Uncertainty - Practical Steps.
Predictions about shocks and stresses often come with a high degree of uncertainty. It's relatively simple to help a village prepare for more frequent floods. But how do you help people prepare if climate projections suggest there's either going to be 20% more rain or 20% less rain? In many areas, scientific models predict that a significant change is coming – but can't confirm the direction of the change. Violence and economic shocks can also be very difficult to predict.

Some of the things that help households and communities adapt to unforeseen disruptions are:
- **Assets.** People with more assets – income, land, savings, livestock, etc. – are usually better able to deal with unexpected changes. But shocks and stresses often destroy people's assets more quickly than development projects can build them up. So a project that focuses on restoring or increasing assets (i.e. much "normal" relief and development) is not enough.
- **Livelihood strategies** that are **diverse** and **ecologically sustainable**. A household or community with more than one sustainable livelihood strategy can often survive the loss of their main livelihood – as long as their other ones are not exposed to the same shock!
- **Good ecosystem management.** All communities rely on ecological resources such as soil, water, trees, pasture, and/or fish. A healthy ecosystem – for example, a well-managed forest or watershed, whose resources are being used sustainably – will usually absorb unexpected changes. When natural resources are depleted through unsustainable use, however, the fragile ecosystem is more likely to collapse in a shock.
- **Information access.** If households have constant, reliable access to key information – like weather and climate forecasts, market prices, and local environmental indicators – they will be better able to recognize major changes as they start to happen, and start adapting as quickly as possible.
- **Experimentation and learning**. The ability to innovate is critical to adapting to an uncertain future. We need to be careful, though; when NGOs talk about "innovation," we usually mean innovations that *we* think up and introduce. But a community that depends on NGOs for innovation will be much less resilient than one with learning institutions that help people experiment and figure out the right answer for themselves. The *farmer field school* (in which groups of farmers try out various techniques, gather information on the results, and analyse them together) is a good example of an institution that helps real experimentation.
- **Restored relationships and trust.** Broken and exploitative relationships increase people's vulnerability and reduce their ability to respond collectively.
- **Governance.** This includes the community's ability to come together for joint decisions and actions (community governance) as well as their connection to local and national government. Effective, accountable, and flexible governance institutions increase people's ability to respond to unforeseen disruptions.
- **Networks**. People who are reliably connected to people in other parts of the country, region, and world (through e.g. religious networks, international labour migration, or kinship ties) generally have more resources to draw on in a crisis.
- **Contingency planning**. A household or community that is used to jointly planning and preparing for the problems they can foresee may be better able to adapt their plans in the event of an unexpected shock.

We can support all these categories in our programming – indeed, they should give us ideas for integrated solutions that increase resilience to *all kinds* of shocks and stresses. (See the Venn diagram in *Integration: Practical Steps*)