

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Paper 6 in PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series



Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace

Global Greengrants Fund, UK

Tewa, Nepal

Cover Image

A group of women sorghum farmers in East Flores, Indonesia. The women, organised by a local organization called YASPENSEL, collected knowledge about traditional staples from different community elders and reintroduced sorghum into their farming practices. Sorghum is a resilient and nutritionally superior plant that can better withstand the impacts of climate change such as droughts and rainy seasons, in addition to being harvested up to three times a year – as opposed to rice, which is harvested once. YASPENSEL is supported by Global Greengrants Fund (GGF).

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About PSJP's Defining Key Concepts series

For philanthropy and development practices to have a significant impact on root causes of poverty, marginalization and violence, they need to be better aligned with social change agendas that are people led. This involves 'defining key concepts' that are commonly used in development and elucidating their meaning and implications in practice. PSJP is facilitating a peer-learning environment in order to do this and is exploring themes such as dignity, community resilience, measuring change, sustainability, community philanthropy, leadership, power among others.

These terms are frequently used in development and philanthropy, and they are included in many organizations' mission statements and performance indicators, but often there is no clear understanding of what they mean in practice or how they can be measured. As a first step to develop this understanding we are facilitating discussions among a diverse set of practitioners in the field on these topics and producing papers which will be shared on <http://www.psjp.org>. We hope to engage in wider ranging discussion in response to the papers and invite you to share your perspectives, experience and research on these themes. To contribute a blog write to us at chandrika@psjp.org

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
PART 1: THE RISE OF RESILIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	4
A NEW PARADIGM.....	4
A NEW POTENTIAL	5
VAGUENESS.....	6
DEFINING RESILIENCE	7
MEASUREMENT DIFFICULTIES	8
THE NEED FOR PRACTICAL EXAMPLES.....	9
PART 2: THE CURRENT STUDY.....	10
THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT.....	10
PART 3: THE CASE STUDIES.....	14
TEWA.....	14
GLOBAL GREENGRANTS FUND.....	18
THE HARVARD HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE.....	21
PART 4: REFLECTIONS.....	26

INTRODUCTION

The word ‘resilience’ is on everyone’s lips everywhere.¹ Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties’, the increased use is a direct result of the increasing prevalence of disasters in the world over recent decades.² The accelerating climate crisis, conflicts and pandemics are leading to increased migration flows and vulnerabilities, evermore severe disasters, and multiplying inequalities. A lack of resilience in systems and societies perpetuates these inequalities, erasing hard-fought development gains and increasing vulnerabilities to future shocks. In response, ‘disaster’ resilience is defined as the ability of a system, community, or society to pursue its human, social, ecological, and economic objectives, while managing its disaster risk over time in a mutually reinforcing way.³

During 2020, the world faced an acceleration in the rate of dramatic shocks: the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting economic turmoil, the ever-gathering climate catastrophe, and the global reverberations of calls against structural racism. These developments occurred against the constant drum beat of rising inequality that erodes the capacity of states to manage the combined effects of these crises.⁴

Such developments make the concept of resilience even more salient. People are asking ‘how can we cope and survive?’ and ‘how can we make sure that we build back better from this crisis?’⁵.

This paper considers what resilience looks like in practice. It is based on the work of three organizations – Tewa, Global Greengrants Fund and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. In June 2020, these organizations came together to hold two online discussions with a total of 27 participants from civil society in many parts of the

¹ According to Merriam-Webster, it is in the top 1 per cent of words used. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].

² ‘Global Increase in Climate-Related Disasters’ (2015). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/global-increase-climate-related-disasters.pdf> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].

³ This definition was developed by Chris Allan for Global Greengrants Fund, taking from Keating, A., Campbell, K., Mechler, R., Michel-Kerjan, E., Mochizuki, J., Kunreuther, H., Bayer, J., Hanger, S., McCallum, I., See, L., Williges, K., Atreya, A., Botzen, W., Collier, B., Czajkowski, J., Hochrainer, S., Egan, C. (2014) ‘Operationalizing Resilience against Natural Disaster Risk: Opportunities, Barriers, and a Way Forward’. Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance.

⁴ ‘Why inequality is the most important economic challenge facing the next president’, in *The Conversation* (2016). Available at: <https://theconversation.com/why-inequality-is-the-most-important-economic-challenge-facing-the-next-president-66806> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020]

⁵ Knight, B. (2020) ‘Facing the shadow within ourselves to #BuildBackBetter’, in *Rethinking Poverty*. Available at: <https://www.rethinkingpoverty.org.uk/rethinking-poverty/facing-the-shadow-within-ourselves-to-buildbackbetter> [Accessed 16 Nov. 2020].

world. Together these projects provide insight into the factors that promote community and disaster resilience and identify measures to mitigate those factors that impede resilience. The work was coordinated by PSJP as part of its 'Key Concepts in Development Series'.

The paper has emerged as a joint effort of all concerned. It focuses on what we can learn from the work on the ground to help civil society foster greater resilience in its work and institutions in the face of current and future crises. It is being published as a discussion document as the first stage in a process to increase the understanding of practical issues in the field and will be followed up. We are aware that this is far from a complete account of resilience and that more work is needed.

The current paper is in four parts:

- PART 1 gives the context of resilience in international aid. It explains the rapid rise of the term and how it has become a new paradigm in development for the field
- PART 2 explains how we conducted the current study
- PART 3 describes the experiences of Tewa, Global Greengrants Fund and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative through the lens of resilience
- PART 4 reflects on the work so far and suggests ways forward to develop the work.

PART 1: THE RISE OF RESILIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In PART 1, we examine the context of how resilience is being used in international development circles, drawing on some of the main writings in the sphere.

A new paradigm

In recent years, the concept of resilience has come to the fore in development circles. In her book *Resilience, Development and Global Change*, Katrina Brown (2016) notes that resilience is currently infusing policy debates and public discourse, and is widely promoted as a normative goal in fields as diverse as the economy, national security, personal development and well-being.⁶

The term 'resilience' is an old idea, deriving from the Latin 'resiliens' meaning to 'bounce back'. It was established in English in 1620 and through time has come to mean 'the ability of an ecosystem to respond to a shock or disturbance by resisting damage and recovering quickly'.⁷ The concept of resilience has been used extensively in disciplines as wide-ranging as ecology, psychology, economics, architecture and genetics.

The idea of resilience in development parlance has come relatively late and yet its rise has been rapid. Following the financial crisis of 2008, the term has been increasingly used by development professionals searching for new approaches to tackling poverty.⁸

The British government's Humanitarian Emergency Response Review in March 2011 placed resilience 'at the heart of the approach both to longer term development and emergency response', catapulting the word squarely into the mainstream development agenda.

By 2012, 'Building resilience' had been invoked as 'a new principle by the UN, donors and NGOs as a way of preventing unacceptable human fatalities and suffering, reducing the costs of emergency responses and developing the abilities to adapt to climate change'.⁹

⁶ Brown, K. (2016) 'Resilience, Development and Global Change'. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203498095>

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_resilience

⁸ Hussain, M. (2013) 'Resilience: meaningless jargon or development solution?', in *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/mar/05/resilience-development-buzzwords>

⁹ Levine, S., Pain, A., Bailey, S. and Fan, L. (2012) 'The relevance of 'resilience'?'. Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/6809-relevance-resilience> [Accessed 18 Nov. 2020].

In 2014, the Montpellier Resilience Conference described resilience as ‘a new paradigm for development’. Since then, many donors and implementing agencies have presented resilience as a new standard for development assistance to the public.¹⁰

By 2015, the philosophy of resilience assumed pride of place in the new UN framework for international development. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) used the concept extensively. Goals 9 and 11 specifically called for infrastructure and cities to be made resilient. Goals 1 (eradicating poverty) and 13 (climate action) both identified resilience as a strategic element of achieving them.

A new potential

The rapid rise of this new paradigm was due to the realisation that the traditional paradigm failed to explain abrupt systemic changes and crises. The old way, called the ‘transitional paradigm’, had governed international aid in post-communist settings over the previous 25 years. Exemplifying a linear approach to understanding social change, this theory proved to be incapable of understanding and addressing social change processes.

Efforts to address this weakness led to the borrowing of intellectual tools from other disciplines where resilience had been in use for many years. Inspired by vulnerability studies in the mid-1970s, humanitarian officials increasingly turned their attention to longer-term solutions. This led to the creation of the disaster risk reduction (DRR) approach. The Hyogo Framework for Action – the first internationally accepted framework on DRR, adopted in 2005 – led to what Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction described as the ‘first comprehensive attempt to detail the ingredients of resilience’.¹¹

According to the study by Katrina Brown, resilience thinking provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of complex, interconnected social, ecological and economic systems.¹² The approach is particularly helpful in situations characterized by high uncertainty, globalized and interconnected systems, increasing disparities and limited choices. That means acknowledging that social processes are inherently dynamic, involving historical and societal interactions which produce synergetic

¹⁰ Gahramanova, A. (2018) “Resilience” approach – a new paradigm in international development?. Around the Caspian. Available at: caspianet.eu/2018/11/22/resilience-approach-a-new-paradigm-in-international-development

¹¹ Kindra, J. (2013) ‘Understanding resilience’, in *The New Humanitarian*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/understanding-resilience>

¹² Brown (2016) op. cit.

results that will always have some unexpected dimensions. This very ‘expecting the unexpected’ may help to realize trade-offs between different courses of action.¹³

In this way, a resilience approach overturns orthodox thinking about international development which hitherto had been dominated by modernization, aid dependency, and economic growth. By contrast, resilience uses a systems approach, embracing complexity, to transform responses to climate change, by managing forests and ecosystems, and by addressing rural and urban poverty in the developing world in culturally appropriate ways, driven by the self-determined solutions of communities.

Writing for Oxfam in 2013, Debbie Hillier stressed the value of building resilience in reducing poverty by building systems that allow the poorest women and men not only to cope with, but also thrive, in the face of shocks, stresses, and uncertainty.¹⁴ This approach suggests that resilience is not merely a response to change, but a way to shape change. Notably, the concept of resilience brings a long-awaited recognition (which was lacking in the transitional paradigm) that uncertainty is a part of how systems and social processes work.

Vagueness

As so often happens with new fashions, terms that become ‘buzzwords’ become overloaded, so that it is unclear what the term means practically and how it helps to shape action on the ground.¹⁵ In one interview, Aytan Gahramanova asked a project manager of EU donor organizations ‘what do you mean by resilience?’. The answer was ‘nobody knows, most probably we will just reframe what we have been already doing’.

Such considerations led Misha Hussain to conclude:

‘Resilience is probably the sexiest new buzzword in international development. But as its popularity has grown, so has criticism of the use of ill-defined terminology in a sector that claims to be accountable.’¹⁶

The consequence of this is that:

‘Now, everybody is building resilience, or at least claiming to be. The term has assumed such political and financial clout, whether you’re working in family planning or disaster management, it seems as if every funding proposal, every programme, every result has to be seen to be contributing to resilience.

¹³ Gahramanova (2018) op. cit.

¹⁴ Hillier D. (2013) ‘No accident: Resilience and the inequality of risk’. Oxfam. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/no-accident-resilience-and-inequality-risk>

¹⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/understanding-resilience>

¹⁶ Hussain (2013) op. cit.

Your very survival as an organization may depend upon it. Consequently, some use the term rather disingenuously, as they try to protect or rebrand their work to access funds.’

To address this, the UN’s lead development agency, along with the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has been tasked with finding ways to consider how development and humanitarian actors can work better together on resilience.

Defining resilience

Notwithstanding efforts to standardise the idea of resilience within the UN system, the lack of a widely accepted definition remains.¹⁷

In an influential article for *The New Humanitarian*, Jaspreet Kindra considered some of the definitions of resilience.¹⁸ The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines the term as ‘the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner’. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, meanwhile, describes resilience as ‘the amount of change a system can undergo without changing state’. The UK Department for International Development defines it as ‘the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses... without compromising their long-term prospects’.

According to the UN’s Development Programme (UNDP), these and other definitions focus too narrowly on responding to shocks rather than preventing or preparing for them, and their stated goal is only to return beleaguered communities to their original state. UNDP therefore proposes to define resilience as a ‘transformative process of strengthening the capacity of people, communities and countries to anticipate, manage, recover and transform from shocks’ – otherwise known as building back better.

According to another account by Samuel Doe, resilience ‘is more of a process than an outcome’. He says he is bewildered when he hears about organizations planning to ‘roll out resilience’. Any community targeted by a programme with a resilience component is meant to end up with improved self-esteem, gender sensitivity, the ability to organize themselves, an effective early warning system, and other forms of self-sufficiency, he says.¹⁹

¹⁷ Hussain (2013) op. cit.

¹⁸ Kindra (2013) op. cit.

¹⁹ <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/31517>

Another problematic aspect of resilience can be when the onus to be ‘resilient’ is put entirely on the target community. According to Ruchita Chandrashekar, a behavioural health researcher and independent psychologist focusing on trauma and post-violence recovery, such an approach can be reductive. She cautions, ‘as a result of this approach we enable a system where people from marginalized communities often blame themselves for their distress, when more of an emphasis needs to be placed on systemic structures that are at play.’²⁰

Measurement difficulties

Difficulties with agreeing a definition mean difficulties in measurement. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency described resilience as a ‘new type of result’, yet the ‘need to choose different indicators for measuring resilience [per se], in order to understand if adaptation has been achieved, seems not to have been considered in most planning processes’.²¹

The problem with the variety of methods and frameworks is that ‘anything goes’. Along with changes in behaviours and attitudes towards subjective issues like gender and self-esteem, resilience measures can also include, among many others, ensuring access to clean drinking water during floods or droughts, reinforcement of riverbanks, strengthening shelters against natural influences, and ensuring alternative livelihoods to secure income.

To address this, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN published indicators to measure resilience, though these seem to be geared more towards vulnerability than resilience. The UNDP said it is in the process of developing a ‘climate, environment and disaster vulnerability index’ – a composite index to measure vulnerability as well as resilience.

Meanwhile, inter-agency groups are beginning to figure out the characteristics of resilience in disaster management and how everything might fit within the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The present state of evidence suggests a gap in the literature in providing conclusive evidence of the cost-effectiveness of resilience-related responses. A review by Athanasios Manis in 2018 showed that most of the reports, papers, briefs and notes tend to make normative assertions as to how important it is to provide humanitarian assistance early enough and to direct efforts towards helping to protect, restore and improve livelihood systems with the objective of building resilience for populations

²⁰ Chandrashekar, R. (2020). ‘The problem with resilience as we know it’. IDR. Available at: <https://idronline.org/the-problem-with-resilience-as-we-know-it-mental-health-wellbeing>

²¹ Hussain (2013) op. cit.

that experienced humanitarian disasters.²² They provide information as to what initiatives have been developed, where and how much funding they received and by which donors. However, very few provide analysis of the impact of resilience-related responses and even fewer provide data and analyses of cost-effectiveness.

Having said that, drawing on these studies, one can indirectly get a sense of conceptual, empirical and methodological challenges when it comes to designing and executing research over resilience and cost-effectiveness. Building back better, in the form of stronger, faster and more inclusivity, could reduce the cost of future disasters in several countries as well as globally. The report concludes that cost-effectiveness is one criterion for evaluating resilience measures and should be used to determine how building back better measures compare with measures focused on supporting individual entrepreneurs.

The need for practical examples

According to the independent think tank ODI, clarifying the added-value of a 'resilience approach' to development requires:

'...a much bigger body of empirical studies from specific crises, helping us to understand exactly what did give some people more resilience, and helping us to understand what can realistically be achieved in the aftermath of such disasters.'²³

Anders Henriksson, Principal Adviser for Policy Definition in the European Commission's Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development agrees:

'One way to explain the benefits of a resilience approach could be through examples of where it has been effective. We could have people who have witnessed the experience in media, saying, "This helped my village. This helped our community. This helped our region".'²⁴

This is the starting point for the current study. In PART 3, we describe three examples of where a resilience approach has been effective. In PART 2, we describe how we approached this.

²² Manis, A. (2018) 'Cost-effectiveness in humanitarian aid and development: Resilience programming'. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies. Available at: gsdrc.org/publications/cost-effectiveness-in-humanitarian-aid-and-development-resilience-programming

²³ Levine (2012) op. cit.

²⁴ To learn more about the EU's approach, see the Commission's communication 'EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises' (COM(2012) 586 final), the 'Commission Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020' (SWD(2013) 227 final) and the EU handbook on 'Operating in situations of fragility and conflict' note #4

PART 2: THE CURRENT STUDY

In PART 2, we explain the genesis of this study, describing how it emerged from the expressed needs of practitioners in civil society development from many parts of the world. We set out the methodology, describing both its strengths and weaknesses in advancing the concept of resilience in the development space. Our goal is to stimulate further discussion, research and experimentation. Our approach is to clarify terms and develop useful tools so that people who are working in development can be more effective in their work and finding support among their peers in the challenging tasks that lie ahead.

The immediate context

After the initial lockdowns were imposed across the world in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PSJP organized a series of conversations with its community members to ‘check-in’ about how they were doing. The calls were an extension of PSJP’s ‘learning circles’ project that comprises a community of practitioners representing development and philanthropy organizations of various sizes from all over the world. Over the course of two years this expanding community has been meeting through facilitated online conversations and one face-to-face retreat in November 2019. The project focuses on building connections, sharing ideas and learning about various themes or ‘key concepts’ in development and philanthropy with the intention of being able to apply the learning in their day-to-day work.²⁵

At the time we organized ‘COVID support calls’ with this group, participants were reeling from the early shocks of the pandemic and the hardships brought on by the lockdown, feeling vulnerable and responding as best they could to the immediate challenges facing the communities they serve (often already very vulnerable communities such as the aged or those affected by conflict) and their organizations.

The findings from these calls were written up and published. A clear and universal finding emerged from these conversations. In thinking about the future, no one wanted to go back to the world the way it was. There was a strong desire to #BuildBackBetter²⁶ and therefore a call for more opportunities for strategic learning on ‘resilience’ with the overarching question, ‘how do we build resilience in difficult times?’.

Moreover, there were clear findings about the role of development and aid organizations in times of adversity:

²⁵ The themes explored so far have included leadership, sustainability, measuring change, community philanthropy and dignity and have been published as the series ‘Defining Key Concepts’. Available at: <http://www.psjp.org/key-concepts/>

²⁶ Knight (2020) op.cit.

‘...the answers in a crisis do not lie with top-down institutions and donors but with communities and grassroots, community-based organizations which are there when the crisis hits, when outside interventions cannot reach or when they withdraw.’²⁷

The calls stressed the importance of adding the adjective ‘community’ to the noun ‘resilience’. This was in line with a definition of community resilience developed by Michael Ungar:

‘the ability of a social group (a complex system with multiple functions) to anticipate and adapt to change using its own inherent strengths and characteristics to absorb the impact of a disturbance (eg disaster event) and to participate in the human, social, economic, political, and cultural processes that support the system in reorganizing and adapting to changes, all the while learning from the event.’²⁸

Despite important gains in the fight for rights and justice that have been supported by international aid and INGOs, it is no secret that the aid industry is riddled with problems (including those of neo-colonialist attitudes, racism, sexual exploitation, and a market-based approach to societal problems) that spill into its policies and undermine these ‘inherent strengths’ and the dignity of communities. This plays out in multiple ways. Consider this example from Sri Lanka presented by Ambika Satkunanathan of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in Sri Lanka at the 10th Anniversary Celebrations of the Foundations for Peace Network in 2016:

‘Due to the nearly 30-year armed conflict, there was not merely destruction of infrastructure, property and lives but also values – values of humanity, decency and democracy. Yet, at the same time the conflict also saw people risking their lives to save others, it saw volunteerism and communities stepping up to address the needs of those affected. The influx of external aid in 2002 and then to some extent post-2009 after the end of the armed conflict, resulted in the destruction of this spirit of volunteerism. We found that many young persons preferred to work for INGOs rather than community-based groups due to much larger salaries and benefits. We saw property and rents in certain areas increase manifold. We also saw small organizations struggle to absorb the large grants given by donors. We saw corruption and breakdown of relationships within networks and civil society groups due to competition for these resources. For instance, there was conflict within a network of 2,000 women due to the creation of two paid positions by a donor to manage the affairs of the network, whereas previously it was done on a

²⁷ Sahai, C. (2020) ‘How do we build resilience in difficult times’. PSJP. Available at: <http://www.psjp.org/how-do-we-build-resilience-in-difficult-times/>

²⁸ Ungar, M. (2018) ‘Systemic resilience: principles and processes for a science of change in contexts of adversity’, in *Ecology and Society* 23 (4):34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10385-230434>

volunteer basis. This not surprisingly led to conflict about who should be hired for those positions because most of the members were economically disadvantaged and as this was seen to benefit only two of 2,000 women.²⁹

Monina O'Prey's research in Northern Ireland comes to a similar conclusion:

'I looked at the impact external aid has on a lot of very lively positive community activism work in Northern Ireland and it killed it all there for 15-20 years. It was only when resources got very tight and people began to go back to look into their own resources that community activism is again hitting the streets here and it is very important work and very much political. Now the whole advocacy activism thing has revived and it is so important to always keep that alive when you are doing community development and peace building work.'

More recently, such iatrogenic characteristics of the aid industry that contribute to the erosion of elements such as the spirit of volunteerism, interdependencies and trust, that make communities resilient, are being called out and resisted. This is particularly manifested in the #ShiftThePower movement spearheaded by the Global Fund for Community Foundations (GFCF). For example, in March 2020, #ShiftThePower published a bold statement on OpenDemocracy³⁰ urging INGOs to work with civil society in the Global South and not in competition with them which weakens domestic civil society. #ShiftThePower has been advocating for an alternative development paradigm³¹ – one that is based on the tenets of equality, justice, trust, and democracy.

What is clear from this resistance and movement for change in the sector is that good intentions are not good enough. We need to ask if our practices and behaviours are self-serving. Are they playing into 'white-man's-burden' models of change and contributing to the fragility of the communities we say we seek to strengthen? Are we affording powerful saviour roles to the world's rich through their philanthropy and undermining the inherent strengths that lie in all our communities?

This shows the importance of the context in which the word 'resilience' is used. As E J Ramos has put it:

²⁹ <http://foundationsforpeace.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/FFP-Anniversary-Conference-report.pdf>.

³⁰ 'An open letter to International NGOs who are looking to 'localise' their operations'. OpenDemocracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/an-open-letter-to-international-ngos-who-are-looking-to-localise-their-operations/>

³¹ 'A Manifesto for Change'. GlobalFundCF. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F2Wm8oZk8wa2JCEUJJfPpeZ6-4qydett/view>

‘The problem is not our resilience but a world that constantly requires our resilience, and a world that has come to learn that our resilience is permission for our continued oppression.’³²

It was to examine such elements of our practice in light of the current crisis that we organized two online discussions with 27 participants in June 2020. The format of the calls was participatory, with three examples of work offered based on the work of:

1. Tewa, a women’s fund in Nepal particularly at the time of the devastating earthquake that hit the country in 2015
2. Global Greengrants Fund’s (GGF) grantmaking programme targeted at building climate resilience
3. Research in community resilience by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) particularly in the Philippines, a country affected dramatically by natural hazards.

³² <https://twitter.com/ejrdavid?lang=en> [Accessed 15 Nov. 2020].

PART 3: THE CASE STUDIES

In this section, we demonstrate how resilience works in three case study examples.

Tewa

Tewa is a women's fund in Nepal. It was established in 1995 to be a nurturing partner to local women's organizations and groups. Since its inception Tewa has been building resilience in Nepal's communities through women's empowerment and a self-reliant approach to development.

Tewa is based on the belief that when women struggling with poverty, marginalization, and invisibility organize collectively, they amplify their voices, strengthen their leadership and are able to overcome injustice. Tewa enables this resilience building by supporting such groups of women through funding their initiatives, enhancing their capacities and connecting them to other relevant groups and national initiatives and processes, and promoting the development of modern community philanthropy.

Community philanthropy means that Tewa fundraises locally and provides grants to women's organizations throughout Nepal. However, community philanthropy goes way beyond financial resources. It is about mobilizing and training volunteers who play a key role in building resilience in communities. They are often the most vulnerable, excluded and marginalized women who are living on the fringes of traditional society.

Hamro Tewa Gaun Ghar (HTG) is a programme that illustrates Tewa's approach to resilience building. It came into existence immediately after the massive earthquake hit Nepal in 2015. Also known as Shadow Barefoot Volunteers Programme, it was initiated to help earthquake survivor families and women to support their lives in the face of trauma and tragedies.

Tewa didn't have any previous experience of operating in natural disasters but jumped into the work from the third day following the earthquake. The first action was to provide immediate relief, the second was to plan for rebuilding and recovery.

Tewa's initial step was to reach out to 22 volunteers and grantee partners from non-earthquake-affected areas. At that time, so many in Kathmandu had lost everything, and people weren't willing to come to help others, but the volunteers and grantee partners stepped forward. After three days of orientation training, volunteers were deployed in six of the most affected districts: Ramechhap, Gorkha, Sindhupalchowk, Dhading, Jharuwarashi, and Dharmasthali.

The objective of this initiative was to sustain and uphold women's agency, transfer useful skills in rebuilding processes and support communities in every possible way. Methods included building a supportive environment, providing training in new trades and skills, childcare and community development. The volunteers mainly targeted

people from marginalized groups, single women, Dalits and indigenous communities in order to help them build self-reliance.

The programme was developed on a needs-based approach. Initially, the volunteers shadowed the role of women in the communities and started counselling, listening to grievances, dismantling houses, clearing rubble, planting rice in the fields, and helping with the harvest.



Tewa volunteers and local women in Barpak, Gorkha – the epicentre of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. After Tewa mobilized the volunteers they worked in the district to form a women's group.

Photo credit: Tewa ©

As time went on, women's groups were formed. Back and forth meetings and interaction were conducted to empower women. In this ongoing process, while the community started to get its strength back, volunteers helped to build shelters for single women.

Examining the Shadow Barefoot Volunteers Programme through the lens of resilience has revealed a lot about what builds resilience in people at an individual level and in communities to face times of great difficulty.

So, what has been learned about resilience from Tewa's experience?

First, the Nepali people have faced much trauma of political conflict and have also been highly vulnerable to landslides and floods. Notwithstanding these difficulties,

their experience has increased local people's capacity to cope. Moreover, strong family ties and community support systems offer a safety net that helps people to cope with difficult situations at a personal and community level.

Second, the presence of a civil society locally has been crucial to resilience in times of trouble. When the government was nowhere, it was civil society, NGOs and INGOs that acted immediately. Building on its earlier experience, Tewa has acted immediately to respond to COVID, too.

Third, for Tewa the key element to resilience building has been respect for the survivor community. To take account of local people's feelings and needs requires approaching them with sensitivity and trust. This means a flexible and responsive design of programmes. Tewa offers discretionary grants giving priority to the women on the ground, so that when disasters or other crises occur, action can be taken immediately to support local people.

Fourth, the power of resilience relies on a human resource network, with more than 800 volunteers, 500 grantee partners, and 40 staff members. This enabled quick mobilization at the time of the 2015 earthquake. At the same time, Tewa could not alone fulfil all the needs of the community, so linked up with other organizations and the government.

Fifth, building resilience has relied on community philanthropy. This involves using assets that already exist within communities and fundraising locally to expand them. While also seeking help and partnerships from others, a key part of the process is to help communities to identify their own abilities. This model works, even in earthquake-affected communities. For example, in an area where 47 houses were damaged by the earthquake, the community was waiting for outside support from the government or NGOs. Tewa volunteers went there and talked to the community; they formed a group and encouraged the community to dismantle their houses themselves. Tewa provided some support, such as trolleys, and with that support, they dismantled their houses. Moreover, even in the most difficult of times after the earthquake, Tewa asked individual survivors if they were interested in supporting another community. The survivors happily gave back to Tewa, giving up to 100 Nepali Rupees (and some exceeding that amount) for the next community. This raised around \$7,000.

Sixth, building resilience shows the importance of breaking stereotypes of gender roles. Nepal is a patriarchal society and most of the caregiver work has to be done by women; but post-earthquake, women were going to dismantle houses, constructing buildings, and taking on work traditionally considered 'male'.



In the wake of the 2015 earthquake, Tewa volunteers dismantle damaged houses in Jharuwarasi, Lalitpur.

Photo credit: Tewa ©

In conclusion, the 23-month programme was a moving experience for Tewa. Much was learned by the organization and volunteers about working with local people and building trust, love and respect between each other and supporting one another at a time of crisis. The programme helped to build confidence and leadership among volunteers and enhance their personal as well as collective agency – a hand-to-hand movement where people from different levels came together to build back better. These relationships are the foundation of resilience.

One of the volunteers, Sushma, founder of Srijansheel Mahila Samaj, an organization that runs skills development and income-generating programmes for women, summed up the impact of the programme:

‘Although the earthquake of 2015 was a dark day for us Nepalis, it also brought hopes in the lives of Nepali women to do something better for the community. Although women’s social, economic and political position in society makes us more vulnerable to natural hazards, we are not helpless victims. Women are important agents for change and need to be further strengthened as such.’

Global Greengrants Fund

Global Greengrants Fund is a participatory grantmaker. The organization supports grassroots initiatives working for environmental and social justice through a network of 150 voluntary advisors, who recommend partners for funding, and act as mentors and resource people for the community partners the Fund supports.

With an organization in the UK and one in the US, Global Greengrants Fund makes about 1,000 small grants of \$5,000 or less per year. This is guided by the vision to support the building of the world’s most effective environmental justice movement – one that is led and self-determined by grassroots actors.

Resilience-building plays a big part in Global Greengrants’ theory of change, particularly in relation to environmental, climate and natural disaster shocks. In the current COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has found the lessons learned from these areas highly transferable. On the basis of this learning, Global Greengrants defines resilience as:

‘The ability to learn, adjust, and incorporate risk and changing environments into decisions about the future.’

It follows from this that resilient systems and communities have distinctive characteristics: they are flexible and contain redundant and spare capacity, as well as being diversified, robust, resourceful and connected, and are transparent and accountable to each other.

The way that these characteristics apply to the work supported by Global Greengrants Fund takes many different forms. In East Flores, Indonesia, for example, the Fund supported YASPENSEL, a group of women sorghum farmers. The women realized that the rice they were planting was vulnerable to climatic changes and needed pesticides to survive. They went out to collect knowledge about traditional staples from different community elders, and ended up re-introducing sorghum into their farming practices. Sorghum is a resilient and nutritionally superior plant that can better withstand the impacts of climate change such as droughts and rainy seasons, in addition to being harvested up to three times a year – as opposed to rice, which is harvested once. Global Greengrants Fund supported YASPENSEL to collect and plant the sorghum seeds. The characteristics of resilience as defined above are all represented in this work: this initiative was flexible, resourceful, and connected, and diversified knowledge by learning from the past. YASPENSEL is transparent in its approach, and accountable to the communities where it works.

A second example comes from Global Greengrants' work in the Pacific Islands: Waa'gey is a community-based organization that works with both elders and youths to use trees felled by storms as an opportunity to teach traditional canoe-building. The Pacific Islands are hit by typhoons with ever increasing severity due to climate change; and often it is community-based actors like Waa'gey who are the first – and sometimes the only – frontline responders. With this work, they are not only cleaning up after a climate disaster, but also transferring indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. For the community, turning the fallen trees into canoes is an important symbol of hope coming out of a time of destruction.



A community in Micronesia's most remote outer islands uses traditional knowledge to convert trees felled by a storm into canoes.

Photo credit: Waa'gey ©

Cultural knowledge transfer and intergenerational learning are important strategies to build community resilience.

The final example is a recent one from Global Greengrants' response to the COVID pandemic. Articulación de familias con PCD de la comunidad Mbocajaty in Paraguay is using funding from Global Greengrants to address food insecurity and hunger in vulnerable communities; joining together to solve their food needs in the absence of effective government support and a lack of access to markets. As in many places around the world, the pandemic has restricted access to buy and sell produce. This project seeks to recover the collective culture of food cultivation and to create a network of knowledge provided by strong community, through family gardens.

Families will be provided with training both in gardening and in small-scale marketing. In the absence of the option for people to meet in person, WhatsApp is used to disseminate knowledge and experience.

As with the other examples, this project has all the aforementioned criteria of resilience, and shows Global Greengrants' approach to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through a resilience lens. Instead of just giving money for food, this means thinking about long-term survival and sustainable approaches in line with the organization's core vision of environmental justice.

Global Greengrants compiled findings from the work in the Pacific Islands into a learning study³³ in 2019. The study asked how small grants of the kind made by Global Greengrants Fund help communities build resilience; in particular island communities impacted by climate change. The research found four reinforcing lessons:

1. Communities know their own needs well, probably better than anyone else, and when there is community ownership and buy-in, change can be long lasting.
2. Investing in people and relationships is critical to both the immediate and long-term success of any climate-smart investments. At its core, resilience-building is relationship-building. Relationships are our most important social capital, something which has become abundantly clear again during the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures.
3. Granting through local advisors provides immeasurable technical and strategic support to the learning and connectedness of grantee communities. Community leadership is enhanced through an intermediary expert layer that can help make connections and aggregate learning.
4. Intentional learning and exchange should be built into projects, as they contribute to resilience, and benefit both communities and advisors. The online learning circles run by Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace are one example of what this can look like.

Much like we have seen during the current situation, resilience is often not about a new idea or a novel technology but is about cultural shifts and new thinking in existing systems – the ability to adapt and learn. The solutions are already here; and as funders and partners, we need to foster them.

³³ 'Fostering Climate Resilience: Lessons from flexible, community-based grantmaking in the Pacific Islands'. Global Greengrants Fund. Available at: <https://www.greengrants.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/FInal-PI-Climate-Resilience-Lessons.pdf>

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) supports research and education on disaster preparedness and resilience in South East Asia. The purpose of this work is to support local communities, both directly through participatory action research and training, and indirectly through population-based research targeted at policy makers, operational NGOs and local government agencies. The work is focused primarily in the Philippines and Bangladesh. Both countries are among the most vulnerable to natural hazards and to the effects of climate change.

Disaster resilience defined

A community's level of disaster resilience can be understood to be related to exposure to vulnerability and that community's capacity to anticipate, prepare for, and withstand shocks.

The work of HHI has focused on actions communities have taken to reduce their vulnerability and increase their capacity to cope with shocks. Disaster resilience in the Philippines and Bangladesh is the outcome of two broad sets of factors. The first set is related to what people actually do to prepare for disasters, both within their individual households, and in the communities where they live. The second set is related to the level of investment and services provided by local government, national government, and a network of community-based organizations, national NGOs, and INGOs.

It is evident that the term 'resilience' can evoke both positive and negative feelings. The very idea of resilience is deeply embedded in cultural and political norms and practice. While it is useful and often practical to 'objectively' assess levels of resilience through measures of observable indicators, resilience is ultimately experienced by communities and by people themselves. A person's resilience therefore has an important subjective component. This is why it is important to begin with the community itself when formulating research questions and developing measures rooted in what is important to the members of that community. This can help to mitigate any unintended negative consequences of development or humanitarian programming designed to enhance that community's capacity to cope with disasters. This also helps ensure that any research done to assess levels of resilience or preparedness is designed with the community and that the results of the research are interpreted with members of the community before being translated into development programming.

Population-based research in Bangladesh and the Philippines

Since 2017, HHI has engaged in population-based research to better understand the factors that contribute to or impede disaster preparedness and resilience. In the Philippines, HHI conducted the first ever nationwide survey looking at household levels of disaster preparedness. In Bangladesh, HHI partnered with Concern Worldwide to examine factors contributing to coastal community resilience. In both cases, the studies looked at factors in six domains to assess communities' levels of

preparedness for disasters. Broadly, these domains include communities' previous experience with disaster, level of social cohesion (expressed both as depth of community connectivity as well as trust), quality of governance and leadership, access to information, the natural and physical environment, and law and security.

One of the reasons for a nationwide survey in the Philippines was to be able to provide a broad overview of what disaster preparedness and resilience look like in the country. Despite the huge number of natural hazards that the Philippines faces, and the large number of organizations and entities that operate there, there had never been a full nationwide household-level survey conducted. The study provided some empirical evidence on what people had previously, mostly anecdotally, understood about levels of disaster preparedness in the country.

The survey revealed a rich set of data on what actions households were taking to prepare for disasters and insights into what information people trust, what their expectations are of local government and other service providers, their experience with previous disasters and their attitudes and behaviours related to preparing for the anticipated impacts of climate change. These reports helped to inform government and development actors about what programming and policies were necessary. Articles were written in the national media to raise awareness.

Resilience Scorecard

The survey identified some of the key elements and dimensions of resilience that were used to develop a 'Resilience Scorecard'. The Resilience Scorecard consists of four factors that characterize disaster resilience in the Philippines. These are:

- Peoples' ability to access and use quality services, resources and information
- Their ability to rely on effective social support
- Their ability to take steps to learn and prepare and adapt before, and to learn from and change after, disasters
- A person's belief that they themselves are capable agents of their own change.

Case studies

In addition to developing tangible measures of resilience through population-based research, case studies were undertaken to better understand the lived experience of communities frequently exposed to and impacted by recurring flooding and exposure to typhoons. Communities that are exposed to recurring hazards that undermine livelihoods and threaten lives are often faced with a decision about whether or not to relocate people to higher ground. This dilemma was very real for two of the communities that HHI works with. One of these communities was an urban barangay located in Quezon City (Sitio Kislap), and the other a rural barangay located in Gabaldon in the province of Nueva Ejicia.



Leticia, one of the residents to relocate from Gabaldon spends her afternoon collecting smoothed white rocks on the banks of the Dupinga river. Residents of Sitio Kislap attribute resilience to availability of jobs, social support networks, and basic government services.

Photo credit: Dr Aubrey P Graham ©

In Sitio Kislap, community members had two basic options. For those that could afford it, they could relocate to a safer area within their barangay. For those with fewer material resources, they could rely on developing safer disaster preparedness measures through training, supported by the rest of the community. In Gabaldon, a community under extreme danger from flooding, the decision was made to relocate the entire community. There are significant trade-offs associated with relocating communities. A move to higher ground saves lives, however relocation often results in limiting access to livelihood sources, and can contribute to social dislocation as some adults leave their families behind in search of employment. Similarly, access to basic services and education may be impeded, often leading youth to seek opportunities in more economically and socially prosperous areas.

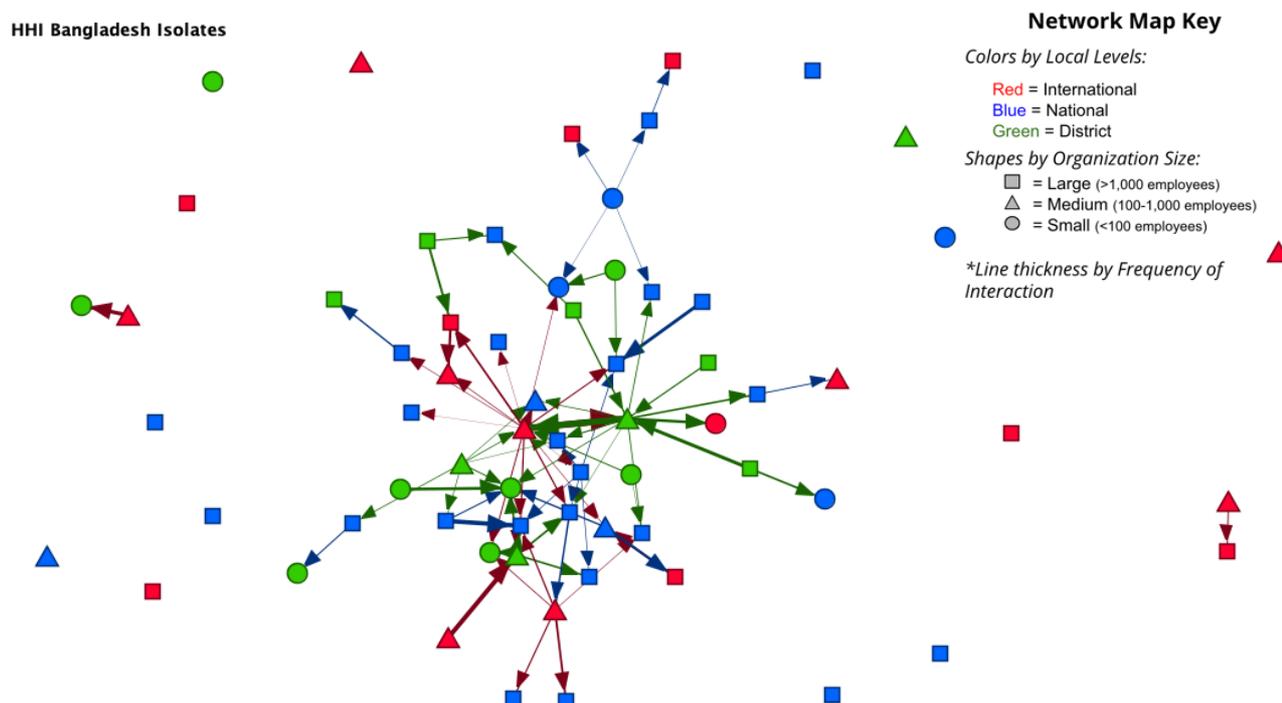
Network analysis

Looking beyond the community, it is also important to look at how organizations that support communities work with one another, how they operate together, and what the shape and characteristics of the network of agencies that work on disasters and preparedness and resilience look like.

This study was based on another HHI survey with community-based organizations, UN agencies, international organizations, national organizations and government. These network analyses were conducted both in Bangladesh (among groups working on coastal community resilience), and in the Philippines among a broad group of humanitarian, development, and government actors.

In conducting these analyses, it was important to understand which agencies and actors served as the central nodes and which were the important organizations in the network, ie those that had the greatest number of connections and broadest reach across the network. It is also important to provide a visual depiction of the network of actors to give operational agencies and policy makers a full view of the richness of the network, the central nodes in the network, and areas of weakness or limited coverage in the network.

Different network maps were created based on the different functional activities that were examined. So, for example, while the network of actors in the Bagherat District of Bangladesh is a rich and complex network (when looking at a broad range of



humanitarian and development activities), the network is far more fragmented when looking at climate change adaption actors alone. Here, the network is comprised of central nodes being played by both international actors and government but there are few connections among national agencies and community-based organizations.

This kind of analysis can provide important information for understanding how aware development and humanitarian actors are of one another, what engagement between them looks like, and can provide insights into whether they are working in tandem or at cross purposes.

It is common to hear the anecdote that coordination is a problem, but rarely does anyone problematize this and unpack exactly where coordination problems exist and what the implications of this are for disaster resilience. This is where this kind of analysis can be important because it can show where networks of agencies are fragmented, and what kinds of things could be done to improve coordination, service delivery, their knowledge of one another, and ultimately their impact on the communities that they are serving.

Summary

It is essential that communities across the globe take steps to prepare for and mitigate the consequences of global climate change. Climate change will ultimately impact everyone on Earth, but marginalized communities will bear the brunt of these impacts as they are often located in the most vulnerable geographies and have access to limited resources. To better serve these communities requires developing a rich understanding of those factors that best contribute to their resilience, or conversely, impede their ability to prepare for future disasters.

We, as a global community, have a shared responsibility to meet this challenge and promote and support leadership that seeks positive and lasting change. Academic institutions, community-based organizations, and other civil society organizations must work together to clarify their shared commitment to this mission and to ensure that states around the world take the necessary steps to enact laws and policies that protect this and future generations.

PART 4: REFLECTIONS

In this section, we reflect on the findings from the case studies and suggest next steps for advancing the idea of resilience as a key facet of international development.

The foremost learning from our webinars confirms that resilience comes from within. The HHI research has yielded four principles of what makes people resilient in disasters, a key one of which is ‘that people believe themselves capable agents of their own change’. The examples from Tewa and Global Greengrants Fund show what happens when development interventions are designed using this principle. For example, Tewa stresses the practice of helping communities in identifying their own abilities. In the wake of the earthquake in Nepal it helped communities not only to rebuild their own homes but even to extend their support to other affected communities. Global Greengrants Fund’s support for Waa’gey was based on a combination of indigenous knowledge and agency coming from within the community to transform an external threat into a practical symbol of hope.

From empowered individuals come community leaders. PSJP’s previous discussions on the concept of ‘leadership’³⁴ have emphasized the importance of local people in ensuring the success of development initiatives. This point was brought home when the COVID crisis separated INGOs from the communities they work with. One of the participants on a call from an INGO working with Rohingyas in Myanmar is acutely aware of this ‘fragility’ in their organization and the importance of strengthening their local leadership base. In contrast, the stars of the Tewa story are its local volunteers – a relationship web of local leaders which Tewa has mindfully nurtured and in which it has come to believe lies the key to the sustainable development and empowerment of the communities of vulnerable women in Nepal that they serve. Its policy about the centrality of people and their relationships in change processes is best captured in this statement about its volunteer programme that was designed with the specific intention of responding to the earthquake victims:

‘As long as there are willing volunteers, this is one of the most sustainable programmes to be conceived. It is the sustainability of the feelings of altruism, philanthropy, and love for fellow humans that needs to be constantly replenished. Attention needs to be paid at the very beginning that that is the sole reason for being [an] HTG volunteer. HTG volunteers are also anchored into local grantee organizations.’

Global Greengrants Fund shares this conviction about the centrality of local leaders in building community resilience and the importance of nurturing relationships. A key feature of its grant programme is its investment in enhancing local leadership,

³⁴ ‘Leadership and Development’. PSJP. Available at: <http://www.psjp.org/resources/leadership-and-development/>

granting through local advisors and providing technical and strategic support to the learning and connectedness of grantee communities.

So, while people and relationships are central to resilience in communities, it follows that the presence of local institutions that can support local leaders and both harness and nurture the local relationship networks is essential. One of the saving graces for the Nepali earthquake communities in 2015 was the presence of Tewa – a strong local civil society organization that was able to respond nimbly and quickly, and mobilize its volunteers to extend immediate support. Global Greengrants Fund understands this and manifests the principle in its philanthropic practice by investing in local organizations that are there to respond to their communities in times of need. As one participant from the webinars put it, community resilience in a crisis is dependent on:

‘the timely presence of NGOs... being able to rely on quality social safety nets.’

Locally based organizations have been the first responders (and often times the only responders) in the pandemic as well. For instance, a participant on our webinars from a community foundation shared that they had responded as early as March 2020 with the Coronavirus Community Fund, with UK£70,000, and by July 2020 the Fund had grown to £1.8 million. The funds came from private sources, from business, from government and the National Emergencies Trust Funding in the UK. With that resource base established to address the immediate needs of its community, it is now channelling its energies into a plan for recovery. Originally targeting older people, as the needs of other groupings in society became clearer, the Fund evolved to support as many groups as possible.

From Indonesia to Mozambique we heard versions of the same story – locally based organizations adapted and responded quickly to meet the needs of their communities. Tewa’s story from Nepal is about this – how a local fund with no prior experience in disaster relief work was able to respond effectively to its communities in the wake of the 2015 earthquake based on its investment in local leaders, in its relationships and in the conviction that people want to and have the ability to help themselves. By supporting and strengthening local organizations Global Greengrants Fund’s funding practice carries the same conviction that locally based organizations are best placed to meet its goals of social and environmental justice.

We can draw from this that communities are resilient when people are able to tap into their inner strength and ability to steer the course of their own life, when local leaders are empowered and strong local relationship networks exist, when local institutions are present that nurture community leaders and local networks and coordinate their collective efforts and resources in times of need. It is also important that outside support serves to build up these processes rather than erode the agency and spirit of volunteerism, undermine the autonomy of local communities’ institutions,

their resource base, and thus their resilience. A noteworthy example of the way institutional philanthropy can be instrumental in the processes that build community resilience comes from the GFCF.³⁵ GFCF supports community philanthropy organizations all over the world based on the premise that local resources and capabilities can help #shifthe power to people. In response to COVID-19, it set up an emergency fund that has so far made 61 grants amounting to \$850,000 to support different kinds of activities by community philanthropy organizations. This includes: supporting the communities they are based in through the crisis and encouraging and building mutuality; immediate response work, as well as activities aimed at looking ahead that #buildbackbetter; and organizational support for local organizations experiencing challenges around cash-flow or reduced funding.

There is, of course, more work to be done to ensure that economic and political processes serve the community and support it through difficult times. The COVID crisis has revealed many inadequacies on this front – including in our health infrastructures and in the failures of governments to protect the economically vulnerable – and has brought to the fore countervailing political and economic forces under the cover of the pandemic and recovery. The resistance to these forces and the building back of better social, political and economic systems will come from resilient communities. At the core of Tewa's approach to development is the belief 'that when women struggling with poverty, marginalization, and invisibility organize collectively, they amplify their voices, they strengthen their leadership and are able to overcome injustice.'

When translated into philanthropic and development practices these simple truths about resilience building and the struggle for justice can be rendered counter-intuitive by decades of conditioning for the measurement of the tangible, by lofty theories of change and an outdated top-down development model. Overcoming these old habits and learning from people and places that are doing things differently is going to be a long drawn out process. What we want to do is to open up a space for examining our practices and behaviours in development and philanthropy – are we making communities fragile or are we helping to build their resilience?

The stories of Tewa, Global Greengrants Fund and the research of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in the Philippines are an attempt to give weight to this process. We hope that you will join us in this learning journey and share your story.

³⁵ <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/>

About Global Greengrants Fund (GGF): GGF is a participatory environmental fund that supports grassroots action on a global scale. GGF is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit in the USA, and GGF UK is a charity registered in England and Wales. Together, the sister funds give grants and accompaniment to grassroots environmental initiatives through a network of advisors. Since 1993, Global Greengrants Fund has provided over 14,000 grants worth more than \$100 million in 168 countries.

About Philanthropy for Social Justice and Peace (PSJP): PSJP is a network for social change. Its purpose is to support the development and adoption of ideas about what makes a good society, to connect and strengthen the agents of this work and contribute to the infrastructure that supports progressive social change. PSJP is hosted by Global Dialogue, registered as a charity (1122052) and a limited company (05775827) in England and Wales.

About Tewa: Tewa is a community philanthropy and women's fund in Nepal. Through funding and capacity development, Tewa supports women to organize, raise their voices collectively and transform discriminatory policies, systems, norms and practices.

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