

# Risk, Perception, Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change in Niger and Tanzania

**SARAH LINDLEY MCKUNE**



This summer I returned to Niger to investigate the feasibility of my desired research. I spent much of 2005-2007 in the area around Tanout in eastern Niger evaluating a British Red Cross Cash Distribution Project. The experience – collecting livelihood data from 359 households, plus focus groups and key informant interviews in 19 communities – sparked my interest in understanding how climate change is being perceived and my subsequent desire to initiate doctoral studies. My research plan had been to return to Niger in fall of 2010 and to build upon the livelihood research that I conducted after the 2004-05 food crisis. Niger is coming out of another food crisis now, thus I wanted to capture and compare perspectives on climate change surrounding these two distinct environmental shocks. However, the security situation in Niger has deteriorated since 2005, and insecurity, particularly in the pastoral zone, left me wondering about the feasibility of the research. Thus, I returned to Niger to meet with researchers at LASDEL, a research institute in Niamey, to look into the possibility of collaborating.

The results were fantastic. I found two doctoral students interested in

pastoralism who were keen to collaborate. We spent a week hashing out theoretical and logistical components of a potential project, and I came home and started writing proposals for funding.

Our research project is investigating how populations of varying degrees of pastoralism in Niger are interpreting and responding to perceived risk of climate change, and how those reactions are affecting their vulnerability and resilience. The project will replicate household interviews conducted in 2005, following the 2004-05 food crisis. The current food crisis will serve as a second environmental shock around which discussions of climate change and perceived risks will be assessed. Data points from 2005 and 2010 will facilitate analysis of adaptations and coping mechanisms and the impact of those actions on vulnerability and resilience over time. The project includes key informant interviews, focus groups, household interviews, and child growth and health measures. I have just returned from Niger, having spent two weeks pilot testing and revising the research instruments in Tanout. And although the logistics of working in rural Niger are challenging, data collection has officially begun!

Once data collection in Niger is

complete, a small-scale version of the project is planned in Tanzania, to test the appropriateness and usefulness of indicators of pastoral resilience and vulnerability across multiple contexts. A workshop will be held in collaboration with the International Livestock Research Institute in Nairobi to discuss findings from the project as well as methodologies for risk assessment and vulnerability analysis.



*Sarah McKune is an interdisciplinary ecology doctoral candidate in the School of Natural Resources & Environment (SNRE). She is an IGERT Fellow (Adaptive Management of Water, Wetlands, and Watersheds) and was a FLAS fellow for Arabic in 2009-10. She recently secured research funding through Colorado State University Livestock-Climate Change CRSP, a USAID project.*