CHAPTER 15

Climate Change = Discourse Change? Development and Relief Organizations' Use of the Concept of Resilience

Mette Fog Olwig

Abstract

Climate change impacts especially the Global South. Humanitarian/development organizations are therefore incorporating a climate change dimension into their work. New concepts are introduced and old concepts used in new ways, potentially changing organizational discourse and thus development issues and goals. To elucidate the possible direction of the new discourse, this chapter examines, on the basis of interviews with developers, concepts employed when discussing climate change, focusing on 'resilience.' Resilience has the potential of including a dimension of local agency, thus involving local communities that have been largely ignored in climate change mitigation initiatives. Many definitions of resilience in relation to climate change exist since it is a complex subject matter approached from different sectors and a politicized issue that has become a central concern only recently. Official definitions are still being negotiated and several organizations have not yet determined an operational definition of resilience. A discussion of definitions and their implications for local agency is therefore timely.

> I was on a mission last week, and it was very interesting for me because I kind of took a step back intentionally for about half an hour and I just listened to the conversation. It was going like this [points in all directions]. There were people who were talking about disaster risk, who were confusing hazards and risks and vulnerabilities to the current climate... with things that had nothing to do with climate change. It gets totally muddled. (Interview with informant working on climate change, April 2009)

In the spring of 2009 I interviewed a number of officials in development/humanitarian organizations in order to examine how they approach climate change at a conceptual and practical level. Climate change has become an increasingly well-documented global problem in recent years and for this reason development/humanitarian organizations have begun to rethink their agendas and priorities in relation to external factors that are somewhat outside the bounds of their previous practice. This involves introducing new concepts and using old ones in new ways, which could potentially lead to a new organizational discourse. Such discourse has important implications for the ways in which local populations affected by climate change are perceived and approached by humanitarian and development organizations. I chose to focus on resilience because this concept has the potential of including a dimension of local agency thus involving local communities that have been somewhat ignored in many climate change mitigation initiatives so far. I wanted to gain an understanding of how the concept resilience is currently used by the development/humanitarian sector, in what direction its definition is moving and what influences this process. I found that different definitions of resilience flourished, but also that many organizations had not yet agreed on a definition. Some informants explained that it is a difficult concept to define in a way that can be easily operationalized in development/humanitarian work.

Several of the informants seemed frustrated, perhaps even resigned, with regard to the 'confusion' and disagreement that appear to penetrate discussions on climate change and disaster risk reduction, as illustrated by the introductory quote. This reflects the general uncertainty concerning what constitutes global warming, climate change and what are 'just' natural disasters – of the kind the

globe has witnessed for millennia. One reason for the confusion described by the informant quoted above may therefore be that climate change involves complex issues. This complexity and uncertainty is also reflected in differing definitions of resilience in relation to climate change. Some of the informants, however, likened the definitional confusion with regard to resilience to prior debates on the definition and operationalization of other concepts used within the development sector, such as 'gender', 'sustainability' and 'participation,' indicating that disagreement over the specifics of the definition of concepts is not an uncommon issue within the development/ humanitarian sector. In a discussion of discourses of development, anthropologist Ralph Grillo points out that there is no such thing as *the* discourse within development '... there is as much diversity *within* the community of "professional developers" [...] as between them and other stakeholders or "players" [...]' (1997: 21).

Some practitioners did not believe that differing definitions and concepts posed a major problem, asking questions such as: 'Does it really matter what the definitions are, as long as we get our work done?' To them what was important was that there was work that needed to be carried out, and whether or not this work could be perceived as reducing vulnerability, building capacity, or giving humanitarian aid was not a central concern. As pointed out by Grillo, however, there are many examples of 'ways in which development discourse constructs the object of development' (1997: 19). Furthermore: 'In many contexts there does indeed seem to be present a "development gaze", or, to change the metaphor, an authoritative voice, which constructs problems and their solution by reference to a priori criteria, for example to "broad themes which buzz around development agencies: malnutrition, labour bottlenecks, soil degradation and so forth" (Gatter 1993: 168-9)'. Anthropologist Georgia Kaufmann provides empirical data to underscore this point. She carried out a study of 'the manner in which individual developers based in Britain think and conceive of development' (1997: 108) and found that: '[t]he choice of words reflects more than a predilection for vocabulary: it comes from a combination of background, politics and training. More significantly, it reflects the way in which the developer conceptualizes the task in hand' (ibid: 127).

An example of the significant implications definitions can have for the targets of interventions can be found in anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes' analysis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She argues that the PTSD diagnosis has become 'a free-floating signifier of danger, harm, vulnerability and woundedness' and that this results in depreciation of the agency of those diagnosed:

> The PTSD model underestimates the human capacity not only to survive, but to thrive, during and following states of emergency, extreme adversity, and everyday as well as extraordinary violence [...] the medical-social science-psychiatric pendulum has swung in recent years toward a model of human vulnerability (Harris 1997) and human frailty (Buttle 2003) to the exclusion of the awesome ability of people – adults and children – to withstand, survive, and live with horrible events. (2008: 42)

In this chapter I discuss differing definitions and understandings of the concept of resilience with relation to climate change to highlight the concept's potential of including a dimension of local agency.[1] I start off by providing a short historical background of the development/humanitarian sector's involvement in climate change work, based on my interviews. This leads to a presentation of the concept of resilience and a discussion of how the differing definitions have come about and why it is so difficult to find an operational definition. I argue that reasons for the varying understandings and uses of resilience include that research and practice in relation to climate change is cross-sectoral and politicized and that official definitions such as those used by the COP[2] are still being negotiated with re-

---

1. The way in which concepts can be understood in many different contexts could be an interesting study in itself, but in this chapter I focus on definitions only within the development/humanitarian sector and not broader cultural definitions. Furthermore, I do not address how personal experience, political commitment, and technical training may have shaped my informants' responses, as Kaufmann did in her study of development workers (1997: 129), although I think this could be a very interesting topic for further study.
2. Conferences of the Parties under the United Nations' Climate Change Convention.

gards to the specifics of their meaning – a lengthy process that may never end. I then argue that a discourse of resilience has the potential of including a dimension of local agency. Disaster management, I show, has evolved from a discourse of technological solutions with little focus on social processes to a greater focus on including local communities in planning by, for example, looking at vulnerability. Resilience, it has been suggested within the context of disaster management, can further strengthen awareness of the potential of local agency, and not only the local community's vulnerability. Finally, I discuss the importance of including local cultural perceptions and agency in work on disaster management and climate change discourse. A definition of resilience that includes local agency could play a major role in stimulating such a discourse.

This chapter is based on formal interviews and a few 'coffee break' informal conversations with representatives from various organizations engaged with international development and humanitarian aid (see list of interviewees in appendix).[3] The interviews took place in Copenhagen, Washington DC, and New York City in April and May 2009. I spoke to individuals in donor agencies and in organizations that focus on disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change, environmental issues, human rights, advocacy, generic social development, and humanitarian relief. My questions revolved around the concept of resilience but the interview often branched out into more philosophical conversations on climate change, development and humanitarian aid, and the use of concepts in general.

Climate change triggers

It is only during the 2000s that the general development/humanitarian sector has begun the process of 'mainstreaming' climate change. To understand the processes by which climate change has become addressed by development/humanitarian organizations, and thus the context within which the language of climate change

---

3. Several of my informants requested that certain statements be off the record. I have therefore chosen to summarize the interviews without referring to specific people or organizations.

has developed, one of my first questions when conducting the interviews was 'When did climate change begin to become a concern to your organization, and what was the trigger?'

In summary, the general answer I received was that at first climate change was considered to be a green issue, not a general development/humanitarian issue. There was also primarily a focus on mitigation, in the hope that it would still be possible to avoid severe impacts from climate change. It was considered to be a defeat to look at adaptation. Not until 2001 at COP 7[4] did scientists move from making abstract studies to arguing that adaptation must be implemented in practice. Thereafter several high profile publications, such as the 2006 Stern Review and the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),[5] made it clear, firstly, that there *were* going to be impacts, and secondly, that these impacts would have *economic* repercussions. This resulted in a shift from a strict focus on mitigation promulgated by green organizations to adaptation involving the development/ humanitarian sector. To a great extent the planning of adaptation projects has therefore only begun and the first projects are in the early phases of implementation.

Some development/humanitarian organizations had prior to these milestone publications been looking at climate change as an important issue, but the attention generated by the publications helped persuade all partners and organization departments to unite on this topic. It may have taken longer otherwise. Funding and political goodwill, furthermore, became more prevalent, aiding any work done in this area. In fact, top-down pressure in the shape of donor requests to have an organizational focus on climate change was mentioned by some as a reason why climate change was becoming an established part of the organization's activity field.

Some organizations have also felt bottom-up pressure to look at climate change issues. Several informants mentioned that their con-

---

4. The seventh Conference of the Parties under the United Nations' Climate Change Convention.
5. A scientific intergovernmental body established by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

stituency and country partners have become increasingly concerned with climate change due to changing local conditions as well as fear instigated by the global media. The milestone for human rights and indigenous people's organizations in terms of their involvement in climate change was the petition filed in 2005 by Canadian and Alaskan Inuit, led by Sheila Watt-Cloutier, to the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The petition argued that:

> The impacts of climate change – "caused by acts and omissions" – by the United States "...violate the Inuit's fundamental human rights protected by the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man and other international instruments. These include their rights to the benefits of culture, to property, to the preservation of health, life, physical integrity, security, and a means of subsistence, and to residence, movement, and inviolability of the home." (As cited in Crump 2008: 29)

Firmly linking climate change to human rights, the petition was key to making human rights and indigenous peoples' organizations important players in the climate change debates. The human rights dimension also includes a focus on the negative impacts of mitigation, as pointed out by Christina Nilsson, Asia Programme Coordinator, The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs: 'Increasingly, international and national climate change mitigation strategies pose an additional threat to indigenous peoples' territories and coping strategies' (2008: 9). Examples include hydro-electricity, Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and agro-fuel where eviction of local communities or limited use of traditional resources may incur as part of the strategy. Historically similar issues have arisen in, for example, the establishment of natural parks. Organizations that are experienced in dealing with those types of issues are therefore increasingly finding themselves involved in work on securing the rights of local communities with regards to climate change mitigation projects.

As an effect of the above mentioned triggers, climate change is today broadly viewed as a development/humanitarian issue, but several of my informants indicated that the process of achieving this

recognition has been far from easy. One informant said it had at one point felt like 'herding donkeys' – things were moving along very slowly. Nowadays, the same informant said, it is like 'herding cats' – everybody is independent and moving in all directions. I found my interviews reflected this situation. In fact, commenting on my attempt to get an overview of what is going on with regard to climate change in the development/humanitarian sector, a few of my informants ruefully wished me 'good luck'.

Gaining an understanding of the concepts being used, specifically the concept 'resilience' in relation to climate change, turned out to be equally challenging. Some organizations stressed that they have for some time done work relevant to climate change, but called it something else. CARE International, for example, used to have a 'Poverty and Environment Network' which is now called 'Poverty, Environment and Climate Change Network'. During the rest of this chapter I will show, through a discussion of the history and current application of the concept 'resilience,' how concepts are being renegotiated in the light of climate change as well as the potential consequences of definitional specificities.

Resilience

A multitude of concepts such as vulnerability, resilience, coping capacity, climate proofing, enabling environment, and adaptation are used in documents discussing climate change. It became clear to me early in the process of interviewing that many of the concepts employed when discussing climate change have not yet been clearly defined by those using them. During a coffee break at the launch of a climate change report, I asked a senior economist about the different concepts that were prominent in the report. I received a response along the lines of: 'I can't answer that question. We have not sat down and discussed the definitions of concepts.' Since concepts such as resilience appear to have a contested history, however, clear definitions could avoid some confusion as to, as Grillo and Kaufmann phrased it, what object is being 'constructed' and what is 'the task in hand'.

Siambabala Bernard Manyena notes that the history of the ap-

plication of resilience 'is not rosy; it is full of contestations, especially regarding its affinity with and lucid usage by a multiplicity of disciplines' (2006: 433). There is not even a consensus with regard to the origin of the concept. According to Manyena, 'some say ecology (Batabyal, 1998), while others say physics (Van der Leeuw and Leygonie, 2000) [...] Most of the literature, however, states that the study of resilience evolved from the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry in the 1940s [...]' (2006: 433). According to Valerie Nelson, social development specialist at the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich, and Tanya Stathers, post-harvest, integrated pest-management specialist at the University of Greenwich, 'Resilience thinking, an important new direction in climate-change research, emerged in the 1980s, with antecedents in the "systems thinking" of the 1970s' (2009: 88).

In the current climate debate, resilience appears to not only have many definitions, but also to be used without *any* explicit definition. When asking my informants how they would define resilience I thus received different reactions. One person quoted Humpty Dumpty, who, in Lewis Caroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, says to Alice: 'When *I* use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less,' elaborating that resilience has become a catch-all phrase 'that is really hiding true communication about what people mean'. Several replied, 'that's a good question.' Another informant, how - ever, felt, 'it's a kind of self-explanatory definition. It is how to make development more climate resilient. So it is development that reduces the impacts of climate change to the extent possible related to the local conditions. So it is a flexible definition.' Another informant told me, 'it's the coping capacity.'

The many uses and definitions, or non-definitions, of resilience were, according to my informants, a product of the cross-sectoral nature and politicization of climate change. In the following I will discuss these factors further.

Institutional cultural dissonance

Climate change is a cross-sectoral concern. This was mentioned by my informants as having positive and negative consequences and to

have affected concept definitions. Some of my informants alluded to 'competing camps' between the climate adaptation and the disaster management sectors. The disaster management sector is well established and has its own conceptual approach. The climate adaptation sector is relatively new, however, and is still establishing its conceptual approach. Disaster and climate change are becoming increasingly linked as illustrated in a recent publication prepared as part of the IPCC: 'various extreme events are very likely to change in magnitude and/or frequency and location with global warming' (Schneider et al. 2007:795). The executive summary asserts, furthermore, that some of these changes are already happening: 'There is new evidence that observed climate change is likely to have already increased the risk of certain extreme events such as heatwaves, and it is more likely than not that warming has contributed to the intensification of some tropical cyclones, with increasing levels of adverse impacts as temperatures increase (very high confidence)' (ibid: 781).

According to one of my informants, 'the disaster management community' and 'the climate adaptation community' have not had an easy time communicating. Apparently there has been a tendency for 'the climate adaptation community' to view DRR as merely part of climate adaptation, whereas 'the disaster management community' has argued that DRR is much more than merely disasters related to climate change. Disasters can occur for many reasons including earthquakes, volcanoes, and poor infrastructure such as a lack of proper drainage in case of rain. This debate has also resulted in discussions concerning definitions. One informant based in the 'climate change community' gave me the following account:

> There are misunderstanding barriers, but sometimes there are ownership barriers. There is one between the disaster risk community and the climate change community. Every time I go to a disaster risk meeting or whatever, I know I am going to spend a lot of my time hearing, "the climate change community got the term mitigation completely wrong, this is a real barrier, etc., etc., etc, they don't understand what they are talking about." It's true that the climate change community use mitigation in a sense which is incompatible with the way the disaster risk community use it. And the disaster risk community were using it a lot earlier than the climate change community were using it

and therefore, you know, why would they do something as silly as that. This happened, you can't do anything about it. It came about not because of the broader science climate change community, although they were part of it, but because the negotiations suddenly put these two terms, mitigation and adaptation, into the negotiations, meaning defined it in a certain way, and that's that, you can't change it.

In terms of resilience, part of the confusion concerns what or who is being made resilient in relation to what. The UNISDR (UN – International Strategy for Disaster Reduction) provides the following definition of resilience:

> The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase its capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures. (http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng%20home. htm)

The climate adaptation sector, however, appears to define resilience as the successor to the term 'climate proofing' of development projects, that is 'proofing' development projects towards climate change, as illustrated by the following quote from one of my informants discussing the COP meetings:

> At the beginning they started talking about climate proofing, standalone adaption. At the beginning people didn't know very well how to refine their language. They talked about, you know, reducing vulnerability, increasing adaptive capacity, implementing concrete adaptation. And then they figured out, we all figured out, that the most appropriate term was building resilience. Because that was the word that was encompassing all these terms, it was also more appropriate, because it was the more modest. It was an approximation of improving everything. Climate proofing was the extreme term. Because you cannot climate proof really anything, while resilience is "I'll do my best!" to improve the situation. It was more scientifically solid and more realistic. So there was a consensus that it was the most appropriate term.

Thus, the disaster management focus seems to be on building the capacity of a community to recover from a disaster, whereas the climate adaptation sector appears to be concerned with making sure that development initiatives are not adversely affected by climate change.

The 'competition' between climate change adaptation and DRR could be indicative of more general competition between humanitarian relief and development. DRR is typically linked to humanitarian relief organizations and climate adaptation to development organizations. However, some of my informants felt that climate change gave the two camps a chance to collaborate more. In several countries climate change action groups, including both humanitarian and development organizations, are being coordinated. A common vocabulary and shared definitions might further enhance opportunities for cross-sectoral cooperation. However, according to one informant, even with a common vocabulary cross-sectoral communication is difficult:

> [Sighs] You would think it should actually improve communication, but… I guess it does, we know we are talking about something vaguely similar, but that also becomes part of the communication barrier, because we are using it in different ways and we are often not aware of the subtleties. So that causes real miscommunication.

The cross-sectoral nature of climate change thus offers both possibilities and limitations. For example, the term 'resilience' is now well known both within natural science and social science. Therefore scholars from these two fields may have an easier time communicating. Yet, subtleties are lost, potentially causing more confusion than what has been gained from using the same vocabulary.

Politicization

Climate change has gone from being primarily a concern of the Green parties to being a ubiquitous term in political discourse generally. Such politicization has a great impact on how concepts are used and officially defined. One informant explained to me that an aspect of negotiations such as COP 15 is to establish common defi-

nitions of terms. Until the terms have been defined in these high pro-
file negotiations, or other important meetings such as those by the
G8 or the IPCC, it is politically strategic to keep definitions vague.
Meanwhile, it is in the interest of different organizations to ensure
through advocacy that the final official definitions are the most func-
tional for their particular causes. For example, as explained by the
informant, the concept 'enabling environment' is used by the US
and the EU to mean primarily trade liberalization. Countries in the
Global South are also beginning to use the term, but include a
broader socio-cultural dimension. Definitions of these kinds of terms
are thus very political with wide implications as to which countries
will support what initiatives. The informant further explained that
for these reasons definitions often end up remaining vague. The im-
portance of which definitions end up being settled on during the of-
ficial negotiations is well illustrated by the earlier discussion of the
term 'mitigation'. The disaster management sector was upset about
the way in which mitigation was being used by the climate change
sector, but my informant said there was nothing to do about it once
a term has been defined in a certain way in 'the negotiations' (e.g.
the COP negotiations).

The debate over whether the concept 'enabling environment'
should include a broader socio-cultural dimension can be paralleled
to the discussion of whether an official definition of resilience should
include a focus on local communities and their agency. Within dis-
aster management it appears that the link between disaster reduc-
tion, resilience, and local communities has been negotiated with the
Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. The Hyogo Framework for
Action was mentioned by several informants as an important mile-
stone in terms of looking at the root causes of disasters. According
to a brochure on the Hyogo Framework published by the United
Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Hyogo
Framework is: 'the key instrument for implementing disaster risk
reduction, adopted by the Member States of the United Nations. Its
overarching goal is to build resilience of nations and communities
to disasters, by achieving substantive reduction of disaster losses by
2015 – in lives, and in the social, economic, an environmental assets
of communities and countries' (United Nations 2007: 2). Since its

adoption, according to Manyena, the 'intimate connections between disaster recovery by and the resilience of affected communities have become common features of disaster risk reduction programmes [...]' (2006: 433). In the following section I will provide a brief outline of how a discourse of resilience can be used to integrate agency and local communities in disaster management. Historically, the process of including local communities involved an acknowledgement of the importance of social dimensions of disaster management.

Social dimensions of disaster management

Until the 1970s natural disasters were generally viewed as naturally occurring physical hazards that could be objectively measured and compared by looking at the likelihood and severity of their occurrence. Intervention was focused on inventing the technology to predict the hazards early enough to get people into safety and to minimize the resulting structural damage through, for example, the erection of physical barriers (Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004: 1-2; Delica-Willison and Willison 2004: 148). This approach was challenged with the argument that social processes are of central importance in determining the outcome of natural disasters. In a 1994 article Blaikie et al. stated that:

> The crucial point about understanding why disasters occur is that it is not only natural events that cause them. They are also the product of the social, political and economic environment (as distinct from the natural environment) because of the way it structures the lives of different groups of people. (Blaike et al. 1994: 3)

This social approach thus argues that natural disasters cannot be reduced to natural factors and that social processes are crucial to understanding why the same hazards may have different impacts. Blaikie et al. explain: 'The 'natural' and the 'human' are so inextric-ably bound together in almost all disaster situations, especially when viewed in an enlarged time and space framework, that disasters cannot be understood to be 'natural' in any straightforward way' (ibid: 5).

A key concept in the original social approach is 'vulnerability.'

In 1994, Blaikie et al. offered the following working definition of vulnerability: 'the characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard' (Blaikie et al.: 8-9). Vulnerability, however, like resilience, is a contested term: 'There are more than two dozen definitions of vulnerability' (Manyena 2006: 440). It has been argued that the concept of vulnerability offers an improved understanding of social processes, because, as explained by the anthropologist Anthony Oliver-Smith, it provides 'the conceptual nexus that links the relationship that people have with their environment to social forces and institutions and the cultural values that sustain or contest them' (2004: 10). However, according to Manyena, there is a 'need for a change in the disaster risk reduction work culture, with stronger emphasis being put on resilience rather than just need or vulnerability' (2006: 433). In his conclusion, he explains:

> First, vulnerability reduction strategies are often orientated towards the creation of a human coping environment. Yet we have learnt that people want more than simply to attain the minimum standards associated with coping, meaning that there is a need to adopt resilience thinking that goes beyond vulnerability reduction. Second, development practitioners increasingly recognize that interventions are more likely to be successful, leading to genuinely positive impacts on human well-being, when the emphasis is on building local knowledge and augmenting existing capacity. This entails the identification of the essential and non-essential elements of communities and building on affirmative action rather than endless risk assessments and reactions to negatives. Third, project planning can learn from resilience discourse in that it encourages us to prepare for resilience that is likely to be more than the sum of individual development activities and go beyond simply reducing aspects of vulnerability that may or may not have been possible to pinpoint. (Manyena 2006: 446)

Thus, according to Manyena, the use of the concept of resilience could potentially lead to an evolution in disaster management towards not only reducing vulnerability, but building on local knowledge and capacities. As the next section will show, there are many parallels between the history of disaster management and that of climate change. Climate change has also started out with a focus on

technological solutions, but there is now a call for a change to include a focus on the social dimension in acknowledgement of its importance. As is the case with disaster management, resilience could ensure that this change also includes a focus on local agency.

Social dimensions of climate change

According to Nelson and Stathers, the history of climate change appears to be developing along similar lines as the history of disaster management, as discussed above: '[T]echnological responses to climate change have been at the fore, with little thought given initially to the ways in which climate change affects human relations or its impact on equality' (2009: 88). The World Bank in its publication *Environment Matters* points out that more knowledge about the social dimensions of climate change is essential: 'Typically, the biophysical and economic causes of vulnerability to climate change receive the greatest attention, yet social dynamics can be decisive in determining the susceptibility to harm and level of resilience of different social groups' (Duarte et al., July 2006-June 2007 (FY07): 24). The IPCC publication referenced earlier acknowledges that the social dimension is still little understood: 'the understanding of impacts, adaptive capacity, and the costs of adaptation is weaker in social systems than in biological systems, and the uncertainties are high' (Schneider et al. 2007: 798). It therefore calls for more social science research in this area such as 'assessments of vulnerability and adaptation that combine top-down climate models with bottom-up social vulnerability assessments' (ibid: 804). As was shown in the above discussion on disaster management, however, the social dimension of natural disasters not only involves the social processes that influence whether a hazard becomes a disaster, but also the agency of a local community that enables its adaptation to, or mitigation of, the dis - aster. To avoid only thinking of local populations as vulnerable it is necessary to have some knowledge of how members of a local society understand and deal with the climate change and to build on this. In other words, what do *they* perceive as the problem and what do *they* believe they need to build resilience against. As Nelson and Stathers argue:

Following through the principles of resilience requires a change in environmental governance from the traditional, "managerialist", "command-and-control" methods (optimizing efficiency in particular parts of the system and failing to consider the bigger system), to managing for uncertainty and building adaptive capacity. However, this may mean trade-offs, for example between reducing vulnerabilities now to specific perceived risks (as much adaptation currently aims to do), and developing sources of resilience and maintaining sufficient flexibility in the management system to cope with sudden surprises and shocks (Nelson *et al.* 2007). Resilience thinking does provide space for the agency of actors (*ibid.*), as "desired outcomes" (the state in which a socio-ecological system is or should be) can be deliberated upon and worked towards. Yet who has a say in this process is clearly an important matter: "Who decides what should be made resilient to what, for whom resilience is managed, and to what purpose?" (Lebel *et al.* 2006, cited in Nelson *et al.* 2007). (Nelson and Stathers 2009: 87)

Several studies have shown that cultural perceptions may be of fundamental importance when addressing natural disasters and climate change. One informant thought of the way in which climate change may impact local culture as a 'sleeper problem,' that is, a problem that is going to wake up soon and start worrying us. In a study of glacier hazard zones set up as a result of avalanches in the 1970s in Peru, the environmental historian Mark Carey found that the local population, the Yungay, while conscious of the physical dangers posed by glaciers, considered their cultural survival more important: 'To many, and especially to the Yungay elite, recovery from these multiple disasters meant rebuilding their lives and their societies in the hazard zone. The risks of further losses of social status, economic security, political power, and cultural beliefs were far more pressing and important than the risk of a glacier avalanche or an outburst flood' (2008: 237). In a study of a more recent natural disaster anthropologist Frida Hastrup found that two post-tsunami rehabilitation projects in India fell short because they ignored local perceptions of everyday life. The projects focused on physical survival of the fishing community – one provided the fishermen with safety kits, while the other built a physical barrier against the sea. The fishermen thought the projects would be very useful in the case of

another tsunami, but they did not use the safety kit in their every day work and moved out of the way of the barrier to gain better access to the sea. If they protected themselves against the sea in their daily work, she concludes, they would implicitly agree with the presupposition of the rehabilitation projects that their work as fishermen was inordinately dangerous. As a fisherman proclaimed: 'If we thought it was too dangerous what would we eat and how would we make a living?' (F. Hastrup 2008: 145).

The way in which developers perceive of cultural dimensions and local agency is important in determining how humanitarian/development projects are structured. In his book on HIV/AIDS in Africa, Hakan Seckinelgin, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics, includes a chapter on the knowledge of policy makers versus local experience and how this affects policies to address 'non-action' by target groups with regards to HIV/AIDS interventions. He concludes that:

> Most of the policies refer to culture as a reified category which is important, but which acts as a barrier to our efforts. In this way, people's agency for change in a particular context is removed and replaced by our categories, which are presented as the only way for change. [...] [T]he implications of this process within the policy implementation context is severe, as it reduces people's self-knowledge to a cultural externality that is considered to have marginal value for dealing with HIV/AIDS. Unless our knowledge (speculative knowledge, directing us to claim *we know*) is directly connected and rethought on the basis of people's knowledge of their lives (practical knowledge), the claim *we know* remains spurious: *we don't know what we think we do*. (2008: 124-125).

The anthropologist Mark Nuttall has similarly commented that perhaps adaptation 'should not be posed in terms of how people can adapt to climate change, but in terms of what prevents them from responding and adapting to climate change' (2008: 6). This transforms people from being objects to agents. This is not to say that the Global North does not have a moral obligation to address the impacts caused by emissions from the Global North, but that the local populations affected 'should play a key role in regional and

global dialogues that will determine the kind of responses to climate change and the social and economic changes that will take place in their homelands' (Nuttall 2008: 7). Or as Seckinelgin puts it: 'The argument here is not about whether we should help or not; it is about what the knowledge base is for this help' (2008: 100). All societies have some level of inherent resilience, as pointed out by the anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup: 'resilience is an emergent quality of all responsible social action; it is the rule and not the exception of social life, given that all societies must demonstrate a degree of flexibility to operate and ultimately survive' (2008: 3). If the definition of resilience includes this dimension, there is a real possibility for local populations to 'play a key role.'

Conclusion

The development/humanitarian sector is beginning to include a climate change dimension in their work, thus acknowledging that climate change has become a cross-sectoral and political global problem that has, and will continue to have, negative impacts on the Global South. Many new concepts are being introduced and old concepts are used in new ways; their meanings are being renegotiated to enable discussions about climate change in a humanitarian/ development context potentially leading to a different organizational discourse. It has been argued, as noted, that development discourse and vocabulary 'constructs the object of development' (Grillo 1997: 19) as well as 'the task at hand' (Kaufmann 1997: 127). To illuminate in which direction the potentially new discourse is moving, this chapter examined the concepts employed when discussing climate change, focusing on the concept of 'resilience.'

It was found that many different definitions of resilience exist. Resilience in relation to climate change is a complex issue that is approached from a variety of sectors. As pointed out earlier, in the words of Grillo, there is no such thing as *the* discourse of development and thus one cannot speak of *the* definition of concepts (1997: 21). Furthermore, research and practice in relation to climate change is a highly politicized issue that has become a central concern only in recent years. Official definitions such as those used by the COPs

are therefore still being negotiated with regard to the specifics of their meaning. Several informants explained that their organization also has not yet determined a definition of resilience that can be operationalized.

So far there has been a largely technological response to climate change, and local communities appear to have been ignored in many climate change mitigation initiatives. There is, however, a growing recognition that social dimensions are also important, but it is crucial that social dimensions do not only refer to local vulnerabilities, but also the agency inherent in the local culture. Projects have historically been known to fail when local perceptions and abilities are ignored. Resilience has been shown in the disaster management sector to have the potential of including a dimension of local agency and involving local communities. If this dimension is incorporated into the concept of resilience in relation to climate change, this could greatly benefit the local communities and the viability of the projects. During a time when climate change discourse is still being formulated, it is therefore timely to discuss the potential of concepts such as resilience to include local cultural perceptions and local agency.

REFERENCES

Blaikie, P. et al. 1994. At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters. London: Routledge.

Carey, M. 2008. The Politics of Place: Inhabiting and defending Glacier Hazard Zones in Peru's Cordillera Blanca. In Darkening Peaks: Glacier Retreats, Science and Society (eds.) B. Orlove et al., 229-240. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crump, J. 2008. Many Strong Voices: Climate Change and Equity in the Arctic and Small Island Developing States. Indigenous Affairs 1-2, 24-33.

Delica-Willison, Z. & R. Willison 2004. Vulnerability Reduction: A Task for the Vulnerable People Themselves. In Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development & People (eds.) G. Bankoff et al., 145-158. London: Earthscan.

Duarte, M. et al. 2007. Adapting to Climate Change: Understanding the Social Dimensions of Vulnerability and Resilience. Environment Matters, Annual Review, July 2006-June 2007 (FY07), 24-27.

Grillo, R. D. 1997. Discourses of Development: The View from Anthropology. In Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives (Explorations in Anthropology) (ed.) R.D. Grillo & R.L. Stirrat, 1-33. Oxford: Berg.

Hastrup, F. 2008. Natures of Change: Weathering the World in Post-Tsunami Tamil Nadu. Nature and Culture 3(2), 135-150.

Hastrup, K. 2008. Waterworlds – Natural environmental disasters and social resilience in anthropological perspective. ERC Advanced Grant – Research Proposal. University of Copenhagen: Department of Anthropology.

Hilhorst, D. & G. Bankoff 2004. Introduction: Mapping Vulnerability. In Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development & People (eds.) G. Bankoff et al., 1-9 London: Earthscan.

Kaufmann, G. 1997. Watching the Developers: A Partial Ethnography. In Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspective (Explorations in Anthropology) (ed.) R. D. Grillo & R. L. Stirrat, 107-31. Oxford: Berg.

Manyena, S. B. 2006. The concept of resilience revisited. Disasters 30(4), 433-450.

Nelson, V. & T. Stathers 2009. Resilience, power, culture, and climate: a case study from semi-arid Tanzania, and new research directions. Gender & Development 17(1), 81-94.

Nilsson, C. 2008. Climate Change from an Indigenous Perspective: Key Issues and Challenges. Indigenous Affairs 1-2, 8-15.

Nuttall, M. 2008. Editorial. Indigenous Affairs 1-2, 4-7.

Oliver-Smith, A. 2004. Theorizing Vulnerability in a Globalized World: A Political Ecological Perspective. In Mapping Vulnerability: Disasters, Development & People (eds.) G. Bankoff et al., 10-24. London: Earthscan.

Scheper-Hughes, N. 2008. A Talent for Life: Reflections on Human Vulnerability and Resilience. Ethnos 73(1), 25-56.

Schneider, S.H. et al. 2007. Assessing key vulnerabilities and the risk from climate change. In Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (eds.) M. L. Parry et al., 779-810. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seckinelgin, H. 2008. The international politics of HIV/AIDS: global
    disease-local pain. London: Routledge.
United Nations 2007. Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the
    Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. Geneva: Inter-
    national Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

APPENDIX

People interviewed:

Bonizella Biagini, Cluster Coordinator, Senior Program Manager,
    Adaptation to Climate Change, Global Environment Facility.
Gernot Brodnig, Senior Specialist, Social Dimensions of Climate Change,
    The World Bank.
Lars Christiansen, JPO, Adaptation to Climate Change, Global Environment
    Facility.
Knud Falk, Disaster Preparedness Adviser, Danish Red Cross, International
    Department.
Saroj Kumar Jha, Program Manager, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction
    and Recovery, Sustainable Development Network, The World Bank.
Pradeep Kurukulasuriya, Technical Advisor, Energy and Environment
    Group/Climate Change Adaptation, United Nations Development
    Programme.
Ida Ljunggren, Project Manager, Global Trade.
Ian Noble, Lead Climate Change Specialist, Environment Department,
    The World Bank.
Mike Speirs, Senior technical advisor (Environment), Danish Ministry of
    Foreign Affairs (Danida).
Sille Stidsen, Environment & Climate Change Programme Coordinator,
    IWGIA – The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs.
Mattias Söderberg, Head of the ecumenical climate secretariat,
    DanChurchAid.
Birgitte Refslund Sørensen, Associate Professor, Department of Anthro-
    pology, Copenhagen University. Teaches Master of Disaster Manage-
    ment.
Morten Fauerby Thomsen, Programme Coordinator with focus on climate
    adaptation, CARE Denmark.