Supporting resilience in difficult places

A critical look at applying the 'resilience' concept in countries where crises are the norm

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Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

Policymakers and aid actors have been grappling for decades with the question of how to better support vulnerable people affected by protracted or recurrent crises, and how to deliver long-term support to reduce chronic poverty or vulnerability in places where emergency relief is frequently required – and where what are often considered the prerequisites for 'normal' development are absent. This paper refers to these situations as 'difficult places', both because the people living there frequently face difficulties in achieving even a minimal level of resilience, and because they are the most difficult environments for those concerned with supporting people's resilience. The recent shift of attention towards 'building resilience' has provided a new banner for discussions about how to engage in protracted crises, or in countries with recurrent crises and at high risk of crisis, in ways that go beyond support for meeting immediate needs.

This paper has been commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) to look at the challenges of supporting resilience in situations where it is necessary to think longer-term, but where the stability and strong governance which are considered necessary for traditional models of 'development' are absent. The German government has developed a strategy for engagement in 'situations of fragility and protracted crises, during periods of recovery and in countries that are particularly exposed to natural hazards' (BMZ, 2013b: 5). It uses the label 'transitional development assistance' (TDA) for this assistance, which can work in parallel with humanitarian assistance, follow it or, as its name implies, be used during a hoped-for transition to more traditional modalities of longer-term development. The main aim of TDA in these situations is explicitly 'to help strengthen the resilience of individuals, local communities, civil society actors and state institutions' (*ibid*.).

The paper looks at how resilience is being taken forward in the international aid sector, and then at how best a donor can support resilience-building. Paradoxically, although resilience seems to be an objective particularly appropriate (indeed, necessary) to the situations for which TDA is intended (conflict, fragility, protracted or recurrent crises), much of what has been written about resilience assumes much more ideal conditions as its prerequisite, and so cannot usefully inform those looking for a practical way forward in such situations. One study (Bahadur et al., 2010) finds that the most commonly identified requisites for people or communities being resilient were: a high level of diversity in economic opportunities; communities having a voice in relevant policy processes; effective decentralised and flexible governance and institutions; and a high degree of social and economic equity. These ideals are so far from the realities of difficult places that it is hard to argue that they are useful even as a guide in setting a direction for desired change. This would lead to the conclusion that resilience is probably not a relevant objective in many difficult places. Frankenberger et al. (2012: 9) is rare in making this explicit:

> There will be certain situations – such as those where formal government remains fragile or absent and/or those experiencing ongoing violent conflict – where resilience building may be impossible unless and until basic minimum conditions are present.

This conclusion sits uneasily with what could be called the 'political' case for resilience. The German government's development policy in the context of conflict, fragility and violence (BMZ, 2013a: 7) argues that conflict, fragility and violence are 'central challenges of *development* policy' [emphasis added], as it is in other recent policy documents from the European Commission (EC) (EC, 2012a) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) (Ashdown, 2011; DFID, 2011a). It is precisely this kind of development in these kinds of circumstances that is being called for in the call for attention to resilience (see e.g. BMZ, 2013b; Ashdown, 2011 and many others). Can it really be unfeasible to support people's ability to cope in the very places where resilience is most needed?

2 What does 'resilience' mean?

One side-effect of the increasing attention on resilience has been a plethora of frameworks describing or explaining it – and some degree of confusion about what building resilience actually means, let alone how best to achieve it. Despite the often fraught discussions over its definition, 'resilience' has a simple meaning: the ability to absorb or resist a stress or shock, and to recover from it. The word has been applied in many disciplines (psychology, ecology, physics, sport, economics), to many entities (health services, livelihoods, eco-systems, football teams, banking systems) and in relation to many stresses and shocks. In normal parlance the word presents few problems, but ironically a perceived need to find a more 'academic' or 'scientific' definition that could give certainty and clarity has more often been a source of confusion and misinterpretation.

Although most definitions of resilience refer to the ability of systems to function in the face of disturbances or hazards, this paper uses resilience to talk about people. Most definitions focus on the amount of damage or loss suffered by the 'system' after a shock, and the speed at which some notion of normality (usually taken as the status quo ante) is regained. Whatever form of words is used, the concept of resilience has to include consideration of the following elements:

- *Exposure:* the severity of the problems that people face, and the likelihood (risk) that they will be hit by them.
- *Vulnerability:* how badly they will suffer if they are affected by the problem.

- *Coping and adapting:*[1] the different things that people do when hit by problems to mitigate difficulty or suffering – their ability to maintain an acceptable level of well-being in the face of problems.
- *Recovery:* people's ability, over time, to return to their previous level of welfare, following a problem.

This paper, too, argues that resilience should not merely be used in relation to how much is lost as a result of a shock or stress, but must also be related to the degree of suffering that people have to endure as a result. People are resilient to the degree that they avoid falling into unacceptable living conditions. The idea that a minimum threshold of well-being is central to resilience – i.e. that a rich person is often resilient even though they may lose a lot more than an un-resilient poor person in the face of the same threat – has somehow been excluded from most commonly used definitions of resilience, lost perhaps in the attempt to find a more 'scientific' definition.

The meaning of resilience is easily understandable in indicating a general direction of what needs to be done. Like most useful words, it is not a scientific concept defined by a neat mathematical equation. Attempts to turn it into one will inevitably lead to misunderstanding and confusion – but they are unnecessary. We need to bear in mind the various concepts related to resilience (risk, coping, thresholds, vulnerability, etc.) and then decide in each situation which ones are critical.

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1 Coping refers to what people do in the short term in abnormal circumstances. If such behaviour becomes permanent then people will have adapted – and will presumably find a new set things that they can do in the face of adversity. This will be their new coping behaviour.

3 What has 'resilience' meant in practice?

Although the ways in which the resilience agenda will change aid practice are still developing, and it is far too early to judge what long-lasting impact it will have, four areas where changes are being talked about and planned are emerging. These areas of attention are: the frameworks for discussing the task of resilience-building; reform of the aid bureaucracy to support resilience; programing specifically for resilience; and establishing a metrics of resilience by which it can be measured and impact can be assessed.

3.1 Resilience frameworks

Much attention has been devoted by aid organisations to developing frameworks for thinking or talking about resilience. By presuming that the challenges which need addressing under the heading of resilience need a new conceptual framework, there is an implicit suggestion that resilience is a new analytical challenge, presenting a new set of issues to be analysed. On the whole these frameworks have not helped to introduce clarity, and they have sometimes conflated characteristics which are not only different but may even be mutually exclusive; they also risk masking some of the key questions for analysis because they have tried to pin down a highly amorphous concept that can be applied in so many ways to so many kinds of entities in so many situations in so many fields – without necessarily maintaining any unchanging 'quintessential' core of meaning. As a result, frameworks have risked making it harder to have a sensible discussion about people's resilience (see Box 1).

In some cases, frameworks have even been misleading: they have risked confusion about the relationship between emergency relief and longer-term development

support that the resilience agenda is supposed to improve;[2] they have implied unreasonable possibilities as goals (e.g. the idea that resilient people become better off the more shocks they suffer (DFID, 2011b)); they can undermine analysis of inequality within society as a determinant of vulnerability by seeing resilient individuals as the building blocks and necessary condition for having resilient communities (e.g. TANGO, 2012) – in fact, communities everywhere can derive resilience by their ability to maintain some of their members in extreme vulnerability; or, as discussed above, they create a description of resilience that is too removed from reality to provide a guide when working in real situations.

This paper does not, therefore, discuss frameworks further, save to make the point that resilience in any particular domain is best analysed through frameworks that explain the workings of those domains, e.g. livelihood resilience is analysed using livelihoods frameworks, nutritional resilience through nutritional frameworks and the resilience of banking systems through banking and finance models.

Over time empirical studies will hopefully provide new insights about what helps make some people more resilient in different circumstances. Such studies are taking place, just as empirical studies on vulnerability have been undertaken for many years. Progress in understanding is incremental, though, and sudden conceptual breakthroughs or theoretical revolutions have not taken place.

3.2 Resilience and the aid bureaucracy

Resilience has had the most effect, and the most positive impact, in influencing thinking about the bureaucracy of international aid. Many aid actors see resilience as offering another opportunity to address the disconnection between development and

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2   Most resilience frameworks make no reference to humanitarian aid (e.g. Oxfam, FAO, Practical Action, Tulane University, TANGO), although it is generally stated that humanitarian action has a role to play in building resilience.

Box 1: What is missing in the resilience theories?

Although the concept of resilience as a whole is receiving a great deal of theoretical attention, some of the areas where theoretical attention is most needed are being skated over and even masked by definitions or theories that hide the questions from scrutiny. Some of the issues which need analysing in any given situation but which are being obscured by frameworks include:

- The relationship between risk and resilience (when is risk to be avoided, and what are the opportunity costs of avoiding it?).
- How far is people's ability to withstand a shock related to their ability to recover from it? Is it right to equate (as most resilience 'graphs'[3] and some definitions do[4]) a quicker recovery with a smaller loss in the face of shocks?
- If not, when is it better to invest in one rather than the other? How do we best judge when it is better to invest in the ability to resist shocks, rather than in a new strategy that would avoid those risks?
- What is the relationship between humanitarian action and resilience-building? Although 'integrated resilience programs' are called for (e.g. Frankenberger et al., 2012), is the aftermath of a disaster the right time to make structural changes?
- Resilience is a quality ascribed to communities, systems and households. What is the relationship between these? Do more resilient communities have fewer vulnerable people? Which should be the objective of international aid?

emergency aid. The highly influential Humanitarian Emergency Response Review (Ashdown, 2011) turned the humanitarian challenge around and made *development* progress (national and international

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3 Many authors have described or explained resilience using graphs showing some idea of well-being on the y axis and time on the x axis. Examples range from the most pictorial or sketched (e.g. DFID (2011b)), through the illustrative (e.g. Mitchell and Harris (2012)) to the mathematical (e.g. Barret and Constas (2013) and Renschler et al. (2010)).

4 See for example Renschler et al. (2010).

policies, aid, etc.) responsible for ensuring that people are able to cope when problems occur. For this to happen, development thinking must be informed by an understanding of how people fall into crisis – who is vulnerable, when, where and, the most neglected question, why. Development practitioners would thus have to collaborate with colleagues responsible for emergency response in two ways: their understanding of what needs to be done would have to be shaped by an analysis of the crisis; and development efforts would have to be targeted at the same people who are most often in need of emergency support.

Once development strategies are shaped by thinking about crises (or vulnerability and resilience to crises), it then becomes necessary for this understanding to work the other way: emergency actors need to understand how relief fits into and is guided by a longer-term strategy. (Such a demand for joint analysis is also made by others, e.g. Frankenberger et al. (2012).) This cannot of course happen as long as development strategies are missing in action in crises-prone areas. The argument that development policy should be determined by crises, which became a major catalyst for the resilience agenda, overlaps with the case for rethinking Linking Relief, Recovery and Development (LRRD) – an LRRD agenda that is not just about emergency relief trying to find exit strategies to link to long-term structures, but is a genuinely 'two-way LRRD'. (See Section 4 below and Mosel and Levine (2014) for a fuller discussion of one- and two-way LRRD.)

Small steps can represent a major paradigm shift. The EC also sees such links as a central issue in improving aid. Its resilience policy (EC, 2012a) and the follow-up Action Plan (EC, 2013) both stress the need for a common analytical approach to emergency and development support that makes resilience a common reference point for both humanitarian and development actors, and call for joint planning processes to develop both kinds of support. Such joint planning has taken place in some countries. Senior officials at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) ran exercises in country offices where staff mapped their development and emergency spending. The visual demonstration of the almost total lack of geographical overlap between the two spoke for itself, and will hopefully lead to change not just in the geographical distribution of aid, but also in how aid professionals think about their work.

Other donors are also thinking about the same problems and trying different approaches. BMZ's use of a special funding stream within TDA, which seeks to bridge the gap between development cooperation and humanitarian aid, has been discussed. With a focus on resilience as a guiding principle, it is specifically thought of as a medium-term engagement (up to four years) in situations of chronic or repeated emergency, with flexible and adaptable implementation modalities. DFID is testing different approaches, including the use of long-term (currently four-year) humanitarian programming in protracted crises (supported in Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Sudan and, shortly, Somalia) and a new funding stream which integrates concerns about chronic vulnerability to crises with the additional vulnerabilities expected to be created by climate change.

Another common theme running through resilience discussions is the need for greater flexibility in programming and aid management. The first target has been flexibility in the scale of interventions, with 'flexing' becoming the new term for an increase in the scale of a project in the face of an imminent crisis. More attention will also be necessary (especially in difficult countries) on flexibility in the sense of being allowed to adapt interventions as circumstances change. This requirement is applicable to aid generally, particularly in countries in 'transition' or otherwise at risk of crisis. It is too early to expect concrete changes in the bureaucratic systems of aid which can satisfy the competing needs for flexibility and accountability, but the fact that this is so central on so many agendas is a major opportunity.

Resilience has been spoken of informally as being 'a combination of DRR and sustainable development'. DRR had become artificially – and problematically – restricted to natural disasters and purely technical in perspective; resilience offers an opportunity to revisit the concerns of DRR, but with a lens that includes the political, social and economic aspects of sustainable livelihoods thinking. There are those[5] who go further and explicitly understand resilience to include the ability of the international community to respond earlier and more effectively to crises (of whatever kind), making emergency preparedness (and not merely DRR) an ingredient in resilience-building.

3.3 Resilience programming

Although a main driver for thinking about resilience was the conviction that development aid should try to prevent people falling into crisis (i.e. an objective of aid *strategies*), 'resilience-building' is increasingly being used as a specific technical objective of aid *projects*. Some donors have created funds specifically intended for 'resilience-building', even if this sits uneasily with the idea that supporting resilience entails breaking down barriers between funds, communities of practice and bureaucracies. Although for many the resilience agenda is explicitly about inter-disciplinarity, most resilience initiatives and programmes have focused on livelihoods. 'Resilience programming' is not widely used to refer to efforts to ensure that basic services are resilient to crises. DFID has launched a major fund for climate change 'resilience', which explicitly encourages DRR approaches aimed primarily at resilience.

Resilience budgets are still in their infancy, but they are likely to spread. The European Union (EU) is increasingly adopting the language of resilience in its programming, but this is largely a rephrasing of food security objectives rather than a 'new' set of objectives.[6] DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE) has launched separate tenders for four-year programmes in Somalia for livelihoods projects and resilience-building, though it is not clear that the distinction will in fact be maintained. USAID launched a request for proposals for a 'Sahel resilience learning' programme in June 2013 with the goal of promoting 'the adoption of proven resilience-enhancing technologies and innovations' (USAID, 2013). This document endorsed methodologies for measuring resilience, which suggests that the direction of resilience programming will increasingly be based on objectives and assessment criteria derived from theoretical resilience constructs.

The aid sector as a whole has not yet arrived at any consensus on how best to build or strengthen resilience, and indeed most agencies would hesitate to claim that they have the answer. A number of tendencies, together with their implicit assumptions, can however be identified. Some organisations continue with the same programming that they have been using for years, relabelled as 'resilience activities'. This probably deserves less criticism than it receives,

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5 See for example Harris (2013), Manyena (2006), UNISDR and WMO (2012).

6 The EU Communication on Resilience is called *The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises*.

if it is believed that the resilience agenda does not introduce a new objective or a new analytical concept, but uses a new language to call for a refocusing of aid (i.e. politically, not technically). The danger comes when activities which could conceivably support resilience in particular situations are then believed to be inherently 'resilience enhancing' wherever they occur. Since the list of activities which could improve people's assets, production, human capital and market access is almost limitless, almost anything can be called resilience-building. (One donor drew up a list of 73 distinct project types, ranging from functional literacy through iodising salt to supporting micro-savings groups in 'an attempt to categorize and organize logically all of the different types of activities that can be imagined to build resilience to chronic drought and conflict in the Sahel'.) Interventions are then justified by their categorisation as resilience-building rather than by reference to a particular problem or situational analysis.

A slightly different tendency has been to call very broadly for major resilience initiatives, but without committing to any specific approach, for instance the EU's Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience (SHARE) initiative and the Global Alliance for Resilience (AGIR). The reason for this is a belief that the challenge of resilience is not inherently a new one for development aid, and does not need any particularly new solutions – just greater resolve to do what we already know how to do. Although we would argue that it is correct that the challenge is not at all new, it does not follow that we therefore know how to meet it. The resilience debate is itself rooted in the conviction that aid has for years been failing to prevent people from falling into crisis, and not merely because inadequate resources have been devoted to the task. The vagueness in describing what is to be accomplished and how is therefore worrying in that it may reinforce, or at least permit, analysis and programming by assumption – the kind of list-making described above as a basis for interventions. This legitimises designing and funding interventions which are not clearly based on in-depth analysis of people's specific situation.

The belief that we know what works is strong, although different people or organisations put their faith in different approaches. Some rely on technical solutions such as drought-tolerant seeds and small-scale irrigation (e.g. USAID). Others look to less proven interventions being advanced independently of any resilience objectives. For example, both the

EU (EC, 2013) and USAID (USAID and Rockefeller Foundation, draft, July 2013) have launched action plans on resilience which have insurance as a key component. It is striking, though, that neither document explains how and where insurance might work, or even which kinds of insurance should be used and for whom.

The World Bank and, with World Bank loans, several governments in Africa are increasingly looking to public works programmes (PWP) as a vehicle for creating economic assets and providing short-term employment for large numbers of people. The World Food Programme (WFP) is investing similarly in PWP, though more often through employment paid in-kind with food. Although this was not originally an agenda emanating from resilience, it is now being linked to it (WFP's food for assets support to the semi-arid parts of Uganda is now being described as 'resilience oriented'). This is paralleled by increasing attention to social protection, for instance by DFID and increasingly by the EU, and the language of 'graduation' from safety nets or social protection is perhaps being seen as a synonym for achieving resilience.

The link between social protection and resilience is intuitive, but not entirely simple. Social protection is sometimes seen as a *component* of resilience and sometimes as a *vehicle for building* resilience. The distinction is important. The former view accepts that people targeted by social protection may never be able to achieve independent resilience. However, if they can rely on support in times of trouble they can enjoy 'dependent resilience', but only if social protection is rights-based and reliable (and genuinely frees people from dependency or exploitation). The more common thinking behind 'social protection-type approaches' sees support as enabling targeted recipients to build personal or community assets to the point where they achieve 'independent resilience'. A recent unpublished review found that these programmes often had unrealistic expectations, offering relatively small transfers over too short a term to achieve transformative change.

Another common approach to resilience-building is to stress the way in which interventions or policies are developed and implemented, rather than their technical content. Many agencies believe that multi-sectoral approaches are essential for supporting resilience, on the grounds that the challenges which people face tend to affect them in lots of ways, and hence there is a need to address the challenges

holistically. However, whatever the merits or otherwise of multi-disciplinary or holistic approaches, there is no clear reason why they have been specifically linked to resilience. It may well be that important contributions can be made in helping people become more resilient by addressing one single challenge that they face rather than trying to responds to all of their challenges at the same time. This ought to be treated as an empirical question rather than a defining characteristic of resilience approaches.

The same applies to community participation, which is often taken to be essential for flexibility and resilience-building (see, for example, the approach of www.reachingresilience.org; IFAD (2013); and the World Bank's Community-Driven Development (CDD) approaches). Participation has long been advocated within sustainable development circles, but the links with resilience are not clear (even if participation and flexibility are both valid principles for aid agencies). Participatory approaches may in fact lead external actors to focus unduly on the communities or households whose resilience is to be supported – possibly underplaying the importance of addressing structural causes of vulnerability, which may lie far away.

A more encouraging tendency is a growing recognition that there is uncertainty as to how best to support resilience, and a belief that innovation, different kinds of programming and learning are needed. This may slowly be replacing the more widespread assumption behind major initiatives that we know how to solve the resilience problem. There is a need to understand far more about the impact of interventions (disaggregated, quantified, contextually understood and assessed years after an intervention ceases), and it is to be hoped that attempts to learn will be broad-based and not straitjacketed by resilience frameworks or new theoretical resilience indicators.

In general, so-called 'resilience programming' is still too new to assess whether or not a clear body of work will emerge, and most current initiatives are based on old approaches to food security, early response and DRR. However, though a fresh take on old problems can be useful in bringing new energy to the challenge, there is a danger that this makes it less likely that thinking and programming will be grounded in a historical perspective and lessons learned from previous experience. The most important shift in attention as a result of the focus on resilience is neither in the content or modality of programming itself,

but rather in how programming is designed. Several actors, including the EC and some donors, have called for much greater problem and situational analysis to underpin interventions and policy. In part, this is a call for development and emergency agencies, departments, ministries and offices to work together on analysis, but by implication this is extended to include the need for analysis from several perspectives: political, economic, political-economy, conflict[7] (as appropriate). It is hard to exaggerate the importance of a shift in emphasis away from interventions based on needs assessment towards ones derived from in-depth problem analysis. This is probably the *sine qua non* of genuine progress in supporting resilience.

3.4 Learning and resilience 'metrics'

Two parallel processes may have a significant impact on how resilience is understood, programmed and financed. There is a broad movement within the aid sector to tie funds increasingly to 'results' as part of value for money. This depends, of course, on agreed ways of defining and measuring results. There has been growing attention on developing methodologies for measuring resilience, and selecting parameters which can serve as indicators or components of resilience. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has led work on quantifying resilience; DFID and USAID have both championed the value for money justification for resilience, and DFID has supported work aimed at quantifying this. Various NGOs are also advancing methods for quantifying resilience or the impact of their resilience-building work (e.g. Mercy Corps, Oxfam). Although it is too early to say what impact quantification will have in setting the agenda on resilience-building, it is likely to be significant. Whether or not the influence is positive will depend very much on what approaches becomes industry standards.

A full discussion of the conceptual and methodological problems with the creation of a resilience metric is beyond the scope of this paper, and is covered in Levine (2014). The need for much better understanding and assessment of the impact of

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7 Based on the BMZ strategy *Development for Peace and Security* (BMZ, 2013a), all development interventions in fragile states require a context analysis that deals with conflict, violence and fragility.

interventions and policies is not in question. However, this cannot be achieved by constructing some abstract entity called 'resilience', creating a list of its various prerequisites or characteristics and then counting how much each of these changes over time. This attempt to create a universal, generic way of quantifying resilience removes so much of what is important about what needs to be assessed – what the particular constraints (and opportunities) are for specific people in any situation, and how far this is changing. (See also USAID/DFID (2012) on the need for context-specific monitoring.) Two examples illustrate why this is counter to common sense.

First, the assumption that any progress on characteristics of resilience is to be counted equally assumes that there are no thresholds below which progress is not useful. In fact, building half a dam does not provide 50% of resilience against a flood: it provides no protection at all until the dam is complete and high enough. Progress on resilience must be analysed, not simply measured, against what is seen to be enough for people to be able to cope.

Second, generic measures would allow a resilience score to increase whichever of the generic components of resilience were altered, regardless of whether or not they were relevant to the particular threat that people faced. For example, the resilience score of people living near a river with the threat of flooding could be improved equally by giving them livestock, by providing them with a health centre, by giving them an extra year's schooling or by improving flood control measures. It seems obvious that which one contributes to their resilience should be derived from an analysis of the risks that they faced and their different options for facing them. This is not to assume that there can only be one strategy in the face of risk (in the example above, investing in education to get a job in town or investing in land that can be irrigated for commercial horticulture may be more useful than flood defences). Diversity of solutions does not contradict the

argument that indicators of progress in resilience can only be determined for a specific population group in a particular context, and that they will depend on the chosen intervention and its accompanying programme theory (see Section 4.3).

It has been argued that an approach to monitoring and quantifying impact which looks only at comparing changes in situation in the same context over time abandons the attempt to quantify resilience in ways which allow comparisons to be made from one place to another. The reply must be to question where this demand for cross-situational quantitative comparison comes from, or, more precisely, why this demand is being made of 'resilience-building' when it has not been made in most other sectors before. Very little good assessment of the impact of livelihood interventions is carried out and impact monitoring is still in its infancy in this sector, even though the concepts are clear, the tools are well understood and the indicators are (relatively) straightforward. Even if the demand for cross-situational measurements of resilience made sense, it would be strange to place a demand on 'resilience building' that has never been placed on other sectors. For those actually working in the field, the most important task is to refine ways of analysing situations of risk so that context-specific indicators can be identified and monitored – indicators which are actually useful to those designing and implementing policies and interventions.

The relatively limited contribution so far of 'resilience thinking' in helping to improve aid does not make the task less relevant or less important. The focus, though, should remain on what the constraints are – whether the constraints facing vulnerable people (or institutions and systems), or the constraints facing the aid systems intended to help them. It is not by chance that the greatest progress has been made in trying to reform the aid system: the resilience agenda helps gather political will to addressing an area where the problems and needs were already well identified.

4 What needs to be done?

The core concern behind the call for resilience, it has been argued, is the need to target development support at those who are most at risk of falling into crisis. Five broad and inter-related areas where progress is needed can be identified, all of which are generally valid, but which have particular resonance for difficult places.

4.1 Refocusing international aid to prioritise helping to prevent people falling into crisis

This is the primary challenge for supporting resilience: mobilising the full weight of political and economic resources that development actors can offer in the interests of people most vulnerable to crisis. The primary importance of this principle for difficult places is precisely to argue for more long-term 'development-style' aid for these contexts. Two particular challenges are detailed here, on the content and the politics of resilience.

The task of supporting the resilience of specific vulnerable groups in difficult circumstances such as conflicts is discussed below. There is also the large-scale task of addressing the chronic poverty and exposure to risk of large populations in areas of the world such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. A project approach cannot be sufficient for such a macro-scale endeavour. Solutions are needed that can work at scale. Partial measures may or may not be steps on the path towards resilience: some conception of the overall task is needed in order to guide individual components of that endeavour. This has so far been absent from the larger international initiatives (e.g. SHARE, AGIR), which have not provided a real road map or destination for resilience-building efforts. However, only when this is done can aid programmes be assessed not by what they do and how much they spend (outputs), but by reference to their place within a bigger picture, making clear how, and how much, they contribute to an overall strategy.

The challenge then will involve development agencies acquiring different sets of skills and expertise:

understanding processes of vulnerability at micro-level, as well as how macro-economic conditions create enabling environments from which some can benefit; and understanding how policies and interventions play out in practice, often in contrast to their stated trajectories or to economic theory. In most countries where there is extreme vulnerability, some of the causes lie in governance and a lack of political will or interest in marginalised groups – or even an active desire to maintain their marginalisation. Many countries receiving aid favour investment in high-potential areas. The current development consensus, around agreements such as Paris and Busan, is that development agendas should be set by national governments. There has however been little discussion of possible tensions between supporting the resilience of the most vulnerable citizens and supporting the national policies of their governments that may be partly responsible for undermining people's resilience in the first place.

4.2 Linking emergency and development policy and interventions

There is no obvious consensus as to whether development support and emergency relief should be thought of as one or managed separately. There is equally no consensus over the extent to which different tools and structures should be used for the two situations. One of the main justifications for maintaining some distinction is that emergency or humanitarian relief is supposed to be given solely on the basis of need and in a politically neutral way: few would argue that development support can be so apolitical, or that comparative need is the only basis for targeting it. Whatever is thought about the differences between humanitarian and development action, though, there is little argument that much more collaboration, interaction and synergy is needed between development and emergency support, or that in countries facing frequent or continuous emergencies a joint analysis by development and

humanitarian agencies and specialists is necessary to ensure that development aid and policy is based on an understanding of how some people fall into crisis, and that crisis response will be planned with a bigger and longer-term picture in mind. In difficult places, this essentially means that *all* assistance, however it is funded and administered, should be brought under a single analytical and strategic umbrella covering both longer-term and short-term perspectives.

The 'LRRD problem' has been identified and diagnosed, and our discussion of the problem and how to address it is contained in a companion paper.[8] Progress on making LRRD a reality has been limited. Mosel and Levine (2014) look at the need for what could be called 'two-way LRRD', where relief and development are mutually linked or integrated, rather than thinking only of linking in one way, emergency relief handing over to development. Relief and development, and any other aid categories such as TDA or recovery, may exist at the same time in the same place, using different modalities to address different problems or take advantage of different opportunities – but they should be conceived holistically as part of a complete strategy.

The difficulties to achieving this are principally bureaucratic. Development spending rarely has as its primary objective the creation of conditions that prevent crises (see above). This is both a moral problem about the use of aid resources, and also a practical one because, in the absence of longer-term initiatives, it is impossible to find sensible exit strategies for short-term relief efforts. Agencies involved in emergency relief thus find themselves forced to use often inappropriate tools and short-term funding to respond to chronic needs because they cannot find an acceptable way of walking away. Chronic problems have to be diagnosed in emergency terms (i.e. focusing on symptoms and needs) – but relief cannot bring chronic needs below acceptable thresholds. Such a situation was clearly seen in Haiti, where three years after the earthquake chronic poverty and grossly inadequate housing conditions continued to be presented as a problem of 'displaced' people in order to justify an emergency response (UNOCHA, 2013).

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8   The paper (Mosel and Levine, 2014) was also commissioned by BMZ.

4.3 Incorporating a future-looking perspective into policies and programmes

Resilience, as a latent capacity waiting to be realised, seems intrinsically to include in itself the future, and people's future responses to changing circumstances and events. Change comes from factors such as globalisation, urbanisation and demographic and technological changes, all of which will almost certainly affect most people's lives in the coming decades, as well as climate change – and a growing recognition of the importance of climate change among development actors has been a key driver in promoting the importance of forward-looking perspectives in policies and programmes. The ways in which these forces will shape people's lives will depend ultimately on politics, institutions and the playing out of relationships of power (see Lister and Pain (2004) for examples from Afghanistan of changes in market conditions driven by power and politics rather than by economic or technical change). Rapid progress in improving the ability of aid to be forward-looking is possible on two levels: in the analysis behind the formulation of development strategies; and in their implementation, by ensuring that development policy and interventions support people's own ability to deal with unknown futures (or, to use the current jargon, their 'adaptive capacity').

Adaptive capacity means people's ability to make and realise well-informed decisions in the future. Adaptive capacity is important in all development situations, but it is especially critical in difficult places, which are typically rapidly changing situations, where the ability to cope with change is key – and where people may not be able to rely on others (e.g. their state, elites) without exploitation. Supporting adaptive capacity is slower and more difficult than transplanting new technologies or providing assets, and it needs very different skills from the ones technicians generally possess. It will thus have significant implications for staffing and resources. For example, far more time (i.e. far more resources) is needed to undertake meaningful participatory processes, which have to be conducted by staff with skills in social analysis and facilitation, rather than staff whose instinct (and training) is

to immediately offer technical, expert advice. At a higher level, supporting adaptive capacity and making the social and institutional reality the key focus of attention means devolving greater decision-making authority to staff who are experts in the context, whereas this power (and the corresponding remuneration) is in most cases concentrated in the hands of staff with a generalist expertise, and experience from many contexts is valued above detailed experience of one. (See Ludi et al. (2012) for a fuller discussion of the implications of taking adaptive capacity seriously for development programming, funding and staffing.)

4.4 Improving the impact of policies and programming on the lives of vulnerable people

An improvement in the quality of aid depends in part on an improvement in the quality of programmes. It is frequently possible to see simply from an analysis of a project design that the stated objectives do not match proposed activities. This is most often because the necessary link between the two, and the analysis of the problem and of the proposed intervention, is missing or superficial. Until programming is obliged to be

Box 2: 'What does a good resilience programme look like?'

Two examples may offer some clues as to what 'good' resilience programming looks like in difficult places.

In post-earthquake Haiti, one NGO, Architectes d'Urgence, was working on community neighbourhood planning in suburbs which had no official existence. As with much of Port-au-Prince, no planning permission had been granted for any development and the formal legal status of the land was probably impossible to untangle. Local residents explained how their unofficial (or, in the local authority's terms, illegal) status was a main cause of vulnerability, undermining their security of tenure and constraining access to services. The NGO's response was simple: as part of the neighbourhood plan, housing numbers were allocated. Residents had small metal plates made with their number, which quickly became a semi-official address. Although the legal status of their neighbourhood had not changed, residents felt a transformation in their ability to negotiate with local authorities and defend their rights over their property. The house number allocation was a small part of a project and brought no change in people's asset or skills or any direct economic benefit. It did not solve all their problems – but it radically reduced what they felt was one of their main sources of vulnerability.

In the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, recurrent conflict has been a constant in people's lives. They live with the constant threat of having to flee – quickly, for extended periods and with few if any external sources of support. When people have to flee

high up in the mountains finding food is hard, and livestock (goats) had to be left behind because they could not withstand the cold conditions at higher altitudes. A simple intervention introduced a different breed of goat specifically chosen for its ability to survive the cold, allowing people to take with them some means of survival when they fled. A culture of mutual assistance meant that the new goat breeds could be easily multiplied and shared.

Do the two projects have anything in common? Neither was designed as a resilience-building initiative. Neither attempted to solve all of the problems people faced. Neither was meant to be replicable. In Nuba, the actual asset transfer was small, and it certainly did not make people any richer; in Haiti, people received nothing at all. In both, the interventions were based on a very good understanding of local social dynamics and their importance. Neither intervention bothered with the usual 'shopping lists' that people present to NGOs: instead, people's real situation was well understood. Perhaps as a result, neither of the projects fitted clearly into a discrete 'sector' (were the goats in Nuba a livelihood or a protection project?).

Perhaps the secret of good resilience programming is doing something smart, based on good analysis of people's problems and opportunities and good understanding of the local social and political system, and designed to give the help to let people do the things that they would like to do for themselves.

underpinned by an analysis of a satisfactory level, much aid effort will continue to have minimal impact on the lives of those who most need it. Such analysis must be as sophisticated in looking at the proposed solution as at the problems to be addressed. Much programming is based on a naïve belief about how a project will play out institutionally, failing to take into consideration the way in which resources and power are contested – and that the people whose resilience needs building are precisely those with the least ability to contest. This requirement is true in all situations, but is most crucial – and hardest to do well – in difficult places.

4.5 Finding new paradigms for longer-term support in protracted and recurrent crises

Generic programming is not appropriate for a category of countries (i.e. the difficult ones) with nothing in common except precisely the fact that they share unpredictability and long-term crises. Indeed, BMZ's TDA fund for such countries has been predicated on the need for flexibility because standard models for delivering aid are unlikely to be appropriate. That said, certain broad principles can be offered on how to work in these countries.

A choice is often presented between working through the state or ignoring the state and engaging instead in direct service delivery. The dichotomy is false in two directions: many possible relations are possible with states and governments; and there are many other actors besides the state and the aid agency which can be involved in aid interventions. Engaging with the state is always important, but the state is never the only viable or necessary interlocutor, especially where it is party to a conflict. In such cases, a dialogue must still be held, and relations sought, with different parts of central and local government (which are rarely monolithic) even when this is not considered the best way of delivering assistance effectively or most fairly. In such situations, many other institutions and entities may be important partners, allies or targets.

Vulnerability analysis should reveal where constraints to people's independence and ability to cope come from – and where opportunities for expanding their agency lie. This may relate to the market, other

Box 3: What do we know about difficult places?

There are no easy generalisations about the collection of countries variously called 'fragile', 'conflict-affected' or in 'protracted and recurrent crises'. However, where conflict at some level has been persistent, it is often to be expected that, even in post-conflict recovery, some or all of the following conditions may be found.

- The state is weak and/or of contested legitimacy.
- Governance is poor – corruption is rife, politics serve the interests of those in power.
- Institutions are weak.
- Many people are very poor.
- The economy offers few opportunities for most people (but high rewards for a few).
- The economy is largely informal – perhaps even with a strong illegal economy.
- Law and order is insufficient or is often arbitrary.
- People feel insecure, and so have short-term horizons.
- It is dangerous to be there.
- People are often displaced, local social norms and order have been disrupted.

These are, of course, the conditions where we can least expect projects to follow predicted trajectories, resources to be distributed and used in accord with the wishes of the project – and where it is hardest to know what is going on or to be able to do anything about it.

members of the community, sources of information, institutions of justice (formal or informal) or financial services. Aid agencies do not need to take responsibility for tackling constraints directly: society is always a constant flux of processes and struggles between institutions and between people, and it is necessary to identify which of these can best be supported and how, in order to achieve the objectives of the intervention.

Problems in most of the countries under discussion will not be solved even in the next decade or more, so a much more long-term view is necessary. This may include both a long-term strategy (of 20 years

or more[9]) for long-term change *and* a longer-term commitment to support for immediate or short-term problems. It is currently difficult for donors to plan beyond a four-year horizon.

The need for flexibility in difficult places has been stressed frequently (see above and Mosel and Levine (2014)). Operational agencies argue for more bureaucratic flexibility from donors so that programmes can adapt to unpredictable needs. However, the challenge is not only bureaucratic. Decision-makers need to know how contexts are changing and what adaptations in policy or interventions are needed as a result. The challenge is to have the right management skills, investment in awareness and effective relationships between the different actors in a project (donor, operational agency, government, local institutions, local population). A donor should ideally not merely *allow* flexibility but *demand* it – activities which have become inappropriate should obviously not continue to be funded.

Flexibility is currently constrained by the very logic of programing and evaluation. The common current practice is for success and impact to be judged by reference to the *project's* objectives. If the beneficiary population has other preferences and uses the learning or inputs offered by an intervention in order to meet their own priorities, this results in an ineffective project according to the most common definitions[10] of 'effectiveness'. This is particularly inappropriate for difficult places, where people's priorities and opportunities are even more diverse and changing than normal.

The need for better analysis has already been stressed. Apart from any technical and economic appraisals, as an absolute minimum all development interventions should be based on a documented analysis that explains:

• why people suffer as they do;
• what their world may look like in several years' time;
• what they are trying to do to overcome the constraints they face;

• how their scope for making choices can be increased;
• what is preventing this;
• what influences or sources of power can be harnessed to support the agency;
• what different interventions and policy changes have been tried in the past;
• what impact these have had on different people and why;
• what possible measures could be taken; and
• how these are likely to play out in practice.

It is rare to find any documentation of such an analysis.

In difficult places, conflict and political-economy analysis will be especially important, with a need for as sophisticated an analysis of the proposed solution (e.g. political realities, institutional capacity and the power balance are likely to affect impact, including how aid may be diverted or co-opted) as for the problem. The general standard of analysis cannot be improved by training alone. It is necessary also to create a demand for analytical capacity, which will happen only when good-quality analysis is essential. At the moment, Mowjee (2013)'s observation on emergency relief, that 'currently there are no incentives in the humanitarian system to provide the most appropriate response', is equally true for development interventions.

The process leading to such analysis also requires further scrutiny. Too often the choice of intervention is based on superficial participation (see Levine et al. (2011), particularly pp. 32–33), with 'community' meetings leading to the collection of a shopping list of requests. A different kind of engagement is needed, one which involves building understanding and trust over longer time spans, and involves different skills to find out what people have to say. This requires greater investment in developing the skill set needed to gain this understanding, and a willingness to finance the time needed to implement the process.

There is still a dominant aid paradigm that conflicts create poverty by eroding resources, and that this can be countered by providing or replacing assets, which will make people more resilient. The implications of pouring resources into these kinds of situations are easily imagined; certainly, if done at all, it needs doing with great care. More can often be achieved by

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9 The World Development Report 2011 (World Bank, 2011) estimates that change in post-conflict countries takes at least 30 years.

10 See for example the DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance (OECD, 1991): 'Effectiveness: a measure of the extent to which an aid activity attains *its* objectives [emphasis added]. This remains the industry standard (e.g. ALNAP, 2013).

thinking of the policies and institutions which shape what happens to people's assets over time, where they get them from, how they are used or traded and how and why they become depleted. The contrast can be seen in two approaches that have been used to tackle widows' vulnerability to land-grabbing in post-conflict Uganda. One organisation purchased a large area of land to resettle landless widows. Another chose to work with local and national institutions of land justice, both formal and informal, to try to increase their ability to administer justice. Regardless of the dangers of creating a community made up entirely of widows, or the dangers of encouraging land grabbing because someone else would simply take care of 'the problem', one is based on meeting the needs of a few directly chosen vulnerable individuals, while the other could be described as building the resilience of all widows by helping to create a situation where they are secure on their own land. Needs assessment, as opposed to problem analysis, often leads to resource provision, rather than resilience-building.

The expectations of most external actors need to be radically scaled down. Donor-funded projects are unlikely to end conflict or poverty or make people resilient to all the challenges they will face. This does not make them irrelevant. Realism means having less ambitious objectives, being more modest about the ability of external actors to effect change on their own and being much more open about the degree of risk that must be run. Currently, external actors are usually far more risk-averse than the people whom they try to help. A greater willingness to experiment with modalities and interventions that may or may not work would be possible if combined with better investment in lesson learning (to know what is not working) and greater flexibility (to change it).

5 Ensuring resilience stays meaningful: avoiding the pitfalls

The previous section described some of the important progress which the resilience agenda can help bring about. Although perfect solutions to problems should never be expected, there are no insurmountable challenges to achieving at least a degree of improvement on all the fronts described. Several past initiatives have tried to solve exactly the same problems as those being discussed yet again in the resilience agenda (e.g. UN, 2000). In order to avoid going round in circles again, it is worth learning from previous attempts at change and keeping an eye on some of the pitfalls which will need to be avoided.

5.1 Generic resilience interventions for difficult contexts

Even though it is widely accepted that interventions cannot simply be applied as blueprints, it seems sensible to establish some broad lessons about the intervention types that have shown the best results in such situations. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for broad lessons to quickly become standard programming. This is indeed already happening in resilience-building. There are two reasons to be cautious about generic programming.

The first is that convincing evidence for the changes brought to people's lives from specific programming has simply not yet been presented. This is hardly surprising, given that outcome monitoring has only recently started to be given serious attention, and there has been very little assessment of the continued impact of interventions in the years after their completion. The second reason for caution follows from the logic in grouping together countries where emergencies are frequent or repeated, and where underlying problems need to be tackled at the same time as international support is needed to help meet immediate needs. There *is* a plausible justification for creating a separate administrative category of aid for difficult places, to establish aid modalities with greater flexibility to fund needs in a longer-term way, and greater room for manoeuvre in relationships with the state.

However, this falls well short of suggesting that there is any common *content* to programming in such countries, beyond some higher-level principles such as flexibility. There are good reasons for thinking that there is probably less homogeneity in difficult places than among any other group of countries, precisely because these are the countries where normal 'rules' of governance, society and markets are most likely to have broken down (see Box 3). All aid should be tailored to the specific needs and the cultural, political and economic context of a country or region, but the diversity and complexity of difficult places make it even more difficult to share lessons – or, rather, to know how to draw and apply lessons.

5.2 Ignoring lessons from the past

Previous attempts to tackle some of the same problems being readdressed under the label of resilience have not been sufficiently successful, and it is essential that the lessons of experience are taken on board. Relabeling the challenge as 'resilience' is leading some to see this as a brand new idea without precedent. That, at least, is the only conclusion possible from the marked lack of attention to an analysis of the lessons of recent history. For example, a major attempt to learn lessons from the 2000 UN strategy for 'the elimination of food insecurity in the Horn of Africa' (UN, 2000), which clearly has not yet met its objectives, should surely be the first step before launching an Inter-Agency Plan of Action for the Horn of Africa (IASC, 2011), or a plan for Supporting

Horn of Africa Resilience (EC, 2012b). An analysis is still needed covering both technical lessons and the political experiences of previous initiatives, both nationally and within international institutions. Rebranding food security as resilience has had very positive effects in creating a new and much wider political and aid coalition. However, past experience remains a source of relevant learning, even when the language that it used was different.

5.3 Generic resilience indicators

Aid bureaucracies justifiably demand accountability, not only for activities implemented but also for impacts achieved. These accountability demands will be even stronger in difficult places, precisely because the demands of flexibility mean that support cannot simply consist in rolling out a pre-agreed set of activities.

There is a strong imperative in the aid sector towards accountability based on assessing impact and value for money by establishing indicators of progress towards resilience. Developing specific indicators for any policy or intervention in order to assess and understand its impacts is critical. However, the tendency to seek generic interventions is paralleled by a strong demand for generic indicators of resilience. As discussed above (Section 3.4), the danger of programming designed to maximise resilience scores rather than help people in difficult situations must be guarded against. Good impact monitoring is needed that starts from a clear analysis of vulnerability and resilience and a good understanding of how change can be brought about (what some call the 'programme theory'; see e.g. Funnel and Rogers (2011)). Ways must then be found to continually assess whether or not this programme theory is working by assessing what is happening in each 'link' of the chain that leads to the desired impact.

Box 4: Monitoring the length of the impact chain

Attempts to monitor impact often come up against two related problems: lack of adequate baselines and many other changes happening in the area ('confounding variables') that make it difficult to find statistical connections between what a project tried to do and final outcomes. These problems are compounded further in the case of interventions designed to support resilience because there is no consensus about what exactly should be counted as a 'resilience outcome'. In fact, even if it were possible to monitor in this way, it would not be very useful as it may tell us how much impact we had, but we would learn nothing about why or the mechanisms by which it came about.

The problems can be largely avoided by going back to the analysis which underpinned the design of the project in the first place. This should make clear what the constraints to people's resilience are, how they operated and the mechanisms by which the intervention proposed to address them. Each of these steps or logical links can be monitored, using qualitative and often quantitative techniques.

For example, the provision of irrigation pumps may be seen as a way to prevent regular acute malnutrition caused by severe food shortages with repeated rain failures. The logical chain has many

links. Outcomes depend upon: the pumps functioning (repairs, fuel, etc.); water reaching the fields (irrigation design, maintenance); the distribution of water not excluding those who face the highest risk of malnutrition (the main target group); the target group having the ability (i.e. time, skills, other necessary inputs) to receive yields which outweigh any opportunity costs of practicing irrigated agriculture; adequate market access and conditions allowing enough income to make a difference; the use of that income to benefit those at risk of malnutrition (e.g. children); all of this making enough difference to prevent malnutrition; and many more, including the basic assumption that the cause of malnutrition has been adequately identified in the first place. The links in the chain are thus a mixture of physical, agronomic, institutional, economic, socio-political, nutritional and even gender-related factors. In order to understand how an intervention is contributing to resilience, each of these links and each of these perspectives should be incorporated. Each of these links can then be assessed and also quantified to understand *how much* change is happening and *why*. This can only take place if there is good documentation of problems, contextual analysis and programme theory. Currently, this is almost never adequate.

5.4 Rethinking risk

The resilience agenda has emphasised the importance of risk (e.g. Mitchell and Harris (2012)) in all development planning. Resilience models are broadly based on the idea that reducing risk (or exposure to hazards) is synonymous with increasing resilience. This may lead to development policy and aid which is more risk averse, in the sense that they promote low-risk changes in people's lives. However, seeking to reduce risk must be seen in two other dimensions. There is a need to assess how far it is possible to escape poverty without taking risks. Interventions intended to maintain people within their current livelihood strategies (though with a higher or more reliable income) may discourage them from taking the necessary steps to escape poverty and achieve resilience, and yet many resilience programmes aim to do precisely this.[11] It is very difficult without hindsight to know when transformational change is a worthwhile risk and which kind of trajectory is maladaptive. Second, assessing people's resilience by looking at their existing risk exposure must be tempered by the recognition (discussed above) that risk-free security may be the price that people have had to pay for survival. It is precisely the enforced avoidance of risk that creates a Faustian bargain (Wood, 2003) whereby people can only guarantee their security by foregoing actions

which would lead them out of poverty or to greater independence.

5.5 Unrealistic expectations

Even if there is more attention to resilience in aid spending, better programming and even an increase in overall international aid, vulnerability is not going to disappear. This is left unrecognised in some of the resilience rhetoric, e.g. that once we have built resilience people will even be able to 'bounce back' and become even better off after (or because of?) a shock (DFID, 2012b). Unrealistic expectations matter for two reasons. Some of the political momentum behind resilience comes from a belief that support for resilience will bring down the future costs of emergency response. This expectation is setting resilience up for failure; when emergency costs are not seen to be quickly reduced, there is a danger that political support will rapidly erode. Second, overly optimistic expectations have led to insufficient discussion of the resource implications of 'achieving resilience', and insufficient analysis of how much can actually be achieved. It cannot be assumed that whatever is done will be of some benefit: there has to be a clear objective and road map at *scale*. It is often said that the resilience discourse is built on positivity, in contrast to the negativity of a focus on vulnerability. There is an understandable desire to remain optimistic and to have high aims: this desire should not cast hard-headed realism as negativity or cynicism.

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11 For example, people have to remain on unviable farms in their villages in Ethiopia in order to receive help from the safety net, arguably dis-incentivising their movement to urban areas – which would constitute a risk, but for many the only accessible escape into resilience.

6 Making progress

Section 4 discussed five broad areas where change is needed in how aid is conceived, organised and delivered in order to make a more meaningful contribution to supporting the resilience of people in places affected by protracted and recurrent crisis, in conflicts and in recovery. Aid agencies have a moral responsibility to do their best to understand what the people in these situations most need and how that can best be arranged, and then to organise themselves and their aid in ways which can deliver this. A number of conclusions can be drawn.

Thinking about 'resilience'. The word 'resilience' is being used to speak about many things, and there is a tendency to over-theorise what should be simple and to under-theorise what is complex. It is important to remember that the banner of resilience has created important political momentum behind old problems (reshaping the emergency–development separation, finding a new aid paradigm, retargeting aid on those most prone to crisis, etc.). This must be welcomed and the opportunity must be exploited to the fullest extent possible. If a new jargon is useful for achieving this, then there is no problem in using it as long as it does not create confusion or the belief that a brand new idea has been created. The analytical demands of aid planning have not changed: we need to understand how and why different people are vulnerable, the constraints on their independent agency, opportunities for supporting change, the power relations that maintain vulnerability and that could potentially provide some way out of it, and how the political economy is likely to shape the outcomes of any intended intervention. Resilience, therefore, emphasises, but does not change, the need for good understanding of problems and situations.

Understanding the impact of interventions on resilience. The unpredictable contexts under discussion in this paper make it even more important to understand in real time the ways in which people's lives are changing and how any intervention is contributing to that change. Each intervention needs to be capable of constant modification; wider lesson learning can only be achieved as more and more evidence is built up. The jargon of resilience cannot be allowed to distract attention from another old need: for monitoring that goes beyond counting outputs and which analyses not just what changes have happened, but also how they have happened. Resilience re-emphasises the need to look at dimensions that have been given too little attention, such as what choices people feel able to make and what constrains them from making other choices, the implications for their future of making those choices and the nature of the risks that they run.

Targeting aid on resilience. Once monitoring is providing enough evidence on how aid is affecting people's ability to cope with hardship, this rapidly needs to become the main political dimension by which an overall aid programme is evaluated. Progress demands that this is not delayed by trying to set in stone the technical details of how such evaluation takes place. It is a secondary matter to worry about how (for example) to combine the number of people reached, their relative needs, which kinds of progress have been made and to what degree and which kinds of risk remain. Such questions can be dealt with over time and should not distract attention from the political goal of refocusing aid on helping to reduce the likelihood that those who are most vulnerable to crisis fail to cope when they encounter difficulties in life.

Resilience in difficult places. In 'transitions' there is a need to think differently, but there is no set of recipes that can be called 'resilience-building', and no set of rules which can substitute for human judgement at each and every stage. Basic principles for working in unpredictable and politically charged situations should be applied, including building in more flexibility, longer-term engagement, more risk-taking and much better learning. These include:

- an openness to working with a wider range of local institutions;
- a more sophisticated breakdown of 'government' and an ability to choose the parts of governmental or state agencies with whom relationships can be helpful;
- openness to a greater range of relationships;
- more emphasis on support to adaptive capacity;

- focusing on improving people's links to institutions other than aid agencies;
- ensuring that all capacity-building starts from an analysis of the constraints to functionality (i.e. eschewing generic 'capacity-building activities');
- making sure that improving the lives of vulnerable people is the objective of any capacity-building, not improving the functioning of organisations or institutions for its own sake; and
- working across the whole spectrum, from immediate relief to longer-term development, and forming relationships with those who also work across the spectrum.

Building resilience with or against entrenched processes? Resilience is seen both as a transformational agenda and one that makes people's lives more robust within their current system. Likewise, aid agencies need to understand and where possible work within existing policy and institutional processes, and yet where necessary and possible also challenge, provide alternatives and bring transformation to these structures and processes. There is often a tension between working to maximise acceptability and striving for transformation, and it may seem unhelpful to suggest that the only principle to follow is to be aware of the choice and to use judgement. However, ensuring that attention is given to thinking about this tension and documenting the rationale for whatever course of action is chosen would be a major step forward.

A bureaucracy for resilience? Few aid agencies oppose flexibility in principle, but the current aid bureaucracy does not facilitate it. Projects are designed, managed and monitored (in theory at least) according to log frames. Project effectiveness is often defined as the degree to which a project reached its predetermined objectives. This creates a tension when needs, possibilities and optimal ways of intervening are unpredictable and changing. Log frames, as used in practice, reinforce the idea that deviations from a plan are associated with project failure, and risk is assumed to be hypothetical only, rather than being integrated as part of the overall intervention design. The need for flexibility demands that operating agencies are held to account for the degree to which they were capable of adapting their original plans – i.e. flexibility should be a contractual obligation and not optional. Only then can interventions also take an attitude to risk that matches that of the people with whom they wish to work. In order for accountability to be possible, both for impact and

for use of funds, new contractual arrangements will have to be developed. Although this will take time, it needs to start urgently.

Learning for resilience. Lesson learning that goes beyond trying to find replicable blueprints is not easy and needs a sizeable body of evidence. Increased emphasis will be needed on establishing collaborative efforts to find out how interventions affect people's lives and their resilience to future difficulties. This will need to go beyond the work of any one agency or donor. Current learning consortia have a role to play, but this is not the same as creating an open source body of evidence through a collaborative effort that is not only sector-wide, but also includes academics and experts from outside the aid sector. Although no one donor can create this alone, there is a responsibility on every agency to play a role in helping this to happen. Any European donor, for example, can most usefully support this though the EU, i.e. taking together both the EU member states as individual donors and the offices of the European Commission itself. Together, these donors and their respective partners constitute a critical mass for making progress. The EC's Action Plan and its Communication on Resilience both provide a peg on which to hang this effort, and some individual EU member states have expressed interest in supporting this.

Staffing for resilience. Resilience-building, in particular in the countries under discussion here, demands a very high level of social and political analysis of the local situation. The current staffing of aid agencies is more geared to technical abilities. High-level managerial decision-makers, often expatriates, are more at home discussing broad conceptual ideas like resilience than staff on the ground. The changes suggested in this paper will create a demand for greater investment in recruiting and retaining high-quality staff who are experienced in a specific place or country. Staff will need a far greater range and depth of skills in order to use new modalities for ensuring the genuine participation in analysis of the people whose lives interventions are intended to benefit, moving beyond the simple reporting back of 'community meetings' with a collection of project requests and 'shopping lists'. Such a change in staffing profiles challenges the current inequalities between geographical generalists (predominantly expatriate) and local specialists (predominantly national staff). Gaining a rich understanding takes time and that time needs to be paid for, testing both the timetables and budgets of aid, where excessive workloads and unrealistic

timeframes do not permit thinking time. This challenge can only be met through explicit policy decisions.

There may be room for a donor, acting as a third party, to support analysis by creating analytical capacity as a 'public good', to be available to those working in some particular difficult place. There are a number of experts who are highly experienced in particular countries and whose understanding of crisis, recovery and recurrent crisis in those countries over decades should be a necessary input into any analysis and decision-making. However, normal career progression means that, as these experts (whether nationals or expatriate) become more experienced, they are less likely to be working in difficult places. Staff turnover means that previous experience is lost to those working in the area who usually will not even know about people who went before them and on whom they ought to be able to call. There is thus no mechanism for making people with a longstanding expertise in a particular area available for consultation when needed. Solutions to this can be found. With current communications technology, 'virtual analytical hubs' can be created as an open access resource, freely available for supporting anybody's decision-making. Practical steps could begin immediately on piloting different models for supporting analysis hubs in one or two countries with a long history of intervention (e.g. Niger, Sudan, DRC).

An aid system for resilience. It is hopefully clear from the preceding analysis that the recommendation here is not to create a separate aid system for building resilience. However, achieving progress in all of the directions suggested above will require some fundamental changes at system level, i.e. not only at the level of individual aid agencies but also in relationships between aid actors. In order to achieve this, agencies need to think of themselves not only as individual actors trying to optimise the way they work, but also as system players actively trying to shape the way in which other agencies behave and relate to each other. Some of what is recommended here cannot be achieved by any agency working in isolation. However, that does not absolve agencies from playing their part in helping to bring about change at this much wider scale.

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