

Stockholm Resilience Centre

Guidance for Resilience in the Anthropocene: Investments for Development



PHOTO: V. MELLEGÅRD

GRAID

At Stockholm Resilience Centre

A programme funded by the
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

GRAID

“Guidance for Resilience in the Anthropocene: Investments for Development” is a programme hosted by the Stockholm Resilience Centre and funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

GRAID IS ABOUT TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICE. Addressing poverty and inequality, and advancing human well-being remains a major ambition and challenge for the 21st century, but it now needs to take into account that development needs to happen in the context of the Anthropocene – an increasingly complex, dynamic and hyper-connected world characterized by accelerating changes and growing pressures on resources.

The Anthropocene changes how we must think about our world and the planet we live on. This has profound implications for development. Through promoting an approach to sustainable development that considers the Anthropocene’s complexity, turbulence and speed, GRAID brings the worlds of resilience thinking and development practice together to explore these implications and their solutions. Funded by Sweden’s International Development

Cooperation Agency (Sida), GRAID’s efforts focus on further developing knowledge on resilience and its application in international development arenas. GRAID works to support the Global Resilience Partnership (GRP); a collaboration between Sida and USAID.

GRAID IS A GLOBAL NETWORK. GRAID, is based at Stockholm Resilience Centre, with two satellite hubs based in South Africa: Stellenbosch University’s Centre for Complex Systems in Transition (CST), and Africa’s largest Research and Development Organisation: The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). GRAID leverages the SRC’s networks, working with the Resilience Alliance, the Future Earth Programme on Ecosystem Change and Society (PECS), the Australian Resilience Centre, the CSIRO in Australia and many others.

GRAID’s mission is to increase awareness, understanding, and usage of resilience as an integral part of sustainable development.

Development in the Anthropocene: The role of resilience

The Anthropocene – the age of humans – truly represents a full world, where everyone is in everyone else’s backyard, and where changes in one part of the world ripple quickly and slowly through regions, connecting across scales and often landing in far distant places. Such complex interactions may result in surprises - situations in which the behaviour in a system, or across systems, differs qualitatively from expectations or previous experiences. The Anthropocene will increasingly be characterized by surprise and turbulence.

The concept of resilience is seen as a possible avenue to address development in the Anthropocene. In popular terms, resilience is having the capacity to persist in the face of change, to continue to develop with ever changing environments. Resilience includes both adaptation, which refers to human actions that sustain development on current pathways, as well as transformation, which is about shifting development into other emergent pathways and even creating new ones. This approach is the focus of GRAID, emphasising the dynamic and forward looking nature of the concept.

The role of resilience in development is a rapidly expanding arena. New knowledge, evidence and methods are still evolving. These insights and approaches have a role to play in informing innovations and new frontier programs, such as the Global Resilience Partnership.

Some of these insights include new directions for development practice:

Beyond local

Resilience thinking teaches us to recognize, relate to and find ways to govern the pervasive cross-scale dynamics of an intertwined planet. Climate change, food prices, disease outbreaks, trade, migration, regional instability – our interconnected global culture is a grand panorama of local, regional and worldwide dependencies. Being cognisant of the potential and power of these cross-scale interactions will be as important as (if not more so) local investments to address sustainability challenges.

Beyond sustainability

Resilience thinking suggests the need to move beyond the reductionist understanding of one-way flows of benefits or costs between the environment and society toward an understanding of deeply intertwined social-ecological systems connected across scales. By recognising this intertwined nature of our world, food for example is understood and managed as a co-evolved interplay of human preferences, diversity of food sources, strong socio-cultural ties to landscapes and food varieties, food prices and global economic dynamics. Development in the Anthropocene, by recognizing the intertwined nature of society and ecosystems, can increase the opportunity space for development to help a growing population weather future storms. In the

Anthropocene, wellbeing, poverty alleviation and planetary life support systems are intrinsically linked.

Beyond persisting

Improving human wellbeing for all in the Anthropocene in a sustainable manner, will require more radical and transformative forms of change. We need to start thinking about development in new ways, beyond coping with and adapting to the changes inherent in the Anthropocene, to capacities to transform and actively shape change and thrive from change. Transformability has been defined as “the capacity to create a fundamentally new system when ecological, economic, or social structures make the existing system untenable”. Transformability is about shifting development into new pathways and even creating novel ones. Crises can open up space for transformations, for new ways of thinking and operating.



Illustration: C. Clifton

WHILE THE ANTHROPOCENE poses several challenges for development, it offers opportunities for addressing many of the urgent, interconnected development and sustainability needs facing humans and the planet. The shift from perceiving people and nature as separate parts that occasionally interact, to seeing them as intertwined social-ecological systems, provides exciting opportunities for development to occur in tune with the biosphere.

Similarly, adopting an approach that goes beyond just adapting to changing situations is needed. In other words, transforming individuals, communities, and societies on to new, more sustainable pathways allows development initiatives to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in the Anthropocene.



PHOTO: M. TROELL / AZOTE

GRAID is working to generate and share the latest knowledge, insights, applications and approaches from resilience thinking for development. These are available online at graid.earth, and:

Wayfinder

Wayfinder is a new generation of resilience assessment – an online platform currently in development under the GRAID programme in collaboration with the Resilience Alliance and the Australian Resilience Centre. Wayfinder is designed to help navigate the Anthropocene by increasing understanding and use of resilience theory and practice as an integral part of sustainable development. A collaborative and practice-oriented approach, it offers new tools and methods for assessing resilience in social-ecological systems and building capacity to adapt and transform. Wayfinder will be available as an interactive online platform accompanied by a set of annotated tools, and will launch in spring 2018.

Rethink: an online magazine on resilience and development

Rethink offers in-depth and compelling stories about complex global challenges. The magazine is for practitioners, researchers, journalists and others interested in resilience principles and how they unfold around the world.

Go to rethink.earth

RE.THINK



For further information, please contact:

GRAID
Stockholm Resilience Centre,
Stockholm University, SE – 106 91 Stockholm
graid.src@su.se

Find more information at:

www.graid.earth