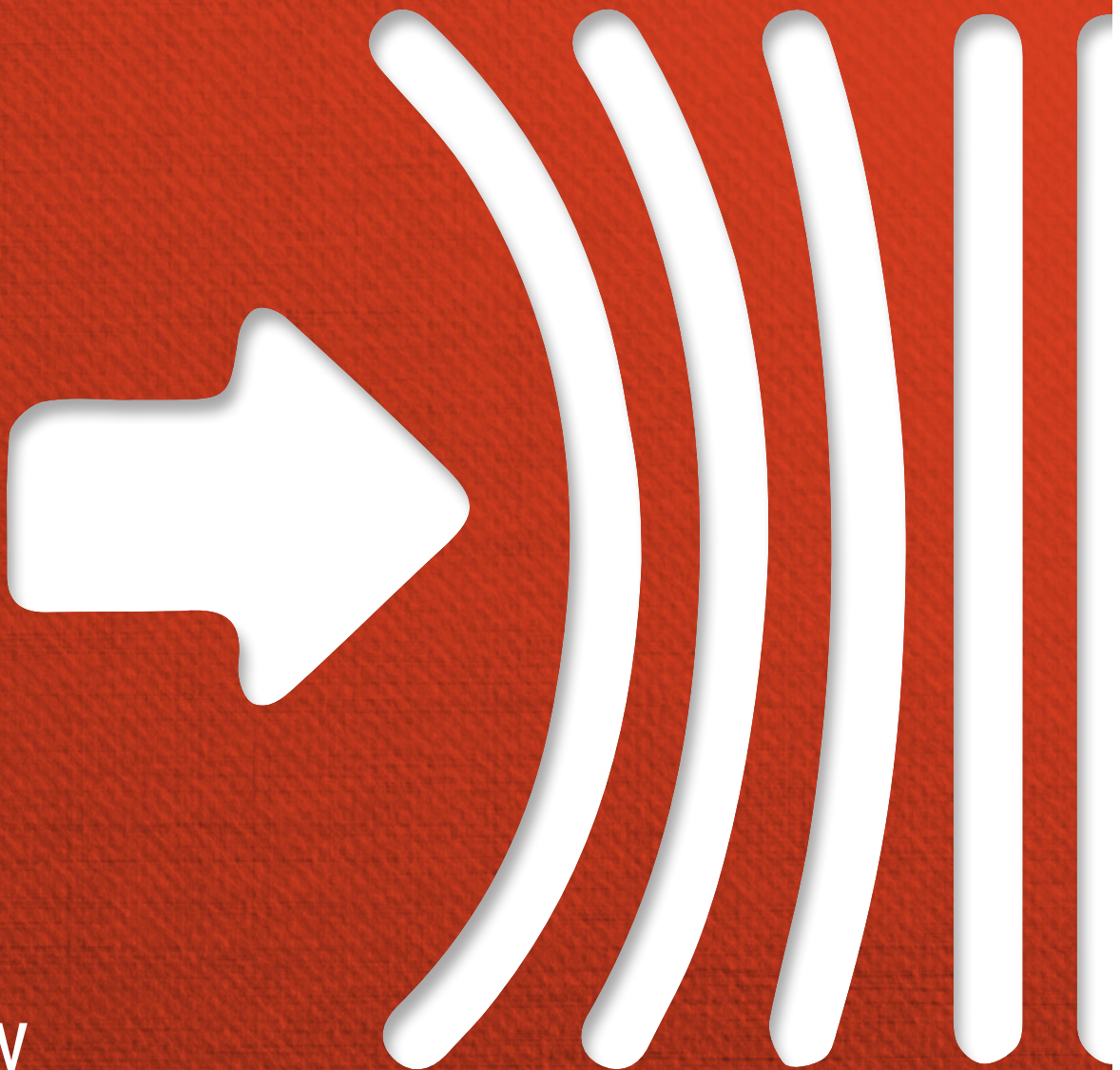# fostering RESILIENCE initiative

ADVERSITY *and* RESILIENCE

An interactive framework

Summary

About us

The Fostering Resilience Initiative:
Our interdisciplinary team works to ensure positive outcomes for children and youth facing adversity.

By measuring and addressing risks and assets at the child-level, as well as within homes, schools, and communities, we promote a holistic approach to child and youth development. Our goal is to create environments that not only fulfill children's and youth's basic needs, but also promote nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills, and civic engagement.

We work with non-governmental organizations, policy makers, communities and other stakeholders in seven countries: Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, India, Kenya, Tanzania, and Peru. Our initiative focuses on three key areas:

1. Learning and Development

Improving learning and development of children and youth, both at school and outside of school.

2. Risk Measurement

Developing, validating and piloting measurement tools to assess risks, assets, and outcomes across several countries.

3. Global Network for Resilience

Building a global network of actors who foster systemic resilience.

Neil Boothby
Director, Fostering Resilience Initiative

> *Children develop, grow* and *thrive* through positive and supportive relationships. The nature and quality of a child's relationships, i.e. child-to-parent, child-to-teacher, child-to-peer, teacher-to-parent, can mediate the effects of adversity and build their resilience.
>
> - J. P. Shonkoff, 2003.

Introduction

Social inputs, including protection, nurture, and stimulation, are as important to early childhood development as meeting basic nutritional needs (Garner et. Al, 2012). Children's brains are literally shaped by their interactions with their caregivers in the first 1,000 days of life (Center on the Developing Child, 2016).

Where nurturing relationships are unavailable to children, the consequences can be severe. While the science on the impact of early childhood interventions is strong, there is a lack of research on best practices in contexts of extreme adversity and poverty in low- and middle-income countries.

Imagine a setting... In schools across East Africa, where violence against children is a common way of disciplining and intimidating children, with half of children in Kenya and Tanzania reporting cases of school violence (UNICEF 2011, 2012). Threats to students' physical safety in schools affects their ability to learn.

Homes, classrooms, schools, and communities can be altered to provide features that protect children against adversities, enhance learning, and develop their talents and competencies (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003).

Few interventions, however, have taken a holistic view of children's developmental needs. They focus on improving the school environment or the instructional capacity of teachers rather than on identifying how children can be supported to attend and participate in school, gain knowledge and skills, and achieve academic goals despite the adversity they face.
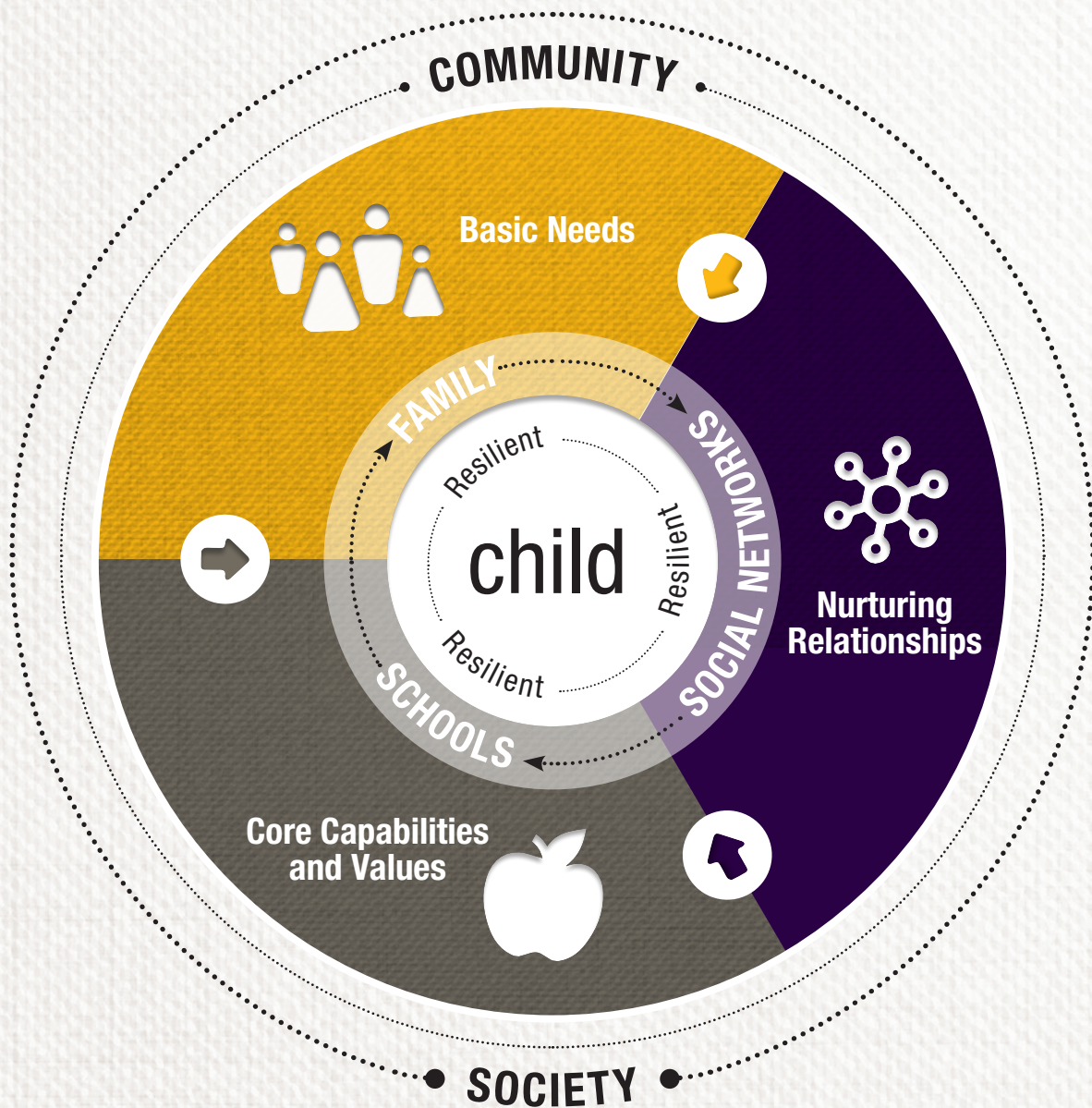
This interactive framework supports the design and implementation of programs that foster children's resilience, particularly in adverse environments. Using school-based programs as a point of entry, the framework illustrates how positive, nurturing relationships can be leveraged within the school, community, and home to improve the resilience of children.

Photo by Global Partnership for Education

Building blocks *for* children's resilience

A holistic approach—one that not only addresses children's basic needs, but also promotes nurturing relationships, socio-emotional skills and civic engagement—is the foundation to fostering resilience in children facing adversity.

COMMUNITY

Basic Needs

Nurturing Relationships

Core Capabilities and Values

FAMILY

SOCIAL NETWORK

SCHOOLS

Resilient Resilient Resilient Resilient

child

SOCIETY

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Adversity *and* Resilience

at-a-glance

Homelessness and residential instability undermine children's **academic achievement** (Cutuli et al., 2013).

Photo by Beth Rubenstein

Exposure
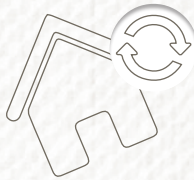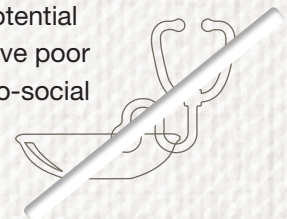to **chronic danger and prolonged neglect** can be more disruptive to a child's developing brain than physical trauma (Shonkoff et al., 2016).

200 million **children under 5** do not reach their developmental potential because they live in poverty, and have poor health services, nutrition and psycho-social care (UNICEF, 2015).

1 billion **children** have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year (WHO, 2018), impacting lifelong health and well-being.

Partnerships **must be**
organized to enable teachers, families and community member to help each other **assist children in adversity**.

Photo by ADRA

What is adversity and resilience and what's the connection?

Adversity and Resilience

> "Children who are able to navigate adverse environments and leverage resources to help them cope are often described as resilient."
>
> – A. Masten, 2014

What is adversity?

Adversity refers to life experiences and circumstances that threaten healthy development (Daniel, Wassell, & Gilligan, 2011), including violence and abuse, as well as chronic exposure to discrimination, extreme poverty or socio-economic disadvantage, and structural inequalities (S Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000).

What is resilience?

Resilience refers to the capacity of a child to cope with, or successfully adapt to, acute and/or chronic adversity that is seen as a major threat to their educational development (Martin, 2013, p. 488). Resilience is about students achieving educational outcomes despite negative life experiences.

What's the connection?

The environments in which children live and the experiences they have in these environments critically influence their growth and development. In nurturing environments, with responsive social care, safety, and encouragement to learn and explore, children thrive.

Adverse environments that are unsafe, unpredictable, and unsupportive threaten children's normative growth and development (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983; Garmezy, 1974; A. S. Masten, Powell, & Luthar, 2003; Nsamenang, 1992; Phillips & Shonkoff, 2000; Rutter, 2012).

These threats can have short and long-term consequences for children's health and well-being, including low educational achievement, behavioral problems, and negative mental and physical health outcomes in later life (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1999; Noltemeyer & Bush, 2013; Schoon, 2006).

However, not all children exposed to adversity have poor outcomes. Resilient children are better able to cope with adversity and function well.

Resilience in children develops when key relationships buffer or modify the effects of adversity at different stages of children's developmental processes (Rutter, 2012).

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5 key principles

Based on the three building blocks of children's resilience, these key principles guide the design of interventions to foster children's resilience.

01 With the appropriate support, all children can reach their potential, regardless of their background and experiences.

02 Children's resilience is affected by multiple, converging spheres of influence. Protective mechanisms within the family, classroom, school, and community can foster resilience by buffering and reducing the adversities children face and providing opportunities for learning and healthy development.

03 The school community is a source of valuable resources and relationships for children. Schools are communities whose actors play an important role in ensuring the welfare and success of children at school.

04 Material conditions matter to fostering resilience. Particular attention and emphasis must be placed on the quality of the environments in which children live and learn. Poor or harmful material conditions need to be improved in schools and at the community level.

05 Multi-sector support is needed to foster resilience in adverse environments. Key actors including government ministries, civil society, communities and donors need to create complementary partnerships to support large numbers of children and youth in adverse environments, i.e. where household income is below food consumption or where children are not safe.

Photo by Alamy Stock Photo

Lessons from the field...

Photo by Columbia University

Addressing children's basic needs

Results from a randomized control trial with stunted (low height-for-age) children in Jamaica, shows that early childhood interventions that address stimulation in conjunction with nutrition and health services reap higher returns than either alone.

The Suubi-Maka economic empowerment program in Uganda improved student attendance and performance by providing households with economic support (a child savings account). The program also provided financial management workshops, income generating projects, and mentors to children (Ssewamala et al., 2016).

Encouraging positive parenting

In **Haiti**, the Catholic Church is one of the largest educational providers, and religious leaders there play a critical role in informing parental attitudes and behaviours. In a pilot program in northern Haiti, a network of priests is helping to disseminate information about the importance of responsive care by parents and other caregivers and its impact on brain growth. The program is a collaboration between ACE Haiti and FRI.

In **India**, a digital reading pilot, Read for Kids, encourages a culture of household reading in low-resource communities. Using the mobile phone and the Worldreader Kids app, which houses a digital collection of 550 children's storybooks in Hindi and English, the programme reached 200,000 households and got parents reading with their young children.

Photo by DFID / Pippa Ranger

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Strengthening social emotional learning

In **Uganda**, the Good School Toolkit uses a holistic approach to prevent violence against diverse groups of children, including boys, girls and those with a disability. It was created to help educators and students explore what makes a healthy, vibrant, and positive school. It focuses on ideas and activities that do not require a dedicated budget to create their vision.

Teachers are valuable cost-effective providers for clinically informed interventions after mass trauma and disaster. During the 2006 **Lebanon War**, a teacher-delivered protocol helped children who were traumatized by daily rocket attacks in northern Israel to cope, focusing on enhancing personal resilience.

Photo by Raising Voices

Photo by U.S. Embassy Jerusalem

Promoting positive teacher-student relationships

The Building Resilience project, a series of teacher training workshops in Israel, aimed to improve the classroom environment by training teachers on resilience, stress, and exposure to trauma. The intervention identified a change in the teacher's knowledge and skills after the intervention but it did not assess relationships (Baum, 2005).

The way forward

Photo by Brian Glanz

Regular monitoring and evaluation provide insight into which interventions are helping children to succeed in school and beyond. Measuring resilience is important in order to monitor progress (UIS, 2016). Resilience, however, is challenging to measure.

An interactive outcomes framework for resilience in children

Efforts to measure resilience usually focus on the individual child. Since resilience is informed by interactions children have with actors at multiple levels in their environment, this framework suggests resilience outcomes need to be measured at each of the ecological levels (child, family, school, community).

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Designing the framework

This interactive outcome framework is designed around:

• Three domains (basic needs, nurturing relationships, and non-cognitive skills);

• Outcomes (activity results); and

• Indicators (observable skills and behaviors) that help measure and communicate change.

Driving the framework

While resilience refers to the ability of students to succeed in school despite exposure to adversity, measurements of resilience need to be grounded in cultural realities of what 'success' means. When developing measurement tools, an important step is assessing the construct validity of the outcomes and indicators.

How to determine the indicators for each domain in a school community

Set objectives

Intervention objectives should be identified through a consultative process involving parents, teachers and other school community stakeholders, including student learners. The domains of basic needs, nurturing relationships and core capabilities and values can be used to prompt discussion about suitable objectives. A community-led approach should not pre-specify the objectives, but rather build community ownership, support, and sustainability.

Develop an indicator framework

Through the consultative process, identify indicators for each of the defined objectives that help measure the objective if it has been achieved.

Refine indicators

There are a number of sources to help intervention evaluation teams develop unambiguous, measurable indicators (for example, Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry (2011). Indicators are best set at the beginning of the planning process for an intervention and can then be used to define key milestones and targets.

Photo by Big Photo

Photo by Andreas Doppelmayr/Shutterstock

fostering RESILIENCE *initiative*

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