

THRIVING, RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS: CHRISTIAN AID'S APPROACH

POVERTY

Managing risk, taking opportunities

Christian Aid wants to enable poor people to move beyond survival and subsistence, to enjoy thriving and dignified lives. This means making a living in ways that provide adequate and predictable food and income, safe and healthy living conditions, and the resources and confidence to take new opportunities as they arise.

However, poor people face many risks and pressures that limit their ability to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing – disasters, climate change, resource degradation, conflict, disease, poor governance, inequality, lack of decent employment, unfair markets, price crashes, competition for scarce resources and more. These factors interact in complex, dynamic ways. They have different effects on different people – but their impact is most severe on poor and vulnerable communities. So for poor households and communities to take full advantage of opportunities, they also have to be able to manage a variety of risks. If we support them to improve their income or grow more food, without addressing the risks they face, then any gains they make could be swept away by a disaster or eroded by climate or market changes.

Equally, supporting poor people to manage risks without improving the way they make a living simply protects their subsistence – it does not help them to thrive. We believe we can promote a virtuous circle, where people are supported to strengthen their livelihoods and manage the risks that threaten them at the same time. This enables households and communities to build up 'buffers' – such as savings, know-how, good health, safe housing and access to support networks – so they are less vulnerable to the next shock. It also gives them a secure starting point for meeting new challenges and adapting to their situations as they continue to change in complex, unpredictable ways. We call this building a **resilient livelihood**.

This document aims to introduce Christian Aid staff and all our partners to this approach.

A resilient livelihoods framework

Christian Aid has over 60 years' experience both of responding to disasters and helping poor people to improve their means of making a living. Over the last decade we have invested in building our experience and understanding of how these two disciplines interact and the central importance of risk, as well as opportunity, in both. Christian Aid's **Resilient Livelihoods Framework** is the result.

The framework is a central part of implementing Christian Aid's new strategy, *Partnership for Change*. It sets out the organisation's goal of building **resilient and thriving societies**.

Our goal is for individuals and communities to gain 'the power... to live with dignity, responding successfully to disasters and the opportunities and risks that they face'.

Partnership for Change: The Power to End Poverty, 2012

The framework sets out an entry point to achieving this goal from a livelihoods perspective. We recognise that the goal encompasses aspects of life that go far beyond making a living – such as peace, healthcare and other basic services, good governance and active citizenship. Ultimately, the framework's success hinges on how the relationships between these different issues are taken up, both by Christian Aid and our partners, and by others in the sector.

The framework provides a more holistic and integrated approach to implementing livelihoods programmes and projects. It is designed to help vulnerable communities and the organisations working with them to understand and manage the range of risks they face – from immediate shocks such as floods or crop failure, to long-term trends such as climate change or social exclusion. It also aims to empower poor women and men to move beyond survival and make the most of opportunities to improve the way they make a

Promoting an insecure livelihood is no better than protecting an inadequate one

living. We believe that combining resilience and livelihoods work will foster communities that are both thriving and sustainable.

The framework bridges the gap between humanitarian and development work. This enables communities, governments, and humanitarian and development organisations to work across sectors in a more coordinated way, to address different opportunities and risks in the short, medium and long terms.

The framework will help Christian Aid’s country programmes and partners – and above all, poor communities themselves – to prioritise and manage the interaction between different issues, enhancing the effectiveness and value for money of our work. It will empower them to improve their livelihoods and protect these achievements from immediate threats, while also protecting them against longer-term pressures. So Christian Aid’s impact will be greater now, and more sustainable in the future, creating a continued ‘return’ on our initial support over many years.

How we define a resilient livelihood

A resilient livelihood is one that enables people to anticipate, organise for and adapt to change – good or bad, sudden or slow. To achieve it, women and men must be able to feed, clothe, house, educate and care for themselves and their families with dignity, and cope successfully with disasters. For this they need safeguards in case of crisis, such as early warning systems, safe housing and food stocks.

In general, the more options people have, the more opportunities exist for them to improve their livelihood. Having more options also makes people less vulnerable to a single shock – a pest may wipe out one crop, but if you are growing several then the impact is less severe. Even people who are dependent on wage labour may be able to supplement their livelihood with an alternative means, such as vegetable gardening.

For poor people to deal effectively with change, whether positive or negative, they need spare assets to use as a buffer. These can be material: for instance, savings to invest in new seeds or buy food during a shortage, or higher ground to plant new crops or use as shelter from a flood. These assets can also include good health, know-how, networks of friends or family and access to government services. If a person’s means of making a living reduces their assets (for example, it makes them ill, damages natural resources or leads people to discriminate against them), then it will not generate the buffers needed for resilience, even if it is highly profitable.

For true resilience, poor women and men need a voice in the decisions that affect their livelihoods, as well as the security and confidence to take opportunities and adapt to changing circumstances.

The key elements of a resilient livelihood are illustrated in Figure 1 (below).

The more elements households and communities can demonstrate, the more resilient their livelihoods will be. Resilient livelihoods

Figure 1. Components of thriving and resilient livelihoods



interventions supported by Christian Aid should consider all components and how they interact with each other.

We will give preference to programmes addressing more than one element, but in most cases it will not be possible to address them all. We must prioritise those opportunities where we can achieve maximum impact, based on context and community priorities. In every case, we should ensure that activities to strengthen one component do not damage another. We do not want to support programmes that focus on profitability in ways that increase risk or damage health, nor do we want to manage risk without supporting people to make enough to live with dignity.

Interconnected challenges, integrated solutions

Christian Aid recognises that poor individuals are subject to a range of pressures, including underlying social and political processes such as exclusion, and long- and short-term economic and environmental factors. These pressures tend to increase their vulnerability to shocks such as floods or conflict, while limiting their ability to take advantage of opportunities such as price increases.

These pressures interact with and often reinforce each other, sometimes to devastating effect – as illustrated in Figure 2, which shows how they combine to make poor and excluded people increasingly vulnerable – so that any shock overwhelms them and turns into a disaster.

Development projects have often neglected hazards altogether, assuming that the background context of poverty remains the same, and that our role is to support people to improve the way they make a living within this fixed setting. Meanwhile, humanitarian response and disaster risk management have tended to focus on the immediate and physical/environmental – that is, hazards and unsafe conditions – rather than longer-term or social/political factors. They have often sought to restore people to the situation they were in before disaster struck, even if this situation was itself highly vulnerable.

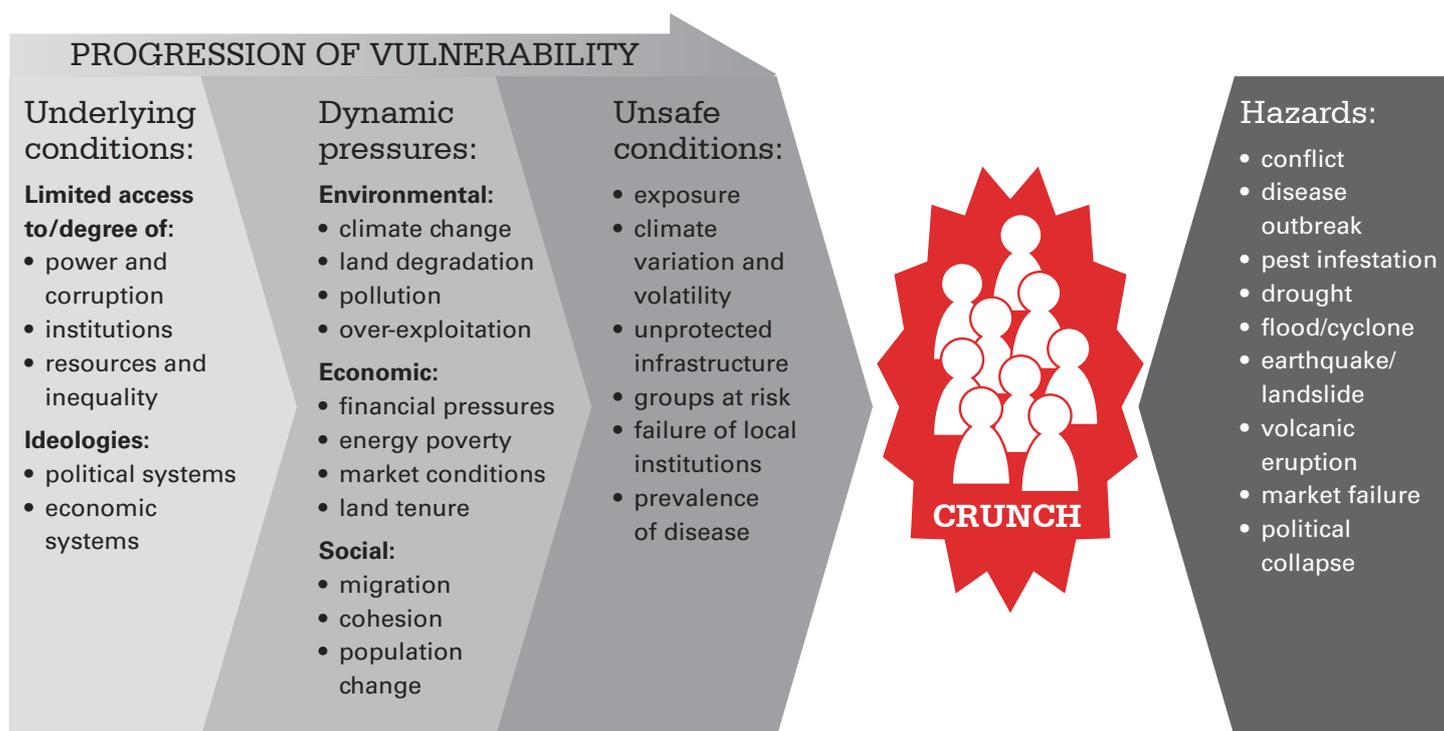
We believe that to foster genuinely thriving and resilient livelihoods, it is essential to understand and address all the drivers shown in Figure 2: underlying power imbalances, long-term trends such as climate change, the daily reality of poor people’s lives, and the hazards that threaten them. These operate at different levels – building resilient livelihoods creates resilient communities; building resilient communities enables resilient livelihoods. We also know that the context changes in unpredictable ways. So the solution that works today may need to be completely overturned tomorrow.

To achieve positive and sustained change, we need an integrated approach that encompasses different disciplines, sectors and timeframes.

At heart, the Resilient Livelihoods Framework is a way of integrating different priorities. We want people to think and work across professional boundaries such as humanitarian, development,

Building resilient livelihoods creates resilient communities; building resilient communities enables resilient livelihoods

Figure 2. The crunch model



disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation or market development. Rather than looking at issues in isolation, we want them to consider how different factors and timeframes interact.

The framework requires and enables a programme approach, with different organisations working on different elements in a joined-up way – from local to national, and even international, levels. This will include practical interventions with and by vulnerable communities, together with advocacy, research and learning.

Above all, it will mean building effective links and partnerships at every level between communities, civil society, government, the private sector and technical experts such as climate scientists, in order to address the range of issues that affect poor women and men.

At project level, the framework aims to support communities, local governments, businesses and civil society to cooperate fairly and take informed decisions together. It enables the identification and selection of the key building blocks for resilient livelihoods in a specific setting – whether social, political, environmental and/or economic. It also suggests how they can be combined coherently and changed when necessary.

Anticipate, organise, adapt

Participation is the key to implementing the framework. Beginning with analysis and developing solutions, our role is to empower poor women and men to articulate their own priorities and make their own decisions.

We could design an integrated approach to a range of livelihoods issues in a ‘top-down’ way, and it might work on a one-off basis. But as the situation changes, new solutions are needed. A genuinely resilient livelihood depends on poor people anticipating change, making plans to deal with it, and altering their actions in response, on an ongoing basis. **It is a process that sees communities taking control of their development.**

This cannot be achieved overnight. It takes time to build the understanding and confidence of people living in poverty, not to mention skilled facilitation. Even once they begin to act, further time is needed to put all the building blocks in place. Each new action generates new opportunities, but it can also create new risks that need to be managed. The process is incremental and cyclical, involving regular reviews of changing risks and opportunities, and new solutions in response.

At country level, a resilient livelihoods programme may begin with a fairly general understanding of poverty and risk, which we then use to target specific areas/groups and communities for more detailed analysis. However, in many countries we have been working on these issues for some time and already understand community realities – in such contexts we can identify key policy

frameworks, market systems or other issues to address at national level. In either case, there is an ongoing link between the overall programme and individual projects, with achievements, challenges and lessons at each level informing the other.

Like everything that Christian Aid does, resilient livelihoods work begins with an **analysis of gender, power and exclusion**. This identifies both who is most disadvantaged (our target groups/project participants) and why (the key social, cultural and political issues we must consider across all our work). Every aspect of this work must satisfy certain minimum gender standards, including:

- interventions do not increase the vulnerability of women and girls
- each programme identifies the power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality in that context, and includes some specific interventions to address these
- women and girls, men and boys participate equally in programme design and management.

This is followed by an **analysis of livelihoods risks and opportunities**, and subsequent prioritisation and action-planning. At programme level, this analysis draws on our networks within civil society, government and academia. We combine economic, development and disaster data with technical inputs such as climate science or political economy analysis, and also with the knowledge and experience of our partners and the communities with whom they work – this then informs an overall analysis of political, economic, social and environmental trends and scenarios, and enables us to develop a strategic response.

At community level, Christian Aid supports partners to conduct **Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PVCAs)**. These involve identifying the most excluded and vulnerable women and men within a community, and supporting them to identify, analyse and prioritise the risks they face and the opportunities they have to improve their situation. They then progress to plan activities designed to reduce risk, respond to opportunities and build resilience. Participants map locally available resources, capabilities and potential sources of support, to identify activities they can carry out themselves and those that will need external support.

Of course, communities cannot do everything, and nor can Christian Aid or our partners. The six components of a resilient livelihood (as outlined in Figure 1) are intended as a guide to project and programme decision-making – one that will encourage programme staff, partners and communities to consider the full range of risks and opportunities, and to identify solutions that address as many elements of a resilient livelihood as possible while doing no harm to any of them. It is important to grasp how different factors

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interact and how changes in one area are likely to increase or decrease vulnerability overall.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Responses must be tailored to the specific mix of risks and opportunities in each situation. They must also consider how particular types of risk and opportunity affect different groups of vulnerable people, since no single intervention will enhance resilience and wellbeing equally for everyone.

The community-led **action plan** sets out these solutions and how they will be put in place. Some can be implemented by communities themselves. Others will require technical and financial support from Christian Aid and our partners. As well as **practical projects**, solutions are likely to involve **influencing policy and practice** at local, national and/or international levels in favour of more resilient livelihoods.

This may mean engaging directly with budget allocations or provision of essential services; influencing market functioning, traditional land tenure and inheritance practices, or other non-governmental decisions; and/or advocacy aimed at national or international policy processes.

Wherever possible, we seek to support partners and poor women and men to take the lead in these activities. As well as influencing specific decisions, we also want to see changes in the way decisions are made, so that poor people have a voice in decision-making and resource allocation, and can hold governments and other power-holders to account.

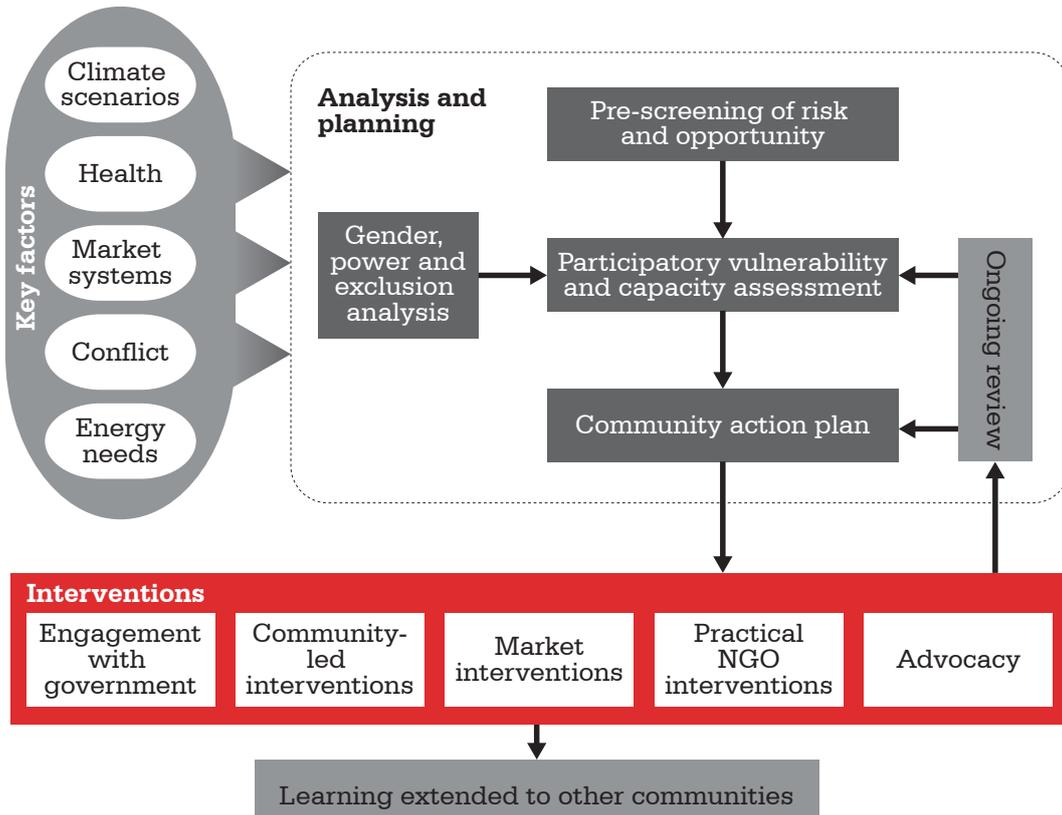
Where Christian Aid does not have expertise or financial resources to contribute, we can still play a **brokering** role, facilitating new relationships between vulnerable communities and other sources of support. These may include other civil society organisations, government, private sector or technical expertise.

For example, in Kenya we have brokered groundbreaking links between farmers, weather stations and climate scientists. Government meteorologists and universities are working with our partner to develop more user-friendly climate information and provide farmers with accessible, reliable weekly and seasonal forecasts – enabling them to make better planting decisions. In Bangladesh, we facilitated joint analysis between women farmers, the country’s largest dairy chain and the government veterinary service. The dairy company subsequently built a chilling plant and worked with the government to provide a ‘care package’ for farmers. Women now have healthier cows producing more milk, so they receive a better price from the dairy company, which in turn gets an improved supply. Christian Aid’s key contribution was to facilitate these partnerships.

We see a major role for Christian Aid in building constructive partnerships between all those who can promote resilient livelihoods. Consequently, we need to understand the distinctive value that communities, partners, government, private sector and technical experts can contribute.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Responses must be tailored to the specific mix of risks and opportunities in each situation

Figure 3. The resilient livelihoods process



Regular **monitoring and review of progress** is essential, both for each intervention and at overall programme level: it allows us to understand whether different activities are adding up to something bigger, and how to manage the entire portfolio of partners and projects to achieve this outcome.

There are established quantitative and qualitative methods for evaluating livelihoods impacts (for instance, crop yields, household assets and gender dynamics), and these will often be relevant and useful at project level. However, there is no corresponding 'toolkit' for assessing resilience – partly because we are interested in the things that did not happen (such as the cyclone that did not become a disaster), and such things are hard to prove. We are also interested in issues such as policy change that may be easy to observe but are hard to claim as our own. Consequently, it is envisioned that the key components will also act as an evaluation guide. Different questions and methodologies will apply to different activities, but the guiding question is always how far women and men living in poverty are acquiring one or more of the key elements of a resilient livelihood, and how this has happened.

Downward accountability should be built into resilient livelihoods work at every stage. This means involving poor people in our processes from initial analysis, sharing information about our decisions, projects and budgets, and establishing mechanisms for raising and resolving complaints. It also means involving poor women and men in assessing what has worked and what has not, and deciding what to do next.

It is essential for communities and others to review risks and opportunities regularly, to ensure their priorities are still relevant. Interventions may create new risks or power imbalances, reveal problems that had not been explored before or generate new opportunities. This may lead us back to the beginning of the cycle, with a **new analysis and action plan**, as communities adapt

to their new situation. By addressing shorter and longer-term risks and opportunities from the outset, and reviewing the way they interact on an ongoing basis, the resilient livelihoods approach enables people to understand, anticipate and deal proactively with changes, both positive and negative, as they unfold. This will lead to greater, more sustainable impact.

The entire process is illustrated in Figure 3, above.

Learning and the future of resilient livelihoods

Building resilient livelihoods is an ongoing activity, and Christian Aid continues to explore it. We operate in a context where new issues, such as conflict, urban expansion and a 'green economy' approach to resilient livelihoods, pose new challenges and opportunities all the time.

The framework offers a gateway to the range of tools and resources that can be used for understanding and assessing opportunity and risk. Recognising that guidance alone is not sufficient, we are committed to using the framework as the basis for developing staff and partner skills, capacity, understanding and confidence in this approach.

We will review our resilient livelihoods work on a regular basis, using the lessons learned to improve and inform thinking within our programmes and across the wider humanitarian and development sectors.

The approach outlined here aims to open up opportunities for poor women and men to analyse their situation, take action to improve it, work with those who have influence and, ultimately, take back control over their lives. We recognise this will take time and perseverance – but as communities develop increasingly resilient livelihoods, we hope they will take ownership of this approach and share their experiences with other vulnerable communities, to build **resilient and thriving societies**.

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Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of dignity, freedom and hope, of power over their own lives.

Christian Aid has a vision – an end to poverty – and we believe that vision can become a reality. We urge you to join us.

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