



Resilience, food systems and food security: examples from Africa

Polly Ericksen
Global Food Security and Environmental Change (GECAFS)
ECI/ Oxford University



Insights from resilience for food security

- Coupled social and ecological system
 - Even though many of the feedbacks are masked or distorted in modern systems
- Buffering capacity arises from diversity
 - among assets and at multiple levels
- Adaptive management requires monitoring and learning by institutions
 - Governance and capacity are required
- Focus on structure and function of system and key processes/ dynamics



Example of pastoralist food insecurity in Northern Kenya

- Adaptive capacity of local pastoralists slowly eroded/ lost
 - Climatic as well as social and political
 - Drought, economic stress, conflicts, sedentarization, marginalization
- Early warning system limited by poor information and institutional weakness
- Solutions lie with investing in local institutions, diversifying livelihoods, stimulating economy



Resilience in food systems: challenges to overcome

- Resilient state not necessarily desirable
 - Who gets to decide what is desirable?
e.g. pastoralists or government?
- Managing for disturbance
 - Conflict with the current donor paradigms?
 - Long planning horizons; emphasis on stability
- Managing at the appropriate scale
 - Trust and accountability at local level?
 - Cash flow constraints



Resilience in food systems: challenges to overcome (2)

- We cannot assume social and ecological resilience move in the same direction
 - E.g. food production increases while diversity decreases
 - Savanna biomass increase but not pastoralist food security (Galvin et al 2004)
- Young et al (2006): Social dynamics replacing biophysical in globalized systems
 - Food systems a prime example (substitutions)
 - Raises questions for future dynamics



Resilience, small farmers and globalized food systems?

- Cash crops OR production of staple foods as a poverty reduction strategy?
 - At least three “rural worlds” with different information and economic support needs
 - Still periodic food crises with droughts as a trigger
 - Human capital and political support insufficient
 - Role of diversification unclear especially for the long term
 - Trade system distorted



Resilience approach highlights cross-scale tradeoffs

- Wealthy food security at cost of poorer (McMichael 2006)
- Food miles or fair miles? (McGregor and Vorley 2006)
 - Where are the real ecological costs?
 - Global environmental goods versus poverty
- Water for agriculture or water for ecosystems or water for cities?
- Social protection or economic growth?
Food security?



Additional thoughts

- Resilience approach suitable for the complexity and heterogeneity of food systems
- Cross-level and scale interactions must be highlighted and analyzed
- Putting in the adaptive management is the challenging part, because of globalized nature, lack of social and political theory, bad information and paradigms
- Change and transformation???
 - Contested outcomes...