



University of Natural Resources
and Life Sciences, Vienna
Centre for Development Research



Workshop, September 19th 2016

Summary: From fragility to resilience: enabling vulnerable people to cope with shocks

Living conditions in rural areas are often precarious, especially for the 500 million smallholder farmers who produce the vast majority of food worldwide. Depending on scarce natural resources and fragile ecosystems, their livelihoods are further threatened by shocks of all kinds. Natural disasters, land-use conflicts and political unrest put additional pressure on people and natural resources.

In this workshop, we addressed how farmers can strengthen their adaptive capacities and increase their resilience to different shocks. We explored which inherent mechanisms of food systems lead to fragility and how farmers can manage the transition from vulnerability to resilience.

RESILIENCE: DEALING WITH CHANGE

Michael Hauser set the stage by reminding the audience that resilience is the capacity of a system to deal with change and continue to develop. The resilience of communities also benefits from diversity and inclusion, for example in decision making. Shared social values and ethics are equally important when it comes to allocating scarce resources in times of crisis, detailed **Waltraud Rabitsch** from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). The capacity to learn and being able to rely on effective (local) institutions adds to communities' resilience.

RECOVERY FROM CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

Crises that call for resilience can be manifold: natural catastrophes, armed conflicts, or scarce resources. From his experience in post-catastrophe recovery in the Himalayas, **Eklabya Sharma** from ICIMOD wished for resilience beyond merely coping with challenges and "bouncing back" to the pre-crisis state. Recovering from crises can also be taken as an opportunity to recover to a better state than the original one, he stressed in his input statement.

This resonated well with **Katharina Felgenhauer's** (IWMI) project experiences, but leads to a controversial question about priorities: should the emphasis be on quick recovery – at the price of recovering to a system that may lack sustainability – or on recovery to a more sustainable option that will take longer to implement?



Resilience of communities has many components: sharing values, anticipating and preparing for crises, and inclusive decision making are some of them, explained co-organizer Waltraud Rabitsch.



Resilience should not be about mere recovery to the state prior to disturbance or crisis; instead we should aim at recovery to a better state, said Eklabya Sharma.



How can we implement long-term measures to increase sustainability without neglecting immediate recovery, asked Katharina Felgenhauer.

More research on how to reconcile short-term relief actions with long-term interventions aiming at the structural causes of vulnerability is clearly needed.

STAY FLEXIBLE, ADAPT!

Communities and the challenges they face are very different. Methods and strategies need to be tailored to demands and responsive to needs. The diversity in challenges and situations also demands diverse strategies, summarized **Erwin Künzi** (ADA), the plenary session's moderator.

Martina Luger (Horizont3000) and **Alexander Öze** (Austrian Red Cross) both wished for a different attitude in project management which allows for failure.

GO LOCAL: USE LOCAL CAPACITY TO FOSTER LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Gerald Hainzl, Institute of Peace Support and Conflict Management (National Defence Academy), strongly argued for local solutions involving local knowledge, experience and capacity: solutions designed in Europe might not even be an option for people living in other parts of the world. Decentralizing and empowering local structures is another key element for increasing resilience, stressed both, Martina Luger and Alexander Öze. Equally important is removing barriers and bridging gaps, also within one's own organization.

NURTURE VERTICAL LINKAGES TO INSTITUTIONS

For **Sabine Homann-Kee Tui**, ICRISAT, working at the local level is necessary, but not sufficient: we need to go beyond, she says, and address challenges at the institutional level. Taking the same line, Carlos Seré stressed the importance of vertical linkages with policy environment: "They are complex, they are messy, we tend to avoid them, [but they are necessary]!"

IGNORING FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO CRISES IS COSTLY

Sometimes factors that promote vulnerability are taboo and discussion, as well as, solution-oriented attempts at problem solving become very difficult. In such cases, we need to inform governments about the costs of not addressing these issues, argued Sabine Homann-Kee Tui.

WORK BOTTOM-UP, INCLUDE MANY STAKEHOLDERS

Continue bottom-up approaches, advised **Elisabeth Leiner**, Caritas Austria. This also applies to communication processes. Refrain from imposing your own knowledge, local people can give you insights on how to best assist them, argued Gerald Hainzl.

Multi-stakeholder approaches are vital to increase resilience. Conflict prevention and management need to be an integral part, reminded **Dereje Kebede** from the Coordination Office of the Austrian Development Cooperation in Ethiopia. Besides governmental players, many actors from different sectors need to be involved. Find synergies



Agricultural training is not enough; farmers also need links to the private sector, to markets, and to insurance companies, illustrated Erwin Künzi.



Martina Luger, Elisabeth Leiner, Romana Roschinsky, Alexander Öze and Sabine Homann-Kee Tui shared their experiences with the audience (not in this picture: Dereje Kebede, Kat Felgenhauer).



Trying to ameliorate agricultural practices alone will not work; we must take social issues into account, said Sabine Homann-Kee Tui.



With shared resources, the resilience of an individual household might drop while the resilience of the community increases. We need to focus more on the poorest, demanded Dereje Kebede.

and identify the strengths of each party, advised **Romana Roschinsky**, CDR.

The diversity of stakeholders is particularly advantageous, if all parties can learn from each other. Innovation platforms have proven useful for empowerment and in the facilitation of learning experiences.

WHAT MATTERS? - UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS DO

Agricultural challenges often hide social issues. When examining local conflicts, remember that there is an institutional environment that influences how these scenarios evolve. Avoid technology bias and exclusive focus on markets; instead, take into account the complexity of local livelihoods and food systems.

Do not place donor needs over the needs of local partners: support the local community in their quest. It would be fatal to foster aid dependency instead of strengthening local capacities. This might entail having to revisit how project success or project results are defined.

"Often outcomes of research projects do not matter so much", said **Carlos Seré**, "but the fact that the local community was strengthened and, that capacities were developed does."

Realistically appraise your own resources: manage your project resources wisely and do not spread your limited funds too broadly. Work with local communities, but also invest in local functional institutions and remember to establish vertical links with policy environment. Do not ignore clashes of government and corporate interests.

RESEARCH DEMAND: MAKE A WISH

Resilience is a highly important concept, but it is difficult to quantify and can only be understood with a systemic approach. What makes a village or a community resilient (or more resilient than another)? How can we measure resilience? At which level do we target resilience: the household or the community level? Many factors contribute to resilience: how can we see to it that these factors bounce back quicker in times of crisis?

An in-depth analysis of the cost of not addressing factors that contribute to the societal, economic and environmental decline would be needed.

Many individual approaches and projects have been successful; but evidence and scientific analysis of how to scale these approaches up is largely missing to date.

Experts lack guidelines and advice for deciding under which circumstances to spread funds or to concentrate on limited activities, going hand in hand with a demand for improving data availability for short-term/context-specific prediction.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional and national alliances for government responsibilities are needed. It is vital to build and maintain local functioning infrastructure, as well as functioning institutions, while assuring long-



Building trust with communities pays off, but it requires more time, explained Romana Roschinsky.



In Martina Luger's experience, trust and confidence foster innovation.



"Adapt, not adopt!", Ann Waters-Bayer and David Molden discussed with Katharina Felgenhauer how to integrate values, identity and skills from existing systems into new options.



There is a role for governments and a role for NGOs - both are necessary. If one element breaks down, others can step in for a while, argued Alexander Öze.



"It's complex!", is the message that the workshop's matrix of results suggests.

term investment in developing research capacities. Resilience includes the notion of preparedness, which implies being able to anticipate and to manage shocks – it can only be increased if activities in this field receive support. It is important to allow for flexibility and diversity in response measures. Emphasis has to be placed on overcoming existing biases and on addressing equity issues.



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