

*IFPRI 2020 Conference: Building Resilience
for Food and Nutrition Security, Addis
Ababa, 15–17 of May 2014: a Synthesis*

**Timothy R. Frankenberger & Mark
A. Constat**

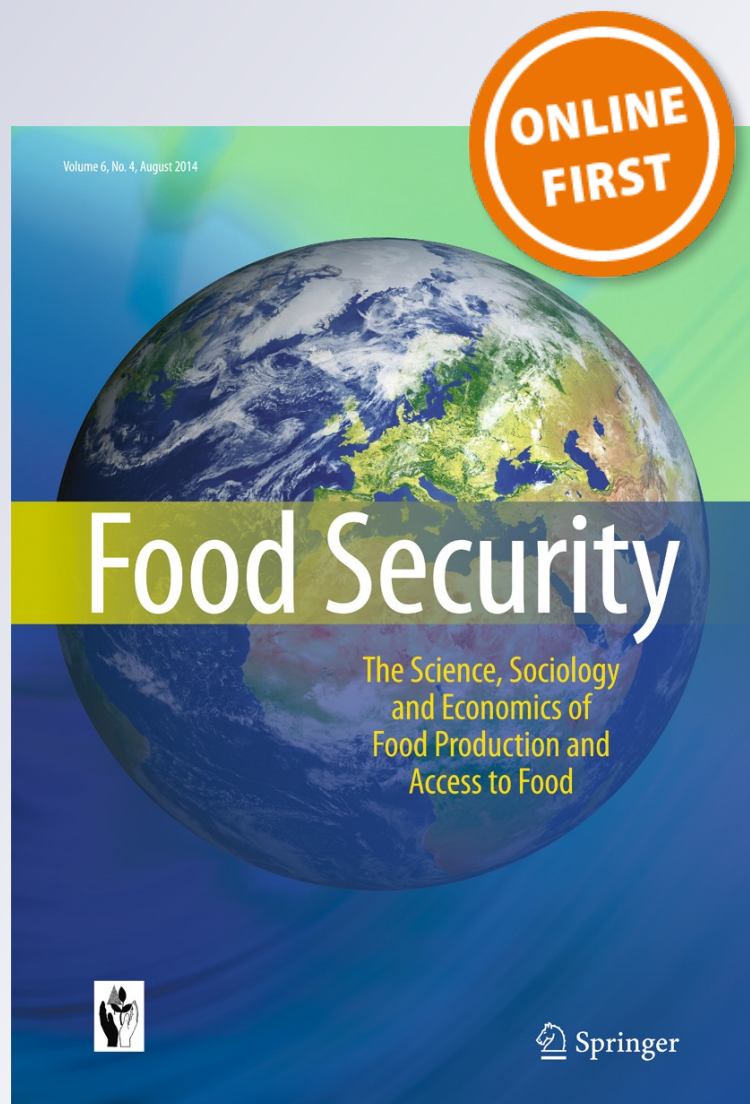
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IFPRI 2020 Conference: Building Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security, Addis Ababa, 15–17 of May 2014: a Synthesis

Timothy R. Frankenberger · Mark A. Constas

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Since 1995, The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has organized several 2020 conferences where major stakeholders gather to address the challenges of poverty and hunger. In recognition of the heightened interest in resilience as a framing concept for development and humanitarian aid, IFPRI organized a 2020 event for 2014 where more than 140 experts and practitioners spoke and shared their experiences and insights. The 800 participants in the 2014 conference, held May 15 through May 17, represented an international community and drew on knowledge from a wide range of actors, sectors, and disciplines. The event provided an opportunity to exchange ideas, build networks, and helped establish a common vision for building resilience. The conference was notable in the way it brought together a varied audience of stakeholders. Speakers and participants at the conference included high-level political figures, key individuals from national and international governing bodies, representatives from United Nations organizations, leaders and practitioners from non-governmental organizations, key staff from technical assistance firms, and academically-based researchers.

Several major themes emerged from the 2020 conference. The conference highlighted an emerging consensus with respect to the definition of resilience, centering on the three dimensions of absorptive, adaptive, and transformational capacities. Key among the themes that emerged to effectively promote resilience is the necessity for coordination over time, across different levels of society, and across disciplines and at

different points of implementation. Perhaps the most discussed topic focused on the measurement of resilience, emphasizing the need to continue and improve our capacity to measure it, as needed, on a more frequent basis and at multiple levels. Innovative forms of technology and data collection, such as information technology solutions and sentinel site early-warning systems, were proposed as options to improve both the support of resilience capacities and resilience measurement. There was also general recognition that building resilience requires increased levels of coordination across short-term humanitarian assistance activities and long-term development programming. It was suggested that attention needs to be paid to the short-term requirements of vulnerable populations—their food and nutrition security and their economies—particularly when confronted by shocks, without compromising development activities that promote sustainable improvements in health and nutrition and alleviation of poverty. Investments also need to be made in development activities in areas that have historically been reserved for humanitarian assistance. It was argued that investments in resilience enhancement can be more effective than those being made in recovery and rehabilitation. In the words of one speaker, we should “manage risk, not disasters”.

Panel members and conference presenters frequently spoke of the necessity to focus on risk management versus crisis management. This suggests that we should be implementing integrated approaches that have long-term commitments, including funding mechanisms that span beyond the common 1 and 2-year cycles in their support of vulnerable areas and populations. Reflecting a position that was frequently asserted, another panel cited the benefits of integrating resilience activities into development programming, including their inherent multi-disciplinary focus and the bridging of research and practice across sociology, anthropology, political science, agricultural science, economics, nutrition and environmental science. The importance of environmental

T. R. Frankenberger (✉)
TANGO International, Tucson, AZ, USA
e-mail: tim@tangointernational.com

M. A. Constas
Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management,
Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA
e-mail: mark.constas@cornell.edu

stewardship, household nutrition, smallholder agricultural productivity, education, disaster preparedness, and the various linkages among all these factors, were all emphasized in various capacities throughout the course of the conference. A major point of emphasis was the need for coordination between government at all levels and development practitioners, academia, civil society, the private sector, and other actors supporting development activities, in order to build resilience among vulnerable communities and their members. With implications for policies, programming and measurement, the conference confirmed that resilience exists and should be targeted on multiple scales—international, national, regional, community, household and individual. Programming needs to be layered to target resilience at multiple levels. More work also needs to be done to develop measures of resilience at levels higher than the household and to integrate analysis across multiple scales.

In the opinion of many conference speakers and attendees, resilience programming needs to be participatory and inclusive. Irrespective of their level of formal education, local people know the land and social conditions better than anyone, thus it is critically important to include them in the design of resilience programming. The need to include a gender focus as part of resilience building was a common theme. Men and women within the same household face different risks. Even when the same set of risks is shared by females and males within the same household, the exposure and impact of those risks can vary across gender. Often, the grassroots work women are doing in vulnerable communities is not recognized and reflected in policies or programs. It was recommended that we formalize the knowledge that women have, identify areas where additional capacity for women can be provided, and ensure that resilience programming reflects the needs and voice of women.

The key role of social capital was stressed by several conference presenters. Building resilience requires changes in behaviors and norms, transmitted through social networks. There is now a strong body of evidence that supports the role that social networks play as buffers for individuals and communities before, during and after shocks. Building resilience often requires collective action, and social capital is a key factor in the support of this. Formal and informal community groups were held up as mechanisms that help to build trust, coordination, shared norms and cooperation. However, steps need to be taken to ensure that interventions do not ignore existing social institutions. When this occurs it can result in unintended, perverse consequences; namely, the displacement of beneficial social norms, the creation of dependence and ultimately, reductions in resilience.

One challenge raised in several panels is how to operationalize the theory of resilience as a systems concept into an approach that can be implemented on the ground. A

general approach to facilitate such operationalization that was discussed at the conference involves using experiences and models offered by the field of ecology. A specific strategy, cited as a way to implement a systems approach, is to focus on the weakest nodes of the system. If one node fails, the whole system potentially fails. Serving the interests of the most vulnerable populations, resources should be allocated to the weakest areas of the system to prevent system failure. The necessity to build flexibility into programming was often stressed.

Technical experts with substantial resilience measurement experience were well represented at the conference and provided their insights with respect to the measurement and monitoring of resilience. One measurement challenge cited is that resilience as a concept is complicated and incorporates many different factors from different disciplines. In order to achieve parsimony, a key characteristic of sound measurement, it is important to distinguish what factors truly make a difference in influencing resilience and what factors do not. A second key characteristic is that resilience measurement requires measurement at multiple scales (e.g., households, communities, institutions and governments) that may change at different rates. The practical implication for these differences in change rates for different scales is that measures may need to be administered over more extended periods of time.

While more frequent data collection is important, it was noted that monitoring systems should be standardized so that data are comparable and representative. Sentinel data collection systems were seen as way to ensure a degree of standardization in metrics that would enable aggregation and introduce efficiency. Potential benefits, enabled through the creation and implementation of these systems, include: early warning of disasters, the ability to track welfare of vulnerable populations and the support of long-term planning. Sentinel sites are a potential tool in helping to support a larger challenge with respect to resilience monitoring—the need to collect data more frequently, including data collected both before and after the occurrence of shocks. Several speakers also alluded to the fact that we have a wealth of data that have already been collected, but not adequately analyzed. A more robust analysis of these data is a potential low-cost, high-return investment. Finally, it was proposed that the conference should be used as an opportunity to promote a global platform for resilience-building and knowledge sharing, including tools, resources, lessons learned, and other forms of knowledge.

Per Pinstrup Andersen offered a challenge to speakers and participants on the opening day of the conference: “What is going to be different in what we do once we leave this conference? Are we going to continue the same as we’ve been doing for the last 10, 20 years; or, is there something new here that we need to incorporate into our efforts to make the world a better place?”. The nearly 800 conference participants from

over 75 countries were in general agreement that, yes, resilience is an important concept that should be integrated into development thinking and programming. Thus, the Building Resilience for Food and Nutrition Security Conference laid the foundation for how governments, practitioners and researchers can implement improved resilience programming and measurement and move closer to the goal of providing food security and poverty alleviation to their constituents. The

broad commitments observed in the various constituencies represented at the conference, combined with specific programmatic efforts and emerging technical innovations that were presented in sessions, hold great promise. The events and dialogues of the IFPRI 2020 conference for 2014 suggest that resilience will serve as an effective focal point for discussion and innovation as the battles against hunger and poverty continue.