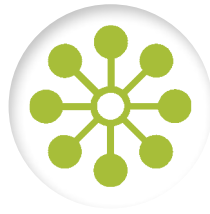


LOCAL GOVERNANCE CASE STUDY



A case study report on strengthening the capacity of local governance structures as a vital dimension of initiatives to improve the resilience of dry land farm communities



Resilience of dryland farmers in the Sahel: reliant on sound and effective local governance systems

**A case study report on strengthening the capacity of local
governance structures as a vital dimension of initiatives to
improve the resilience of dry land farm communities**

**The experience of the
Agroecology Plus Six program**

A regional initiative undertaken by the Groundswell West Africa network

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Cover photo

*Woman from a savings and credit group sharing a testimony with
the learning “caravan” travelling in the village of Bilamperga,
Bilanga Municipality, Burkina Faso.*

Credit: Association Nourrir sans Détruire (ANSO).

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List of acronyms

AE+6	Agroecology Plus Six program
AEC	Agro-Ecological Committee
CPA	Committee for the Promotion of Agroecology
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CVD	<i>Comité villageois de développement</i> [Village Development Committee]
ECOWAP	Regional Agricultural Policy for West Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FMNR	Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (of trees on cropland)
GRP	Global Resilience Partnership
NGO	Non Government Organizations
PCD	<i>Plan communal de développement</i> [Municipal development plan]
PDESC	<i>Programme de développement économique, social et culturel</i> [Economic, Social and Cultural Development Programs]
RAIPFNS	Regional Agricultural Investment Plan and Food and Nutrition Security
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

- This case study reports on the process and findings of the Groundswell West Africa network's Agroecology Plus Six (AE+6) program in the Sahel. Operating in three program areas in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, the AE+6 program aimed to strengthen the resilience of dry land farming systems, primarily by enabling farm families counter land degradation and the effects of climate change.
- Fragile and drought-prone ecosystems, accelerating degradation natural resources, high population growth, and the ill effects of high external input agricultural techniques promoted by the Green Revolution approach, have depleted soils leaving farmers in the dry lands increasingly vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity.
- The AE+6 program enabled rural communities in the Sahel to adapt agroecological principles and practices for transforming their farming system to become not just more productive, but also sustainable, resilient, equitable and nutrition sensitive.
- To sustain the initial gains, the Groundswell AE+6 regional team helped both local government and village-based leadership become aware that the foundation of strengthened resilience for food and nutrition security in the dryland areas required the transformation of farming systems through agroecology.
- Beyond agriculture, resilience requires essential change in the "socio-ecological system". The latter entails changing how natural resources are managed and distributed, ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable within the community are addressed, strengthening local adaptive capacity, and fostering wide-spread social mobilization at the grassroots.
- The decentralized governance structures in the program areas of the three countries were roughly similar. One dimension consisted of elected municipal councils responsible for overall planning and the provision of social and technical services. The other dimension, at village level, was comprised of traditional governance structures (chief and elders, religious, women and youth leaders) responsible for a wide range of responsibilities affecting the social and cultural dimensions of community life, land tenure, and use of natural resources.
- For strengthening local governance for resilience, the AE+6 program team implemented a dual strategy to address both dimensions.
- First, the AE+6 team helped **local government** personnel deepen their understanding of resilience as a key factor in governance, social systems and agriculture through meetings and workshops. This was followed by arranging for municipal government officials and technical staff to learn, first hand, how village-based leaders and organizations were applying agroecological principles and innovations to improve production, adapt to climate change, restore soil fertility and regenerate natural resources.
- Through the creative use of radio, "caravans", workshops, prizes and competitions, and by demonstrating practical evidence of how to strengthen resilience, the AE+6 team persuaded local government leaders re-consider their attitudes towards "business-as-usual" conventional methods of agricultural "modernization".
- Groundswell's AE+6 teams also addressed other constraints to strengthened resilience at the local government level:
 - i. inadequate local technical expertise
 - ii. low institutional capacity for facilitating inclusive participation in assessing root causes of vulnerability

- iii. limited knowledge to identify systems oriented solutions, and planning from a resilience lens
 - iv. poor coordination of integrated multi-sector initiatives for resilience
- These constraints meant that the existing development plans by rural municipalities remained largely focused on physical infrastructure (roads, markets, schools), to the detriment of livelihood promotion, risk reduction and resilience
- The second part of the strategy for strengthened governance addressed constraints at **village** level. Here, the AE+6 program teams developed innovative ways to overcome underlying barriers for strengthening the resilience of rural livelihoods:
 - i. high levels of illiteracy
 - ii. lack of awareness about what grassroots resilience entailed
 - iii. a hierarchical social structure that prevented consideration of the needs of the vulnerable groups
 - iv. socio-cultural norms inhibiting efforts to address equity, women's empowerment and nutrition issues
- Groundswell's AE+6 dual strategy consisted of engaging with the two levels of local governance (municipal administrative structures vis-à-vis villages) at the same time, in an interactive way. AE+6's approach made village-based leaders and organizations the primary actors to implement field-based resilience activities.
- Once these activities showed promising results, and generated enthusiasm at the village level, AE+6 teams enabled local government technicians and officials to learn from these practical experiences, and use their new insights and knowledge to revise their development planning for resilience.
- The main interaction between rural municipal and village-based local governance systems occurred when:
 - i. AE+6 teams arranged for decentralized governance officials and elected representatives to make intensive site visits to learn from the villages, and
 - ii. villages delegates participated in events led by those responsible for district planning at the municipal level and whose task it was formulate local plans aligned to municipal development plans.
- This integrated and strategic approach generated significant changes in governance, leadership and organizational capacity in support of resilience in a very short time frame of 18 months. The concept of 'resilience' has become a much better understood and accepted term. It formed the focus of brainstorming, group discussions, diagnosis of vulnerability and problem solving sessions. Resilience sensitive strategies have been written into policy documents, modified planning processes, and increased support for transforming dry land agriculture through agroecology.
- Through its efforts, the AE+6 program teams in each country succeeded in helping rural municipal councils to review (and often modify) their 5 year development plans and budgets, and make a significant shift in overall governance for strengthened resilience.
- The case study shows that decentralized local governance structures and community-based structures in dryland areas of the Sahel can play a key role in facilitating a sequential, integrated, multi-actor and cross-sectoral process to strengthen the resilience of dry land farming communities.

Introduction

The resilience crisis in the Sahel

A growing percentage of the Sahelian population is becoming chronically vulnerable to food and nutritional insecurity. The structural reasons include the incremental degradation of fragile and drought prone ecosystems, high demographic pressure, and the low capacity of vulnerable populations to adapt to the stresses of rapid environmental change and climate shocks.¹

Traditional farming practices can no longer sustain livelihoods. Gender inequality, poor nutritional practices, and inadequate technical and social services exacerbate the problem.

In order to survive, an ever-increasing percentage of households engage in negative coping mechanisms. These include selling much of their harvest to pay back loans, eating their seed stocks, borrowing money from usurers, cutting down on the number of their daily meals and selling their physical assets.

These desperate responses to long-term stresses and periodic shocks further increase the vulnerability of these populations who then suffer from a “resilience deficit”. Weak governance, marginalization, non-inclusive development policies, inappropriate technical advice, and the inability of small-scale farmers to influence policies and government institutions to better address their priority needs are underlying drivers of this growing crisis. Figure 1 on the next page illustrates how populations, already vulnerable, are being pushed even further into a food and nutrition insecurity crisis because of their reduced capacity to cope and adapt.

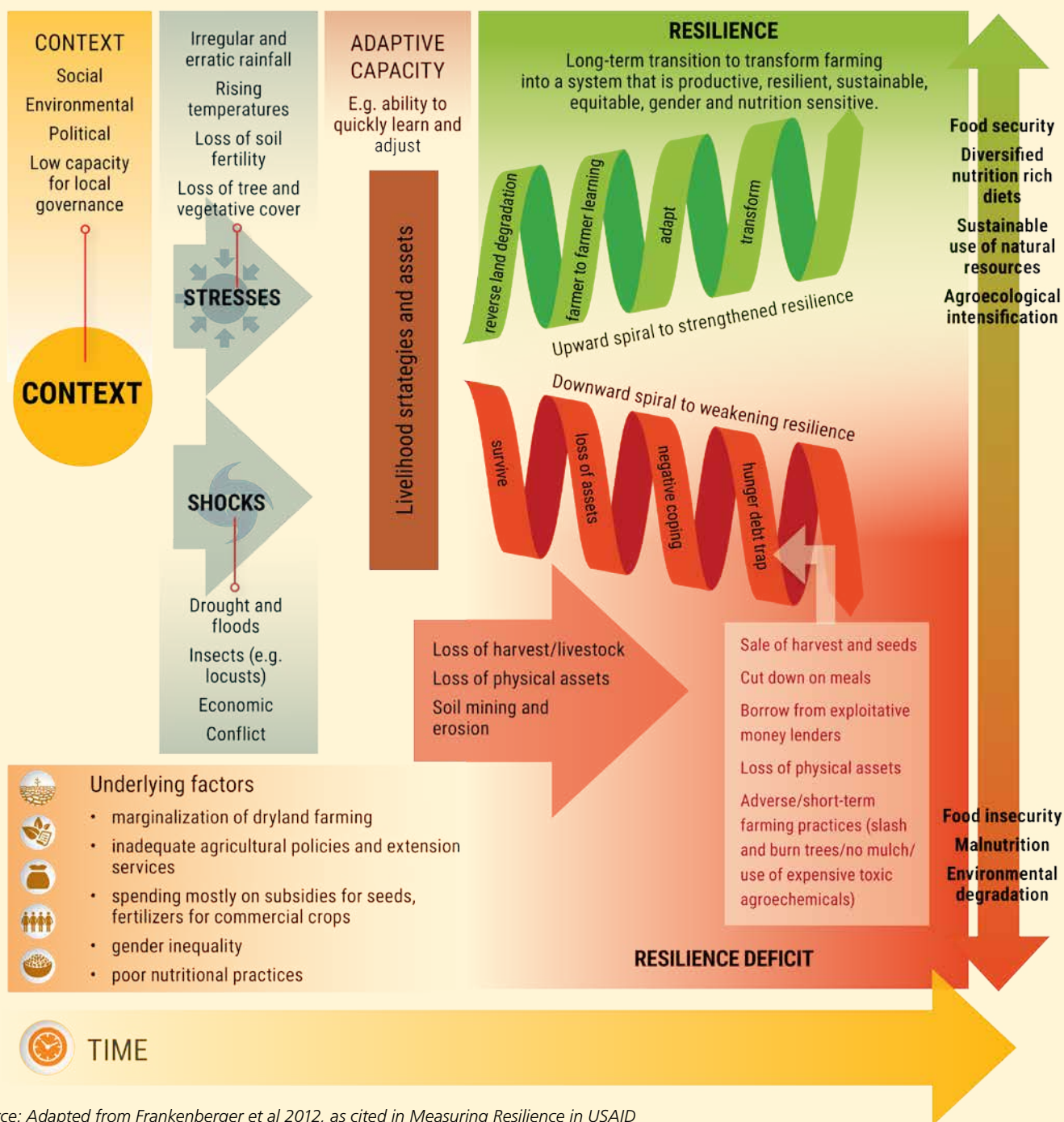
This case study documents an action-research initiative in three countries on how to enable local decentralized governance systems to strengthen resilience of rural communities in dryland farming areas of the Sahel. The essence of this resilience strategy was to apply agroecological principles and practices to address the stresses of declining soil fertility, degradation of natural resources, erratic rainfall, and the periodic shocks of major droughts.

A critical assumption of this strategy is that agroecology is essential to transform existing farming practices and to strengthen the absorptive and adaptive capacities of rural communities. Once this foundation of intensified agroecological farming is in place, it serves as the basis on which to integrate complementary resilience activities in equity, women’s empowerment, and nutrition, tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

The case studies, conducted in three regions, rural Mali, Burkina Faso and Mali, asked the question: **how can the systems of local governance in each of these countries positively influence the ability of rural households and communities to strengthen the resilience of the farming system and related livelihoods to reverse land degradation, overcome the hunger/debt trap, and adapt to a changing climate?**

Local government structures are best positioned to address the needs of socially marginal, or vulnerable groups within specific local contexts. They are pivotal, therefore, to build the resilience of communities within their territory.

Figure 1: Dynamics of Resilience and Vulnerability for dryland farmers in the Sahel



Source: Adapted from Frankenberger et al 2012, as cited in *Measuring Resilience in USAID*
http://fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/resilience_measurement_in_usaid.pdf

The pivotal role of decentralized governance structures in building local resilience

Decentralized governance systems deliver services to their constituent communities. Local government structures are best positioned to address the needs of socially marginal, or vulnerable groups within specific local contexts. **They are pivotal, therefore, to build the resilience of communities within their territory.**

For the Groundswell West Africa network, local governance relates to two inter-related systems. The first is the administrative elected municipal councils, known in francophone West Africa as territorial collectives (*collectivités territoriales*).² The second are informal village structures, where traditional leaders and elders play an important role in organizing life in the community.

The “resilience” mandate applies to both. However, territorial municipalities, under decentralization legislation, are generally responsible for land planning and management, as well as social services.³

Purpose of the case study

This case study documents the action research process used to develop mechanisms through which localized governance can become more effective in strengthening resilience. This consisted primarily of promoting the adaptive and transformative capacities of dry land farming households and communities to address land degradation and climate change.

This case study is meant to be relevant to a range of actors - particularly national governments, technical and financial donors, international development agencies, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working at national level.

The key lessons are about how to foster a transition to agroecological farming within the ecologically fragile, drought prone areas of the Sahel, as the foundation for strengthening the resilience of rural livelihoods.

The findings indicate how local governance structures can play a key role in facilitating an integrated, sequential, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral process to transform the farming systems of rural communities within their respective agroecological zones, and lay the basis for sustainable, productive and resilient livelihoods.

This case study is one of a series of six closely related studies documenting the main findings and lessons of the integrated AE+6 for resilience approach.

The AE+6 program

The AE+6 program was conceived as a “proof of concept” initiative to spread agroecological practices across the Sahelian region. The design assumed that lessons learned could be applied widely to build the resilience of an estimated 12 million small-scale farmers in the drylands who are increasingly vulnerable to food and nutritional insecurity, land degradation, declining soil fertility, erosion, loss of vegetative cover and climate change.

The impact of conventional high external-input agricultural technologies, based largely on agrochemicals, monoculture of certified seeds, mechanization, growth corridors and large-scale irrigation schemes favored by the Green Revolution approach, has exacerbated these trends.

This productivist approach underlying the push for a “modern agriculture” has been strongly decried by many actors globally⁴⁵, across Africa⁶⁷ and in the region⁸, including by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which in 2008 stated how this model, “largely dependent on natural resources and poorly paid labor, (had) become unviable”.⁹ The industrial model indeed fails to address critical issues of dependence on the importation of food to feed the Sahel¹⁰ and the critical need to adapt to a changing climate. Recent research conducted in the Sub-Saharan African region has extensively documented how the push for high, agrochemical-based input farming methods had disrupted subsistence practices, exacerbated poverty, corroded local systems of knowledge, trade and labor and curtailed land tenure security and autonomy.¹¹

Box 1**What is agroecology?**

Agroecology is an approach to farming that mimics the functioning of local ecosystems,¹⁴ allowing for “food production that makes the best use of nature’s goods and services while not damaging these resources.”¹⁵ It is a science that applies ecology to the design of farming systems; uses a whole-systems approach to farming and food systems and replaces “external inputs by natural processes such as natural soil fertility and biological control”.¹⁶ Agroecological farming systems are “developed on the basis of farmers’ knowledge and experimentation”¹⁷ and link ecology, culture, economics and society to create healthy environments, food production and communities. It is a multi-functional approach to farming that is productive, economically viable, socially just, resilient to climate change, sustainable and nutrition sensitive.

Groundswell network partners in the region bear testimony of how an over-reliance on this perspective of “modern” farming practices has led to the loss of agro-biodiversity, loss of agricultural knowledge and related culinary knowledge, and environmental degradation (notably soil erosion and degradation and pollution through the bio-accumulation of agro-chemical in soils and water bodies.)^{12 13}

The AE+6 program was officially launched in January 2016. Field operations began in April 2016 and lasted until September 2017. The Global Resilience Partnership (GRP), an initiative conceived by USAID, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) provided financial support. Groundswell International through its West Africa network of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) partners, assumed the regional coordination of the project.

The underlying premise of AE+6 was that the progressive agroecological intensification of farming systems is the essential foundation of any effective approach to resilience in the drylands. This is because the underlying causes of growing chronic vulnerability include declining soil fertility, degradation of natural resources (trees, water, pasture, vegetative cover), and climate change (erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and periodic drought).

Without enabling small-scale farmers to adapt to climate change and transforming their farming system to reverse land degradation, all other initiatives to strengthen resilience cannot have a significant, lasting impact.

A second assumption of the AE+6 approach was that while beneficial, such technical innovations would not adequately address resilience. Agroecology, as it is advocated by AE+6, is therefore not only about substituting agricultural practices but also about reconfiguring food systems as a whole, so that these (re)find a social, economic and ecological balance¹⁸.

Therefore complementary measures would be required to meet the specialized needs of the most vulnerable groups (women, children, and poorer households). This would entail integrating effective social and governance mechanisms to address gender inequality, poor nutritional practices, and inadequate community capacities for adaptation.

A review of the evidence shows that measures focusing on increasing agricultural yields often neglect the specific needs of women and resource-poor farm households through non-inclusive, socially non-differentiated and gender-blind activities.

Consequently, the AE+6 regional team led by Groundswell developed complementary resilience strategies that build on the foundation of agroecology. These form the bedrock of the AE+6 resilience framework. It entails a series of progressive, layered and multi-sectoral interventions that primarily address “livelihood promotion” and “risk reduction” dimensions, as well gender, equity, nutrition. Improving local governance to build the capacity for long-term planning, sustaining and scaling out the process is the focus of this case study (See figure 2).

Each of the six dimensions of the AE+6 program, particularly the improved agroecological practices, had been undertaken before. What was different and innovative about the AE+6 approach was that it aimed at:

1. exploring how to integrate nutrition, equity, women's empowerment progressively into the overall strategy of agroecology for resilience, so as to optimize potential synergies
2. learning how rapidly to scale out (spread) the overall process at low cost in order potentially to cover hundreds of villages in a short time
3. learning how to sustain the AE+6 resilience process by strengthening local governance at community and municipal levels

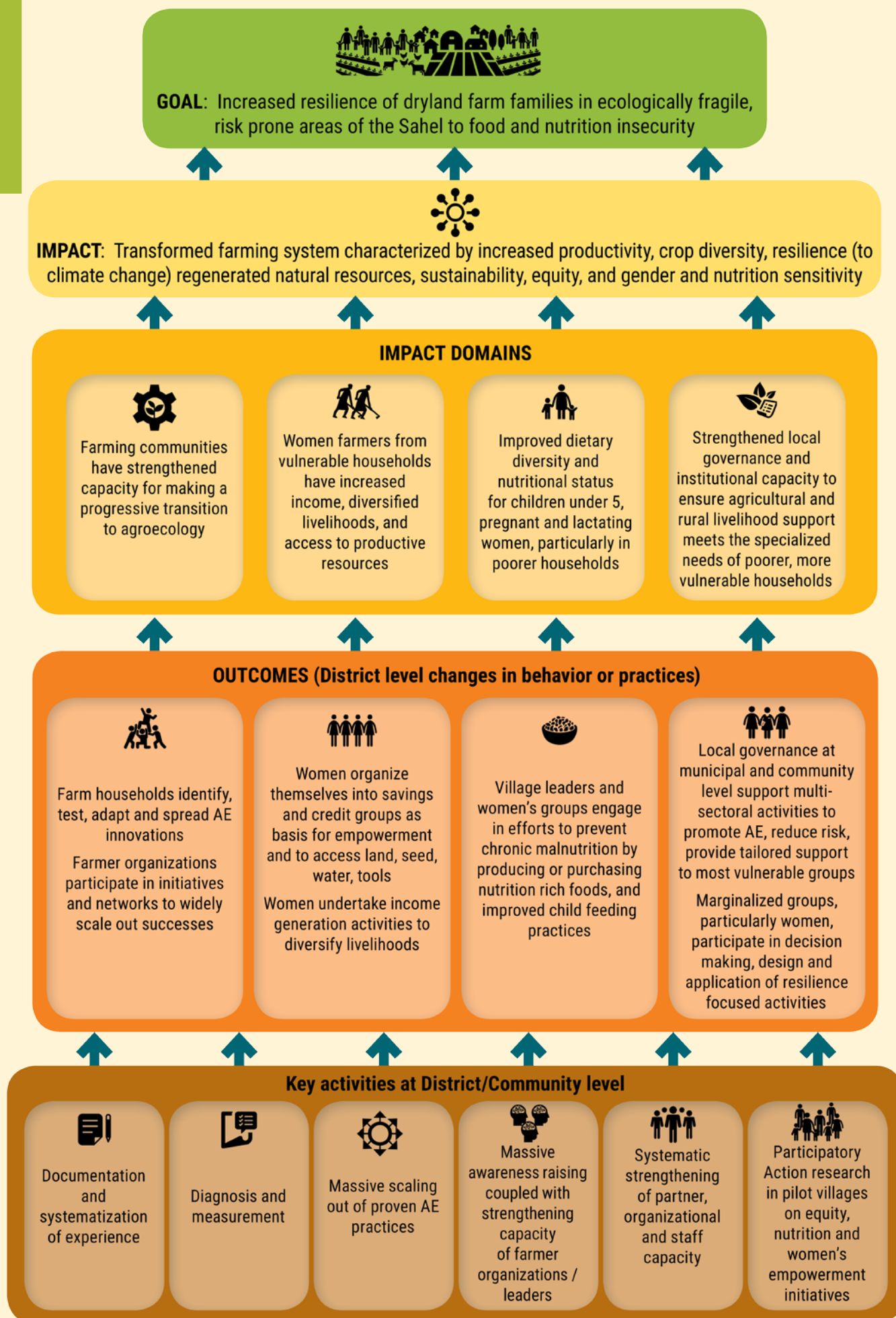
The AE+6 resilience team employed a comparative analysis across three Sahelian countries; Burkina Faso (Eastern Region), Mali (Tominian Cercle of Ségou) and Senegal (Kaffrine Region) to determine the contextual factors supporting and constraining the results. Groundswell's West Africa network of NGO partners tested this approach each in their own countries. These were Association Nourrir sans Détruire ("Association for Feeding without Destroying") in Burkina Faso, Sahel Eco in Mali and Agrecol Afrique in Senegal (see the annexure for detailed information about these three NGO members of the Groundswell network in West Africa). Most of the strategies of AE+6 were new to the NGO partners.

Because AE+6 for resilience initiative had a short implementation period (18 months), the research findings documented in this case study capture only an initial snapshot of lessons learned and good practices.

The underlying premise of AE+6 was that the progressive agroecological intensification of farming systems is the essential foundation of any effective approach to resilience in the drylands.



Figure 2: Overall AE+6 program architecture



1. Rationale for improving local governance for resilience within agroecology

1.1 Local governance systems: who are the actors?

To sustain and expand the initiative to strengthen the resilience of farming systems in dry land communities, Groundswell's network partners tested strategies to build the capacities of local governance structures at two levels. These included the decentralized, locally elected municipal councils known in francophone West Africa as territorial collectives (*collectivités territoriales*),¹⁹ and traditional leaders and structures at the village level.

Decentralized local government bodies in Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal, the planning process at the rural municipal level constitutes the main mechanism through which local governance can influence resilience. A decentralized structure is best suited to deliver services addressing context specific needs of the constituent communities in a territory, including also socially marginal groups such as women. Moreover, locally elected district councils are responsible for land and environment management. This means they have a major potential role in the development of agricultural systems in their territory. However, local governments often lack the capacity to deliver on this mandate and thereby fail to shield the most vulnerable from risks and recurrent crises.

Decentralization was initiated early in the 1970s for Senegal, and in the 1990s for Burkina Faso and Mali.

In Senegal, the government implemented decentralization by progressively enacting various legislation and policies. Three tiers of decentralized government were created, namely: regions, district communes and rural communities. There are 370 rural communes that are led by a directly elected rural council and a President elected from among the council members. The 2001 Constitution further entrenched the function of local governments as the medium for citizen participation in the running of their local affairs.²⁰ In 2009, Senegal created a Ministry of Local Government, which has continued to promote the Law of Decentralization.

In 1991, Burkina Faso adopted a new constitutional dispensation that recognized the territorial collectives as "legal entities, financially autonomous, and administered by elected bodies"²¹. The "commune" is the basic unit of local government. Each commune has a municipal council whose members are directly elected through universal suffrage and a mayor who is indirectly elected by the municipal council.²²

Modern decentralization in Mali began in 1992. While the 1992 Constitution provided the principles for decentralization, the 1993 law set the framework for decentralization.²³ It established regions, *Cercles* (similar to a province or district) and municipalities, and constituted elected councils. The *Cercles* are divided into 703 municipalities (communes), of which 667 are rural municipalities. These in turn are divided into villages.²⁴ Each municipality has a council whose members are elected for five-year terms by eligible citizens in the territory. The counselors in turn elect a mayor.

Decentralization legislation outlines the following responsibilities for the communes:

- land planning/management (Senegal/Burkina Faso/Mali)
- environment and natural resource management (Senegal/Burkina Faso/Mali)
- emergency relief (for Burkina Faso)^{25 26}

In theory, central government has no jurisdiction over actions that local governance agencies take to manage and sustain local resources on which local territories depend. Each local community has its own set of natural resources and challenges, cultural and heritage structures and agricultural potential to manage. This gives decentralized governance systems significant flexibility to allocate resources to bolster local resilience.

‘Often, in our countries of intervention, if the agricultural sector receives any support, it is from a productivity approach; there is very little thinking given to diversifying food production, equity, nutrition, women’s empowerment and adopting regenerative farming principles, as governments are influenced by Green Revolution thinking (...) There can be no resilience if the system on which Sahelian populations depend the most for their survival (agricultural land) is eroded and degraded, especially in the light of increasing demographic pressure.’

Peter Gubbels, AE+6
Groundswell team leader

Local government’s ability to address resilience, however, is constrained by a low level of financial resources, inadequate institutional capacity, and overarching national policies for agricultural development that are not conducive to resilience.

The Regional Agricultural Policy for West Africa (ECOWAP), implemented through the Regional Agricultural Investment Plan and Food and Nutrition Security (RAIPFNS), is a key shaper of agricultural policy in West Africa. The National Agricultural Investment plans translate this regional policy into operations at the national level. In consequence, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal are characterized by conventional approaches to agricultural development. Most public investments are directed to the more fertile, rainfall abundant zones of the country, subsidies for external inputs such as certified seeds, chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides, mechanization, irrigation²⁷ and the promotion of export crops such as cotton and peanuts.²⁸

The challenge for local governments, particularly those based in the more ecologically fragile and drought-prone dryland areas is to find innovative ways to depart from an agrarian policy strongly oriented to subsidizing agrochemical inputs for larger scale commercial agriculture.

Traditional local governance structures at the village level

Groundswell network partners also addressed local governance by working with informal local village structures, where traditional leaders play an important role in organizing the life of the community. In West Africa, local leadership includes local customary and religious leaders, women and youth leaders, and any association that is formally or informally established to represent its members’ interests within a community.

The AE+6 resilience team found it necessary to differentiate between these two levels of local governance. The elected municipal structures adhere to fixed planning cycles and contend with a certain degree of bureaucracy and constraining time frames. Working with informal local village structures, however, offered greater flexibility and, to some degree, more immediate impact – achieved by facilitating appropriate participation and ownership of resilience oriented activities from the start.

1.2 Challenges for local governance systems to ensure resilience

All three of Groundswell’s network partners determined that the five-year development planning process was key to municipal level management and administration for resilience.

For this reason, the AE+6 strategy for local governance was to work with municipal councils to assess and revise these plans [locally known as *Plan communal de développement* (PCD)] from a resilience lens. The quality of this process was often hampered by a lack of awareness of (and commitment to) resilience and by a conventional vision of development that was oriented strongly to expanding rural infrastructure.

Peter Gubbels, the Groundswell team leader for AE+6, explained, *‘At the local government level, we have observed that both elected structures and technical teams do not have a good understanding of what resilience means. Too often, when disaster strikes and early warnings are issued, local municipalities will tend*

to wait for the food relief sent by central government.’ This diagnosis highlighted the “starting point” for working with municipal councils and technical services. The first challenge was to deepen awareness and knowledge of resilience, and generate commitment to improving resilience in terms of fulfilling the local government mandates.

Other underlying factors contributing to the weak capacity of local governance to build local resilience include inadequate local technical expertise and inability to undertake inclusive participation in local planning processes. All of Groundswell network partners noted the lack of technical expertise of municipal councils and officials as a major impediment to building resilience.

Tsuamba Bourgou, the executive director of ANSD explained how in Burkina Faso, local municipalities tend to devote little attention to livelihood promotion and risk reduction. Rural municipal plans and budgets tend to focus on the building of market infrastructure for the trading of food, the expansion of road networks, water supply, and schools, etc.

Another constraining factor is that participation of community leaders, particularly women, in local development planning is minimal. To some extent, this reflects a lack of resources and skills by local government to convene and facilitate participatory processes requiring diagnosis and planning.

Local government structures at the village level often fail to consult widely in the community when undertaking local development planning. In Burkina Faso, for instance, the village committee for development (CVD) is the structure serving as the liaison between the village and local government. Its mandate is to tackle development issues from a cross-sectoral perspective. However, across all three program areas, Groundswell network partners note that the CVD (or their equivalents) have not been fulfilling this role.

According to ANSD, the newly formed agroecological committees it helped bring into being, are emerging as a more dynamic and inclusive forum to take on these tasks (see section 2.2).

These challenges relating to the lack of technical skills and limited participatory culture are compounded by a lack of financial resources. The decentralization of responsibilities and decision making to the local level often is not matched by fiscal decentralization. The funds received by municipalities are often less than the official allocation stated in the national budget, and what municipalities raise on their own. Local officials deplore their lack of financial resources to make the final planning document and budget a true planning tool.

Another factor is that local planning can be influenced by an underlying process of political brokerage between interest groups that often leads to the imbalanced distribution of public resources, often to the detriment of the more vulnerable and less influential groups.

Based on this background knowledge and understanding of the challenges, Groundswell’s AE+6 resilience team developed strategies to strengthen the capacity of local governance and create a more conducive enabling environment for resilience, based first and foremost on promotion of agroecology, and transforming the farming system.

‘In general, the budgets allocated to food security are negligible and close to nothing is achieved in this respect. Local governance structures tend to focus on the “hard” and neglect the “soft”.’

Tsuamba Bourgou, the executive director of ANSD

2. Strategies implemented in the three countries

From the outset, Groundswell network partners' strategy was to engage both the elected councils and the community/village-based structures.

Because of the limited time frame for AE+6, and also taking into consideration municipal/communal budgetary and planning cycle constraints, it was clear that AE+6 partners would not be able to implement their resilience "vision" directly through local government stakeholders.

Their strategy, therefore, was to begin "from the bottom up" by building the capacity of village-based leaders and organizations to become the primary "owners" of the resilience agenda, based on agroecology, and to serve as the main actor for its application.

At the same time, the AE+6 partners worked to get local district technicians and officials "on board" from the outset. This was accomplished by informing them about the AE+6 objectives, and briefing them regularly on progress and results. This informal endorsement of AE+6 activities by the municipal/communal governance structures was important in order to raise their awareness about resilience issues, and "create space" to work directly in the villages to generate practical results.

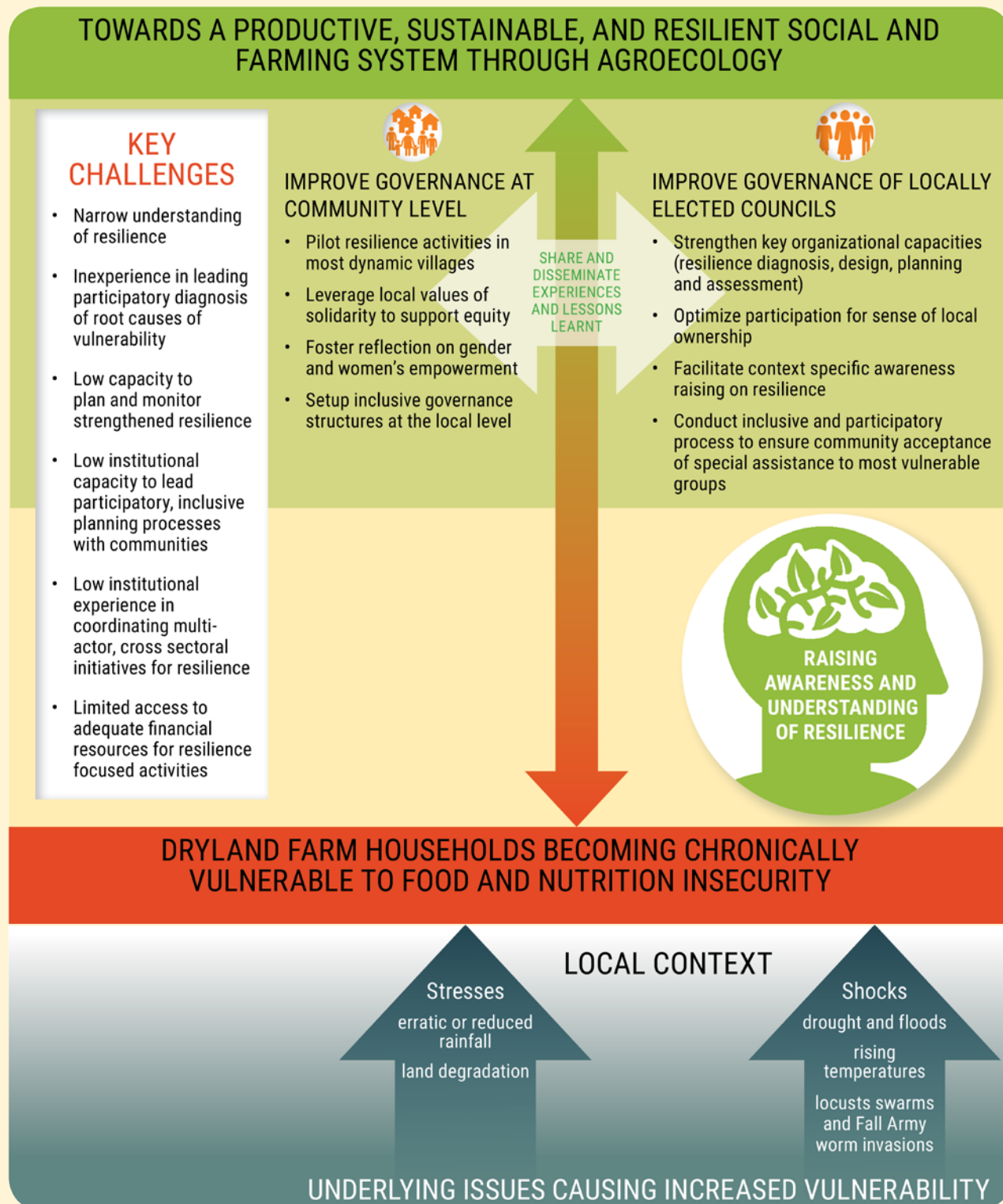
In this way, Groundswell network partners in each country obtained sufficient "buy-in" with municipal authorities and technical services, while having the necessary flexibility to undertake an action research oriented resilience agenda in an inclusive and participatory approach, required to generate practical results and village enthusiasm.

The processes of engaging with decentralized district and village-based local governance systems were linked at two key stages:

- i. Once the *in situ* implementation of resilience strategies in villages had started showing some results, Groundswell network partners engaged in review and lesson-learning processes, such as the *caravans*²⁹, in which locally elected councilors, and technical services staff took part.
- ii. Once municipal plans had been revised (or the elements to be integrated into the future revision of these plans had been finalized), Groundswell network partners facilitated sessions to disseminate the outcomes at the village level. The village agroecological committees then conducted similar planning exercises at the community level, inspired by these plans (see box 2).

This dual approach allowed AE+6 country teams to drive the resilience agenda and the associated innovations in an evidence and results-based way, obtain the support of community leadership and, last but not least, generate a strong level of commitment and enthusiasm from people in the participating communities. This is depicted in figure 3 on the next page.

Figure 3: AE+6's approach to strengthening the capacity of local governance structures to improve the resilience of dry land farm communities



2.1 Strategy to build the resilience capacity of local governance

The aim of Groundswell's network partners was to enable municipal councils better integrate community-based resilience activities into their development plans. This required assisting the rural municipalities to revise their five-year development plans and budgets from a resilience perspective.

To this end, AE+6 country teams formulated the following activities to overcome the constraints identified:

- i. raise the awareness of local leaders around issues of resilience
- ii. ensure that the locally elected leadership took ownership of the process
- iii. bring into being or modify the mandates of local organizational structures
- iv. develop the planning capacity of decentralized local government
- v. formulate revised local development plans to allocate resources equitably
- vi. share and disseminate experiences and lessons learnt

In all the three countries, Groundswell network partners started work with elected municipal councils and technical personnel with a preliminary awareness-raising session. This often led to a decision to establish an *ad hoc* commission entrusted with conducting a diagnosis (from a resilience lens), identifying solutions, and planning priority resilience actions to be integrated into the municipal development plan.

The diagnosis phase entailed an appraisal of the local development plan and budgets to assess to what extent these were resilient-sensitive. In all three countries, this diagnosis phase revealed that local government planning tools only marginally included direct support activities to strengthen rural livelihoods for greater resilience.

What follows describes how the AE+6 partners achieved a significant shift in local governance by giving substance to each of the strategies outlined above.

Raise the awareness of local leaders around questions of resilience

AE+6 partners convened awareness-raising workshops with all the relevant local stakeholders (i.e. all members of the municipal council as well as the main NGOs working in the area). The agenda included initiating collective thinking to better understand resilience, discuss the mandate of local governance for resilience, and determine how best to build the resilience of rural communities. These sessions constituted the preliminary "warm up" phase for the more ambitious exercise that followed later to assist local government to review their local development plans.

Ensure that locally elected municipal leaders take ownership

To ensure that the AE+6 initiative activities would be accepted, Groundswell network partners promoted a sense of ownership by the locally elected leadership. As far as possible the municipal mayor was requested to be strongly involved. Groundswell network partners also engaged the municipal council in deciding how this process to strengthen community resilience should be driven. It often was not feasible to formulate a new development plan. Instead, the local government working groups formulated actions that could be inserted into the existing plans as an amendment, or be used to inform the formulation of the next 5 year development plan.

Bring into being or modify the mandates of local organizational structures

Groundswell network partners used the deepened knowledge of resilience by local government actors to help them review and assess their development mandate. These workshop training sessions entailed considerable reflection (building on the initial awareness-raising session). The outcome was that local government actors often agreed to modify their interpretation of their mandate to enable a stronger resilience orientation.

Develop the planning capacity of decentralized local government

Because municipalities were unsure about how to go about their planning process, the municipal Economic, Social and Cultural Development Programs (*Programme de développement économique, social et culturel*, known as PDESCs) often consisted of a wish list of interventions, as opposed to a strategic vision of development. To a large extent, this reflected a lack of institutional capacity by municipal authorities of how to undertake an effective planning process.

AE+6 program teams convened multi-stakeholder workshops at the “commune” (municipality) level to improve local planning and monitoring capacity. Selected “working groups” received training on selected key topics related to resilience including: analyzing and understanding the root causes of vulnerability, assessing the gradual effects of climate change particularly the erratic rainfall pattern, the degradation of soils, the loss of tree cover and desertification. Through a participatory process, AE+6 teams guided stakeholders on how to identify and plan initiatives to improve natural resource management, reduce the risks of drought, essentially through agroecology.

Formulate new local development plans that shifted resources towards building the resilience of the community as a whole

This support to municipal councils resulted in the formulation of new local development plans. The detailed manner in which one of the AE+6 partner teams went about this is captured in box 2 below.

Box 2

ANSD's experience revising the municipal plans in the communes of Bilanga and Gayéri

A consultant was contracted to conduct the process in both communes. A wide range of stakeholders was involved (municipal councilors, de-concentrated state technical services, partner NGOs and delegates from village associations). After the first awareness-raising workshop, these stakeholders agreed to form an ad hoc committee (composed of the mayor, the heads of various commissions within the municipal council, representatives of the technical services, NGOs and a representative of the traditional authority). This was established in each municipality.

These ad-hoc committees undertook a participatory appraisal of existing municipal development plans and formulated a municipal resilience plan, based on indicators of household resilience that were defined in a participatory manner.

The ad hoc committee identified several potential activities that could contribute to increasing the productivity of sylvo-pastoral agriculture in a sustainable manner, embed nutrition into agriculture, integrate gender and equity, and improve local governance in general. Activities focusing on local governance included training peasant organizations in communities on agroecological practices; doing refresher training with local water-use associations and village development councils (CVDs) about their roles and responsibilities.

A first draft of the revised local development plan was tabled for discussion in both municipalities. The facilitator of the session elicited inquiries, suggestions and amendments from the participants. The resulting improved draft was validated during an extraordinary municipal council session.

In the Bilanga rural municipality, the entire process was concluded and the new local development plan was approved in June 2017. This new PCD for Bilanga was integrated as an annexure to the current plan, which is to be revised in 2020.

In the Gayéri municipality, their PDC dated back to 2009 and therefore ended in 2014. The municipality is currently negotiating and fundraising for the needed resources to formulate a new plan. The work completed as part of this process will be fed directly into this new planning cycle.



The Gayéri local council voting in favour of the amendment of their local development plan (Burkina Faso)

Credit: ANSD

Share and disseminate experiences and lessons learnt

In order to showcase what could be achieved to strengthen local community resilience, the Groundswell network partners organized “caravans”. ANSD for instance, organized a caravan in July 2017, inviting local municipality (mayors and prefects), provincial (*Hauts-commissaires* and regional directors for agriculture, environment and animal husbandry) and regional officials (members of the Regional council, agricultural regional chamber, regional directors for agriculture, environment and animal husbandry) and other interested stakeholders (local NGOs). Throughout a three-day excursion to many villages, participants witnessed first hand what was done on the ground to promote agroecological practices and to improve the resilience of vulnerable households. Regional and municipal authorities both had a direct opportunity to dialogue with villagers about their experiences.

Visits were arranged to the agricultural fields of model farmers. Here again “caravaners” had the opportunity to discuss and learn from the farmers. During these visits, the technical experts of the partner NGO also had a chance to do some troubleshooting and to advise farmers on how to improve their techniques.

AE+6 partners often arranged for media representatives to be present, to report on proceedings, particularly through radio and local bulletins.

To prepare for successful caravans of local and regional governance actors, AE+6 engaged in intensive preparation with the local communities, as explained in the next section.

2.2 Strategy adopted to build the resilience capacity of village-based leadership

At the village level, there was also a lack of awareness on resilience and a lack of processes to reduce vulnerability to food and nutrition insecurity. A key issue was that socio-economic differences were not taken into account when implementing livelihoods activities. This often resulted in the most vulnerable being further “left behind” particularly those caught in a “hunger debt trap”. AE+6 partners also noted the limited involvement of vulnerable groups, particularly women, in shaping livelihood strategies meant to benefit them.

To address these issues, the AE+6 team formulated the following activities:

- i. raise the awareness of local leaders about the need for inclusive resilience-building at the local level
- ii. adopt participatory approaches to ensure local leadership took ownership of activities for resilience
- iii. set up inclusive governance structures at the village level
- iv. link resilience activities strongly to traditional and cultural values of solidarity
- v. share and disseminate experiences and lessons learnt

The AE+6 partner teams conducted these activities at the village level in the following ways:

Raise the awareness of village leaders about the need for inclusive resilience-building

Raising awareness of the effects of socio-economic and gender disparities was a critical first step in seeking community buy-in for specialized support tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable. The process aimed at facilitating a collective understanding of the root causes of the poverty/hunger trap, and the effects on food security. This led to an agreement to determine, in a collective manner, which households were the most vulnerable (according to local criteria of wealth) and to undertake activities designed to meet their needs. These activities are captured in detail in a different case study dealing with the integration of equity into resilience activities.

Ensure local leadership takes ownership of resilience-strengthening processes

AE+6 partners noted that participation by community leaders and women in local development planning was very weak. Often this was due to inadequate skills and a lack of resources to convene and facilitate participatory processes, solve problems and plan. AE+6 partners included, as much as possible, community leaders in training workshops in planning for resilience. This helped create a broader pool of community-based stakeholders who learned how to engage in participatory planning.

Setup inclusive governance structures at the local level

ANSD established inclusive governance structures, in the form of agroecological committees known as *Comités Agroécologiques* (AECs) in French, in each of 18 rural communities. The purpose of these AECs was to lead and manage the scaling out of agroecological practices throughout the entire community. This effort included reaching not just all interested farmers, but also to members of the more vulnerable households, including women. The consultations enabled an inclusive participation in decision making about the design and application of resilience initiatives.

Another purpose of the AECs, beyond the planning and monitoring, was to strengthen the capacity of village-based organizations to promote and advocate agroecological methods. ANSD reported that in the villages it supported, these AECs emerged as the primary mechanism to promote testing and adaption of innovations for resilience.



Visit of a farmer's field in the village of Yadgho, Gayéri municipality (Burkina Faso) with the participants of the learning caravan.

Credit: ANSD

These AECs were composed of five to seven people. Each represented different social, cultural or economic groups in the village, often including delegates from: the customary chieftaincy, local women's groups, the village CVD.³⁰ Depending on the village, delegates from livestock breeders or artisans associations could also be represented.

In Senegal, the approach of Agrecol Afrique consisted in bringing together any actor with a strong interest in agroecology, so that they could jointly persuade households in the wider community to begin changing their agricultural practices. In Senegal, these committees were called Committees for the Promotion of Agroecology (CPA). They were comprised of delegates from the different dimensions of agricultural production (i.e. a representative of communal farming, always a woman, and representative for cereal production, etc.)

The work of these committees was to plan activities linked to agroecology, promote related innovations, and to support and monitor the implementation of these innovations. They worked in close contact with Groundswell's network partner in Senegal, Agrecol Afrique, who provided trouble-shooting support when needed. These committees also had responsibility for ensuring that the most vulnerable strata of the community received specialized attention. Thus, the CPAs were also key for addressing equity issues in the village (see case study report on equity).

Demonstrate that resilience activities are based on local values

AE+6 partners identified and piloted methods to strengthen village-based risk reduction management strategies in 18 rural communities in the three countries. In each program area, the AE+6 team sought to

identify and build on traditional cultural values of solidarity, collective action and mutual assistance, which had often been developed by the ancestors over generations. One example included the tradition of “*habbanaye*” (providing a poor family with female animals to help start a small herd). Another was the provision of seed to families that lacked seed stock.

This linkage to the cultural traditions that affirmed human solidarity made community members more receptive to the equity strategies than they might otherwise have been. (These strategies are described in detail in the case study focusing on equity).

Share and disseminate experiences and lessons learnt

At the village level, strategies to spread agroecological practices and disseminate lessons flowing from the resilience activities included: rural radio broadcasts, local language videos, field trips, farmer-to-farmer learning exchange visits, champion farmers, farmer field schools, inter-village sessions and creating an extensive network of volunteer farmer promoters across each of the communes.

To facilitate the rapid spread of innovations, AE+6 partners adopted a dual strategy. The first consisted of identifying key “pilot villages” within a wider cluster of neighboring villages. In each pilot village, the AE+6 team undertook a “full spectrum” of agroecological resilience-building activities, consisting not only of promoting key agroecological practices, but also integration of equity, women’s empowerment and nutrition.

The second strategy consisted of using the pilot villages as learning sites for a large number of neighboring “expansion” villages for spreading the “first wave” of basic, low cost, high potential impact, and easily scalable practices. Over time, once the more complex technical and social innovations tested in the pilot villages were well developed, they constituted a “second wave” spreading across the expansion villages, generated mostly through learning and exchange visits.

3. Challenges

In all three Sahel countries, decentralized local authorities at both the village and municipal levels had to learn how to overcome significant social and organizational challenges in order to achieve significant resilience benefits. This required changing attitudes, mindsets, and strengthening local institutional capacities and processes.

Other challenges related to specific operational issues encountered by the Groundswell network partners in implementing their strategies and activities.

3.1 Challenges faced by local governance systems in building local resilience

A limited vision of local rural development

A review of existing processes in all three countries indicated that resilience is not specifically integrated into the planning and budgeting process.

In the case of Mali, Sahel Eco undertook a detailed review of the local planning documents (PDESCs). This review indicated that the PDESCs did not include a development vision that addressed risks, stresses and shocks affecting communities, or identify the specialized needs of the most vulnerable households, particularly, women within those households.

Project partners in Burkina Faso and Senegal confirmed this diagnosis. The vision of members of local governments in the Sahel for development is often limited to the expansion of physical infrastructure.

'Local governance actors need to understand that the expansion of large infrastructure is almost of no use in communities whose day-to-day resilience is threatened; these communities are not able to benefit from large infrastructure, let alone maintain it. The emphasis needs to be laid on soft issues, especially food security,' explains Tsuamba Bourgou (ANSD). He concludes that the key challenge is for local actors to forge a common and harmonized vision of local development, which the project training focusing on resilience started addressing in the target communities.

Low level of capacity for participatory planning

The diagnosis phase conducted in Mali highlighted that people in the commune – often including the government staff providing technical services in agriculture, livestock and natural resource management - had little or no knowledge of their own PDESC or its content. This lack of knowledge by key technical staff and village leaders about the PDESC reflected insufficient participation and inclusion in the process of preparing local plans and budgets.

Limited technical capacity at the municipal level

Elected municipal councils and technical services responsible for comprehensive development planning often lack the technical skills to diagnose, design and coordinate the more complex aspects of an integrated approach to resilience. Sahel Eco's review of five PDESCs in Mali, indicated inadequate preparation, a poorly conceived development vision, limited assessment of the likely effectiveness of proposed interventions, and little or no monitoring of the outcomes of the previous PDESC.

The persistent grip of central government policy on local governance

This limited technical and institutional capacity reflected the recurrent analysis that the decentralization process in West Africa still remains hamstrung by numerous challenges. Local governments in Burkina Faso have a low degree of discretionary power. Accountability to citizens at all levels is weak. Central government continues to play a dominant role in local governance. This leaves municipal councils with relatively little space to maneuver.³¹ The same applied for Mali, where local government faced similarly challenges: the transfer of responsibilities to the local level was not accompanied by sufficient financial resources; weak capacity to mobilize local revenues meant that local governments continued to depend on central government; insufficient representation of civil society.³²

Insufficient financial resources

In Burkina Faso, a 2010 study showed that fiscal challenges impeded the efficiency of local government. Local taxing powers were restricted while transfers from central government were both insufficient and unpredictable.³³ In Senegal, central government transfers represented about 20 percent of the total expenditure of local governments. But in practice local government only received a small portion of this target percentile. As a result, local authorities are working to increase the level of local revenue in order to increase fiscal autonomy.³⁴ The Malian experience also revealed that local-level sources of revenue are highly limited. This meant that PDESC plans functions more as a wish list of development interventions. From the perspective of local leadership, this document often tended to serve as a promotional brochure to be distributed to potential donors to attract their investments or programs.

High turnover of technical staff

When engaging with decentralized governance structures, AE+6 partners in all 3 countries witnessed the negative impact that high turnover of technical staff had on the capacity of local government. Technical staff members are often moved to other positions, leading to a critical loss of skills and institutional memory.



Participants of the caravan discussing the fields visited (including the provincial Director of Agriculture, the Provincial Executive secretary, the deputy Mayor of Gayéri and ANSD's Executive secretary) (Burkina Faso).

Credit: ANSD

Political changes and political instability

Political instability and “politics” in general were another factor negatively affecting the ability for undertaking resilient sensitive development. AE+6 partners observed that decentralization of responsibilities to local governance structures often created a situation in which political considerations unduly influenced development priorities. In some situations, AE+6 activities were negatively affected or even put on hold because of political instability.

3.2 Operational challenges faced by AE+6 in supporting local governance

Illiteracy, one of the greatest impediments to community development

Illiteracy is a critical impediment to all rural development. For AE+6 resilience activities also, this was one of the single greatest impediments. Illiteracy in the program areas slowed down implementation of resilience activities and also limited their impact. The extent of illiteracy³⁵ surprised some of the AE+6 teams. ANSD reported that even community leaders declaring themselves literate could hardly read. As a result most people couldn't take notes during the training sessions focusing on resilience. This reduced the effectiveness of training sessions focusing on planning, data collection and the monitoring of resilience activities.

To address this issue, in villages where the illiteracy rates were very high, AE+6 arranged to bring in locally based resource people to assist with learning processes. Another tactic was to replace some of those who were originally enrolled in the training who could not read or write with literate individuals. The technical content of the training was simplified to facilitate wider understanding. ANSD also had some of their materials translated into local languages to enable participants to better assimilate what they were learning.

Local resistance to focusing on the most vulnerable

Many development workers tend to be “uncomfortable” with targeting the poorest in non-emergency situations, because of how it affects their relationships with interest groups in the wider community. The challenge is to carefully explain, and reach agreement on the reasons for developing differentiated approaches to meet the livelihood needs of more vulnerable groups. A related issue is that local socio-cultural attitudes about the role of women. The gendered division of labor and unequal access to productive resources is

deeply entrenched. Providing special attention and support to women, (for example, to gain access to land) requires careful consultation within a resilience oriented program.

Limited time to demonstrate results and impacts

The 18 months of AE+6 operations generated strong positive results. The initial sessions of training and awareness-raising had started to change attitudes, and create space for resilience interventions. However, the AE+6 teams in all three countries stated that a longer-term process of multiple iterations would be needed to consolidate and institutionalize the foundational resilience work done. Learning for transformative change is best assimilated when repeated and spread over several sessions. A progressive and interactive approach is required to enable communities to truly take ownership of the innovations introduced.

In this light, despite the significant shifts in governance, and the success stories reported, the impact of local governance for strengthened resilience has not reached its full potential, and is not yet institutionalized.

A report by ANSD, capturing the outcome of the 3-day learning caravan in Burkina Faso, illustrated this. Despite showcasing major results, the visit also underlined shortcomings in the implementation of some agro-ecological techniques. Some farmers have not yet fully mastered application of the water catchment techniques. The “caravaners” also noted the use of agro-chemical herbicides, which was a relatively new practice in the area. ANSD made sure to follow up on these issues in future projects. The main lesson was that transforming farming systems requires a longer-term time frame to adapt and master the principles of agroecology.

Political changes and political instability

At a macro political level, local government elections were conducted in all three countries during the implementation of AE+6. This meant that many of the locally elected municipal councilors were about to end their mandate, and were not open to new initiatives.³⁶ Burkina Faso was recovering from great political instability with a transition government handing over power to a newly elected national government.³⁷ During the transition, many responsibilities at the municipal level were suspended for an extended period. These macro-level contextual factors constrained AE+6 efforts to strengthen local governance for resilience.

4. Results and impacts of these interventions in each country

Agrecol Afrique- Senegal

Within its program area in Kaffrine, Agrecol Afrique established three committees for the promotion of agroecology, one in each rural municipality reached. In addition, Agrecol Afrique initiated work with two municipalities to revise their municipal planning documents. Agrecol Afrique was not able to complete the work initiated with the remaining Diamagadio municipality, as the local leadership was insufficiently available, during election times, to take part in the review of existing planning documents from a resilience lens.

The Mbeuleup municipality however managed to carry out this diagnosis of existing policies. Agrecol Afrique staff regularly convened local stakeholders, and helped them learn to define resilience activities and to draw up a provisional budget to implement these actions. The local leadership committed to integrate these resilience activities into its future development plan.

This advocacy work carried out by Agrecol Afrique in Senegal resulted in the mayor of Mbeuleup becoming a “champion” of resilience. He decided to reject the subsidies from central government. Instead he accessed improved seed and purchased organic fertilizer (chicken manure) that he provided to local farmers.

Agrecol Afrique commented on how such acts of leadership proved critical in shifting the municipality's development paradigm.

Association Nourrir Sans Détruire - Burkina Faso

ANSD established a total of 95 AECs in villages across their target areas. ANSD also facilitated and supported the integration of resilience activities in the formulation of two municipal plans (Bilanga and Gayéri), which are currently seeking finance to implement these plans (see Box 3).

Sahel Eco - Mali

Sahel Eco supported the establishment or the revival of 63 local village committees. The key agenda for these committees was to strengthen their organization and activities specifically around the promotion of agroecology and training committee members in their responsibilities.

A communal resilience plan was elaborated for the communes of Fangasso and Mandiakuy in the Tominian Cercle. These plans, that integrated climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, were approved by the communal councils. The municipalities now need to secure the funding required to implement these plans. These plans were heralded as pivotal for the municipality going forward with building its resilience, serving as reference documents for advocacy and fund raising. These broad resilience plans were complemented by the action plans adopted in the eight "action research" villages supported by Sahel focused on integrating equity, women's empowerment and nutrition into their agroecology program.

Of all the village-based interventions focusing on building resilience introduced by Sahel Eco, communities identified two for providing the strongest adaptation benefits. The first was farmer managed natural regeneration (FMNR) of trees (a method for agroforestry) to improve soil fertility and increase agricultural production. The second was Sahel Eco's work with women to develop their capacity for harvesting non-timber forest products (see nutrition case study).

'Each and every year, we would wait for government subsidies to get seeds and fertilizers. This not only resulted in bad planning during the wet season as these subsidized inputs always arrived late, but they also made us too dependent. Today, following the AE+6 intervention, we are aware that we can produce our own seeds and that we can do away with government subsidies to have good yields and produce healthy and diversified food.'

Mayor of Mbeuleup
(Senegal)

Box 3

How ANSD used AECs to set up reciprocal processes involving municipal development plans

The technical and organizational skills at the village level have been strengthened by virtue of the capacity building that their members received as part of the AEC. Consequently volunteer farmer trainers and an increasing number of households (and women) are now applying agroecological principles in their daily activities.

Two feedback sessions were organized in each of the villages using the AECs as the medium for interpreting and concretizing the municipal development plans. This created synergies that pulled in technical government personnel and elected municipal representatives.

In turn, members of the agroecological committees were trained on how to give substance to the key activities comprising the plan. This resulted almost 40 villages drafting resilience-based action plans.

Almost all villagers, including the illiterate, had an opportunity to ask questions and comment on these plans.

This shows how participatory planning efforts to include resilience became inclusive, with the municipality being able to give direction to development at the village level. Most of the action plans drawn up by the villages made provisions for agroecological interventions.



5. Lessons learnt

This case study shows that decentralized local governance structures and community-based structures can play a key role in facilitating a sequential, integrated, multi-actor and cross-sectoral process to strengthen the resilience of dry land farming communities.

The following factors contributed to the success of AE+6 program in strengthening the capacity of rural municipalities and traditional leaders and village based organizations to undertake resilience-oriented activities.

5.1 Success factors that fostered support of resilience by governance structures at municipal level

Key success factor # 1: elected leaders become aware of the importance of the notion of resilience

Success in integrating resilience into local government and community planning began when, for the first time, members of municipal council had a common understanding about the concept of resilience, and its relevance for their local development. This was an important breakthrough. It led municipal councils to actively reflect on what their mandate, as promoters of local livelihoods entailed, beyond infrastructural development. Municipal councilors received an orientation in how to identify activities and measures that could lead to better integration of resilience in local development plans.

‘These plans could have been better, and they would have been better if we had developed them directly, ourselves, for the communities, but then we wouldn’t have built such capacity within the community. The next plan will be even better, as a result of their doing’.

Tsuamba Bourgou, ANSD

Key success factor # 2: elected leaders take ownership of the process

In all three countries, AE+6 partners achieved a high level of commitment to the resilience agenda by ensuring the active involvement of the local leadership at every step in the process. It began with awareness-raising sessions, followed by the participatory diagnosis of current plans and the design and implementation of resilience-oriented activities. By being involved from scratch, members of local governance structures developed a strong sense of ownership over the resilience agenda.

The AE+6 partners refrained from doing the diagnosis or planning for resilience directly or outsourcing it to outside consultants. This meant that the newly formulated development plans and activities were not as well developed or as optimal as they could have been. However, it was crucial that members of local governance structures “learn by doing” and acquire new skills, rather than seek a more professionally refined end result.

AE+6 partners fostered a sense of local ownership by getting the local leader (mayor) to make a public commitment to making use of the new skill set and knowledge on resilience. These new skills were used to formulate the next municipal development plan, or make use of the outcomes and strategies developed for integration in the next planning cycle.

In Burkina Faso, the mayors of Bilanga and Gayéri municipalities were personally and actively involved in the planning process for resilience. This led their respective administrations to actively get on board. In Senegal, the municipality (Mbeuleup) that progressed furthest in embedding resilience into its local development plan was led by a mayor who had become a champion and advocate of agroecology.

Key success factor # 3: change the mind set and perspective of elected leaders about their local development role in light of resilience

The AE+6 teams focused awareness raising sessions on changing the mind set and attitude of elected local leaders and technical services about the role of the municipal development plan, and its function as a strategic, visionary development document that considered the needs of different groups, particularly the most vulnerable.

What proved seminal in the AE+6 approach was bringing local leadership to the realization that the transformation of farming systems in order to address chronic vulnerability required a broader vision of development, new patterns of working across sectors, and support for new methods of social mobilization at the community level. In the context of local governance, locally elected have the powers and responsibilities to determine how local communities make use of productive resources and how these are managed and allocated.

AE+6 teams conducted participatory exercises to help local governance structures make the paradigm shift from a narrow approach essentially focused on infrastructure development towards a strategic approach focused on how best to make use of these productive resources to improve the resilience of households, seek synergies between productive systems, foster inter-sectoral cooperation, and adapt innovations.

Key success factor # 4: elected leaders receive training for resilience

Several interactive training sessions facilitated by AE+6 teams brought about the following outcomes. Participants were able to:

- understand and diagnose the root causes of vulnerability
- understand how shocks further lock rural community into greater vulnerability
- identify key resilience initiatives, informed in part by the lessons emerging from the field trials piloted by AE+6 in selected pilot villages
- plan and budget for such initiatives

Key success factor # 5: elected leaders explicitly integrate resilience-related outcomes into their operational plans and budgets

Support for a resilience sensitive planning process resulted in the integration of resilience activities into revised local development plans. A key indicator was the increase in the number of budgeted activities focused on resilience and the formal approval of this plan by the municipal councils.

Key success factor # 6: elected leaders share and disseminate experiences and lessons learnt

AE+6 teams enabled the dissemination of experiences and lessons through different means and media. These included community radio broadcasts and the production of short documentary films in which elected leaders were interviewed. To reach rural communities, the Groundswell network partner ANSD also included the staging of theatre plays and organized itinerant caravans. The targeted audience (in this case village-based leadership) had an opportunity to learn about and directly witness the successes and challenges to strengthen resilience.

5.2 Key success factors that fostered the adoption of resilience activities by village-based governance structures

Key success factor # 1: all members in the community understand the issues involved and agree to become active participants in processes

AE+6 teams found it was essential to raise awareness about the structural causes of vulnerability and the hunger/debt trap in the community. They achieved free prior informed consent (FPIC) from the community that beyond widespread training in improved agroecological methods, the most vulnerable should receive special tailored consideration for any resilience building activity.

Building this consensus at the early stage avoided creating misunderstanding and jealousy and therefore opposition to equity and gender change related interventions.

Most often, AE+6 partners arranged to convene “general assemblies” within the communities reached. This provided an effective platform to engage with the full community on specific themes relating to resilience, including equity and gender (these two themes are discussed in detail in two related case studies on AE+6).

Key success factor # 2: municipal councilors and technical service staff play a more active role in support of resilience in village life

The AE+6 strategies piloted in the villages had greater probability of successful adoption when the technical staff of municipalities was involved. The AE+6 partner’s role was to ensure that activities were planned in a bottom-up manner, tailored to the local context and conditions, and with inclusive participation. Once this framework was established, activities were more successful when AE+6 partners facilitated “co-implementation” of activities such as technical training on agroecological innovations (such as *zaïs*, half moons, stones walls, composting, improved seed, FMNR, as well as the management of soil, seedlings and pests).

Key success factor # 3: representative, credible and active committees are formed

The establishment of representative and credible agroecological committees proved key to the success of the program. The AEC delegates influenced and promoted the resilience activities through all of their respective constituencies, in particular to foster the adoption and spread of agroecology in their villages. All the work plans of the various groupings were fed into the AEC’s overall “master” work plan for the village. The AECs served as the “go-to reference point” for planning, leading and managing village-based activities for resilience.

Key success factor # 4: village members actively take part in resilience activities that build on local values, and show quick tangible benefits

The resilience strategies implemented as part of AE+6 (warrantage, seed banks, revolving animal loans, local seed distributions, women’s savings and credit, in addition to the core agroecological innovations) generated many tangible benefits. The Groundswell network partners relied on these results to showcase what could be achieved to the elected municipal leaders during the caravans, and leverage these practical experiences for scaling out. Peter Gubbels, the team leader of the AE+6 program, attributed the success of AECs to their being strongly rooted in community structure and linking their work to traditional values of solidarity.

Key success factor # 5: personal agency, farmer to farmer and community to community learning is encouraged and celebrated

The spread of a set of interlocking resilience activities succeeded largely because of the strategy of training of volunteer village leaders to test, adapt, promote and disseminate agroecological knowledge. Agrecol Afrique for instance trained at least four volunteer farmers in each village of intervention in agroecological

innovations. This way, there would always be a farmer available to train another. Having multiple volunteer farmer trainers also ensured that all neighborhoods in the community could be reached, and reduced the risk of “withholding knowledge” (whereby a volunteer farmer expects remuneration from other villagers for imparting them this knowledge). This “cascade” approach to training, where each of the AE+6 partners initially train a wide network of volunteer promoters, who in turn each train 5 or more other interested neighbors, has enabled rapid spread and adoption of agroecological practices.

Conclusion

The overall aim of the AE+6 initiative led by the Groundswell West Africa network was to develop a “proof of concept” of how to strengthen the resilience of farming systems and livelihoods of small-scale households located in ecologically fragile, drought prone drylands areas in the Sahel.

This particular case study documents how the decentralized structure of local governance, as well as that of local communities, played a key role in facilitating a sequential, integrated, multi-actor and cross-sectoral process of both strengthening and sustaining the resilience of farming systems and rural livelihoods.

Many of the AE+6 program lessons and results have significant wider research and policy implications for overcoming the growing crisis of chronic food and nutrition insecurity in the Sahel. In terms of strengthening local governance for resilience, the picture that emerges from this case study is that the following conditions need to be put into place:

- government mechanisms such as decentralization, representative democracy and policies must be leveraged
- elected local officials and technical services must better understand their role in strengthening their constituents’ long-term resilience
- local policies, priorities and programs must be scrutinized and assessed to determine to what extent they adequately address the core issues of resilience
- new systems for inter-sectoral and multi-actor coordination need to be put in place to manage processes
- new social innovations and structures for mobilizing human resources, such the agro-ecological committees working at village level, farmer to farmer and community to community learning, the creation of an extensive network of well trained community based leaders and volunteers, are essential, in order to build adaptive capacity and on local knowledge
- developing context specific, grounded resilience strategies cannot be centrally driven; the nature of resilience requires a participatory action research to observe, diagnose, test, adapt, assess, collaborate and share – as evidenced by caravans, field trips, farmer champions, training of trainers, etc.
- processes and methods used by local governance must be revised and improved to better address equity, inclusion, gender/women’s empowerment, and nutrition issues, for effective resilience results
- in the dryland areas of the Sahel, the foundation for all successful resilience activities must be based on a progressive transformation of the farming system through agroecological intensification

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Agriculture écologique en Afrique (Agrecol Afrique)- Senegal

Agrecol was originally an association founded in Switzerland in 1983. Some of its branches became autonomous, including Agrecol Afrique, which obtained its status as a Senegalese NGO in 2002. Since then, Agrecol Afrique has continuously been supporting the practice and expansion of organic and ecological agriculture in Senegal and more broadly in West Africa. Its core aim is to help farmers increase agricultural yields in a sustainable manner, foster the marketing and consumption of nutritious and healthy food, help local populations overcome the lean season and indebtedness and to become actors of environmental conservation, to ensure food security for all. Agrecol Afrique implemented the AE+6 project in the region of Kaffrine.

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Association Nourrir Sans Détruire (ANSO)- Burkina Faso

ANSO was founded in 2011 – and was legally recognized in 2012 with the mandate to support local rural development. ANSO's goal is to strengthen farmers' capacity and the organizations representing them to become contributors of food security and to fight poverty, while protecting natural resources. ANSO currently works with over 100 communities from 3 municipalities in the East Region of Burkina Faso.

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Sahel Eco: Mali

The Sahel Eco association was founded in 2004 with the mission to work with the Malian populations and neighboring countries to improve their livelihoods through better environmental management, based on the principles of good governance. The triptych "ecology, economy and listening" guides Sahel Eco's activities. In Mali, Sahel Eco undertook the AE+6 initiative in six communes located in the Tomini Cercle of the Ségou region.

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This study further documents how in Rwanda, it is only a wealthy minority that is able to benefit from the “enforced modernization” entailed by the Green Revolution paradigm and that “policies appear to be exacerbating landlessness and inequality for poorer rural inhabitants” (2016:204).
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