



EU Approach to Building Resilience to Withstand Food Crises in African Drylands (Sahel and Horn of Africa) 2007-2015

Executive summary

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*Cover picture:
EU Ethiopia (ECHO)*

Executive Summary

Objectives

The evaluation assesses the strategic application of the European Union's (EU) approach to building resilience to withstand food crises in African Drylands (Sahel and Horn of Africa) during the period 2007-2015. It is joint evaluation between EuropeAid and ECHO (respectively the European Commission's Directorates-General for International Cooperation and Development [DEVCO] and for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations [ECHO]).

Context

Several events have contributed to triggering the development of regional and national strategic approaches. The most important were: the Niger crisis in 2005, the 2007/2008 world food prices crisis, the 2009/2010 pastoral crisis in the Sahel, and most significantly the 2011/2012 food crisis in the Horn and the Sahel. More recently there have been the instability in the Sahel, the migrant crisis in Europe, and El Niño in 2015/2016.

The EU's 2012 Communication on the EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Security Crises defines resilience as '*the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks*'. It aims at "*more effective EU collaborative action, bringing together humanitarian assistance, long-term development cooperation and on-going political engagement ... leading to a reduction in humanitarian needs and more sustainable and equitable development gains*". Its operationalisation includes: (i) adapting financing instruments, (ii) understanding the underlying causes of food security, (iii) comprehensive and collaborative EU political-development-humanitarian action, (iv) coordinated, multi-sectoral action, (v) measurement of resilience outcomes, and (vi) national ownership. The EU approach is a shared inter-service responsibility of DEVCO, ECHO and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Methodology

This is a theory based evaluation, informed by an analysis of EU policies, strategies and documentation on the main programmes, an inventory of EU funding, a database analysis, 250 interviews with EU and external stakeholders, a survey of 50 selected EU Delegation and ECHO field staff, and field visits to six focus countries: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in the Sahel; and Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia in the Horn of Africa. The evaluation faced several challenges, which related notably to the complexity of a multi-sector inter-service approach, a wide scope, an evolution over time in the approach and in its operationalisation, the political sensitivity of the subject matter, and data availability. The methodological approach aimed at addressing these challenges.

Evolution of funding

DEVCO and ECHO commitments related to the EU resilience approach to food crises in the Horn and Sahel are estimated to total about five billion Euro over the period 2007-2015 according to an inventory exercise conducted as part of this evaluation: 2.2 billion by DEVCO (excl. €687m global budget support) and 2.6 billion by ECHO. DEVCO commitments varied considerably on a yearly basis, with peaks in 2009 (launch of the Facility for rapid response to soaring food prices) and in 2013 (just after the EU Communication on Resilience was issued). ECHO resilience-related contracts grew slowly from 2007 with a peak in 2012.

Main findings

Shaping the EU approach

The EU approach to building resilience to food crises has evolved markedly over the evaluation period. Three periods can be distinguished over the timeframe covered by the evaluation: i) development of the policy building blocks (2006-2011); ii) formalization of a consolidated resilience approach (2012-2014); and iii) the broadening of the approach and the rise of the migration agenda (as of 2015).

EU field staff have regarded the EU resilience approach as a direct and appropriate response to the increasing frequency and magnitude of food crises in the Sahel and the Horn. Political orientations led by EU headquarters have also been influential in shaping the resilience approach. Recently the building of resilience to food crises has been brought together with the demand for better-managed migration under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

Relevance to addressing the needs of beneficiaries and authorities

The scope of EU supported causal analyses of food insecurity to inform the design of its resilience actions generally remained narrow with little attention to conflict and political drivers, and more generally to the root causes of food crises. These left strategies weakly adapted to addressing the causes of conflict-driven protracted emergencies, and the linkages between building resilience to food crises and managed migration were not sufficiently developed. EU resilience programmes were principally focused on mitigating the impact of shocks, rather than on longer-term trends such as climate change and demographic trends.

The EU approach to building resilience has been largely coherent with partners' policy priorities, and the EU has worked with national institutions to strengthen their capacity for resilience-building. However, differences have continued to exist between countries; Government priorities in some cases were less focussed on targeting vulnerable populations or had not yet broadened the approach from food and agriculture to a multi-sector approach.

Operationalisation by and collaboration between DEVCO, ECHO and EEAS

While the approach was a shared inter-service responsibility, the respective mandates of DEVCO, ECHO and EEAS implied differing levels of responsibility for building resilience to food crises. It became an increasingly prominent objective for DEVCO due to its mandate for poverty reduction and food security. This asymmetrical responsibility was reinforced by the differing capacities and instruments available to ECHO and EEAS. Building resilience to food crisis has not become a key priority for the EEAS, their focus being rather on priorities such as human rights, peace-building and State-building. There is a perception from field level staff that building resilience to food crises is losing prominence at senior levels of ECHO with a focus on acute emergencies.

Nevertheless, DEVCO and ECHO have collaborated well on building resilience to withstand food crises at headquarters level, sharing political and technical leadership in developing the resilience approach, and developing and disseminating a range of tools and guidance materials. Their collaboration at field level has varied widely between focus countries. In several countries there has been a transition in primary responsibility for building resilience to food crises from ECHO to DEVCO. Where collaboration between the Services occurred, evidence of synergies and complementarities were found, contributing added value. Nevertheless, the Joint Humanitarian Development Frameworks (JHDFs) was weakly articulated with EU country strategies and programming, accountability frameworks were weak, and differing mandates and procedures between ECHO and DEVCO have hampered inter-service collaboration.

Coordination and EU Added Value

The EU approach to building resilience to food crises appears to have been broadly coordinated with both development partners and governmental authorities at the strategic level, but operational coordination on programming has differed considerably at country level. There was limited evidence of alignment around a common resilience agenda at the level of the EU and Member States in focal countries.

EU financing instruments and modalities

The EU drew primarily on established financing instruments to build resilience to food crises, including the EDF, DCI and Humanitarian Implementation Plans. The EU improved its instruments progressively over time, notably with the introduction of flexible financial procedures that increased the timeliness of the support in times of crisis. Moreover, the EU introduced new financing mechanisms more specifically devoted to financing resilience activities¹. However, although EU financing instruments permitted some budget modifications in the event of an unforeseen crisis, the degree of flexibility in relation to other donors remained limited. Moreover, the use of the humanitarian instrument was not well fitted to supporting long-term efforts to build resilience. EU's policy dialogue in support of building resilience to food crises has had an important but contrasting role in the two regions: it built on existing processes in the Horn while it initiated a new policy initiative (AGIR) in the Sahel.

Operationalising the approach

Following the introduction of the EU approach, building resilience to food crises has been integrated as a core objective of EU external strategies by both ECHO and DEVCO. Agriculture and food security has been uniformly included as a focal sector in the 11th EDF for key countries. Resilience was a priority for all areas of humanitarian aid in the Humanitarian Implementation Plans, but ECHO budgets have not generally predetermined the sectors of expenditure.

The impact of the EU approach on the objectives and design of programmes was harder to determine. It was most visible in terms of 'flagship' programmes. ECHO has institutionalized a mechanism for assessing and monitoring the extent to which funded actions are resilience-sensitive with the introduction of a resilience marker. An equivalent mechanism has been lacking at DEVCO, which makes portfolio analysis difficult.

The EU does not yet have a standardized approach to measuring resilience outcomes at programme or project levels. Established food security indicators were used to signal short-term progress, but fell short of being able to explain changes in latent capacities to manage future shocks. Nevertheless, there has been some evidence of significant improvements in long-term food security in the Sahel and Horn, and some of this evidence suggested a correlation with EU programming.

Visibility and lesson learning

The EU did communication efforts on its resilience approach but these remained ad hoc and were not part of an EU level resilience communications strategy. They have had limited effects in creating a common understanding among EU staff of the approach to building resilience to food crises. Awareness on the part of Member States and external stakeholders as regards the EU approach was limited; EU resilience-related programmes such as AGIR were the main channels contributing to the EU's visibility.

Cost-effectiveness

Operationalizing the EU approach has increased transaction costs at multiple levels (e.g. among DEVCO and ECHO staff at field level; among implementing partners), owing notably to its collaborative inter-agency and inter-sectoral nature. In the absence of empirical evidence on the additional benefits of the approach it was difficult to determine whether these costs were justified.

Institutionalization of the approach

The EU was found to be a major supporter of developing regional and national strategies for building resilience to food crises – most prominently in the Sahel region. Progress has been made in building up the capacity of national institutions to undertake analyses in support of policy development. However, action on these strategies has been limited and variable, notably due to institutional limitations, limited financial resources, and the extent to which these

¹ These concern SHARE, which is a political initiative, Pro-Act, a methodology for (GPGC and other) funds allocation and the EU emergency Trust Fund for Africa, which is a cooperation instrument.

approaches favour political interests. National ownership was clearest in countries where donor-government dialogue and financing has been sustained over several decades.

Conclusions

Relevance

Conclusion 1: The EU approach to building resilience was well adapted to situations where recurrent food emergencies were driven by weather-related or economic shocks and where there was effective governance, such as in Kenya, Ethiopia, Niger and Burkina Faso. However, the approach was less well adapted for complex emergencies in fragile states, where food insecurity was primarily driven by conflict.

Effectiveness

Conclusion 2: The EU approach prompted a strategic shift with a shared commitment between DEVCO and ECHO to the goal of building resilience. This commitment has been translated into the allocation of resources towards building resilience at global, regional and country levels. Development budgets have prioritized support for food security and agriculture in support of building resilience to food crises. Resilience building has been generally mainstreamed within ECHO programmes.

Conclusion 3: Analyses of the root causes of food crises have increasingly been carried out and this is at least in part directly related to the EU approach. However, these analyses were of variable quality and not clearly used for decision-making on programming in part due to poor timing.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Conclusion 4: The EU approach has contributed to new and adapted financing instruments and mechanisms. Innovative combinations of country programmable and thematic instruments provided timely, flexible and predictable funding to contribute to building resilience to food crises. As a consequence, development financing instruments were no longer found to be a significant constraint on EU action in building resilience to food crises. Examples of new instruments and mechanisms more specifically devoted to financing resilience activities are PRO-ACT, SHARE and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The evaluation did not find compelling evidence to support the creation of a specific mechanism for funding resilience to food crises – such as a Trust Fund for Building Resilience.

Coherence, Coordination and Complementarity

Conclusion 5: DEVCO, ECHO and the EEAS provided specific advantages in building resilience to food crises, and synergies have been achieved from linking EU development and humanitarian action. However, collaboration was limited by differing mandates and priorities, and hampered by a lack of clarity in terms of division of responsibilities and roles. While inter-service collaboration was advantageous to building resilience, it was not a necessary precondition.

Conclusion 6: The EU has struggled to implement multi-sectoral approaches in building resilience to food crises: such approaches were highly dependent on the capacity to coordinate with other development partners with a view to covering the different sectors. Within DEVCO the resilience approach has been closely associated with the agriculture and rural development focal sector but this sectoral contribution has not been adequately coordinated with action by other development partners to provide the full range of complementary sectoral interventions. The EU Joint Programming process offers a potential – but underused – mechanism for developing an integrated and comprehensive approach.

Conclusion 7: The interlinkages of building resilience to food crises with the EU migration agenda are complex and are not yet clearly established. Managed migration has recently become a top policy priority for the EU as reflected in the Valletta summit (2015). The policy commitment to building resilience to food crises has been brought together with the migration agenda, for instance in the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The assumption is that the food crises and migration share the same root causes and solutions. However, research evidence indicates that the interrelationships are not straightforward. The drivers of migration at an individual level are complex, and only partially related to risks or stress. Studies highlight that migration is an important coping strategy that contributes positively to building resilience to food crises. In the short-to-medium term migration is shown to be facilitated through development – to which resilience-building contributes - rather than reduced by it.

Impact

Conclusion 8: As part of the EU approach, progress has been made in developing resilience measurement tools. However, these tools are geared towards supporting strategy and policy development rather than measuring the contribution of specific programmes and projects to building resilience.

Sustainability

Conclusion 9: The EU has been an advocate for, and partner in, developing national resilience strategies, but national ownership remained limited.

Recommendations

R1. The approach to building resilience to food crises should be adapted to the specifics of different contexts. Specifically, senior managers of DEVCO, ECHO and EEAS should acknowledge that different contexts will lead to differentiated approaches and differentiated levels of responsibility for building resilience to food crises. This should include clarifying the respective roles of DEVCO, ECHO and the EEAS in operationalizing the approach to building resilience depending on the root causes, while taking into account their different mandates. DEVCO, EEAS and ECHO should also clarify the relevance of the EU approach to building resilience to food crises as a contribution to managed migration.

R2. The EU should strengthen the process for developing collaborative, inter-service, country-level EU strategies to build resilience to food crises. Headquarters should clarify the approach to, and accountability for, joint analysis of the root causes of food insecurity. In-country staff could prepare Joint Humanitarian Development Frameworks, with clear and transparent linkages between these analytical processes and the EU Country Strategies. They should also improve routine interaction between EU services in the field.

R3. The EU should further strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of, and lesson-learning from, its contribution to building resilience to food crises. It could therefore usefully develop an accountability framework within the joint country strategy that defines monitoring indicators and reporting arrangements on actions by the three Services in implementing key elements of the approach. DEVCO and EEAS (in relation to the IcSP) could develop resilience markers for monitoring progress in integrating resilience perspectives into programming (as did ECHO). At the same time DEVCO, ECHO and EEAS could develop and implement a common learning strategy.

R4. EU services and Member States should improve inter-donor coordination, with specific attention to coordination between Member States, in building resilience to food crises. It could for instance develop a coordinated approach to covering the priority sectors of intervention necessary to build resilience to food crises within the framework of the Joint Programming process.