

NOTE NO 4

Promoting resilience in situations of conflict and fragility

Topic overview

Definitions. Resilience is defined 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’ (2012 [Communication](#)). Fragile situations are those ‘where the social contract is broken due to the State’s incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions’ (2007 [Communication](#)). In practice, the two concepts largely overlap: with only a few exceptions, all countries deemed ‘highly vulnerable’ (see vulnerability and crisis [assessment indicators](#)) are in a conflict or fragile situation. Promoting resilience in situations of conflict and fragility means factoring in a weak or unaccountable state, and the looming shadow of armed conflict (past, present or probable).

The **value of the resilience approach** resides in (i) addressing not only the symptoms of a crisis (which can be sudden or slow onset) but also its causes and (ii) synergising across policy communities. This approach holds the greatest promise in situations of conflict and fragility, where poor government performance, a history of social exclusion and the legacy of armed conflict tend to linger — and history tends to repeat itself (one in two countries reverts to conflict within five years of a peace agreement). These are also situations where synergy across policy communities is essential to avoid doing harm and achieve lasting impact. In particular, the short-term response to emergency needs must also be designed so as not to undermine longer-term development prospects.

A crisis can be human-made or natural, but in fragile contexts, it always combines many dimensions and makes the population (or part of the population) acutely and chronically vulnerable.

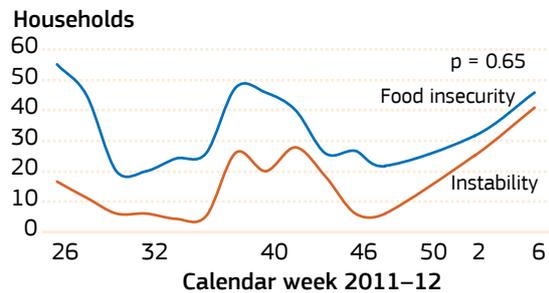
- When a human-made crisis occurs in a context of fragility, it is often because the features of fragility combine to explode into a crisis, often triggered by one event, or a series of events — for example in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya (2010–11). Then, the crisis leaves a legacy that makes fragility and conflict chronic. The resurgence of conflict in the Central African Republic and South Sudan end-2013 are cases in point, with 1 000 casualties and thousands displaced in a matter of months.

SUMMARY

- Promoting resilience in situations of conflict and fragility means factoring in the state’s incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions, and the looming shadow of armed conflict.
- The added value of the resilience approach resides in (i) addressing not only the symptoms of the crisis but also its root causes; and (ii) synergising across policy communities. This approach holds great promise in situations of conflict and fragility.
- Both the symptoms and the root causes of a crisis need to be addressed — this is particularly important in situations of conflict and fragility, where history tends to repeat itself.
- When identifying the causes of crisis and how they interact, process matters. It is also useful to identify areas of both risk and resilience.
- Mapping ongoing and planned interventions will help to identify gaps, contradictions, overlaps and areas for greater synergy, as well as consider their sustainability.
- Designing a resilience programme, or more generally applying the resilience approach, entails learning from past experience, addressing both emergency needs and longer-term resilience building, and factoring in risk.
- Implementing a resilience approach requires special attention to coordination mechanisms; thinking about peacebuilding and state-building issues from Day 1, even if they are long-term issues; and engaging with national counterparts according to context.

- When a natural disaster occurs in a context of fragility, the features of fragility ('state incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions', social exclusion or armed conflict) also make vulnerability acute and chronic. For example:
 - Graph 1 shows the correlation between political instability and food insecurity in Yemen;
 - Somalia, a country rife with conflict and without an effective government since 1991, has not surprisingly suffered the brunt of the 2011 food crisis in the Horn of Africa;
 - the 2010 Haiti earthquake was much more deadly than the Chile earthquake, and quickly combined with pre-existing conditions (limited state responsiveness, extreme poverty and social exclusion) and other crises (cholera).

GRAPH 1 Correlation between political instability and household food insecurity in Yemen



Source: Ecker (2014) based on UNICEF 2012 Pilot Social Protection Monitoring Survey data.

The 2013–20 [Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis-Prone Countries](#) notes this heightened vulnerability: fragile settings are 'more vulnerable to internal or external shocks such as economic crises, conflicts or natural disasters' than other contexts. Indeed, 'in fragile and conflict affected states, household vulnerability and the lack of sustainable development are closely linked to state fragility and conflict'.

In cases of both natural and human-made crises, not only the symptoms of the crisis but also its causes need to be addressed to avoid history repeating itself. In a situation of conflict or fragility — i.e. where there is 'state incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions', social exclusion or armed conflict — addressing the causes of crisis entails including peacebuilding and state-building as part of the intervention package. This is not without challenges, as peacebuilding and state-building can be outside the remit of humanitarian actors (not to mention the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence), and only partially within the remit of development actors. However, the [Action Plan](#) emphasises the need, in fragile states, to 'secure stability and meet basic needs for populations in the short term while at the same time strengthening governance, capacity and economic growth, keeping state-building as a central element'.

Key issues

While guidance exists on promoting resilience (notably the 2012 [Communication](#) and 2013 [Conclusions on Resilience](#), the [Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework](#), and the 2013–20 [Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis-Prone Countries](#)), this note aims to **help EU staff promote resilience given fragility**, i.e. taking into account the lack of state responsiveness and/or tense social relations. Specifically, it spells out issues to bear in mind when (i) identifying risks and their causes; (ii) mapping ongoing and planned interventions; and (iii) developing and implementing a resilience approach.

The steps below follow the method outlined in the [Communication on Resilience](#) and the [Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework in the context of food security](#).

Step 1. Analyse the nature and causes of the crisis

Analysis is the first step towards any smart engagement, as an uninformed programme can end up doing more harm than good (see [Note No 1](#) for more general guidance on analysis).

1.1. Set up a process that makes sense

- Identify the most relevant unit(s) for analysis of the nature and causes of the crisis at hand: regional, national and/or local. If the focus is national, remember to consider regional drivers of crisis and resilience.
- Identify who to involve in the analysis, and when, bearing in mind that different stakeholders can analyse crises in very different ways because of the wide range of risks to which people are exposed, the different degrees to which they are exposed, and data and transparency limitations in fragile settings.

1.2. Identify the causes and their interplay

Distinguish whether the causes are at the individual, household, community, country or regional level. Consider the political and social context. For example, in Yemen (see case study), grievances, ideologies and political interests were considered in implementing the resilience approach.

1.3. Identify areas of both risk and resilience

Draw from the range of EU analysis and early warning instruments, notably [conflict analysis](#), [Global Vulnerability and Crisis Assessment/Forgotten Crisis Assessment](#), the Index for Risk Management ([InfoRM](#)) and the EEAS [Risk Index](#). These should help to ensure that social tensions and armed conflict are identified, in addition to food crises and climate shocks: ‘When working to improve resilience in fragile and conflict-affected states, the EU will pursue an approach that also addresses security aspects and their impact on the vulnerability of the populations’ (2012 Communication). An early warning system that is common across sectors and policy communities can significantly increase its effectiveness, as the December 2013 example of South Sudan illustrates, where there was an unforeseen reversion to crisis.

Identify the most vulnerable groups. In situations of conflict and fragility made acute by crisis, it is tempting to define 90 % of the population as vulnerable, but interventions need to be targeted to the most vulnerable, as well as addressing the root causes of crisis.

It is also important to identify which groups and systems are resilient. In fragile settings, coping mechanisms have developed — sometimes over a period of years — and are almost always overlooked and therefore not built upon. No fragile state is a *tabula rasa*, even after the most dramatic crisis.

Step 2. Map ongoing and planned interventions

Possible questions follow.

- What themes and communities do planned and actual interventions by the EU, other development partners and national/regional authorities cover?
- Do they cover priority needs (both urgent needs and important needs), or are there gaps in certain regions, social groups, sectors, etc.? In particular, to what extent are current interventions targeting the most vulnerable populations? To what extent are they addressing the root causes of the crisis?
- Conversely, are there duplications?
- Are there contradictions across the different interventions? Could there be greater synergies across them?
- Are they sustainable, given the most probable scenario?

Sources of information for this mapping include programmes and projects by ECHO, DEVCO, other development partners and national/regional authorities, and evaluations/reviews of all of the above. Following this desk review,

this mapping is best done through a joint humanitarian-development (and, if possible, multi-donor) workshop, to allow for debate.

Step 3. Develop a resilience approach

Based on current guidance, the following are possible avenues to develop a resilience approach.

3.1. Learn from experience

Fragile settings are often subject to multiple crises and multiple types of crises. It is always worth reflecting on previous and current resilience approaches.

- Were they focused on the right things?
- Were they based on assumptions that have proven correct?
- Is the current context markedly different from previously? Are there new risks and opportunities to take into account?
- If these programmes did not deliver as much as expected, what will be different in the current cycle of programming? (The assumptions? The objectives? How risks are managed? The programme design? Its delivery?)

3.2. Address both emergency needs and longer-term resilience

For the short-term response to emergency needs to not undermine longer-term development prospects, the EU response should involve the partner country's state and society to, over time, improve state responsiveness and the management of social tensions. In South Sudan, ECHO and the EU Delegation to the country developed a Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework (2014) that takes a two-track approach: immediate relief interventions and longer-term strategies complement each other for resilient households and communities. In Somalia, the EU's EUR 36 million Resilience Programme includes a range and mutually reinforcing set of interventions: support to the federal government to develop a resilience strategy, support to improved agro-pastoral and farming practices and marketing, and better access to services for pastoralists and farmers.

When central government is unable or unwilling to focus on the resilience agenda — including its developmental goals — or to engage in dialogue, it is all the more beneficial to engage in dialogue, in the first instance, with local authorities, community leaders and/or regional authorities (see [Note No 7](#) on engaging with national counterparts in situations of conflict and fragility).

The link between resilience and state-building can be made, for instance, through state-building contracts (e.g. in Mali), EU trust funds (e.g. the EU trust fund in the Central African Republic will help to channel funding for interventions that are considered essential to stabilisation, including state-building; support to elections; and support to health, education and food security) or regional indicative programmes (e.g. the regional indicative programme for West Africa, which includes a specific component for capacity development).

3.3. Factor in risk

The 2013 Council Conclusions on the EU Approach to Resilience call for 'a medium-to-long term perspective when planning humanitarian action and development programming'. At the same time, fragile contexts can evolve rapidly and in very different possible directions. Resilience programming should therefore be built on scenario planning (what are the best case, worst case and most plausible scenarios?) and include room for readjustments to respond to both reversals and opportunities.

Resilience programming will also benefit from a **realistic** assessment of needs, and a proactive way to manage them (see the [Yemen case study](#) in Note No 7).

Step 4. Implementing the resilience approach

How the resilience approach is implemented matters as much as what is in it. Issues that may arise follow.

4.1. Pay special attention to coordination mechanisms given that national capacity is often limited and that increased resilience needs a multi-sector response

Agreeing on a set of well-defined objectives, appointing a lead donor and agreeing on a clear division of labour will help to focus the agenda on addressing the causes of crisis

'You can't have a resilience approach all of a sudden. You need to build on existing assets, and there are always some.'

*Sarah Bernhardt, EU
Delegation to Yemen*

BOX 1 Greater resilience in the Horn of Africa: working with and through regional partners, and with other donors

The 2010-11 drought in the Horn of Africa affected over 13.5 million people, led to famine and population displacements, and — despite massive international assistance — to tens of thousands of deaths. In the wake of this crisis, the heads of state of the region's countries pledged to end drought emergencies and asked the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to take the lead on this initiative. This commitment translated into the IGAD Drought Disaster and Sustainability Initiative, which stimulated national governments in the region to develop country-specific programmes. These national resilience programmes are complemented by an IGAD-led regional programme.

In this context, the EU developed the SHARE (Supporting Horn of Africa Resilience) initiative, with a two-pronged approach: a short-term response for emergency assistance and short-term recovery in 2011-13, and longer-term assistance to help affected communities and countries enhance resilience to face future droughts (2014-20).

Increasingly, EU assistance is being aligned to the IGAD drought initiative framework at the regional and national levels. At the same time, EU assistance for resilience in the Horn of Africa is coordinated with that of other donors, notably through the Global Alliance for Action for Resilience and Growth. Humanitarian and development partners involved in this alliance meet twice each year and hold regular telephone conferences. They also engage with IGAD and the IGAD member states in meetings at technical and strategic levels.

Sources: Willem Olthof (DEVCO D2); IGAD; SHARE.

and limit the burden on partner countries. To the extent possible, it is best to use (or build on) existing coordination mechanisms rather than creating new ones. Box 1 provides an example of coordination that brings together humanitarian and development actors from different donor administrations, while fostering leadership from partner countries.

4.2. Is the aftermath of crisis really the right time to think about the long-term issues of peacebuilding and state-building?

There is increasing recognition that the pact among the elites and the social contract between the state and citizens are usually renegotiated at times of crisis. Therefore, it might be best to anticipate how the response to crisis is likely to shape things to come. When saving lives requires EU programmes to use modalities that may undermine state-building, thought should be given to how and when you can shift to modalities that are more likely to increase state responsiveness.

4.3. Engage according to context

The Action Plan recalls: 'It is primarily a national government's responsibility to build resilience and to define political, economic, environmental and social priorities accordingly... It is ultimately individual countries' responsibility to progress towards resilience, meeting key development standards'. However, 'where alignment behind government-led strategies is not possible due to particularly weak governance or violence conflict, opportunities for partial alignment at the sectoral or regional level will be sought'. And when the state is weak, even at the sector or regional level,

working with CSOs and directly with communities can be a third option, while involving local authorities and line ministries as much as possible.

Additional resources

Fragility-specific

- EU 2013–20 [Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis-Prone Countries](#) (paragraphs on fragility).
- Alexandre Marc et al., *Societal Dynamics and Fragility: Engaging Societies in Responding to fragile Situations*, Washington DC: World Bank, 2012.
- OECD, [Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility: Policy Guidance](#), DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, OECD, 2011.

Not fragility-specific

- EU, [Communication: the EU approach to resilience: learning from food security crises](#), 2012.
- EU, [Conclusions on the EU approach to resilience](#), 2013.
- EU Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework.
- Annelies Heijmans et al., [Reaching Resilience, Handbook for Aid Practitioners and Policymakers in Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Poverty Reduction](#).

Case study

Beyond the emergency: strengthening nutrition systems at the local and national levels in Yemen

SOURCE



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CONTEXT, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

- Yemen has been experiencing alarming levels of under-nutrition for decades. The shocks that occurred during the civil unrest of 2011 and that led, among other things, to the present nutrition crisis, overlap with the pre-existing socioeconomic and political situations that gave rise to similar crises in the past. Nearly half of all children under the age of five are chronically malnourished (47 %) and 13 % suffer from acute malnutrition. Global acute malnutrition reaches alarming levels in coastal areas, far exceeding the international emergency threshold of 15 %. The health and health service indicators that are relevant for nutrition are below the average observed in countries with a similar level of socioeconomic development.
- The generous donor support currently unfolding in Yemen is a crisis response. Curative services are organised at the periphery of the national system. Virtually no support is given to local institutions, which are by and large sidelined or used as implementation vehicles. One result is a high degree of fragmentation and dispersion. Standards are difficult to implement and non-centralised coordination efforts result in disempowered national institutions.
- A National Nutrition Strategy for Yemen was approved in 2009 but suffers from a lack of vision, relies on a weak analytical basis and makes little provision for the integration of services into a primary health care package. The government's health sector budget has so far not included funding for nutrition activities. The Ministry of Public Health and Population is struggling to maintain pre-2011 service levels. Inter-ministerial coordination is absent. Management capacities at the central as well as at governorate and district levels are scarce. Training institutions are unprepared.

Opportunity

- Yemen recently joined the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement, which may be seen as a first step in institutional engagement.

Ambivalent

- A strong emphasis on decentralisation (work with local authorities and fiscal decentralisation) offers opportunities, but also presents challenges in terms of steering the sub-sector and promoting equitable and balanced growth across the country.

ACTIONS TAKEN

The Yemen team emphasised the need to address both immediate needs at the local level and systemic changes at the national level, and designed a programme to strengthen the resilience of nutrition systems to complement the ongoing and well-funded response to immediate needs.

Programme objectives

This programme's goal is to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the delivery of equitable nutrition services by supporting their integration into primary health care and supporting the capacity development of the ministry at various levels. The programme therefore aims for four results:

- the institutional, leadership and governance capacities of the ministry and governorate health offices are enhanced, and the ministry is enabled to steer the subsector in full cooperation with relevant stakeholders;
- the technical capacities of a critical mass of public health staff are increased;
- an enabling environment for nutrition programmes is created through supporting legislation, information, education and communication, and active participation in inter-ministerial activities;
- an enabling environment for nutrition investments is created while responding to cogent needs in terms of micronutrients.

Programme modalities

The programme uses a centralised approach, with the funds managed directly by the Delegation.