

Assessing systemic community disaster resilience: taking a measured approach to radical transformation

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Embracing radical transformation: The future is now

Perth, Australia



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**FIRE to
FLOURISH** 
Strength through community-led action

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia. This work was created by people living on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boonwurrung Land, and Ngunnawal and Ngambri Land.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.



Strengthening community disaster resilience needs radical transformation

What does this really mean?

Who should be involved?

How might it actually be achieved?

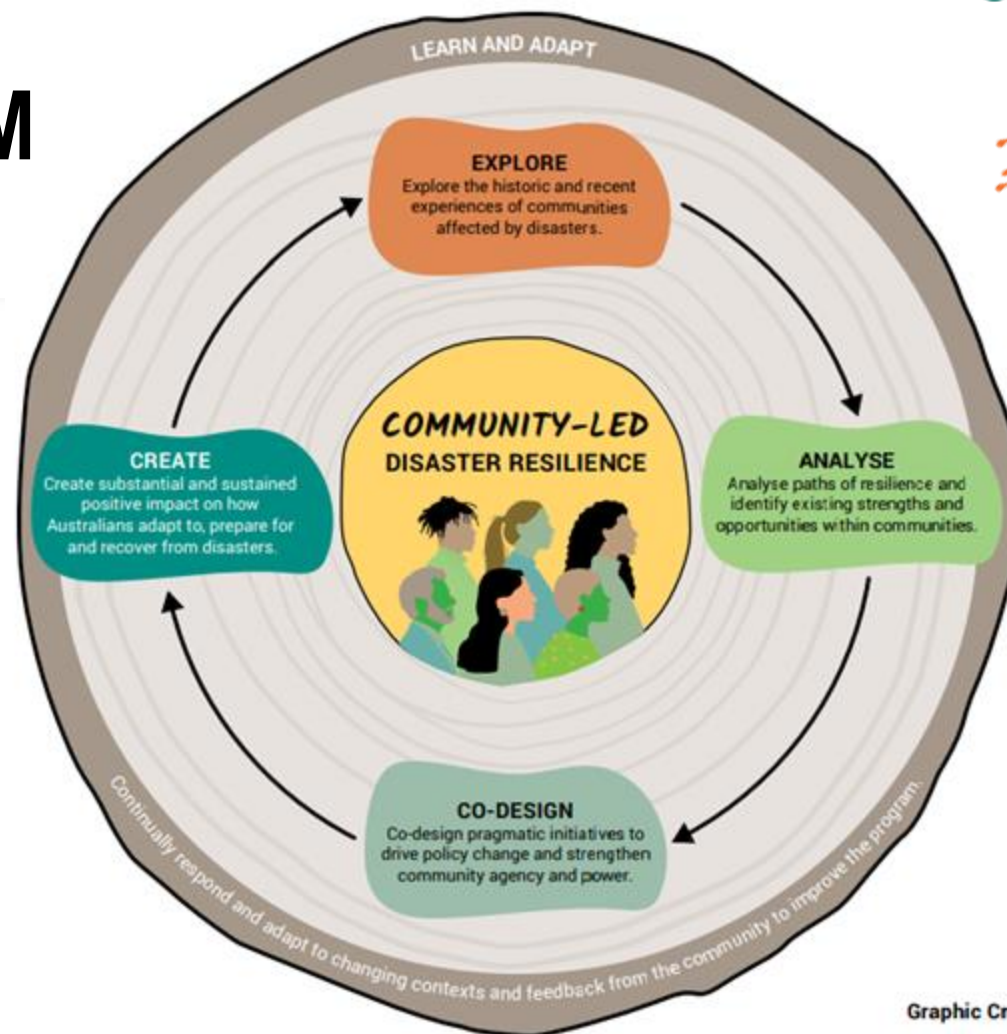
And how do we avoid throwing the baby out with the
bath water?

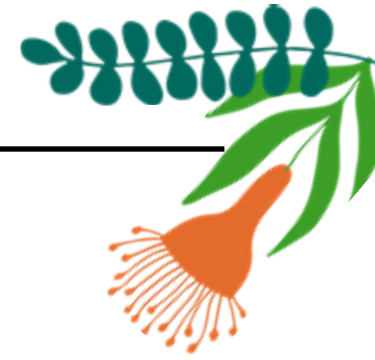


FIRE TO FLOURISH PROGRAM

Our mission is to trial innovations in community-led resilience and influence system changes to support their scaling.

Fire to Flourish was conceived in the aftermath of the 2019/20 bushfires, which exposed the exacerbated impacts of disaster on communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage. Since those fires, we have been working deeply with four severely affected communities to support their recovery and longer-term resilience to climate change.





HOW DO WE DEFINE DISASTER RESILIENCE?

The ability of a system, community, or society to pursue its social, ecological and economic development and growth objectives, while managing its disaster risk over time in a mutually reinforcing way (Keating et al., 2017).



Individual:
Get a degree



Household:
Buy a vehicle

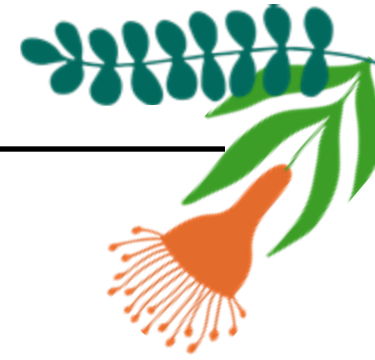


Small business:
Expand production



Community:
Electrify the community

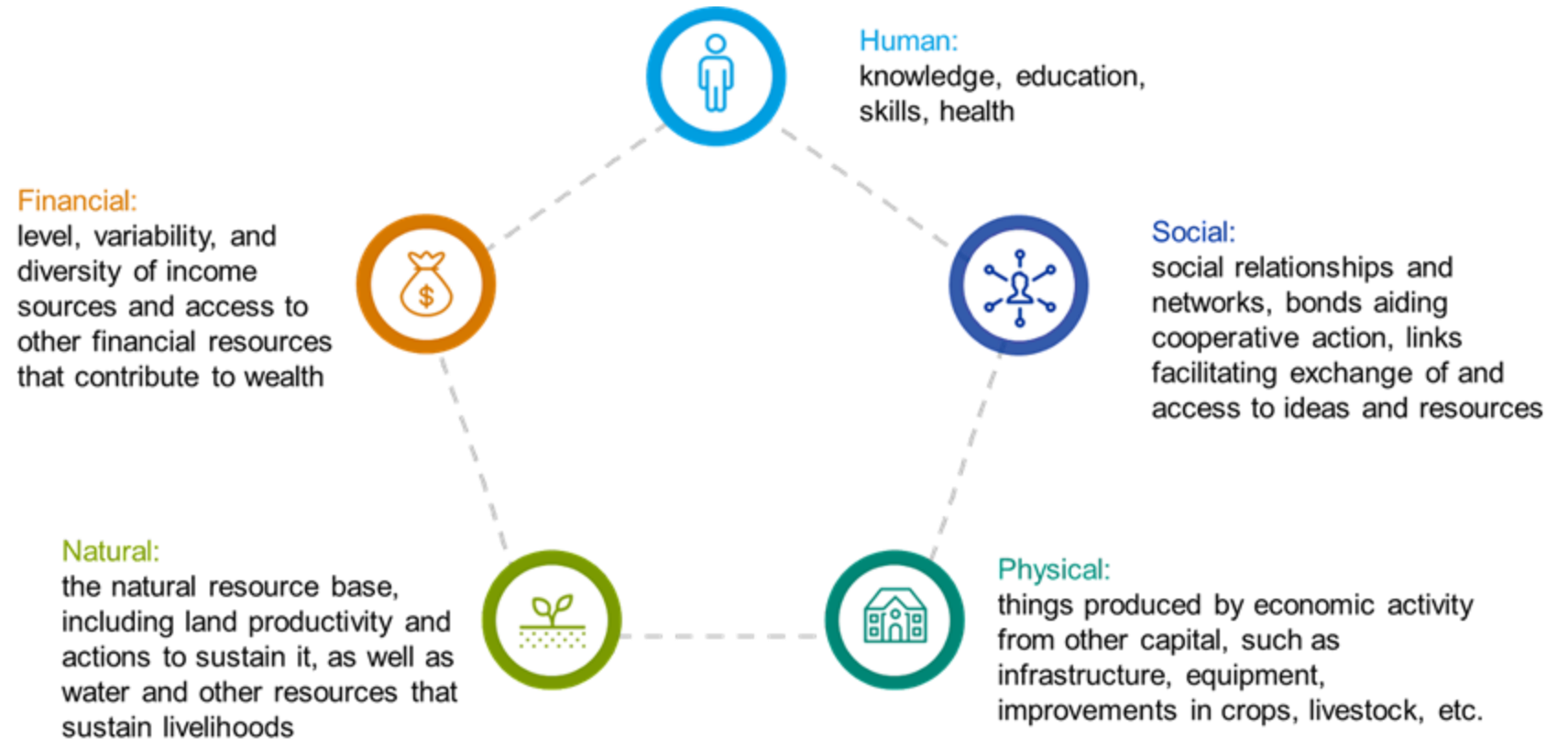
After a disaster event, are the community members going to be able to achieve their goals in their planned timeframes?



DISASTER RESILIENCE - MORE THAN JUST DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

CRMC FRAMEWORK STRUCTURE

5 DOMAINS OF RESILIENCE

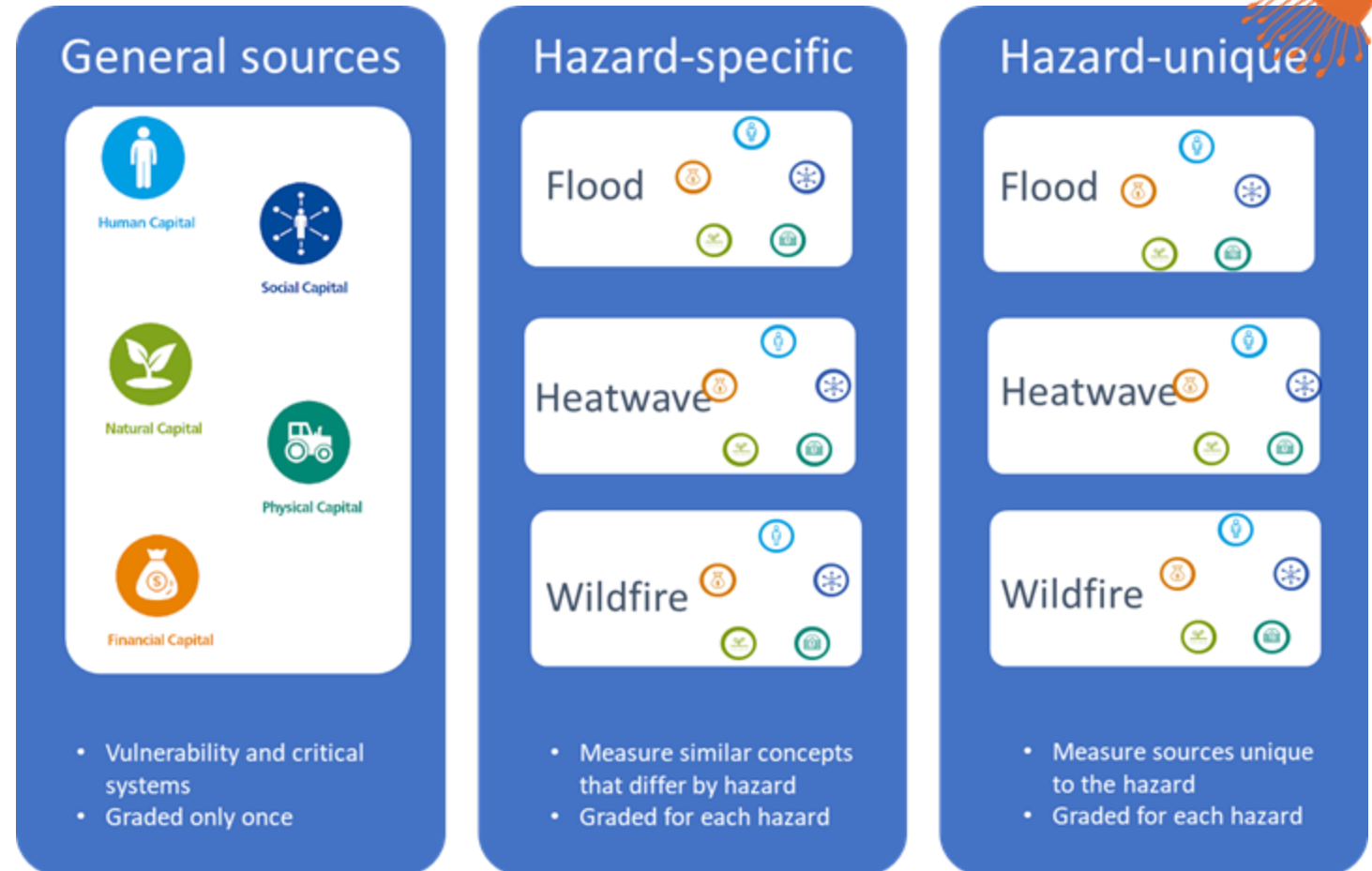




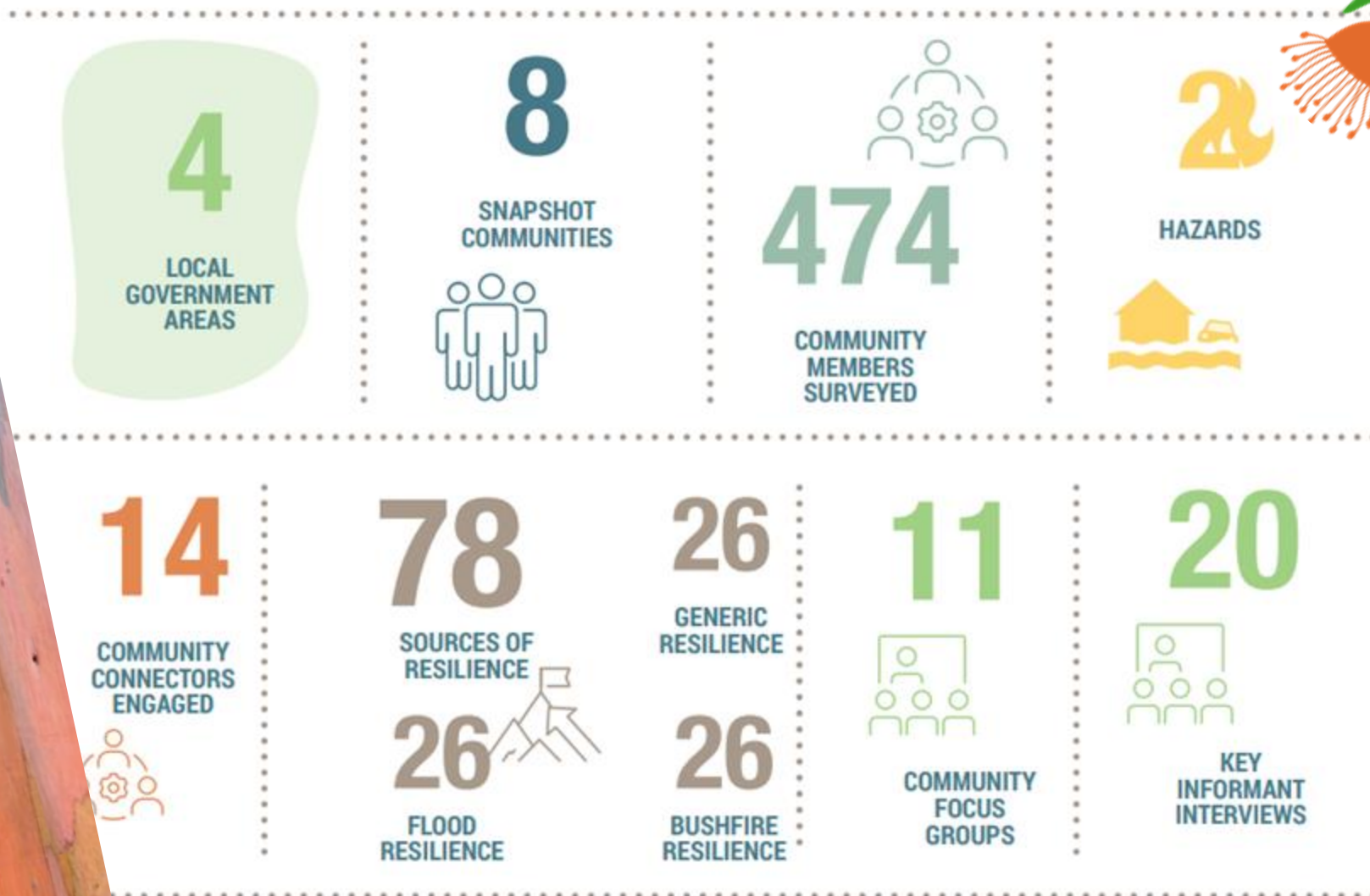
CRMC FRAMEWORK STRUCTURE

INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

- 26 general resilience indicators
- 26 indicators per hazard assessed - wildfire and flood
- indicators assess household, local community and government resilience
- Each indicator scored from A-D
- Monash University worked in partnership with Zurich Flood Alliance to develop indicators for wildfire resilience



OUR PROJECT



Strengthening community disaster resilience needs radical transformation

So, what did we find?

What strengths can be built from?

Where are the critical gaps?





Strong overall patterns

Across all of the eight communities, there were:

- better scores in immediate response capabilities compared with long-term planning
- strong awareness of hazards across communities, but weaker implementation measures such as government investment in critical infrastructure
- better scores for specific hazard responses compared with general resilience measures such as energy, communication and transport systems.



Areas of strength

Highest resilience scores in the:

- Human domain
- Physical domain
- Social capital domain

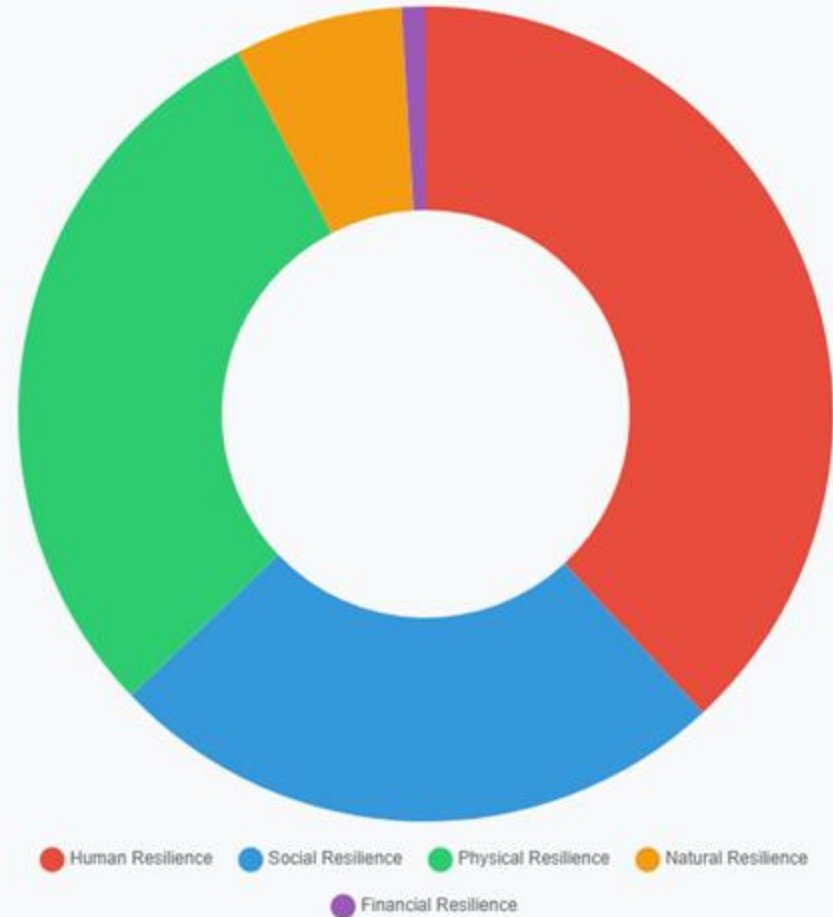
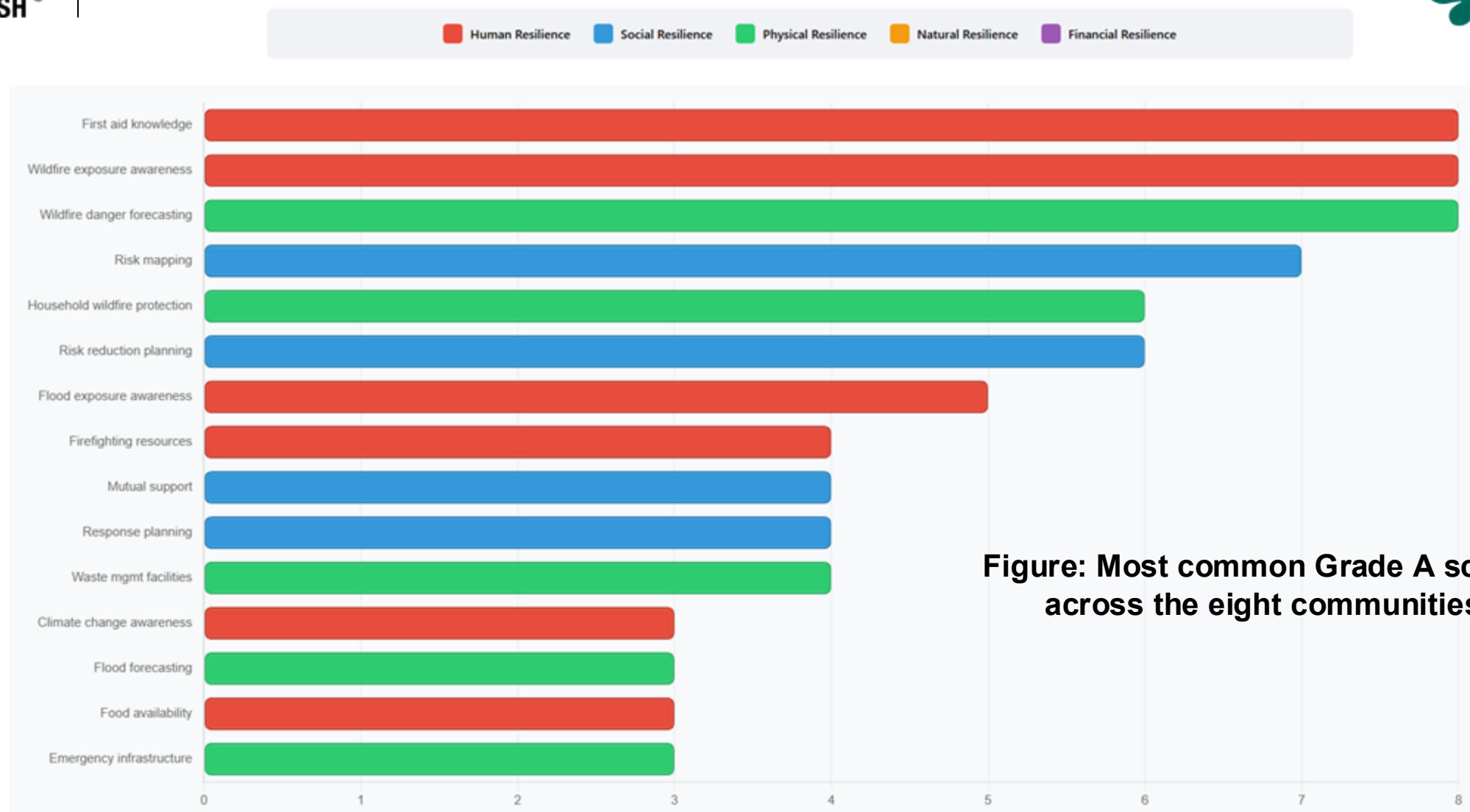


Figure: Grade A scores of all eight communities across resilience domains



**Figure: Most common Grade A scores
across the eight communities**



Areas of strength

- Communities actively prepare for disasters
- Community members know their environment and are taking action where they can
- Community members rely on and trust each other, and have strong trust in the local emergency services

“I just think if we’re going to get better at preparedness and building resilience, there needs to be acknowledgement of the role that community-led initiatives play in our community.”

– Clarence Valley community member

“I think that’s when you have to step in, and with community, start looking after your neighbours. In the long run you’re still part of the one community, and if you don’t look after each other, you’re going to get lost.”

– Tenterfield community member



Areas that can be improved



Figure 1 : Grade C scores of all eight communities across resilience domains

Figure 2 : Grade D scores of all eight communities across resilience domains

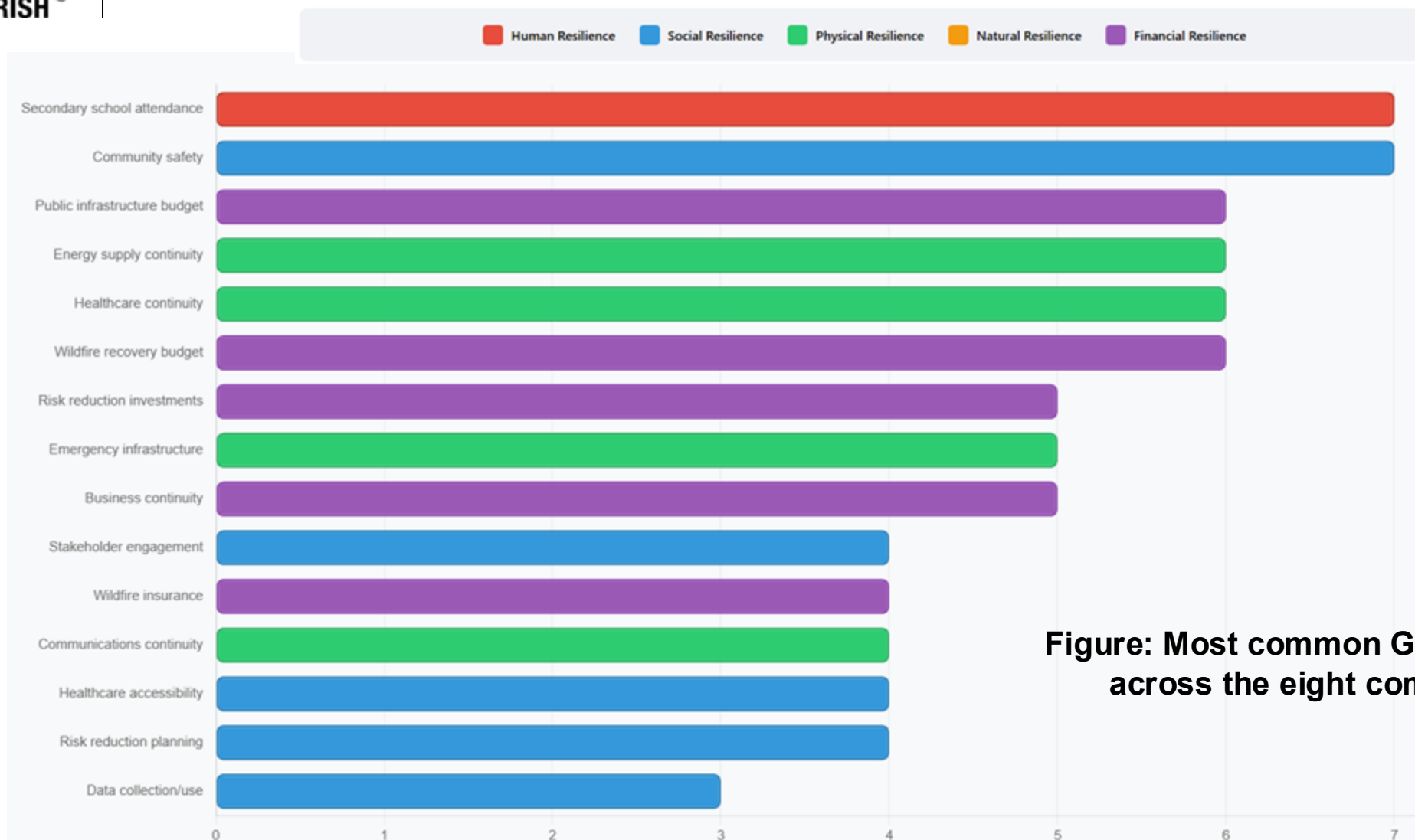


Figure: Most common Grade C scores across the eight communities

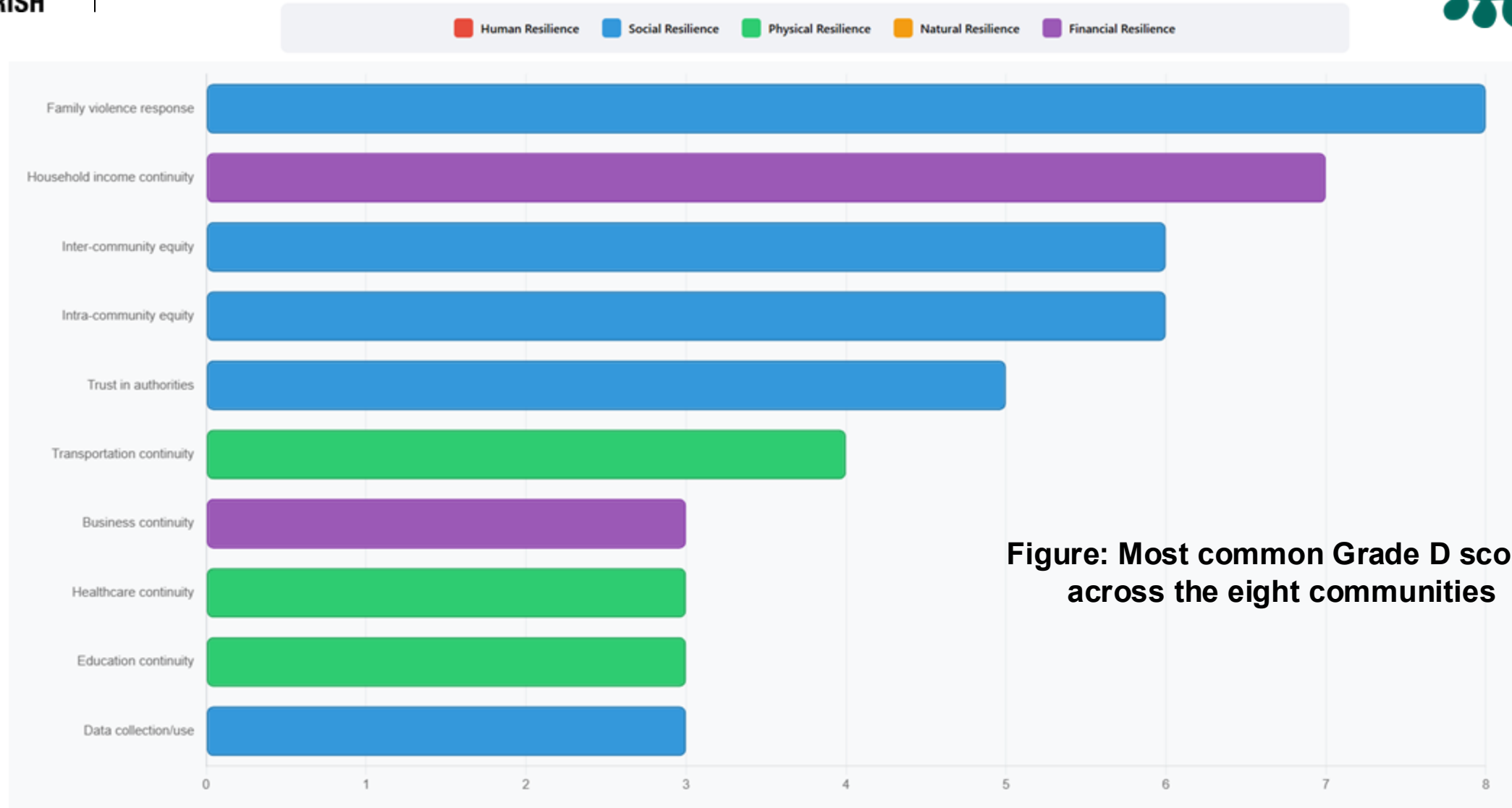
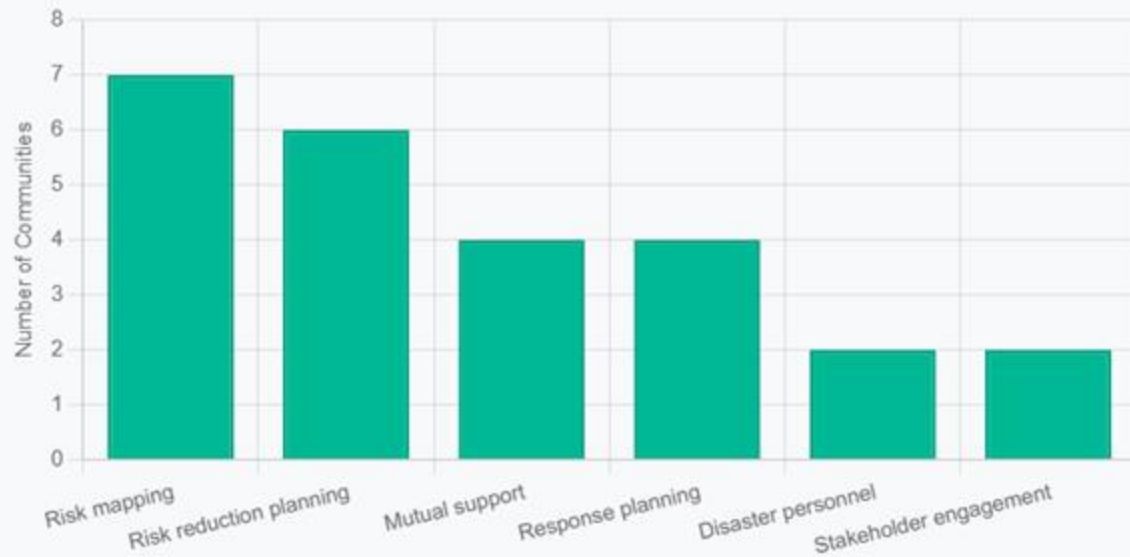


Figure: Most common Grade D scores across the eight communities

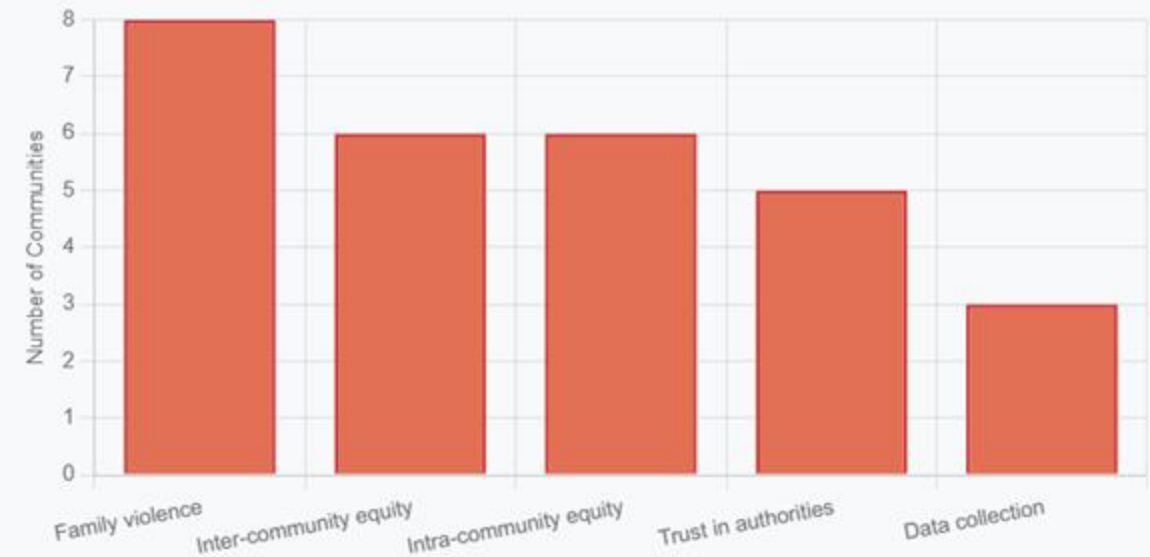


Social capital strengths and gaps

Social Strengths (Grade A)

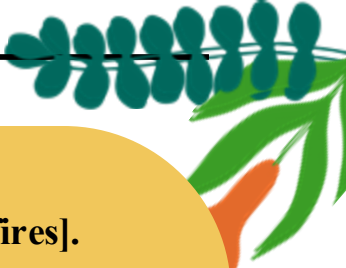


Critical Social Gaps (Grade D)



Areas that can be improved

- Post-disaster service and funding models do not fully meet community needs.
- There has been a lack of systemic investment in critical infrastructure and essential services.
- Government investments in communities are not perceived as equitable or effective.



“We’ve had a lot of our shire impacted [by bushfires]. However, we have a lot of our shire that wasn’t impacted. However, that means that they are at way more at risk for the next one. Now, when you try to apply for funding just for a 45,000 litre static water tank, you can’t get that funding if you haven’t had an impact.”


– East Gippsland community member

“We have services and organisations parachuting in to help with response and with recovery, and they do some great work, but then they withdraw. And some communities are very angry about that. Recovery is not just three months.”

– Clarence Valley community member

More areas that can be improved

- There were low levels of trust in local authorities.
- Local emergency services are stretched, with numbers of volunteers falling
- Emergency planning is not sufficiently responsive to local people and place



“After the 2022 floods, communities were left feeling that they had to take [disaster risk reduction] on. There was a slow realisation that we needed to take control, that we know this area better than anyone else, and we can’t rely on the government to do anything for us.”

– Clarence Valley community member

“[I see] marriage breakdowns, financial hardships, and watch families go through ongoing hardships – these really affect Tenterfield. People are living week to week – people are at breaking point. They are so angry – with no help, with [bush]fires, it’s a real blame game ... Recovery paths are so complex – especially with the effect of compound complex disasters – people have lost their soul.”

– Tenterfield community member

Strengthening community disaster resilience needs radical transformation

Where is radical transformation required?





Where is radical transformation required?

Our findings indicate a need for radical transformation in how cross-society actors collaborate, prioritise and invest.

National and state initiatives and resources should actively enable place-based decision-making and actions.

Top-down structure of decision-making should be avoided, to leverage the strengths that exist in community knowledge and connections.



Who can use this information?

- The eight communities (and the four local governments) that were assessed as part of this project.
 - Other communities, local governments and agencies interested in strengthening disaster resilience in their own areas.
 - Policy makers and funders, looking to design and enable more effective and efficient disaster resilience measures.
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Reflections on the project

- We have demonstrated that disaster resilience can be meaningfully measured at a community scale to directly inform local priorities and actions.
- We saw many strong examples of community members and grassroots organisations doing everything they can to increase their community disaster resilience.
- Participating in the resilience assessment process helps build resilience in itself.
- An implementation approach tailored for local context is essential.
- The results are already empowering communities in their decision-making processes.

THANK YOU

Sign up to Fire to Flourish
newsletter for updates here:



Learn more about Fire to
Flourish's growing body of
knowledge here:



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Fire to Flourish is a five-year transdisciplinary program working at the intersection of disaster resilience and community development. In partnership with communities affected by the 2019/20 Australian bushfire season, Fire to Flourish aims to support communities to lead their own recovery, co-create foundations for long-term resilience and wellbeing, and disrupt cycles of entrenched disadvantage. The program will trial and scale innovations in community-led resilience, amplified through partnerships with government, philanthropic, not-for-profit and private sector organisations.

A partnership between:



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