



Promoting Resilience in the Sahel: New Approach or New Fad?

The recurrence of food crises in the Sahel has helped shift thinking on relief and development. It has also convinced donors that the issue of food security must be addressed in a more resolute, lasting manner. As part of these shifts, one word has emerged in the discourse of various stakeholders (NGOs, donors, regional institutions, etc.) and that word is “resilience.” In the literature, in aid programs, in strategy papers, in regional policies, this word has had incredible success, sometimes taking on the flavor of a real slogan. The Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) initiative, launched in December 2012 at the behest of the European Commission, has made it the cornerstone of the objective of eradicating malnutrition in the Sahel.

We felt it interesting to understand what this term encompasses in the eyes of the various stakeholders, shedding light on points of convergence and divergence, the progress that resilience may (or may not) represent, and above all what it can mean in the context of the Sahel. The present brief is based on the writings on the subject and roughly twenty interviews with relief and development actors (donors, farmers’ organizations, NGOs, regional institutions and experts). These interviews can be consulted online.¹

That this brief attempts to answer the following questions:

- *What is resilience? Is it merely a trend or a true paradigm shift for food security policies in the Sahel? What initiatives are underway in the region?*
- *In what ways do the perceptions of the various stakeholders converge?*
- *What challenges does this concept raise?*

I/ Origin and Definition of the Concept of Resilience

A. How the Need to Think of Food Crisis Prevention and Management Differently Emerged

The Failure of Crisis Prevention and Management Policies

A glance at history is needed to understand how the notion of resilience emerged and spread. For this, we have above all relied on stakeholders’ accounts and their take on the emergence of resilience, following the observation that public policies favoring food security were failing, as illustrated by the repeated crises.

From the Optimism of the 1960s to Failure

In the 1960s and early 1970s, it was thought that hunger would eventually be eliminated through economic growth and a steady rise in agricultural production. The 1973 crisis in the Sahel began to chip away at this idea. The structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF in the 1980s forced governments to give free rein to market mechanisms. Weakened by these policies, which notably imposed the elimination or drastic reduction in national stores, governments were unable to respond to food crises. The

international humanitarian community (United Nations, NGOs) then took on a growing role in the response to food crises. The persistence of crises indicates, notably for humanitarian actors, the failure of development policies because the households and communities targeted by development assistance “collapse” at the first crisis. The model that separates development (supposed to prevent crises) from humanitarian action (supposed to overcome them) now seems outmoded. It is the very notion of temporary crisis—of shock—that needs to be re-thought, addressing the deep-seated and chronic causes of vulnerability in the Sahel.

New Crises, New Responses

The major crises in the 2000s speed up awareness by triggering new responses that in turn helped influence thinking. The word “resilience” was used in the context of a humanitarian crisis for the first time during this period.² [17] The food crises in Ethiopia in 2003, Niger in 2005 and then the Horn of Africa in 2011 changed how vulnerability was

¹ <http://www.inter-reseaux.org/ressources-thematiques/article/serie-d-entretiens-d-inter-reseaux>

² In 1998, as part of an assessment report following the Bahr el Ghazal crisis in South Sudan. At the time, the term “resilience” was applied to survival systems developed by populations in conflict situations.

perceived. Several points were notably revealed:

- Productivist approaches are inadequate, because the last crises were not caused by insufficient agricultural production but by abnormal price variations.
- Crises have cumulative effects because the first crisis causes affected households to get rid of their capital (herds, reserves) and take on debt to obtain food. Once this capital lost and debt acquired, they are even more vulnerable if a second crisis hits.
- The repetition of crises highlights the need to associate relief and development more closely: we are no longer facing limited, defined crises that need temporary solutions but a structural crisis that requires giving people the means to withstand hazards and shocks on their own. This is the link between relief and development, a concept that had already been developed in the 1990s (LRRD: linking relief, rehabilitation and development).³
- Food aid cannot be kept separate from other dimensions—education, health, nutrition, etc. All of these aspects are closely connected, and aid programs must take them into account: this idea is promoted by UNICEF and NGOs such as Action Against Hunger (ACF).

The 2000s were therefore a time of new awareness. Donors promoted resilience in strategy papers and regional policies as a way to learn from these lessons. In 2005, the Hyogo Framework for Action, a 10-year strategic plan established by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) proposed “building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.”

B. Resilience: Source and Definition of the Word

The term “resilience” is itself an import from other disciplines. Initially, it was a concept in the physics of materials: it designated the capacity of a given material to recover its initial shape after a shock. The word had good fortune in its application in psychology: highlighted for the first time during World War II, it designated an individual’s capacity to recover from serious trauma.

The notion was then introduced, by analogy, in disaster risk reduction (DRR) where it was used to describe the reaction of populations and adaptation mechanisms triggered by natural disasters (such as a hurricane, torrential rains, etc.). The most widely used definition today is that of UNISDR, adopted in 2009: “The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.”

There are many other definitions, all fairly similar. Let us cite the DFID’s definition as it has played a particularly large role in promoting resilience: “Disaster Resilience is the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses—such as earthquakes, drought or violent conflict—without compromising their long-term prospects” [R4].

The SHARE (Supporting the Horn of Africa’s Resilience) initiative, launched by the European Union (EU) in the wake of the 2011 crisis in the Horn of Africa and a precursor to the AGIR initiative, explicitly emphasized resilience. The “resilience approach” now promoted by donors therefore seems to be the sum of these experiences, all of which emphasize people’s capacity to respond to and limit the effects of crises themselves.

A Backdrop of Dwindling Aid

The resilience trend is happening in a difficult economic context: the 2008 crisis had a sharp effect on donor countries’ resources, triggering reflection on budget choices.

With resilience, the notion of “value for money” (that is to say, a return on investment, with aid being the investment here) has become a real watchword within DFID. It reveals a determination to justify aid spending in the eyes of British taxpayers, if needed by cutting off funds to certain programs deemed ineffective. Experts have objected to this temptation to seek profitability at any price.⁴

The popularity of resilience cannot be explained by just the desire to cut funds by emphasizing people’s capacity to recover on their own from crises. However, the financial situation does indeed have an impact on the reflections of donor countries and their aid agencies, although this is not always clearly stated in official speeches. For instance, during the discussions on the AGIR initiative, there were misunderstandings about a possible budget envelope linked to the initiative (see sidebar).

These definitions are sufficiently broad to inspire somewhat of a consensus among development and humanitarian actors, as well as among the populations concerned. Let us comment, however, that while the UNISDR’s definition insists on the stability of the system (“preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures”), the DFID’s definition opens the door to changes in the lives of the people concerned (“maintaining or transforming living standards”).

Once resilience has been defined, it is useful to determine how it relates to vulnerability, a widely used notion among development aid actors. Without getting lost in semantics, most stakeholders consider these two notions to be “mirror images” of each other: a vulnerable population, household or individual is not resilient and inversely, a resilient population, household or individual is not vulnerable [17].

However, the following nuances can be stated:

- The notion of resilience is more “positive” inasmuch as it insists on people’s capacities. In this way, it goes hand in hand with the notion of empowerment, often highlighted in strategy papers: give populations the ability to withstand shocks or extended stress on their own.
- It is also more dynamic: resilience starts with the notion of a changing environment that requires constant adaptation without necessarily any return to the initial state. In contrast, vulnerability designates a state, above all.

³ This concept was popularised in particular by the Groupe URD, a NGO created 20 years ago and focused on linking emergency and development aid (<http://www.urd.org>)

⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/bovertv-matters/2012/sep/20/experts-caution-assessing-value-uk-aid>

C. The Ambiguities of a Generic Concept

The term “resilience” is used fairly often, notably in strategy papers, in an absolute (“promote resilience”) and positive sense. Two reservations must be noted, however.

- Resilience manifests itself in many ways, depending on the population in question, the context, etc. For instance, the main factor in the resilience of nomadic herders is mobility that allows them to take their herds to wetter lands to feed during the dry season or during a drought [18]. For sedentary farmers, it can be the existence of grain reserves or a diverse portfolio of activities. Beyond its basic definition—the ability to resist shocks dynamically—resilience is therefore defined differently depending on the context.
- The enthusiasm for resilience waned among a number of

experts for whom resilience is ultimately an objective concept without any positive or negative connotation. For instance, one can respond to a shock or outside stressor by lowering one’s expectations (e.g. economist Amartya Sen’s “adaptive preference” theory). A simple example can explain this: if the breadwinner of a household loses his or her job, he or she might move to a less expensive neighborhood. This is indeed adapting to a change in economic conditions, but it happens to the detriment of the household or even the children’s future (they will attend schools that are not as good) [R8]. Similarly, a farmer may react to a rise in the price of a given agricultural product by growing more of this product; but if the market for the product falls, he will be vulnerable.

III/ Resilience: What Difference Does It Make?

Promoting resilience is accompanied by insistence on the new nature of the approach, which includes an ensemble of initiatives (LLRD, safety nets, etc.) within a joint strategy. In fact, when speaking of resilience, actors insist sometimes on the temporal dimension (anticipate crises) and sometimes on

sector-related aspects (linking food security to health, education, etc.). This is why it is occasionally difficult to determine just what about resilience is new—perhaps the bringing together, in a shared framework, a range of initiatives conducted in a piecemeal fashion.

A. A Determination to Bring Relief Work and Development Aid Closer Together

All stakeholders, and in particular members of international organizations, insist on the need to anticipate crises: for instance, the 2011 crisis in the Horn of Africa hit a country that was already seen as being in a state of emergency. More generally, the high rates of early childhood malnutrition in Africa, particularly in the Sahel, tend to blur the lines between a “normal state of affairs” and “emergencies.”

Rather than prevent crises themselves—which are unpredictable when caused by ecological disasters—it is a matter of helping populations withstand the effects of crises through warning systems and capacity building. Many initiatives of this type have been set up on the local and regional levels by UN agencies, NGOs and regional institutions. For instance, we can cite IFAD’s programs to improve farmers’ understanding of climate change mechanisms, or the (re)establishment, under the steering of CILSS, of a network of meteorology stations in Sahelian countries. Similarly, Oxfam is working on early warning systems for food insecurity to soften the blow of crises. We can also cite the Community Early Warning System and Emergency Responses (CEWS-ER) set up by CARE, notably in Niger, that involve communities themselves heavily in running the food situation monitoring and warning system. These approaches have one thing in common: they aim to increase the knowledge available to public institutions, development aid partners, and the

population, in line with the notion of empowerment mentioned above. There is unanimous agreement on this point, and it is part of a continuation of actions undertaken by regional institutions in the Sahel [15].

These initiatives, which remain relatively scattered, are completed by an institutional and organizational drawing together of organizations in charge of emergency relief and those focusing on development aid. In this area, UN agencies have undertaken extensive, in-depth work since the start of the 1990s and the creation of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). An ecological, social and humanitarian disaster, the 2004 tsunami brought a new awareness of the need to coordinate emergency aid and development aid: this is the role of the country coordinator (or “resident coordinator”) who ensures coordination between aid agencies (UNICEF, IFAD, FAO, WFP, etc.), with varying degrees of success depending on the country. Significantly, aid organizations in Europe (DEVCO and ECHO) and the United States (USAID) have made similar efforts. For USAID, the aim is to set up “joint planning cells” between relief and development departments [14]; DEVCO and ECHO are coordinating through the AGIR initiative. This harmonization has extended into inter-institution cooperation between USAID and the EU⁵, as well as between international organizations.⁶

Emphasis on Multi-Sector Efforts

Development aid actors insist on a second point: resilience is based on the belief that vulnerability has a systemic quality. For several decades, food security policies focused on increasing agricultural productivity. Faced with the relative failure of these

policies, as seen by the repetition of food crises, the need emerged for a broader approach to treat all aspects of vulnerability, not only economic but also social, weather-related, etc. The lessons learned from partners’ work on chronic

⁵ In Ethiopia, USAID and the EU agencies have set up specific teams that meet regularly to share good practices in pastoral zones [11].

⁶ The goal of the High Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis set up by the UN in 2008 is to bring together experts from all UN agencies, the World Bank and the OECD to provide coordinated support in food insecure countries [11].

vulnerability, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and adaptation to climate change can thus be united in a common approach, as the European Commission emphasized in a communication to the European Parliament [R7]. This common approach, which implies multidimensional programs to help populations, has become possible with greater contact between institutions.

USAID is currently working on multi-sector aid programs in the Sahel containing agriculture, access to care and back-to-work components—one example among others of multi-form action

to address the determining factors behind vulnerability at their roots [14]. We can also wonder how this approach differs from the integrated development approaches of the 1990s.

These multi-sector programs echo “cash transfer” programs, conditional (cash-for-work) or unconditional (relief), and spread out over time to sustainably improve households’ resilience [17]. These “safety nets” have been successfully set up in Ethiopia with the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), and they are projected to be applied in the Sahel.

The AGIR Initiative in the Sahel

The Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) grew out of a consultation organized in June 2012 in Brussels on the food crisis in the Sahel. In light of the chronic vulnerability affecting a large portion of the population in this region—a sign of the failure of the aid policies applied until then—the stakeholders, that is to say Sahelian decision-makers and their partners in the North, decided to launch AGIR to “put an end to the cycle of hunger and malnutrition.” A series of meetings was then held to lay the foundations of the partnership between technical and financial partners, regional organizations in the Sahel and West Africa, and later farmers’ organizations (FOs), civil society and the private sector, prior to a plenary meeting in Paris in early November 2012. On December 6, 2012, the process resulted in the Ouagadougou joint declaration. AGIR attributes food insecurity to four main causes: the poverty and degradation of the livelihoods of some households, dysfunctions in markets and value chains, climate shocks and disasters, and finally conflict and troubles.

The aim is to eradicate malnutrition within two decades, by targeting three segments of the population: (i) the most vulnerable farmers, (ii) farmer-shepherds and herders, and (iii) poor workers in urban and rural areas.

To attain this objective, four priorities for action have been set:

“Pillar 1: Restoring and strengthening the livelihoods and social protection of the most vulnerable populations [...].

Pillar 2: Strengthening health and nutrition [...].

Pillar 3: Increasing food production, the incomes of vulnerable households and their access to food in a sustainable manner [...].

Pillar 4: Strengthening governance in food and nutritional security, [...].”

AGIR does not intend to replace existing policies, and its technical and policy leadership is explicitly assigned to regional organizations and governments; rather, the aim is to in some way “inject” resilience into existing programs. The vision emerging from the initiative is one that takes into consideration the multi-sectoral nature of crisis and, consequently, of the solutions to be adopted: more than just agriculture, health, education and purely policy-related issues must be addressed based on consultation of all stakeholders involved.

The consultation had a difficult start: the source of the initiative (ECHO, the European Commission office in charge of emergency relief) and the order in which meetings were held—decision-makers, financial partners and then, at the end of the line, FOs—fanned fears as to their real role.

There was another misunderstanding about the financing likely to accompany the initiative: AGIR will not “release” any additional finance on its own, contrary to initial hopes and what some declarations seemed to imply. However, its launch coincides with the preparations for the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) for the 2014-2020 period. The priorities identified by AGIR should therefore be able to be included in it, particularly as agriculture and food security have been selected by a vast majority of countries as areas on which to concentrate European aid, unlike in the previous EDF.

The ambiguities that presided over the launch of the initiative also have to do with its hybrid nature: AGIR has strong guidelines but is not a program in its own right; the initiative proclaims a set of action principles but without any binding force. AGIR consists of “injecting” resilience into existing programs, which makes it difficult for stakeholders to grasp. Its rapid, even precipitous, launch also helped fuel misunderstandings. The initiative therefore remains to be established for the long haul, which depends above all on a shift in practices and mentalities. The AGIR initiative is the equivalent of the SHARE initiative launched by the EU in the Horn of Africa in 2011. Comparing the two experiences should provide useful lessons.

B. Emphasis on Coordinating Interventions at the Risk of Misunderstandings

Resilience has allowed the various partners (regional institutions, NGOs, FOs, donors) to hold a dialogue around the same table, united by the conviction that to help people survive crises, the notion of emergency must first be rethought in the framework of coordinated action. The inclusive and coordinated nature of the resilience approach is, what is more, promoted very heavily by the European Union in the framework of the AGIR initiative, and saluted by most partners as real progress. The objective is in time to avoid institutional conflicts, advance in the same direction, and avoid “duplicating” programs in different institutions. Indeed, the lack of visibility and coherence linked to the multiplicity of actors is

one of the main hindrances in development assistance.

In the eyes of NGOs, this notion is one of the main contributions from resilience, which makes it possible to place food security at the heart of the agenda and forge a new consensus breaking with traditional sectoral policies: the emphasis placed on resilience amounts to a recognition of their failure, which manifests itself in the repetition of crises [19]. From this perspective, resilience is above all becoming an advocacy tool for NGOs to use with governments and regional institutions. It is therefore an opportunistic (minus the pejorative connotations) position in which the emergence of a

new “trendy” idea is used by certain actors (mainly NGOs) to

serve the priorities they defend [110].

C. But Marked Skepticism Within Local Communities

The institutional falling into line behind resilience is also limited by the fact that it comes above all from donors: this coming together happened at the level of the UN, European Commission and USAID. Under these conditions, farmers’ organizations and local communities are at risk of once again being the end recipients of a method that escapes them. This dimension is all the more visible as representatives of FOs feel that they have been “doing resilience” for a very long time [11] [12]. For instance, practices such as transhumance are in and of themselves a form of resilience—that is to say, adapting to weather conditions subject to cyclic changes. We

can note that climate change, which notably manifests itself in a more rapid succession of droughts, has compromised these traditional endogenous responses, and this is why efforts such as spreading information on climate change are still fully relevant. However, the start of the consultations on AGIR did not help dissipate the fears of local stakeholders, although the situation seems to have been righted afterwards (see sidebar). The feeling may emerge that resilience is discussed over people’s heads, an all the more paradoxical state of affairs as the notion insists rightly on their central role.

III/ Making Resilience a Reality: How the Subject of Debate

The relative unanimity of “pro-resilience” discourse cracks a little when the subject turns to operationalization—in other words, to how to make populations more resilient to shocks and stress. Should households or communities or local

institutions be addressed first? Should we focus on agriculture, as FOs insist, or also address non-agricultural and urban populations? Should aid programs favor the most vulnerable?

A. Vast Divergences Regarding Intervention Targeting

The vital question of targeting interventions to improve resilience reveals considerable divergences, fault lines even.

- The first divergence is scale. Most aid projects focus on household level, as households are a natural target, particularly in the fight against malnutrition. However, an approach widened to community level allows one to understand long-term social and economic dynamics. USAID, for instance, set up an aid program for Ethiopian herders based on a longitudinal study of the future of these populations and their livelihoods. Thus, a widening gap has emerged between the wealthiest, who can react to droughts by moving their herds over very long distances, selling some of their livestock, and the poorest, who cannot. Consequently, the chosen solution is to support the transition of the poorest to other activities, preferably in urban areas, while in parallel support for the wealthiest involves defending their rights, livestock health care, etc. This type of approach is based on very in-depth prior research with academic partners. On the contrary, one of the risks of an approach focusing on households is to crowd out purely policy-related questions and issues relating to the resilience of collective “institutions.” For example, all it takes is one crisis year to put a microfinance institution or grain bank in trouble. For many, increasing the resilience of these local institutions, built over the long term, is a priority. But insisting too fully on the microeconomic level comes with the risk of losing sight of power stakes on the local and national level and between international partners. One of the criticisms levied against the resilience approach is its incompatibility with social sciences [R8], whereas they may actually provide more systemic understanding of the issues.
- Another disagreement deals with targeting the most

vulnerable. While a “resilience” approach naturally consists of addressing vulnerable populations, it remains to be determined whether they should be the only targets. The field of activity determines the target: when it is a matter of adaptation to climate change, entire populations are targeted, but in the fight against malnutrition, the poorest are. In the agricultural sector, ECHO, which is behind the AGIR initiative, emphasizes the most vulnerable, relying on objective measurements of vulnerability [13]. However, we can also advance that a resilience-fostering approach consists of anticipation, and therefore of acting on farmers who have not yet become vulnerable: those who will withstand the next crisis by digging into their reserves, depriving themselves of the means to withstand the crisis after that. Finally, FOs adopt points of view that often contract with “pro-vulnerable” approaches: as sector-specific organizations, they have a tendency to defend the interests of all of the farmers they represent, not merely the poorest.

- Extending on from this debate, the question of which sectors to favor is equally the subject of controversy. FOs and regional organizations tend to make agriculture the priority recipient of the resilience approach, while NGOs and UN agencies insist on the need to widen the focus. Indeed, the determinants of malnutrition are many and go far beyond the question of agricultural production: water supply, sanitation, nutritional quality of food, education, and birth rate are also part of the picture. In regard to the AGIR initiative, urban populations are officially included among the recipients but emphasis is still on agricultural populations (farmers and herders).

B. Implications for Food Security Policies and Governance

Integrate AGIR Within Existing Policies

Extending on from the debate on the sectoral anchorage of resilience, there is not always a consensus on whether existing policies, notably ECOWAP (ECOWAS's agricultural policy), can integrate the various aspects of resilience. The Ouagadougou statement of December 2012 officially launching the AGIR initiative explicitly recognizes “the political and technical leadership of ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS” in the regional governance of the Alliance [R2]. Resilience must be integrated mainly through Pillar III of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) that aims to “increase the resilience [of] vulnerable populations in Africa by reducing risks of food insecurity and creating linkages for participation in agricultural growth.”⁷ This pillar provides for a regional agricultural investment plan targeting the most vulnerable populations. This plan is based on precise identification of these populations, a review of existing policies, and the prioritization of interventions. The tools mobilized are notably improved nutritional indicators, safety nets for the poorest, and measures facilitating access to markets for farmers. However, as the implementation guide for Pillar III of the CAADP specifies, “It is important to note that Pillar III does not attempt to address all sources and types of vulnerability and food insecurity; rather, Pillar III activities target vulnerable populations most likely to be able to contribute to and directly benefit from increased agricultural growth.” It is therefore above all an agricultural growth program. There is a very wide diversity of opinion on the ability of the CAADP and ECOWAP to integrate all aspects of resilience: among NGOs, skepticism seems to prevail even though ECOWAS's food security policies are praised as a step in the right direction [I9] [I10].

C. An Indispensable Break with the Status Quo

Ultimately, the “resilience” approach requires a real shift in culture for all development partners. The rigidities unique to institutions—whether they be international agencies, governments, regional institutions, or large NGOs—make going back to “business as usual” under a new disguise a possibility. First, while relief actors and development aid actors have made real efforts to come together through joint programs and various mechanisms for collaboration, there is still a large divide between those who are “agriculturally-focused” and those who are “nutrition-focused.” Second, the worlds of relief and development aid remain largely distinct, with separate hiring chains. Sitting down at the same table, in this case for the AGIR process, is not enough on its own to resolve misunderstandings and ambiguities. Donors' mentalities also need to shift. Indeed, resilience, which depends on long-term initiatives and projects that do

It also remains to be determined whether, on the regional level, the CAADP shall be able to target vulnerable populations. The institutions promoting AGIR—notably ECHO—insist on decentralization as a way to differentiate approaches based on local situations. This necessarily raises the question of coordination with regional and national institutions. At what level should steering be situated? Who will implement the resources allocated to promoting resilience?

The Challenge of Institution Compartmentalization

The question of integrating resilience in all its many dimensions into regional and national policies therefore raises the issue of governance. The AGIR initiative is intended to enter existing structures rather than create new frameworks. One of the solutions evoked to foster ownership of the resilience approach in regional and national institutions is to decompartmentalize policies or, to use an expression often used by donors, put an end to operating “in silos.” Indeed, one of the main difficulties encountered by NGOs and donors when setting up innovative “pro-resilience” programs is the fact that the interlocutors find themselves in different administrations (Agriculture, Health, Education, etc.) and do not necessarily communicate amongst themselves. In regard to governance, one initiative often cited as an example is the 3N (“Nigerians Nourish Nigerians”) program whose implementation is overseen by a high commissioner appointed directly by the president and having the mandate of organizing consultation [I17]. Between technical support, advice and interference, balance is, for partners from the North, difficult to achieve.

not necessarily have immediate results, is less “sellable” to policy-makers and their constituents than emergency humanitarian relief. It demands long-term projection that is all the harder since in times of financial difficulties governments have a tendency to sacrifice spending that does not meet an immediate need. In both donor and aid recipient countries, the sustainability of initiatives can always be threatened by election schedules [I6].

Finally, a worrying drift has been seen in the allocation of funding to projects: resilience is tending to become a buzzword⁸ of sorts, a mandatory ingredient in all programs [I7]. If this trend continues, resilience would become merely another buzzword, a word that must be included in any strategy paper or aid project without necessarily reflecting on its meaning—thereby justifying FOs' skepticism and ECOWAS's caution.

7 <http://www.caadp.net/pdf/CAADP%20Pillar%20III%20FAFS%20Country%20Implementation%20Guide.pdf>

8 <http://www.irinnews.org/report/96549/AID-POLICY-Resisting-the-mantra-of-resilience>

A Crosscutting Issue: Indicators

The question of indicators is crucial in many ways for the operationalization of resilience. First, the “resilience” approach requires in-depth knowledge of living conditions and close monitoring of the parameters that can affect these conditions (e.g. changes in weather patterns or price fluctuations at the most local level).⁹ Second, good indicators are vital to assessing and possibly correcting the projects implemented. Third, and finally, drawing up a shared list of indicators to define the objectives to attain allows for diagnostics to be shared among partners (states, donors and NGOs), thus facilitating ownership of the process on the local level.

In this area, CILSS is called on to play a driving role through the AGRHYMET Regional Center, in charge of both collecting information on weather, harvests, food security, etc. and supporting technical services in ECOWAS countries. AGRHYMET has set up a system to collaborate with FEWSNET, USAID’s early warning system, FAO, WFP, Oxfam, Save the Children, etc. This system consists of pooling the food security data collected by each organization in its area of specialty. This type of collaboration forms a shared framework that involves all the partners with the aim of producing a complete diagnostic shared by the main protagonists working to prevent food and nutrition crises [15]. All these partners agree on a single framework for vulnerability analysis (the harmonized framework). Containing 12 key indicators, it acts as a regional exchange platform on early warning information. It relies on a network of field actors who regularly transmit information on prices, incomes, nutrition indicators, etc.

While there is a set of indicators that are relatively effective to measure household resilience and thus anticipate crises, the challenge is to establish effective analysis of these data. In West Africa, it is still very difficult to set up a framework for in-depth, detailed and up-to-date analysis supposed to provide information to fuel dialogue on and the agenda for resilience. Food security analyses are above all produced by humanitarian agencies (United Nations, NGOs) and several information analysis frameworks coexist: the regional systems run by CILSS, the IASC group in Dakar, and the systems unique to each institution (WFP, NGOs, etc.).

Conclusion

Very briefly defined as the “capacity to recover,” resilience was introduced into development thinking through DRR (disaster risk reduction) and adaptation to climate change before spreading to all areas of aid. Two positive effects can already be felt:

- Resilience is a recognition of the failure of the development policies of the past and forces donors to face up to their responsibilities—donors who were unable to anticipate the major crises in the Horn of Africa and Sahel although the countries concerned had long been in critical condition.
- It places the issue of people’s food security at the heart of the debate and brings all partners to the table.

Beyond these indisputable contributions, the idea of resilience is in fact multi-faceted:

- It tends to connect emergency aid and development aid: a resilient population is one that is prepared for crises and likely to recover rapidly.
- More than on their vulnerability, it insists on people’s role and their own capacities through the notion of empowerment.
- It has a holistic dimension and shows a determination to attack the many causes of vulnerability. Promoting resilience calls for coordination between adaptation to climate change, food security, and even democracy building.
- It manifests itself differently depending on the target population.

However, there must be no misunderstanding about the more pragmatic reasons it has been so enthusiastically embraced by donors: it is also a matter of a determination to rationalize aid by “emphasizing” recipients—states and populations—who are supposed to find the means to overcome the crisis themselves. This relatively pessimistic perspective is not absent from the discourse of FOs and regional institutions in West Africa.

In the eyes of its promoters, resilience is indeed an innovative approach in that it simultaneously combines a range of tools and partners on the policy, organizational and operational levels with the aim of ensuring flexible steering of aid in pre- and post-crisis situations. It also gets populations involved so that they take an active role in their destiny. This approach can best be seen in integrated programs combining ecologic, economic and social action.

The risk is therefore that in order to obtain a political consensus, we avoid tackling the most sensitive questions: governance and the sharing of roles among donor states, agencies and recipient states, targeting (what sectors and which segments of the population?), and the respective positions of the humanitarian and development aid communities in this process. The price of this avoidance will be a watering down of the concept of resilience, making it merely a vehicle for old, ineffective practices.

⁹ Many indicators have been defined in recent years by NGOs, UN agencies, and the CILSS. One of the main paths to improvement lies in collecting high frequency data on household food situations: by so doing, one can obtain a precise picture of the situation in a region or given population and issue alerts more rapidly. Indicators such as the Coping Strategies Index and the Food Consumption Score allow quantitative and above all qualitative analysis of households’ resilience [17].

A Series of Interviews on Resilience to Food Crises in the Sahel. Inter-Réseaux conducted roughly twenty interviews with development and humanitarian aid actors, including: Dodo Boureima from the Billital Marobé network (I1), Djibo Bagna from ROPPA (I2), Ibrahima Aliou from APSS (I3), Alain Sy Traoré from ECOWAS (I4), Maty Ba Diao from AGRHYMET (I5), Jean Zoundi from the Sahel Club (I6), François Grünwald from the Groupe URD (I7), Frauke de Weijer from ECDPM (I8), Eric Hazard (I9) and Madeleine Evrard Diakité (I10) from Oxfam, Malcolm Ridout from the High Level Task Force on Global Food Security (I11), Philippe Thomas and Pier Paolo Piras from DEVCO (I12), Jan Eijkenaar from ECHO (I13), Christophe Tocco from USAID (I14), Patrick Jacqueson and Sylvie Wabbes from FAO (I15), Naoufel Telahigue from IFAD (I16), Jean Martin Bauer from the WFP (I17), and Daniel Kull from the World Bank (I18).

<http://www.inter-reseaux.org/ressources-thematiques/article/serie-d-entretiens-d-inter-reseaux>

R1 Resilience: Buzz Word or Critical Strategic Concept? URD Paper, August 2012, 8 p. This paper by the URD takes a critical look at the notion of resilience, examining the issues of integrating the various dimensions of vulnerability and the variable interpretations of the concept among stakeholders.

http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/ArticleResilience_EN.pdf

R2 AGIR Joint Statement, Ouagadougou, 6 December 2012, 4 p. This statement announces the founding principles of the AGIR initiative.

http://www.oecd.org/swac/topics/EN_Declaration_Ouagadougou_CD.pdf

R3 Escaping the Hunger Cycle: Pathways to Resilience in the Sahel, Oxfam, Sahel Working Group, September 2011, 124 p. Oxfam reports on the progress made in advancing resilience in the Sahel through existing programs (agroecology, early warning systems, cash transfers) and on coming challenges (governance, price fluctuations, population growth, etc.).

http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/rr-escaping-hunger-cycle-sahel-food-security-260911-en_0.pdf

R4 Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper, 2011, 20 p. A founding document that reviews possible ways to integrate the resilience approach in existing DRR programs.

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications1/Defining-Disaster-Resilience-DFID-Approach-Paper.pdf>

R5 World Bank: Social Resilience and Climate Change: Operational Toolkit, 2011, 20 p. In this document, the World Bank defends an integrated approach to adaptation to climate change by taking into account the social aspects of this change.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/244362-1232059926563/5747581-1239131985528/Operational-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

R6 The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises, European Union, October 2012, 13 p. In this document presented at a preparatory meeting on the AGIR initiative, the EU asserts its intent to tackle chronic vulnerability and draw lessons from its past experience in the Sahel and then introduces the AGIR initiative.

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/food-security/documents/20121003-comm_en.pdf

R7 Resilience in EU International Cooperation: A New Fad? ECDPM, Oct. 12, 2012. ECDPM briefly comments on the previous document, criticizing three points: the approach's "top-down" and government-focused (to the detriment of communities) approach, the silence on support for endogenous change (initiated by communities themselves), and finally the lack of consideration of the necessary coordination between policies that may sometimes conflict with each other.

<http://www.ecdpm-talkingpoints.org/resilience-in-eu-international-cooperation-a-new-fad/>

R8 Resilience: New Utopia or New Tyranny? Reflection about the Potentials and Limits of the Concept of Resilience in Relation to Vulnerability Reduction Programmes, IDS, Sept. 2012, 61 p. An extremely detailed review of the resilience approach, its presuppositions and its limitations. In short: while resilience enables the integration of approaches from different fields (DRR, adaptation to climate change, the fight against hunger), it cannot replace poverty alleviation.

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp405.pdf>

R9 Towards Local-level Food Security in West Africa: "Zero Hunger in West Africa" ECOWAS, Sept. 2012, 21 p. This position paper reports on the state of ECOWAS's reflections on consideration of resilience in the ECOWAP.

http://www.inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/Faim_Zero_EN.pdf

These *Food Sovereignty Briefs* are a joint initiative by Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural and SOS Faim Belgium. They aim to provide summaries of food sovereignty-related subjects based on a selection of particularly interesting references. They are published every quarter and distributed digitally.

SOS Faim Belgium (www.sosfaim.org) supports farmers' and agricultural producers' organizations in roughly fifteen countries in Africa and Latin America. Inter-Réseaux Développement Rural (www.inter-reseaux.org) is an association that aims to promote networked discussions, exchanges and reflection on the subject of rural development in developing countries.

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These briefs were produced thanks to the financial support of the General Directorate for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Belgium) and SOS Faim Belgium. Inter-Réseaux is supported by the Agence Française de Développement.

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Inter-Réseaux, January 2013.