

# Investigating resilience at local, organisational and institutional levels: a methodological note



Learning Paper #2

July 2016



Photo: Camilla Audia

Interviewing women in Seru, Ethiopia, October 2015.

Christian Aid's multi-country Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme aims to enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities in high-risk locations (see box 1, page 2). By studying the shaping and evolution of resilience associated with BRACED, partners will be able to bridge knowledge gaps and strengthen linkages between knowledge and action.

The knowledge gap in how to build resilience to climate shocks and stresses was assessed in Learning Paper #1,<sup>1</sup> and via a thorough literature review.<sup>2</sup> This gap translates to the lack of clarity sometimes apparent in implementing government policies and development activities designed to build resilience. The research and learning component within BRACED supports partners to articulate, and act on, this gap by providing rigorous, systematic data collection, analysis and guidance, through learning events and relevant publications based on literature reviews. The aim of research in

BRACED projects is to enhance understanding of how project activities can help deliver more resilient livelihoods in different contexts.

Following on from the Statement of Intent, this Learning Paper #2 presents:

- **the common methodology:** a qualitative longitudinal methodology, including a mix of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus groups, key informant surveys and desk reviews
- **a justification of the study and the conceptual framework** that integrates Béné's three-dimensional view on resilience<sup>3</sup> (box 4, page 3) and Cleaver's Institutional Bricolage approach (see box 5, page 4)<sup>4</sup>
- **preliminary findings** from both Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, derived from the baseline data collection of 2015-2016, signposting the direction in which the research is heading.

## Box 1: About BRACED

- Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) is a DFID-funded, multi-country programme, launched by Christian Aid in 2014.
- It will benefit 5 million people across Sahelian Africa and neighbouring countries, plus South and Southeast Asia, helping them to become more resilient to climate extremes, and improving the integration of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate adaptation methods into development approaches.

King's College London (KCL) is a partner in two Christian AID-led consortia.

- in Burkina Faso, which received grants totalling £7m, 1.3 million people will benefit, across four provinces
- in Ethiopia, which received grants totalling £4m, 700,000 people will benefit, across 12 woredas (districts).

### The main research question guiding our work is:

'How does interaction within the BRACED project, between household-and village-level actors, project partners and local and national government, inform resilience-building processes and outcomes?'<sup>5</sup>

Processes focus on the intermediary role of project partners in connecting national- and village- or household-level actors in chains of resilience programming. Outcomes are measured at the individual and household level through:

1. change in the balance of the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities (see box 4, page 3)
2. the development of gender equity.

### Research questions, methods and sampling

**This study is interested in ascertaining how flows of information, between and across different types of actor, shape policy, practice and outcomes for resilience programming.**

## Box 2: Definitions of key terms

**Qualitative research:** research that produces findings not derived by statistical procedures. Some of the data may be quantified but the bulk of the analysis is interpretative. It highlights the perspectives of the participants and their diversity.<sup>6</sup> **Resilience:** the process that enables a system to absorb, adapt or transform in face of shocks or stresses.<sup>7</sup>

**Institutions:** the rules of the game, including legislation, work guidelines and organisational structures, and informal cultural practices and routines. All institutions express, reproduce and may be challenged by social values and actions.

**Organisations:** coordinated groups of people with a particular purpose.

Our research focuses on three different contexts, each with specific actors and intertwined institutional environments:

- villages, households and individuals at local level
- BRACED partners as intermediary-level organisations
- government components at national-through-local levels.

Together, these contexts interact to shape the overall institutional environment through which information is produced, communicated and translated into action within BRACED.

### Justification and conceptual framework

The research and learning components for each of the local, intermediary partner and government contexts will reveal stakeholder perceptions of resilience and their translation into action. **The research aims to make sense of the ways in which institutional context shapes, and is shaped by, the behaviour of actors.** This, in turn, will shape expressions of resilience, gendered norms and climate-knowledge systems within government and intermediary organisations, at individual and household levels, and up and down the communication chain (see box 3, page 3).

### Box 3: Research contexts

- At the **local level**, our research investigates how strategies for livelihoods shape, and are shaped by, the interplay of partners' resilience programming and governmental interventions.
- At the **partners' level**, it explores the mechanisms through which policy actors interpret resilience and put it into practice.
- At the **government level**, it reviews the process of production and communication of climate information, comparing it against the goals of resilience programming.

This study focuses on social relationships, learning and behaviour to enhance understanding of the positioning of climate-knowledge systems within resilience programming. In particular, BRACED is interested in the use and interpretation of climate information, and how this is brought together with local knowledge to influence activity. We are interested in how such interactions shape outcomes for social inclusion in resilience-building programming, particularly as it pertains to gender.

To examine resilience strategies at household and individual levels, we follow Béné et al's three-dimensional AAT framework for resilience.<sup>8</sup> AAT stands for absorption, adaptation and transformation, and defines resilience as people's ability not only to bounce back from a shock, but also to adapt and transform because of it (see box 4, below).

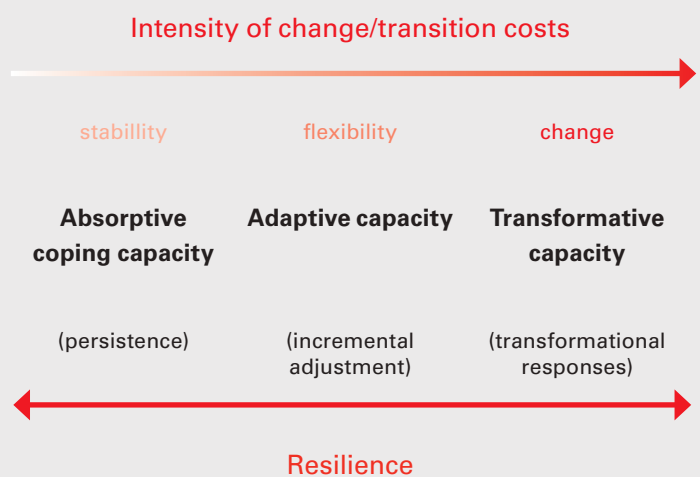
Our understanding of the ability to deal with adverse changes and shocks (AAT outcomes), and therefore our study of social processes, relationships and behaviours shaping the AAT components, will come from observation and analysis of the shifting balance between these components over the project's timeframe and across scales (relating to individuals, households, villages and the relationship that these have with partners). We are interested in the extent to which programme interventions are able to shift the resilience capacity of target populations between the three components.

We will explore how the priorities and perceptions of resilience held by partners and institutions influence this process; we will also investigate the degree of communication and interaction between villages, partners and institutions and the potential impact on the shaping of policies.

### Box 4: 3-D framework for resilience: AAT<sup>9</sup>

- embraces the ability to bounce back from a shock but also to adapt and transform because of it
- defines resilience based on the concepts of:
  - **absorptive capacity** (coping strategies by which actors buffer the impacts of shocks on their livelihoods and basic needs)
  - **adaptability** (the capacity to adjust to moderate potential damages, take advantage of opportunities or cope with consequences)
  - **transformability** (the ability to create a new system when previously existing structures make the current system untenable).

Figure 1: The 3-D resilience framework



Source: Béné et. al., 2012

Cleaver's Institutional Bricolage framework<sup>10</sup> emphasises how individuals interacting with organisational structures and guiding institutions coproduce knowledge (see boxes 5 and 6, below). It provides relevant tools to understand how far recipients take up knowledge, what is left behind and the utility of that knowledge in patching and piecing together new or existing institutions.

#### Box 5: Institutional Bricolage framework<sup>11</sup>

**The Bricolage approach** is a conceptual framework recognising that people consciously and unconsciously patch, or piece together, institutions, modifying old ones regardless of their original purpose or creating new ones more adapted to new contexts. This is done by individuals, drawing on existing social formulas (ways of thinking, making sense of the world, social norms and sanctioned social roles and relationships, etc).

#### Research sub-questions and methods

The main research question leads to a series of detailed questions presented in the table overleaf, which shows how these are being addressed through background and analytical studies.

#### Box 6: Coproduction of knowledge<sup>12</sup>

**Coproduction of knowledge** involves the bringing together of different knowledge sources and experiences from different disciplines, sectors and actors to develop new and combined knowledge together. It has been defined as the idea that knowledge is a combination of scientific and social approaches based on the assumption that 'the ways in which we know and represent the world (both nature and society) are inseparable from the ways we choose to live in it'.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 1: Research questions, aims and methodologies**

| <b>Research questions, aims and methodologies</b>   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <b>(Note: SSI = semi-structured interviews; PO = participant observation; FGD = focus group discussion; DR = desk review)</b> |  |  |  |
| <b>Detailed questions</b>   | <b>Background studies</b>  | <b>Analytical studies</b>  | <b>Outputs</b>   |
| <b>How is resilience understood within the BRACED project?</b>  | <p>Literature review of contextual data on population, climate, rainfall, agricultural and livestock production, malnutrition, food aid distribution (national census, partners' initial reviews and baselines, partners' reports, BRAPA – BRACED participatory approach reports)</p> <p>Timeline of events and disasters of the past five years at the local level. Constructed with the implementing partners and relevant governmental agencies involved (SSI, PO, FGD)</p> | <p>Analytical study/desk review to analyse local actors' understanding of resilience; to understand the partners' interpretation and highlight the government's view on resilience (DR, SSI, PO, FGD)</p>  | <p>Policy brief presenting preliminary findings from the baseline</p> <p>Three-minute video bridging Ethiopia and Burkina Faso's initial perceptions of project's goals at the partners' level</p> <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p>                                     |
| <b>How project activities are understood to contribute to building resilience</b>   | <p>Desk review of governmental and NGO activities and their recorded impact in local sites (DR: partners, project-wide and cross-consortia documents, reports, knowledge manager papers, case-studies, evidence)</p>   | <p>To understand how government and partner resilience-building activities (water and soil conservation, savings and credits associations, etc) and other relevant training (climate information training, listening groups guidance, etc) are planned, carried out and evaluated, communicated and perceived. (SSI, PO, FGD)</p> <p>Analysis will use the Bricolage approach and Béné's AAT framework to map and investigate communication across scales and contexts</p> | <p>Policy brief presenting preliminary findings</p> <p>Three-minute video bridging initial understanding and partners' programming across Burkina Faso and Ethiopia</p> <p>Policy briefs following some of the learning activities carried out by King's College London</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p> |
| <b>How do resilience-building activities impact on people's livelihoods?</b>  | <p>Desk review of data on livestock, agricultural production, means of production, commercial activities (baseline reports, partners' reports, knowledge management documents and case-studies, secondary data)</p>  | <p>To assess village-and household-level livelihood strategies (SSI, PO, FDG);</p> <p>Analysis of local actors' reaction to partners and governmental activities (training, information access) (SSI, PO, FGD)</p>   | <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Video on village-and household-level livelihood strategies and BRACED related impact</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p>  |



|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Is providing accurate, reliable, delocalised and accessible climate information helpful for livelihood strategies?</b></p> | <p>Data on communication of climate information provided by the government or NGOs (DR: national met offices reports, UK met case studies, knowledge management documents, project's baseline, general secondary data)</p> | <p>To understand the local actors' perceptions of the appropriateness and utility of climate information, to map access and to highlight changes in livelihood strategy and social relations associated with this information (SSI, PO, FGD)</p> <p>To highlight traditional forecast methods, their importance and weight compared to scientific methods; analysis of the interactions and role of scientific and local knowledge in decision making and sharing of best practices between actors (coproduction of knowledge) (SSI)</p> | <p>Policy brief presenting preliminary findings</p> <p>Policy brief on institutional learning, including case study of the project's understanding of climate information production, communication and use (Q2Y2)</p> <p>Video on village level understanding of weather and climate information and traditional forecasting</p> <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p> |
| <p><b>How does BRACED impact on women's livelihoods and resilience?</b></p>  | <p>Desk review of data on governmental and NGOs activities specifically targeting women (partners' documents, baselines, reviews, KM papers and case studies, general secondary data)</p>                                  | <p>To understand women's roles in livelihood activities (at the village and household level), access to and use of information and in shaping communication (SSI, PO, FGD)</p>   | <p>Overseas Development Institute (ODI) study on gender across BRACED including Burkina Faso case study</p> <p>Policy brief on how gender is included in the project (Q2Y2)</p> <p>Video on women's resilience within BRACED</p> <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p>  |
| <p><b>How does communication evolve between actors over the course of the project?</b></p>                                       | <p>Project documents (DR)</p>  | <p>To map all actors' views on resilience, climate information and the impact of perceptions in framing and delivery of policy, programming and implementation activities (SSI)</p> <p>Analysis will use the Bricolage approach to bring together data collected throughout the project to highlight potential reciprocal influences for shaping new aspects of institutional policies and organisational programming</p>  | <p>Policy brief on learning (Q3Y2)</p> <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Institutional analysis and research with ODI (to be defined)</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p>  |

|  |                               |   |  |
|--|-------------------------------|---|--|
| <p><b>How do evolving relationships between project partners influence project outcomes?</b></p> | <p>Project documents (DR)</p> | <p>To highlight the learning process between project partners and government agencies. To identify any influence of learning on partners' activities, policies and practices (SSI, surveys and video)</p> <p>Analysis will use the Bricolage approach to map the actors' views, relationships and evolving dialogue prompted by working in a consortium</p> | <p>Policy brief on learning</p> <p>Video to capture different views across the project</p> <p>Policy brief after learning event (Y3)</p> <p>Policy brief on findings (Y3)</p> <p>Academic paper (Y3)</p> |
|--|-------------------------------|---|--|

## Sampling

At **government level**, the research will mainly consist of a desk-based study of published legislation, policies and programme documents. It will review BRACED project documents such as baseline reports and BRAPA reports. Follow-up interviews will be needed with some key informants, to be identified with the help of the partners at a later stage.

At **partners' level**, data collection will involve a mix of semi-structured interviews, surveys and video interviews to highlight views of the main concepts, institutional learning over the course of the project, and the challenges and opportunities of working in a consortium. Interviewees will be selected according to their role within the project and availability, and will change over the course of the project to ensure they are as representative as possible.

For the research related to climate change, resilience and livelihoods at **local level**, we have purposively selected six villages in Burkina Faso and four villages in Ethiopia.

**Comparable livelihood strategies** are considered the main factor to examine, because they allow the research to consider the data from both countries simultaneously; in both countries, the populations practise both farming and livestock activities. To examine resilience from a variety of angles, we selected villages both close to and far from the main roads and markets, with differing levels of accessibility.

Each of the selected villages has a population ranging from 2,000 to 8,000 people; it is important for the purpose of this research that they are similar in size to enable us to document any social change from a small sample. It would have been too difficult to engage with larger villages, and smaller ones might have been too small to provide a variety of perspectives. In **Ethiopia**, the research had to take into account important

variations in climatic conditions between highlands and lowlands, and therefore two villages were selected in each zone.

In **Burkina Faso**, the implementing partners suggested we focus on account villages receiving high-intensity and middle-intensity activities. The BRAPAs, conversations with local staff and prior knowledge of the area suggest that to maximise perspectives, the selection of households should take into account lineages and the position of the household within each village. This resulted in our choosing 18 households across the six villages in Burkina Faso that offered a range of social positions and access to resources, as per the project's initial household economic analysis results. Similarly, in Ethiopia, households were chosen to represent the variety of social statuses within the villages, social inclusion and degrees of access to resources.

## Limitations

This indepth qualitative research recognises its own limitations. A small sample study cannot be generalised and translated into country or region-wide policy recommendations. Moreover, because of the project's timeframe, this provides support to partners without grasping BRACED impact fully. The project does not aim to compare two BRACED projects and will not be able to achieve a full comparative analysis.

The institutional analysis has similar limitations; with a timeframe parallel to the project, it will lack the necessary distance and perspective to present the project's full impact. Its novelty and interest, however, lie in its originality, fresh approach and combined analytical framework. The research puts forward interesting findings that will be useful to the partners over the course of the project, as well as a starting point for further studies.

## Early results: voices from the village

Baseline data collection took place in October 2015 (within Seru woreda, Ethiopia) and March 2016 (in Passoré province, Burkina Faso). Conversations with the partners and with a sample of beneficiaries aimed to explore the detailed research questions. Semi-structured interview guides were shaped to grasp initial perceptions of the project's main concepts, as well as to provide insight into the context; local-level information on resilience; people's understanding of climate shocks and main resilience mechanisms.

This baseline is extremely important for the research, as it constitutes the first step of mapping the perceptions, context and social fabric that are vital for the Bricolage analysis. Moreover, it sets the initial stage of the components used in Béné's framework at local level.<sup>14</sup> Preliminary findings directed the research towards the key themes that will be analysed across the two countries. Emerging themes are in the boxes below and overleaf.

### Box 7: Previous NGO presence will impact implementing activities and depth/breadth of changes

In the Seru woreda of Ethiopia, the BRACED project chose to work with marginalised populations, in a remote area. Lack of pre-existing data, supporting structures and externally introduced resilience-building techniques are likely to impact the delivery of activities and project outcomes. At the same time, working in such an area offers a great opportunity to analyse how NGOs are received and perceived in the first place, and how can they present themselves effectively. In an area where previous interventions have been few to none, changes are likely to be greater and more easily traced back to BRACED.

By contrast, the Passoré province of Burkina Faso has seen decades of previous NGO intervention. The strong link between the communities and local partners might bias the overall intervention and make it more difficult to trace project outcomes back to BRACED. However, partners are likely to be more embedded in the social fabric and have a more profound influence in the longer term. Similarly, the quantity of pre-existing agricultural and livelihood-related data offers a great comparison tool to measure change and to grasp resilience. This contrast in contexts is an important variable to keep in mind when analysing changes in the AAT components of resilience.



Fieldwork in Passoré, Burkina Faso, March 2016.

### Box 8: The impact of governmental and international food aid programmes

Despite heavy NGO presence in Passoré, there is no systematic food aid programme in Burkina Faso. Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Réhabilitation (CONASUR) has a mandate to prevent and reduce the effects of different kinds of disasters, but only intervenes in extreme situations or aftermath of a crisis. The World Food Programme (WFP) has long-standing programmes for targeted food distribution; none is systematic and they usually address a specific population such as infants or people with acute malnutrition. It has emerged that, generally, people rely on neighbours rather than state aid; moreover, they rely on themselves and tend to diversify activities to spread risk. This is not always possible or efficient, but initial data collection suggests it is a common factor.

According to baseline data cross-examined with relevant literature, in Ethiopia, government food aid is a major part of the households' livelihood strategies. Preliminary findings suggest that in remote areas such as Seru, the food aid dependency is deeply embedded in the social fabric. All the preliminary interviews mentioned access to food aid as the main resilience strategy in case of a disastrous event or particularly bad harvest. While other strategies have been mentioned, they seem to be isolated and linked to specific individual skills rather than community response triggers. The presence of systematic food aid defines how people understand livelihoods and resilience mechanisms, as well as the role of the government.



### Box 9: Traditional knowledge, cultural and social organisation

The Ethiopian resettlement programmes implemented in the from the 1970s-1990s encouraged people to move from less productive regions to more productive areas as a solution to overcrowded highlands. Despite this now being discouraged by the government, preliminary interviews from **central Ethiopia** highlighted that this mechanism is embedded in societies.

For pastoralists who started settling not more than four generations ago, nomadic relocation is a straightforward response to famine and environmental shocks. It also highlights important knowledge of cattle-related best practices, often cited as a resilience strategy. However, when examining the lowlands, in particular, this extensive pastoral knowledge appears not to be in sync with the current sedentary, agro-pastoral context.

In **northern Burkina Faso**, interviews showed the origin of the ethnic group to be agricultural and sedentary. This translated into centuries of traditional knowledge on water and soil conservation techniques (such as *zai pits*, *cordons pierreux* and so on). However, climate unpredictability and soil degradation can make an over-reliance on those techniques counterproductive.

Interviews from both countries suggest that resilience-building mechanisms (traditional techniques, pastoral strategies, small trade of wood or forest products) are insufficient or not always suitable in the longer term. A specific attention to the local context and its changes will underpin this analysis.

### Box 10: National and traditional forecasting methods

Findings from both countries, confirmed by the reports published by the UK Met Office and BBC Media Action, highlight the presence of traditional forecasting.

In **Passoré**, the land and village chiefs read signs (winds, birds, ants and insects behaviour and plant behaviour) and report conclusions to the villagers. Despite admitting that these predictions are not always right, most interviewees acknowledged that to disobey would be disrespectful to the elders. A similar mechanism appeared to exist in **Seru**. From the initial conversations, it appears that traditional methods of predicting weather are exclusively short term (such as dark clouds on the neighbouring mountains indicating imminent rain) and leave little time to act in advance.

Findings from both countries indicate a tendency to avoid planning for the longer term. In Burkina Faso and Ethiopia, people are concerned about the rainy season, but in the former this tends to be more because of issues relating to land tenure and strong agricultural traditions (a series of mandatory events to be completed before sowing), while in the latter, concerns relate to religious reasons rather than the long-term impact of the weather.

Power relations within households and villages indicate that it would be considered disrespectful for the elderly, community or religious leaders to take action based on forecasts broadcast on the radio. This is a common factor in both countries and will be considered in our analysis, since it impacts the framing of the project itself and the partners' ability to be effective.

### Box 11: The political context and national and local government presence

Both Ethiopia and Burkina Faso have experienced some instability at the initial stage of the project; this is particularly true of Burkina Faso, following a revolution, a coup and terrorist attacks. In addition to issues around project implementation, this research needs to look at the evolution of institutions at both national and local levels. The incidence of riots, such as the ones around Addis Ababa for land tenure protestations, or the presence of temporary government structures, such as those in Burkina Faso, must be considered.

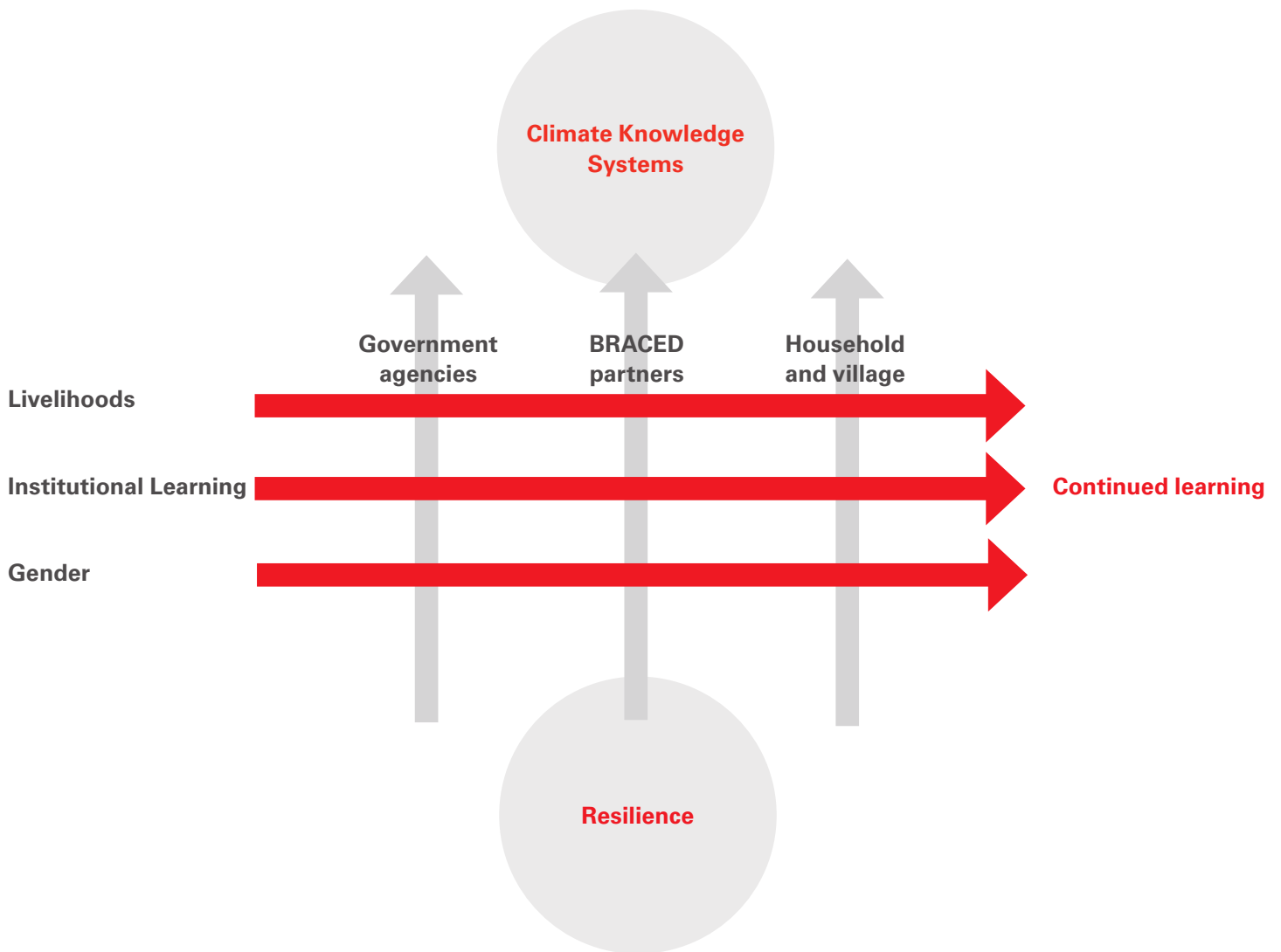
For both practical and ethical reasons, the BRACED projects have been touched by events such as the Ethiopian drought (considered one of the worst of the decade) and the Burkina Faso flooding. While the occurrence of these extreme weather events is part of the project's reason for existing, they need to be investigated and taken into account when considering the framework for resilience.



### Where do we go from here?

- **Sampling will be finalised** and a full literature review and methodology document completed and circulated.
- **In-depth data collection** will be conducted in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia to add to our Bricolage map, contextual knowledge and understanding of Béné's components of resilience.
- **Learning events** will be held to shape the methodology around partners' needs and requests.
- **Continued analysis and learning** will take place, alongside the publication of a final academic paper.
- Ultimately, **we seek to support programming in BRACED** by revealing how institutions shape (and are shaped by) preferences for enacting resilience as absorption, adaptation and transformation.

Figure 2: Climate knowledge systems



## Endnotes

1. *Building resilience to climate shocks and stresses: addressing the knowledge gap*, Learning Paper #1, Statement of Intent, Sophie Rigg et al, Christian Aid, 2015, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/geography/research/Research-Domains/Contested-Development/projectsfunding/braced/BRACED-Learning-paper-1---statement-of-intent.pdf>
2. The full literature review and methodology will be shared within and outside the consortia in November 2016.
3. *Resilience: New Utopia or New Tyranny? Reflection about the Potentials and Limits of the Concept of Resilience in Relation to Vulnerability Reduction Programmes*, Christophe Béné et al, IDS Working Papers 2012, 405, Sept 2012, [www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp405.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp405.pdf)
4. *Development through Bricolage: Rethinking Institutions for Natural Resource Management*, Frances Cleaver, Routledge, 2012. See also: *Furthering Critical Institutionalism*, Frances Cleaver and Jessica De Koning, *International Journal of the Commons* 9:1, 16 March 2015, [www.thecommonsjournal.org/articles/10.18352/ijc.605/](http://www.thecommonsjournal.org/articles/10.18352/ijc.605/)
5. To add clarity, this is a reformulation of the original research question: How does BRACED shape changes in local and national government, the village level institutional architecture, and among project partners with outcomes at the village and household level?
6. Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Flick, 2009, U. Flicke, *An introduction to qualitative research*, SAGE, 2009.
7. See note 3.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. See note 4.
11. Ibid.
12. *States of Knowledge: The Co-production of Science and the Social Order*, Sheila Jasanoff, Routledge, 2004, p2
13. See note 3.
14. See note 12.



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

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