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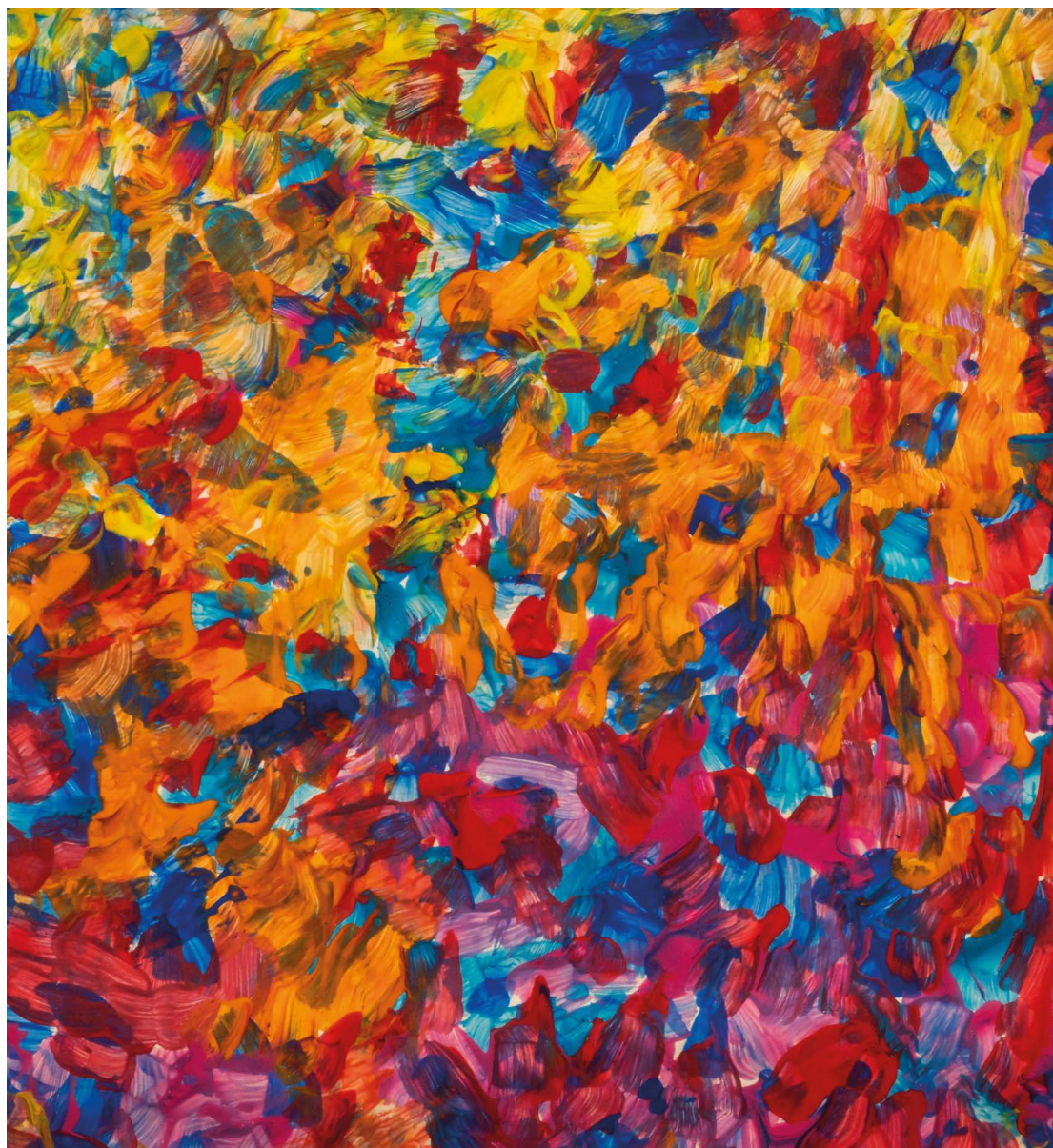
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► **People, Problems, Processes**



# Resilience and Development: Complement, Substitute or Stopgap Solution?

The Case of Sahelian Pastoralism

**Véronique Ancey**

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## **ABSTRACT**

What is the political function of the ubiquitous term “resilience” in today’s development aid? This article analyses the discourse of some aid programmes and projects, drawing on 15 years of empirical research on the Sahelian pastoral populations, who today are a symbol of resilience. It shows how the notion of resilience conveys compassionate and security meanings characteristic of a neoliberal policy, resulting in the weakening of public policies. Beyond an alternative between rhetoric and innovation, the use of this notion applied to social groups fine-tunes the ideological steering setting the course of development policy since the 1980s. This article questions the originality of resilience-building projects at local level and the relevance of this notion in the social field.

## **KEYWORDS**

resilience, herders, aid, development, policies

## Introduction

In the late 2000s, the notion of resilience swept into the discourse of many development aid institutions in the wake of the humanitarian discourse and, more generally, with a keen perception of the different kinds of risks involved in the design of public interventions. Does the success of resilience reflect a change in international development cooperation or is this notion just another buzzword in a sector in need of recognition and in constant pursuit of new ideas?

This article<sup>1</sup> explores the transformative potential of the notion of resilience in aid and public interventions with a particular focus on Sahelian pastoralism. Our starting point is the hypothesis that by naturalising the risks and sometimes essentialising the populations, the notion of resilience – and the analytical frameworks stemming from it – tends to reconfigure the forms of public intervention. This reconfiguration is part of a broader picture of the neoliberal transformation of public action, where the emphasis is placed on its security and compassionate approaches. The population resilience narrative shifts the focus of the public debate to the moral stage of solidarity as an expression of “humanitarian reason” and compassion policies (Fassin, 2010). On the aid scene, then, resilience rhetoric could well mark a shift away from the transformative ambitions for societies previously upheld by development discourses: this would mean that public action today amounts, in certain situations, to “the good will of humanitarian (or social) workers [healing] the wounds of the neoliberal state” (Agier, 2008). From our point of view, the question of the resilience of human groups to social conditions, as opposed to individual mental resilience or ecosystem resilience, not only concerns resistance and adaptation of livelihoods, it also renders unthinkable the radical transformation of these livelihoods, thereby locking the populations in the status quo.

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This analysis draws on fifteen years of aid surveys conducted by the authors in West Africa (Pesche & Nubukpo, 2004; Gabas *et al.*, 2014; Ancey, 2014), focusing on the dynamics of Sahelian pastoral systems in terms of food security, access to natural resources and risk perception (Ancey & Monas, 2005; Ancey *et al.*, 2009b). Combined with a recent review of the specialised literature on action research, these findings situate the term of resilience in the social history of pastoralism and development.

The article first focuses on some key features of the rapid spread of the notion of resilience, in general and more specifically in official development assistance (ODA). It then analyses the transformative nature of the notion – from international to local level – focusing on a number of ongoing programmes in order to highlight the lack of originality of actions claiming to be original and the singular simultaneity of its use with counter-Jihadism as a strategic priority in the Sahel. Our second hypothesis is that the growing use of resilience shapes first and foremost how strategies and interventions are designed without, hitherto, affecting the forms of local action conducted by the projects. At local level, it is as yet hard to discern any change of direction. However, the experience of pastoralism raises the question of the relevance of the notion of resilience when applied to the analysis of social and territorialised change. Although pastoral production systems have become a prime target for the use of the notion of resilience in the last ten years, their capacities to adapt to their environmental conditions were recognised long ago by veterinarians, anthropologists, geographers and ecologists (Doutressoulle, 1947; Santoir, 1983; Dupire, 1962; Khazanov, 1984; Bonfiglioli, 1988; Behnke & Scoones, 1992), even as politicians persisted in accusing them of archaism: “We have considered nomadic herders as the representatives of an obsolete, or at least moribund, sociological model for so long that we should start to be surprised that they are still here,” (Pouillon, 1990). Yet the real paradox lies elsewhere: the notion of resilience, used to describe the capacity of systems to adapt and endure in the long term, generally takes little account of the analysis of the dynamics of social change, albeit the mainspring of structural societal transformations.

## 1. Resilience Bursts onto the Global Scene, Bringing Change, Hope and Concerns

The omnipresence of the notion of resilience in public debate, first in the Global North and then spread by aid institutions in the Global South where it was quickly taken up in regional programme discourse, reflects the rapid globalised circulation of certain ideas behind economic models such as growth. By comparison, other notions have been more geographically bound: governance and development in the Global South, social change in the Global North, etc.

### 1.1. A Multiform Spread

The notion of resilience was first developed and used in scientific fields – mainly materials physics (1960s), ecosystem ecology<sup>2</sup> (1970s) and psychology (1980s) – yet the real boom in its use in scientific publications came in the mid-1990s.<sup>3</sup> Analysis of the notion of resilience has given rise to numerous publications addressing its multiple meanings (Brand & Jax, 2007; Anderies, 2014). This polysemy aside, the idea generally attached to the notion of resilience concerns the capacities of a “system” exposed to external shocks to adapt and recover.

In the 1990s, the notion of resilience was swiftly taken up by a number of areas of public intervention: risk management, the economy and, more recently, development aid (United Nations, 2005; United Nations, 2012). It appears to epitomise a period, sometimes called “advanced modernity”, in which the issue of risks – especially those created by humans themselves – constitutes a new and prominent dimension of public action (Beck, 2001; Giddens, 1993).

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2 The notion has been explored most of all by this field of the ecology of complex ecosystems, in the wake of Crawford Holling’s work (Holling, 1973; Holling, 1995), mainly by scientific communities structured around Resilience Alliance established in 1999.

3 Of a total of 45,586 scientific references containing the word “resilience” published up to December 2015, just 1,811 (4%) predate 1995 with 64% published after 2010. Within this exponential upsurge, the social sciences, absent prior to 1995, represent nearly 22% of the references identified for the 2010-2015 period (Scopus database figures, accessed in March 2016).

The “security watershed” (Atlanti-Duault & Dozon, 2011) of the 2000s spurred the spread of the notion of resilience in political discourses in the Global North. In the United States, in the wake of the World Trade Center attack in 2001 and then Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Republican Administration’s tone echoed this development: “We will disrupt the enemy’s plans and diminish the impact of future disasters through measures that enhance the resilience of our economy and critical infrastructure before an incident occurs,” (Bush, 2007). In France, the same tune could be heard: “Complexity and uncertainty are becoming major features of [our] new environment. [...] We need to build the country’s resilience, that is its capacity to rapidly restore an acceptable, if not normal, way of functioning in the face of a major crisis,” (Sarkozy, 2008). These developments appear to mark the advent of a new risk culture spread throughout all sectoral and territorial policies. ODA bears the marks of this contagion effect.

On the ODA scene, use of the notion of resilience also got underway in the mid-2000s. The World Bank made exponential use of the notion after 2005, mainly for all financial and macroeconomic matters, but also in the environmental field. A similar development can be noted for the European Union. At the turn of the 2010s, the term became widespread and the major agencies explicitly placed resilience on their action programmes (DFID, 2011; European Commission, 2012; FAO, 2013, World Bank, 2014). Resilience was also included in the French Republic’s humanitarian strategy for the 2012-2017 period (Buffet, 2014). This spread was not confined to donors’ global strategies or official documents, but also extended to the discourses of political leaders and civil society in aid recipient countries.

## **1.2. Political Implications of the Changes in Development Discourse**

The keywords “development”, “poverty”, “vulnerability” and “resilience” are set on different planes, because a policy break sets apart development ambitions and poverty reduction.

Without detailing the history and crises of development theories here, the different schools of political and philosophical thought relating to development all had in common the ambition to devise and implement structural transformations, whether seeking to change social and international relations (Perroux, 1961; Rist, 1996) or the value creation processes (Rostow,

1956; Rodrik, 2008). In a break with this transformative ambition, the later poverty reduction, vulnerability reduction and resilience support programmes concern targeted populations and do not challenge existing economic and political structures. Replacing the development policies with poverty reduction, implemented by the aid programmes in the 1980s (poverty reduction strategy papers, PRSPs), and targeted pro-poor policies is tantamount to considering that there are no, or no longer any, structural differences between “developed” and developing countries. It is as good as negating or taking as concluded the historical process of globalisation by the expansion of capitalism.

In a clear break with the poverty analyses, the notion of vulnerability gained traction in mind-sets and institutions in the early 1990s: “Vulnerability is not the same as poverty. It means not lack or want, but defenselessness, insecurity, and exposure to risk, shocks, and stresses,” (Chambers, 1995). In fact, what lies behind the succession of the three keywords of “poverty”, “vulnerability”, and “resilience” is a continuum of aid programmes implemented from the 1980s through to the current day, orchestrated by symbolic and operational assisted-population targeting techniques. Even though the early promoters of the notion of vulnerability set themselves apart from the analyses in terms of poverty, their attempted rethink was absorbed by institutional recuperation of the approaches and by its corollary, simplification. In view of the fact that the economic, social, health and food situation of part of the population had deteriorated following the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), the targeting mechanisms fenced off populations now identified as vulnerable groups. These mechanisms set them apart from the rest of the population, implicitly assumed more capable of reacting or, by medical analogy, more protected against a threat – poverty – equated with an exogenous risk. The term applies increasingly to an attribute intrinsic to the populations and ever less to the responsibility of the policies implemented. The notion of resilience has easily found its place in this technical and ideological environment of procedures and thinking. Firstly, its widespread use tends to create a semantic vagueness always supposedly remedied by a decomposition by standard indicators, variables and categories. This methodological tweaking goes hand in hand with a successful new development economy, which tests aid interventions designed as clinical trials on randomised samples whereby sample groups



are studied as statistical cohorts rather than as elements of a society. Secondly, one of the intellectual underpinnings of the aid institutions, the simplified neo-classical theoretical approach, tends to centre the focus on players' responses to constraints: "Neo-classical economics [...] focuses on the motivations of producers and their responses to constraints of various sorts," (Friedmann, 1978). This intellectual and ideological whirlpool lends itself to an approximate assimilation of the notion of resilience and its theoretical framework, which bears essentially the capacities of a "system" exposed to external shocks to adapt.

The history of the sustainable livelihoods analytical framework is embedded in a similar process. Vulnerability approaches based on the analysis of livelihoods and published in seminal English-speaking articles (Swift, 1989; Chambers & Conway, 1991) display a qualitative concern with understanding the inequalities of resources, status, skills and strategies defining those hitherto placed under the umbrella term of "poor". These approaches, their "practical concepts for the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Chambers & Conway, 1991) and their methodological tools were swiftly popularised by most of the international public and private development organisations in the 1990s in the structural adjustment policies designed to adjust the Southern economies to global market conditions. Some saw this as a transition "from victim-centric compassion (helping the poor) to paternal attention (helping the vulnerable to help themselves and protecting them for as long as they remain fragile)" within the frame of a process of depoliticisation (Lautier, 2013). In general, the standardised use of the terminology of "vulnerability", "capabilities" and "assets" follows the line taken by the poverty reduction programmes, in an epistemological and political break with the initial meaning of livelihood in the work of Karl Polanyi (Polanyi, 1944), who described "livelihood" in opposition to the normative categories of western classical and neo-classical economics. Instead, the institutionalised use of the sustainable livelihoods analytical framework converts all Polanyi's forms of socioeconomic exchange and circulation (market trade, redistribution and gift trade) into "capital" or assets of five types: natural, physical, human, social and financial contained in an individual or family portfolio. This terminology is compatible with aid disbursement channels and neoliberal language, whereby equating sustainable livelihoods with the organic properties of a system facilitates the comparison of societies with social-ecological systems and their analysis in terms of resilience.

Burnt out by its fleeting success, vulnerability lost its evocative power due to its categorical use by development interventions arbitrarily equating “old”, “young” and “women” with vulnerable groups, irrespective of the socioeconomic conditions underlying their situations. In comparison, the notion of resilience – which has replaced vulnerability in aid discourses – benefits from both a need for a terminological change, a more positive connotation, apparent multidisciplinary scientific credibility and a positive political climate. The notion of resilience is more semantically and ideologically charged than vulnerability, even though it is more often than not associated with it by mere opposition and by apposition (Pasteur, 2011). Less common are the texts where the two notions are defined in connection with one another: “Vulnerability is influenced by the build-up or erosion of the elements of social-ecological resilience ... [whilst] discrete events in nature expose underlying vulnerability and push systems into new domains where resilience may be reduced” (Adger, 2006).

The recent emergence of resilience in the succession of notions promoted by aid policies therefore illustrates the political import of vocabulary, well known since George Orwell. The consequence, if not purpose, of technicisation is to depoliticise the issues. Yet price volatility, often raised on a par with “drought” among the risks against which the resilience of social groups needs supporting by local engineering operations, is not a natural hazard and is in actual fact a political responsibility.

In the aid field, the notion of resilience fulfils a protective function: “The rationale behind the World Bank’s ‘climate resilient development’ policies is to protect economic growth from the ravages of climate change,” (Brown, 2012). The international institutions advocating support for resilience to cushion shocks and cope with risks are behind a naturalisation of crises and essentialisation of populations, with two repercussions. First, resilience, like vulnerability before it, each supposed, ideally, to best characterise system adaptations, have, under the economic policy in place, actually stepped up the transfer of the onus for risk management to the agents themselves. Second, they are blind to the economic and social causes of populations’ inequalities and vulnerability, thereby ruling out thinking on alternative options to the policies responsible for them (Ribot, 2013) in favour of individual responsibility, which makes little sense in an environment of

multiple, structural uncertainties and instabilities. This points up the fact that this notion now overrun with meanings serves as much an ideological purpose (Jonathan, 2013) as a technical purpose.

## **2. Resilience in Practice in Pastoralism Aid**

These developments are illustrated by the Sahelian pastoralism discourse currently dominating in the international financial institutions, development programmes and even trade organisations. Resilience features at all levels, setting itself up as a pillar of academic and political representations and taking up position in technical recommendations. What is behind its remarkable success in pastoralism discourse and what does it change in practice?

### **2.1. Resilience as a Framework for Security Action in the Sahel**

Some years ago, the notion of vulnerability and the livelihoods approach were used largely to refer to pastoral societies (de Haan, 1999; Care, 1998), analysed as systems of poorly monetarised activities, considering the aptitudes – or “capabilities” – of their players to leverage tangible and intangible resources. In the case of pastoralism and the Sahel, resilience now appears to fulfil a dual function: analytical, as a new way of characterising pastoral societies, and normative, to justify interventions in the Sahelian setting seen as particularly sensitive to the risk of Jihadist terrorism. The proliferation of action research initiatives at different levels addressing pastoralism from the angle of resilience is recent (early 2010s). The pace and customary steps of these actions mean that it is as yet too early to make any assessment of them: once resilience is on the aid policy agenda, it takes years to conduct the expert mission bidding procedures, set up the financing agreements, conduct any recruitment required, hold the launch seminars and actually get the actions underway before outcomes can be monitored and analysed. However, it is possible at this point to analyse these moves, without jumping to conclusions and pending a subsequent assessment.

Since the 2010s, not one report, conference or development project can be found on the subject of pastoralism that does not refer to resilience. Could it be possible that the recent scale-up of meetings on and investment in Sahelian spaces is driven by new concern over the living conditions of

herding populations? In 2015, the French Agency for Development (AFD) and the World Bank co-published a report entitled *Confronting Drought in Africa's Drylands: Opportunities for Enhancing Resilience* (Cervigni & Morris, 2015), following the *Human, Social and Political Dimensions of Resilience* background paper (FAO/World Bank, 2013), in order to “build a broader understanding of current and future vulnerability in drylands, and help identify policies and investments in support of resilience.”

In 2013, following an international conference on “Pastoralism and Security in the Sahel”<sup>4</sup> in Chad and an International Forum on Pastoralism in Mauritania,<sup>5</sup> the Heads of State and Government of the six Sahel-Saharan countries<sup>6</sup> alongside a number of stakeholders (regional organisations, civil society organisations, producer organisations and the private sector) published a position paper “with the aim of building the resilience of Sahel-Saharan pastoral societies”. The move continued with the publication of *Reaching Resilience. Handbook Resilience 2.0* (Care, 2013) and the launch of projects, programmes and institutional alliances such as: AGIR (Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative – Sahel and West Africa) in 2012, BRACED<sup>7</sup> (Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters) in 2014, PRISE (Pathways to Resilience in Semi-Arid Economies) in 2014 (Agridape, 2014), and PRAPS<sup>8</sup> (Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project) in 2015. Self-styled resilience projects, programmes and alliances are proliferating at different levels with such speed that it is too early to list them all.

Each of the abovementioned projects works with one or more European and/or African development partners: international institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private consulting firms, independent consultants, semi-public research bodies and audit firms. They are not

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4 Conference held in Ndjamena (Chad) by AFD.

5 Forum held by the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahelian Zone (CILSS) and the World Bank in late October 2013.

6 Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Chad.

7 Programme financing 15 projects in Myanmar, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, and funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). See <http://www.braced.org/>.

8 Regional project with US\$248 million in funding from the World Bank covering Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Senegal, Niger and Mauritania.

**Table 1: Regional Pastoralism Development Initiatives in West Africa (February 2017)**

Initiatives	Countries covered	Donor/Main promoter	Focus
PRAPS: Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Project	Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Chad	World Bank, CILSS	Resilience of pastoral communities
PREPP: Education Programme for Pastoral Populations	Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Togo	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; Association for the Promotion of Livestock in the Sahel and the Savannah	Education-training for smooth transhumance
BRACED: Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters	Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)	Resilience of transhumant families
PRIDEC: Regional Programme for Investment in Livestock Farming in Coastal Countries	Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo	World Bank, Islamic Development Bank and ECOWASa	Smooth management of transhumance for regional integration
PREDIP: Regional Dialogue and Investment Programme for Pastoralism and Transhumance in the Sahel and West African Coastal Countries	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Chad, Togo	European Development Fund and ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States)	Pastoral security, political dialogue and governance

Source: Astou Diao Camara, personal communication.

mentioned here for want of an exhaustive inventory, but they represent the economic players in development today.<sup>9</sup>

9 For example, the BRACED project “is helping people become more resilient to climate extremes in South and Southeast Asia and in the African Sahel and its neighbouring countries” (see <http://www.braced.org/about/about-the-projects/>) (accessed in May 2017). The consortium, which oversees the contract and financial management of the grants and monitors project progress, is led by KPMG, a global network of firms providing audit and advisory services in 152 countries and employing nearly 189,000 staff in 2016. In the knowledge production field, ODI (Overseas Development Institute) is mandated to “generate new knowledge, evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation.” In Africa, the organisations in charge of the projects are: WeltHungerLife (Burkina Faso), Mercy Corps (Uganda and Kenya), Christian Aid and Farm Africa (Ethiopia), Near East Foundation (Senegal and Mali), Concern Worldwide (Sudan and Chad), Catholic Relief Service (Niger and Mali), Care International (Niger), Acting for Life (Senegal, Niger, Mauritania, Mali and Burkina Faso), International Relief and Development (Mali), and the Consortium pour la Recherche Économique et Sociale (Senegal).

Use of the notion of resilience justifies public interventions in areas usually passed over by investment and economic policies: “Parts of the Sahara are [...] are home to pastoral nomads, but these areas also provide shelter for a growing band of Jihadists. [...] To limit Jihadist influence will require immediate strategies [...] to rebuild the northern pastoral economy. [...] A stronger pastoral society, supported by a border force could control the potential Jihadist threat and contribute to national reconciliation.” (IIED, 2013). In any case, it is worth noting that the use of the word “resilience” and the relative magnitude of the funds allocated to pastoralism go hand in hand with scaling up counter-Jihadism as a strategy priority, even though no evidence is ever put forward for the “more resilience, less Jihadism” nexus.<sup>10</sup>

Local player networks are not slow to grasp this opportunity to access aid funds: in a direct echo of the official declaration of Heads of State in November 2013, a memorandum circulated by the representatives of the regional networks of livestock breeders of West Africa expressed the regional development issues in terms of resilience and security,<sup>11</sup> therein bringing into play the two registers of compassion and security. These security representations are moreover perfectly embodied in the neologisms of “Sahelistan” and then “Africanistan”, appearing in both the press and defence papers, to drive home the analogy between the Sahel, failed states and perceived terrorist threats in the Middle East (Laurent M., 2013; Laurent S., 2013; Taje, 2010; Le Pautremat, 2012; Michailof, 2015). Countering Jihadism might, after all, give the Sahelian populations a belated financial and political opportunity by furthering investments to improve their standard of living. The important thing will be to determine, when put to the test and over and above the security dimension, whether the notion of resilience keeps its promises for change.

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10 This alternative (resilience or Jihadism) is actually a profession of faith: it could be said that the trafficking associated with jihadism is a desperate adaptation to scarcity and pressure, not even for income, but to escape summary executions.

11 “Secure pastoral areas, a key driver to build the resilience of pastoral communities, but also a factor for building peace and security in these areas”; “In the Sahelian area, more than elsewhere, development and stability are closely interlinked, especially in cross-border areas. [...] Insecurity, which has become a recurrent problem in West and Central Africa, seriously affects pastoral mobility. The prevailing security crisis is exacerbated by youth unemployment. These young people, who are increasingly excluded from the traditional means of access to natural resources and goods and who have few alternatives but migration, are exposed to crime and the lure of extremist groups and armed rebellions.” (APESS & RBM, 2013).

Is resilience transformative for the development aid system and, if so, how? In the view of certain players' critiques, resilience marks a radical change: "Resilience is a recognition of the failure of the development policies of the past and forces donors to face up to their responsibilities – donors who were unable to anticipate the major crises in the Horn of Africa and Sahel although the countries concerned had long been in critical condition." Based on the premise that, "A resilient population is one that is prepared for crises and likely to recover rapidly," (Inter-réseaux, 2013), the notion of resilience is considered to be able to "connect emergency aid and development aid" (*ibid*) and form the basis for more effective interventions, whereby players in the different aid communities cooperate to help the targeted communities rebuild and preserve their adaptability to constraints and shocks. The notion of resilience is thereby seen as having the power to decompartmentalise structures and institutional practices between the emergency aid and development aid sectors. All the aid players, currently in specialised silos, could coordinate strategies combining emergency aid and risk reduction with integrated structural development projects, interconnecting short- and long-term solutions, and transferring to the socio-ecosystems the means – and the responsibility – for their empowerment (Béné *et al.*, 2012). Others, however, see its widespread use as having served basically to promote the scientific and aid communities specialised in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation by borrowing "the certitude of ecology" (Levine *et al.*, 2012).

For the time being, aid practices do not appear to be keeping pace with the slogans. The sector's main innovations concern the financial instruments and private systems (Gabas *et al.*, 2014), which have more to do with public management reform (Naudet, 2012) than social and economic evaluations of the effects of aid. The following section will first examine a few illustrations of this operational continuity, pointing up the changes in terms of how beneficiaries are represented. Secondly, it will look into the relevance of the notion in the light of nomadic herding strategies before discussing the possible implications of the use of resilience in the design of national and supranational aid programmes.

## **2.2. “Everything Has to Change for Nothing to Change”: Avatars of Resilience in Practice**

At local level, the NGO Oxfam and the World Food Programme jointly launched a “resilience” aid programme in Senegal in the early 2010s, targeting 500 households in the rural community of Koussanar: “For the 1.3 billion people living on less than a dollar a day who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, vulnerability to climate-related shocks is a constant threat to food security and well-being. As climate change drives an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural hazards, the challenges faced by food insecure communities struggling to improve their lives and livelihoods will also increase. The question of how to build rural resilience against climate-related risk is critical for addressing global poverty,” (Oxfam, 2013). This purportedly innovative programme was actually based on four classic pillars of action supposed to enable farmers to strengthen their food and income security: improved resource management (risk reduction), insurance (risk transfer), microcredit (prudent risk taking) and savings (risk reserves). Lowland rice cultivation, creation of wells for horticultural production and training in rice production techniques were combined with an insurance feasibility study based on a weather index – whose performance was tested during the 2013 cropping season when rainfall in the Sahelian area varies by 30% on average each year. The NGO gave training in savings and small business management: a credit system linked to a village cereal bank was introduced to provide beneficiaries with access to credit after harvest, when high household expenditure often forces households to sell their food crops at low prices. In this case, as in many others (Alagbe, 2013), the notion of resilience is merely a rebranding of classic food security projects. Likewise, the components of the main regional pastoralism support project underway in the Sahel (PRAPS) also take the classic form of animal health, natural resources management, market access, crisis management and institutional support.

However, changing how beneficiaries are represented can have an impact on programme and development strategy design approaches. At regional level, the “new” regional AGIR programme was officially launched in Ouagadougou in December 2012 at the 28<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA). This initiative incorporates the notion of resilience into the design of the development strategies and operations in



the form of a cross-cutting meta-programming exercise, much like the old poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), with the aim of reconfiguring all the sector-based policy priorities.

In practical terms, the purpose is not to engage the Sahelian countries in new agricultural policy programming processes in parallel to the Economic Community of West African States' ECOWAP/CAADP<sup>12</sup> process, but to: 1) conduct an integrated, inclusive analysis of existing policies, programmes and dialogue frameworks; 2) round out existing programmes, where necessary, by identifying relevant priorities contributing to the resilience of the most vulnerable households, families and communities; and 3) define "country resilience priorities" (CRPs). Nevertheless, the opportunity to rethink the link between long-term development and disaster management was not really taken up. AGIR remains essentially a food security platform. The case of Niger is a typical example of this: the country resilience priorities defined for AGIR in February 2015 are essentially a rehash of the 3N Initiative ("Nigeriens Nourish Nigeriens") already in place, setting out under "resilient" headings the same food and nutrition priorities. These are themselves reminiscent of the programmes set up in the late 1970s following the severe drought (food self-sufficiency above all). AGIR's goal hence remains focused on the agricultural populations practising subsistence farming, without envisaging any real changes to herder participation in economic choices and land governance. This example illustrates the meta-programming role assigned to resilience which, as a cross-cutting notion, questions and potentially reshapes interventions and existing policies.

Although cooperation player practices do not really appear to have changed with the growing and polymorphic use of the notion of resilience, changes can be found in the ways in which the "target" societies and populations are referred to. The widespread use of the notion of resilience in the ODA literature goes hand in hand with a change in risk perception: a shift from the view of a world seen as static – based on the idea of a development lag, of a world stood still into which progress needs to be injected – to the

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12 The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which is the agricultural strand of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), has been coordinated by ECOWAS since 2002. The Economic Community of West Africa Agricultural Policy (ECOWAP) is the main instrument of the CAADP.

view of an unstable world exposed to shocks whose resilience needs building or supporting. In the case of the pastoral societies, the development sphere's view morphed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the stigmatisation of stagnation seen since the colonial period (Pouillon, 1990) to singing the praises of resilience. However, political extroversion (Bayart, 1999; Nubukpo, 2011) and the “exogeneity” of knowledge (Viltard, 2008) characteristic of official development assistance still appear to be the norm and, in the absence of local, independent and audible political voice, the agendas defined by the aid sphere sidestep the fact that the populations concerned could define their own political project and aspire to change their own standard of living. Instead, the state of “resilient” is proffered to them from the outside.

The innovation of the resilience discourse is often associated with the fact that it is credited with taking more systemic account of adaptation to risk than the previous “risk management” analytical frameworks. Yet has the question ever been put as to what the “new resilient” think of these risks and how they affect their lives? The expression “risk management” immediately points to a utilitarian conception of players' responses to risk. From a socio-historical point of view, however, “the issue of risk is inextricably linked with the social construction of protection systems and perceptions of security,” (Castel, 2003).

### **2.3. The Limitations of Adaptive Resilience to Understand Societies**

In the Sahel, the survival of herders in an uncertain environment depends on the keenness of their eye on resources, their caution and their responsiveness, and their management of the spatial and temporal heterogeneity of the resources. In the pastoral world where “risk and uncertainty dominate life” (Van Dijk, 1997), the constraints and risks are not equated with a given event. Drought, for example, the number one risk cited in all dryland studies, is not a potential isolated event, but part of everyday life: “Drought years come and go and human beings cannot be certain when the next drought will occur and kill the cattle and people. All they know is that droughts do recur. The pastoralist and farmer of the Sahelian countries have taken this truth into consideration so much as to incorporate what I will call “the drought potentiality” into their social and economic systems, in order to survive,” (Bovin, 2000). From an ecological point of view, pastoralism

is the art of coping as best one can with the imbalances and uncertainties: “Pastoralism [...] is based on diversity, mobility and responsiveness to, if not anticipation of, events. Heterogeneity and dynamism are its key words! The optimum is not an objective; pastoralism makes do with compromises, manoeuvres and tricks of the trade, in short, adequate solutions,” (Hubert, 2012). In pastoral drylands (annual rainfall of less than 400 mm), natural resources are scattered and random. There is no structural outside protection for these societies. Whether in Senegal’s Ferlo Desert, relatively densely endowed with livestock wells, the expanses of Northern Niger, in Chad around the basins of Kanem, in the foothills of the Ouaddai Highlands or on the plain of Batha, where water is hours away on foot, it sometimes takes days to reach a health centre or market. The capacity to obtain goods and services depends on the size of the herd that can be sold in part and on social contacts, while security in the event of a crisis is prepared for with unremitting caution. In this setting, “drought” is hard to isolate from the other constraints. Translating “stress” and “probability” into all languages is useful only if attention is also paid to what other languages have to say about how they see their world: for example, the Wodaabe in Niger use the word *kisal* to express a way of life that produces an ideology, a culture and behaviour (Bonfiglioli & Diallo, 1988) in conditions that Westerners would probably call “survival”. An approach based on the probability of distinct hazards hitting a system at a precise moment in time would therefore be entirely inappropriate in this situation. There are ultimately only two advantages to using a battery of multicriteria indicators, previously of vulnerability (Ancey *et al.*, 2009b) and now of resilience: 1) to show technical expertise supposed to improve intervention effectiveness; and 2) to convey the idea of rapidly operational interventions.

Yet the pastoral systems in the north of Senegal, Niger, Mali and Chad have undergone a series of significant technical, social, territorial and environmental changes. Behind the “system resilience”, the technical and economic challenges of feeding and watering the livestock have changed with the use of industrial feed and the expansion of hydraulic projects for pastoral use. Social relations regarding resources and herds have evolved in response to land use developments, land tenure rights, demographic pressure and agricultural expansion. The herds themselves have been transformed by genetic selection and by individual strategies introducing small ruminant

herding by women and children to round out the family management of a herd of cattle (Ancey *et al.*, 2009a). Migration strategies in the pastoral world evidence a change in young herders' attitudes towards consumption, money and herds, in other words towards the pastoral way of life (Manoli & Ancey, 2014). This human mobility is not merely in response to local poverty or a temporary crisis, but now extends beyond the well-known diversification strategies (Hampshire, 2002; Timera, 2001). Acknowledging these changes compels observers to accept a change of purpose: it is no longer a pastoral group or a system of activities, but a fragment of a diversified society in a state of flux. What, therefore, is the explanatory scope of the notion of resilience in the social field?

The question relates to the theoretical purpose of the school of thought on social-ecological systems. This scientific community, institutionalised by the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP) revolving around the Ostrom husband-and-wife team,<sup>13</sup> took on board the contributions of disciplines such as law, anthropology, political science and ecology to launch studies on the resilience of social-ecological systems. It influences development programmes headed by international institutions: FAO and the World Bank (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom, 1996; Ostrom *et al.*, 1999; Ostrom, 2008). This grounding in social-ecological systems as the sole basis for analysis of the living environment (natural or social) runs the risk of naturalising the analysis of social phenomena and probably explains why resilience captures more the self-regulating, adaptive properties of natural systems than power relations inherent in social systems (Cannon & Müller-Mahn, 2010).

Practically speaking, the pastoral systems resist and adapt: herders and herds will remain in the Sahel for a long time. But for how long? Living on what, with whom and in what conditions? Producing what and in which ecosystem(s)? Handing on their herd to whom? The issue here is to recognise that the notion of resilience does not capture societies' transformations, choices or breaks any more than it does their universal concerns (live decently, produce, reproduce, support, hand on, etc.). In the absence of a

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<sup>13</sup> Elinor Ostrom, founder of the Bloomington school of research on Common Pool Resources based on her book *Governing the Commons* (1990), was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences by the Bank of Sweden in 2009.

clear definition of the scope and limitations of this notion, there is a risk that living, complex, evolving balances will be compromised by dogmatic or technicised interventions (activity specialisation, herd functions, segmentation of spaces and ecosystems, artificialisation of the system, etc.).

Politically speaking, there could be something new in calling populations “resilient” in that it could well mark a shift away from the transformative ambitions of the previous ideologies of colonial economic development and development. Policies now centred on resilience, i.e. on preserving livelihoods and system integrity, appear to restrict the populations concerned to resistance and adaptive actions without inviting thinking, not to mention involving them in understanding the broad processes of economic and social transformation or in improving the terms of access to basic goods and services.

## Conclusion

In these historic times of growing uncertainties and successive crises, resilience support for populations appears as a compassionate version of risk group profiling: embedded in the long history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the public management of these populations has been perfected on a large scale through the industrialisation of information techniques and the spread of the neoliberal government project (Castel, 1981).

In the particular field of aid, the approach in terms of resilience conveys representations of the problems and solutions very much in step with the neoliberal vision of global government, whereby public action is increasingly closely associated with private dynamics and national public policies are set within global and transnational frames. By partially replacing political responsibility with private – international or family – solidarity, by privatising and making a moral issue of the undertaking, these representations and their terminology are instrumental in dispelling the notion of political responsibility and, consequently, that of sovereignty. In the competitive institutional and financial arena of ODA, the proliferation of the use of the term “resilience” risks being detrimental to thinking and funding in support of an alternative conception of public responsibility, social change

dynamics and thereby forms of regulation in the public interest. Moreover, thinking on sustainably improving standards of living is edged out by the urgency of subsistence aid, which is driven from the outside often at odds with local perceptions and strategies.

In the world of aid, it is as if there were neither “overt struggles for changes of the institutional framework” nor “silent tugs-of-war hidden beneath routine cooperation within a framework of instituted inequalities” (Elias & Scotson, 1994), but an interplay of interests and institutional reproduction. The anomie that Norbert Elias finds to be characteristic of the outsiders takes the form of a loss of a sense of responsibility among the assisted populations (Naudet, 2000; Lavigne-Delville & Aghali, 2010), which rules out the idea of an alternative to this system. The characterisation of the populations by their structural resilience is indicative of a political relationship in which the aid community, standardised and technicised, takes the place of public authorities in charge of choices that could bring far-reaching, long-term change.

More generally, households’ capacities to save, invest and access credit depend in part on their income and their management, but also on the monetary and non-monetary environment created by price, health, education, credit, production and other policies. These public environment conditions need to be factored into the comparison of poverty situations across countries (Drèze & Sen, 2013). The analysis of households in terms of resilience, on the other hand, is blind to the balances of power and domination established and reproduced at all levels, from local to international. The widespread use of the notion of resilience in relation to development issues in the Sahel places public policy problems outside of the analytical framework more than ten years after the Paris conference on development (2005) asserted the primacy of Southern policies and their much-needed role in aid delivery. Today, when the climate itself is no longer seen solely as a natural phenomenon, but also as a political issue, it is time to relinquish this irenic and naturalistic conception of societal affairs. Basically, there is more to the question than just the resilience fad, which will itself probably soon pass.

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