

Resilience in the Drylands of the Horn of Africa: What it means for practice

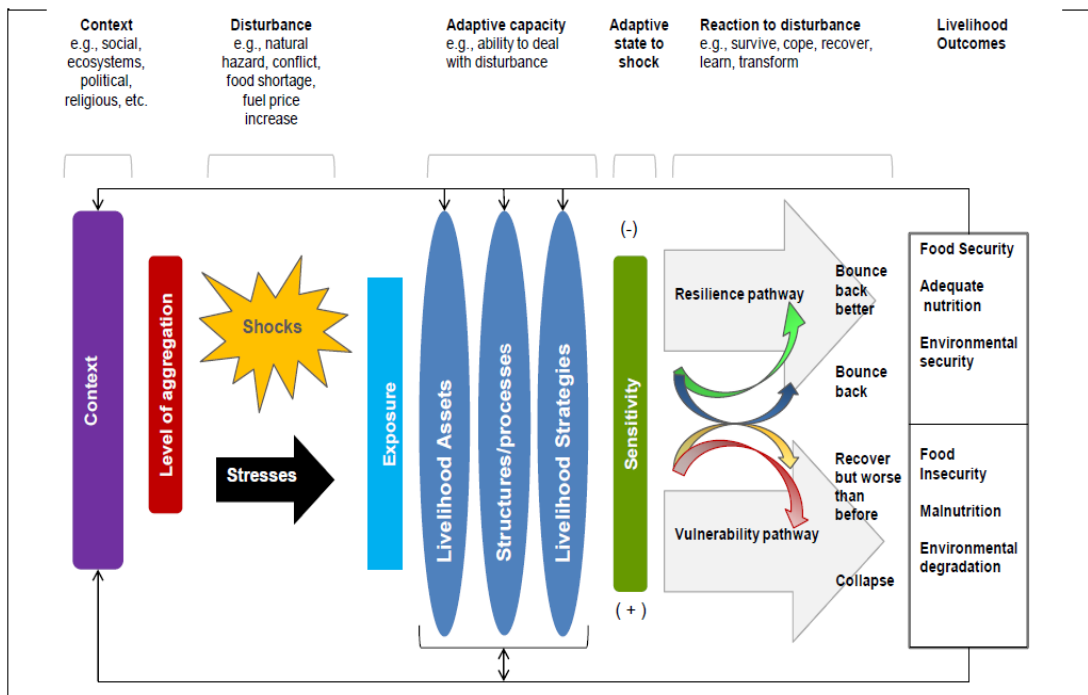
Vanessa Tilstone, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Manager, REGLAP, April 2013¹

Introduction

The recent frenzied debate around resilience has been bewildering both in the way in which so many organisations feel the need to develop their *own* frameworks, and in the way that there has been so little clarity of what practical value these frameworks bring. The recent DFID, World Bank and USAID discussion paper on ‘Enhancing Resilience to Food Security Shocks in Africa’² finally brings together thinking on what is meant by the concept and some of the principles that are fundamental to it.

The DFID/World Bank/USAID paper defines resilience as: ‘*the ability of countries, communities, and households to anticipate, adapt to, and/or recover from the effects of potentially hazardous occurrences (natural disasters, economic instability, conflict) in a manner that protects livelihoods, accelerates and sustains recovery, and supports economic and social development.*’ (p.1) The TANGO conceptual framework is used as a reference which clearly integrates sustainable livelihoods; disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation approaches, reinforcing the link between relief and development as well as promoting more coherence among different disciplines.

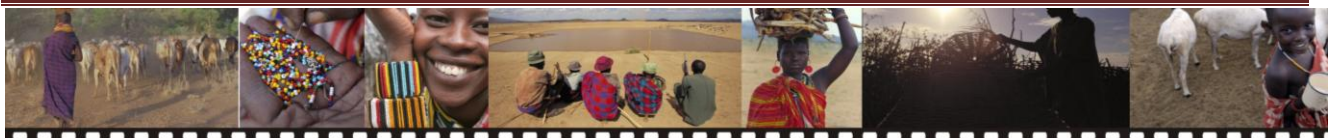
Figure 1: Resilience Assessment Framework



TANGO 2012. Adapted from DFID Disaster Resilience Framework (2011), TANGO Livelihoods Framework (2007), DFID Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (1999) and CARE Household Livelihood Security Framework (2002).

¹ More information about REGLAP can be accessed on <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/reglap>

² http://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/discussion_paper_usaid_dfid_wb_nov_8_2012.pdf



The paper outlines some key principles that are widely accepted in the development community but are often not implemented. Much work remains to be done to ensure that these principles are put at the forefront of the 'resilience agenda' by all development actors.

Key resilience principles:

1. Putting communities and their main duty bearers (local government) at the centre of development and humanitarian efforts

Putting communities at the centre of resilience efforts requires respect for communities, their institutions and knowledge systems; and a spirit of mutual learning between development partners and the communities. This is much talked about, but it is surprising how little it is done with development staff living away from communities, high staff turnover, lack of attention to critical listening and communications skills, a focus on projects rather than people and institutions, and short project time frames leading to rushed interactions and relationships. Considerable capacity building will be required to bridge the gap in understanding between communities and development actors, including local government.

2. Understanding and focusing on social and ecological systems rather than individual components of those systems

Extensive livestock production balances the use of fertile and less fertile areas, through mobility and careful natural resource management. Thus cutting off productive areas for crop agriculture, blocking migration routes, promoting enclosures etc. undermines resilience. There are often close linkages between pastoralists and town dwellers, with many people reliant on pastoral system even though don't have cattle, via processing, trading, and social support systems. Pastoralism conserves biodiversity, with tourism major earner (although currently dryland dwellers rarely benefit).

In a situation where the ecological and social system has already been permanently impaired, the redefinition and rebuilding of productive and resilient systems needs much thought and effort. Given that alternative livelihoods options currently available have little chance of supporting all people involved in livestock production in the short term (Heady's analysis suggests that at most irrigated crop agriculture can support 3% of the dryland population in the HOA³), the protection of remaining dry season grazing areas and key migration and marketing routes is a first urgent step in slowing further damage.

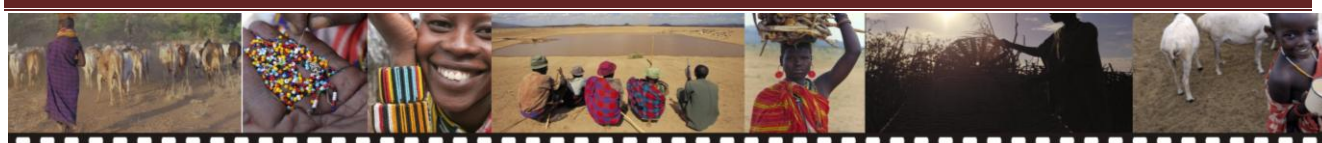
3. Promoting integrated multi-sectoral approaches

The promotion of integrated planning processes is difficult and challenging in dryland areas, not least due to the remoteness, lack of infrastructure and local government and community capacities.⁴ Multiple and often contradictory planning processes take place both within and outside government: land use planning, contingency planning, and a whole range of sectoral planning processes—few of which link to or recognise the existence of other processes or are couched in a holistic community-owned vision for future development in the drylands.

The recognition that resilience has to be built across sectors and scales in order to have impact is highlighted as critical in the DFID/World Bank/USAID paper. Obviously one organisation cannot address all the levels and components required (see Figure 2 below), however by promoting co-ordinated planning, particularly of the

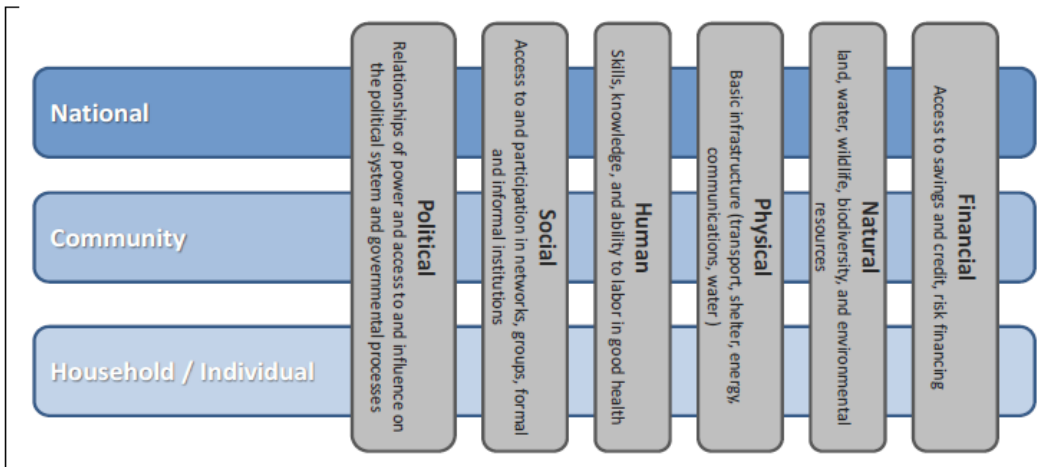
³ <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/publications/ifpridp01176.pdf>

⁴ See 'Plotting progress: Integrated Planning in the drylands of Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda', February 2013, <http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/library/detail/en/c/2589/>



government where priority interventions are addressed and linked to a common vision, this can be improved—with donors playing a critical role.

Figure 4: Building Resilience across Sectors and Scales



Source: Adapted from DFID 2012

Pastoralists operate at landscape level often across borders, a fact that needs to be considered in effective planning and implementation. Co-ordination of interventions in drylands areas is often a challenge due to multiple actors, often simultaneous implementation of relief and development interventions, lack of understanding of the local context and weak local government. Everyone has a responsibility to promote co-ordinated planning and implementation and share lessons learnt to improve practice.

4. Increasing emphasis on longer-term investments and addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability

Again, lots of talk but not much action! The underlying causes of vulnerability: power, lack of basic services and infrastructure, land fragmentation, limitations on mobility, population growth, appropriate and accessible education, governance – capacity building, land rights, economic empowerment – these are long term processes, and cannot and should not be done in short term funding windows!

5. Recognising and responding to the different needs, capabilities and aspirations of different individuals, households and communities

In the drylands there are increasing wealth disparities and increased competition for land and water between pastoralists and crop producers and economic migrants, with elites including NGO and local government staff often controlling resources. Conflict ensues and is increasingly violent and hard to contain. Empowering and focusing on the most vulnerable within each livelihood group, especially to negotiate resource rights, and developing complementary livelihoods options is a priority.

There is much talk about innovation and doing things differently in resilience discussions. Innovations that incorporate lessons from the past, prioritise and strengthen the delivery of universally accepted goods—education, governance, community organisation and voice—and address the underlying causes of vulnerability, are essential. But doing things differently for the sake of it, introducing innovations without understanding why similar efforts have failed in the past and ignoring local context and perceptions are a recipe for disaster.

One of the problems that the drylands has always had to confront is the assumption that technological solutions designed for highland areas and cultures can automatically be transferred. There are many useful lessons and good practices from the highlands; however there is a need to combine these with local knowledge and realities to identify opportunities for impact. Embracing the differences of dryland populations present a



major challenge to us all, particularly governments in the region. As Duncan Green in his 2012 edition of ***From Poverty to Power*** states:

'Pastoralism, with its strong emphasis on family and clan loyalties, and on common, rather than individual, ownership of land and forests, throws down a profound challenge to many of the assumptions that underlie 'modern' governance. Whether such visions can co-exist is a test of the ability of governments and societies to recognise and encourage pluralism, rather than uniformity' pp.223.

This difference is particularly important in discussions around measuring resilience. Local perceptions and quantitative measurements are essential in order to ascertain where or if resilience is growing or declining. But the multi-dimensional nature of resilience means that current national measures fail to capture some of the most important issues affecting resilience e.g. governance, peace and security.

The way forward

Donors regularly raise the issue of cost effectiveness when discussing which resilience interventions they should fund. However, the value for money argument should always consider the alternative, which is the repeated and ever growing cost of humanitarian relief. We must also not forget that globally we have agreed to fundamental rights to education, health care etc. and should focus on finding the most cost effective and innovative ways to deliver these basic needs, rather than questioning whether we should be providing them at all. What's needed from both donors and NGOs is a greater focus on long-term programming and the flexibility to adapt to changing realities and difference in needs. The tricky underlying issues which NGOs often avoid/leave to government—power, land, governance and basic service provision—must also be tackled.

Taking a resilience approach will involve much more than inserting the word into debates and discussions. NGOs and donors have already started to re-brand their programs as resilience building with little or no change in content, often focusing on narrow social welfare measures such as social protection and cash transfers being as key resilience building mechanisms. The concept will only become useful if it translates into a wide and consistent understanding of the priorities and processes for implementing it i.e. the promotion of locally defined and owned visions of resilient futures that everyone then contributes to in a co-ordinated way.

For comments/ suggestions, please contact Vanessa Tilstone at vtilstone@oxfam.org.uk



Humanitarian Aid
and Civil Protection

The project is funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO)

Copies of this and related documents can be accessed at:
<http://www.disasterriskreduction.net/east-central-africa/reglap>

