PART IV: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Review, Assessment, and Action

This is the final video in our series. In it, I'll review what we've covered and then suggest a way of applying what we've learned through a community resilience assessment and action plan.

As we've seen, we live in a social-ecological system that is not on a sustainable path and is increasingly vulnerable to what we have called the "E4" crises—energy, ecology, economy, and equity. Climate change has implications across all four of those domains, making it the meta-crisis of our time. Building the resilience of our society will entail significant changes in human systems. And that will consist not of a series of band-aids, but systems thinking and systemic change that understands the historical roots of immediate crises and also responds to changing conditions, contexts, and feedbacks.

We've seen that resilience and sustainability are different but equally useful concepts. Resilience has to do with adaptability to real or potential disturbance, and with the *process* of how we manage the systems we care about. Sustainability has to do with becoming less disturbance-prone in the first place, and with our ability to survive and thrive on an ongoing basis.

The variety and scale of the challenges facing nature and society in the 21st century can seem overwhelming. That's part of why we suggest focusing efforts at the community level. The community is likely the most accessible and fruitful site for intervention.

So, what to do with all this information? There are many ways to get involved in building community resilience. Every action you take makes a difference one way or the other, and, if you give some thought to it, you can

find actions big and small that will work for you, given your interests, skills, and opportunities. These may be at the personal level, the neighborhood level, the community level, or in the national arena. In any case, you'll find helpful resources at resilience.org/act.

If you're really keen to apply what you have learned here, one way to do so might be to design and implement a ***community resilience assessment***. Why an assessment? It's important to understand a system as much as possible before intervening in it.

Designing a resilience assessment requires answering a few key questions. First, *resilience of what*? What's the system you're interested in? What's its boundary? Is it an ecosystem? A city? A neighborhood? Your university? An organization? If it's a human system, what are its interactions with natural systems? What are its resource flows, its dependencies and impacts?

A resilience assessment for a community, if it's not just an academic exercise and is meant to lead to implementation, has to be undertaken with the consent and involvement of the community. So at the very earliest stages of the assessment, you'll need to start talking to people. But who? Well, we'll get to that in a moment.

Another key question: What's the source of the identity of this system? If it's an ecosystem, its identity may arise from climate, topography, soil types, and key species and their interactions. But assuming it's a human system, you may need to engage in many conversations or undertake a formal survey to get an idea of what makes a particular community unique, and what therefore needs to persist as the community adapts and transforms itself.

Next important question: Resilience to what? What are the most likely foreseeable disturbances? Are there particular uncertainties regarding resource flows or climate? What are the vulnerabilities not only of the system as a whole, but of subsystems and components?

Then: If it's a human system, how is it governed? Who makes decisions and how? Who are the stakeholders? Who is often left out? This helps inform you who should be involved in the assessment, and who are at least some of the people you should be talking to. Among other things, the assessment should seek to reveal how *adaptable* the governance system itself is. Building resilience may require action on the part of the governance system, and it may also require change in its design, composition, or rules.

What are likely cross-scale interactions? Every system is comprised of subsystems, and every system is part of a larger system. Are subsystems approaching critical thresholds? Are changes in larger systems likely to spill over to impact or overwhelm the system that you are interested in?

What are the opportunities available to build sustainability and adaptability? And who are potential allies to resilience-building projects? That is, who in the community is already working on sustainability and resilience issues generally; and who is working on the key vulnerabilities that you have identified?

Synthesize and share your findings, and work with the community to identify and focus on one or more specific projects. Remember: resilience assessments are a snapshot in time. Plan to revisit the assessment process at key stages as your project evolves.

The next step will be to develop a ***resilience action plan*** and get started implementing it. As you intervene in systems, proceed by Hippocrates' famous dictum: First, do no harm.

Work with the community to decide, based on your assessment,

- What needs to be done?
- Who should do what and when?
- With what resources?
- When can it be done?
- What are the expected results?

That's the essence of your action plan.

Well, good luck, and stay in touch. Post Carbon Institute aims to provide an increasing array of tools to help resilience practitioners, including our daily-updated website Resilience.org. Please let us know if and how this video series was useful to you, or how it could be improved. And please let us know about your community resilience plans and projects.