

RESILIENCE ACTION DIALOGUE II

6th & 7th June 2019, Future Africa, Pretoria

Summary report



Key highlights: Towards a research-action agenda for resilience and development in southern Africa

This report outlines key outcomes and highlights emerging from discussions held during the second Resilience Action Dialogue in June 2019.

One of the most stand-out messages coming from multiple participants, was that *context matters*. There was broad acknowledgement that multiple tools and frameworks exist for understanding and co-developing options for building resilience, but there are no universal solutions. It is possible however to learn from universal discussions and innovate solutions that are compatible and localized to specific contexts and on-the-ground realities.

Many of the participants are actively engaging with resilience both as a concept, but also as it relates to informing practice, especially linked to *exploring, measuring and building certain resilience capacities/capabilities/abilities* (hereafter generalised as capacities).

Most of the participants mentioned that their work focused on at least one capacity (absorptive, adaptive and/or transformative) with some participants reporting on work that explores all four capacities- viewed sometimes as a continuum, with others adding additional capacities that are important (e.g. anticipatory capacities linked to intervention strategies such as forecast-based financing) . It was clear that most participants are using different approaches, metrics and frameworks to do this and this is an opportunity for further engagement, reflection and co-learning.

While not mentioned explicitly (except in one presentation)- *dimensions of equity* came out strongly in the sessions as cross-cutting issues and require further critical engagement, especially as they relate to power dynamics in planning processes (bottom-up versus top-down approaches), access to information, the dominance of certain knowledge types (e.g. scientific versus indigenous/local knowledge), gendered impacts of programming and implementation and how to include metrics in monitoring and evaluation work that can surface equity-related issues more prominently.

Two concepts surfaced frequently from participants: *prevention of backsliding* (i.e. how to ensure that people are not worse off following interventions or shocks) and *boosting self-reliance*. Both these concepts stimulated discussions on the importance of understanding complex histories, and the structural legacies of colonialism and exploitative practices that have resulted in certain vulnerabilities. While interventions are mostly local there is a need to think of how vulnerabilities are linked to and impacted by decisions, policies, politics and processes operating at multiple scales.

The final session of the dialogue surfaced '*key ingredients*' of a resilience approach that participants highlighted were important issues that needed further exploration:

- The need to acknowledge the *dynamic and uncertain nature of resilience* across space and time
 - This feeds into a research agenda to explore options for adopting an *adaptive management* approach to governance but also for programming of large projects and reflecting and learning with funders.
- *To harness the use of foresight, futures and scenario methods* for exploring different 'resilience futures' in systems and across scales (for e.g. in understanding the trade-offs linked to the new African free-trade agreement).
- To better *articulate and acknowledge how culture and value systems shape resilience capacities* and how these can be built into resilience projects and associated interventions and response strategies across scales.
- To better understand how *resilience approaches can assist with addressing and transforming institutional barriers and bottlenecks* in order to advance issues related to social-ecological justice (e.g. access, timing and allocation of resources), assist with harmonising and implementing legislation and improve accountability
 - Specific attention needs to be paid to being aware of, but not restricted by *political agendas and short-term political timelines* in order address both short term and long-term processes and feedbacks.

- While some participants have started to explore *subsidies and incentives* for resilience building activities, this was noted as an important area of work that needs to be integrated in resilience-related activities going forward.

Policy opportunities

In addition to outlining ideas to co-develop a research-action agenda for enhancing resilience through linking research to practice, participants also identified some key policy opportunities going forward. These were mainly linked to the newly developed **SADC Regional Resilience Strategic Framework 2019** which once finalised, will be used as a cross-cutting decision-support tool for cross-sector planning for strategic SADC directorates, units, services and centres through the regional integration themes as well as cross-cutting themes (e.g. Disaster risk management, natural resources, agriculture and food security, human and social development). This is a key opportunity for researchers and practitioners working in SADC to engage in ways to strengthen these activities, especially in the implementation of the SADC Regional Resilience Strategic Framework.

The newly brokered African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), a free trade area, outlined in the **African Continental Free Trade Agreement** among 54 of the 55 African Union nations will have a profound impact on the resilience of African countries. Whether this impact is negative or positive, will rely on whether the implementation policies boost local and regional resilience capacities. While this trade agreement can boost local and regional economies and reduce the need to look beyond the continents borders to trade, which can minimise shocks and stresses linked to global food systems and climate change related impacts (e.g. extreme weather events, slow onset hazards), there is limited research on the cross-scale impacts, trade-offs and equity implications of different free-trade implementation pathways. As there are estimates that the agreement will boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022, this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in research, policy and practice.

Greater efforts need to be made to *link and harmonise “top down” policies* (e.g. those articulated in environmental strategies of The African Union Development Agency (AUDA)) *to “bottom-up” interventions* in order to build, reflect and learn from a growing evidence base of practices on the ground. This can assist with co-developing and trialing more localised solutions and can help streamline development interventions from governmental and non-governmental institutions including foreign aid. However, there are currently few mechanisms to do this, and many conflicting policies and strategies from different sectors (e.g. food, climate and water policies with competing mandates).

Insights for innovative practice

While many forecast-based financing interventions are being implemented linked to disaster risk reduction for boosting food and water security, these approaches are still fairly disciplinary and linear. Innovative approaches *linking meteorological data, with models and coupling this with indigenous and local knowledge* are being trialed which in the examples articulated can boost trust and legitimacy in forecasting processes.

Rethinking measurement and evaluation metrics to capture the multiple dimensions and relationships between resilience capacities and how they link to “resilience capital pivots” i.e. human, social, economic, physical, social and natural and how these change over time in relation to interventions.

Building and strengthening communities of practice working on integrating resilience in development theory, policy and practice was highlighted as being very important for co-learning and strengthening institutional capacities and cross-sectoral integration.

Harnessing technological developments in online and mobile social media platforms (e.g. Whatsapp, Slack, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and simple websites/data portals) for building and nurturing these communities of practice are currently being widely used. However, while connecting remotely has been made easier through technology, participants articulated that *face-to-face interactions mediated through dialogues* and knowledge exchange processes are vital for building trust and focusing co-learning on

specific topics. Having a “neutral institution” that can facilitate these processes and draw in different actors across the research-implementation continuum over time was highlighted as being important for ongoing reflection, learning and adaptation for rethinking practice.

Participant list

Amuron Irene	International Federation Red Cross Red Crescent
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Belinda Reyers	Future Africa/ Stockholm Resilience Centre
Bernard Slippers	Future Africa
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Emma Ludvigsson	Stockholm Resilience Centre
Gys Loubser	Blackhole Productions
Jamie Robertson	USAID Resilient Waters Project
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