

'Trade-offs' between wellbeing and resilience

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There can be "trade-offs" between increasing human wellbeing and improving the resilience of societies and ecosystems, researchers say.

Wellbeing and resilience to [environmental changes](#) are key goals of sustainable development, and they are often seen as linked or even

interchangeable terms.

But a new paper—by an international team of researchers and development organizations, led by the University of Exeter and Lancaster University—says the two don't always go hand in hand.

This is especially the case if [wellbeing](#) and resilience are understood too simplistically—but appreciation of the complex links between the concepts can help to find win-win scenarios.

"We want to highlight the vital distinctions and connections between wellbeing and resilience ahead of the COP26 UN climate change conference in Glasgow next week so that policies can be better designed and ensure that addressing the climate crisis does not harm people's wellbeing and livelihoods," said lead author Dr. Tomas Chaigneau, of the Environment and Sustainability Institute on Exeter's Penryn Campus in Cornwall.

Nathaniel Matthews, one of the co-authors and CEO of the Global Resilience Partnership, said: "Wellbeing and resilience both feature heavily in policy targets, especially those relating to sustainable development.

"Assuming that the two automatically go together is not helpful. When this mistake is made, it is often the poorest and most marginalized people who suffer."

Dr. Chaigneau added: "For example, after the 2004 Asian tsunami, new legislation in India and Sri Lanka prevented homes and businesses being rebuilt close to the coast, in order to create buffer zones and build resilience to future tsunamis.

"This forced people who depended on the sea for economic, cultural and

social reasons to move to isolated villages inland, undermining wellbeing in diverse ways.

"If these trade-offs had been thought through more thoroughly, then measures to ameliorate them could have been implemented alongside them.

"Our website (navigating-complexity.com/home) provides an opportunity to explore some of these complex trade-offs."

Dr. Chaigneau also said that understanding and pursuing wellbeing in simple economic terms is driving the climate crisis, and therefore undermining resilience in potentially devastating ways.

Professor Christina Hicks, of Lancaster University, said: "If we are to build long-term resilience, while addressing contemporary environmental challenges, it is vital we pay attention to an inclusive vision of [human wellbeing](#)."

The research team—which includes Northumbria University, the Stockholm Resilience Center, the Global Resilience Partnership and Practical Action—say a more inclusive interpretation of the concepts can lead to better outcomes for people and the planet.

"A narrow focus on achieving resilience and wellbeing locally and in the near future, can lead to trade-offs elsewhere or in the future. We need to consider resilience and wellbeing at regional and global levels, and on timescales spanning generations," Dr. Chaigneau said.

"Responding to extremes in hot or cold temperature changes linked to climate change through [air conditioning](#) or central heating, for example, might improve human wellbeing and may even enhance our household resilience to such environmental and climatic changes, but in the long

term, it can exacerbate climate change and won't be good for either.

"We need to think of wellbeing and resilience as processes rather than simple outcomes.

"We hope our paper will provide food for thought ahead of the vital COP26 talks."

The paper, published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, is entitled: "Reconciling wellbeing and [resilience](#) for sustainable development."

More information: Tomas Chaigneau, Reconciling well-being and resilience for sustainable development, *Nature Sustainability* (2021).

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