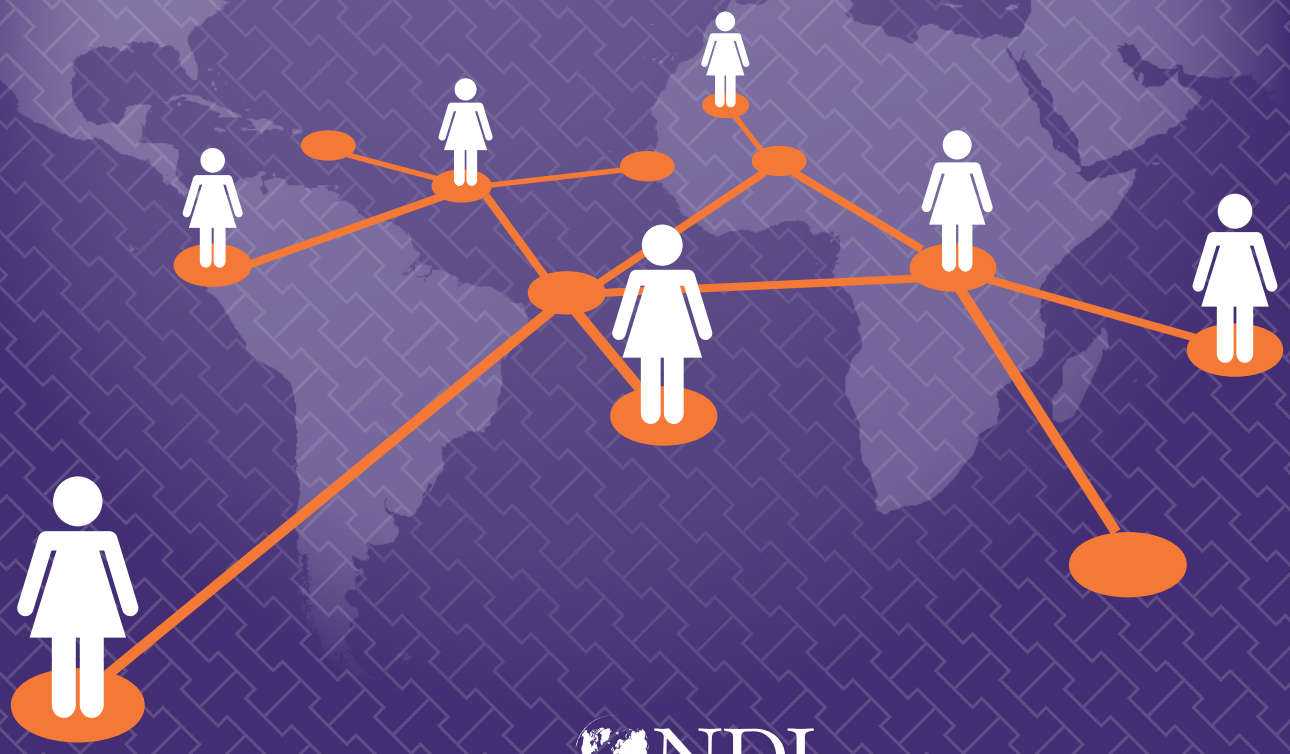
Women, Resilience, and Democratic Delivery in Crisis

PROGRAM GUIDE



NDI
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

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ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization working in partnership around the world to promote and protect democratic institutions, processes, norms, and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy, freedom, and dignity prevail for all. NDI works with political parties, civic groups, parliaments, and other organizations and individuals in more than 60 countries to strengthen democratic institutions, protect elections, advance citizen participation, and promote open and accountable government. NDI builds trusted relationships with partners, and these relationships set NDI apart from other groups and give NDI a key competitive advantage. NDI operates with the belief that a more democratic world is a more peaceful and prosperous place.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AMIDST INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AND SUCCESSIVE SHOCKS AND CRISES, communities face the challenge of responding to threats in ways that strengthen or undermine democratic governance. A common tendency during crises is for political systems to constrict into command-and-control modes of operation, which are often characterized by militarization, exclusion, and a dominant focus on stereotypically masculine power structures. While such approaches may initially appear to be responsive to shock, they frequently erode democratic norms, exacerbate barriers for women and members of marginalized groups, and hinder long-term recovery and development.

By contrast, community resilience-focused efforts offer a more inclusive and sustainable approach to managing crises. Resilient communities are those which empower a broad base of citizens to proactively address threats and their secondary and tertiary effects. This requires sharing information, fostering learning, and continually refining response strategies—practices which are fundamentally at odds with rigid command-and-control systems that centralize decision-making and stifle innovation. When communities adapt to crises, they not only mitigate immediate threats but also transform social relationships, power systems, and forms of social capital in ways that advance democratic values, such as gender equality, social inclusion, and the integration of displaced populations.

Evidence shows that women and women's rights organizations play a critical role in building community resilience. Their legitimacy, extensive networks, and ability to mobilize citizens across diverse barriers enable them to bridge gaps in governance responses. When these individuals and organizations collaborate effectively with governments, they amplify public responses through inclusive and grounded strategies. In instances where government responses are insufficient, these individuals and organizations provide essential services and support systems deeply rooted in local needs and priorities.

Recognizing the pivotal role of women and democratic governance in community resilience, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) sought to explore how communities and different levels and types of governments engage in subnational governance to respond to shocks and how women contribute to these efforts. Through the Women, Resilience, and Democratic Delivery in COVID (WRADDIC) program, NDI examined the mechanisms by which women and local governments strengthened resilience and identified opportunities to enhance these efforts. This guide presents NDI's Community Resilience Framework, distills key lessons learned, and offers practical guidance to support more effective, inclusive, and democratic shock responses.

GETTING STARTED

UNDERSTANDING SHOCKS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Community resilience refers to the capacities that communities mobilize to cope, adapt, transform, and learn in the face of shocks and longer-term stressors.

These **shocks**—such as community violence, unexpected political transitions, or natural disasters—often prompt a shift to centralized, "command-and-control"[1] modes of operation in which power and decision-making processes are characterized by militarization, exclusion, and traditionally masculine power structures. This process of consolidation can undermine democratic governance, exacerbate inequalities, and further marginalize groups like women and minorities.

Examples of Shocks

- Civic unrest
- Community-based conflict (e.g. over land and water resources)
- Crop pests and diseases
- Drought
- Dramatic inflation, currency devaluation/ instability
- Floods
- Forced displacement
- Gender-based violence
- Large-scale disease outbreaks (e.g. Ebola, COVID-19)
- Land degradation
- Livestock diseases
- Sudden political transition
- Violence from organized armed groups (e.g. extremist, ethnic, religious or political conflict)

Resilient communities counteract the tendency to revert to patterns of command-and-control by leveraging inclusive institutions, fostering strong social networks, and harnessing adaptive capacities to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shock. These communities are better able to maintain stability and ensure equitable access to services to recover in the short-term and transform in the long-term to achieve democratic governance and development goals. Fragile communities, by contrast, lack the capacity to adapt and respond effectively, often leading to prolonged recovery periods and exacerbating inequalities and marginalization.

WHAT SETS RESILIENT COMMUNITIES APART?

Resilient communities are better equipped to adapt from and transform in the face of shock because they can leverage specific capacities. These capacities include:

SOCIAL CAPITAL: Resilient communities harness networks of trust and cooperation within and between groups, and with institutions. These networks foster collaboration and resource-sharing during crises.

INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS: Resilient communities ensure diverse voices, particularly those of historically marginalized groups like women, young people, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex+ (LGBTQI+) individuals, internally displaced people (IDPs), and other minorities, are integrated into decision-making processes.

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY: Resilient communities learn from experiences, innovate, and adapt strategies to effectively manage changing conditions amidst crises.

Fragile communities are less able to learn and adapt in the face of shock, gather feedback on how they're doing, and launch a collective response strategy. They often struggle with exclusionary governance, weak or insufficient resource distribution, and inequitable service delivery. Characteristics of fragility include:

- Exclusionary or illegitimate decision-making processes
- Limited or inequitable access to resources and services, which are often concentrated in urban centers or among powerful groups
- Weak social networks which limit collaboration, resource-sharing, and accountability mechanisms.
- Lack of formal and/or informal social safety nets
- Suppression of women and marginalized voices, excluding them from critical decisions and information networks during crises.

Corruption further exacerbates these challenges, leaving the most vulnerable, who are often the most affected by shocks and the most difficult to reach, without access to essential services or support during crises.

When a community cannot quickly recover from a shock, there are long-term implications for inclusive and sustainable democratic development and the ability of all citizens to participate and flourish. However, by addressing gaps and strengthening existing resilience capacities, communities can transition from fragility to resilience, better managing immediate risks and working towards sustainable development.

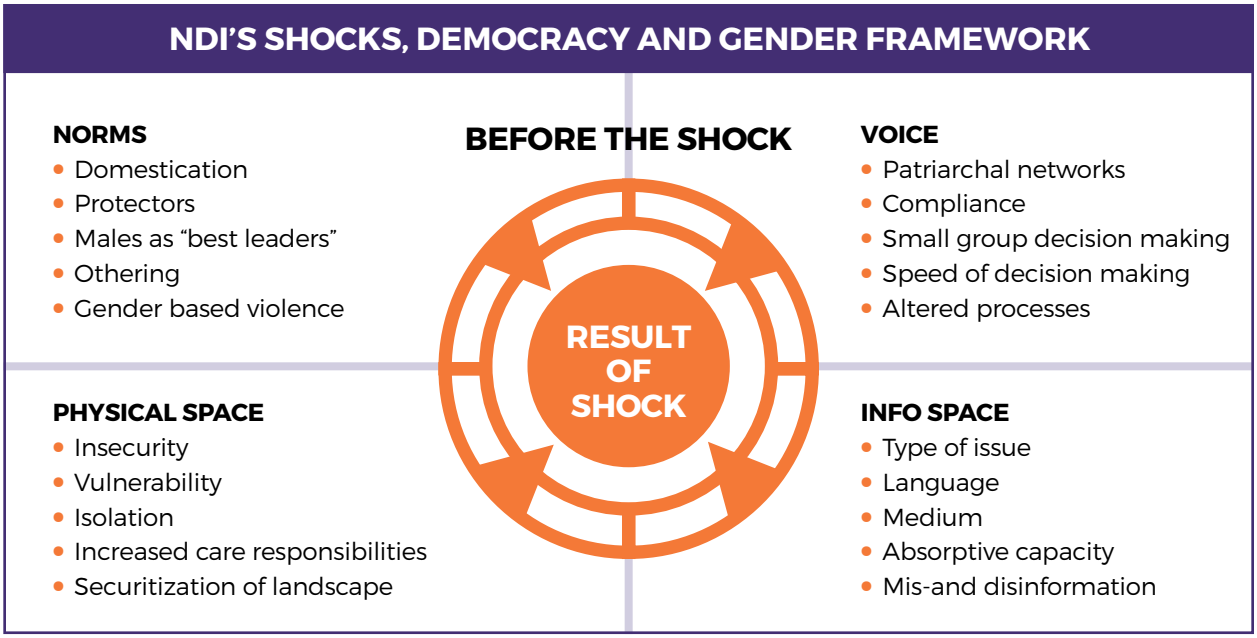
Resilient communities can harness:

- Trust networks within and across community groups and between citizens and decision-makers
- Collective efficacy and action
- Open and trusted communication channels
- Inclusive and adaptive leadership structures and institutions
- Equitable distribution of basic services and resources
- Diverse women's inclusion and participation in decision-making
- Formal and informal social safety nets
- Diversified income-generating activities
- Community learning and adaptation strategies

HOW GENDER RELATES TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Gender plays a crucial role in how individuals and groups experience shock and resilience as well as their access to leadership and decision-making in the face of response and recovery to shocks. Different groups of women, men, girls, and boys all experience different levels of vulnerability and exposure to shock, which influences their capacity to cope and contribute to the resilience response. Diverse women and girls, however, are often exposed to additional, gender-specific barriers that render them more sensitive to shock. This can also prevent them from utilizing skills and knowledge to improve how their community adapts and transforms after shock. At the same time, women play an essential role in building resilience by mobilizing civil society and citizens, fostering communication channels, advocating for members of marginalized groups, and sharing effective resilience responses.[2]

Traditional gender roles and exclusionary power structures often limit women's access to resources and decision-making spaces. It is also important to note that in any given context and community, different groups of women will have different needs and access to power and resources. The intersectional framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw is important to consider how various personal and structural factors work together to create disproportionate injustice, inequity, and inequality for different groups—in other words, how overlapping factors such as socio-economic status, geographical location, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, disability, and other identities interact to impact different groups of women in unique ways. In this context, the research under this program sought to understand diverse women's experiences of response and recovery from shocks because of these interlocking systems of discrimination and exclusion. To build resilient communities, it is important to scrutinize the prevailing power dynamics and ensure that diverse women's full participation and unique priorities and contributions are prioritized.



NDI's Shocks, Democracy, and Gender Framework illustrates the interconnected relationships between shocks, democratic governance, and gender dynamics.

NDI developed a **Shocks, Democracy and Gender Framework** during the COVID-19 pandemic to lay out an understanding of the long-term opportunities for, and threats to, gender equality and women's political empowerment that exist within shocks. The graphic above is a depiction of this framework which outlines the gendered dynamics that shrink the political space for women and girls during a shock.

A GUIDING FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

NDI's WRADDIC program identified several cross-cutting factors that contribute to a community's resilience in the face of shocks. Resilient communities rely on absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities. These capacities help communities deal with shocks in different ways:

- **Absorptive Capacity:** The ability to absorb the impacts of shocks and maintain essential functions without significant damage.
- **Adaptive Capacity:** The ability to adjust and modify behavior or structures in response to changing circumstances.
- **Transformative Capacity:** The ability to fundamentally change systems, relationships, and institutions to address root causes of vulnerability and increase long-term resilience in the midst of shock.

Drawing on WRADDIC's findings and lessons learned, NDI developed a **Community Resilience Framework,** which offers a structured approach to strengthening the capacities that enable communities to withstand shocks, recover effectively, and achieve long-term adaptation and transformation. Local governments and women and women's rights organizations play a central role in building these resilience capacities. This framework is built on three key pillars essential to fostering resilience:

1 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT:** Local governments are pivotal to resilience through the delivery of critical services, information sharing, and fostering community trust. Effective local governance in moments of crisis goes beyond service delivery; it requires inclusivity and adaptability to address the diverse needs of all community members, particularly marginalized groups. Trust in local government strengthens its legitimacy and enhances its ability to respond to crises effectively and equitably.

2 **WOMEN AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS:** Women and women's rights organizations play a central role in community resilience by mobilizing and delivering resources, building social cohesion, and offering perspectives that are often overlooked, particularly during crises. Their leadership and inclusion are critical for reaching across social divides and adapting to emerging challenges and changing conditions.

3 **ENGAGED CITIZENS:** An engaged citizenry plays an important role in resilience by holding institutions accountable, facilitating collective action, and contributing to informed decision-making. Communities thrive when citizens actively collaborate with local governments and civil society, including women-led organizations, ensuring responsive and inclusive crisis response.

These pillars—local government, women and women's rights organizations, and engaged citizenry—are interdependent and must embody key resilience capacities within themselves. Equally critical are the relationships between these pillars, which rely on trust, mutual support, and open communication. Communities demonstrate resilience when these pillars can harness **inclusion, social capital,** and **adaptive capacities.**

Resilience Capacities

INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS: Communities that have inclusive and participatory decision-making structures are better equipped to recover from shocks. Inclusive institutions ensure that all groups, especially those most vulnerable and exposed to shock, have a voice in governance and crisis response. Inclusivity builds broad community support and mobilizes resources, enhancing the collective response.

As women comprise half the population of any community and are also represented within other marginalized groups, their meaningful inclusion in decision-making not only builds broad-based support for inclusive crisis response but also enhances the community's overall capacity to effectively mobilize in citizen-responsive ways.

SOCIAL CAPITAL: Communities with strong social capital are better able to cooperate, share resources, and exchange critical information during crises. Strong social networks enhance cooperation and resource- and information-sharing during crises. Because of the spaces they occupy and roles they play, women are essential to building and maintaining this social capital. Social capital can take three forms:

- **Bonding (within group networks):** Close-knit groups, such as women's associations, with strong levels of in-group trust build resilience by fostering mutual support, quickly mobilizing resources, and sharing vital information during crises. These networks can act as safety nets for members during times of need. However, when such groups are isolated or homogenous, lacking connections and networks both between diverse community groups and with those in positions of institutional or governmental authority, they risk inhibiting broader community resilience.

*NDI's research found that women's savings groups in **Sudan** demonstrate resilience by pooling resources to provide financial support to members during times of need or crisis.*

*NDI's research in **Burkina Faso** found that women's agricultural and market associations were representative of diverse ethnic groups, enabling them to organize joint initiatives to sustain income generating activities for their families. However, without bridging or linking connections, they were poorly positioned to advocate for crisis response policies that protected their economic activities.*

- **Bridging (between groups):** Connections between diverse groups foster collaboration and mutual understanding. Ensuring women's groups have connections between groups strengthens community resilience.

*NDI's research in **Malaysia** found that women's associations were often isolated with weak bridging connections to other groups or linking connections to institutions. In*

particular, women's associations struggled to contribute to resilience because of their homogenous nature. The lack of bridging connections with community members from other ethnic groups prevented the formation of joint initiatives to share information, build trust, and mobilize resources across community groups. In addition, it inhibited their potential to present a united front to advocate for broader community needs with local government effectively.

*NDI's research in **Ukraine** showed that women and women-led associations had strong bridging connections that enabled them to draw on vast networks to quickly mobilize resources and direct aid to vulnerable community members.*

- **Linking (connections with institutions):** Community connections to government, traditional or religious institutions, or NGOs provide access to resources and information, thereby strengthening resilience. When women's associations build these connections, they amplify their ability to address community needs and advocate for inclusive response policies.

*In **Ukraine,** NDI had conducted gender-responsive programming that embedded gender sensitivity into community governance practices, such as participatory budgeting and gender committees. This groundwork became a resilience factor during the war. In communities where these practices had taken root, women maintained strong connections with institutions and officials, even amidst the disruptions of war. Officials, informed by prior engagement with gender-sensitive practices, were better equipped to understand and respond to the needs of diverse community members. This foundation enabled adaptive and inclusive decision-making that better accounted for the perspectives of displaced populations and other marginalized groups.*

*In **Burkina Faso,** women's associations were not connected to formal and informal community decision-making structures. This undermined their ability to access and share vital information, advocate for their own interests and needs, and organize relief efforts that ensured the most vulnerable groups received assistance.*

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP: Communities with adaptive leadership capacity learn from past experiences and innovate to address future challenges. Effective adaptive leadership means that local governments, community leaders, and community organizations not only absorb and respond to shocks but also learn from them, reimagining community relations and systems for the future. Adaptive leadership integrates the perspectives of women and marginalized groups to ensure that crisis responses are equitable and effective.

*In **Burkina Faso,** male-dominated leadership structures excluded women from critical decisions on resource distribution and security policies. For example, a poorly designed curfew disproportionately affected women's ability to access markets and fields, further impoverishing communities and undermining resilience.*

Based on the findings from the WRADDIC research, NDI recommends that to strengthen resilience, each of the three pillars, including Local Government, Women and Women's Rights Organizations, and Engaged Citizens, must:

- **Be inclusive,** ensuring meaningful participation from all segments of the community and integrating diverse perspectives into responses;
- **Demonstrate adaptive leadership,** innovating and modifying strategies based on inclusive consultation and in response to changing conditions; and
- **Build networks of trust and cooperation** within and across community groups and institutions to enhance collaboration.

NDI's Community Resilience Framework depicts the core components and pathways for building community resilience, emphasizing the role of women and women's organizations, diverse community networks, and inclusive and adaptive decision-making in building resilient shock responses.

To move towards resilience, communities must address the root causes of fragility, such as corruption and exclusionary practices, weak institutional legitimacy, and inequitable service delivery, violence—including gender-based violence—, and barriers to the participation of women and other marginalized groups. By fostering inclusion, building adaptive systems, and strengthening social capital, communities can establish robust feedback loops for learning and adaptation, ensuring short-term recovery and progress towards long-term development and democratic governance goals. The **Community Resilience Framework** provides a structured roadmap for practitioners to assess vulnerabilities and identify pathways to resilience.

A list of additional key concepts and definitions can be found in Annex I.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles should guide NDI and organizations' working to build community resilience.

- **Do No Harm:** Always ensure that interventions do not intentionally or unintentionally cause harm to participants, researchers, practitioners, or communities at large. This principle is particularly important in fragile environments where efforts to enhance resilience must avoid reinforcing harmful gender norms, exacerbating conflict dynamics, reinforcing social divides, and/or strengthening command-and-control responses.

- **Recognize and Address Biases:** Practitioners must be aware of their own biases, particularly in terms of power dynamics, gender roles, and social norms. Building resilience requires an inclusive approach that actively seeks to elevate marginalized voices and promote equitable access and participation in a time of shock.

- **Foster Partnership and Ownership:** The most resilient communities are those that actively engage all members, including diverse groups of women, men, young people, and members of other marginalized groups, in decision-making processes. Programs should partner with local stakeholders and promote local ownership of resilience strategies, empowering communities to lead their own recovery and adaptation efforts.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE PROGRAM APPROACH

METHODOLOGY

The WRADDIC program used comparative research and action learning to explore how gender-sensitive approaches can enhance community resilience in shock environments. From 2021 to 2024, the program operated in four distinct contexts:

- **Burkina Faso:** Focused on the shock of rising violent extremism
- **Malaysia:** Focused on the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Sudan:** Focused on the shock of unexpected political transition and successive coups
- **Ukraine:** Focused on the shock of war and internal displacement

In each country, NDI conducted research in two communities, one that local researchers deemed "more resilient" and one "less resilient", in order to compare community resilience factors and gaps. NDI worked with local research organizations in each country to conduct focus groups, key informant interviews, and surveys to hear from diverse groups within the communities, and identify and validate sources of resilience in each community.

The research analyzed how local governments and women-led organizations and networks responded to these shocks to identify the resilience and fragility factors that cut across the cases. NDI also validated and gathered lessons learned from an action learning program approach to strengthen community resilience through working with local organizations to conduct activities based on the findings of the initial research.

The WRADDIC program adopted the **theory of change** that IF women's rights organizations have organizing capacity and deeply rooted community networks, and+/ IF consultative mechanisms exist between women's rights organizations and the local government, THEN a community will be more resilient to shock.

LIMITATIONS

The WRADDIC program faced several key limitations in research, target area selection, operations and evolving political contexts that impacted the ability to deliver comparative insights and recommendations. **Research limitations** stemmed from the use of varying research methodologies and frameworks across countries, largely due to inconsistent access to communities, differences in research capabilities, and successive shocks which required iteration and adaptation. This inconsistency in approach hindered to some extent the ability to draw cross-country comparisons. Furthermore, the selected communities did not always fit a straightforward categorization of "more resilient" vs. "less resilient," complicating efforts to systematically analyze resilience factors.

Target area selection proved challenging, particularly in identifying communities with similar democratic profiles but different resilience levels. Each country presented unique complexities, as researchers had to locate communities with comparable socio-economic characteristics but also with distinct resilience responses to shocks.

Successive shocks posed additional operational challenges and in the majority of country cases diverted resources and attention to immediate crisis responses. These ongoing disruptions expanded the program's time horizon, limiting researchers' ability to isolate the impact of the initial shock and capture community perspectives and learning. The successive shocks required regular adaptation and flexibility in both the implementation and design of activities to respond to evolving needs and priorities. Additionally, some target areas proved less receptive and open to engagement, which created barriers to programming. This reluctance, often driven by political polarization, intervention fatigue, or skepticism toward external assistance, compounded the challenge of maintaining community engagement and participation on resilience-building goals. Further, successive coups and escalating conflict severely limited the ability to safely access certain communities, individuals, and institutions throughout the research and the pilot programs, particularly in Burkina Faso and Sudan. As a result, the depth of research and the ability to conduct follow-on action learning activities varied greatly in each country and community based on evolving risk mitigation and security strategies employed by staff, participants, researchers, and local organizations.

WRADDIC PHASES

The WRADDIC program followed four key phases to support a gender-sensitive approach to understanding community resilience in shock contexts.

PHASE ONE Community Resilience Research

This phase involved participatory research to understand resilience and fragility factors within the program's target communities. To isolate and compare these factors across shock contexts, NDI conducted the research in two communities in each case study: one community that was identified as "more resilient" and one community identified as "less resilient". Through focus groups and interviews, NDI examined how governance and social systems functioned in response to a shock, emphasizing diverse women's roles and barriers to participation. This research informed the development of targeted interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience through incorporating gender-inclusive strategies.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Shock Scenario Analysis:** NDI and local partners assessed the potential of various shock scenarios (e.g., political transition, economic crises, and natural disasters). This helped to identify the level of risk and types of threats that communities were most vulnerable to and their degree of exposure to potential shock. This insight helped inform the direction of resilience research to more deeply examine the impact of shocks and community resilience and fragility factors.

- **Resilience Research:** NDI and local research partners gathered context-specific data on resilience and fragility factors within the target communities, such as social and

governance structures, leadership capacity, economic conditions, security forces' activities, and women's roles in crisis response. The findings identified existing resilience capacities that could be reinforced and pathways to build resilience.

Key Resilience Questions

The following key questions were employed to help guide practitioners in gathering comprehensive information about the target area's context, vulnerabilities, and existing resilience capacities. These questions are illustrative and should be adapted to each unique context.

General Context

- What are the socio-economic conditions of the target community? (e.g., employment rates, economic indicators, primary livelihoods, etc.) How do these conditions affect women's roles and livelihoods?
- Are there active civil society organizations or community groups? What issues do they address, and how do they interact with local authorities? Are these groups inclusive and representative of various ethnic, religious, and socio-economic segments?
- Is there legislation protecting women's rights and prohibiting gender-based discrimination?
- How diverse are local governance structures, particularly regarding representation of women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups?

Shock Scenario Assessment

- What shocks (political, economic, environmental, conflict) currently threaten the community, and how likely are they to occur?
- How exposed is the community to these shocks? What compounding stressors exacerbate their vulnerability?
- Which groups are most vulnerable, and why?
- What is the current security situation? How does it impact marginalized groups?

Resilience Capacities

- What existing capacities help the community cope, adapt, and transform in the face of shock?
  - ⊕ Who leads crisis responses, and who is excluded from decision-making processes?
  - ⊕ How is critical information communicated during crises? Are all groups reached, or are some left out?
  - ⊕ Does the local government or media communicate fairly and effectively with all groups during shocks?
  - ⊕ How do women leaders and women-led organizations participate in crisis responses?
  - ⊕ What role do local government officials and community leaders play in supporting or hindering women's participation?
  - ⊕ Who benefits from crisis response efforts, and are any groups systematically excluded from decision-making or resources?

Additional resilience research templates can be found in Annex III.

Case Example Spotlight

In Burkina Faso, NDI conducted a study to assess how two target communities, Kiembara and Dio, responded to the shock of violent extremism, aiming to identify the resilience and fragility factors. To conduct this research, NDI partnered with a local civil society organization, *Groupe de recherche-action sur la sécurité humaine* (Human Security Action Research Group, or GRASH), which conducted qualitative research in both communities. These communities were selected due to similar demographics and exposure to violent extremism, providing a comparative basis to understand community resilience.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The study utilized deductive research methods whereby GRASH developed five initial hypotheses on factors potentially impacting community resilience, including uncoordinated responses across local entities, social cohesion deterioration, local governance capacity limitations, under-informed or misinformed populations, and negative impacts of security measures. These hypotheses were tested and evaluated through qualitative research methods.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was gathered in two phases: 1) Four focus groups (women, men, young women, young men) in each community explored resilience factors and how their communities responded to violent extremism. 2) Key informant interviews with community leaders provided additional depth and validation for the insights emerging from the focus groups.

Local data collectors were recruited to foster trust and rapport with research participants who are often suspicious of outside interventions. The data collectors were trained in research methods and data collection techniques. This included a supervised practice session to enhance their skills and further refine the data collection tools.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings are categorized according to NDI's community resilience framework: inclusive institutions, social capital, and adaptive leadership. These insights reveal significant differences in resilience capacities between Kiembara and Dio and provide lessons on the role for democracy and governance assistance in strengthening resilience.

- **Inclusive Institutions**
  In both Dio and Kiembara, the lack of inclusivity within governance structures emerged as a significant fragility factor. In Dio, decisions were typically made by customary and religious leaders without consulting marginalized groups such as, and there was almost a complete absence of women in decision-making. This exclusion meant that support for vulnerable groups, including women, often relied on spontaneous efforts from local leaders and civil society rather than coordinated, strategic response planning. Conversely, Kiembara showed some degree of inclusion, particularly due to the presence of women-led CSOs and female councilors advocating for women's empowerment in decision-making. However, while women in Kiembara participated in crisis-related decisions, they still faced information gaps, limited skills training, and social norms and customs that prioritized male voices. Excluding vulnerable groups, particularly women, from

decision-making processes around crisis response left community needs partially unmet as these groups experienced different levels of exposure and sensitivity to shock. The inability to capture diverse perspectives left the communities less prepared to respond comprehensively and sustainable to shock.

- **Social Capital**
  Social cohesion and trust networks were initially strong in both communities, enabling a unified response to the shock. However, ongoing violence strained these bonds, leading to increased tensions and stigmatization of certain ethnic groups. In Kiembara, an influx of displaced people and local political polarization tested social cohesion, yet the community's strong civic structures helped bridge divisions and facilitated collaborative problem-solving. Kiembara's linking social capital, or connections between community members and institutions, enabled a more cohesive support network, even under strain. In Dio, while the community's relative homogeneity helped maintain a surface level of unity, social capital was more fragmented. Traditional leaders restricted open communication and inclusive decision-making, which hindered trust-building across community groups and with local authorities. This challenge was compounded by the relative absence of local government and civic institutions, which had largely fled the area following the outbreak of violence. The lack of institutional actors left a vacuum in formal support systems and reduced social capital with institutions essential for launching a coordinated crisis response. In both communities, women's groups leveraged shared priorities, such as economic stability and essential services, to foster cooperation within and across identity groups. However, the primary resilience gap was a lack of inclusive bridging connections between citizens, particularly women, and institutions, which prevented a coordinated crisis response.

- **Adaptive Leadership and Learning**
  Both communities made some efforts to foster adaptive leadership, largely through engaging religious and customary leaders in crisis response. However, the absence of a structured consultation framework between administrative, customary and religious leaders, and citizens limited the communities' capacity to adapt and learn from shock. In Dio, leaders imposed restrictive measures, such as curfews, without inclusive consultation, which alienated some community members and reduced their ability to adapt their livelihoods to the shock. Conversely, Kiembara's more inclusive institutions allowed for relatively more flexible responses, such as involving diverse voices in planning, which enhanced the community's adaptive capacity. However, both communities struggled to strategically learn from their responses to the shocks due to a lack of consistent community engagement and feedback loops.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The study illustrates the crucial roles of inclusive institutions, social capital, and adaptive leadership in fostering community resilience. In both cases, resilience was hindered by weak institutional frameworks and exclusionary governance structures. The case study suggests that fostering consultation between citizens and local government and involving marginalized voices, particularly women, in decision-making could strengthen resilience against future crises.

PHASE TWO Community Resilience Interventions

Building on the insights from phase one, phase two involves designing and implementing targeted interventions to strengthen resilience. In phase two, a cohort of women leaders collectively identify community resilience capacities and gaps, identify priorities, and inform targeted resilience learning agenda and action plans.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Participatory Community Mapping & Action Planning:** A cohort of women leaders, drawn in part from participants in the research phase and in part through references from research partners, collectively mapped the resilience capacities and gaps within their communities, identified barriers to women's participation, and set priorities for community action. Their priorities focused on improving critical social services and optimizing social systems to benefit the most vulnerable groups. They also identified opportunities to strengthen connections to power-holders and decision-makers in order to channel their priorities and concerns. This collaborative exercise informed the development of a community resilience action plan.

- **Capacity-Strengthening Workshops:** Based on the findings from the resilience research and community mapping, an action-learning agenda was implemented to strengthen the cohort's skills to engage and participate in decision-making and better support their family's and community's resilience through prioritized activities. These sessions focused on enhancing participants' knowledge and skills related to advocacy, negotiation, public speaking, income generating activities, human rights, and land rights.

Case Example Spotlight

MALAYSIA'S COMMUNITY MAPPING PROCESS

In Malaysia, NDI partnered with Engender, a local civil society partner, to facilitate a participatory community mapping exercise with women leaders from the target communities of Desa Mentari and Petaling Perdana in Petaling Jaya Selangor. The two communities are based in large apartment blocks, each with several thousand residents. Engender also led the research phase of the project, but struggled in the second phase to convene women community leaders to conduct the mapping exercise. The convening challenge arose primarily through the interaction of existing context factors and intervening elections that took place during the phase two period; namely,(a) that political partisanship and ethno-linguistic identity divisions shape social interactions and public networking affiliations within the community, which makes it challenging to convene partners from across political and identity groups together; and (b) that the intervening state elections not only drew the time and attention of targeted participants during this period, but also led to a shift in the constellation of local and state government officials that had previously engaged with the program, and upon whose convening power Engender had relied.

After several delays, Engender convened nine women community members, including representatives of the neighborhood watch committee, the resident representatives council,

and civil society for a one day mapping exercise. The mapping aimed to generate feedback on concrete challenges, potential solutions, and participant aspirations in order to inform the Local Gender Action Resilience Plan (LGARP). The engagement also aimed to foster interaction, collaboration, and consultation across the various local networks where women engage: i.e. community neighborhoods, members of parliament, local and state governments, and women's rights groups.

The mapping validated the phase one research findings on challenges for community and women's resilience in the face of exogenous shocks:

- **Community governance structures, relationships, and interactions have strong political partisan and ethno-linguistic associations**, which strain relationships between leaders of all genders who have differing political affiliations and ethno-linguistic identities, as seen in both neighborhoods. This contributes to observable bias in community leader voting processes and to factions and divisions among community members. This context was identified by participants as ultimately impacting the democratic delivery of services, social harmony, and broader well-being of the community, which in turn challenges resilience in the face of shocks. For example, during COVID-19, the provision of information and supplementary services such as food assistance was organized along politically partisan—and to a lesser extent, ethno-linguistic—lines. Such division during the crisis reflects an extension of the way things are generally done in non-shock situations.

- **Inconsistency and fragmentation in community level governance structures.**. While a joint management committee (JMB) is the lowest level of governance within the large apartment block communities, not all apartment block communities have established these bodies to oversee structural and operational affairs. The community of Petaling Perdana, for example, has no such body, so the City Council (MBPJ) has had to step in and supplement, leaving a number of core community needs unaddressed.. Where there are JMBs and other hyperlocal organizations (such as resident associations or neighborhood watches), participants in both the research and community mapping exercises highlighted weak management, inter/intra block infighting and disagreements among leaders, and lack of consultation with residents.

- **The invisibility of the City Council.** Despite having a mechanism for coordination and support through a community focal point system, these are often male and politically partisan roles, leaving little opportunity for women to engage directly with the City Council or to be seen within their community as leaders and holders of information and influence. There were distinctions in the level of engagement between the City Council and the two communities. In Desa Mentari, for example, the gap is wider, but in Petaling Perdana, the resident advisor liaison with the City Council has been more engaged to raise community concerns and priorities.

- **Male-donominated power structures** and **women's financial dependence** on men. Prior to the COVID shock, women had a range of work opportunities, largely as cleaners,

factory workers, in food catering, and micro-income generation, particularly in food products. But these opportunities did not provide financial independence; rather, they supplemented financial resources that are otherwise provided by men, primarily husbands but also other male breadwinners. In general, this left many women in a financially precarious situation and vulnerable to unequal power dynamics within the home, which can impact on a woman's ability to engage in public life and, in some cases, increase risks for domestic violence. A majority of women lacked sufficient savings to fall back on in a crisis, leaving them exceptionally vulnerable during the COVID period when regular employment opportunities were no longer available. In a number of cases, concerned NGOs and local residents collected donations to prevent starvation, and many traditional women's assistance CSOs modified their working methods to support and coach women on financial literacy and management. However, in the post-COVID era, women's earnings remain insufficient, particularly in the new context of higher cost of living and increased prices on core goods. This situation exacerbated women's already fragile financial circumstances and highlights the importance of sustainable livelihoods for women.

Resilience factors identified by participants included: strong relationships with direct neighbors, though primarily those of the same ethno-linguistic identity and political affiliations; a culture of "looking out for each other"; the presence of a number of allies in formal leadership positions at different levels of government, including in the City Council, State Assembly, and civil society; and the availability of and connections to a range of civil society services that are important to women in the community, such as assistance for survivors of gender-based domestic violence, among others.

Based on this mapping exercise, the group identified key resilience-building pathways, which centered around strengthening women's leadership skills, network connections, and links to formal governance structures, as well as enhanced knowledge of the availability of critical services in the community, such as gender-based violence hotline. They emphasized the need for training in women's leadership skills, network- and trust-building opportunities to strengthen relationships among women community leaders themselves, and networking opportunities with women and men government leaders.

The mapping findings, along with findings from the phase one resilience research, informed the development of an action-learning agenda to equip women leaders with tools needed to address the challenges identified in the mapping process and, more broadly, to enhance local crisis response capacities and resilience in the long-term.

Case Example Spotlight

BURKINA FASO'S COMMUNITY MAPPING PROCESS

In Burkina Faso, NDI partnered with GRASH, a local civil society partner, to facilitate a participatory community mapping exercise with women leaders from Kiembara and Dio. This exercise assessed community resilience capacities and identified gaps in women's leadership and participation in local decision-making, particularly in the context of violent extremism and insecurity.

Fifteen women leaders from various associations and cooperatives participated in the two-day exercise. Together, they mapped their communities, identifying essential resources and significant gaps in services. They documented the effects of insecurity on their community, including disruptions in economic opportunities, rising youth delinquency due to school closures, and reductions in health services. They also underscored women's limited access to decision-making spaces, in general, while highlighting the local prefect's support for gender-inclusive leadership as a crucial entry point for resilience-building efforts.

The mapping exercise validated and contextualized the findings from the resilience research in phase one. Participants highlighted resilience factors, such as trust and social networks that enabled the communities to unify against threats. In addition, the women described adaptive strategies, like training as volunteer midwives and diversifying livelihoods, to support their families and communities. They also reinforced the finding that Kiembara benefited from greater collaboration between local authorities and citizens, while Dio faced structural and capacity gaps that limited their resilience. Based on these insights, the group outlined key resilience-building pathways, which centered around women's empowerment and decision-making participation. They emphasized the need for skills training in leadership, negotiation, and conflict resolution as well as specific areas to support their families and communities, including first aid, agriculture and farming techniques, land rights, and human rights.

The mapping findings, along with the phase one resilience research, informed an action-learning agenda to equip women leaders with tools to enhance local crisis response and strengthen resilience in the long-term. The results were also instrumental in creating a community resilience action plan, which was later negotiated and validated with local officials.

PHASE THREE Men, Power, and Politics Training

Recognizing that traditional gender norms and closed, male-dominated leadership circles often limit women's participation, especially during crises, this phase focused on engaging men as allies in supporting women's leadership and participation. The **Men, Power, and Politics Approach,**[3] developed by NDI's Gender, Women and Democracy team, aims to shift harmful gender norms and encourage male leaders to become advocates for gender equality. The MPP approach follows a series of linked exercises facilitated by male trainers who have experience discussing gender inequality and norms with other men in their local communities.

According to the three phases of the approach, male political leaders are first given the opportunity to personalize issues of gender; to understand their own disproportionate power and privilege, and the impact this has on their lives, their families and their communities.

Second, the participating political leaders are encouraged to professionalize this new understanding by applying it to how gender norms impact broader political contexts and political organizations. Third, the approach supports men to leverage this increased understanding of gender norms to strategize how to achieve organizational change and broader gender equality efforts in ways that are accountable to women.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Men, Power, and Politics Workshops:** In collaboration with local partners, NDI organized training sessions designed to engage local male leaders in the target communities in Burkina Faso and Malaysia to have discussions about local gender norms, understand the value of women's participation within their communities and institutions, and to recognize and interrupt gender inequitable behavior when they see it in their institutions. The ultimate goal of this approach is that these men become transformative agents of change for women's political participation. This approach represents a change from many commonly used democracy and governance approaches, with an intentional focus on promoting equitable social norm change as a key factor in program success. In the context of this program, incorporating MPP workshops and a social norm change approach was essential to ensure that research findings and action learning on women's contributions to resilience in each community was accessible to decision-makers and power holders in each community. This engagement with male leaders helps emphasize that women's contribution to resilience from shocks and service delivery can benefit whole communities and strengthen institutions, and that creating an enabling environment for women's leadership and decision-making—both informally and in politics—is not solely the burden of women themselves.

- **Working with Local Experts to Contextualize Curriculum:** In both countries, NDI worked with local organizations and male trainers to adjust the MPP curriculum to be responsive to local gender norms and context, ensuring that the discussions would resonate with men in each community. In Burkina Faso, NDI worked with local masculinities experts, GRASH, to hold a workshop for members of Special Delegations who replaced local councils following the January 2022 coup. The curriculum for this session was tailored to the context and political developments to prevent destabilizing the fragile political and security situation at the local level. Participants were introduced to the concepts of gender, gender norms, and identity and the positive roles that women play in strengthening community resilience in order to prepare them for engaging with the women's associations leaders on the community resilience action plan. An important lesson from this work in Burkina Faso was that local contextualization is essential to ensure that conversations on gender equality and inclusion are approached with caution and through a locally responsive lens. Though these conversations can be necessary to ensure that long-term peace-building processes better include women, potential unintended consequences should be considered, including that promising temporary peace pacts forged between male actors are not disrupted, causing further fragility and conflict in the short term.

TOOL: MEN, POWER, AND POLITICS PROGRAM GUIDANCE

Case Example Spotlight

MALAYSIA

A key challenge identified during both the resilience research and community mapping phases in the Desa Mentari and Petaling Perdana communities is the patriarchal nature of power structures in both private and public life and the limited interest among hyper-local and local men community members in advancing women's leadership and influence. While there are a number of women in community and government leadership positions, traditional gender norms challenge resilience to shocks by limiting women's ability to forge networks and to access and influence formal and informal power systems.

To address this, NDI partnered with an international masculinities expert and organized two trainings with the Institute's Men, Power and Politics methodology. Contextual factors within the two communities, including inconsistency in and limited access to apartment-block councils and other institutionalized bodies, challenged the ability of NDI and its partner, Engender, to engage participants from among male community leaders for the training. As a result, NDI adapted its approach to target men civil society and political leaders from the surrounding area and state government offices, toward the longer-term objective of (a) establishing a competent and sustainable community of male allies within the broader region that could effectively integrate gender transformative practices into their their own organizations and work, and who could be mobilized in the future to support the women community leaders through informal network connections; and (b) to establish a cohort of future MPP trainers from among the participants in the first training that could be enlisted to support the future deployment of MPP methods within the target communities and beyond.

Accordingly, the first training, which was held in-person, supported 10 political and civil society leaders from nearby communities and state offices identified through an open call and references from program partners, as well as NDI staff, to better understand how perceptions of gender and gender roles impact their personal lives and political contexts and institutions, and to develop strategies to enhance gender transformative change within their respective organizations and roles. Participants showed a dedication to the objectives of the MPP framework and demonstrated a full understanding of and ability to assimilate the MPP transformative process into their own gender understanding and to their respective work in the civil society advocacy and governance spheres. NDI and the expert facilitator designed a 360 degree evaluation tool for participants to constructively review and support their colleague's development. Results from these evaluations, as well as facilitator recommendations, contributed to selecting a cohort from among these participants for the second training, which followed a Training of Facilitators (TOF) approach.

The second TOF training series was organized online over two weeks with five participants from the first training series. This focused on building the capacity of participants to independently facilitate MPP trainings in the future with cohorts of men political and civil society leaders. Based on their earlier learning in the first training series, participants in the ToF individually led various MPP training sessions and facilitated iterative dialogues. Each session was followed by a review and comment session wherein fellow participants and the expert facilitator provided

feedback and suggestions using an updated 360 degree evaluation framework. All participants demonstrated competence, understanding and sensitivity throughout the process.

While direct connections between MPP participants and women community leaders in Desa Mentari and Petaling Perdana are limited due to contextual factors identified above, the existing of a cohort of male allies and trained MPP facilitators in the broader community services to reinforce the availability of expertise and resources for women community leaders over time.

PHASE FOUR Community Resilience Action Planning

The final phase focuses on strengthening community resilience by convening consultations between women leaders and local officials to develop community resilience action plans. These action plans addressed critical resilience gaps underscored through resilience research and community mapping exercises.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- **Community-Government Consultations:** NDI and its local partners facilitated dialogues between women leaders, traditional community leaders, and local government officials. During these sessions, women leaders present their findings on community resilience capacities and gaps and participants negotiate and co-create action plans to address prioritized community resilience challenges, such as access to essential health services, economic recovery, or psychosocial support for vulnerable populations.

- **Community Resilience Action Plans:** NDI and local partners supported the development of Community Resilience Action Plans, which were collaboratively negotiated at the local level with women's groups, traditional and religious leaders, and local officials. These plans identified gender-sensitive resilience gaps and prioritized critical issues, such as ensuring access to health services, rebuilding livelihoods, or addressing the needs of displaced populations. Through these co-created action plans, stakeholders collectively determined practical steps to strengthen community resilience, fostering ownership and accountability across all levels of participation.

Case Example Spotlight

MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, NDI's local partner Engender worked with local women leaders to develop and implement a community resilience action plan based on identified goals and needs from the community mapping exercise. Initiatives were designed to contribute to two overarching objectives: (1) strengthen women community leaders' connections to women and men political and civic leaders within formal institutions, and raise awareness among those formal leaders of the roles that women play in supporting their communities; and (2) enhance the leadership skills of women community leaders and their knowledge of services available within the community in order to strengthen their capacity to support their fellow community members. The plan was subsequently submitted to the Member of Parliament representing the communities.

The action plan specified the following initiatives:

- Workshop on Women's Empowerment and Leadership, focused on peer exchanges and sharing lessons from women community leaders in accessing and exerting power in decision-making positions;
- Workshop on gender-based violence, focused on raising awareness of available services and fostering the ability of women community leaders to assist other women within their communities to access services;
- Raising awareness of support services offered by civil society organizations and women's rights groups in the communities;
- Raising awareness of and expanding access to mental health counseling services within the communities
- Dialogue and engagement opportunities with the Member of Parliament for the state and with women community leaders
- Leadership in Action engagements (state representation), such as through a visit to parliament and opportunities for follow-on dialogues with the member of parliament
- Leadership in Action engagements (local representation), such as through meeting with Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) and State Women's Empowerment Unit (WBS) representatives to present community mapping findings, women's prioritized concerns, and to share the LGRAP.

Due to context-driven challenges to convening women leaders to implement the identified resilience-building activities, several initiatives were combined and participation in most events averaged eight to 10 participants. Challenges engaging women participants from across political partisan and ethno-linguistic communities also remained. For example, all participants in the workshop on women's leadership were Malaya, none were Indian, though most events engaged women representatives from across the two communities of focus. As a result of networking engagements implemented under the action plan with city council and state leadership, several political leaders acknowledged the gender gaps in community-government relationships and the impact this has on power dynamics and community resilience in a context of shocks. Based on this, they made commitments to ensure that more women be appointed as community liaisons in the future. The Member of Parliament also offered to establish an internship program within his office for a small number of women leaders from the two communities, in order to sustain and expand their leadership skills and influence into the future.

These developments align with the WRADDIC community resilience framework by promoting more inclusive institutions and strengthening the social capital and leadership capacity of women from the two communities.

Case Example Spotlight

Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, NDI's partner GRASH worked with local women leaders and community stakeholders to develop and implement a community resilience action plan aimed at strengthening local resilience capacities. The action plan was informed by the resilience research and a community mapping exercise that identified key resilient pathways, including enhancing women's leadership, economic empowerment, and improving access to critical services like healthcare and education. To guide the development of the action plan, GRASH formed a monitoring committee comprised of three women leaders and three local government officials. This committee validated and finalized the action plan before its presentation to the broader community.

After the plan's initial development, GRASH facilitated a two-day consultation workshop between local government, traditional leaders, and women leaders to negotiate and finalize the proposed plan. During the first day, participants reviewed the program's initial activities and outcomes, including the key resilience findings and the action-learning agenda's activities focused on women's leadership, economic stability, and a positive masculinities training. Participants highlighted the program's positive impact on resilience, noting how capacity-strengthening had enhanced women's economic activities and community engagement. Women reported increased interest in participating in decision-making and emphasized the roles they play in building community resilience. On the second day, participants refined the action plan objectives through group work and discussions, prioritizing inclusive economic activities, healthcare, education, and women's land access. Through this collaborative process, participants established two main objectives: 1) strengthen the capacity and empowerment of women at the local level, and 2) increase women's involvement in community decision-making and resilience-building efforts.

The action plan outlined specific workstreams to build resilience capacities across key areas. Activities included income-generating skills training, first aid workshops, and women's rights education, strengthening women's organizational and leadership skills and positioning them as central actors in resilience and community development. Key workstreams included:

- **Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention**: The action plan highlighted the important roles women play in maintaining social cohesion in their communities through involvement in activities like education and healthcare. GRASH provided training in conflict analysis, mediation, and advocacy, empowering women to act as agents of peace and cohesion within their communities.

- **Leadership Empowerment:** Women's leadership and management skills were identified as necessary to enhance community associational life and civic activism. GRASH delivered training in leadership and management skills, including a session dedicated to women's legal rights. As part of the training, women leaders brainstormed recommendations to increase women's engagement in local decision-making structures, such as Village Development Councils and Village Land Commissions.

- **Masculinities Training**: To transform community norms and behaviors that serve as barriers to women's leadership and participation, GRASH delivered a masculinities training for male leaders. The training aimed to foster positive shifts in attitudes towards women's leadership and community engagement.

- **Health Services Delivery:** Amidst growing insecurity, participants identified emergency healthcare as a critical gap, especially for pregnant women and children. GRASH trained village midwives and volunteers in emergency first aid to address this need and raise awareness of their crucial role as crisis responders within the community.

- **Entrepreneurial Skills**: Women's income-generating activities were identified as a cornerstone of family and community resilience. However, women face barriers to economic resilience, including skills gaps, inequitable land access, and a lack of access to financing mechanisms. To help women scale and sustain their initiatives, GRASH provided training and coaching in animal husbandry, agricultural techniques, and business development. GRASH organized a roundtable introducing women to micro-financing institutions, helping them identify financing options for their business ventures.

- **Community Land Rights**: Gendered disparities in land rights, access, and control is a crucial barrier to the resilience of women and the broader community. GRASH organized a discussion with community leaders, women, youth, and representatives of local government and land councils. With the help of an expert facilitator in local land rights issues, the discussion raised awareness of existing civil and customary rights and tenure frameworks and practices. Participants mapped the disparities, discussed their impact on resilience, and created a roadmap for further advocacy in support of women's land access.

The community resilience action plan aligns with the WRADDIC community resilience framework by promoting more inclusive institutions, strengthening social capital, and enhancing adaptive leadership capacity. NDI supported GRASH in implementing these action plans, which fostered increased engagement and trust between women and local authorities and service delivery improvements. This collaborative, locally-driven approach serves as a replicable model for strengthening community resilience in other contexts.

EMBLEMATIC CASE STUDIES

THE PROJECT'S FOUR CASE STUDIES each represented different configurations of resilience and fragility based on NDI's Community Resilience Framework (Figure 2) that describes the pillars of community resilience (local government, women and women's rights organizations, engaged citizenry) and the relationships between them that ensure community resilience (bridging and linking social capital, inclusive communications, planning and decision-making processes; feedback loops that ensure learning and adaptation). Using the framework to assess the different configurations of resilience certain patterns emerge which can be used to validate future community action plans to bolster community pillars and relationships.

BURKINA FASO: WOMEN'S RESILIENCE IS COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The Burkina Faso case demonstrated that local governance structures that were not inclusive of women made decisions that further excluded and disempowered women to the detriment of the entire community. In Dio, community leaders sought to manage community insecurity by prohibiting women from engaging in economic activity outside community boundaries, such as going to market to sell goods, or growing food on a small plot of land given to the village women. This decision greatly impoverished the community overall, increasing food insecurity and putting the well-being of many families at risk. **In this case, the community action plan focused on a particular resilience pillar, namely strengthening women's rights and activism, and establishing linkages between womens' groups and local government and citizens.** This demonstrated to local leaders that womens' empowerment and capacity offered stronger resilience responses and improved community well-being in the midst of shock. Women trained in health care could replace government health workers fleeing the violence. Women trained in agricultural skills could improve community food security and well-being. Teaching women leadership, negotiation and conflict resolution skills could ensure that community decision-making was more inclusive, innovative and adaptive.

MALAYSIA: PARALLEL SYSTEMS

In this case, the community pillars of resilience were quite active, but they were not working together. Womens' organizations mobilized during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide community resources, but they worked parallel to rather than with government organizations, and they supported communities primarily along ethnic lines. Therefore, the COVID shock reinforced community divisions when local government structures provided assistance on the basis of political affiliations and womens' organizations segregated their responses along ethnic lines. The result was a fractured system of response that often did not reach the most marginalized and vulnerable, and reinforced the existing system of patriarchal power. **In this case, the community action plan focused on the linkages—establishing relationships of respect, trust and activism between local government structures and womens' groups—and breaking down barriers between womens' groups.**

SUDAN AND UKRAINE: RESILIENCE AND EXTREME SHOCK

The cases of Ukraine and Sudan offer important insights for building resilience in real time in the face of successive, compounding shocks. At a certain point, the shock or successive shocks may overwhelm any community resilience capacity and the community tips into survival mode to exist in the face of danger, active conflict and adversity, rather than longer term community building. This is certainly the case of Sudan where, in the initial phases of the counter-revolution, local government structures disappeared. In their place other mechanisms, such as Resistance Committees, women's collectives, and other informal community forms of organization, were able to sustain communities even with significant influx of displaced and migration outflows. However, as violence rose, political negotiations at the national level fell apart, and armed groups fought for political control, community resilience structures and relationships greatly deteriorated and often disappeared in the face of these successive shocks.

In Ukraine, where communities faced similar successive shocks of armed conflict, occupation, displacement, gender-based violence, and human trafficking, the pillars of resilience—local government, citizen engagement, women and women's rights groups—have held and even gained in strength and activism. However, how those pillars have related to each other has determined the ability of communities to respond to displacement and armed violence. Many frontline communities have had to discard formal structures of governance, including participatory budgeting, community hearings, etc., as well as engagement with civil society to respond to the conflict in adaptive and fluid ways. What distinguished resilient and non-resilient communities—those able to deal effectively with the disruptions of war (missile attacks, disinformation, shelling) and displacement was the extent to which gender sensitivity was already embedded in community practices". **Communities that had previously institutionalized practices such as gender-sensitive budgeting, established gender committees, and mainstreamed gender considerations in decision-making were better able to adapt to the challenges of war.** Even as formal structures dissolved or consolidated, these communities maintained a greater degree of inclusivity and ensured that women's perspectives, including those of displaced women, and other marginalized and minority perspectives, informed their responses to conflict and displacement.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Complex local governance ecosystems influence fragility and resilience

In many contexts, local governance operates within a dense ecosystem of overlapping authorities, informal power structures, and identity politics. These interconnected formal and informal dynamics shape how communities navigate shocks and stresses. Conducting a governance ecosystem mapping clarifies relationships among different governance levels, including micro-governance systems like apartment block boards, neighborhood associations, and decentralized government departments. This mapping can reveal how resources are distributed, who influences community decision-making, and where potential opportunities exist for engaging diverse stakeholders effectively.

Recommendation: Map local governance ecosystems

Communities manage multiple, layered shocks and stresses simultaneously

Communities often manage layered shocks and stressors, both small-scale (affecting households or small segments of the population) and large-scale (impacting entire communities or regions). The WRADDIC program underscored the need for viewing resilience holistically, addressing interconnected systems such as governance, health, and economic systems, alongside micro-governance structures and informal power networks. A comprehensive understanding of shocks' nature, frequency, and impact across sectors enables tailored, system-wide interventions that strengthen resilience. Engaging local stakeholders to understand intersecting shocks and vulnerabilities and designing cross- sector initiatives that align with a holistic understanding of community needs will increase the efficacy of programming aimed at strengthening community resilience.

Recommendation: Develop a holistic assessment of community shocks and vulnerabilities

Diverse risk profiles exist within communities

Social factors such as ethnicity, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, and age–significantly influence exposure and sensitivity to shocks. Community resilience strategies must be customized to reflect these specific vulnerabilities, as they shape both risks faced and resilience capacities. Engage local stakeholders to assess how risks manifest across different groups, tailoring program interventions to address these unique needs and strengths effectively.

Recommendation: Tailor interventions to meet unique risks and vulnerabilities

Elite pacts and power imbalances in conflict contexts increase the potential for harm

In conflict-affected contexts such as Burkina Faso and Sudan, elite alliances—often male-dominated—stabilize power structures through formal and informal agreements. While these alliances provide fragile, short-term stability, they often exclude marginalized voices, particularly women. Addressing these power imbalances requires sensitivity to existing alliances and tensions, as efforts to promote inclusion could destabilize tenuous peace arrangements. Conduct a gender-sensitive conflict analysis to identify where power imbalances pose risks to marginalized groups and community stability. When engaging elite stakeholders, understand the local context to help avoid reinforcing exclusionary structures or provoking backlash. A phased or parallel approach, such as engaging male leaders on the benefits of gender inclusivity in their personal lives, can build allyship without directly challenging or destabilizing existing arrangements and allow for gradual progress towards inclusion.

Recommendation: Understand and navigate entrenched power dynamics

Compounding barriers can prevent inclusive and sustained participation

Barriers like time constraints, resources, safety concerns, and perceptions about leadership potential can limit participation in community resilience activities. In some contexts, stereotypes around leadership, partisanship, and social identity compound barriers to access and participation.. Community resilience programs should be designed and implemented with a broad inclusion lens and a flexible and adaptive approach. Securing buy-in from diverse community influencers, adjusting the timing of activities, selecting neutral sites for engagement, and providing support services (e.g., transportation or childcare) can help overcome some of these barriers. Peer-to-peer networks and mentorship systems pairing experienced community leaders with newcomers can also foster participation by offering structured guidance, support and entry points.. Community resilience efforts should focus on building trust over time by creating space for respectful, constructive dialogue across identities.

Recommendation: Design inclusive, flexible activities to promote participation

Flexible research approaches are needed in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected contexts

In conflict-affected and hard-to-reach communities, restricted access often limits the depth and quality of data collection. In these contexts, data collection can also risk being extractive and unresponsive to local needs. To address this, research approaches should prioritize adaptiveness and participation, partnering with local organizations to ensure data is context-sensitive and aligned with community dynamics. By co-creating research agendas and methodologies with local stakeholders, programs can promote ethical and mutually beneficial outcomes while avoiding harm or exploitation.

Recommendation: Use adaptive research methods and local partnerships to conduct research

Empowering marginalized voices can provoke resistance from diverse voices

Strengthening resilience and empowering marginalized actors can trigger resistance from dominant groups, including both men from traditionally privileged as well as marginalized backgrounds. Resistance can stem from a range of factors, such as concerns over resource competition or losses in relative privilege due to shifts in traditional power dynamics. For example, in Burkina Faso, NDI faced resistance from young men during community resilience initiatives focused on enhancing women's land access and tenure. Young men viewed these changes as potentially threatening their future economic stability and social standing. Programs must incorporate Do No Harm[4] and conflict-sensitive approaches to mitigate risks of backlash or resistance. This includes conducting pre-project activities, such as conflict analysis and stakeholder meetings to develop shared language, build understanding, and establish norms for community engagement and collaboration. Programs should include protective measures, such as fostering safe spaces, creating support networks, providing security briefings for participants, and offering referrals for additional psychosocial services as needed. Resistance can be proactively addressed through strategies like parallel educational sessions, peer-led outreach, and collaboration with diverse community groups. Leveraging train-the-trainer models with trusted male leaders and elders can ensure inclusive messages are disseminated organically, reducing resistance and fostering broader community buy-in.

Recommendation: Incorporate protective measures and mitigate resistance through context-aware, flexible approaches

CONCLUSION

RESILIENCE TO SHOCKS IS NOT JUST ABOUT SURVIVAL; it is about transforming and empowering communities through inclusive, democratized responses. Resilient responses to shock resist the tendency to centralize and consolidate decision-making, which can erode democratic norms and processes. Instead, resilient responses leverage democratic subnational governance to empower diverse communities to share information, learn, and adapt, thereby equipping them to address both immediate threats and their cascading impacts. As communities adapt and transform in the face of challenges, they can fundamentally reshape social systems, power dynamics, and relationships in ways that promote inclusion, equality, and long-term democratic governance. By investing in resilience strategies that center diverse citizen participation, prioritize learning and adaptation, and leverage the transformative role of women and women's networks, communities can not only manage threats but build more inclusive, prosperous, and democratic societies.

Endnotes

1 Command-and-control is a term commonly used to understand and describe how authorities and commanders of traditional forces exercise decision-making to accomplish a mission in the context of defense, national security and conflict. In this context, command-and-control is defined by unilateral decision-making and strong, centralized control by a leader who assigns tasks, designates objectives, and gives direction with little or no input or consultation. As compared to a community resilience response to crisis, command-and-control is typically associated with a top-down, militarized, and often masculinized response.

2 Brechenmacher, Saskia and Hubbard, Caroline, How the Coronavirus Risks Exacerbating Women's Political Exclusion, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the National Democratic Institute, 2020; Lauren Van Metre, Community Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kenya, US Institute of Peace, Peaceworks, 2016.

3 https://www.ndi.org/men-power-and-politics

4 Do No Harm is an overarching principle and analytical framework that seeks to avoid putting program participants, staff, and community members at physical or emotional risk, whether intentionally or unintentionally. It involves assessing whether programming disrupts or reinforces existing power imbalances, conflict dynamics, discrimination, or other harmful practices.

ANNEXES

ANNEX I. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

"Resilience" is an ambiguous concept, and, if left undefined, the project would have failed to deliver comparative insights and lessons learned. Below is a conceptual framework and clear terminology that was used by all teams to identify, support, and measure resilience capacities at the community level.

Hypothesis: Communities are resilient when local government, women's rights organizations and the community itself have the institutions, social capital (bonding, bridging, linking), and adaptive leadership capacity (diverse sources of information, feedback loops) to respond to a specific shock.

Definitions

Resilience: The capacity of people, communities, societies or states to learn, cope, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks or crises.

Shocks: External deviations from long-term trends that have substantial negative effects on people's, families', communities', or states' current status and state of well-being, livelihoods, resources, safety or their ability to withstand future shocks. Examples include drought, flooding, disease outbreak, market fluctuations or violent incidents.

Institution: a significant practice, relationship, or organization in a society or culture. Here an institution can be a formal organization of government, or an informal structure or relationship that legitimately fulfills a social or political purpose.

Social capital: the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively.

- **Bonding**: Horizontal ties or connections between individuals who are similar to each other and may live within close proximity to one another.
- **Bridging**: Ties or connections between members of one community or group to other communities/groups. Bridging social capital often crosses lines, boundaries, and groups.
- **Linking**: Connections or networks between individuals and groups that interact across institutions. Linking social capital is often conceptualized as a vertical link between a network across hierarchies with some form of authority or power.

Adaptive leadership: A combination of knowledge (based on good information and past experience) and strategic response (knowledge applied appropriately and leadership ability) to mitigate the specific shock.

ANNEX II. RESILIENCE AND FRAGILITY FACTORS

Resilience Factors:

- Inclusive and adaptive leadership: Leaders who assess and take proactive steps to mitigate risk, engage constituents constructively, and organize collective action in response to shocks
- Collective efficacy and activism
- Inclusive and reliable information networks and communication strategies
- Women's participation and inclusion in community and economic decision-making
- Respect for and knowledge of women's rights
- Inclusive and responsive distribution of basic services and resources
- Inclusive decision-making institutions and networks
- Diversified livelihoods and access to financial institutions
- Formal and informal social safety nets
- Bonding social capital within families, groups, etc.
- Bridging social capital between different networks
- Linking social capital across hierarchies

Fragility Factors

- Exclusionary or illegitimate decision-making institutions
- Weak or inequitable distribution of resources and services
- Weak bonding, bridging, and linking networks
- Exclusionary or illegitimate leaders
- Lack of formal or informal social safety nets
- Unreliable or exclusionary information networks and communication strategies
- Women are excluded from or marginalized in community and economic decision-making

ANNEX III. RESILIENCE RESEARCH TOOLS

NDI's WRADDIC program used a flexible and context-sensitive research approach, working closely with local partners to adapt and tailor research tools for use in local communities. This approach prioritized collaboration and grounded the research in the unique social, cultural, and political dynamics of each context. Depending on the context, the research teams utilized either inductive or deductive research methods to identify resilience capacities and gaps, ensuring that findings were both relevant and actionable.

Deductive research starts with a pre-defined theory or hypotheses and tests it against specific evidence. This method allows teams to systematically apply a framework, such as the Community Resilience Framework, to examine and validate resilience capacities and/or fragility factors. Deductive methods are structured and focused, enabling focused analysis and alignment with program objectives. However, they may miss unexpected insights or dynamics that fall outside the original hypotheses.

Inductive research, on the other hand, begins with open-ended observation or data collection to identify broader themes and patterns. This approach is particularly valuable in complex or less familiar settings, offering flexibility and the potential to uncover unanticipated or innovative factors. However, it can sometimes be less targeted or efficient compared to deductive research.

Both approaches have unique strengths, and teams can choose the best fit based on their specific goals and context. Using the Community Resilience Framework as a guide, teams applying deductive methods can test and validate established concepts or factors, while teams using inductive methods can uncover new dynamics and tailor the framework to local needs. The WRADDIC program's use of both methods demonstrates how combining approaches can validate hypotheses and uncover context-specific insights, ultimately strengthening community resilience programming.

The templates included in this section represent research tools developed and used in the WRADDIC program. Through the program, NDI examined community responses to recent shocks to identify resilience and fragility factors. By anchoring the concept of "resilience" in tangible events and moments, researchers gained deeper insights into community strengths, vulnerabilities, and adaptive capacities. Participants reflected on their lived experiences during crises, offering valuable perspectives on how communities respond and adapt. These research tools are highly versatile and can be adapted to explore broad community resilience capacities and pathways in diverse contexts. This flexibility allows NDI and its partners to proactively plan for future shocks or enhance real-time resilience strategies. For additional support and guidance, please contact NDI's Peace, Climate, and Democratic Resilience team.

A. WRADDIC Community Resilience Assessment—Key Informant Interview Guidance and Template

The Key Informant Interview (KII) is a qualitative research method used to gain in-depth insights into resilience factors, gaps, and community dynamics in response to shocks or crises. This approach allows facilitators to explore hypotheses developed from focus groups, surveys,

or desk research and to test assumptions about what strengthens or weakens community resilience. KIIs are designed to draw on the expertise and lived experiences of individuals with specialized knowledge or unique perspectives, such as local leaders, government officials, or representatives of civil society organizations.

Preparing for a KII: The research team should review secondary data and preliminary findings to identify hypotheses or gaps requiring further exploration. Questions should be tailored to the respondent's expertise and adapted to the local context. Interviews must be conducted ethically, with informed consent obtained beforehand. The research team should ensure a private, comfortable setting and be ready to ask open-ended and probing questions to uncover detailed, nuanced insights. Facilitators should provide translated materials if necessary, and secure an interpreter for respondents not fluent in the primary research language.

Considerations for Designing KII Questions

The KII is an opportunity to gain in-depth insights into resilience factors and gaps within a community. The research team should design questions to test preliminary hypotheses developed from focus group discussions, surveys, or desk research. These hypotheses might include assumptions about what contributes to resilience, what creates vulnerabilities, or how certain groups (e.g., women, youth, marginalized populations) engage in crisis responses.

Guidelines for Designing Questions

- **Focus on Depth:** Select a few key issues or hypotheses to explore thoroughly rather than trying to cover many topics superficially.
- **Leverage Expertise:** Design questions tailored to the respondent's unique experiences, knowledge, and expertise. For instance, questions for local government officials may differ from those for community leaders or civil society actors.
- **Use Open-Ended Questions:** Formulate questions that encourage respondents to share detailed narratives, examples, and reflections rather than simple "yes" or "no" answers.
- **Incorporate Probing Questions:** Prepare follow-up or probing questions to elicit further detail and clarification. Probing may help uncover the underlying reasons for a respondent's conclusions or reveal additional dimensions of resilience factors.

Example Hypotheses and Corresponding Questions

1. Hypothesis: Traditional leaders play a critical role in mobilizing crisis response.

- Who led the crisis response in your community?
- How effective were these leaders in mobilizing resources and engaging different groups?
- What challenges did they face?

2. Hypothesis: Trust and collaboration between diverse community groups strengthen resilience.

- How did people in your community work together during the crisis?
- Were there groups that were left out or marginalized? Why?

3. Hypothesis: Economic recovery measures disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.

- How has the crisis impacted economic activities in your community?
- What recovery strategies were implemented, and how effective were they?
- Were certain groups, such as women or youth, more affected than others?

Considerations for Conducting a KII

KII facilitators should be flexible and prepared to adjust the questions based on the flow of the conversation or the respondent's responses. Facilitators should remain open evidence that may contradict preliminary hypotheses. This approach helps uncover nuances and avoids overlooking key resilience factors. Facilitators should keep the number of questions manageable to avoid overwhelming the respondent or diluting the depth of the discussion.

To encourage open dialogue, facilitators should begin with general questions to help the respondent feel at ease. Once familiarity is established, the facilitator can gradually move to more specific or sensitive topics while ensuring the respondent remains comfortable sharing. The facilitator should offer space for additional comments or insights at the end of the interview to capture anything the questions might have missed.

Gathering Informed Consent

Gaining informed consent is a critical step in conducting ethical research, ensuring that participants understand the purpose of the interview, their voluntary involvement, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality and well-being. It establishes trust, respects participants' autonomy, and creates a safe space for open and honest dialogue.

The following informed consent script and statement is an example that can be adapted to the local context and research objectives.

Informed Consent Template

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is [Facilitator Name], and I will guide today's discussion as part of a project supported by the National Democratic Institute (or, NDI). This study seeks to understand how communities build resilience to shocks or crises, including their ability to respond and recover effectively. These insights will inform future strategies to enhance resilience at the local level.

This interview is voluntary, and you may skip any question or end the interview at any time without negative consequences. The discussion will take approximately 60 minutes and may involve questions about sensitive topics, including violence or discrimination. These discussions might bring up uncomfortable or upsetting emotions. Please know that you are not obligated to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable. You may pause the interview, skip a question, or stop participating at any time. We are committed to your well-being and will provide a list of local resources and support services if needed. Your responses will remain confidential and anonymous, and no personal information will be attributed to you in the final report.

There are no right or wrong answers. We value your honest opinions and perspectives.

Do you consent to participate?

If yes, please sign below:

Signature of Interviewee _____ Date _____

At this time, the facilitator should also provide additional information about the key concepts and ideas that will be explored in the interview to ensure the respondent is prepared to participate.

Key Concepts

Resilience: The ability of communities to adapt, respond, and recover from shocks or crises while maintaining or even strengthening their social and institutional structures. Think of a crisis that occurred in your own life where you might have consulted with family and friends, maybe contacted an expert, and, with their help, came up with a plan of action. The next time a crisis occurred you likely had more confidence in how to handle it. You had become more resilient. Resilient communities do the same thing: they consult, come up with strategies, and learn from the experience. They use that capacity to confront other crises or shocks.

Shock: Any unexpected event (natural disaster, disease outbreak, conflict, or economic crisis) that disrupts community life. Sometimes shocks are repeated or so significant that a community cannot recover. Leaders are no longer legitimate, community trust and relations are broken and the community becomes at risk for violence, predatory actors, etc.

KII Questionaire Template

The following sections and questions are provided as examples and should be adapted by the research team to the local context. Based on data collected from secondary sources and focus group discussions, modify the template to reflect the specific hypotheses being tested and the unique dynamics of the community. Use probing questions where needed to uncover deeper insights.

This approach ensures that the interview remains relevant and context-sensitive while allowing for flexibility to capture unanticipated findings.

SECTION ONE	COMMUNITY OVERVIEW
Hypothesis	
Questions	• How would you describe the overall quality of life in your community? • What social, cultural, or economic factors make your community strong? • What major challenges or crises have affected your community in recent years? • What actions were taken in response, and how effective were they? • Were any groups excluded or left vulnerable during the response?

SECTION TWO	LEADERSHIP AND COORDINATION
Hypothesis	
Questions	• Who typically takes the lead during crises in your community? • How do local leaders engage other civil society groups and members of the community in decision-making?

SECTION THREE	SOCIAL CAPITAL AND TRUST
Hypothesis	
Questions	• How do people in your community collaborate during crises? • What factors increase trust and cohesion among community members?

SECTION FOUR	LEARNING AND ADAPTATION
Hypothesis	
Questions	• What lessons has your community learned from past shocks? • How have these lessons been integrated into future planning or responses?

SECTION FOUR	SERVICE DELIVERY AND SOCIAL IMPACT
Hypothesis	
Questions	• How have crises impacted livelihoods and economic resources throughout the community? • How have the government or community members mobilized resources to recover?

SECTION FOUR	LEARNING AND ADAPTATION
Hypothesis	
Questions	• What steps can be taken to strengthen resilience in your community? • Are there any additional comments or insights you'd like to share?

Closing

Thank you for your time and contributions. Your insights will be valuable in shaping strategies to enhance community resilience. If you have further questions or would like to share additional thoughts later, please feel free to reach out.

B. WRADDIC Resilience Research—Focus Group Template

Focus Group Information

- Date and Time:
- Location:
- Participants: (List roles, e.g., teacher, health worker, youth leader, etc.)

Introduction (to be read aloud at the beginning of the interview)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My name is *[Facilitator Name]* and I will be the focus group facilitator. My colleague *[Note Taker Name]* will be taking notes. This session is part of an NDI-supported project exploring how communities respond to shocks and crises to identify ways to strengthen resilience. The results of this study should inform strategies to build community resilience to shocks.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can leave at any time. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. No statement will be attributed to an individual, or even to a specific neighborhood or location where the focus group was conducted. There are no right or wrong answers; we encourage you to share your honest perspectives.

Before we begin, do we have any questions?

Discussion Topics and Questions

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW
• How would you describe the overall quality of life in your community? • What are the key strengths of your community? • What factors or challenges make your community more vulnerable to crises? • Can you share examples of major crises or shocks has your community faced recently? • Which of these events had the greatest impact on your community, and why? • How did your community initially respond to this crisis?

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE *** The crisis that participants have identified as the one that has impacted them the most will serve as the basis for this discussion. The responses will help identify community resilience and fragility factors. ***
Learning and Adaptation • What specific actions did the community take to address the crisis? • Who was involved in responding to the crisis (e.g. individuals, groups, organizations)? • Were these efforts inclusive of diverse groups, such as women, youth, or marginalized populations? • What lessons did your community learn from the experience? • Have these lessons been incorporated into your community to prepare for future crises?

Communication Strategies

- How did you receive information about the crisis?
- Was this information accurate and timely?
- Was the information accessible to everyone in your community? Why or why not?

Social Capital

- Did the crisis bring community members or groups closer together, or did it create or exacerbate divisions?
- Did you feel your community had the capacity to respond effectively to the crisis? Why or why not?

Leadership

- Who led the crisis response, and how would you assess their effectiveness?
- How were the following groups or individuals involved in the crisis response:
    - Youth and youth organizations?
    - Traditional leaders?
    - Religious leaders?
    - Local officials?
    - Women's rights organizations?
    - Others?
- How did the relationships between these groups influence the response efforts?
- How did the crisis affect relationships within the community overall?

Community Activism

- What actions did you or others in the community take during the crisis?
- Did you collaborate with traditional or religious leaders, local officials, or organizations such as women's or youth groups?
- What impact did these actions have?

Economic Resources

- What are the main economic activities in your community?
- How did the crisis affected livelihoods and access to resources?
- How did the community mobilize resources to address the crisis, and who led these efforts?
- What recovery strategies worked best for your community, and who was left out of these efforts?

Local Public Authorities

- How did citizens and women perceive the response of local public authorities during the crisis?
- What could local public authorities do differently to ensure a more inclusive response in the future?
- During the crisis, did local public authorities facilitate connections between different groups to strengthen dialogue?
- How could these inter-group connections improve resilience to future challenges?
- In the aftermath of the crisis, did the government take actions that affected civil society organizations, such as women's rights groups? If so, how were these groups impacted?

RAPID RESPONSE & OPEN DISCUSSION
• Looking back at the strengths and weaknesses identified earlier, do you see any changes or additional strengths and weaknesses now? • Do you have any other insights or comments you'd like to share?

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