Sustaining health system resilience in extreme circumstances: insights from key informant interviews with UNRWA staff across Gaza and Lebanon during the COVID-19 pandemic

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UNRWA case study

Aim: to better understand what sustains health system resilience and to appraise how effective and equitable service delivery was during the COVID-19 period in Gaza and Lebanon using the example of the UNRWA health system in each setting

Ph credit: @UNRWA

Methods and settings

47 interviews with professionals at headquarter, field, area and clinic level.

Monitoring of the response and routine care delivery context for UNRWA.
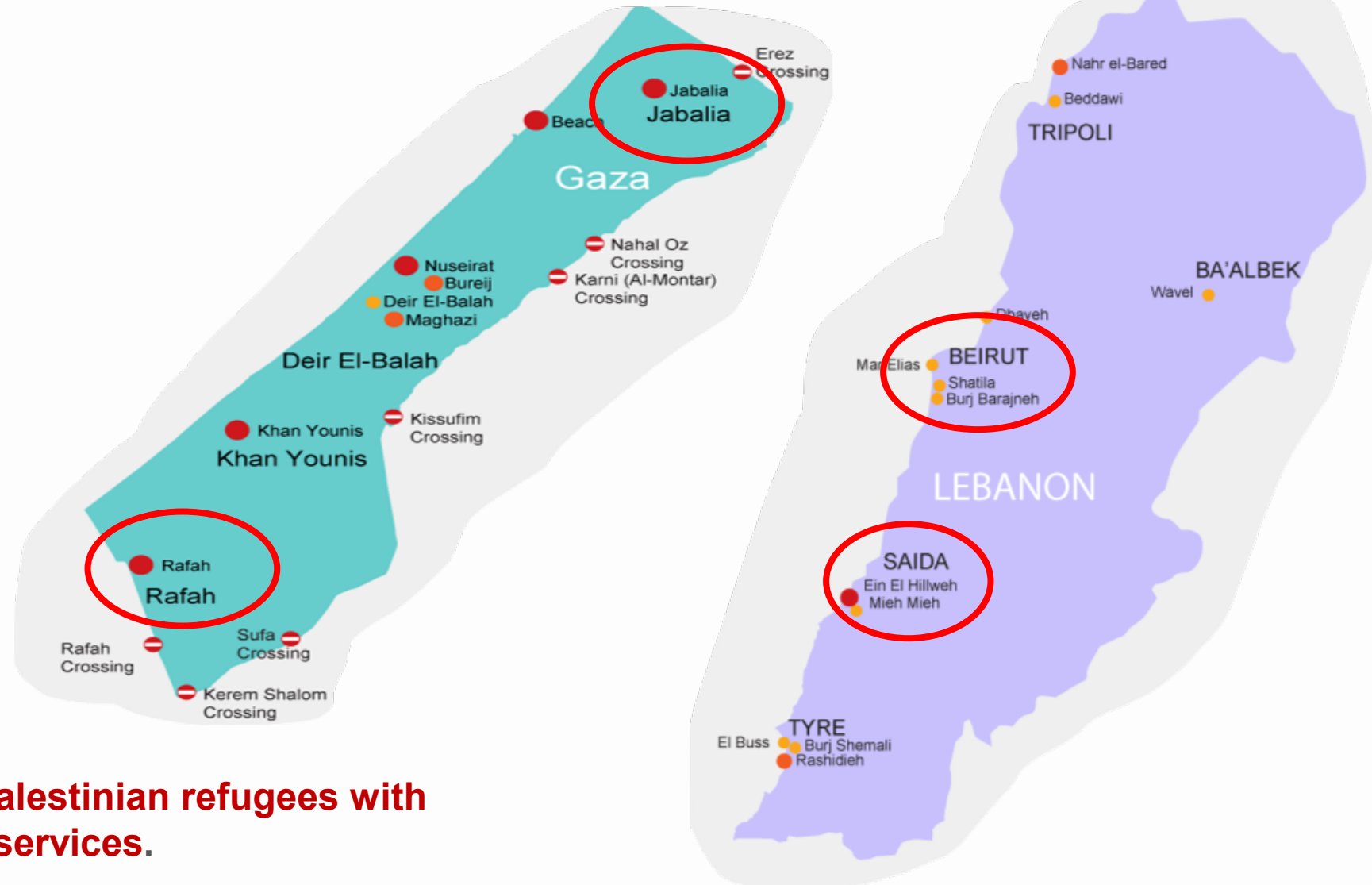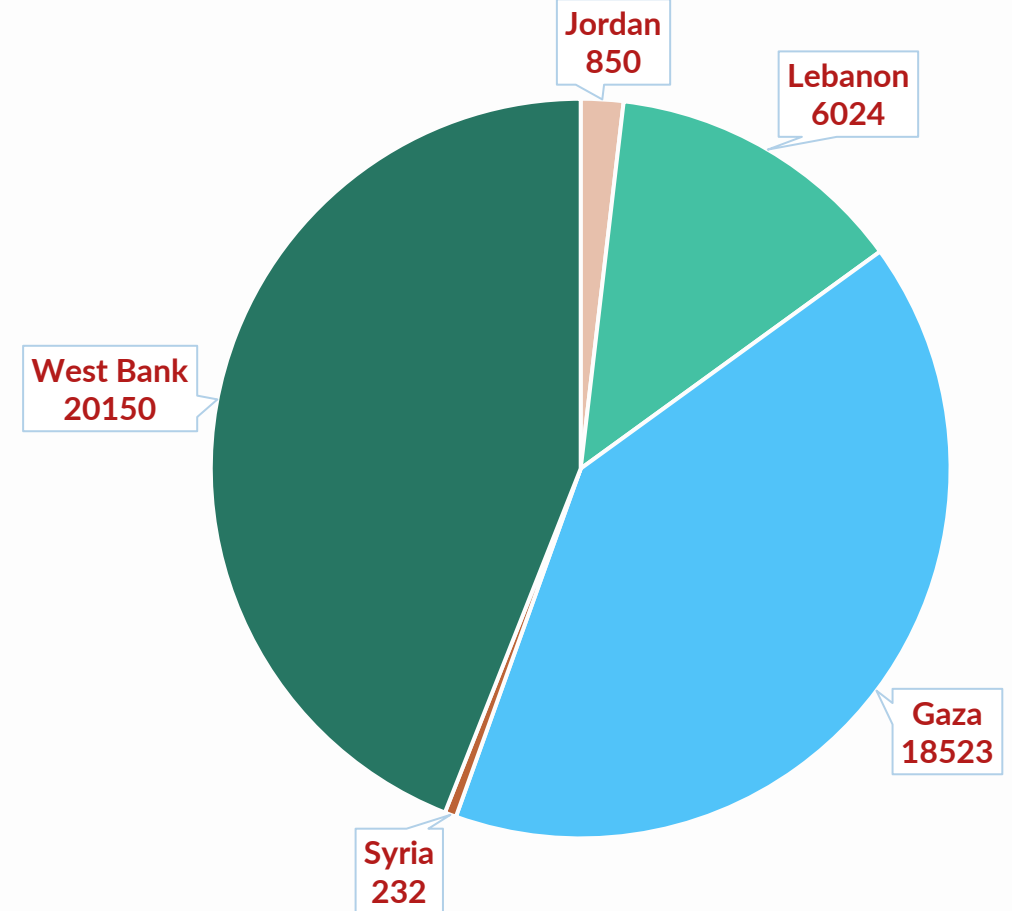
UNRWA supports 5.7 million Palestinian refugees with primary health care and other services.

Context mapping and overview of COVID-19 situation in UNRWA settings (up to March 2021)

Public health recommendations (number of weeks issued)
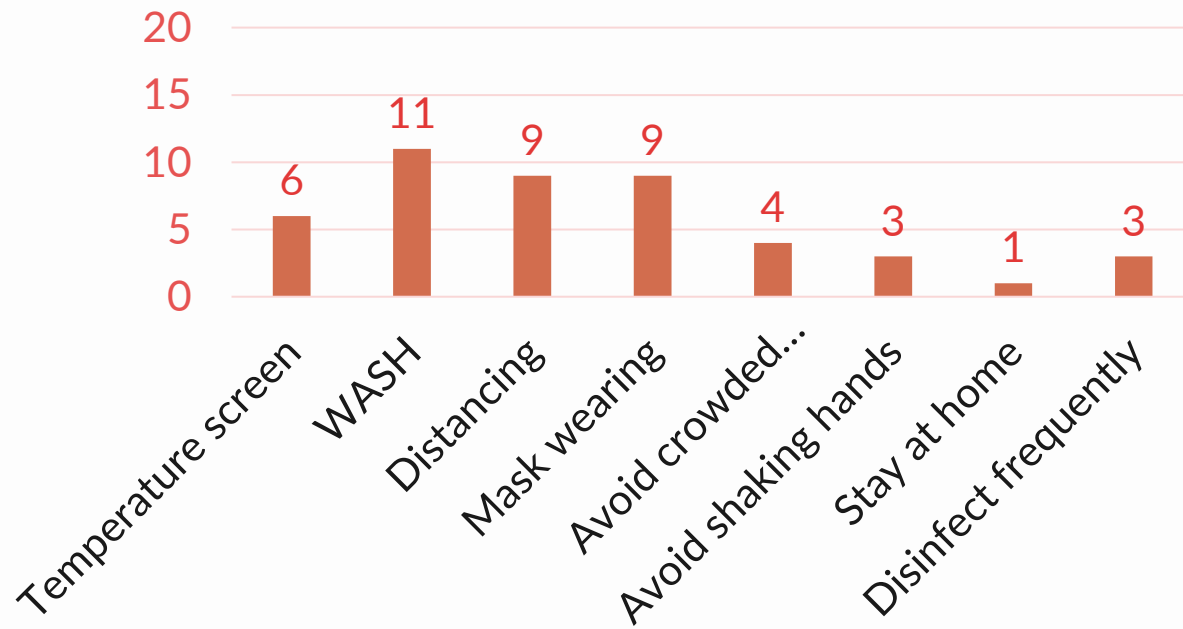
Total COVID-19 cases among Palestine refugees

Jordan 850
Lebanon 6024
West Bank 20150
Gaza 18523
Syria 232

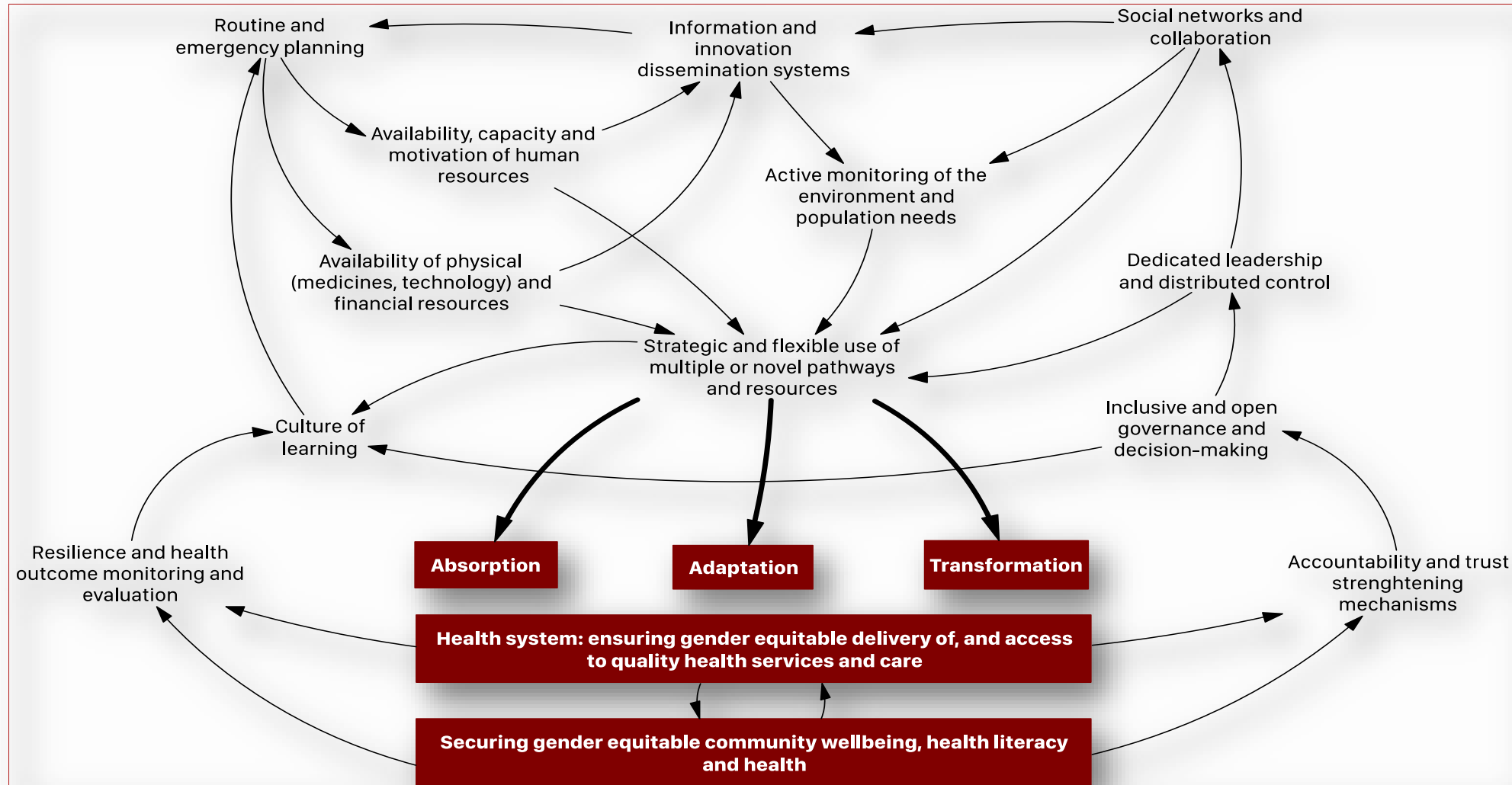# A framework for understanding health system resilience

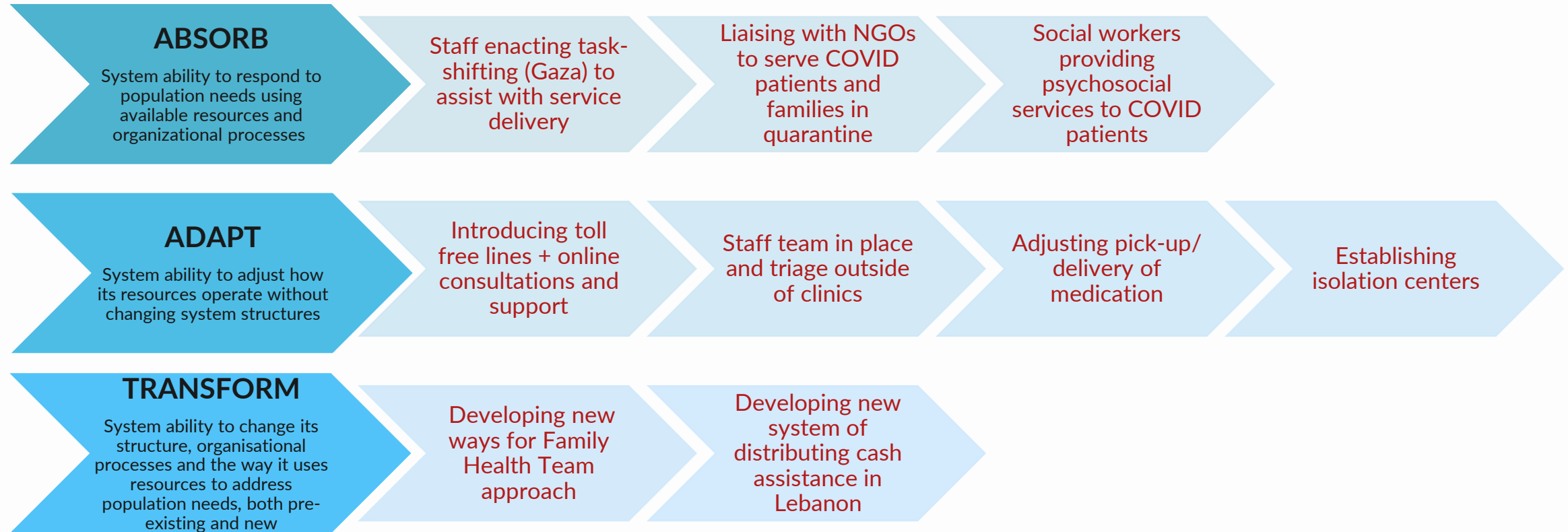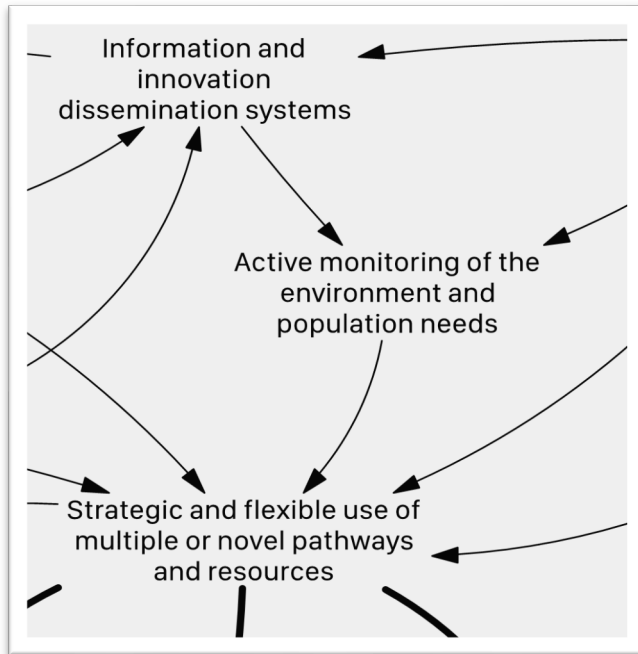*Figure: Resilience framework, ReBUILD for Resilience 2020*

Main resilience responses enacted in the health system

ABSORB
System ability to respond to population needs using available resources and organizational processes

- Staff enacting task-shifting (Gaza) to assist with service delivery
- Liaising with NGOs to serve COVID patients and families in quarantine
- Social workers providing psychosocial services to COVID patients

ADAPT
System ability to adjust how its resources operate without changing system structures

- Introducing toll free lines + online consultations and support
- Staff team in place and triage outside of clinics
- Adjusting pick-up/ delivery of medication
- Establishing isolation centers

TRANSFORM
System ability to change its structure, organisational processes and the way it uses resources to address population needs, both pre-existing and new

- Developing new ways for Family Health Team approach
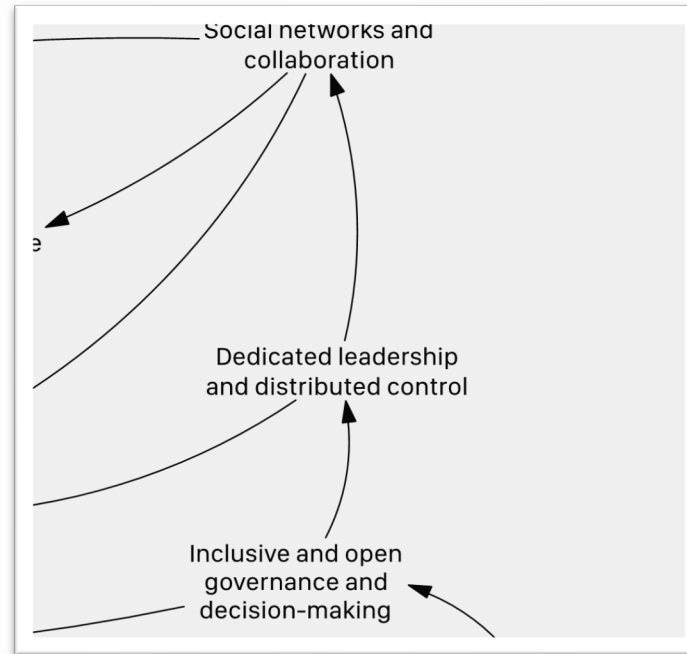- Developing new system of distributing cash assistance in Lebanon

Challenges and enablers of UNRWA health system resilience during COVID-19


Enabler: information systems capturing needed information

Example: Hotline to listen to population's concerns, needs, receive feedback and modify the process

Enabler: Strong staff links, inclusivity and distributed control helps make informed quick decisions

Example: Views from area and field level rapidly inform decision-making (e.g. decision to repurpose school space into medical points)
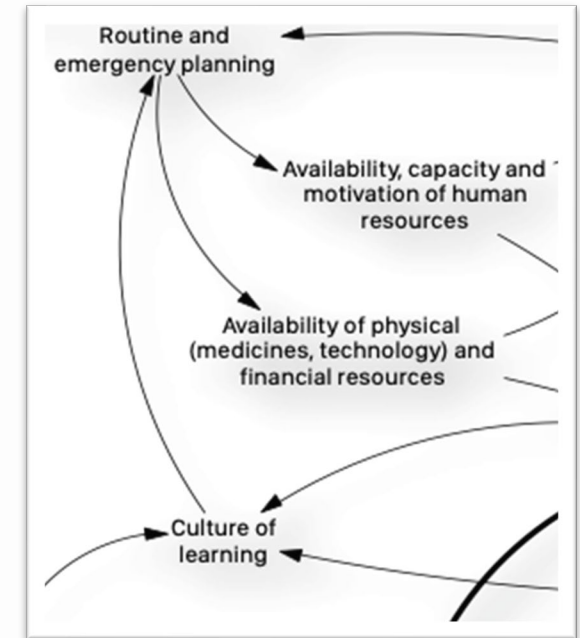
Challenge: Reliance on donors and lack of compensation for additional risk

Example: Need to seek funding via flash appeals to support health staff

Recommendations

- **Strengthen all the diverse underlying capacities** that sustain health system resilience

- **Collaborative structures and networks** which can implement, review and revise plans as necessary

- A **culture of learning**, rewarding employee **innovation in service delivery** and allowing **real-time adjustment of responses**

- Demonstrating **compassion** towards beneficiary populations, **providing services consistently** and **being responsive to community needs**

Thank you

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