

Assessing Resilience: reconciling community knowledge with government planning

The Resilience Assessment methodology piloted by the Near East Foundation Consortium in Mali and Senegal under the Decentralising Climate Funds project seeks to strengthen local government planning systems by empowering local people to engage with local governments and identify practical strategies that build their adaptive capacity and longer-term resilience to climate change.

Disconnect between community and government planning

In dryland environments characterised by high and increasing climate variability and extreme events, managing risk requires real-time adaptation to the incidents that arise unpredictably and uncontrollably – avoiding the bad or worse consequences while taking advantage of the opportunities that variability might offer.¹ Realizing such nimble adaptation strategies requires localised systems of governance for planning that bring together not only local government authorities, but also local people through their institutions. Evidence from the work of the Adaptation Consortium in Kenya suggests community and local government systems working together are better able to ensure more appropriate and timely responses to climate change that benefit the more vulnerable, are often more accountable to local citizens and contribute to consensual decisions between actors – thus contributing to goals related to resilience, governance and peacebuilding.²

In Mali and Senegal, local governments are formally responsible for land use planning, service delivery, coordination across sectors and stakeholders, environmental and construction regulation, and funding investments in public goods that support local livelihoods and the economy. These roles and activities are fundamental to building the resilience of communities. Furthermore, their proximity to the ground should enable them to deliver tailored climate adaptation responses that take into account the diversity and complexity of local ecosystems and economies, as well as the needs and priorities of local people.

Summary

Participatory Resilience Assessments offer a tool to address current weaknesses in government-led planning systems, which often fail to recognise climate variability or to meaningfully include communities in priority-setting. Inclusive processes that engage local knowledge, perspectives and priorities are key to delivering successful climate adaptation that complements current strategies, reflects local context and supports long-term resilience. Moreover, the process of engaging in productive dialogue with local authorities empowers local communities to engage their governments more broadly – strengthening local government-community relationships that can support resilience in the long term.



Box 1: Barriers to managing climate risk through local government planning

- Limited capacity of local governments to support community-driven planning and climate adaptation.
- Low capacity to interpret and use climate information to inform planning decisions despite its availability from national meteorological departments or other sources.
- Limited coordination in planning across sectors, stakeholders, scales and timeframes. Mechanisms exist, but generally are operationally weak for want of funds and lacking structure to coordinate climate change adaptation actions, apart from the early warning system managed at the national level.
- Limited budgeting capacities, partly due to the lack of financial resources and knowledge about procedures for identifying, prioritising and setting up projects related to climate change.
- A lack of dedicated funding to ensure that climate change issues are included in local policies and plans.

Source: Fisher et al 2016; Msangi et al 2014⁵

Community-based institutions have legitimacy in the eyes of many of the community – particularly with respect to land use, resource management and conflict mediation. They also have knowledge and tested strategies for managing climate variability and change.

This is the theory. Reality is somewhat different.

In practice, many community-based organisations, particularly customary institutions, lack capacities of genuine representation and the skills to engage with government and other external actors on an equal footing. Government planning fails to support community-driven planning and climate adaptation.

This disconnect between community and government planning is in part due to the persistence of a ‘desertification’ narrative that emphasises scarcity and degradation due to variable rainfall and frequent drought exacerbated by irrational traditional production systems.³ Thus while local governments do consult local people on their development priorities, the focus is more on identifying their needs than necessarily identifying how to support their adaptive strategies designed to exploit or lessen the risk of climate variability. This feeds a dependency view of Sahelian communities and justifies interventions to ‘stabilise’

conditions, often through investments in technology and infrastructure that are not only costly and unsustainable without external support, but which fail to capitalise on the knowledge, experience and ingenuity of people that either exploit the heterogeneity and variability of their environments, or adapt to it during periods of stress.⁴ Such planning results not only in undermining of resilience in the short term, but represents a missed opportunity to capitalise on the region’s potential to address more radical climate change in the near future.

Re-connecting communities and local government

From the outset, the DCF Consortium engaged communities and local government planners in participatory Resilience Assessments. The assessment approach and tools, developed from existing participatory research methods, are still a work in progress to assess their potential to address the challenges (as noted in Box 1) and ensure a more equitable representation of vulnerable groups’ priorities.

The dominant focus on seeking to ‘remedy’ environmental instability characteristic of the Sahel has meant that relatively little attention has been paid to exploring the opportunities those production systems successfully operating under conditions of variability and unpredictability offer for advancing efforts to build resilience against future, more radical, climate change.

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Figure 1: Key steps and components of the Resilience Assessment process implemented in Mali



Their design is based on two core principles. First is their ability to enable local people, differentiated by gender, age, production system and wealth to articulate to external actors the rationale underpinning their livelihood strategies in the face of variability and climate change. The tools seek to provide a platform for local governments and communities to discuss how local livelihoods function and interact, the factors that constrain their resilience to the impacts of climate change, and practical ways to build adaptive capacity and longer term resilience. Such understanding should provide the basis for local government to establish the institutional conditions to strengthen community driven planning and adaptation.

The second principle is to ensure the approach and tools are pertinent, accessible, affordable and can be mainstreamed into existing local government planning systems. This is critical to ensure that differentiated local perspectives, knowledge and priorities are institutionalised into local government planning and decision-making.

Nine participatory Resilience Assessments were conducted in 2016: six in the Mopti region of Mali and three in the Kaffrine region of Senegal. In Mali, these workshops were supplemented by interviews with households in six villages in three different agro-ecological zones. The results and the pertinence of the methodology for supporting local government planning and decision-making will be published in a Working Paper and Policy Briefing in March 2017.

Conclusion

For Sahelian livelihood systems operating under variable and unpredictable climatic conditions, a degree of risk is inherent – eg it may or may not rain in the right place, at the right time or in the right amount. Currently, this is normal and risks of this nature are managed to a greater or lesser degree by the livelihood systems through a range of different production strategies that seek to reduce the impacts of climate variability. Strategies include planting

The Resilience Assessment process is informed by the premise that local people have knowledge and tested strategies for managing climate variability and change, and for climate adaptation to deliver resilience sustainably, these strategies need to be integrated and given due priority in formal planning systems.

different crop varieties with different maturation times or different crops on different soils with different water requirements, raising different species of livestock, splitting herds, or maintaining the rangelands as common land accessed through negotiation and reciprocity. A planning framework that brings together community knowledge and practice with other information, such as climate information, will enable these systems to respond more quickly to current levels of climate variability and extreme events, while contributing to our understanding of how best to address future climate shifts.

In understanding why vulnerability occurs it is important to distinguish between risks that are inherent to, and managed by, the system, and the induced vulnerability that is a result of external factors undermining the ability of the system to function properly and thereby manage risk effectively.⁶ Enabling communities to articulate the factors that strengthen or weaken their livelihood systems provides the basis for local government to support the functionality of local livelihood systems while investing in longer-term processes to address future climate shifts.

In the DCF project, the Resilience Assessment process not only contributes to understanding, but also serves as a precursor for community-led identification and implementation of investments in adaptive strategies funded by devolved climate adaptation funds. The Resilience Assessment is a critical component of the devolved funding model, working hand in hand with the institutional frameworks that help channel climate finance to local communities.

Notes

¹ Krätli S., Hülsebusch C., Brooks S. and Kaufmann B. 2013. Pastoralism: A critical asset for food security under global climate change. *Animal Frontiers* 2(5): 42-50.; Krätli, S. 2015. Valuing variability: New perspectives on climate resilient drylands development. <http://pubs.iied.org/10128IIED.html>. IIED London / ² Tari, D., King-Okumu, C. and Jarso, I. 2015. Strengthening Local Customary Institutions: A Case Study in Isiolo County, Northern Kenya. Adaptation Consortium, National Drought Management Authority, Nairobi. http://www.adaconsortium.org/images/publications/Rapid_Assessment_-_Web_Update.pdf. / ³ Behnke, R. and Mortimore, M. Eds. 2016. *The End of Desertification? Disputing Environmental Change in the Drylands*, Springer Earth System Sciences, Springer; Krätli, S. 2015. Valuing variability: New perspectives on climate resilient drylands development. <http://pubs.iied.org/10128IIED.html>. IIED, London; Hesse, C. 2011. Ecology, Equity and economics: reframing drylands policy. <http://pubs.iied.org/17106IIED.html>. IIED, London; ⁴ Krätli S., Hülsebusch C., Brooks S. and Kaufmann B. 2013. Pastoralism: A critical asset for food security under global climate change. *Animal Frontiers* 2(5): 42-50.; Krätli, S. 2015. Valuing variability: New perspectives on climate resilient drylands development. <http://pubs.iied.org/10128IIED.html>. IIED London; ⁵ Fisher, S., Koulibaly, P. Keita, A., Denis, L., Hesse, C., and McPeak, J. 2016. Baseline report. Near East Foundation consortium under the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme; Msangi, A., Rutabingwa, J., Kaiza, V. and Allegretti, A. 2014. Community and government planning together for climate resilient growth: issues and opportunities from Longido, Monduli and Ngorongoro Districts, northern Tanzania. IIED. <http://pubs.iied.org/10075IIED.html>. / ⁶ Krätli, S. 2015. Valuing variability: New perspectives on climate resilient drylands development. <http://pubs.iied.org/10128IIED.html>. IIED London

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The project

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