

Resilience: Touching a Colourful Sky: Breaking the Mould of Linear Models of Innovation and Creating Innovative Learning Spaces for Social Change of Resilient Small Scale Farmers

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Abstract

Conventional models of intervention in agriculture and rural development policies neither gave attention to the ever changing global challenges, uncertainties and complexities of environment under which small scale farmers live nor acknowledges the importance of local knowledge's in rural areas. Emic resources are seldom considered as a resource to be strengthened or build upon. In this context, a group of students from Africa and Asia at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA), during a course on Media Design for Social Change engaged in a poetry project to explore resilience of small-scale farmers. This resulted in a surprising series of poems and paintings that, put together, capture the idea of resilience in an entirely non-linear, intuitive way. The dynamics of the activities and the aftermath of exhibiting the poetry route made us to question the role of rural development organisations and structures in approaching social resilience. We realized that conceiving social resilience as a livelihood capital requires due consideration in vulnerable rural contexts of unsustainability, insecurity, poverty and emic and etic processes of change. The paper argues that other innovative trajectories could be employed to create spaces of learning and communication that encourage or articulate social resilience. To reach such goals it is required to contest the training and performance of related rural development professionals.

Keywords: Poetry, Social change, Social resilience, Spaces of learning

1. Introduction

Complex and dynamic world and global challenges affecting directly and indirectly subsistence farmers at grass root level and the small-scale farmers are the receivers of such impact. Under such complex challenges small scale farmers are innovating on a regular basis in order to survive. But who is listening? Understanding and exploring how communities can successfully adapt to such challenges become an important concern of policy agenda at global level. Recognizing such challenges requires rethinking, re-learning, and re-designing through bringing diverse actors background together and confront mind-sets and novel ideas on social learning and develop capacity to catalyse innovation, increasingly attention being paid to the 'resilience' events of small scale farmers. To this reaction, a group of master students from Africa and Asia at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA), during a course on Media Design for Social Change engaged in a poetry project to explore resilience of small-scale farmers with the intention to create new spaces of communication and learning by unravelling the complexities and resilience of small scale farmers through poems, while deepening their knowledge on the concept of 'resilience' through desk study. Thus, the paper builds on conceptual work and literature review that is carried out by master students at Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences and presents contributes to resilience paradigm from communication and rural innovation perspectives.

2. Concepts and Research: A theoretical grounding for exploring 'resilience'

Resilience is the most important scientific and community concern, and relatively new concept. According to Marshall, Marshall, and Abdulla (2009, 904) 'resilience' is an important concept that is emerging to guide and support more inclusive approaches to the management of combined social and ecological systems" (following Ludwig, Walker, and Holling 1997; Berkes and folke 1998). He explained that, there are still challenges to bring together the 'social and 'ecological.' Especially there remains a knowledge gap with reference to the social aspects of the resilience (Davidson 2010; Brown and Westaway 2011).

Broadly speaking, the word 'resilience' can be understood as an approach that focuses on reducing risk by increasing the adaptive capacity of local people and environment in which they depend in a way that strength communal bond, resources and peoples capacity to cope. Increasingly, community resiliency has become the focus of international research (Kulig and Brown; 1997). This emerging international consensus focuses on the

way of building more resilient agricultural systems of poor small scale farmers.

- In July 2008, the UN High level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis underscored the importance of strengthening resilience in order to support smallholder livelihoods and long-term food security.
- The FAO High-Level Conference on World Food Security declared that: “it is essential to address the fundamental question of how to increase the resilient of present food production systems to challenges posed by climate change.”
- The UN Commission on Sustainable Development insisted that in order to adapt to climate change, there is a need to promote resilient agricultural systems.
- The UN Special Reporters on the Right to Food stated that “we need to build a system that ensures a sufficient degree of resilience in the face of increasing volatility of agricultural markets of agricultural primary commodities, and which maintains such volatility within acceptable margins.”

Hence, the aforementioned literatures argue that, the knowledge and importance of social resilience for improving livelihoods and food security of the rural communities at global perspectives. This is the underlying premises for this article that will equip development professionals’ engaging in the domain of rural innovation and communication to build communities resilience through reversing conventional mould of looking community problems from outside.

2.1. Towards a grass root communication strategies as the starting point for solutions

So far much of conventional model of intervention in agriculture and rural development policy neither gave attention to the ever changing global challenges, uncertainties and complexities of environment under which small scale farmers live nor acknowledges the importance of local knowledge’s and social technical arrangements in rural areas. Rather, it is more dedicated to increase production by transferring hardware technologies. This is the main critiques behind the failure of the paradigm. In this paper we will discuss different innovative methodological approach and strategies that have a great importance in order to break conventional mould and build the resilience of small scale farmers and improve social changes. To this end, we will discuss resilience from different dimensions that will help diverse actors and professionals working in rural development setting in order to approach and build resilience of small scale farmers in agriculture.

2.2. Resilience is about stimulating traditional folklore by different communication strategies

The art of communication begins with the creation of living things (plants and animals). Farmers in rural areas used folklore such as poems, tales, etc. while working in individual or in a group to overcome the weariness of their work and express their farming problems, soils etc. Farmers have traditionally knowledge, expertise, skills and can prepare for and adapt to the negative effects only if they understand it and knows its potential impacts. Thus, effective communicative strategies such as poems are novel fashion to explore this traditional knowledge to catalyse innovation. Building the capacity, knowledge and skills of development professional working in rural development in the areas of network building, negotiation and facilitation of interpersonal communication skills are crucial importance to achieve the aforementioned goals (see also Leeuwis, 2004).

Community infrastructure (community centres and youth recreation facilities, transportation, health services, local arts, music and food markets) are required to support community needs and actions to build their resilience. However, it is not well recognised as relevant in rural development and natural resource management sector (see also Wheth and Hunter 2009; Prichard, Purdon, and Chaplyn 2010). They suggest that an exploration of such element of social resilience would enhance development professionals to broaden their understanding of the situations/contexts beyond their responsibility, which have the latent potential to affect their operational results.

2.3. Resilience is about facilitating farmer’s knowledge and local innovation through diverse of communication strategies

Over the last two decades much of the innovation discovered are those of small-scale poor farmers in the south living in poverty. Gathering and networking this innovation as social process needs a multiple communicative intervention strategies such as experiential learning, listening to the life story of the small scale farmers, total participatory and immersion research. This learning process must engage diverse actors (farmers, extension workers, researchers and NGOs) in order to share and seize opportunities at household, regional, and national levels. This view also supported in the works of (Chambers, 2007).

According to Chris Garforth (2009) communication is not just telling people, advising people, passing on messages. It is equally – or more importantly – about asking, listening, exchanging, learning together and platform building. A combination of traditional poems of farming community and modern communication methods can help communication workers to improve the quality and outreach of their program and enhance social learning. A poem is a product of culture, and culture determines the code, structure, meaning and context of the communication that takes place. The participation of the local folk artists, story tellers and performers in

the production and use of traditional media ensures respect for traditional values, symbols and realities and at the same time, ensures that such media productions appeal to rural audiences. By tapping the community's creative pool of traditional culture, expressions, small scale farmers can maintain their cultural identity while gaining the social resilience.

Moreover, dialogue can be initiated and guided by field communication workers and discussion tools such as flipchart, audio-cassettes, videos can be used to help community to visualize, express and reflect their own farming matters. These activities can lead to diagnosis of farming problems and find alternatives and solutions. According to Leeuwis (2004) storytelling, poems and songs that have existed for hundreds of years as entertainment educational functions both in the northern and southern contexts. Moreover, he explained that this entertainment education is widely used to explain sensitive issues that are not easily discussed openly and/or in a personal way.

According to kumaran, one of the researcher in the paper listening as Radical Act (2003:14) concludes "life story collection is much more than a research method. It is an attitude of mind, a deposition of heart..., by privileging this method of collecting data; we have given the legitimacy and significance to different ways of being a researcher and a person. Soon the alternative ways of doing research may come to complement other conventional ways, and hopefully create a radically new development researcher. " How many of us 'as development professionals' ready to jump into the communities to understand farmers problems? Are really development professionals ready to reverse and break conventional mould of approaching communities? The problems of rural communities cannot be solved as behaving us outsiders. Rather, we argue that, its' the total participatory research and process of living with the communities that should reverse our conventional mould and explore the voice of overlooked communities and engaging them in the heart of development issues. In similar way, Chambers (2004) also explained that development is not by blue print but an adaptive learning process that needs the reversal of normal professionalism by new professionalism- putting the last first- in choice of the clients, professional values, research methods, and roles. Research methods and approaches are more holistic and experimental and located at field conditions, roles should also reversed with poor people as researchers and innovators. Therefore, the term 'building resilience' as in development intervention should work out here.

Knowledge, skills and learning denotes to individual and group to respond to local needs, priorities and agendas (also see Eade 1997; Cuthill and Fien 2005). It comprises knowledge partnerships, technology and innovation, skills development and consolidation. Knowledge partnerships are central to individual and community ability to cope with change. Such partnership has involved diverse actors (scientist, researchers, farmers, government officials etc.). Technology and innovation draws from local, national and international experience which can be adapted to local contexts. A need for skills consolidation and development included skills for communication, governance, soil and water management, business and financial management, agronomic practice etc.

2.4. Resilience is about building social networks and mutual trust

Farmers are better able to adapt to challenges when they have strong social networks and make a decision in a way that involve others. The livelihood of small scale farmers are improved when they have both formal and informal social networks that enhance social learning. When farmers come together through different means and share ideas, views and farming situations and learn from one another the level of trust among them also strengthened. Besides, these networks should favour and promote female small scale farmers as they share large responsibilities in agriculture and the most vulnerable class especially in the south.

(Christean Maclean, 2013) expressed how community network building is essential to enable community to adapt to the identity challenges and social disconnection occurring with rapid population growth:

I think most people want to be part of the team; they want to feel like a part of the community; they want to have a chance to be useful, but they don't necessarily get presented with the opportunity [...] if you can get everyone on the street, to come down for the bit of a street party [...] that what they are meeting their neighbours and sharing information and it's just starting to build those little social networks. Then it's the beginning of the dialogue in that street and from that they'll probably start talking to each other about other things so there's a bit of support network; they know other people in the street who share their value and concerns, or who don't. It's that connectivity which I think is at the heart of this.

3. Conclusion

The concept of 'resilience' in the domain of social science has caught the interests of policy makers and development professionals who are seeking to bring the concept into evidence base practice. Development professionals involving in rural innovation and communication are reporting limited knowledge gap to foster social resilience. Hence, the paper has used practical activity of Master students and literature review in order to

deepen the horizon of knowledge for development professionals involving in rural innovation and communication. Accordingly, the paper was developed to clarify ambiguity of the term at academic level and developed an amazing series of poems and paintings that, put together, capture the idea of resilience in an entirely non-linear, intuitive way.

The paper argue that, varieties of communicative strategies (like storytelling, poems, songs and etc.) in rural development are important to build social resilience by creating awareness and express problems in the societies like drought, health issues, war and conflicts etc. In the arenas of rural development poetry plays a crucial role in facilitating social learning and fostering innovation trajectories and networking among actors. Thus, we argue that in order to contribute to the resilience of small scale farmers ‘we’ scientists, researchers and communication professionals engaging in rural development should re-think our multiple role of communication (Leeuwis, 2004) that could facilitate resilience and social learning in order to explore innovation of small scale farmers.

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