

What is ‘resilience’ in the Somali context?

By the end of a training week on community action planning for resilience programming in Dolow, there had been much discussion over what resilience programming should look like. From the range of opinions, many of which were passionately held, it was clear that better understanding of the concept of resilience was needed, for some sort of consensus. Since there is not one single word equivalent to the English ‘resilience’, the group of about 20 – all of whom had participated in the training, and all of whom worked either for FAO/WFP/UNICEF or an NGO – discussed Somali words that might apply. What emerged was a debate about the meaning of the term resilience in the context of Somalia and humanitarian/development work, and one which was quite revealing:

1. The first word suggested by a young man working for a local NGO was **boqsasho**. This means recovery, for example the recovery of a person from a sickness or of a community from a drought.
2. A similar word was then added by an older man, **kabsasho**, and the group agreed it was relevant but a synonym.
3. A woman then ventured **ceeyn sami** as more relevant, since it refers to the ability to cope. This word relates to an individual’s internal strength or energy to withstand a shock – an old woman might have more of this than her neighbor, and thus she alone would survive a bad drought – that was the example given. But the group argued that this could *not* suffice as an equivalent to resilience, for it is something integral in someone and so it cannot be built...
4. From the argument over **ceeyn sami** someone recommended we add **laqabsasho** to what was now emerging as a list of component parts rather than a single term to adequately express resilience. **Labqasho** means adaptation, something someone needs if they move from a rural area to a town for instance, or something a herd of livestock undergoes when their mobile pastoralist owners switch seasonal location.
5. **Barbah** was then introduced by a young man from a rural area, a word which refers specifically to the ability to cope with drought. For example a camel has better **barbah** than a cow. The group agreed it covered resilience but decided it was too much a word specifically used for animals...
6. Finally, a young man suggested **adkaysi**. This, he said, covered multiple concepts that we had been discussing, ones including preparedness, capacity, resourcefulness, adaptiveness and intrinsic qualities of endurance and resistance. A certain crop plant has **adkaysi** because of its good genes, good luck, and good positioning, but also because it can access water and pesticides from a farmer. A human has the **adkaysi** to endure shocks better because of its internal energy and health, but also because it can support itself economically and access services, food and resources. The group endorsed this choice, and the illustrative examples were provided by young women who felt strongly that **adkaysi** should be picked as the leading Somali word for resilience, but complemented by the others.

A set of Somali words for resilience thus emerged, with one more relevant than others:

boqsasho/kabsasho

ceeyn sami

adkaysi

laqabsasho

barbah