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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Pandemic Response and Mutual Aid as Climate Resilience: Learning From Community Responses in the Boston Area

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ABSTRACT

Community responses to the impacts of COVID-19 in working-class communities of color in the Boston area are examples of resilience in action. Building climate resilience is not just about hardening physical infrastructure but also about strengthening social and civic infrastructure to reach and protect the most vulnerable. This article explores the lessons learned from the pandemic for more equitable approaches to climate resilience. We find that community-based organizations and networks are building social capital through mutual aid networks rooted in solidarity, care, and reciprocity and forging new collaborations with government, funders, and service providers. These social capacities have saved lives and can also help transform the systems that produce vulnerabilities and inequities in the first place. Our overarching conclusion is that resilience is rooted in our abilities to work together, mobilize resources, and take care of one another.

INTRODUCTION

Before the pandemic, GreenRoots had been organizing residents against disproportionate environmental burdens for more than 20 years in Chelsea, Massachusetts, a predominantly working-class Latinx community. On March 11, 2020, 2 days before the pandemic shutdown in Massachusetts, GreenRoots convened a call with 15 stakeholders to begin coordinating emergency response among community, nonprofit, and governmental partners. That group continued meeting for the next 65 consecutive days and became the Chelsea Pandemic Response Team with 75 people and 10 working groups. This early coordination helped Chelsea transform from having the highest per capita rates of COVID-19 in Massachusetts in the early months of the pandemic (Massachusetts Department of Health, 2020) to a model for pandemic response, achieving some of the highest rates of vaccination among working-class immigrant communities in the United States.

This community-led pandemic response in Chelsea and other working-class communities of color in the Boston area was not just heroic, but an example of resilience in action. Though GreenRoots was not a service agency and had no previous experience in emergency response, they stepped up to catalyze citywide action by drawing on their deep relationships with

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vulnerable populations and previous collaborations with government, service agencies, hospitals, and funders. The social capital that they had been building was mobilized as a form of resilience to weather the pandemic storm. Those who want to advance equitable approaches to climate resilience can learn much from these grassroots community responses to the pandemic.

COVID pandemic disruptions to housing, employment, health, and access to services are very similar to climate change impacts (such as flooding, severe storms, and extreme heat). Whether responding to climate change or a pandemic, communities must rely on their social and civic infrastructure to reach and protect the most vulnerable. This social approach to resilience goes beyond narrow engineering conceptions of resilience that focus on hardening physical infrastructure to “bounce back” to normal. Rather, these communities are building resilience to “bounce forward” and transform the systems that produce vulnerabilities and inequitable impacts in the first place. The pandemic exposed long-standing structural inequities and systemic gaps in government and nonprofit services that make historically marginalized communities extremely vulnerable to a public health crisis or to being hit first and worst by climate change.

In this article, we explore lessons learned from the pandemic for climate resilience and justice, based on a set of interviews and group discussions with 22 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Boston metropolitan area. These interviewees provided a remarkable range and depth of response. La Colaborativa, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI), and VietAID turned their buildings into food pantries, serving thousands of families each week. Mutual Aid Eastie delivered 5,000 meals a week at the height of the shutdown. New relief funds were created, such as the MassUndocuFund that channeled more than $1.5 million to 3,400 undocumented workers and their families. The Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition brought 1,200 people out to the first weekend of mass COVID testing in Roxbury. In Chelsea, La Colaborativa and GreenRoots mobilized health ambassadors to do door-to-door and on-street outreach. CBOs provided hands-on support in multiple languages to assist residents and local businesses in accessing government aid. These responses stretched these organizations beyond their regular operations and capacities. They took on the challenge because they are rooted in an ethic of care for and solidarity with their communities.

A deeper understanding of these grassroots responses can help practitioners from CBOs, government, service providers, and funders to advance more equitable climate crisis response and resilience strategies. We begin by reviewing approaches to defining resilience and examine social resilience, equity, and mutual aid. Then, we describe our methods and community partners. Next, we detail stories of pandemic response and mutual aid and how these have impacted CBOs and social and civic infrastructure. We conclude with lessons learned and recommendations.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE, EQUITY, AND MUTUAL AID

Climate resilience frameworks and programs have emerged over the last decade as severe storms, flooding, and extreme heat have become more frequent. In the climate field, resilience has often been framed as an adaptation strategy, as opposed to mitigation. Resilience, however, is a broad concept that goes beyond climate with many definitions across various disciplines, including ecology, engineering, and psychology. The climate field is heavily influenced by ecological systems theory, which defines resilience as the ability of an ecosystem to persist and absorb changes, as well as to come to new states of equilibrium (Holling, 1973). However, a survey of government practitioners of resilience found that most defined it from a narrower engineering approach, seeing resilience as the ability of a system to “bounce back” to a normal state (Meerow & Stutts, 2016).

The “bounce back” approach to resilience is critiqued in academic and practitioner literature because it is about returning to the status quo, which ignores long-standing inequities and the particular needs of working-class communities and communities of color and leads to apolitical, technocratic strategies (DeBacker et al., 2015; Meerow et al., 2019). The ecological systems definition of resilience is more dynamic, allowing for a “bounce forward” to alternate states, which requires learning, adaptation, and inclusion of those who are impacted. However, many researchers find that this ecological definition of resilience is still too focused on nonhuman natural systems, lacking a social and political analysis and ignoring uneven power relations that underlie structural inequalities (Matin et al., 2018; Meerow et al., 2019).

A social resilience approach integrates political, economic, and ecosystems analyses. In their review of the literature, Meerow and Stutts (2016) identified 16 characteristics of resilience, almost half of which are social factors (diversity, inclusion, equity, feedback, iterative process, transparency, and adaptive capacity). While equity concerns from a natural systems resilience approach often focus on addressing disproportionate impacts after they happen, a social resilience approach also examines why there is vulnerability in the first place. The focus broadens to the socioecological systems that produce inequities in both “normal” times and the crises experienced during pandemics or as the climate changes. One example of a social resilience framework is the “people-centered approach to resilience” put forth in the *Pathways to Resilience* report, which has three core elements: deep democracy, economic transformation, and an ecology that reimagines the relationship between humans and nature (DeBacker et al., 2015).

A social conceptualization of resilience must also contend with structural racism and other deeply embedded and intersectional systems of oppression. According to Bonds (2018), a natural systems approach to resilience “conceals the political and racial nature of social systems, obscuring the role of previous policies, institutions, and authorities in siphoning resources from poor neighborhoods of color in order to build resilience elsewhere” (p. 1287). It also erases the social construction and racialization of “nature” itself, concealing the long history of creating protected open spaces as a means of exclusion and genocide (Quimby et al., 2020). Ranganathan and Bratman (2021, p. 116) go a step further, arguing for a shift from resilience to “abolitionist climate justice” to decolonize climate change practice and theory. An abolitionist ecology would recognize the deeply embedded racialization of our political and economic systems to go beyond White supremacist logics in conceptualizing nature, climate, and resilience (Heynen & Ybarra, 2021).

Mutual aid is one resilience response that emerged and spread quickly during the pandemic across the United States and the globe (Carstensen et al., 2021; Solnit, 2020). Mutual aid is not a new phenomenon but as old as human civilization itself (Spade, 2020). At its most basic level, mutual aid is people taking responsibility to care for one another and provide for material needs. In the United States, mutual aid can be found particularly in the histories of marginalized peoples, from Free Black societies first founded in the 1770s and Chinese immigrants defending themselves from racial discrimination in the 19th century to the fraternal and benevolent societies serving European immigrants by the start of the 20th century (Maddox, 2022; Sen, 2020). In recent decades, mutual aid efforts have emerged in the wake of disasters like Hurricane Katrina (New Orleans), Superstorm Sandy (New York City), and Hurricane Maria (Puerto Rico). These emergencies can spark a rise in social support, though these efforts can wane when resources and energy run out or can be undermined by government (Mao et al., 2021).

There is a long-standing tension between mutual aid initiatives and government, given that it is often because government has inadequate capacity or is unwilling to meet the needs of marginalized groups that mutual aid efforts start in the first place. One study of three COVID mutual aid efforts in Scotland found that they each progressed through various phases of being supplementary, complementary, or adversarial with government (Rendall et al., 2022). For some, mutual aid is about building more horizontal systems, as characterized by the phrase "solidarity, not charity" (Spade, 2020).

A study of COVID mutual aid efforts in Colorado found three values underlying these initiatives: reciprocity, shared humanity and interdependence, and community-driven care and redistribution of resources (Littman et al., 2022). Other research has identified various challenges to mutual aid, such as who participates given digital access and exclusion (Soden & Owen, 2021; Wilson et al., 2022), how to meet immediate needs versus addressing structures of inequality (Soden & Owen, 2021), and how or whether to sustain efforts over time as the immediate crisis fades (Fernandes-Jesus et al., 2021; Soden & Owen, 2021). There are also many opportunities to strengthen community engagement and organizing through mutual aid. Several reports document how CBOs pivoted to provide mutual aid, as part of their work to address systemic racism and inequalities (Loh & Shor, 2022; Praxis Project, 2020; Rodriguez, 2020; Tallant & Ruggeri, 2022).

We use a social resilience approach in this article to explore how communities are building capacities that can respond to a range of impacts and transform the systems that produce them. This approach frames the social processes that have produced inequities that make certain communities more vulnerable. We examine the ways that resilience capacities and strategies, including mutual aid, can remedy systemic and structural inequities, rather than simply return to "normal."

METHODS AND COMMUNITIES

This project compiles findings from two studies of community-based responses to the pandemic (Estrella-Luna & Loh, 2021; Loh & Shor, 2022). In fall 2020 and summer 2021, we conducted 38 interviews with individuals representing 22 organizations (see Table 1) that were involved in pandemic response in working-class communities of color in the cities of Boston, Chelsea, Revere, and Somerville. These organizations work in some of the areas of Massachusetts hardest hit by COVID. They range from newly formed to long established, and included informally structured community-based efforts, formal nonprofits of various sizes, and funders (public and private).

In addition to interviews, we conducted two convenings in fall 2021 with eight CBOs to discuss their experiences and share their learnings. These CBOs are all smaller nonprofits, with less than a dozen paid staff prior to the pandemic. All engage working-class communities of color, including immigrants that identify as Latinx, Chinese, Cape Verdean, or Vietnamese. While some CBOs provided some services prior to the pandemic, others explicitly did not. All engage in advocacy, civic engagement, and organizing to address a range of persistent and structural inequities facing their communities.

COMMUNITY PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The pandemic responses of the CBOs that we interviewed and their allies were heroic, but also tremendously challenging. These groups were not primarily service providers, but rather organizers and advocates. Yet, these CBOs shifted almost overnight to emergency aid response. They provided direct aid (food, financial, and other), support to access government assistance

Table 1. List of Organizations Interviewed

Organizations	Geography or Community Served	Type
Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition (including Next Leadership Development Corporation and BEJI)	Black/ African American community in Boston	Network/ Coalition
Black Economic Justice institute (BEJI)	Black/ African American community in Boston	CBO
Boston Resiliency Fund (City of Boston)	Boston	Municipal Funder
Chinese Progressive Association	Boston (Chinatown)	CBO
City of Revere	Revere	Municipality
Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)	Boston (Roxbury, Dorchester)	CBO
El Centro Cooperativo de Desarollo y Solidaridad (CCDS)	Boston (East Boston immigrants)	CBO
Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council	Boston (Mattapan)	CBO
Green Roots	Chelsea	CBO
Jericho Movement Boston	Boston	CBO
Jobs with Justice	Workers in Massachusetts	CBO
La Colaborativa	Chelsea	CBO
Mass Redistribution Fund (MRF)	Massachusetts	Funder
Matahari Women Workers' Center	BIPOC and immigrant women workers in Massachusetts	CBO
Mutual Aid Eastie (including NUBE and Eastie Farm)	Boston (East Boston)	Network/ Coalition
Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE)	Boston (East Boston Latinx)	CBO
New England United for Justice (NEU4J)	Boston (Dorchester, Mattapan)	CBO
Revere COVID Ambassadors	Revere	Municipal program
Solidarity Supply Distro	Boston	CBO
Unitarian Universalist Mass Action Network (UUMA)	Massachusetts	Funder
VietAid	Vietnamese community in Boston (primarily in Dorchester)	CBO
Welcome Project	Somerville (immigrants)	CBO

(including language services), health services, business and worker assistance, technology, and mutual aid.

At the beginning of the pandemic shutdown, groups focused on meeting basic needs, as many in their communities lost work and others were forced to continue as essential workers. Almost all became involved in food distribution. DSNI, La Colaborativa, GreenRoots, and VietAID established food pantries with weekly, or more frequent, operations that served over 12,000 families per week at the height of the pandemic. Several groups formed food delivery services for those with limited mobility or with a family member with COVID. Other material aid was also provided, such as personal protective equipment, diapers, toys, and winter coats.

Financial aid became increasingly important as the shutdown continued and many were not eligible for federal COVID relief payments. Groups serving immigrants who have insecure immigration status (and/or do not have a federal tax ID) established their own funds. Welcome Project's immigrant relief fund supported 1,200 people in one year. The Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) and VietAID helped establish the Asian Community Emergency Relief Fund with other partners, raising more than a half million dollars for almost 2,000 households. GreenRoots and La Colaborativa cofounded the One Chelsea Fund and distributed $1.4 million to impacted Chelsea residents. DSNI provided $25,000 to Boston-based artists and over $300,000 in gift cards to residents.

CBOs also helped community members access government programs, including rental assistance, unemployment, and food stamps. Even in nonpandemic times, applications for these programs can be challenging. Individuals from many immigrant communities experience language barriers and confusion over how to fill out applications. Many hesitate to apply at all due to their immigration status. CBOs helped to overcome some of these barriers by providing interpretation and translation. Most groups offered one-on-one assistance to help individuals fill out forms and follow up with agencies. DSNI already had capacity in the four major languages of their neighborhood: English, Spanish, Cape Verdean Creole, and Haitian Creole. GreenRoots was bilingual in English and Spanish but established capacity to serve residents in another four languages. The Welcome Project, which had already been running English as a Second Language classes and training youth interpreters, began offering translation services for government agencies and mutual aid groups.

In response to the health crisis, CBOs mobilized access to COVID testing and vaccines. The Black Boston COVID-19 Coalition brought 1,200 people out to the first weekend of mass COVID testing in Roxbury. Groups provided translation and helped get people out to vaccine town halls. La Colaborativa played a lead role promoting the health response to COVID in Chelsea, which achieved some of the highest rates of vaccination among cities in the United States with similar demographics. They hired 10 *promotores de la salud* (health promoters) to do outreach and education and encourage residents to get tested and vaccinated. They reached people in Spanish and English on the street, door-to-door, and at mobile testing centers. To help counter the false information that was spreading on news and social media, particularly among Spanish-speaking populations, they posted their own videos on TikTok and Facebook.

The shutdown severely affected workers and businesses. CPA, DSNI, GreenRoots, and La Colaborativa all hired workers who were unemployed due to the pandemic to support food distribution and public health outreach. DSNI established a small business relief fund, distributing $10,000 to local businesses. CPA provided more than 200 households with vouchers to Chinatown restaurants and bakeries to support those businesses and address food insecurity. The City of Boston reached out to CPA to use the Boston Resiliency Fund to connect residents who had been laid off with jobs in the city's food distribution program. CPA worked with several other CBOs to serve as a kind of temporary employment agency, hiring 80 people and bringing on four coordinators who could speak the four main languages spoken by the new hires to orient them and support their transportation needs. These new workers helped pack and distribute food through the YMCA and public schools, while CPA rapidly figured out how to manage the complexities involved in using city funding and handling payroll for these workers.

The physical distancing and isolation requirements of the pandemic pushed many to acquire and learn new technology and software. CBOs built their capacity and trained others to use video conferencing platforms like Zoom. Many CBO staff provided one-on-one support to ensure that participants could engage fully in virtual meetings. VietAID, New England United 4 Justice (NEU4J), and Welcome Project received donations of laptops, tablets, and hotspot devices for internet access to distribute to community members. Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE) shared their Zoom account with community members by creating meetings on their behalf. In addition, NUBE, as part of Mutual Aid Eastie, created a Community Chat on WhatsApp for members to share resources and information, as well as sell goods, ask for assistance, and communicate with each other.

CBOs also built new models of civic engagement and empowerment through wellness and mutual aid efforts. Many groups conducted wellness checks, particularly on those most vulnerable and isolated in their communities. These checkups were often done over the phone and included surveying needs and making connections to resources. These groups also recognized that beyond material aid, many community members needed emotional support. Many lost family members, felt isolated, and/or needed help accessing information and resources. In response, the groups formed committees, pods, and circles for peers to support one another. For example, NEU4J made calls to 85,000 people, holding more than 5,000 conversations in the first year of the pandemic.

Many CBOs also helped form mutual aid networks. NUBE had already been experimenting with decentralized ways of organizing neighbors in East Boston prior to the pandemic. When COVID infections spread, NUBE asked people to serve as block captains to get in touch with their neighbors. With several other groups, they started Mutual Aid Eastie as a way for people with abundance to share with those in need. Food distribution became a main activity, growing to 5,000 meals delivered each week at the peak of the crisis. There were also efforts to ensure reciprocity. Everyone receiving aid was required to do an orientation around the values of the work and sign up with a WhatsApp mutual aid chat list, to help match offers and needs.

IMPACTS OF PANDEMIC RESPONSE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

The grassroots pandemic responses in the Boston area show that CBOs played a critical role in helping their communities to "weather the COVID-19 storm." These groups are led by and comprised of residents. They have built community organizing and civic engagement capacities to reach vulnerable and marginalized populations, and they have developed high levels of trust and cultural competency within their communities. This social capital is a key component of the social resilience that helped people to survive and overcome barriers and deficiencies in existing public and private service systems. Because these groups are deeply connected to the people in their places, they understood the need for emergency response and immediately pivoted their work and resources when the pandemic hit.

These CBOs are small organizations, allowing them to be nimble and flexible. Yet, they are also perennially underresourced. During the pandemic their capacities grew but were also stressed in various ways. All shifted some of their work to remote, requiring new technology and training. But direct services still required in-person engagement. As one DSNI staffer noted, "I have been in the office all this time. Our doors were really never closed. People know how to reach us via email and phone; [we] gave out cell phone numbers. People understood that if they needed us, we are here."

Some groups brought on more staff, often hiring residents, to meet needs such as staffing new food pantries and providing language services. La Colaborativa grew from about 15 to more than 60 mostly part-time and/or temporary staff members. New programs were created. An El Centro Cooperativo de Desarollo y Solidaridad (CCDS) leader reflects, "[W]ho thought at the beginning of this year that we had to do an emergency fund, and how to establish an emergency fund? We didn't have any idea of that. So even just establishing an emergency fund, learning how to do it, how legally we need to be responsible, having an advisory committee to actually approve the donations. All the structure that was needed to actually be able to do this, it was capacity that we gain[ed] internally that we didn't have before. And we had to learn in doing it."

This growth had its own challenges. One group experienced some "systemic chaos because we have expanded so quickly." For GreenRoots, the challenge was "staying intersectional but not losing focus." They wanted to address resident needs but recognized that "we can't do it all." With such overwhelming need that persisted for months and is still ongoing in some ways, CBO staff were exhausted physically and emotionally, experiencing some burnout and turnover. A CPA leader estimated that they would "have to increase staff by three-fold" to sustain everything they started during the pandemic. They were able to do a lot during the pandemic "because of dedication of staff and volunteers and activists, some of whom we've helped over the years."

These CBOs also played a major role in forging new collaborations and strengthening preexisting partnerships among service agencies, government, and funders. The strongest or most impactful response efforts were those that were coordinated by individuals or organizations that were part of preexisting networks, such as in Chelsea with La Colaborativa and GreenRoots. People who had worked together before, or who had known about other people or organizations, were more likely to coordinate, largely because there was a preexisting well of trust to draw upon. One aid project led by a consortium of nine CBOs used funds from the City of Boston Resiliency Fund to assemble wellness kits for families with COVID-positive members across Boston. Instead of buying commercially available masks, they sourced 2,500 masks from the sewing cooperative that CCDS had been supporting in East Boston.

In addition to deepening collaborations with preexisting partners, CBOs also strengthened work with government and larger service organizations, sometimes setting aside past differences or conflicts. For example, DSNI deepened its relationship with the Food Project, a long-time partner, to supply fresh produce for its food aid, but also began working for the first time with YMCA. "We united and put our opinions to the side," according to a DSNI staff. CPA, because of its support for workers, has sometimes had conflicts with small businesses, yet collaborated with the Small Business Administration and Local Initiatives Support Corporation to provide workshops for small businesses to apply for federal aid. Similarly, Welcome Project reported more collaboration with groups "we sometimes butted heads with," such as the business sector.

Importantly, CBOs became more publicly recognized and valued during the pandemic as critical bridges to vulnerable communities. Government, larger service providers, and funders all came to CBOs to help channel aid to those most in need. For example, as described above, the City of Boston came to CPA to help hire laid-off workers to staff food distribution programs. Funders approached CBOs with new resources and flexibility. According to GreenRoots, "that was one of the really great things about COVID: funders allowed flexibility. They said, 'Do what you got to do with your community, and we'll talk to y'all later.' That was amazing. And that was how we were able to pivot." One of NEU4J's funders created more flexibility by allowing them to just fill out a Google form instead of a lengthier application; according to a NEU4J leader, "we have proven we can move this work without a ten-page grant."

During the pandemic CBOs also innovated new forms of civic engagement and organized in tandem with services that enabled them to expand their reach beyond their typical constituencies. A GreenRoots leader said that "our community engagement shifted to making sure that those residents who were most disconnected could get connected. We speak Spanish, but there are 30 languages spoken in Chelsea. We knew there were people who weren't being reached." NUBE "split up all of our neighbors by streets. We asked them to call their neighbors and see if they are interested in signing up for WhatsApp." They had 300 people active on WhatsApp. La Colaborativa used TikTok to counter false information about vaccines.

As a result of their pandemic response, these groups engaged and served many new people whom they had not previously reached. VietAID compiled a database of more than 1,000 individuals, 80% of whom were nail salon workers. CPA found that there was a far larger number of Chinese Uber and Lyft drivers in their community than they had previously recognized until these drivers called them for help.

CBOs have had to navigate tensions between services and empowerment. NEU4J developed an approach that they call "wellness-to-organizing" where they engage with people first through services but use those opportunities to do education and outreach and provide ways for people to become engaged in campaigns for change. For a NEU4J leader "it's not just about getting the service. If they sign up for rental assistance, they hear about housing justice. If filing for unemployment, they hear about worker's rights and the struggles. This is a vehicle to continue our organizing." NUBE, as part of Mutual Aid Eastie, tried overcoming a culture of "service-ism" by bringing all who receive aid into a WhatsApp group where they are not only accessing what they need but also offering what they have (including their time and labor). One NUBE leader found that to shift from the culture of charity, "we had to redefine it as reciprocity and being in relationship with each other. It's saying I have enough. Our folks say I don't have anything to give, yet our people were saying I made tamales and can sell or give it." NUBE believes the new mutual aid infrastructure was made possible by existing social capital.

LESSONS LEARNED

For those committed to building climate resilience and justice, these community responses to COVID offer valuable lessons.

1. An equitable approach to resilience requires addressing historical social and racial inequities that create vulnerability in the first place.

Vulnerability to climate change impacts and pandemics is rooted in historical inequities. Thus, building equitable climate resilience must be people-focused and intersectional. One leader with the Greater Mattapan Neighborhood Council expressed that "there's so much money that has been spent for nine months at the federal, state, and city levels. It's astounding. ... But with all that has been spent, it just exposed the fact that a lot of the systems people were depending upon were actually, truly broken to begin with."

2. The social capital of CBOs and their networks are a primary resource for resilience.

The CBO networks that connect people in the Boston area and foster trusting relationships allowed for rapid response to the pandemic and will be crucial in climate emergencies. CBOs are at the intersection between resources and those in need. As expressed by one Revere COVID Ambassador, "the first thing that I learned from my experience working as an ambassador and [being] a Revere resident is that we have to build the trust between us and our neighbor. ... Then we decided to have a WhatsApp group so we can communicate. If something happened, like a hurricane, we can reach each other, check in on each other."

3. In crisis response, there is an opportunity to shift from a service culture toward mutuality, solidarity, care, and reciprocity.

In the pandemic, it became clear that public and private service providers were not able to reach everyone in need. Many CBOs are explicit that they are not service providers but rather are building local capacities and leadership to fix the broken systems that produce vulnerability and inequities. Yet, shifting the deeply embedded culture of service-ism and competition-based charity is not easy. A Boston Resiliency Fund staff member remarked, "one of the barriers that's really hard to break down is the feeling [of] competition for funding. [If] I'm referring my ten friends who are also doing great work, does that mean that ultimately my organization will get less money?"

4. Building social resilience means investing in CBOs and community-driven initiatives that build social capital and that can build back better from crises.

CBOs were able to meet the moment in remarkable and heroic ways but often operate with insufficient resources. Though funders became more flexible and trusted more in CBOs to use resources effectively, much of the pandemic-driven funding has now ended. According to Next Leadership Development Corporation, when funders look at CBOs, they "will say, 'Oh well, they're not ready' or 'They don't have the infrastructure' or 'They don't have this. They don't have that.' Well, there's a reason they don't. Because funders have not invested in those things. Funders only invest in programmatic, operational stuff. And so, of course, they don't have the infrastructure and the systems and the processes and all the stuff because that's not what gets funded."

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"We will very likely have more crises like COVID. ... We can't exactly say how these crises are going to unfold. We learned that we're not prepared. We're not ready to handle it. The city isn't. The state isn't. And people just had to somehow scramble and get their act together," observed a leader with Eastie Farm. The pandemic is a wake-up call for building resilience and fixing inequitable systems to prepare for future pandemics and a changing climate.

Our overarching conclusion is that resilience is rooted in social capacities to work together, mobilize resources, and take care of one another. Climate is not a separate issue siloed from other ones; it is part of an intersectional set of issues. As Solidarity Supply Distro said, "we do not think about our work in terms of the climate or the environment. We think about [it] in terms of people." As a Matahari leader put it, "groups who are doing democratic organizing or building community leadership development, we are in essence building capacity for people to survive climate change."

The pandemic has created new opportunities for CBOs to integrate services with organizing in mutual aid and wellness-to-organizing models. CBOs should sustain new language capacities and support flexibility and care for its staff. CBOs can also build on the heightened recognition of their roles to strengthen collaborations with government, funders, and large service providers.

Government, funders, and service providers should invest in and partner with CBOs as a major strategy for building resilience. They should continue to build the relationships and trust that were advanced during the pandemic. They can provide longer term core funding to support organizational infrastructure and sustainability of CBOs. Funders can allow more flexibility for how CBOs use resources and decrease the barriers for obtaining support. Community engagement and organizing should be seen as a core strategy for improving services and building overall community resiliency. Most crucially, these partners should listen to and follow the lead of communities most impacted.

While "we rose to a challenge we had never seen before," in the words of one DSNI staffer, we all need to take this opportunity to build and sustain an infrastructure of community care and support. Mutual aid networks help build this infrastructure through reciprocal relationships rooted in solidarity. CBOs do not want to be heroes in the next crisis; they want to be more ready and resilient. Just meeting needs of the most vulnerable is not enough. An equitable approach to resilience (including climate) should also help "bounce forward" toward more just and sustainable communities.

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