Vulnerability or Resilience? Development in a Network Perspective

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Abstract

In contrast to actor oriented approaches, a network perspective of development focuses on interdependencies and relations into which persons, organisations or social units like communities etc. are integrated. Not individual capacities and competences (or lack of these) defines vulnerability or resilience, but relations and interdependencies determine agency. From recent research on reconstruction following disasters, it can be shown that vulnerability results from either reduction of interdependencies that lead towards entropy or a too rapid increase of interdependencies resulting in over-complexity, i.e. integration into contradictory unstructured interdependencies. Most development projects increase interdependencies and therefore bear the danger to generate over-complexities leading towards disasters for individuals, households, communities or even beyond this. (see in this context the discussion of "development - displacement - dispossession"). In contrast resilience can be defined as structuration of interdependencies through institutions. Thereby complexity remains, i.e entropy is avoided as well as over-complexity because interdependencies are structured. Accordingly, development should focus on resilience rather than vulnerability. This requires a new point of view though: Vulnerability looks at deficits especially of individuals or semi-individuals like households. In contrast, resilience refers to strength of social units to cope with challenges, including the challenges brought about by development projects.

Three examples will be presented to explicate these arguments:

1. Reconstruction in Pang Nga province, Thailand after the Tsunami: Not the big international organisations solve problems but the reconstruction is based on local initiatives.

2. Initiative or expectation: Comparing responses of the Lahu and Lisu minorities to a large scale development project in Northern Thailand.

3. Responding to urban challenges: Communal self-organisation in a Bangkok slum area.

Keywords: Vulnerability, Resilience, Development Projects

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