



# ROUTES TO RESILIENCE

## LESSONS FROM MONITORING BRACED YEAR 2

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Reflection paper



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## Reflections in brief

### The basis for reflection

This paper shares insights, reflections and lessons learnt from designing, implementing and reporting against the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework. The BRACED programme aims to build the resilience of up to 5 million people vulnerable to climate extremes and disasters and supports international, regional and local organisations working in 15 consortia across 13 countries in East Africa, the Sahel and South-East Asia.

To understand what works and what does not in building climate and disaster resilience, the BRACED Knowledge Manager (KM) is developing and testing a variety of resilience measurement and monitoring approaches and frameworks. This year's reflections are based on the second annual round of results reported by Implementing Partners (IPs) and BRACED projects are now just six months away from completion. Each year, the KM Monitoring and Results Reporting (MRR) team addresses the critical question: *'How are BRACED projects contributing to building resilience?'* The answer is captured in our companion synthesis report – *'Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2'*. This paper provides the MRR team's reflections on, *'What lessons have we learnt from the monitoring and results reporting efforts to date in BRACED?'* During the second year of BRACED, we addressed the following M&E challenges:

**Dealing with the trade-offs of programme-level MRR efforts:** In large and complicated programmes like BRACED, the overall structure and analytical orientation (aims and objectives) delineate the limits, scope and role of programme-level M&E. Monitoring and reporting across a portfolio involves several tensions and trade-offs that need to be openly discussed and managed. These trade-offs surround the purpose of the M&E system (accountability versus learning); quantitative versus qualitative information; project – versus programme-level learning needs; internal versus external audiences and expectations; and robust synthesis versus timeliness of learning. The extent to which a programme learns from its M&E efforts depends largely on the nature of the structures, knowledge culture and communication channels within it.

**Adapting programme-level M&E frameworks and systems as projects evolve and mature:** Programme-level M&E needs to be flexible enough to continue to be relevant as projects progress and to accommodate learning as evidence emerges. For example, as the nature of the results delivered changes throughout a programme, the M&E systems designed to capture these results must also change.

**Reporting on resilience – outcomes versus processes:** Reporting outcome-level data needs to be complemented by evidence about the processes involved in resilience being built at the programme level, so as to draw new insights and lessons that can contribute to reframing wider debates about resilience programming in practice. In BRACED, 'building blocks' of change are captured through qualitative reporting against the Areas of Change framework, which

has led to the identification of four interrelated processes that lead to change: **layering and linking, responding and adapting, including and scaling and embedding** (see the report, [Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)).

These experiences have generated new insights and lessons about how to approach the monitoring and results reporting of a resilience-building programme the size of BRACED. Lessons learnt during Year 2 can be found in [Section 3](#).

## How can BRACED build on this learning?

The process of implementing an M&E framework across a portfolio of projects continuously challenges our understanding. While there is no perfect M&E system, lessons to date point to critical considerations and implications for the future of BRACED and other resilience-building programmes.

**Based on the size of the programme, be pragmatic about the extent of learning possible at project and programme level, and design the M&E system accordingly.** Working in a large programme and generating meaningful learning are not incompatible. To make learning possible, however, investments need to be made at all levels to ensure flexibility, buy-in and ownership from the start, with project – and programme-level learning priorities and needs openly discussed and agreed upon.

**Invest as much, if not more, in the 'M'.** The more complex a programme is, the greater the need for supporting monitoring processes. Monitoring is essential, but expectations about the speed of evidence-based learning within a large programme, and the pressures and demands on the monitoring team, need to be managed.

**Focus on resilience trajectories and pathways to change.** Trajectories of change and resilience 'results' are different in different contexts. It is important to monitor the change relative to the starting point and to track the *processes* programmes follow to ensure programmes are designed, tailored and delivered in a way that meets a longer-term need within each context.

**Invest in and promote an M&E culture that values learning.** Learning about what works and what doesn't in building resilience requires ownership and commitment to interrogating project and programme-level theories of change. Projects need to be encouraged to report real and tangible challenges, so then can move away from doing 'more of the same' towards genuine reflection and learning for improvement.

## Questions for further reflection

Monitoring and reporting progress in large resilience programmes presents a set of unique challenges. With the aim of improving practice and informing future decision-making about M&E designs for resilience programmes, the authors (the KM MRR team) wish to engage BRACED stakeholders and wider audiences in the following critical questions that

emerge as a result of reflections on the trade-offs associated with designing large-scale M&E frameworks and systems for resilience-building programmes.

**How can M&E efforts in large resilience programmes optimise evidence generation and learning?** For resilience programmes working across a portfolio of projects like BRACED, there are challenges in the extent to which M&E efforts can truly engage in participatory bottom-up approaches and generate evidence and lessons in real time to inform decision-making and programme implementation. Addressing these challenges requires transparent debate and discussion about:

- What is feasible in practice? And what are the most effective approaches and processes to generate robust evidence that informs policy and practice?
- How can project – and programme-level learning best support each other?

**How much change can projects and programmes tolerate?** Given that there are complex consortia arrangements and contracts, there are limitations as to how much the system can change and adapt. There can be a mismatch between how adaptive programmes want to be and how much they are able to be. Addressing this challenge requires pragmatic decisions and priorities about:

- What really counts as adaptive management? How much learning and adaptation is feasible for consortia projects? Where are the critical crunch points in the process?
- How reasonable is it to accommodate changes from both project and programme level? What does it take to achieve this?

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in resilience programming**

There is no perfect system and we are still learning about how best to approach M&E in a large programme. As outlined in our companion report, 'Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2', the time has come to move away from theoretical and conceptual debates, towards pragmatic and practical decisions reflecting on what is essential and what is feasible in resilience programming, as no system will do it all. We hope that this report will help decision-makers and practitioners design their M&E frameworks based on greater awareness of the trade-offs that emerge when truly engaging with learning-focused M&E.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Image: Neil Palmer,  
CIAT

## 1.1 What is this paper about?

The UK Department for International Development (DFID)-funded Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme comprises 15 field-based resilience-building projects across 13 countries in the Sahel, East Africa and Asia. These projects are implemented by 15 Implementing Partners (IPs), whose performance and delivery is overseen by a Fund Manager (FM). The programme has a dedicated Knowledge Manager (KM) tasked with generating and consolidating learning about which actions work best to strengthen community resilience to climate extremes and disasters in a variety of contexts. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities are undertaken at both the project level and the programme level within BRACED (see Annex 1 for further details).

A key area of work of the KM is generating knowledge about M&E practice in a complex resilience-building programme. To this end, the KM is developing and testing a variety of resilience measurement approaches and frameworks through a set of Monitoring and Results Reporting, Evaluation and Research activities. As a core part of this work, the KM Monitoring and Results Reporting (MRR) team developed the BRACED programme theory of change (ToC) (see Annex 2) and related M&E framework.

The components of the M&E framework were new and untested ways of monitoring, measuring and understanding resilience-building efforts. The framework has been adopted by project IPs and applied to their M&E over the course of two years. At the end of year 2, IPs provided systematic qualitative and explanatory reporting for the second time against the BRACED M&E framework. The MRR team has since undertaken a programme-level synthesis of all project-level year 2 annual reports.

This paper presents the MRR team's reflections and learning so far from testing the BRACED M&E framework through year 2 project-level reporting and the process of completing the programme-level synthesis of these data. It addresses the question: 'What lessons have we learnt from the monitoring and results reporting efforts to date in BRACED?' The paper builds on the lessons and reflections shared during year 1 and presents a set of reflections and lessons from integrating, improving and adapting our own reflections during year 2 as well as the process of completing the programme-level synthesis of these data. The findings of the programme-level synthesis itself are captured in a separate paper, 'Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2'. The companion synthesis paper answers the question of 'How are BRACED projects contributing to building resilience?' and explores BRACED programme progress to date against the BRACED M&E framework.

## 1.2 Who is this paper for?

Designing and implementing programme-level M&E frameworks for resilience-building programmes is a relatively new area of work, where limited experience exists. Reflection and learning about the BRACED M&E framework is therefore a critical area of work for the BRACED programme, providing an exciting opportunity not only to improve M&E practice within BRACED but also to contribute to building the knowledge base on resilience monitoring and measurement for the wider community. This paper is aimed at:

- **Stakeholders internal to BRACED** – project IPs, the KM, the FM and the donor DFID. The paper provides a set of lessons on how change can be monitored, measured and understood in the BRACED programme. These reflections should be used to enhance the BRACED M&E system for year 3 of the programme. They will inform on-going monitoring and results reporting at both the project and programme levels as well as wider BRACED KM work on tracking and measuring resilience outcomes.
- **Outside BRACED** – M&E practitioners, donors and programme staff with an interest in designing, implementing, monitoring and measuring resilience-building efforts. The paper outlines the practical experiences of the BRACED programme so far in dealing with the trade-offs of programme-level M&E; adapting programme-level frameworks as projects evolve and mature; and reporting on resilience as evidence emerges.

The report should be read alongside the companion synthesis report, 'Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2'.



## 1.3 How have we reflected?

In order to gather lessons about BRACED experiences to date in relation to the M&E framework and its associated reporting templates, the MRR team undertook the following:

A consultation with IPs themselves, gathering informal feedback on their experience of monitoring and reporting against the BRACED M&E framework. We placed emphasis on changes made to the templates in year 2, as well as drawing out challenges and learning from the BRACED approach to monitoring (see Section 3.2).

A team reflection on what worked well and not so well. We also held a one-day internal reflection workshop with broader KM team members on 4 September 2017 to draw on wider KM experiences. This was based on the initial findings against the question addressed in the programme-level synthesis, 'How are BRACED Components A and B building resilience to climate extremes and disasters?', in order to contribute to answering the question of this report: 'What lessons have we learnt from the monitoring and results reporting efforts to date in BRACED?' In addition, we sought particular KM feedback on any challenges in analysis, and improvements needed to outcome-level M&E reporting templates (3As and Transformation).

This paper is not an in-depth technical assessment of the BRACED M&E framework. Rather, it is a reflection piece to share with the readers of the companion synthesis paper the reflections and lesson emerging from its undertaking. In Section 2, we present a brief overview of the BRACED MRR approach and system. In Section 3, we present the reflections and lessons learnt from MRR efforts undertaken during year 2 by the KM's MRR team. Finally, in Section 4, we provide conclusions and implications for M&E design of large resilience programmes as well as questions for further reflection. Through these reflections we aim to contribute to broader debate and design of M&E for future resilience-building programmes.

The KM's MRR efforts sit within a larger BRACED M&E infrastructure (see Annex 4). Detailed analysis of the framework and monitoring and measuring resilience in BRACED is part of a wider collective effort. The lessons in this paper are limited to the KM MRR team's area of work.



## 2. MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN BRACED

Image: Neil Palmer,  
CIAT

In BRACED, M&E activities are undertaken at both the project and the programme level. Further information on how M&E is set up and managed across the BRACED programme is in [Annex 1](#). The BRACED logframe and ToC are the two cornerstone documents of the BRACED M&E framework (see [Annex 2](#)).

The BRACED KM MRR teams sits within the wider KM M&E structure (see [Annex 1](#)) and supports IPs' qualitative annual reporting about progress and learning against the BRACED M&E framework in order to understand *how resilience is being built at the programme level*. Two mandatory programme-wide quantitative measures of resilience were in place as part of project-level M&E at the launch of the BRACED programme:

- the number of people supported by BRACED to cope with the effects of climate change<sup>1</sup> (an output-level indicator of the BRACED logframe) and
- the number of people whose resilience has improved as a result of BRACED support<sup>2</sup> (an outcome-level indicator of the BRACED logframe).

<sup>1</sup> ICF KPI 1.

<sup>2</sup> ICF KPI 4.

The KM developed the programme ToC and BRACED M&E framework after projects had designed their M&E systems. This enabled qualitative data generation in order to understand, explain and contextualise existing quantitative indicators. The purpose of the BRACED M&E framework was to provide a programme-level vision of change as well as to ensure a common language and minimum alignment of monitoring, results reporting and evaluation efforts across BRACED, while acknowledging and accommodating project-specific M&E approaches and plans in different contexts. The framework situates project-level M&E within the broader programme context and enables evidence generation and lesson-learning about how resilience is being improved at the programme level (for more information on how we rolled out the framework, see [Annex 5](#)).

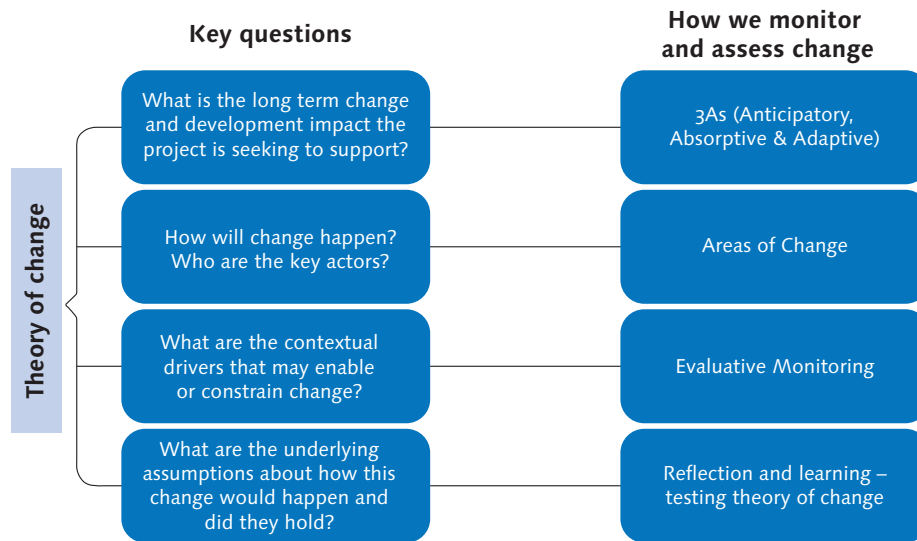
In addition to the two programme-wide quantitative measures of resilience, BRACED IPs monitor and report project results on an annual basis against the three main components of the BRACED ToC: Areas of Change; the 3As; and 'Evaluative Monitoring (the main concepts of the M&E framework are described in [Annex 3](#)). Together, these three components provide an overarching approach to complement the more quantitative International Climate Fund (ICF) key performance indicators (KPIs) and enables us to track, measure and understand the processes of change that lead to climate and disaster resilience in specific contexts and to specific shocks and stresses. Underpinning the BRACED M&E framework is the need to critically reflect on and question project and programme ToCs, to foster internal learning and to build robust evidence about how and why interventions are successfully contributing to improving climate resilience (or not).

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The KM MRR team developed a set of reporting templates and IPs report annually on the resilience capacities being built; the change processes underway; if and how the context is affecting these changes; and what the implications are, if any, for the project ToC design. Figure 1 summarises this approach. For the specific questions asked of IPs, see the reporting templates.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The M&E framework reporting templates form the second of two parts of the BRACED project annual reports. In the first part, IPs report progress against their logframe indicators to the BRACED FM. In the second part, IPs explore, explain and contextualise these results.

**Figure 1: BRACED KM M&E framework**



\* If you are unfamiliar with the concepts and definitions used in the BRACED M&E system, see Annex 3.

Improvements in year 2 focused largely on simplifying reporting procedures by adding more specific questions within each of the frameworks and tools (see Annex 3: What have we changed in year 2?) Finally, we added explanatory guiding information into templates to compile headline guidance into one document. Lessons learnt from this process are further explored in Section 3.2.



### 3. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR?

Image:  
USAID/Nepal

This section presents the MRR team's reflections and lessons learnt to date from developing and implementing the BRACED M&E framework and conducting the second programme-level synthesis of BRACED project results reporting. During year 1, our lessons related to the main challenges faced when designing a programme-level M&E framework for a programme like BRACED, comprising 15 projects working across 13 different countries. During year 2, we reflected in particular on the main challenges faced when improving a programme-level M&E system as individual projects evolve and mature.

- **Dealing with the trade-offs of programme-level monitoring and results reporting efforts:** In large and complicated programmes like BRACED, the overall structure and analytical orientation (aims and objectives) delineate the limits, scope and role of programme-level M&E. Monitoring and reporting across a portfolio involves a critical set of trade-offs that need to be openly discussed and managed. These trade-offs surround purpose of the M&E system (accountability versus learning); quantitative versus qualitative information; project versus programme-level learning needs; internal versus external audiences and expectations; and robust synthesis versus timeliness of learning. The extent to which a programme learns from its M&E efforts largely depends on the nature of the structures, knowledge culture and communication channels within the programme.

- **Adapting programme-level M&E frameworks and systems as projects evolve and mature:** Programme-level M&E must be flexible enough to continue to be relevant as projects progress and to accommodate learning as evidence emerges. For example, as the nature of the results delivered changes throughout a programme, the M&E systems designed to capture these results must also change.
- **Reporting on resilience – outcomes versus processes:** Reporting outcome-level data needs to be complemented with evidence about the processes of how resilience is being built at the programme level so as to draw new insights and lessons that can contribute to reframing wider debates about resilience programming in practice. In BRACED, 'building blocks' of change are captured through qualitative reporting against the Areas of Change framework, which has led to the identification of four interrelated processes that lead to change: **layering and linking, responding and adapting, including** and **scaling and embedding** (see [Routes to resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)).

### 3.1 Dealing with the trade-offs of programme-level MRR efforts

Little has been written about monitoring and reporting progress of large and complicated resilience programmes. Much of the discussion and effort has concentrated on developing frameworks for measurement, with the assumption that the kind of frameworks that can work well at project level, such as the logical framework, can be applied at the programme level, and that lessons generated can be applied across a diverse portfolio. However, our experience in BRACED to date tells us that this is not the case and, in fact, we need to be more creative about how to monitor, measure and synthesise evidence and lessons about resilience-building across a large portfolio. Several tensions and trade-offs within the M&E process are to be expected, and it is critical to be aware of and comfortable with the trade-offs that committing to particular strategies and methods entail and to be able to explain these to others.

There is a need to be more creative  
about how to monitor, measure and  
synthesise evidence and lessons about  
resilience-building across a large portfolio

During year 1, our efforts concentrated on designing and rolling out the M&E framework (see [Routes to resilience: Lessons from monitoring BRACED, year 1](#)). This year, as our experience has grown and the programme has evolved, we have faced difficult trade-offs. There are trade-offs between the structures and frameworks required to carry out M&E for accountability and for programme-level learning needs. There are trade-offs between programme-level frameworks

that enable coherent and robust data analysis and frameworks that support project-level needs. There are trade-offs also between pursuing M&E processes that suit internal learning and meeting the needs of external stakeholders. Finally, there are trade-offs between ensuring rigorous synthesis of data and the timeliness of lessons to inform programme-level decision-making.

**1. Learning and accountability purposes are distinct yet compatible, but these should be reflected and reinforced in the programme-level M&E structures.** The dual purpose of M&E, accountability and learning, and the challenges this entails, has been an issue of discussion for a long time. While there are significant overlaps between the two, they are not identical, and they require different frameworks and approaches. In BRACED, learning and accountability purposes have been clearly divided. Our KM MRR team has a clear role on learning – addressing, at the programme level, the question of *how* IPs are building resilience on an annual basis. The KM MRR team does not utilise a performance rating or have an evaluation function; rather, it supports BRACED IPs on data collection and reporting efforts to generate evidence against the programme ToC and its underlying assumptions. The BRACED FM is responsible for overseeing and assessing project performance against the projects' logframes for accountability purposes. These two processes converge on an annual basis for the DFID Annual Review.<sup>4</sup>

By separating these two functions, we assumed the KM MRR team could play a critical 'friend' role, supporting reflection, critical thinking and learning about projects' pathways to change. Our experience during year 2, however, tells us that separating the two functions may create a 'false dichotomy' if the necessary structures and resources do not accompany this division. While BRACED has allocated time and resources for face-to-face interactions and monitoring visits for performance assessments, the same cannot be said for learning purposes. We, the KM MRR team, have closely engaged with IPs at key moments – in the design of the M&E framework and its application by IPs to 1) project-level M&E and 2) year 1 and 2 reporting. However, we have used less resource-intensive options during project implementation, such as written M&E guidance and one-off engagements with groups of IPs. Yet experience to date tells us that truly engaging projects in a learning process at the programme level requires regular one-to-one support, face-to-face interactions and field visits. These are of critical importance to support internal capacity, ensure triangulation of findings and facilitate consistency in reporting efforts across BRACED projects. Additionally, they are required to build the necessary buy-in, trust, open communication channels and learning spaces to make sure experiences are openly discussed and IPs engage in a learning process from the bottom up.

<sup>4</sup> The DFID Annual Review is an assessment of overall progress against the BRACED logframe at the programme level. It draws on aggregated quantitative data reported against logframe indicators, with the narrative to explain the numbers drawn from the qualitative reporting templates against the BRACED programme ToC.

## Truly engaging projects in a learning process at the programme level requires regular one-to-one support, face-to-face interactions and field visits

The assumption that separating learning from accountability purposes in two distinct teams (FM and KM) does not stand if our structures in place are not adequately suited. These two objectives, accountability and learning, are not necessarily incompatible, and in BRACED we are looking hard at how to support both functions. They are sufficiently different to merit separate consideration. Yet M&E systems that blur the distinction between accountability and learning purposes run the risk of falling short in both areas. For example, in order to reduce reporting burden, at the request of IPs, the latter submit a single annual report to both the FM (for onward reporting to DFID) and the KM (for evidence generation and learning). The report has two distinguishable sections: in Part 1, IPs report on project progress in the last year against the project logframe (accountability) and in Part 2 they provide a narrative reflection against the project ToC (learning). Although distinct in nature and purpose, the objectives of the two frameworks – accountability and learning – were potentially hindered because of the blurred reporting lines, the detailed reporting requirements and the fact that most IPs had not planned or resourced for data analysis and reflection for our programme-level M&E, beyond the mandatory logframe reporting against the relevant ICF KPIs. For example, a possible solution could be having clear reporting lines plus adequate funding to support project – to programme-level learning.

### M&E systems that blur the distinction between accountability and learning purposes run the risk of falling short in both areas

It is essential for BRACED to review the ways in which the existing structure is compatible and incompatible with the purpose, to ensure the two functions work cohesively and reinforce each other. Challenges related to the amount of data required for both purposes from an IP perspective are further explored in [Section 3.2](#).

**2. A reduced set of quantitative indicators would release time and resources for qualitative information that helps explain change across the programme, without increasing overall costs.** The logical framework is key for accountability purposes to donors and participants, because progress is easily aggregated, reported and understandable, funds can be traced and project targets and plans can be marked and tracked. Yet quantitative data for accountability lack explanatory information. This year it has become apparent that, although logical frameworks may suit the purpose of measuring progress against expected



milestones at project and programme level, the lack of explanatory information hinders comparative analysis of quantitative data across the BRACED portfolio. This is not new: indicators have their limits, and only with the qualitative reporting against the ToC was there enough contextualised evidence to analyse the underlying processes of change across the programme. The integration of the two approaches (logframe and ToC) provides both quantitative and qualitative information that is useful for both accountability and learning purposes; however, this dual approach is more costly than using one or the other. A potential way forward for BRACED could be to prioritise qualitative frameworks, which allow deeper exploration of the mechanisms and processes that underlie these numbers, and to complement this with a handful of mandatory quantitative indicators at the outcome level, measured in ways which allow for some level of consistency.

### **3. Programme-level M&E requires bottom-up approaches and**

**top-down direction.** Closely related to the point above, there are always trade-offs between the approaches required to carry out M&E for learning at the programme level and the value this brings at the project level. At the programme level, there is a need to capture and understand a diverse range and approaches to build resilience, and the M&E framework has to be relevant across a number of different socio-political, geographical and climatic contexts. At this level, there are many external stakeholders involved, all with different expectations. As a result, the focus of programme-level M&E frameworks is more diffuse and boundaries are much harder to define than at project level. This makes programme-level M&E efforts much more complex, particularly when it comes to generating insightful lessons to generate critical learning about how resilience is being built across a diverse portfolio.

During year 1, we followed a mixed approach: developing programme-level ToCs consistent with project-level visions and designing overarching frameworks (including the Areas of Change and the 3As,) to provide a certain amount of standardisation and coherence across the portfolio to facilitate programme-level synthesis. Yet there are trade-offs between approaches to aggregate and synthesise in a way that allows consistency and comparability across a portfolio, and project-level frameworks that are tailored to collect evidence and generate learning to meet project needs. As a result, programme-level reporting requirements may not be perceived as addressing project-level learning needs, or seen as useful and relevant for projects to engage with (see Section 3.2). In short, projects may not be incentivised to participate in programme-level learning. There may be several reasons for this: work overload, adding an additional layer to the existing reporting requirements and so on. So *'How can programmes support evidence generation and learning from the bottom without placing heavy demands on projects?'* Demonstrating the added value of programme-level learning right from the start is of utmost importance to ensure understanding of mutual benefits and to generate buy-in. This could be achieved by engaging projects right from the start in the development of programme-level M&E frameworks and reporting formats, and ensuring projects have the time and resources to engage in programme-level reflections.

**4. Meeting both programme – and project-level learning needs cannot be underestimated: it impacts the quality of the learning process at both levels.** Closely related to the point above, at the programme level there is a wide variety of audiences, both internal and external to the programme, with distinct expectations and learning needs. Whereas some stakeholders are more concerned with progress, results and implications for programme-level design (i.e. donors and fund managers), others are more interested in how the projects are contributing to resilience-building (i.e. IPs and other project implementers). The KM team has noticed that this divide in expectations has an impact on the value of the lessons generated and reported at the programme level. The broad focus forces programmes to ensure M&E efforts address distinct yet complementary learning needs. For example, in BRACED, the KM's annual MRR efforts generate evidence and lessons that feed into programme-level decision-making processes, programme design and policy influencing. This exercise is complemented by KM-led project-level mid-term and final evaluations, which directly support and contribute to project-level learning (see BRACED Mid-Term Report).<sup>5</sup> Supporting learning needs at both levels is necessary but, at the project level, this substantially increases M&E activities and reporting burdens; at the programme level, this increases the complexity and structures of M&E teams. This raises the question *'Are programmes like BRACED committed, resourced and structured to support both project – and programme-level learning needs?'* Programmes need to be honest about which level of learning is prioritised, and/or seek synergies for reporting at both levels.

**5. It is possible to generate evidence and lessons across a large programme, but real time-learning requires much more than robust aggregation and synthesis of data.** For learning to be useful, it must be fed back in a timely way to inform progress. At the programme level, a robust synthesis of findings to support course-correction may lose its relevance if it comes too late, as any lessons that emerge may be no longer useful if they are considered past their 'sell-by date'. However, timeliness should not come at the expense of the value of the reports or lessons learnt.

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The MRR synthesis comes after several months of analysis and synthesis, to ensure the evidence and findings are robust. This process is essential to ensure rigour and representativeness and to draw out meaningful interpretation. Given the time lag between data submission and synthesis, there are delays in using

<sup>5</sup> Leavy, J., Boydell, E. and McDowell, S. (2017) Making progress: BRACED at the mid-term.

this to inform learning and decision-making processes at the programme level. This raises the question '*To what extent does the size of the programme compromise real-time learning and adaptive management?*' To bridge this gap in BRACED, we need to foster and facilitate clear communication channels and facilitate trust between the project level and the programme level via constant interaction, so M&E activities and subsequent reflection can occur in a timely manner and IPs can promptly apply lessons to project implementation. This challenge returns to trade-offs in design, where the learning is not resourced in the same way as accountability. This means opportunities to engage with projects in the field, share emerging insights from project and programme level and build communication channels are lost.

Given the resources and structure of the existing BRACED programme, we can work to optimise sequencing, and manage expectations of when learning can be fed in. This will help projects and programmes plan for this and create the time and space to reflect on lessons to ensure learning is applied. Having said this, the monitoring team encounters high levels of demand throughout on-going programmes. In the early stages, evidence-based learning from monitoring data comes at a time when other evidence-based efforts are either discrete entities or in progress and still establishing evidence to be able to draw out findings. The early insights into resilience-building processes garnered through monitoring efforts create demand for the findings, both internally and from external actors, and high levels of scrutiny.

### While monitoring enables learning within the lifetime of programmes, it is not instantaneous and it cannot provide all answers to all audiences

Expectations are particularly high in year 1, at a time where findings are more likely to be descriptive of 'what' is being implemented, rather than able to draw insights into the processes and progress made. In BRACED, it was only in year 2 that the findings began to shed light on some of the 'hows' in resilience-building efforts. While monitoring enables learning within the lifetime of programmes, it is not instantaneous and it cannot provide all answers to all audiences. While monitoring generates learning that is very valuable, expectations need to be managed in terms of both the speed of evidence-based learning (especially in large programmes) and the demands and scrutiny that the monitoring team are working under.

## 3.2 Adapting programme-level M&E frameworks and systems as projects evolve and mature

To support evidence-based adaptation, a learning system requires flexibility and space for change. As part of the trade-offs made by selecting an M&E system, the degree of change that is possible may be limited by the existing structures in place, as well as by the costs associated with change and the perceived 'importance' of doing so. During year 2, our learning points to the need to evolve M&E systems as programmes mature, and finding ways to support change within existing limits. We begin by presenting IP feedback on their experiences of reporting against the monitoring framework in year 2. Then, drawing on this, we step beyond IP data to reflect more widely on what would be required from an M&E system to promote and support high-quality reporting on project progress over multi-year programmes. Finally, reflecting on the implications of engaging with deeper levels of learning for different functions within a large programme, we reflect on what it would take to support meaningful learning, and to move from learning towards adaptive programming.

### Our learning points to the need to evolve M&E systems as programmes mature, and finding ways to support change within existing limits

**1. M&E frameworks and reporting systems are not set in stone; rather, they need to be improved and updated as evidence and lessons emerge from IP experiences.** Based on our experiences from year 1 and mindful of the reporting burden for IPs, we made several changes to the reporting templates to facilitate improved reporting. From a KM perspective, reporting this year was improved overall compared with last year. Although this varied across the projects, overall there was more evidence of changes and more well-evidenced statements included in self-reporting, guided by IP familiarity and experience from year 1 reporting, as well as the narrative structure put in place in the templates for year 2. For descriptions of the changes made to reporting templates in year 2, see [Annex 3](#).

As with last year, we sought feedback from IPs on the year 2 reporting process, on changes to the templates, the learning process and challenges and benefits of qualitative monitoring. The questions were as follows:

- *How did you find the Part 2 templates to complete this year, in comparison with last year? Is there anything you would change to tell your project's story better?*
- *Reflecting on where you started, what have you learnt through the BRACED monitoring and annual reporting process? What would you take forward for M&E in your work (beyond BRACED)?*
- *What do you think the main challenges and benefits are of the BRACED qualitative monitoring process?*

These questions are voluntary, and follow a period of high demand on IPs' time, taken up by annual reporting. Our survey elicited responses from seven out of fifteen IPs<sup>6</sup> – fewer than hoped but, given existing workloads as well as IP familiarity with the process in the second year of reporting, this is in line with expectations. In addition to the written feedback, we further engaged with IPs through a webinar held on 6 October to share the findings of the synthesis and the implications for M&E. We summarise findings from the feedback below.

This year, five out of seven IPs reported that the changes to templates in year 2 facilitated reporting processes by reducing complexity and improving clarity. Specifically, in Part 2 (ToC), reducing the number of templates and simplifying reporting against the progress markers were noted improvements. Beyond template changes, several other factors improved reporting experiences this year, which included IP familiarity with the process; the Annual Reporting Supplement (ARS) workshop to support IP reporting; and other internal project factors, such as completed progress markers by the time of reporting in year 2, which in some cases were developed only during/after year 1 reporting. Additionally, projects have made progress and this year IPs have more evidence of change, which improved narrative reporting.

Despite improvements in year 2, the templates remain imperfect. There remains some overlap in reporting against the Areas of Change, particularly between 'knowledge, understanding and commitment' and 'skills and practices'. Three IPs felt the Areas of Change were too disaggregated to 'tell the story' of the project fluidly and without repetition across the four areas. Suggestions for improvement included integrating Part 1 (logframe) and Part 2 (ToC) of the ARS to reduce repetition between reporting outcome-level data against the logframe (KPI 4) and narrative reporting of outcomes (3As). This could reduce ARS length, and also facilitate reflection about how resilience is being measured in BRACED (across KPI 4 + 3As). Other suggestions to improve templates include further combining templates to reduce their number and reducing the length of the ARS (particularly of Part 1 – logframe reporting). Additionally, two IPs noted that the separate feedback processes and timeframes for the FM (Part 1) and the KM (Part 2) could be streamlined to reduce the number of requests for clarifications and further information that IPs received following initial report submission. We will reflect on this feedback and, where possible, use it to inform changes in year 3.

Challenges and benefits of BRACED qualitative monitoring and reporting. Challenges for IPs relate to the time-consuming process of qualitative reporting, and also specifically to reporting against adaptive capacity, which remains limited by the short timeframe of the programme. Despite these issues, IPs listed several benefits of the qualitative reporting process, including discussing and reflecting through the qualitative reporting process, which was useful to project teams; learning about new approaches, methods and tools to reflect changes processes and impact; identifying contextual factors that may promote or hinder change; and learning about the challenges of generating robust evidence for resilience-building.

<sup>6</sup> LWW, CIARE, Zaman Lebidi, SUR1M, BRICS, IRISS, DCF.

IPs reflected more broadly on their learning through the BRACED monitoring and annual reporting process, which included learning how to narrate and provide evidence related to the ToC; the use of outcome mapping to articulate progress against qualitative changes; the utility of Areas of Change and the 3As as frameworks to report qualitatively on changes; and the importance of clearly articulating and testing ToCs, used in conjunction with logframes, to ensure change is being brought about and is measurable.

*'On the one hand, thanks to BRACED's monitoring-evaluation approach, IP monitoring and evaluation managers are better oriented in collecting the information needed to complete the annual report, on the basis of a well-defined framework. On the other hand, the KM's feedback and questions helped better understand the BRACED evaluation process, i.e. what is expected, what to provide and how to tell stories with facts and evidence.'* (LWW)

Different IPs conveyed varied ideas about how they may alter each of these frameworks in any future M&E work, but nonetheless found that using the frameworks provided opportunities for learning. Only two IPs noted that they would not take forward most of the reporting frameworks, mainly because of limited capacity for this level of reporting beyond BRACED.<sup>7</sup>

Feedback from IPs highlights that the level of understanding and capacity required to report against the BRACED M&E framework raises important issues related to capacity-building of M&E staff. IPs report challenges in building the understanding of all staff involved in data collection and the reporting process, and in apportioning sufficient time and budget for these reporting processes at the project level. Further, these limitations in the understanding and capacity of field staff pose challenges for this type of reporting, making evidence challenging to produce and limiting their meaningful participation in the process. For the KM and FM, offering regional workshops, providing more guidance in French and finding ways to strengthen individual support for M&E within IPs are all suggestions to support capacity-building for M&E project staff.

<sup>7</sup> In BRACED, projects follow relatively standard reporting processes with the FM, including logframe reporting, value for money, risk registers, etc. In addition, they report against the ToC with the KM. This learning focus is surplus to usual M&E reporting.

**2. Wider reflection highlights that M&E reporting formats may need to be tailored to the implementation stage.** Reflecting on IP feedback that the templates prevented some projects from 'telling their story' fluidly, coupled with our wider understanding of the need for consistent and robust results reporting across the BRACED portfolio, we have reflected on ways to optimise the quality of reporting over time. At inception and the initial stages of implementation, structure and support are required to ensure robust results reporting across diverse projects to ensure standardisation and enable coherence for lesson-learning. However, as projects become familiar with reporting expectations and the emphasis on reflecting and learning, programme monitoring and reporting formats need to evolve to allow projects to reflect their learning in a way that is useful for project-level learning, as well as for generating evidence at programme level about how and why progress is being made. This means tailoring M&E reporting frameworks to the programme implementation stage, for example evolving towards asking broader evaluation questions as the programme moves through its lifecycle. This may allow IPs to 'tell the story' of their project more fluidly, as well as reflecting on where changes in scale or scope are required to maximise impact. This 'adaptive M&E system' has implications for donors in terms of both cost and flexibility. More funding will be required for a 'learning' M&E system able to redesign data collection processes as/when appropriate during the programme lifetime (see [Section 3.1](#)).

**M&E reporting frameworks need to be tailored to the implementation stage of the programme, for example evolving towards asking broader evaluation questions as the programme moves through its lifecycle**

**3. An adaptive and learning-focused M&E system requires space and incentives for change – at project and programme level.** A wider reflection from our learning as a monitoring team relates to the extent to which change could be accommodated within existing structures, to enable deeper emergent learning. To move beyond incremental tweaking of relatively independent indicators towards adaptive programming, organisations, consortia and M&E systems need to be able to evolve (see the companion report [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)). This requires 'space' for reflection as well as flexibility to allow for change within systems and structures through appropriate sequencing and planning. As a consequence, ensuring projects and programmes are designed and have the capacity to accommodate change has repercussions at all levels. For example, at the project level, IPs need the freedom to change course as required, based on their learning. Projects may need to adapt their plans, ToCs and indicators as they learn 'what works', to reinforce success or to course-correct based on learning about what has not worked, without penalties. This raises an important point that learning requires an understanding of both what does work and what does not.

An M&E environment that facilitates discussion around reporting 'failures' is important to learning, yet there are challenges to doing this openly. These are not limited to the BRACED programme, and may relate to the competitive nature of securing project funding as well as to concerns about continued funding within on-going programmes. For example, a project may opt to continue down the same path (despite limitations), because modifying a logframe or ToC can be viewed negatively at donor and/or programme level. Yet 'selective learning' created through reporting successes alone can have an adverse effect on project implementation, as well as on learning at the programme level, as similar failures are prone to being repeated by others. To improve programme-level learning, and subsequently BRACED project implementation, IPs should consider providing more information to report on what has not worked, why and how the changes made are more likely to lead to increased impact.

### To move beyond incremental tweaking of relatively independent indicators towards adaptive programming, organisations, consortia and M&E systems need to be able to evolve

To support this, there needs to be a shift in development culture to go beyond focusing on accountability and 'reporting against indicators and milestones', to instead focus on learning amid uncertainty, and understanding what is (or is not) found to be most impactful in the context, even if the number of activities implemented is lower than original targets. Changes at the project level need to be supported and accommodated at the top. This shift cannot happen without support from donors to place emphasis on the value of learning, beyond just the value of metrics. Further, to minimise trade-offs in programme-level transparency and accountability, fund managers would need to implement systems that can explain where and how funds are being spent flexibly, and to best effect. Donor and fund manager performance assessments would need to be more nuanced, and prioritise explanation of progress over measures of success.

### Adaptive and learning-focused M&E systems require more nuanced and responsive 'performance measures'

Critically, learning-based projects that adapt to increase impact as they learn 'what works' have implications for assessing the performance of projects at programme level. Adaptive and learning-focused M&E systems require more nuanced and responsive 'performance measures', which can take into account the context-specific nature of project starting points and people's needs, as well as the variation in trajectories of change and expected outcome level 'results' (see [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)). A learning focus requires a cultural



shift towards building organisational capacity to learn and adapt, both 'bottom up' and 'top down'. Building both the space for reflection and the capacity to adapt would support a move away from incremental course-correction and 'tweaks' to activities and processes, towards creating more fundamental changes to approaches based on questioning assumptions and underlying strategies, to support meaningful change (see [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)).

### 3.3 Reporting on resilience: Outcomes versus processes

The application of the BRACED M&E framework over the course of two years has challenged our understanding of M&E frameworks for resilience measurement. During year 1, our efforts and lessons focused on the processes of developing measurement frameworks for resilience. This year we have been faced with the practical challenges posed by 'measuring' outcomes using the 3As framework, as well as demonstrating the value of understanding processes of change. Understanding 'how' resilience is being built is supported both by qualitative reporting formats and by the monitoring process itself to foster learning within the lifetime of a programme. This emphasises the role of and the need for monitoring within M&E systems more generally.

#### 1. Moving from concept to practice has challenged the 3As framework, but integrating 3As with transformation could improve understanding.

This is the second year that we have applied and tested the 3As framework to analyse the nature of resilience outcomes. Similar to last year, this has enabled the programme to understand how BRACED projects have been addressing anticipatory and absorptive capacities to date, but it remains unclear how they will contribute to longer-term adaptive capacities (see [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)). At the programme level, the 3As framework has been useful for drawing attention to the (often) missing 'A' – adaptive capacity, which moves towards longer-term adaptation in changing climatic contexts, and is essential for building resilience to climatic shocks and stresses. Additionally, the framework sheds some light on the tensions between short-term needs and long-term objectives. Yet, when it comes to measuring change, the programme relies on KPI 4 to generate the figures. Put differently, the 3As is an explanatory framework, not a measurement tool. The 3As enables us to ask and answer the *how* questions revolving around the processes that have fostered progress and change towards the development outcomes. Yet, as projects mature and more outcome-level data are available, the added value of the 3As framework to help support analysis and explain the processes that are leading to change is unclear.

Based on our learning from year 2, reporting formats have hindered contributions from the 3As framework. Consequently, further changes are required to improve reporting on resilience outcomes. For example, year 2 reporting demonstrated heavy reliance on reporting against various indicators mapped onto the 3As framework, rather than reflecting on and assessing progress in building the 3As more deeply (see [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)). This is reflected in the annual reporting templates filled in by IPs. Whereas most

IPs listed indicators against each capacity and results to date, when asked for explanatory text to reflect and explain results and potential trade-offs or complementarities between the three capacities, overall they gave little information. Further, the indicator structure for the 3As compartmentalises the capacities, which masks some of the complementarities and trade-offs between the 3As. For future reporting, improvements could be made by reporting how certain indicators help achieve the various capacities, and under which conditions. Additionally, the 3As could be better mapped onto changes in transformation to enhance the assessment of progress in building capacities, as scale, catalytic effects and sustainability are all critical for each of the capacities assessed. This would also lend insight into the relationships between capacities and transformation. To improve the evidence base in year 3, changes to templates include merging 3As concepts with Transformation to support a better understanding of how transformational changes lead to outcomes (or not).

### The indicator structure for the 3As compartmentalises the capacities, which masks some of the complementarities and trade-offs between the 3As

Findings in year 2 show there are trade-offs between the three capacities, which need further analysis. In particular, the long-term approach needed to build adaptive capacity and required by project implementers appears in contrast with the shorter-term 'response'-driven approach communities need for building absorptive capacity. This is an important obstacle to note in terms of what can be achieved under BRACED, as the inclusion of local communities' priorities is challenging if BRACED aims seriously to include climate change considerations in its activities. This does not challenge the concept of resilience *per se*, but the extent to which it can be achieved using existing approaches. Further, BRACED projects' multiple contexts and entry points offer the potential to better monitor and evaluate different pathways for locally rooted transformations in resilience. For BRACED to leverage transformational changes in practice as well as insights for debates about 'transformative' adaptation, a stronger evidence base of local processes of change is necessary.

**2. Monitoring progress in resilience-building is not about the what, but the how.** With or without KPI 4 and the 3As framework, resilience outcomes take time to mature. A focus on outcomes alone would have meant valuable data and evidence were overlooked. Using qualitative frameworks to explore the processes of change has been useful to move reflection beyond the 'extent to which', to consider the 'how' questions, in particular in relation to the four main areas of change identified in the BRACED ToC: knowledge and attitudes, capacity and skills, partnerships and decision-making.

While during year 1 the qualitative frameworks enabled us to reveal the challenges of establishing the foundations for change, in year 2, with more

data on the table, the 'how' questions led to the identification of four interrelated processes that lead to change: **layering and linking, responding and adapting, including** and **scaling and embedding** (See [Routes to Resilience: Insights from BRACED year 2](#)).

## Focusing on processes provides a more holistic understanding of the intricacies of how project design influences pathways towards climate resilience

How can we better tell the story of resilience-building processes? Our experiences to date have two interrelated implications when it comes to monitoring and reporting efforts in BRACED. First, a focus on processes shifts the focus of change from participants (as measured through the Areas of Change framework) to the IPs themselves, and, in turn, the assumptions underpinning the BRACED ToC. Focusing on processes provides a more holistic understanding of how project design influences pathways towards climate resilience, as we can generate insights from the evidence about the intricacies of *how* project activities are implemented. The investigation and analysis of these processes compels IPs to be more reflective than usually required by accountability-focused M&E, to reassess all aspects of the project design and its underlying assumptions. Second, this does not mean a new framework is required for data collection. Rather, our findings reemphasise the need for question-based (qualitative reporting) frameworks around the key building blocks of the ToC, prioritising these, complemented with a handful of quantitative indicators. Such narratives open up the black box of 'how' resilience is being built, leading to an improved understanding that fosters learning for resilience-building practice. Further, the integration and investigation of the 'how' questions in the existing framework will facilitate more in-depth analysis of the four interrelated processes leading to change. This will allow us to better understand the nuances surrounding project outcomes, in particular lending insight into why outcomes have (or have not) materialised at the culmination of the three-year programme.

### **3. In the absence of shocks and stresses, a focus of M&E on processes is likely to be more valuable in supporting programme-level learning.**

Understanding how resilience is being built (or not) requires qualitative understanding of processes, but this year's findings highlight that an analysis of the 3As does add value to such assessments. Reporting change processes (towards outcomes) is critical to understand what is working and why, which can increase impact by feeding back learning within the programme lifecycle. This highlights the increased role and requirement for monitoring systems (in addition to evaluations) to capture progress and support learning for course-correction, rather summarising findings on completion. Yet there is still work to be done to feed lessons back into programmes in a timely way to support 'real-time' learning (see [Section 3.1](#)). The function of monitoring itself is not a silver-bullet; the increased importance of monitoring requires that this

element of multi-year programmes be resourced appropriately (at project and programme level), and, in line with earlier arguments, be sequenced to optimise knowledge-gathering and supported by donors to promote genuine learning (from success or failure) to move towards adaptive management.

What then is the most appropriate way to measure resilience in the presence and absence of shocks and stresses? The measurement of outcomes is important but '*Should we place more emphasis on monitoring and measuring the processes of resilience-building?*' These questions relate to understanding in the year 2 report that, at the outcome level, 'results' are development outcomes. This has implications for the design of M&E systems as well as for what can be achieved in a short, fixed, three-year period.

In the absence of a shock or stress during their lifetime, the success of resilience programmes may not be measured by resilience outcomes *per se* but by achievement of positive development outcomes. Therefore, at the programme level, there is a need to move away from ticking boxes against resilience outcome indicators or capacity frameworks and towards monitoring and measuring the *processes* involved in achieving positive development outcomes. This will help ensure programmes are designed, tailored and delivered in a way that meets a longer-term need within each context. If the processes of resilience-building are coherently linked and layered, inclusive, responsive and adaptive and scaled and embedded, and integrate science, as appropriate to the problem and feasible within the context, then outcomes will, by virtue of a focus on the process, follow. So, perhaps the wider debate is about whether the focus should lie on measuring resilience results, or whether it is the processes and developmental outcomes that emerge in the context of shocks and stressors that should be monitored and measured.

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Yet, when households, communities or countries at large are exposed to shocks and stresses, capacity frameworks for measuring improved resilience become more relevant. A shock-activated assessment should be added to M&E systems, which could use either existing data as a baseline or a 'short cycle' data-gathering process to assess both the impact of shocks and stresses and whether and how capacity-building supports communities and households to absorb, anticipate and adapt. This would enable real-time evaluation and learning to measure and understand resilience responses adopted by stakeholders. Further, to truly test the recovery element of a resilient household or community, this element could be tracked forward beyond the lifetime of a programme into more meaningful timeframes for recovery<sup>8</sup> (years to decades), by adding a formative element to the M&E system or adding an *ex-post* element several years after the shock.

<sup>8</sup> Sword-Daniels, V., Twigg, J., Rossetto, T., and Johnston, D. (2016) Unpacking long-term disaster recovery processes: A case study of the healthcare system in Montserrat, West Indies. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 34(1): 113–142.



# 4. HOW CAN BRACED BUILD ON THIS LEARNING?

Image: Georgina  
Smith/Worldfish

M&E for resilience programming is still nascent, and BRACED is learning by doing in terms of what and how progress can best be measured and reported. The BRACED programme as a whole is testing a set of frameworks and approaches that need to be fine-tuned as evidence emerges and experience is built. Here, we have shared our experiences and reflections based on our experiences over the course of two years from the KM's MRR work. We hope this will go on to contribute to on-going and future efforts in designing, implementing and reporting against M&E frameworks of resilience-building programmes.

The process of implementing an M&E framework across a portfolio of projects continuously challenges our understanding. MRR efforts will continue in year 3 of BRACED and we will continue to reflect on experiences and lessons learnt. Moving forward, beyond fine-tuning the BRACED M&E framework based on lessons learnt to date, we will continue to explore options and ways to continue improve project – to programme-level reporting, including simplifying, where possible, reporting templates; reducing the reporting lead time between project – and programme-level reporting; balancing top-down and bottom-up learning; fostering peer-to-peer learning; and supporting spaces for data triangulation from different sources across projects.

While there is no perfect M&E system, lessons to date point to critical considerations and implications for the future of BRACED and other resilience-building programmes.

## 4.1 Implications for M&E design of large resilience-building programmes

Monitoring and reporting progress of large resilience-building programmes presents a set of unique challenges. Much of the M&E discussions to date for resilience-building efforts have concentrated on project-level measurement frameworks, but, when working across a large portfolio, such frameworks are not enough, and we need to think about the structures and systems that support data collection and reporting at the programme level.

We all want to see better M&E that contributes to knowledge generation, which improves practice and informs decision-making processes. Yet for M&E to make a useful contribution to improving our understanding of what it takes to build resilience, programmes working across large portfolios must place a much greater focus on learning. This has direct implications for the design of M&E structures, systems and measurement frameworks. A learning-oriented M&E system across a portfolio of projects requires pragmatic and transparent decision-making to balance top-down and bottom-up learning needs; designing flexible and adaptable structures and systems that can accommodate and manage change as evidence emerges and understanding improves; finding alternative ways of measuring and monitoring progress and results; and investing in and promoting an M&E culture that values learning. These implications are outlined in more detail in the following sections:

- **Based on the size of the programme, be pragmatic about the extent of learning possible at project and programme level, and design the M&E system accordingly.** Large programmes will, by default, be less flexible and adaptable than individual projects, and there will always be limits to the extent to which they can represent the diversity across a portfolio of work. Yet working in a large programme and generating meaningful learning are not incompatible. To optimise learning, large and complex M&E systems need to be specifically designed with learning in mind. M&E should not be seen as an 'add-on' activity, but rather as a way of understanding what is working and what is not, providing a basis for learning and adaptive programming. Investments need to be made at both project and programme level, as programmes cannot be flexible without flexible projects. If project-level M&E systems are too rigid in their objectives and results, they will drive rather than facilitate project-level decisions, and undermine flexibility and adaptation as projects progress. Conversely, if they are too flexible, it can be difficult to track progress against hypothesis and assumptions at the programme level. Striking a balance requires investing considerable time and resources in participatory processes, where project – and programme-level learning priorities and needs are openly discussed and the extent to which they can be supported are agreed upon. For the chosen M&E approach to be successful, there has to be at least some level of wider buy-in and ownership. Moreover, the timing and sequencing of data collection and reporting is of critical importance: this shapes how project – and programme-level findings and lessons feed into each other, and, in turn, how they feed into decision-making processes at all levels. Yet the speed

at which lessons can be generated and applied within a large programme will always be an issue. Finding informal means of communication, to foster debate and information-sharing, could be a viable way forward. Ultimately, M&E approaches will need to be tailored to the needs of each particular programme, aware of the trade-offs and priorities driving framework selection and design. A better understanding of the potential trade-offs is the starting point. Yet this will not be sufficient on its own, and the ability to adapt and innovate will be crucial.

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- **Invest as much, if not more, in the 'M'.** The timing and frequency of data collection and reporting efforts are key aspects of M&E systems for resilience programming. The reality of the context within which resilience investments are made is that the climatic context and socio-political landscapes are constantly changing and, as a result, unforeseen changes and challenges will inevitably emerge. In order to capture, analyse and understand change processes, on-going monitoring can provide critical information to support course-correction and adaptive management. In addition, beyond mandatory reporting requirements and data aggregation, the more complex a programme is, the greater the need for supporting monitoring processes. These include on-going evidence-based learning, creating opportunities and 'space' for reflection, supporting capacity-building and developing stakeholder understanding and buy-in to the learning aims and the learning process. This needs to be supported by top-down emphasis on learning, as well as the resources to ensure effective M&E at different levels. Here, the role of a KM in supporting or facilitating complex planning and M&E processes is critical. Within the enhanced role for monitoring, expectations about the speed of evidence-based learning within a large programme, and the pressures and demands on the monitoring team, need to be managed. In addition, when a shock hits within the lifetime of a programme, real-time assessment of resilience responses should be a critical component of any M&E system, to be activated when needed.



When a shock hits within the lifetime of a programme, real-time assessment of resilience responses should be a critical component of any M&E system, to be activated when needed

- **Focus on resilience trajectories and pathways to change.** A focus on resilience as a process will draw attention to resilience trajectories as starting points. Trajectories of change and resilience 'results' are different in different contexts, thus simplistic assessments of projects 'success' or 'underperformance' based on performance ratings or 'results' alone are not appropriate. Programmes need to find alternative ways of measuring and monitoring progress and results. This does not mean indicators (both quantitative and qualitative) have to be discarded or that they compromise the collection and analysis of good data: robust learning requires solid evidence. What is important to monitor is the change relative to the starting point, and to track the processes that projects follow to ensure they are designed, tailored and delivered in a way that meets a longer-term need within each context. In the absence of a shock or stress, there may need to be greater emphasis on the processes of resilience-building, alongside tracking the development outcomes. However, when a shock hits, a real-time evaluation element could be activated to measure and understand the resilience responses adopted by stakeholders and to evaluate resilience outcomes. This could be further complemented by formative or *ex-post* evaluations specific to the shock-affected context that go beyond the lifetime of the programme to measure and understand the critical recovery element of resilience, often neglected and poorly understood.<sup>9</sup>

What is important to monitor is the change relative to the starting point, and to track the processes that projects follow to ensure they are designed and delivered in a way that meets a longer-term need within each context

- **Invest in and promote an M&E culture that values learning.** The three implications outlined above can be implemented only if programmes are committed to engaging in learning processes, to generate evidence and lessons that can inform practice. Learning about what works and what doesn't in building resilience requires ownership and commitment to interrogating project – and programme-level ToCs. To this end, programmes must promote

<sup>9</sup> Sword-Daniels et al. (2016).

an environment in which reporting and learning from failures are not penalised but rather are encouraged, and used as a basis for reflection and learning. Efforts are needed to instil a vision and culture that is both conducive to engaging with in-depth analytical and reflection processes and provides safe spaces to report 'failures'. This needs to be facilitated through flexible structures and processes, and by supporting projects to build capacity and generate buy-in. Projects need to be encouraged to report real and tangible challenges that have led to course-correction or that have hindered progress, alongside their successes, which in turn will generate and facilitate learning across programmes. This also allows deeper understanding of the contextual and implementation challenges that other projects and programmes can learn from. This moves away from doing 'more of the same' towards genuine reflection and learning for improvement. With this stance, M&E of resilience-building programmes could shape the way we learn and enable sharing of experiences and lessons learnt more widely.

## 4.2 Questions for further reflection

There remain real-life challenges and pragmatic decisions that need to be made for translating implications into practice. With the aim of improving practice and informing future decision-making about M&E designs for resilience programmes, the authors (the KM MRR team) wish to engage BRACED IPs, the broader BRACED KM, the BRACED FM, DFID and wider audiences in the following critical questions that emerge as a result of reflections and trade-offs that come about when designing M&E frameworks and systems for large resilience-building programmes. Emerging insights in this paper can initiate discussion; however, the BRACED programme should continue to answer this throughout its lifetime.

**How can M&E efforts in large resilience programmes optimise evidence generation and learning?** For resilience programmes working across a portfolio of projects like BRACED, there are challenges in the extent to which M&E efforts can truly engage in participatory bottom-up approaches and generate evidence and lessons in real time to inform decision-making and programme implementation. We have argued that a learning focus and adaptive and flexible M&E approaches that evolve as projects mature should be key principles for the design and implementation of M&E frameworks at the programme level. Yet questions remain: *'To what extent is this feasible?'* And *'What structures are required to make this happen?'* As our understanding improves, we need to start considering what is feasible in practice, as well as identifying the most effective approaches, structures and processes to generate robust evidence that informs policy and practice.

**How much change can projects and programmes tolerate?** Even if evidence and lessons can be generated across a portfolio of projects, there are complex consortia arrangements and contracts in place across programmes like BRACED. Responding and adapting to learning derived from both the 'project level' and the 'programme level' means targets, priorities, incentives, roles and responsibilities

will be continuously in flux throughout the lifetime of a programme. There are limitations to how much the system can change and adapt without generating even more uncertainty for programme stakeholders, and in addition the cost implications associated with updating systems and processes on an on-going basis need to be considered. This raises questions about *'What really counts as adaptive management?'* *'How much learning and adaptation is feasible for consortia projects?'* And *'How reasonable is it to accommodate changes from both project and programme level?'* *'What does it take to achieve this?'*

BRACED is still being implemented and results are tentative; however, we hope these questions will spark meaningful debate and conversation about what it really takes to build the resilience of the most vulnerable to climate and disaster extremes.

## Annex 1: Monitoring and evaluation in BRACED

M&E activities are undertaken at both the project level and the programme level within BRACED. Each of the 15 BRACED projects has its own ToC, logframe, M&E plan and M&E system. Every IP reports progress and learning against its logframe and ToC on an annual basis. Each project is also carrying out a mid-term review and a final evaluation.

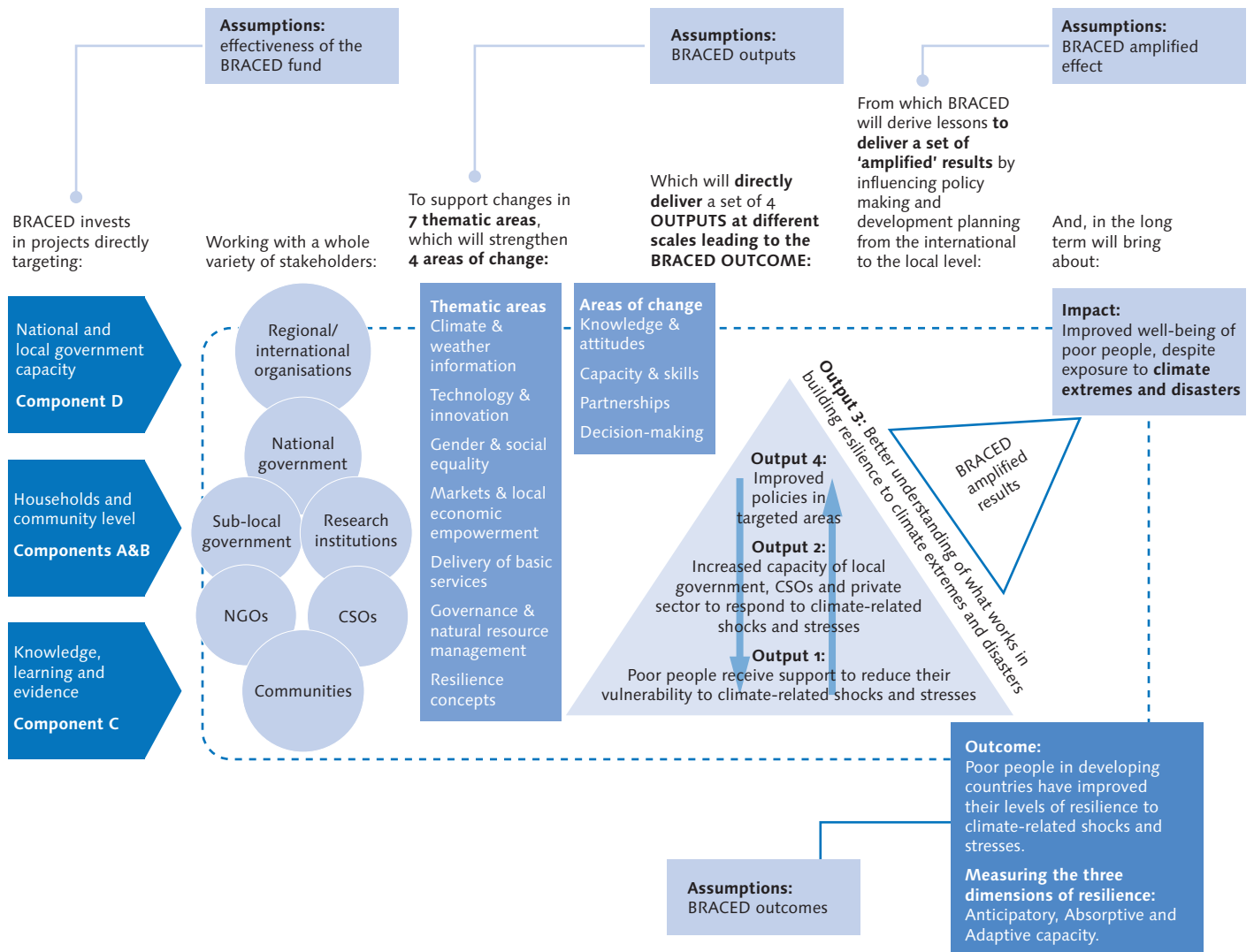
Progress against the project-level logframes is reported to the BRACED FM, who manages the project grants on behalf of DFID. The FM then aggregates and reports BRACED project results against the BRACED programme-level logframe. The FM also undertakes on-going project performance monitoring.

At the programme level, there is an overarching ToC (see Annex 2) and a set of MRR and Evaluation activities, led by the KM. The KM has provided support and guidance to project IPs to ensure the alignment of project – and programme-level M&E through the M&E framework. Progress and learning against project-level ToCs is reported by IPs to the BRACED KM using the M&E framework in order to understand *how resilience is being built at the programme level*. This report is based on those inputs.

Within the BRACED M&E system, the FM is responsible for overseeing the delivery of the BRACED projects, by collecting financial accountability information, annual reporting at the output/activity level and also collating relevant data against the BRACED mandatory KPIs of the ICF, including KPIs 1, 4 and 15.

Through a ToC approach the KM MRR team focuses on building and sharing evidence and knowledge. As well as the substantive MRR activities, the BRACED KM is also undertaking a set of evaluation activities to understand the extent to which BRACED project interventions work (see Annex 4).

# Annex 2: BRACED theory of change



## Annex 3: The concepts of the M&E framework

### Tracking resilience pathways through Areas of Change

Four aspects (Areas of Change) were identified as key processes of change in the BRACED programme ToC, based on an analysis of BRACED project-level ToCs: knowledge, understanding and commitment in relation to resilience-building; skills and practices to manage climate and disaster risks; collaboration and coordination in partnerships; and decision-making processes to ensure inclusive participation. These Areas of Change represent what is often referred to as the 'missing middle' in project logframes by enabling us to better understand the set of processes that link project outputs to resilience outcomes and ultimately to impacts on human well-being. They also provide the framework for assessment of the BRACED programme's trajectory towards impact.

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The four Areas of Change are defined as:

- **Changes in knowledge, understanding and commitment** in relation to resilience-building, in order to further strengthen policies and practices (*previously knowledge and attitudes*)
- **Changes in the skills and practices** of local communities, civil society, national and local government and the private sector to manage the risks of climate extremes and disasters (*previously capacities and skills*)
- **Changes in collaboration and coordination in partnerships** among key stakeholders to deliver effective interventions (*previously quality of partnerships*)
- **Changes in decision-making processes to ensure inclusive participation** of the most vulnerable, as one key aspect of a resilient system (*previously changes in decision-making processes through inclusive participation*)

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The Areas of Change also pay particular attention to the stakeholders and actors involved in BRACED by asking two 'simple' questions across them: Who is changing? And how?

How do we track and report change? The Areas of Change use an adapted outcome mapping approach to measure change using graduated progress markers from 'expect to see' to 'like to see' to 'love to see' changes. Monitoring and results reporting against the four Areas of Change builds knowledge and understanding about the 'pathways to resilience' in BRACED. More details on the BRACED Areas of Change are available in Note 3 of the [BRACED M&E Guidance Notes](#).

## Understanding resilience outcomes through the '3As' – Anticipatory, Absorptive and Adaptive capacities – and Transformation

In BRACED, resilience is understood to be the capacity of a system to change and adapt in the context of multiple and interacting shocks and stresses. Three interlinked 'capacities' were identified as the outcomes of the Areas of Change processes, based on an analysis of close to 50 resilience frameworks: the capacity to Anticipate, Absorb and Adapt to shocks and stresses (the 3As). The 3As aim to measure and understand changes in resilience outcomes at different levels and to different kinds of shocks and stresses. Instead of specifying a set of indicators to measure 'resilience', the 3As framework enables IPs to develop context-specific indicators with their respective stakeholders. It is an organising tool to analyse the outcomes BRACED projects may be achieving. Monitoring and results reporting against the 3As builds knowledge and understanding about 'resilience outcomes' in BRACED. More details on the BRACED 3As are available in Note 4 of the [BRACED M&E Guidance Notes](#) and the paper '[The 3As: Tracking resilience across BRACED](#)'.

How do we track and report change? BRACED projects report against two [International Climate Fund key performance indicators](#) at the outcome level. [KPI 4](#) is 'the number of people whose resilience has been improved'. In BRACED, this number is derived from collating project-level reporting at the outcome level, where projects have identified the project-specific outcome indicators that will demonstrate changes in resilience. These indicators have been tagged to resilience capacities – anticipatory, absorptive and adaptive capacity – and, in some cases, IPs have identified additional indicators for transformative change. BRACED project IPs decide how to weight the indicators according to their project ToCs and how they expect to see progress in building resilience.

The second indicator is [KPI 15](#), 'the extent to which interventions are likely to have a transformational impact'. This is a self-assessed outcome-level qualitative indicator. Tracking transformation is difficult, as these types of changes can be deliberately engineered but are often beyond the scope of a single intervention. The KM developed a new scorecard to support IPs to monitor the likelihood of transformational impact at the project level in a comparable way. Through this scorecard, the programme M&E system does not define transformational outcomes *ex-ante*, but instead tracks the likelihood of transformation against three pillars identified in the literature: policy, empowerment and innovation. It includes certain characteristics of transformation, including 'catalytic', 'at scale' and 'sustainable outcomes'. IPs are encouraged to report against changes they interpret as representing these pillars or characteristics of transformation.

## Contextualising results through Evaluative Monitoring

Within the programme ToC there is an assumption that BRACED pathways to resilience and resilience outcomes are achieved within an enabling environment at the local, sub-national and national levels. The nature of the prevailing context (specifically, the governance structure, decision-making processes, incentives, relationships, etc. of different groups and individuals) and IPs explore and report on the extent to which this context supports or constrains change under Evaluative Monitoring. This builds knowledge and understanding about 'resilience in context' in BRACED. More details on BRACED Evaluative Monitoring are available in Note 4 of the [BRACED M&E Guidance Notes](#).

How do we track and report change? The BRACED reporting templates include Evaluative Monitoring as a critical part of the reporting and reflection process. Evaluative Monitoring brings an evaluation lens to the reporting exercise by situating the data collected within an understanding of the prevailing context. The aim of this reporting template is to shed some light on projects' risks and assumptions and to be explicit about the fact that change occurs as a result of many actors and factors. Monitoring and reporting questions include, 'What are the key contextual factors (at local, sub-national and national) that may enable or constrain change in the project?' 'How are these contextual factors enabling or constraining change from the project?' 'Have they contributed to any unexpected outputs or outcomes?'

## Changes in annual reporting templates for year 2

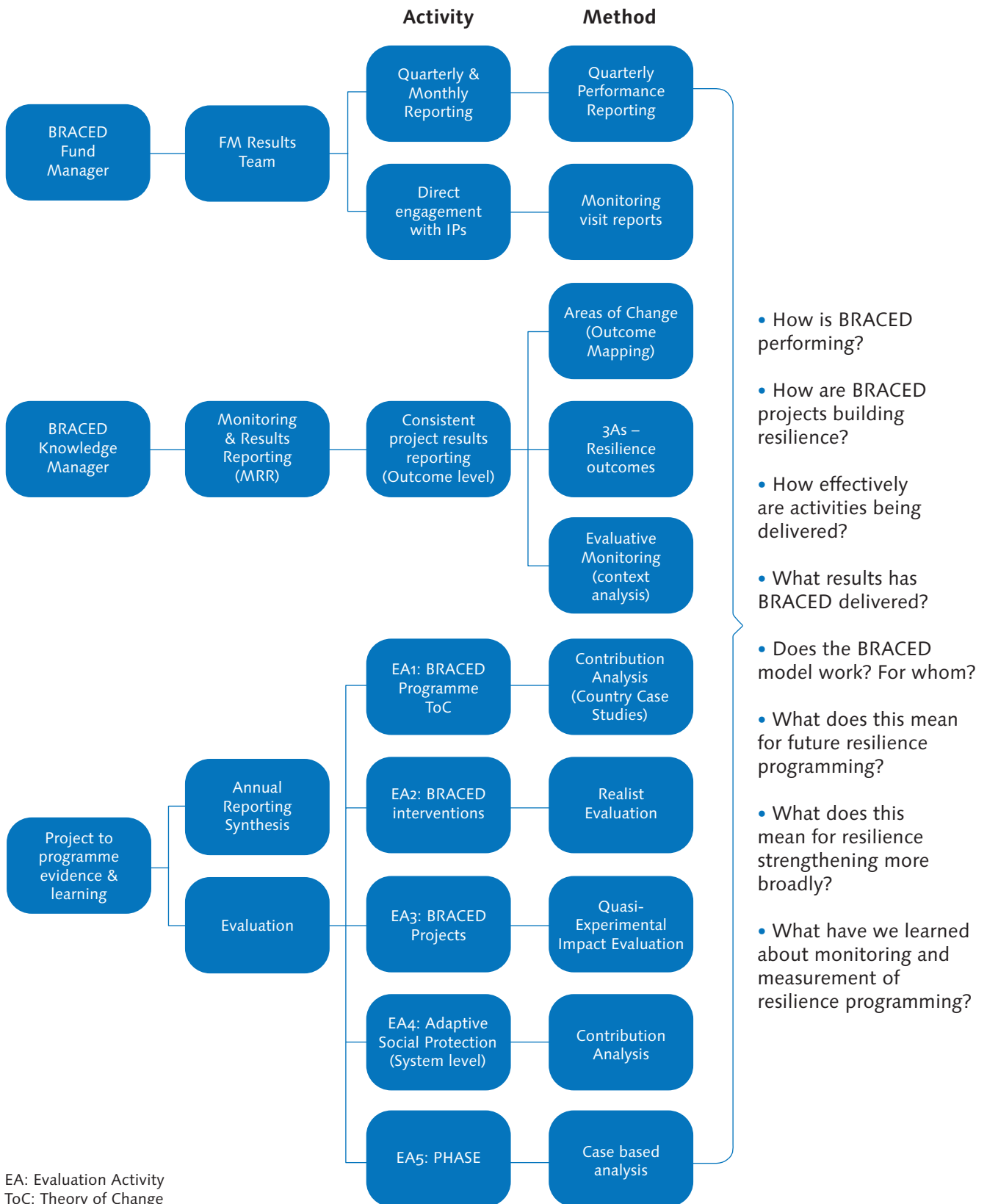
Based on experience, IPs' feedback and our own learning, during year 2 we further improved the definitions and set of reporting templates to reduce the reporting burden and better facilitate BRACED IPs to reflect on and report against their project ToC.

- **the Areas of Change definitions**
  - 'capacities & skills' to 'skills & practices', to improve clarity between the 3As (outcome level) and this Area of Change
  - 'knowledge and attitudes' to 'knowledge, understanding and commitment', to reduce reporting overlap between this Area of Change (AOC1) and skills and practices (AOC2)
- **reporting on changes and pathways**
  - improved clarity and facilitated project-level reporting by adding a guiding narrative structure to support reporting in a way that would tell a story of change, building from activities to outputs and evidence of changes
  - simplified the Areas of Change templates to reduce the need for reporting narratives against progress markers 'expect/like/love', to instead just tick which level or progress was achieved, to reduce complexity, placing emphasis instead on the supporting narrative of change



- integrated evaluative monitoring with the Areas of Change analysis to explore contextual factors enabling or constraining progress for each area
- **reporting outcome level change**
  - added a specific question about shocks and stresses and if/how resilience capacities reduced impacts
  - added specific questions about how projects are contributing to changes in social norms and governance structures

## Annex 4: BRACED M&E 'infrastructure'



## Annex 5: Rolling out the BRACED M&E framework

The BRACED M&E framework was developed and rolled out as follows:

- The programme-level MRR team combined a bottom-up and top-down approach to develop the BRACED programme ToC. On the one hand, this included a review of all 15 project-level ToCs and logframes and consultation with the project IPs. This set out key elements of the programme-level M&E framework to which projects would contribute both results and data. On the other hand, at the programme level, frameworks were developed to enable to the extent possible the standardisation of concepts, analysis and reporting against the programme-level ToC.
- The programme-level MRR team then provided a range of support to project IPs:
  - Detailed written guidance was shared with all IPs on the M&E framework and how to operationalise it (in the [BRACED M&E Guidance Notes](#)).
  - One-to-one conversations were held with each IP to answer any questions in relation to the framework and how to apply it to project-level M&E.
  - Written feedback was provided on updated versions of project-level M&E documents to check alignment to the programme level.
  - Group support was provided both face-to-face and remotely on a group basis to train IPs in the reporting templates and how to report against the M&E framework.

During the first year of BRACED implementation, the KM MRR team worked alongside IPs and the FM to ensure the alignment of project-level M&E with the programme-level M&E framework and to enhance the overall quality and comparability of BRACED M&E.

After face-to-face consultation with all IPs on the draft framework during the BRACED inception workshop in Senegal, February 2015, the KM developed written guidance for all IPs to operationalise the framework. Following the sharing of the [BRACED M&E Guidance Notes](#) (March 2015), the KM provided a programme of one-to-one support to IPs to apply the framework in their finalisation of project-level ToCs, logframes and M&E plans.<sup>10</sup>

The MRR team then developed the set of reporting templates to gather data against each of the M&E framework components to enable standardised and comparable reporting by all IPs of BRACED project results. The KM also developed reporting templates for two aspects of programme logframe reporting,

<sup>10</sup> This included a one-to-one Skype call with each IP to discuss the implications of data collection against the M&E framework for project-level M&E (April–May 2015) and a written review of updated project-level M&E documents (June–July 2015), before they were signed off by the FM.

on the 'use of climate and weather information' and on the 'likelihood of transformation'. Draft versions of these templates were shared with IPs for their feedback at the BRACED Annual Learning Event in Senegal, February 2016, and at a webinar in March 2016. The KM then worked collaboratively with the FM to both finalise the overall annual report template (March 2016) and train IPs in its completion (May 2016).<sup>11</sup>

In year 2, we mirrored the same process and structure with a webinar in (April 2017) and completion of annual reports in May 2017.

<sup>11</sup> A two-day face-to-face participatory training event was held with representatives of all BRACED projects, organised jointly by the FM and the KM. IPs had the opportunity to share examples of their draft reports with the group for feedback and continue drafting their reports while asking questions and receiving real-time feedback from the KM and the FM.

BRACED aims to build the resilience of up to 5 million vulnerable people against climate extremes and disasters. It does so through a three year, UK Government funded programme, which supports over 120 organisations, working in 15 consortiums, across 13 countries in East Africa, the Sahel and Southeast Asia. Uniquely, BRACED also has a Knowledge Manager consortium.

The Knowledge Manager consortium is led by the Overseas Development Institute and includes the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, ENDA Energie, ITAD and Thomson Reuters Foundation.

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The BRACED Knowledge Manager generates evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation in partnership with the BRACED projects and the wider resilience community. It gathers robust evidence of what works to strengthen resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and initiates and supports processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes. The Knowledge Manager also fosters partnerships to amplify the impact of new evidence and learning, in order to significantly improve levels of resilience in poor and vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

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