Benjamin Zyla

How to Strengthen Resilience in Fragile States: Taking Stock

Introduction

Over the past two decades, we have seen a significant rise in the popularity of the concept of resilience, especially in the academy where the concept of resilience is known for its interdisciplinarity (Manyena, 2006; Welsh, 2014; Chandy, 2015) and informing policies dealing with developmental, social, economic, security and environmental problems in fragile states. As Seville (2008: 1) notes, resilience has become "the new black" as it continues to crop up in a wide-range of discussions across the literature. In other words resilience is a central concept in the field of international development that studies the factors that lead states to become fragile or even failed, as well as how to make states more resilient towards external shocks like natural disasters, economic crises or general (geo-)political instability (Gaillard, 2010). In many ways, one might argue, the literature considers state fragility as the opposite to resilience (Pospisil & Besancenot, 2014).

However, despite the recent fame of the resilience concept in the academy and the policy world, there appears to be no formal consensus on what the term means, what it entails, and how it can be useful moving forward (Rogers, 2015: 55). In this *AIES Fokus* we take stock of the resilience research program, its gaps, and point to some areas of future studies. Indeed, studying resilience has clear policy implication and is important in the context of international statebuilding.[1] As the OECD (2010) reminds us, the transition from fragility to resilience is inherently under-researched area while much of the previous literature on fragile states has focused on what causes states to fail. Studying resilience offers an alternative and refreshing insight into what makes states succeed. It thus also offers some important policy prescriptions for bureaucrats in national, supra- and international institutions (e.g. EU, UN).

In what follows, we first review how resilience is defined in the literature; we then briefly discuss how resilience is measured; and finally, we discuss what possible policy prescriptions can be drawn from this.

Defining Resilience

The majority of the literature has considered fragility and state failure as the opposite to resilience (s.f. OECD 2009; Pospisil & Besancenot, 2014). Moreover, it has been linked to capacity and outcome whereby the former represents the ability to adapt to disturbances, stress and adversity, and the latter signifies a return to a stable position (Chandy, 2015). For example, the United Nations characterizes resilience as having "the capacity to withstand or absorb the impact of a hazard [whether natural or man-made] through resistance or adaptation, which enables […] certain basic functions and structures during a crisis, and bounce back or recover from an event" (UNISDR, 2012: 11). Some key definitions of resilience that have frequently been cited in the literature include the following:

Capacity and Legitimacy of the State

Often the discussion on resilience begins by focusing on the role of the state as the source of not only instability but also the absence of resilience. Gelbard, for example, defines resilience as "a condition where institutional strength, capacity, and social cohesion are sufficiently strong for the state to promote security and development and to respond effectively to shocks" (2015: 7). It is suggested that resilience appears to have a trickle down effect whereby states that experience low resilience are also often concurrently characterized by corruption or a lack of capacity (or the willingness) to work in the best interest of their citizens (Pouligny, 2010: 12). As a result, their low levels of legitimacy often lead to mistrust from their constituents, which limits the political and social cohesion within an already fragile situation

(Ibid.). Moreover, and in relation to societal needs, the level of fragility within a state and its ability to remain resilient is determined by its capacity to deliver services. In short, a central component of resilience as an academic concept as well as a policy tool is finding an equilibrium between citizens' expectations towards their state and the state's overall capacity (and willingness) to deliver basic services and public goods (OECD, 2009: 65).

While state capacity and legitimacy have become almost an accepted wisdom in the literature, there remains a significant debate on what good governance looks like within a resilient state. Kaplan (2009: 4), for example, considers a "good government" as one that uses local identities, capacities and institutions to strengthen the overall development of a country. In contrast, he defines weak states as those who ignore the histories and traditions of their people, ultimately causing them to lose the trust and support of the general population. Kaplan breaks this further down into two key factors that underline low resilience, namely political identity fragmentation and weak national institutions. Together, these two factors prohibit the functionality of an effective governance system while simultaneously diminishing the legitimacy of the state. In other words and to put it simple, the overall level of resilience of a nation depends on the legitimacy and functionality of the state (see also OECD, 2009; Pouligny, 2010). Resilience thus derives from a combination of state capacity, resource distribution, effective institutions and state legitimacy, which are underlined by political processes facilitating effective state-society relations and expectations (OECD, 2009; 2010; 2011, Hout, 2010; Ryan, 2012). According to the OECD (2010: 15), state legitimacy demonstrates a resilient factor as it provides a foundation for rule based cohesion rather than coercion. As such, a key element to resilience is reciprocity and mutual accountability between both the state and its citizens (USAID, 2013: 43)

as well as a functioning and legitimate government.

Social Resilience: Local Capacity, Agency and Empowerment

Manyena and Gordon (2015a: 49) argue that resilience goes way beyond the capacity of the state to remain resilient. It must also focus on the capacity of local communities to "fill the void" of the state during the collapse of key national institutions. In what follows, resilient communities are characterized by stability, peace, security, development and continuity in the community. Similarly, Tsuma et. al. (2014: 45) note that resilience can be found in communities that have the capacity to withstand internal and external shocks through 'locally-owned' mechanisms.

Building off of this, Bohle et al. define resilience within the context of agency at the individual and community level. He explains that resilience and resilience-building is the empowerment of vulnerable populations to pursue livelihoods which they perceive as imperative to their own personal well-being and social resilience (2009: 12). We must therefore change our focus from a 'system-oriented' to a 'people-centred' outlook of resilience by concentrating on human entitlements, capabilities, freedoms, choices and equity. An agency-based approach to resilience thus rests on states' overall level of human security—that is the capacity and agency of local communities to manage vulnerabilities and to remain stable, despite pressing internal and external conditions (see also Tsuma, 2014; Manyena & Gordon, 2015a; 2015b).

Management and Mitigation of Risk

Another key component of the concept of resilience is the ability to manage and mitigate risks (Seville, 2008; Brunner, 2009; European Union, 2009; Ryan, 2012). Often, this is seen through withstanding or absorbing unforeseen shocks. Brunner (2009: 6) describes this as a "process of preparing and responding to the eventual actualization of multiple and increasingly diverse risks." Based on this definition, a

key component of resilience is not just the mitigation of risk, but also the foresight to plan for unexpected risks and threats (Seville, 2008; UNDP, 2012). Ryan (2012: 22) thus describes resilience as a form of prevention by which states have a national capacity to anticipate potential risks. In that sense, they are able to either prevent or mitigate oncoming perils. Correspondingly, Seville (2008) breaks this component of resilience down to the capacity to prevent risks from occurring; the capacity to prevent risks from worsening; and the capacity to recover from risks or threats once they have occurred. Therefore, resilience is the ability of a state to remain stabilized or recover relatively quickly from unexpected shocks (e.g. uprisings of violence, natural disasters, economic shocks, etc.). This is a definition of resilience that the EU, for example, has adopted (2009: 72).

Adaptability

Building off of risk management, a key component of resilience is the notion of adaptability (Pouligny, 2010; Government of the UK, 2011; Chandler, 2012; Joseph, 2013; USAID, 2013). In order for an individual, community or state to be resilient, they must maintain the capacity to adapt to threats, risks or unprecedented changes, which allows them to maintain a high level of "function, structure and identity" (Government of the UK, 2011: 4). According to USAID, "resilience is the ability of people, households, communities, countries and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth" (2013: 6). To add onto this, Chandler depicts resilience as the capacity to positively adapt to issues that arise from external and internal domains. He classifies a resilient subject, on an individual or nation-wide level, as an "active agent" (2012: 217; see also Joseph, 2013: 39) who can absorb and adapt to risk through self-transformation.

Resilience as Human Security

In 2000, the United Nation's General Assembly drew a link between the concept

of human security and resilience by noting that "[t]he focus of human security is on fostering government and local capacities and strengthening the resilience of both to emerging challenges in ways that are mutually reinforcing, preventive and comprehensive" (UN, 2010: 7). Human security rests on the principle that states fill the primary role of enhancing and protecting the survival, livelihood and self-possession of their constituents. In that sense, the concepts of human security and resilience run parallel to one another—that is human security cannot be achieved without resilience, and vice versa. When states reach greater levels of fragility, for instance in terms of poor governance, the human security concept illustrates the need to access the root causes of these weaknesses and to develop "timely, targeted and effective responses" which ameliorate the resilience of the state and its citizens (UN, 2010: 7). Thus, the human security concept illustrates the need to improve resilience on a horizontal level, combining state actors, institutions and local capacities.

Similarly to the UN General Assembly, Chandler (2012) finds that resilience has its origins in the human security discourse. The emphasis on human security acts as a preventative and non-coercive framework to strengthen resilience in fragile states. More specifically, Chandler (Ibid.) presents resilience in contrast to the liberal internationalism by noting that resilience is largely defined by a level of vulnerability requiring a dispersal of power and a bottom-up approach. In contrast to liberal internationalism, resilience emphasizes local capabilities and capacities (Ibid.: 223), and like human security, it is an ongoing process that has agency. Ultimately, the human security discourse is another means through which the origins of resilience can be interpreted.

The human security relation to resilience scholarship highlights the focus on the community and individual aspect of the resilience process, as discussed earlier. This consideration rests on the principle that communities have the means, empowerment and agency to define and uphold their own resilience. Chandler, for example,

notes that resilience must represent "the empowerment and responsibility of agency at the local societal level, rather than upon the assertion of the right of external sovereign agency" (2012: 213). Contrary to putting an emphasis on the state's role in building resilience, community level approaches advocate for the rise of individual agency and the accountability of individuals and communities to secure their own well-being. In terms of security, this is seen through the encouragement towards community-level preparedness, awareness and coping strategies with potential risks.

How is Resilience Measured?

The OECD (2009) recognizes that factors supporting state resilience are not linear but interacting and interrelating. As a result, Chandler charges that resilience is best considered a "normative or ideal concept" (2012: 217), which suggests that it can only be measured in terms of comparison or relativity. To this end, USAID offers a three step process to measuring and analyzing resilience (see table three below). Firstly, a contextual analysis must be conducted through an examination of a country's history, structure, and institutions to establish a better sense of their 'exposure' to internal and external shocks (2013: 12) (outlined at the top of table three below). This can also be seen through the size, frequency and duration of violent stressors. The second step is a factor analysis, which focuses on the effectiveness and legitimacy of institutions; the availability, performance, diversity, and redundancy of resources; and, the networks, behaviors, attitudes, innovation and institutional memory of adaptive facilitators (Ibid.).

The final measure is a resilience analysis, which synthesizes the two previous steps. This final step outlines the 'exposure' of a community or state to stressors, and their overall ability to mitigate, recover and overcome these risks (Ibid.: 13).

Policy Implications & Prescriptions

We conclude this *AIES Fokus* with some policy implications. Manyena and Gordon (2015a: 48) argue that resilience measures that solely focus on security, recovery and reconstruction are "short-term" or "passive" solutions to a much greater issue. Similarly, Longstaff (2008: 1-2) notes that resilience does not correlate to short-term stability. Running off of this, Ryan (2012: 22) charges that a short-term focus cannot build resilience as it is not a 'quick and easy' fix. As such, to understand the full picture, resilience building and its measures should be looked at as a long-term process of engagement. One way by which policy officials know that resilience has arrived in fragile states is by studying the perceptions of the citizens of each fragile state (Osaghae, 2007). Consequently, it should be left to the discretion of the citizenry to decide whether or not their country is resilient, not the international donor community (Ibid.: 691). Here, we can clearly identify a theoretical and empirical gap in the literature. Donors need to focus specifically on measuring resilience quantitatively and qualitatively in order to

★ develop better universal measures of resilience responding to the multidisciplinary definitions of the term

★ better understand what types of measures would be required to document resilience processes and practices during various shocks or risks (i.e. economic shocks, political instability, civil strife, etc.);

★ understand how these measures differ from one to the next.

Improving State-Society Relations and Local Capacity

A key focus of policy provisions has been centred upon improving the effectiveness of state-society relations, which are defined by three key dimensions: the nature of the political settlement, the expectations towards the state on the side of its citizens, and the capacity of the state to realise these expectations (Arandel et al.,

2015: 987). The focus should thereby be, as noted above, on increasing community resilience, not as a way to dictate or measure what is being or should be done locally, but to "support and enable local activity by making existing good practice available to others" (UK Government, 2003). The state should offer opportunities where the state itself works along local actors. Referring to Charlie Edwards 'four Es' of community resilience, Brunner (2009: 7) argues that state involvement at the community level should be based on engagement, education, empowerment and encouragement. Furthermore, he maintains that governments and administrative agencies must engage in a constant dialogue with small-scale communities to be able to better meet their expectations. To do so, governments should provide tools and resources to promote resilience on a community and individual level, such as creating platforms for accessing education (Ibid). Similar to Brunner, Manyena and Gordon (2015a: 45; see also Kaplan, 2009, p. 16) prescribe an approach where the state and society work together to enhance resilience. To create a better-rounded mode of governance, they suggest to establish opportunities where both state and non-state actors participate in mixed public, private and community-based networks. This could strengthen the overall capacity and agency of actors at the community level, building "local trust, interconnectedness and networks".

The European Union recognized this interdependence between state and non-state actors, and suggests that resilience must be considered among and in between household, community and state institutions and how these three levels constructively interact and work together. In states where there is a strict top-down approach, there is limited potential for non-state institutions and local actors to develop their own coping and adaptation strategies. In recognizing these limitations, the EU prescribes a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach to achieve socio-economic resilience (EU, 2009: 74) whereby both state and non-state actors have the means to develop resilient strategies. On the side of the state, the EU recommends that policies and practice focus on enhan-

cing communication between state and non-state actors, which should be driven by a societal needs-based approach (EU, 2009).

Manyena and Gordon (2015a: 49) adapt this recommendation to exogenous interventions and develop a context specific need of understanding of resilience. Specifically, they focus on intervention plans to strengthen resilience that centre on individual communities by identifying existing resilience factors, improving and sustaining these factors and delivering resilient communities.

This approach accentuates the need for a context specific understanding of local conflicts and fragile situations at all levels of the intervention process. As a result, responses to instability or conflict should follow a resilience-sensitive approach on a community level. Intervening programmes should build off of already-existing local knowledge, traditions and capacity, instead of exogenous actors introducing entirely new governance approaches or institutions (Manyena & Gordon, 2015a: 49) on local communities.

Enhancing Society-Society Relations

Along similar lines, Kaplan (2009: 14) recommends that donors focus their efforts on promoting and building better social cohesion at the national and local levels. In doing so, international donors should encourage the inclusiveness of formal institutions to ensure that all citizens benefit. In addition, he argues, we need strategies that focus on unity and cooperation across groups in conflict zones (and not strictly between the state and society at large). This recommendation is close to Manyena and Gordon's (2015a: 45) conception of society-society relations who argue that in the past stabilisation and resilience methods have largely focused on vertical state-society relationships, rather than horizontal society-society dynamics. While Manyena and Gordon do not disregard the importance of both approaches, they argue that in conflict and fragile situations there should be a more pronounced focus on the latter (e.g. looking at the relationship between different ethnic, religious and ideological groups), which could ultimately be used as a tool to renegotiate and strengthen the social contract.

Building on this, Kaplan (2009: 20) recommends that international donors must ensure that their aid practices meet the needs of society-society relations—that is a more equitable distribution of resources to groups across the country, regardless of their region, gender, religion, clan, etc. Thus, donors need to shift away from aid mentalities of the past such (e.g. supporting one group or region in lieu of another). Therefore, donors need to be made more aware of the concept of resilience and that the primary goal of any intervention should be to strengthening the resilience of a fragile state.

Avoiding a One-Size-Fits-All Approach Given the very complex nature of fragile states and thus the complexity of getting these fragile states back on their feet and increase their resilience, international donors must avoid imposing their own "externally-engineered" problem-solving mechanisms, because they gravely overlook local indigenous knowledge and capacity. In order to avoid this, the OECD (2007: 2) reminds us that managing progress is different in each fragile state; it is also fundamentally different from that in stable countries. In other words, resilience must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and donors must avoid a one-size-fits-all policy approach (OECD, 2007; Seville, 2008; Yamin, 2011). Resilience is a contextual process that requires individually targeted policies. As a result, the international donor community must recognize that resilience in one place may not necessarily be the same as resilience in another. For instance, the intensity level of conflict in Afghanistan was sustained across the majority of provinces, whereas in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, conflict was more localized to individual areas (OECD, 2007: 16). Based on these differences alone, the strategies of international donors should not look at resilience as a one-policy solution, but on problem-solving tools that are appropriate to the local and national contexts of the fragile state and its communities.

Benjamin Zyla, Ph.D., is Associate Fellow at the AIES as well as guest researcher at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Konstanz in Germany (for 2017/18), and Associate Professor in the School of International Development & Global Studies at the University of Ottawa in Canada.

Notes

1) In all what follows, however, we need to be clear that due to space constraints this AIES Fokus unfortunately cannot offer a full-blown analysis in all of these regards. Undoubtedly, this requires a book-length manuscript and is thus beyond such brief Fokus.

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