Resilience and development: complement, substitute or stopgap solution

Véronique Ancey∗†, Benoit Daviron2, and Denis Pesche

1CIRAD (CIRAD) – CIRAD : UMRArtDev – Avenue Agropolis 34000 Montpellier, France
2CIRAD (CIRAD) – CIRAD – Avenue Agropolis 34000 Montpellier, France

Abstract

The word “resilience” occupies a growing position in the development aid discourse. It is used by all aid agencies (EU, DFID, USAID...), by many NGOs and by several international organizations (FAO, UNDP, WFP...). It gives opportunities for the creation of new programs and new initiatives like the Global Alliance for Resilience (AGIR) created by ECOWAS, UMOA and CILSS with the support of EU other OECD countries. Employed to define the interventions of these various actors in crisis and post-crisis situation, it is accompanied, in most of the case, by persistent call for a closer coordination – or even a fusion – between development project and emergency actions. The growing importance given to resilience in development aid reflects the increasing influence of humanitarian perspective at the expense of developmentalism. Because of the rich expertise produced by paid scientists, consultants and humanitarian organizations fellow travelers, the notion of resilience is disseminated as a tool to think and to act in front of development issues. A technical discourse imported from the medical world takes the lead by focusing the public attention on crisis situation (crisis mediatization and scnearization) and emergency solutions (plumpy nut for example). On food issues it reduces under-development to under-nutrition symptoms, substituting symptomatology of suffering individuals for social and economic analysis.

Simultaneously, “evidence based” research method, imported from medical sciences are more and more used by development aid actors. Today, the humanitarian ideology responds to global concerns with resilience program combining the old “industrial” effectiveness with the new care approach.

This new generation of technicalist representation is facilitated by the public policies and development aid discredit, by the development thinking crisis but also by the increasing consideration given to crisis and risk in management strategy. Development policy failures and repeated crisis lead some actors to predict or to call for the disappearance of the border between the structural and the urgent, and to propose an institutionalization of emergency actions.

The increasing influence of the resilience approach, that illustrates the ground gains by humanitarian standards and medical thinking orientations, raises many problems in relation to the ambitions of the development project.

∗Speaker
†Corresponding author: veronique.ancey@cirad.fr
Users of the resilience perspective tend to "naturalize" any "shocks" even price spikes or wars and to reduce development objectives to the survival of populations. Moreover, they individualize problems and solutions. Influenced by neo-liberal thinking, they shift from the targeting of vulnerable groups to a patient oriented approach.

Whatever the definition and the economic representations adopted (catching-up, convergence, increased positive freedoms, buen vivir), the level of inequality accepted, the concern for sustainability and its actual achievement, the project named "development" has always included a long term improvement of the common good and individual welfare. These notions are absent of the resilience discourse and the resilience doesn’t seem to be articulated to any structural changes policy. There, therefore, an important issue in understanding if the use of the word "resilience" imported from the humanitarian word is gaining ground as a complement or as a substitute of the development thinking and policies.

**Keywords:** pensée du développement, humanitaire, crises, néo, libéralisme