



STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE IN NEPAL



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Save the Children.



Sabal is placing communities in the lead for securing continued development and future wellbeing.

Communities in the Central and Eastern Midhills of Nepal continually encounter a range of inter-related shocks and stresses posed by ineffective governance, ecological degradation, natural hazards, systemic social constraints, and economic insecurity (caused by poverty as well as macro-economic stressors such as inflation and price fluctuations). As a result, vulnerable households throughout the region are hampered by limited agricultural productivity, insufficient access to public services (health, education), inadequate infrastructure, and exclusion of disadvantaged groups, particularly women and those in 'lower' castes.¹ Subject to these shocks and without access to public services, social protection programs, insurance products, or institutional savings, the rural poor often struggle to meet basic needs and secure viable futures for their families.

Since 2014, Save the Children and partners have implemented the **Sustainable Actions for Resilience and Food Security (Sabal)** activity to help close to 150,000 households in eleven districts of central and eastern Nepal to develop durable solutions to these challenges. In April and May 2015, four of Sabal's six original districts were significantly impacted by devastating earthquakes. Throughout the immediate response and long road to recovery, the Sabal activity has provided integrated support to strengthen **local governance, market-responsive on- and off-farm/ non-farm livelihoods, financial services, and social capital**. By involving participating communities and key stakeholders, both private and public, in the design and implementation of solutions to local problems, Sabal has helped them lay the foundation for improved resilience and long-term self-reliance.

SABAL QUICK FACTS

Activity Name

Sabal – Sustainable Actions for Resilience and Food Security

Stated Goal

To improve resilience and food security of targeted population in 11 districts of central and eastern mid-hills of Nepal.

Implementation Period

2014 - 2019

Reach

The activity is expected to 148,363 households (270,143 individuals)

Primary Focus Areas

Agriculture, livelihood diversification, nutrition, gender equity and social inclusion, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

Funding Sources

Sabal is a development food security activity (DFSA) funded by USAID's Office of Food for Peace

Implementing Organizations

Save the Children (lead), Helen Keller International, CARE, Action for Enterprise (until June 2017), Nepal Technical Assistance Group, Nepal Water for Health, Development Project Service Center, Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development, TANGO International, Action Against Hunger, and 17 district-level local partner organizations.

¹ Diwakar, Vidya. (2018). Resilience and Sustainable Poverty Escapes in Nepal. Overseas Development Institute (ODI). April 2018.

Inclusive Approaches to Strengthening Food, Nutrition, and Livelihood Security

The overarching objectives of the Sabal activity are to help poor, vulnerable and socially excluded households achieve **stable incomes, optimal health and nutrition status** (especially of women and children), and **improved ability to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses**.

An array of factors stand in the way of achieving these objectives, including poor access to agricultural inputs and product markets; a lack of viable off- or non-farm employment opportunities; household labor shortages resulting from out-migration and the feminization of agriculture; limited access to financial services, unequal participation in formal and informal social protection programs; and exposure to repeated natural hazards and economic upheaval. From the outset, Sabal has aimed to address these inter-related drivers of vulnerability through a comprehensive, community-led approach to development that prioritizes solutions to underlying causes—shifting away from a focus on treating the symptoms.

Figure 1 illustrates several of the means through which Sabal interventions have strengthened **absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities** at multiple scales.²

Sabal's support for financial literacy and inclusion through promotion of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and strengthening credit cooperatives has directly contributed to improved **absorptive capacity** among participating households and individuals. Findings from annual results monitoring show that 106,750 farmers participated in community-based savings and credit schemes and more than 31,783 took out agriculture-related loans from local financial institutions. Stimulating demand and enabling access to existing crop and livestock insurance further strengthened a holistic approach to financial inclusion. Over the same period, Sabal trained 2,068 people in disaster preparedness, establishing 99 community-based early warning systems and supporting the implementation of 115 (11 municipal level and 104 ward/VDC level) community disaster risk reduction (DRR)/climate change adaptation (CCA) plans. Because of these and other efforts, the FY18 Annual Monitoring Survey (AMS) found that the average negative coping strategy index score was reduced from 3.3 at baseline to 0.99.³

Sabal's strategy for **promoting alternative livelihoods** reflects a market-led approach in which marginalized groups (youth, women, extreme poor) receive both hard and soft skills training to identify potential employment or entrepreneurship pathways.



12,388
households*
enrolled in health
insurance scheme



201
PHC/ORC
strengthened
(health clinics)



\$1,114,322 USD
saved through village
savings and loans
associations (VSLAs)



101,506
farmers and others
applied improved
crop and livestock
technologies
or management
practices



30,548
members have
borrowed from
group savings

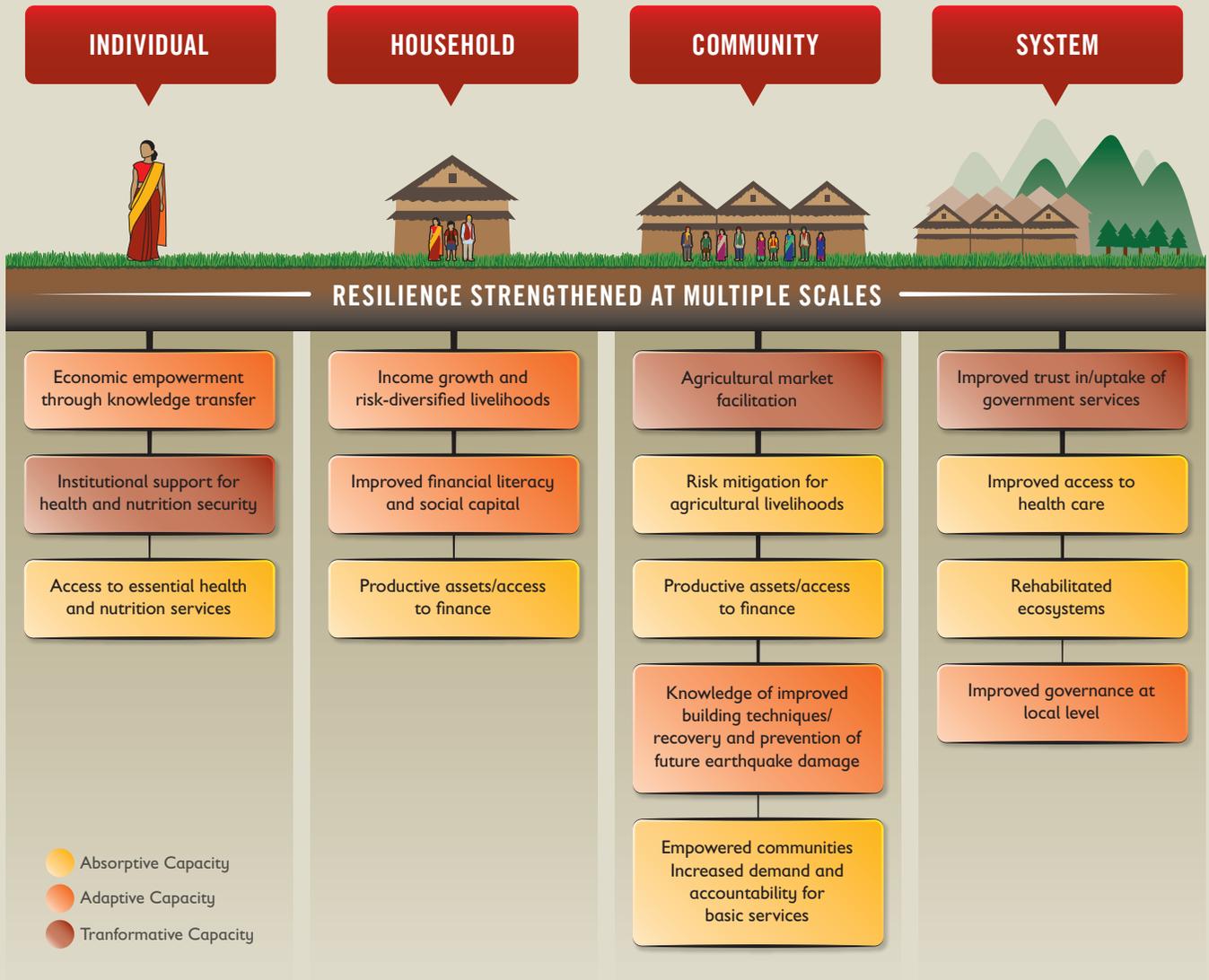
84,068
farmers adopting
improved natural
resource conservation
and management
technologies

*as of data available in July, 2019

2 Béné, C. 2018. Concept Note: Measuring Resilience Across and Between Scales and How to Do It. Produced by TANGO International as part of the Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award. https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/ConceptNote_MultiscaleResilience_FINAL_508_0.pdf

3 Note the Baseline and Annual Monitoring Surveys use different sampling frames.

FIGURE 1: Sabal's Multi-level Approach to Strengthening Resilience



ILLUSTRATIVE SABAL INTERVENTIONS

Financial literacy and skills training for men and women Life skills and safe migration training for youth Teachers/health workers trained on adolescent health/nutrition, reproductive health, menstrual hygiene	Skills training, knowledge transfer, access to services for marketing agricultural produce Off-farm/non-farm livelihoods for youth and ultra-poor women Saving and credit mobilization through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and links to financial institutions	Strengthened linkages between farmer groups/cooperatives and crop/livestock insurance schemes Coordination with National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) for promotion of seismic-resistant building construction Strengthened community groups and increased social capital	Creating awareness/promoting uptake of national health insurance - Social Health Security (SHS)/Micro-Health Insurance (MHI) Afforestation, promotion of improved forest management and soil conservation practices Increased community participation in local government planning and budget allocation prioritization
---	--	---	---



42%
of HHs reporting
improved access to
agricultural markets
(inputs, product)



50% change
in HH adoption of
diverse economic
activities
(FY17-FY18)



4,009
households
participating in
financial literacy
training



85.9%
more households
reporting improved
food consumption and/
or dietary diversity



725
Start and Improve Your
Business (SIYB) graduates
established on-farm, off-
farm and service-related
businesses in 2018

Data from the FY18 AMS also show improvements in indicators related to **adaptive capacity**. The proportion of households adopting diverse economic livelihoods has increased from 38% in FY17 to 57% in FY18. On a similarly promising note, the percentage of beneficiaries applying natural resource conservation and management technologies has increased from 70% in FY17 to 81% in FY18, and the percentage of beneficiaries using at least one improved practice increase from 81% in FY16 to 98% in FY18.⁴

Sabal has made substantial progress toward improving the **transformative capacity** of target communities by strengthening market linkages, increasing access to formal safety nets such as government health and agriculture insurance, promoting uptake of agricultural services, and empowering participating households to adopt gender equitable decision-making. Sabal's work with the government to promote the social health security program resulted in 8,768 new households enrolling in the program. Similarly, Sabal interventions resulted in more than 100,000 farmers establishing improved linkages to agricultural markets and improvements in joint decision-making related to household income and expenditures.



Photo: Ms. Moon Pradhan / Save the Children

⁴ This indicates an improved ability for individuals to make informed choices and changes in livelihoods and other strategies in response to longer-term social, economic and environmental change.

Leveraging Community Resources and Strengthening Social Capital

Reflecting USAID’s vision for the Journey to Self-Reliance,⁵ Sabal’s approach to increasing resilience has maintained a focus on strengthening the enabling environment among participating communities. This focus can be seen in targeted and tailored support for a range of local institutions committed to improving the health, nutrition, and livelihoods security of poor, marginalized populations.

By establishing and improving the knowledge and skills of Farmers’ Groups (FGs), Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs), Village Animal Health Workers (VAHWs), Enhanced Homestead Food Production Groups (EHFPs) and Village Model Farmers (VMFs), Sabal has made sustainable investments in human capital that will benefit participating communities for years to come.

Sabal actively created effective linkages between these groups and local government counterparts, to promote responsive local governance, advocate for gender equity, and demonstrate inclusive means of overcoming restrictive social norms including caste. Applying tools specifically developed to assess the capacity of individual community groups, Sabal helped ‘strong⁶’ groups formally register with local government, securing their role and ensuring that local priorities are included in future community development initiatives. Groups that were determined to have ‘average’ or ‘poor’ capacity received tailored coaching and mentoring support to enable them to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to graduate to self-reliance.

Ongoing changes in formal governance structures have resulted in greater resources and autonomy among local government actors, creating opportunities for Sabal to leverage activities and facilitate engagement of participants in more inclusive and sustainable development processes.

During 2018, 41 municipalities allocated a total of USD \$9,835,014 from their own budgets to Sabal-promoted activities supporting livelihoods, health, nutrition, WASH, and DRR/CCA.



4,190

Farmers’ Groups



178

178 Community Disaster Management Committees



1,533

Enhanced Household Food Production Groups



256

Trained Village Animal Health Workers

⁵ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/WEB_PF_Full_Report_FINAL_10Apr2019.pdf

⁶ Sabal has developed a rigorous process to assess group strength; categorizing groups into good, average, and poor.

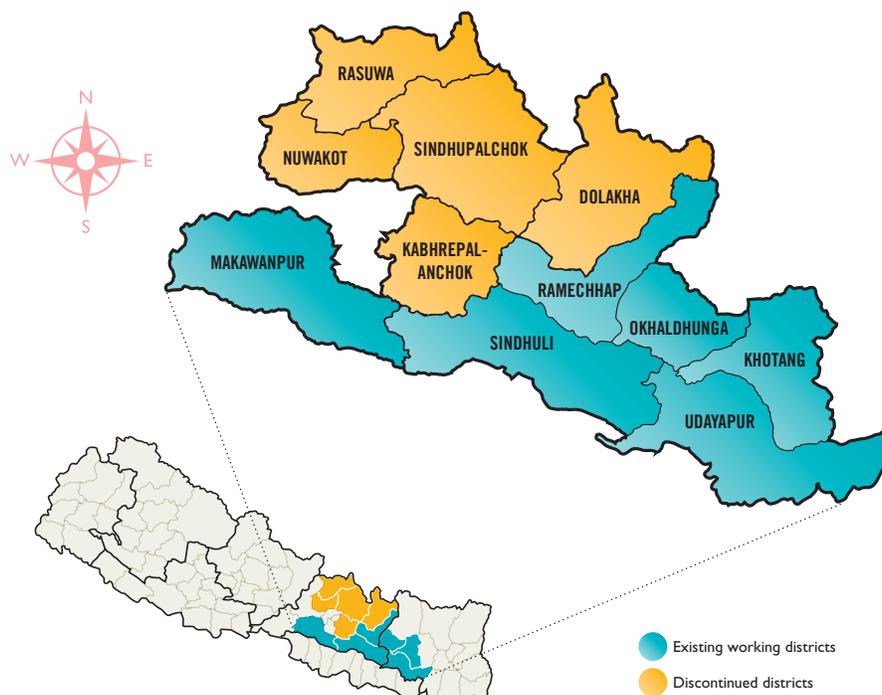
Adapting and Responding to Needs in a Dynamic Context

Experience gained throughout the world has demonstrated that enhancing the resilience of vulnerable populations is an iterative process, requiring donors, implementers and participating communities to continually apply learning, respond to crises and proactively adapt to changing conditions. The Sabal activity provides a concrete example of **collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA)** processes that directly contribute to the resilience of participating households and communities.

Sabal began in October 2014 with implementation in six districts of Nepal. During April and May of 2015, Nepal suffered a series of devastating earthquakes. Recognizing and proactively addressing the projected food and income gaps, and to support recovery in heavily affected areas, Sabal utilized support from USAID's Office of Food for Peace to expand its coverage into five additional districts heavily impacted by the earthquake. Aligning with the recovery priorities of the Government of Nepal, the activity developed a cadre of skilled technicians that could support post-earthquake reconstruction while at the same time helping individuals adapt to the changing livelihoods opportunities in their communities.

Adaptation of the Sabal design and implementation mechanisms was also needed when the Government of Nepal went through a major restructuring in 2015-2017, devolving power to local municipality level; an action which had a direct impact on administrative units involved in Sabal interventions and monitoring activities. Sabal approached these challenges as opportunities to develop context-specific strategies for 'graduation' of community groups through strengthened linkages with government actors, including the District Agricultural Development Office, the District Livestock Services Offices, Rural Municipalities, Municipalities and other agencies charged with providing information, services and resource support to local communities.

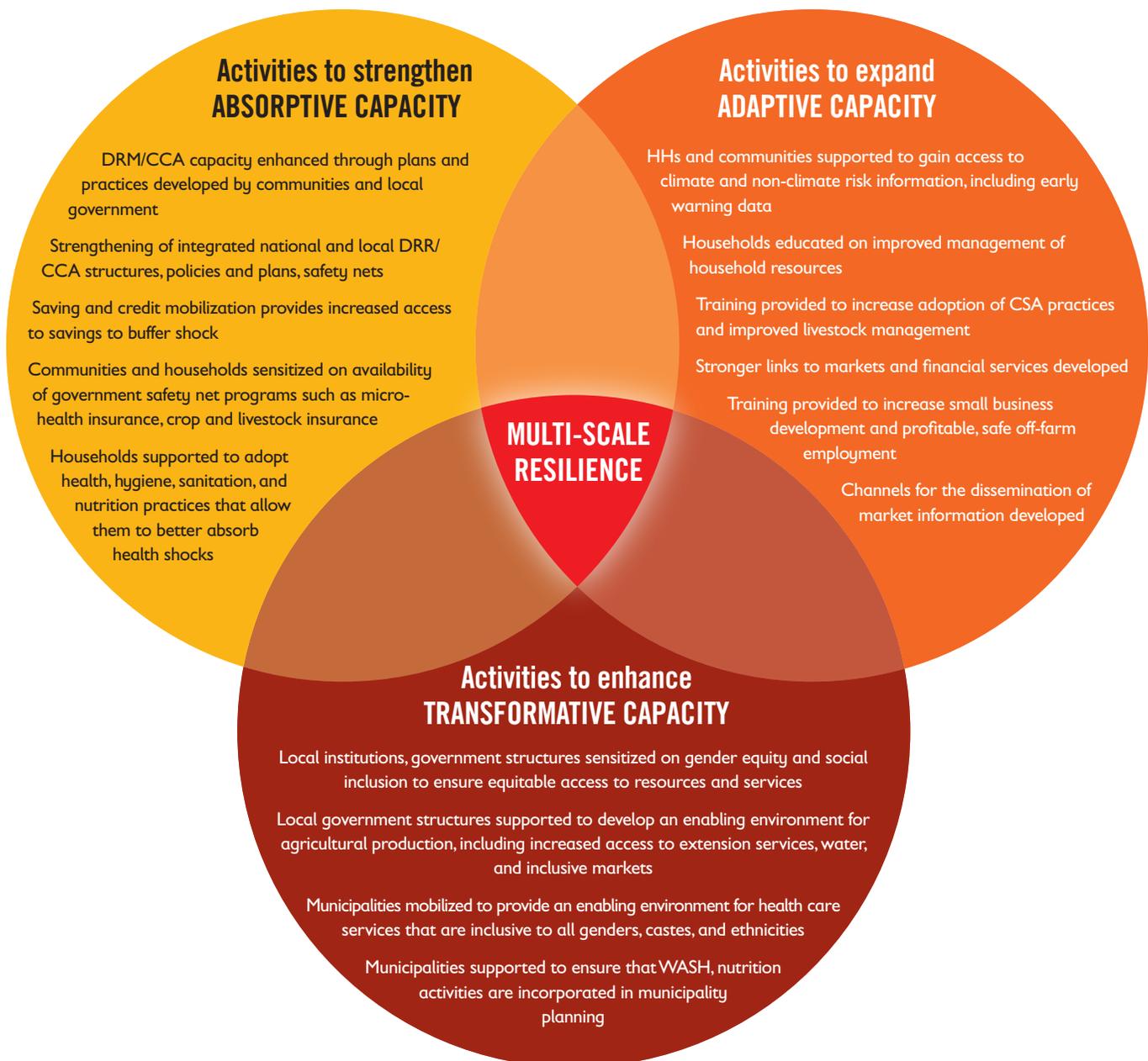
FIGURE 2: Sabal Program Area



By 2017, the Sabal team recognized that a collaborative review and updating of the activity's Theory of Change (TOC) would help the team reflect on these and other contextual changes and apply learning from ongoing monitoring data. Sabal staff then developed an updated stakeholder-mapping matrix and documented which assumptions were holding and which were not. The M&E team also synthesized data from the activity's routine monitoring database, sectoral studies, indicator tracking tables and other resources to ensure that the TOC revision reflected a coherent approach to adaptive management.

Revising the TOC enabled the team to consider gaps in data on resilience capacities and develop tools for filling them as part of a reinvigorated commitment to improve programming through learning. Finally, Sabal used its revised TOC to improve integration and layering of complementary interventions focused on livelihoods, health, nutrition, and climate change adaptation, with disaster risk reduction, gender equity and social inclusion, and environmental safeguarding as crosscutting themes, in a way that contributed to enhanced resilience capacities and sustainable outcomes.

FIGURE 3: From Revised Sabal Theory of Change (2018)





Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. Around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – every day and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

Save the Children USA
501 Kings Highway East, Suite 400
Fairfield, Connecticut 06825
United States
1 (800) 728-3843
www.savethechildren.org

This brief was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Save the Children and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

© Save the Children Federation, Inc.

Cover photo: Ms. Moon Pradhan /
Save the Children