

Building Resilience - Key to Helping Families Bounce Back from Food Security Crises

Food and Agriculture Organization

How do poor families manage to have enough to eat even in very difficult circumstances? When faced with shocks and economic stress, why do some families bounce back more quickly than others? The EC-FAO Food Security Programme has developed a "Resilience Tool" to help policy makers understand what makes families more resilient to crises.

The tool provides a framework for understanding the most effective combination of short and long term strategies for lifting families out of cycles of poverty and hunger. It looks at the root causes of household vulnerability instead of trying to predict future crises or disasters. It also considers how household food security links to the entire food system.

"We need to understand the reality of how households cope and strengthen them, instead of trying to predict their vulnerability to future events which are difficult to foresee, " remarked Luca Alinovi, a senior economist at FAO.

The factors that make households resilient to shocks and stresses are:

- income and access to food;
- assets such as land and livestock;
- social safety nets such as food assistance and social security;
- access to basic services such as water, health care, electricity, etc.;
- households' adaptive capacity which is linked to education and diversity of income sources; and
- the stability of all these factors over time.

These factors are combined into an index which gives an overall quantitative "resilience score". The score clearly shows where investments need to be made to further build resilience.

"If you give a poor family \$10 in food aid, you will immediately see the impact on their well-being. Investing \$10 in education or in irrigation may not have the same immediate impact, although families will reap the benefits in the future- perhaps with more durable results." explains Erdgin Mane an economist who is helping to develop the tool.