

Understanding Resilience

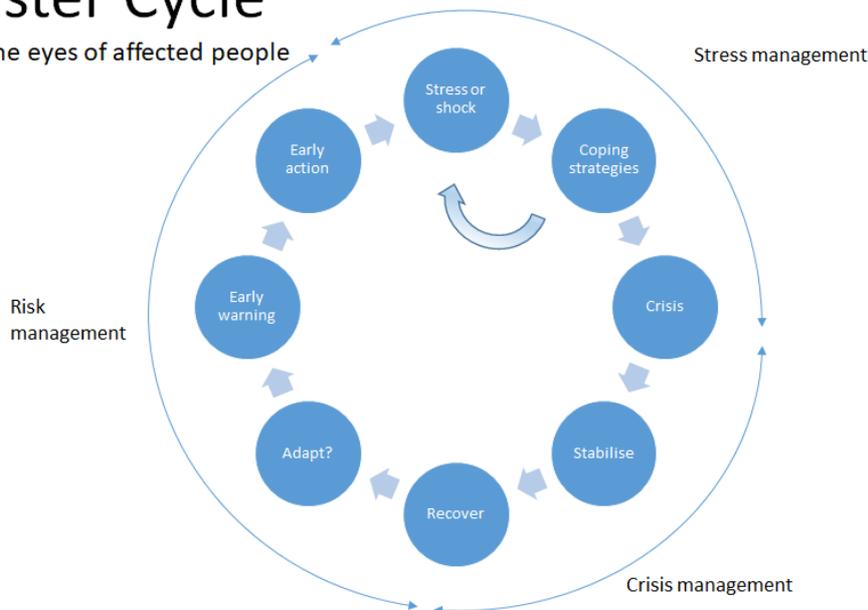
THE DISASTER CYCLE

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One helpful way of looking at resilience is to explore what happens when people experience shocks and stresses. If people and communities are adapting to shocks and stresses every day without falling into crisis - though perhaps becoming more or less vulnerable - what happens when people do fall into crisis? What is known as *The Disaster Cycle*, is shown below and illustrates what happens when people experience stresses or shocks. These can be split into 3 areas - Stress management, Crisis management and Risk management.

Disaster Cycle

through the eyes of affected people



1. Stress management

Those impacted by the shock or stress try to adapt by themselves. For the vast majority of small shocks and stresses this will be enough to avoid crisis and is heavily influenced by people's income and access to resources.

- **Stress or Shock** - people, within their wider communities, experience either a short term acute quick onset event - shock - or longer term slow onset change or trend - stress
- **Coping strategies** - people make changes to their lives and livelihoods in response to or anticipation of the shock or stress - see Table 1 for examples
- **Crisis** - Coping strategies are insufficient to maintain one or more essential life functions, eg access to sufficient nutritious food

2. Crisis management

Coping strategies have not worked and outside help is needed.

- **Stabilise** - stopping the impact of the shock or stress from getting worse and ensuring access to basic services, e.g. cash distributions to enable people to buy what they themselves prioritise and are able to access or access to health care
- **Recover** - Returning to pre stress level of essential function, e.g. by re-establishing livelihoods, rebuilding damaged shelter, and recovering health, etc... However, this is likely to be a recovery to increased vulnerability if the reasons for susceptibility to the shock or stress are not addressed

Note: external assistance (e.g. by Tearfund and our partners) is likely to reinforce people's own potential to return to pre-crisis state brings together both *stabilising* and *recovery*. It works with governments - where feasible - and affected people to build on and reinforce coping strategies that help in the short term without damaging the longer term outlook. It does this through putting power back in affected people's own hands, involving them in what and how external assistance is applied and re-establishing livelihoods.

However, recovery only to pre-crisis levels is not enough if it still leaves people vulnerable to the same shocks and stresses. External assistance must aim to 'build back better', reducing the future risk of people falling into crisis by reducing their Exposure and Sensitivity while building their Adaptive Capacity, where

- Exposure is the magnitude and frequency of the shocks and stresses people face
- Sensitivity is how much people are impacted by the shocks and stresses
- Adaptive capacity is people and communities' ability to make changes to reduce the likelihood of being affected, or the impact when they are affected

3. Risk management

With the growing gap between the scale of crises and resources available to respond to there is an urgent need to invest in Risk management through Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Preparedness.

- **Adaptation** - also known as mitigation, describes measures to reduce exposure or sensitivity to known shocks or stresses and thus their impact. For example, where the stress is drought, those practising pastoralism may group together to negotiate better access to dry season grazing land. While there is the potential for risk reducing changes to lives and livelihoods on recovery from the effects of a crisis, it is not automatic. People and communities may be coping with multiple shocks or stresses and lack the knowledge, motivation, skills or resources to adapt
- **Early warning** - describes processes that enable timely action ahead of a shock or stress to reduce the risk of crisis. It is based on timely monitoring of indicators that measure the likelihood, location, extent, timing and degree of shocks and stresses. However, for early warning to be effective it must also be accurate, accessible, understandable and believed by those who will take action. For example, simple, weather forecasting information transmitted by a national meteorological office via radio to inform farmers of rain-fed crops whether a coming wet season is likely to be early or late, or above or below average.

- **Early Action** - describes activities carried out in response to early warning to reduce the likelihood and / or severity of impact. Taking the above example of weather forecasting, farmers may choose to grow different, more drought tolerant crops if drought is expected. Early warning helps people to plan and take early action when there is time to avert a crisis. It will not stop a typhoon in the pacific but it may enable people to implement a predetermined evacuation plan to move to higher ground and shelter in stronger buildings till the storm is past, saving lives and small high value assets such as money and identification documents.

In summary, the disaster cycle helps us to grasp that if people are to “to move from just striving to survive to a fuller sense of thriving and flourishing” then help is needed not only to manage crises but also risk before shocks hit or stresses develop. Also, as people are adapting continuously to multiple and recurring shocks and stresses - often daily - disaster preparedness is not enough as you can only prepare for what you know. What about the unknown - for example the increasing uncertainty and extremes of weather predicted by climate change? For people to flourish they and the systems and networks they rely on need to be less vulnerable to known shocks and stresses but also flexible to adapt to the unknown and the uncertain.