

RESILAC*

*LAKE CHAD INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL RECOVERY



KEY MESSAGES

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CAN A
TERRITORIAL
APPROACH HELP
TO REINFORCE
RESILIENCE
IN A CRISIS
CONTEXT?

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"Land is the object of power struggles, while territories are the result of power struggles"

Claude Raffestin, French Geographer

For several years now, the aid sector's current methodological paradigm has been called into question, as is evident from the Grand Bargain commitments related to localisation and the 'Triple Nexus'. Though, more often than not, the sector has struggled to put these into practice, there are more and more initiatives promoting integrated, territorially-based projects, with a central role for local actors. The focus is currently on sub-national levels (regions, communes, towns, villages, or neighbourhoods), where operational methods are determined by the specific characteristics of each territory and each local context. These approaches, referred to as 'territorial approaches', go beyond the humanitarian versus development dichotomy, and focus on the role and position of organisations from a territory, who are the only ones capable of bringing about genuine social change.

This study looks at the territorial approach adopted by the RESILAC project (Inclusive Economic and Social Recovery Around Lake Chad) and its impact at different levels. It explores the polysemous notion of 'territory' in the societies of the Lake Chad Basin, particularly in terms of ownership and representation, and the processes that contribute to these. We conducted in-depth studies based on local monographs, primarily using a qualitative approach. We analysed six territories located in three countries : Oudjilla and Mindif-Centre in Cameroon; Adebour and Gagâla in Niger; and Nguelea and Medi Koura in Chad. As part of the data collection process, the multi-disciplinary research team conducted around 180 interviews and focus groups with a variety of actors. These gave rise to a number of observations.

First of all, the assumption that is often made by aid projects, that there is territorial unity at the local level, does not always stand up to scrutiny when we look at the reality on the ground. There are a number of territories, rather than a single territory. Of course, the local administrative level (very often the commune) constitutes one of the local borders that should be taken into account, but beyond this given territory, it is the socially-constructed territories that reveal the roles of different players and the divisions that exist related to political and economic interests. These are the product of history, and the way that the

different peoples within a territory have settled and gained ownership there. Addressing the issue in terms of the construction of a territory means that we can look beyond administrative limits that often do not correspond to the reality on the ground. It helps to reveal the different functional and symbolic territories that exist. Individual and collective representations of a territory depend on people's experiences and their status (particularly in terms of age and gender). A territory's inhabitants do not all see the territory in the same way, and do not all occupy it in the same way: a male territory, a female territory and a youth territory can exist alongside each other, for example.

The RESILAC project has adapted its activities to local events and needs in order to reinforce the resilience of individuals and territories. A territorial approach has been put into practice, community-based needs assessments have been conducted and communities have been involved. However, it remains a challenge for the project to take social and political divisions in villages into account. The constraints linked to the project's timeframe and objectives may prevent in-depth appreciation of territorial dynamics. Furthermore, as is the case for other projects, RESILAC is focused on certain territorial needs but does not address other priorities that were identified by the study and during community-based needs assessments, such as education. The project therefore reinforces the resilience of functional territories (related to operational sectors), but this is less evident at the level of the administrative territory (and its different territorial layers).

'Territorialising' humanitarian and development aid, or, in other words, placing local actors at the centre of projects, requires ambitious strategies. Though, by definition, territorial approaches are not prescriptive, they require tools and methods to identify each territorial actor and assess their legitimacy in the local public context. Tools and methods are also necessary to establish the conditions in which these actors can run projects that promote inclusive local development and resilience. The resilience that the project aims to establish is not just the sum of individual forms of resilience. Rather, it is the combination of different territorial levels and community-based components (the management of commonly-owned assets, mutual aid, self-organisation, etc.). This territorial resilience needs to be built by actors themselves in order to avoid the trap of an unclear and ahistorical objective that is disconnected from communities and their future.

KEY MESSAGES

Territorial appropriation and representation

- As a social and historical construct, a territory is the result of economic, legal and symbolic appropriation.
- A territory is a part of each person's identity. There are as many symbolic territories as there are inhabitants. These differences are obscured by unifying narratives. Narratives are dominated by the collective representations of elderly men. Specific analysis is needed in order to be able to perceive the territories of women and young people.
- A territory is continually changing in response to different interests and power relations.
- Traditional and administrative limits, which are not always geographically logical, can be a barrier to the social cohesion and effective governance of territories.
- Administrative limits do not reflect territorial divisions and the fragmentation created by political and economic interests or inter-community relations.
- The assumption that is often made by aid projects that there is territorial unity at the local level does not always stand up to scrutiny in terms of the reality on the ground.
- Though security and environmental crises have an impact, to varying degrees, on all the territories of the Lake Chad Basin, these have simply been grafted onto existing local problems and conflicts, which, in some cases, have gone unseen by aid actors, and in others, have been made worse.
- Aid projects do not always have the same impact on populations: certain failures increase defiance, others are forgotten, while those that have the greatest impact are those that meet people's priority needs.

RESILAC's territorial approach

- RESILAC's territorial approach is based on five major principles: specific to the territory, multi-sector, multi-actor, multi-level, and flexible.
- The communal level was chosen for the project's operational areas, giving priority to the administrative territory over the functional territory.
- It is difficult to define RESILAC's approach because it is not sufficiently conceptualised. The fact that each organisation has its own operational approach and methods means that they do not have the same understanding or definition of the RESILAC approach.
- RESILAC adapted its activities to local events, regional crises and the specific needs of the population.
- Despite the tools developed for the territorial approach, social and political divisions within villages were not always fully taken into account.
- Local actors have different sources of legitimacy related to specific roles within a project (contextual or technical expertise, entry points, customary knowledge).
- Much of RESILAC's impact is at the individual and family level, but it also affects, to a lesser extent, the functional territories of each operational sector. At the administrative territory level, the impact is even more limited as the project does not meet all priority needs (e.g. access to water, education, health, exclusion, risk-taking behaviour, etc.).
- It is not possible to state that resilience does or does not exist, nor is it possible to label a project 'resilient'. All we can do is assert that the project's strategies contribute to reinforcing resilient systems (for example, VSLAs or natural resource management agreements) and observe in retrospect that pro-resilience factors have been reinforced (such as mutual aid, territorial cooperation or the collective management of commonly owned assets).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Topic

Recommendations

Selecting operational territories

Recommended selection process:

1. Delineate the area impacted by the crisis (often on a regional scale).;
2. Identify legitimate local actors who promote social change in the relevant operational sector;
3. Identify the functional territories of each operational sector, by specifying the scale (need to move from a regional to a local scale)
4. Establish the administrative levels concerned and all the local actors who should be involved.

Understanding territorial realities

If there have been no recent assessments on the theme or for the area, carry out in-depth assessments focusing on the history of the territory in order to identify divisions and power relations. Recognise the essential role of contextual actors in order to understand and integrate territorial realities. Regularly monitor the territorial context, update situation assessments (for example, once a year) and continue to analyse conflicts as the project unfolds.

Involving territorial stakeholders

Channel funding towards national and local actors: allocate, for example, 1/3 of the budget to international actors and 2/3 to national actors. Ensure that the project is run based on consultation, or co-decision-making, between international and national/local actors.

Territorial resilience

Jointly establish a definition of 'territorial resilience' with local actors (for example, the pro-resilience factors that are being aimed for: the management of commonly-owned assets, mutual aid, self-organisation, etc.). Avoid presenting resilience as a general objective of projects: the concept should, at least, be made more precise (Resilient to what? Who is to be resilient and why?). It should subsequently be defined locally, or, ideally, should be replaced with a more specific thematic (for example improving chronic poverty or food security) or political objective (a social change driven by one or more local actors).

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