Africa RILab located in Ethiopia examines the impact of drought and chronic displacement on local communities and regional dynamics. Partners include universities in Ethiopia and Somalia.

The Southern Africa RILab based in South Africa concentrates on the impact of chronic disease, especially HIV/AIDS, on access to livelihood assets and understanding local adaptive strategies. Partner universities are in South Africa, Malawi, and Zimbabwe.

The RILabs engage communities in identifying and prioritizing their needs through participatory assessments. Innovation design teams develop and test interventions in the communities, then evaluate their impact on resilience. The Network is preparing open online courses to respond to the context-driven needs of RAN members and share successful approaches with students, faculty, innovators and communities across sub-Saharan Africa.

For More Information
www.usaid.gov/hesn • www.ranlab.org • twitter.com/AfricaResilient