Chapter 2
Resilience: The Holy Grail or Yet Another Hype?

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2.1 Introduction

Disaster risk is globally on the rise, mainly as a result of the complex interplay of environmental, demographic, technological, political and socioeconomic conditions that are expanding hazard and vulnerability profiles (Peek 2008). The inevitability of climatic change at both the global and the local level is generally accepted to be a fact, and various sources predict its dramatic impact on the planet and on humankind (Jones et al. 2010; UNICEF 2007; UNISDR 2004; Save the Children 2007). The field of disaster studies has consequently experienced a significant shift concerning both the nature of disasters, and ways to contend with them. Over the past few decades it has become accepted that disasters occur at the intersection of a natural hazard and people's vulnerabilities, i.e. the organisation of society, with implications for the activities undertaken under the denominator of disaster management. That is, if disasters are inevitable, measures could only be directed at preparing people for a possible disaster to come—disaster preparedness—and assist them once a disaster had hit—disaster response. Approaching disasters as an intersection between nature and humankind on the other hand implies targeting underlying factors equally, including enduring vulnerability and

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people's capacities. Following this trend, resilience thinking currently tops the agenda of disaster risk reduction, and yet the challenge in the coming period is to overcome the teething troubles of this approach. Indeed, resilience has the potential to become the next battleground for on-going debates on the purpose of humanitarian aid; i.e. whether it should be provided solely on the basis of identified needs, linked with development objectives, as part of broader coherence/whole of government agendas for wider change, or simply be a means of preserving the status quo—what Walker and Maxwell (2009) label as the '3 Cs', compassion, containment, and change. To establish resilience as a useful approach to interventions rather than a political tool or point for debate, it is consequently valuable to pursue a mapping of the current discussions with regard to its promises and pitfalls. This chapter therefore provides an examination of the approach, without claiming to present an exhaustive list of issues. Rather, it is a careful exploration of experiences, both in theory as in practice of a resilience approach. The next section starts by discussing in more detail the shift that has taken place in thinking on disasters and their management.

2.2 What Has Been Going On in the Field of Disaster Studies

Over the past century, a twofold shift has taken place, concerning both the nature of disasters, and the way to contend with them. Within academia and practice for many years, 'natural disasters' were explained as unexpected events predominantly exogenous to society, catastrophic products of powerful geophysical systems (Hewitt 1983). Core disaster response activities focused mainly on the provision of outside assistance to restore what had been destroyed in the wake of disasters. In line with this approach, disaster actions and activities were a showdown between powerful forces of nature and a state-led technocratic and militarised counterforce. They had several characteristics: first, the scientific understanding and monitoring of geophysical processes was central, with the main goal of predicting hazards and suppressing and controlling geophysical processes through planning and managerial activities (dikes, water pumps and flood control works are such examples). Second, if not suppressible, human activities were often controlled to separate people from risk through, for example, building codes and so-called 'fail safe' measures. Finally, emergency measures were undertaken to reduce human suffering. Disaster plans were developed, and relief and rehabilitation bodies were established. These were inspired by geophysical study and research, but were subsidiary to emergency actions (Hewitt 1983) and were mostly state-led, and military or quasi-military in character.

Slowly, however, in the 1970s this approach started to transform due to several contingencies in the international sphere, including the increased globalisation of risks, the declining role of the state, and the de-legitimisation of pure scientific

knowledge. This validated the role of disaster management towards non-state actors and enlarged activities to include mitigation and other development-oriented activities. Initially, reductions in time and space resulting from globalisation increased the connections between different actors, connecting everyone in a global 'risk web' with catastrophic potential. The subsequent increases in complexity threw into question the capacity of science/government alone to understand and manage risk. An eroding belief in science as a panacea to all problems created room for more complex and integrated approaches to difficulties society faced, hence the field of disaster management was increasingly taking economic, social and political issues into account. Risk became everyone's product and responsibility, and due to the potential for catastrophe, a majoring organising facet of contemporary society. International understanding of disasters mirrored these orientations, and efforts shifted towards managing disasters using multiple stakeholders, forms of knowledge, sectors, and approaches, and addressing both causes and consequences through emergency response, prevention and mitigation, and social and political change. Indeed, this led to a growing convergence between developmentalists focused on longer term change and disaster managers including humanitarian actors (Lavell 2012). Table 2.1 displays how development and disaster paradigms have been moving closer over the past decades. In both fields, increasingly similar themes and topics surface, bridging the (theoretical) gap between development and disaster. In practice, however, the moving closer of the two fields did not evolve as neatly as presented in Table 2.1 (Manyena 2012).

Table 2.1 Disaster and development moving closer (Faling 2012, based on Manyena 2012 and Ellis and Biggs 2001)

	Development	Disaster
1950s–1970s	**Modernization** Technical approach Redistribution through growth State-led Dependency Trickle-down	**Technocratic approach** Natural disasters Cost-benefit analysis State-led Satisfying risk Quantifying risk
1970s–1990s	**Market liberalisation** Structural adjustment Free markets NGOs Decentralisation Gender Good governance	**Vulnerability** Construction of risk Complex emergencies NGOs Risk assessment Resilience development
1990s–2010s	**Sustainable development** Participatory approaches Livelihoods Vulnerability Climate change adaptation Environment and sustainability Resilience	**Resilience** Participatory approaches Livelihoods Vulnerability Climate change adaptation Environment and sustainability Disaster risk reduction (DRR) Gender Good governance

Roughly from the 1970s onwards, it became increasingly accepted that disasters are a combination of nature's forces (the hazard event) and (political, social, economic, cultural) vulnerabilities, endogenous to society (Cannon 1994). A disaster in this view can be defined as "*the outcome of a physically uncompensated interaction between a natural unleashing event and a social system*" (Albala-Bertrand2000, p. 188). This has serious implications for the activities covered by the field of disaster management. Since, if disasters are inevitable, measures could only be directed at preparing people for a possible disaster to come. Hence, along with prevention and response, disaster management now also covers mitigation, adaptation, transformation, and livelihood support.

This trajectory poses problems for humanitarian actors operating within disaster management spheres. As codified in the humanitarian principles, humanitarian action seeks to deliver aid on the basis of need alone. When taken to their logical conclusions, vulnerability and resilience paradigms that acknowledge the human causes of disasters can provide justification for using emergency aid either in a way that reduces disaster risk or in a way that does not increase disaster risk. This argument gained traction in the 1990s following a number of incidents where aid was viewed as leading to dependency and reducing capacity, or contributing to or prolonging conflict, including, most notably, the displacement of populations following the genocide in Rwanda (Storey 1997; Uvin 1998; Macrae and Leader 2001; Eriksson 1996). It is associated with a number of concepts such as 'new' humanitarian approaches, among others exemplified by Anderson (1999), who reviewed '*how aid can support peace – or war*' to argue that aid should be used towards longer-term peace and stability. While some have argued that humanitarian aid should contribute to longer-term positive change and acknowledge and act on the larger web of risk within which it operates, traditional humanitarian approaches suggest that this would risk subsuming needs-based humanitarian action into a political agenda, so threatening humanitarian principles and, consequently, space and access in the process.

2.3 Resilience as the Answer?

As a continuation of the above-mentioned trends, resilience currently tops the agendas of disaster academics and practitioners. Indeed, it has become a common feature in humanitarian and development arenas since the adoption of the 2005–2015 UN *Hyogo Framework for Action: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, a policy framework that sets out a country-level DRR agenda for signatories.

The term resilience stems from the Latin word *resilio*, which means '*to bounce back*' (Klein et al. 2004). The Oxford English Dictionary defines resilience as (1) *the act of rebounding or springing back* and (2) *elasticity*. It is unclear from where exactly the field of disaster management derived the concept (Manyena

2006), however, in the sciences the notion of resilience is historically believed to originate from applied physics and engineering (Alexander 2013). From this purely mechanical point of view, the resilience of materials refers to the quality of being able to store strain energy and deflect elastically under a load without breaking or being deformed (Boyden and Cooper 2007; Klein et al. 2004). In the 1940s, the study of the concept evolved in the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry and, since the 1970s, the term has been employed in a more metaphorical sense. In this line, resilience refers to structurally enhancing the adaptability and capacity of individuals, communities and/or structures to bounce back, and/or transform and move forward in reaction to adverse conditions following a hazard (Gaillard 2010; Levine et al. 2012; Manyena 2006; Plummer 2011).

In using this broad definition of resilience, it bears the following features. First, echoing DRR thinking that has evolved over the past decades, resilience adopts a holistic understanding of risk and disaster. It views disaster as a combination of a hazard event and risks embedded in local economic, political and social institutions. Resilience approaches seek an integrated assessment, combining different fields of expertise. Activities are increasingly multi-sectoral, with communities bearing responsibility for risk reduction, with help and assistance from (local) governments and stakeholders, meaning the governance of disasters is increasingly organised bottom-up. The latter implies that communities bear ownership, and local stakeholders are expected to jointly contribute to risk reduction. This builds on the assumption that the best possible results are achieved through the pooling of knowledge and experience and the inclusion of all stakeholders, many of whom have different viewpoints and needs (Frerks et al. 2011; Manyena 2006; McEntire et al. 2002).

While a resilience orientation offers a number of promising features, there is a danger that it can become subsumed as a means of maintaining the *status quo* or furthering coherence discourses. As a means of maintaining the *status quo*, the concept of 'bouncing back' from a disaster can be used to advocate for a return to the previous structural conditions that caused the disaster in the first place; Manyena (2006) suggests resilience should instead be thought of as 'bouncing forward', a view that implies building adaptive capacity for positive change. When it comes to enactive positive change, however, the question must be asked: change for whom? Positive change can sometimes be a zero-sum game, meaning that certain actors benefit at the expense of others. From a governance perspective, the potentially contentious nature of this change can be disguised by the vagueness of resilience terminology. Brand and Jax (2007) argue the term is a powerful 'boundary object' to foster communication across sciences and disciplines and bring them together towards a common outcome. Similarly, the term might also function as a boundary object for aid actors—including governments and humanitarian organisations—as has occurred with community-based DRR rhetoric (Heijmans 2009), and new humanitarianism that fostered coherence arguments in the 1990s (Macrae and Leader 2001). Indeed, resilience offers a number of benefits but must be used carefully to ensure it does not get politicised in a harmful manner.

The previous approach towards resilience usually refers to the resilience of communities, societies, organisations or systems. A resilience approach which orients the term to support individual agency can offer a counter to the potential of resilience as an excuse for the *status quo*. Throughout time and place, societies have been fascinated with how individuals overcame adversity and succeeded in life, or human (individual) resilience. Three general 'waves' of resilience research can be identified in psychology, social and behavioural sciences, that form the basis of a human perspective to resilience. The first wave included research in the behavioural sciences, which sought to understand and prevent the development of psychopathology (Masten 2011). Studies focused on individual and individually mediated factors associated with positive outcomes. To gain basic descriptive data, scholars focused on fundamental issues of defining and operationalising concepts. Later, the focus shifted when scholars set out to understand process and change, test emerging theories, and develop strategies to actively promote resilience (Masten and Obradovic 2008). The second wave focused on research that emphasised the temporal and relational aspect of positive development under stress (Ungar et al. 2007; Masten 2011). Masten explains that the work attempted to move beyond description and to probe the processes that might account for differences observed in the first wave. Finally, the third and more recent wave of research has taken a more ecological interpretation of resilience, which includes perceiving resilience as an outcome of processes influenced by one's context and culture. Moreover, researchers began designing and implementing experimental research and more frequently started offering suggestions for practice and policy, with warnings concerning the limited state of the knowledge at any given time (Ungar et al. 2007; Masten 2011). Although resilience research in the field of social and behavioural sciences has been common practice, the focus in relation to natural hazards is limited. Resilience from a human perspective could be helpful for the field of disasters, since it can benefit from the insights gained through previous research. Moreover, it provides a more tangible and applied understanding of the concept. But what does human resilience actually entail?

2.3.1 Human Resilience

Human resilience requires focusing on the extent to which individuals navigate their way through the tensions and stresses caused by adversity. This includes personal capabilities and psychological resources (internal level) as well as wider capitals and resources made available to individuals by their environment (external level). When exploring the concept from an individual perspective, the focus lies on understanding risk and protective factors that moderate outcomes and impacts of hazards on individual people. These moderating factors are variables that strengthen or weaken the effects of stressors on humans (Boyden and Cooper 2007). Risk and protective factors are characterised as internal and external (ecological) in which the first refers to the combination of characteristics that make up

an individual, and the second refers to the outcome of environmental factors, which affect an individual's well-being (Montgomery et al. 2003; Boyden and Cooper 2007). The interplay between the internal and the external factors, according to Boyden and Cooper (2007), is dependent on how each of the factors is transmitted and to what extent the options are accessible. In addition, the effects of adversity are highly influenced by both individual and collective (familial, communal, institutional, etc.) processes and therefore it is important to identify how these different mechanisms correlate and reinforce one another. It is believed that the greater the number of risks humans face (internal and external), the greater their vulnerability.[1] On the other hand, Montgomery et al. (2003) explain that human resilience tends to increase with the presence of protective factors that help the individual to cope with misfortune. In other words, the way individuals cope with, and even in some cases respond positively to, adversity is seen as a combination of positive personality traits as well as a supportive environment.

Although the scope of this chapter does not allow for in-depth discussion on possible factors that enable human resilience, research shows that resilience is multifactorial and thus that interventions should focus on multiple factors rather than single ones (de Milliano 2012; Ungar 2008). Resilience enabling factors modify the effects of risk in a positive direction and include resources, strategies, and power relations that are helpful or beneficial to 'bounce forward'. Although different for each individual, internal factors that can have an enabling function include cognition, behaviour, and spirituality. Specifically this includes one's level of intelligence, personal attributes and sociability, hazard related behaviour, participation, and a relationship with a 'higher being' (de Milliano 2012). External factors include relational, socio-political, economic, and physical/environmental resources. Perceived and/or received support from intimate (e.g. family and friends) and more distant relations (e.g. political leaders), access to and possession of economic, political and material resources, financial and physical environmental capital, together with the previously mentioned internal factors, can all be important for individuals to cope with a stressor. Understanding which and how these factors enable individuals to overcome adversity per age-group, gender and context is a helpful starting point for enabling resilience (de Milliano 2012).

2.4 Pros and Cons of the Resilience Approach

Donor and host governments, intergovernmental organisations, NGOs and academics are increasingly focusing on the language and practice of resilience in their day-to-day proceedings. Indeed, the concept is being introduced as an organising principle to prevent unacceptable levels of human vulnerability, reduce

[1] Related to natural hazards this also includes the number of hazards, their frequency, severity and potential, the degree of preparedness of the individual.

the costs of emergency response, and bring disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and other risk management measures into mainstream development practises (Levine et al. 2012). However, many actors find themselves struggling with putting flesh on (sometimes abstract and ambiguous) resilience as an approach. Moreover, the attempt to enhance the resilience of individuals or communities gives the impression that it requires a wholly new approach for organisations and actors. This subsequently requires an amalgam of skills, expertise and knowledge, of which it can be questioned whether actors have the resources to develop and deploy them. Lastly, there is a danger that, improperly oriented, resilience discourse can end up being a hype or be used to maintain *status quo*. On the other hand, the resilience approach offers a wide set of promises, and various arguments are being put forward in defence of the concept. Hence, a set of challenges and opportunities can be identified.

2.4.1 Conceptual Discussion

With resilience widely appearing in policies, papers and discussions throughout disaster studies and practice, a conceptual discussion is manifesting itself in a number of ways.

First, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which resilience is embraced among scholars, practitioners and policymakers, it remains widely disputed as to exactly what the term refers to. Indeed, resilience may either relate to (groups of) people or (ecological or infrastructural) systems (Levine et al. 2012). This can be explained from the different backgrounds of the concept. In the field of social and behavioural sciences, including psychology, resilience is used in reference to people, and their ability to recover following a disturbance, most particularly in relation to children and their family situation and traumatic stressors (Manyena 2006). In the field of ecology, resilience is commonly applied with regard to ecosystems, and their capacity to withstand or recover from a disturbance in nature (Folke 2004). What contributes to confusion over the concept is that resilience is either process-oriented or outcome-oriented. When viewing resilience as an outcome, it reinforces the reactive stance—bouncing back as maintaining the *status quo*—as deployed in more conventional practices in DRR. That is, if resilience is an outcome, disaster management naturally focuses more on supply, and *ad-hoc* temporary involvement, whereas viewing resilience as a process implies a more sustainable, comprehensive, and continuous endeavour—bouncing forward to change the *status quo* (Manyena 2006). However, approaches such as 'Build Back Better' tend to constitute a challenge in terms of affordability, hence are often discussed, but seldom (successfully) implemented (Khasalamwa 2009). Moreover, it is not always possible to make a neat distinction between communities' or individuals' resilience, and the risk or threat external to the community. Some people's resilience might actually increase due to opportunities occurring during and after the shock event. Partly due

to the confusion over the concept of resilience, there is currently often little comprehension on how to translate the concept into a workable approach.

Second, the approach varies depending on its scale of focus. It is often overlooked that resilience enabling factors and processes differ for individuals as compared to household, communities, systems or society. The lack of scale-based clarity creates a threat that resilience becomes a convenient hype, hiding blurry policies and programmes and politicised aid agendas. To make sure that the approach does not become so vague that it cannot be categorised or measured, it needs to be scale-specifically operationalised. Thus, based on a common understanding of the concept of resilience, its meaning has to be redefined for each level and translated into concrete, specific indicators.

Third, as Fox et al. (2012) also point out, communities currently live in a multi-risk environment. This implies facing slow and rapid onset emergencies, violent conflict, climate change and other global challenges such as pandemics and biodiversity loss, as well as chronic political, economic and societal fragility. These environments are changing fast and are becoming increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Many previous approaches have failed to adequately address the multiple challenges of these evolving contexts. One of the advantages of the resilience approach is the dynamic nature of the concept and the recognition that things are not static, but change, adapt and evolve. This is in itself a progression with respect to previous conceptions of the world which might have relied too heavily on an assumption of equilibrium and immobility.

Fourth, Levine et al. (2012) emphasise the frustration with the need for repeated massive aid efforts in the same parts of the world. This has led to increasing pressure and acknowledgment of the need to address the underlying vulnerabilities which are embedded in the resilience approach. The widespread adoption of resilience has allowed communities of practice the opportunity to work across the 'silos' of humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and international development. It is perceived as a common denominator under which different realms can meet, develop a common language and share their experience without losing their original meaning and intrinsic strength (CARE et al. 2013). It often implies a systemic approach which entails that it works across levels, and acknowledges that these levels are interrelated, and affect people and their environments across scales. This has enriched the diversity of the lenses used to examine situations of adversity. It also means that instead of only responding to symptoms, resilience approaches address underlying causes and build on current capacities, making a long-term approach in policy and practise inevitable.

Fifth, authors such as Cannon and Müller-Mahn (2010) place caution towards a system approach. They warn that the ability of ecosystems to absorb shock and to recover from any disturbance are empirical matters. Although the analogies for these qualities can be applied to human 'systems' and lessons can be learned, it can be dangerous to be seduced by this 'scientistic' approach. Since there is no consensus framework for resilience, authors such as Levine et al. (2012) warn against modular analyses as they undermine inter-connectedness of material, political and institutional factors in creating resilience. It should be impossible to

separate one component from another or from their context. The authors emphasise that if the resilience approach does not incorporate real-life dynamics it is a step backwards.

2.4.2 Practical Issues

Apart from conceptual issues there are also a number of practical issues related to the approach, which should not be overlooked.

First, political and security implications aside, diverging interpretations lie at the heart of the process of translating words into 'action'. Inevitably, much of the direct programme intervention in relation to this is mostly done by local partner organisations in the country of implementation. Resilience as an approach requires the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, recipients, local governments and organisations, and every actor involved in the process of implementation often has their own interpretation, inspired by a combination of backgrounds, interests and experience. In fact, interpretations of resilience might even differ within organisations. Since resilience assembles a wide variety of different fields, from disaster risk reduction to climate change adaptation and livelihoods approaches, these interpretations may diverge significantly. Differing understandings may lead to activities that may not always meet expectations. For example in Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, a Dutch-based organisation's resilience programme is being implemented by a group of local organisations. Although recipients are living in dire situations in slums where they are deprived from both services and safety nets and that are flooded heavily on a regular basis, local organisations consider recipients to already be resilient as they are able to return to their pre-disaster situation without much external assistance. The interpretation of resilience of the Dutch-based organisation, and as laid down in the programme description, aims to target the wider socio-economic environment. However, from the notion of local partner organisations, additional measures are rather superfluous (Faling 2012). Moreover, the resilience approach for some people may be like 'old wine in new bottles'. That is, existing strategies, approaches and routines of organisations could be categorised under the umbrella of resilience leading to a situation in which organisations transform their speech while continuing to work in the same 'conventional' manner, as is often the case when new concepts and approaches are introduced to organisations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). While lip service may provide organisational benefits, it can leave local communities excluded from the potential alleviation the resilience approach has to offer.

Second, resilience acknowledges the complexity of the realities of risk, and hence promises to integrate a variety of fields in a holistic approach. Simultaneously targeting disaster risk, climatic and environmental issues, and economic and political features requires a wide range of competencies on the side of implementing organisations. One of the issues with putting flesh on a resilience approach is that implementing partners lack the resources to deploy an integrated

and holistic approach, which targets a variety of issues and aspects of disaster risk. This includes human, material and financial resources. Moreover, the approach requires that proper risk analysis is carried out. It can be questioned as to how well organisations do this and with which criteria. Often, limited time and financial resources are made available for thorough assessment, analysis and design preceding interventions. Finally, the segregated policy, funding and organisational infrastructure and architecture often do not facilitate bridging silos and taking integrated approaches.

Third, the width of the notion enables the clustering of a vast variety of activities under the resilience umbrella. The local Philippine partners implementing the Dutch resilience programme find themselves struggling to interpret the approach and translate it into concrete activities to enhance the resilience of local communities. The background of staff members is in emergency response, which further complicates the understanding of the complexity that resilience aims to address, since staff have not been trained on approaching disasters from a developmental or holistic perspective. These organisations find themselves continuing the activities they are familiar with, while paying 'lip service' to the resilience approach. However, the activities undertaken only cover a small range of issues linked to people's resilience, thereby obstructing the enhancement of people's capacities in a sustainable manner. In theory, partnerships are supposed to overcome these gaps, but reality often demonstrates that this falls short of expectations (Faling 2012).

Fourth, the approach is novel in the sense that it brings the notions of dynamic change, risk, and uncertainty options into development planning and implementation, alongside rights, needs and vulnerability (Fox et al. 2012). This enables programmes and interventions to be developed differently according to risk and vulnerability analysis. In this sense, as emphasised by Fox et al. (2012), building resilience is more about "*changing how we programme, rather than what we programme*". Through the approach, people are urged to be ready for change, and the ability to undertake comprehensive monitoring and analysis, and to actively learn is underpinned. As an approach it encourages full use of available knowledge and encourages disciplines to share approaches and work together to enhance resilience. It requires implementing organisations to, on the one hand, take a systems approach and, on the other hand, think holistically about governance, livelihoods, hazards, stresses and future uncertainty (Fox et al. 2012; CARE et al. 2013). In addition, different timescales need to be recognised since it requires considering past activities and future projections for climate and society.

Fifth, the real test for resilience, however, may be in situations of complex political crises. Here the question arises as to how to practically include disaster response and, following that, realise the bouncing back better after a crisis, thereby neglecting the very nature of emergency aid (Levine et al. 2012). To deliver aid to those in need, organisations often make great efforts to distance themselves from actors involved in conflict, relying on the humanitarian principles as a means of guidance. Resilience, with its holistic and systemic orientation, provides a justification to instrumentalise aid as part of broader foreign policy objectives. That said, resilience promotes and encourages non siloed thinking and, if oriented toward a

human perspective, can promote agency and forward change. A question remains whether resilience in any form is a viable option for aid in these situations and if it can be separated from broader coherence agendas.

Finally, until there is agreement as to what it means and what the approach is trying to achieve, it is challenging to develop helpful manuals on how to implement a resilience approach. The wide variety of actors involved all have their own unique interpretations of resilience and, as mentioned above, every context needs a particular approach, based on individual and communal needs. Hence, communications and relations should strive to be as specific as possible, thereby being receptive for other interpretations, while always seeking to bring differences to the surface, and identify and tackle gaps and misunderstandings among different stakeholders working together. Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge the time it takes to internalise new thoughts, visions and insights and to train practitioners.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that resilience is neither a Holy Grail nor yet another hype. Resilience currently tops the agendas of disaster academics and practitioners and has become a common feature in humanitarian and development arenas since the adoption of the 2005–2015 UN *Hyogo Framework for Action*. This approach followed from transformations in the field of DRR, concerning both the nature of disasters and the way to contend with them. In the 1970s disasters were understood as unexpected and exogenous events, to be contended with by state-led interventions based on scientific knowledge and through bodies with a quasi-military character. Slowly, however, this approach started to transform due to several contingencies in the international sphere, including the increased globalisation of risks, the declining role of the state, and the de-legitimisation of pure scientific knowledge. Currently, the resilience approach is applauded because it is found to encompass a broader understanding of disaster and risk, thereby promoting a holistic and integrative approach and being more sensitive towards the local economic, political and social environment. It requires a bottom-up approach, empowerment of local communities, and the inclusion of multiple stakeholders. Resilience approaches usually refer to the resilience of communities, societies, organisations or systems. It is argued however, that human (individual) resilience could also be helpful for the field of disasters. The individual approach provides a more specific and applied understanding of the concept and can offer a counter to the potential of resilience an excuse for the *status quo*. Moreover, the field of disasters can benefit from the insights gained through previous research in the field of social and behavioural science.

Whereas the resilience approach is taking centre stage in the field of disaster risk reduction, this chapter argues that for resilience to be valuable, there should be continuous awareness of its pros and cons. This entails: addressing conceptual confusion; acknowledging the complexity of multi-risk environments; including

multiple stakeholders; deploying sufficient resources; and acknowledging the challenges for humanitarian actors. The approach should constantly be adapted to new insights and fully integrated into both humanitarian and development policies and practice. It should be remembered that it is not possible for any single actor or intervention to build resilience to everything, for everyone and forever. By decreasing conceptual confusion, increasing analysis and working together to ensure that resilience building programmes support community-driven processes, political traps can be avoided and the breadth and sustainability of impact will be improved. The latter is best reached by taking dynamic and scale- and context-specific approaches, and can enable reaching the goal of further enhancing the capacity of humans and systems to deal with disaster.

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