



INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

Op-ed

Why Building Global Resilience Is the Best Investment We Can Make Now

By Buyelwa Sonjica

The 21st century has ushered in an era marked by unprecedented challenges, from the existential threat of climate change and the destabilising effects of economic inequality to the proliferation of cyber threats and the recurring spectres of pandemics and geopolitical tensions. These intricate crises have laid bare the frailties in our interconnected world, underscoring the imperative for cohesive and robust strategies. As we navigate this complex landscape, it becomes increasingly clear that international responses must be recalibrated to address these urgent needs more effectively.

Resilience isn't merely about bouncing back; it's a vital quality that enables societies to evolve stronger in global crises such as climate change, economic instability, and pandemics. It's intrinsically linked to societal fragility, a dynamic condition influenced by governance, political stability, and social cohesion. Building resilience is a long-term commitment that requires a layered approach to surviving challenges and fundamentally transforming systems for future preparedness.

A significant issue stems from how international solutions are structured: isolated clusters with minimal interconnectivity. Even more concerning is the fact that the UN Security Council, the sole UN body with the authority to issue binding decisions to member states, is poorly equipped to address some of humanity's gravest threats—particularly those that don't necessitate military intervention. For instance, it could provide a unique platform to discuss vexing issues such as how to bridge the gap between the haves and the have-nots; how to end poverty, a matter that had alluded the world for time immemorial. This incongruity casts doubt on the efficacy of international governance systems and underscores the need for more holistic and flexible frameworks capable of addressing long-term, multifaceted challenges.

In addition, the limitations of existing global structures are symptomatic of a more significant issue: the inability of existing international institutions to adapt to a rapidly changing global environment. The focus on state-centric issues and military interventions often overlooks the root causes of fragility, such as economic inequality, social injustice, and environmental degradation, which require multi-sectoral and long-term strategies.

Consequently, the rise of new international groups like BRICS underscores a critical point: when nations feel underrepresented or believe that existing institutions are failing, they seek alternative platforms to achieve their objectives. BRICS aims to amplify voices from the Global South in international forums and reform critical international financial institutions, making them more representative and responsive to the challenges confronting developing economies.

Far from being a mere contest for influence with Western economies, these developments reveal that developing countries perceive the current phase of globalisation as inherently risky. This strategy is

intrinsically tied to the concept of resilience, both at local and international levels. By seeking to minimise economic vulnerabilities and create more robust financial systems, these nations are taking proactive steps to build resilience outside existing institutions. This is a clear example of how resilience is not just a local issue but a global imperative, requiring coordinated efforts and diversified strategies to navigate the complexities of today's world.

While the UN Security Council plays a crucial role in global politics, the international community must create institutions that further concentrate on the underlying structural conditions contributing to societal fragility stemming from deeper issues within communities and nations.

The Foundation for Global Governance and Sustainability has been championing the establishment of a Global Resilience Council (GRC) under the auspices of the UN. This proposed entity is designed to unify various agencies, stakeholders, and sectors under a single framework. Its mission is to facilitate long-term planning, acknowledging that resilience-building is a multifaceted, enduring, and cross-sectoral endeavour. It seeks to shift the focus from predominantly militarised solutions to fragility, concentrating instead on the structural and long-term conditions that enable fragile nations to build resilience. A sort of security council for non-military issues, albeit a more democratic and representative structure.

This initiative represents a significant step towards adopting a more systematic approach to addressing fragility, reducing the reliance on security approaches and focusing on addressing common human security challenges. It aims to enhance coordination among multi-sectoral strategies and bolster the international community's capacity to comprehend the interconnectedness of coordinated efforts for building resilient societies. Rather than viewing resilience through the narrow lenses of development, economics, or military strategy alone, the Council encourages us to see it as part of intricate systems that demand equally complex solutions.

It could serve as a nexus for diverse local, national, regional, and international actors. The Council could facilitate more effective national planning, support articulating a coherent societal vision for the future, and advocate for global strategies that transcend traditional, simplistic, and linear paradigms.

Established organisations like the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, and the African Development Bank have already laid the groundwork. Their strategies and insights offer valuable lessons for the proposed Global Resilience Council. Existing approaches focus on critical areas such as legitimate politics, security, and economic foundations, stressing the importance of nationally-led assessments and coherent planning. Their comprehensive tools could significantly inform the Council's agenda.

A decade ago, the African Development Bank's High-Level Panel on Resilience offered a multi-faceted strategy that remains relevant today. It highlighted the need for regional frameworks to tackle transnational challenges like climate change and called for inclusive governance to build trust between states and citizens. These recommendations align closely with the Global Resilience Council's objectives and offer a blueprint for moving beyond short-term solutions.

Incorporating these insights can make the GRC more practical and grounded in reality. The international community needs to move beyond rhetoric and effectively assist in fostering the inherent resilience within communities, advocating for a multi-layered approach that coordinates community, state, and regional efforts.

The GRC presents an innovative approach to some of the most pressing challenges of our time. However, its success will depend on clearly defining its mandate and securing political will. As we

contemplate the future of global governance, let's remember that resilience is not just about weathering storms; it's about transforming our systems to be better prepared for the challenges ahead. The Council could be a significant step in that direction.

In a world where challenges are increasingly transnational, the GRC could serve as the vehicle for a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future, but it will require careful planning and collective will to make it effective.

Buyelwa Sonjica is the Chairperson of the Inclusive Society Institute's Advisory Council. This article builds on the speech he made at the 'Inclusive Governance for a Peaceful and Resilient World conference', held in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023.