
EUTF THEMATIC EVALUATION ON STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE OF VULNERABLE AND DISPLACEMENT AFFECTED COMMUNITIES IN HORN OF AFRICA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1 Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings, conclusions, lessons and recommendations of the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF) Thematic Evaluation on Strengthening Resilience of Vulnerable and Displacement Affected Communities in the Horn of Africa (HoA). The study was commissioned by the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) with the aim of providing an overall independent assessment of the results achieved and lessons learnt in the HoA in relation to the second strategic objective of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (2015-2025). The second strategic objective (SO2) aimed to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable sections of society, including refugees and displaced persons.

The evaluation focused on the HoA countries which received most support from the EUTF, namely Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. It also examined cross-border interventions. Temporally, the evaluation looked at interventions from the start of the EUTF in 2016 up until 2024. During this period, approximately EUR 756 million in contracted funding was allocated to resilience interventions in the HoA region.

Throughout the EUTF implementation period, the HoA region experienced major challenges including civil wars, political instability, natural disasters, the effects of Covid-19 and persistent poverty. These challenges underscored the pertinence of the EUTF's resilience support, although it also presented challenges to a smooth implementation. Against this background, the evaluation assessed the extent to which the EUTF contributed to improved food security and natural resource management, strengthened disaster and conflict risk management (DRM) and social cohesion among Internally Displaced People (IDPs), refugees and host communities. It also identified obstacles and opportunities for sustainability, reviewed the effectiveness and efficiency of project delivery and assessed the overall added value of the EUTF's support to the region.

The evaluation was carried out in 2024 and included missions to Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda. Support to Sudan and to cross-border regions was investigated remotely. A mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis was deployed embracing nearly 250 semi-structured interviews, 39 focus group discussions (during which 315 people participated), documentation review, a targeted e-survey, quantitative (financial) reviews of project portfolios and direct observation through project visits (to the extent feasible, given security and logistical constraints).

Policy relevance of the evaluation

The evaluation is timely for several reasons:

- At European Union (EU) policy level, there is an ongoing debate on how best to support complex environments and protracted crisis contexts, particularly in the HoA, where the number of vulnerable and displaced communities continues to grow.
- With the conclusion of the EUTF and the introduction of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation instrument–Global Europe (NDICI-GE) it is crucial for policy makers and practitioners to assess to what extent the new instruments and mechanisms are suited to providing support to vulnerable communities and to counter factors which promote displacement and migration.
- At the institutional level, the new European Commission leadership, approved by the European Parliament in November 2024, will require information and guidance on how to further engage in such complex and protracted crisis contexts.
- Finally, the policy relevance of this evaluation was confirmed via the Council Conclusion on Stepping up Team Europe's support to global food security and nutrition on 16 December 2024, a topic that is at the heart of this evaluation.

The rationale for the EUTF interventions in the HoA was the region's persistent fragility and a state of protracted crises which has lasted for several decades. There is a persistence of poverty and vulnerability underpinned by scarce resources, social grievance, absence of the rule of law, unaccountable governance, violent conflicts and disputes around natural resources. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt strongly in the region where gains in poverty reduction reversed.

The HoA remains one of the most food-insecure regions in the world. It has faced a series of devastating natural disasters over the last decade, driven by climate change and environmental degradation. Prolonged droughts, including the worst in forty years, have led to severe water shortages, crop failures, and livestock deaths. Concurrently, intense flooding destroyed assets and infrastructures, exacerbating vulnerability in the region. These events have continuously threatened the livelihoods of millions of rural households triggering increased levels of internal displacement and relocations across borders. As a result, the number of people suffering from acute food insecurity has steadily increased and has risen sharply since 2019. By 2023, *Ethiopia*, *Somalia*, *Sudan*, and *South Sudan* ranked among Africa's ten most food insecure countries, according to the Global Report on Food Crises.

Overall assessment

The evaluation found that EUTF resilience-focused interventions were able to address the principal root causes of instability, including marginalisation, economic exclusion, weak governance, food insecurity, conflict, and natural disasters. Besides the quality of project designs and the performance of implementing partners, project success was influenced by features of the specific country context and the underlying instability in the region.

Interventions helped reduce vulnerability among selected host communities, refugees, and IDPs, in particular at household level and in surrounding communities. However, stakeholders agree that, given the scale and depth of vulnerability in the region, as well as protracted crises, it would have been unrealistic for the EUTF support to have made a more substantial impact on reducing vulnerability throughout the region.

Primary beneficiaries were vulnerable households located in both rural and urban settings who were either members of host communities, IDPs or refugees. Efforts to strengthen the capacity of public authorities to address resilience recorded positive results in relatively stable contexts such as *Kenya* and *Uganda*, but were limited in *Somalia*, *Ethiopia*, *South Sudan*, and *Sudan*.

A particular achievement of the EUTF was its ability to bring together different EU services at headquarters and in the field to set priorities in relation to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance (HDP nexus) in a protracted crisis situation. While the EUTF also encountered several challenges, it provided flexibility and responsiveness to rapidly changing needs on the ground, including in cross-border contexts.

Conclusions	
Main conclusions	Justification
<i>C1 – Appropriate attention to food security</i>	The attention given to improving the food security of vulnerable communities was appropriate and was in most cases promoted through a multi-sector approach which took account of the multiplicity of factors shaping food security including access to incomes outside the agriculture sector.
<i>C2 – Natural resource management as a key consideration</i>	The management of natural resources was a key consideration in the design and implementation of resilience-related interventions and was often linked to food security, DRM and conflict management interventions.
<i>C3 – Disaster Risk Management not consistently addressed</i>	DRM is generally regarded to be one of the cornerstones of resilience building and was considered a relevant area for SO2 funding in a region prone to natural shocks. However, DRM was not consistently addressed as a priority and as a result the contribution of resilience-related interventions to DRM strengthening has been comparatively limited.
<i>C4 – Interventions strongly oriented towards the humanitarian-development nexus</i>	A key strength of SO2 interventions was their orientation across the humanitarian-development nexus to respond to humanitarian situations and/or to development opportunities, depending on the context. The peace element of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus was mostly addressed implicitly through attention to social cohesion and by working in a conflict-sensitive/‘do-no-harm’ manner. Explicit conflict analyses were not often conducted.
<i>C5 – The CRRF is relevant to orient resilience interventions</i>	The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) provided an important framework to orient resilience-related interventions, helping to address social cohesion between host communities and IDPs/refugees and thereby promote the peace-element of the HDP nexus at community level. The CRRF also helped to promote a harmonised approach to resilience building via country policy, planning and coordination frameworks in Uganda and Kenya.
<i>C6 – Choice of delivery and management modalities was highly determined by context</i>	The choice of management modalities (direct, shared, indirect) and delivery methods (projects/ programmes/ budget support), including the choice of delivery channels (multilateral organisations, NGOs, EU member state agencies), was determined by context including the track-record of implementing partners, where the role of EUDs in shaping designs and approaches proved critical. The selection of different modalities and methods allowed SO2 interventions to tailor the responses and to link up with other EU services, EU member state agencies and non-EU donors.
<i>C7 – Institutional set-up of EUTF was relevant</i>	The EU’s institutional set-up at Headquarter (HQ) and country level facilitated the delivery of SO2 interventions that were generally responsive to needs, timely and flexible. However, better use could have been made of the EUTF knowledge management and learning system (MLS) to inform country level decisions and to provide insight on impacts. Impeding factors to the optimal use of the MLS included its late development, as well as limited time during the early years of the EUTF to formulate outcome indicators and to conduct baseline studies.

<i>C8 – Relevance of EUTF for remote areas confirmed</i>	SO2 support was of added-value in difficult-to-reach, and remote areas characterised by weak state presence and/or governance, including border regions, because it allowed the EU to become one of the few international partners that was able to provide significant levels of funding over the medium-term in such contexts.
<i>C9 – Sustainability was only marginally achieved</i>	It has proven challenging to sustain the results of resilience-related interventions across the region, however, where the right pre-conditions were in place, (some level of) sustainability was achieved both at public authority and community levels.
<i>C10 – EUTF was of added value but there is scope for better targeting</i>	In addressing vulnerability and building resilience in the HoA, the EU identified the right priorities for funding via resilience-related interventions and, in most cases, delivered the support in the right way. However, there was scope to better focus the support in order to prevent interventions being spread too widely and/or too thinly.

Recommendations

A. Strengthening resilience via thematic and geographic entry points

1. *Food security and Natural Resource Management should remain key thematic entry points for strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities*

- It is challenging for households to meet their food security needs because of persistent high levels of poverty, and exposure to repeated natural and human-made shocks that contribute to a high incidence of forced displacement.
- Evidence points to the importance of creating income generating opportunities both within and outside the agriculture sector as an alternative pathway for vulnerable households to meet their food security needs.
- The management of natural resources, water in particular, is key to a better and more sustainable food production.

2. *Greater attention should be given to strengthening Disaster Risk Management capacities of vulnerable communities and, depending on context and needs, linking such support to Natural Resource Management and food security interventions*

- The attention required for disaster risk management will vary by context, but in principle, should be an integral part of community-level interventions that support food security and natural resource management.
- Engaging with and supporting public authorities with mandated responsibilities for disaster management needs is essential as they provide the frameworks and technical resources that support community level actions.

3. *Make better use of the EU's comparative advantage in supporting resilience in remote and cross-border areas by better coordinating the management of such support between EUDs and HQ, implementing organisations, and partner governments*

- Given that these areas often host refugees and internally displaced populations – and face heightened risks of instability and tensions with host communities - the EU is encouraged to reinforce its engagement in such regions. To achieve this, the EU should explore ways to strengthen management and coordination mechanisms that facilitate engagement among different EU Delegations present in the region, the different implementing partners involved and enhance the participation of public authorities.

B. Effective approaches underpinning support to resilience

4. *Continue applying a multi-sector approach when addressing different dimensions of vulnerability while ensuring coherence in the scope and breadth of interventions*

- The causes of vulnerability are multi-dimensional and intertwined which requires in most cases a multi-sectoral approach. This not only calls for a well-balanced approach to address relevant policy, institutional and capacity issues at the national and sub-national levels but also working directly with vulnerable communities.
- However, overly complex multi-sectoral engagements, that demand a high level of coordinated action across multiple actors and stakeholders can lead to dysfunctions and loss of effectiveness.

5. *The HDP nexus should be further promoted, particularly in contexts of protracted crisis and long-term refugee/IDP management. Given the risks of social and political unrest, more attention should be paid to the Peace element of the Nexus*

- The HDP nexus approach has demonstrated its usefulness in linking interventions at the interface of a humanitarian situation and the need to provide longer-term resilience and development assistance.
- It has also demonstrated its applicability in vastly different settings and at very different moments in time, ranging from the management of refugees and host communities in Kenya and Uganda to protracted crises in parts of Ethiopia or Somalia.
- EUDs should ensure that implementing partners pay more explicit attention to addressing social cohesion and conflict reduction at the local level, including the conduct of baseline and periodic conflict analyses.

6. *Depending on country contexts, continue to promote the CRRF as a relevant framework for achieving a better country-led international response to regional migration and to the integration of refugees/IDPs into their host communities*

- While the opportunities to promote the CRRF depends on country context, including political dynamics, public finances and the capacity of public institutions, it should be promoted, even in contexts where the pre-conditions do not appear to be in place.
- Supporting the CRRF can help open pathways towards country-owned policies, frameworks and interventions as well as achieve results at the community level in terms of social cohesion and integration. EU interventions should therefore align with, and support the CRRF, or similar partner country initiatives (e.g. country pledges at the Global Refugee Forum), or in their absence should be ready to promote their formulation and implementation.

7. *Considering the growing number of problems caused by natural disasters and violent conflicts in the region, the EU should further explore different kinds of partnerships and forms of collaboration, including the promotion of TEIs, because the EU is unable to address existing and future problems on its own*

- Partnerships between the EU and various international funding institutions and implementing partners – multilateral organisations and NGOs – were indispensable for addressing the needs of vulnerable communities across the region.
- While the EUTF facilitated successful collaboration with various partners, more should be done to encourage partnerships, with a particular focus on promoting Team Europe Initiatives.
- This might require adopting common conceptual approaches, addressing timing and alignment issues, identifying the most appropriate division of labour among partners, engaging in joint operations and/or the setting up of pooled funding mechanisms.

8. *Carefully assess implementation partners' capacity and their suitability to be contracted for assignments in different contexts*

- For the implementation of support at the community level in protracted crises contexts, local and international NGOs were generally better suited compared to agencies from multilateral organisations or EU member states agencies, with management systems that are comparatively lighter and more agile.
- Public entities, such as UN organisations and EU member states agencies however, may have a comparative advantage over NGOs in engaging public authorities at national and local levels. Accessing policy makers and dealing with more strategic issues, are generally better dealt with by such entities.
- These perspectives, such as cost-effectiveness or good knowledge of the context, should be taken into account, in the assessment of suitable implementing partners, but should not be read as something cast in stone.

C. Institutional set-up and operational provisions for resilience-related support

9. Undertake more solid and regular analytical work as part of the design and implementation of resilience support, but do not overload implementing partners with excessive requirements for diagnostic work

- A careful balance should be struck between insisting on diagnostic work when preparing an intervention and leaving space for implementing partners to shape designs and structure interventions according to their own insights and locally acquired knowledge and experiences.
- Implementing partners should however be required to conduct periodic assessments/reviews and/or organise reflection moments as a way to pinpoint challenges impacting on progress as well as contributing to overall learning and accountability.

10. Continue to include flexible funding provisions across all interventions in support of vulnerable communities and provide implementing partners sufficient discretion to react timeously to emergencies and rapidly changing situations on the ground

- The EUTF generally provided the needed agility via flexible funding arrangements (contingency funding options or crises modifier provision) to make needed changes to project designs, including shifting from a more developmental focus to a more humanitarian focus. Such flexibility needs to be retained in future resilience interventions.
- In line with good practices of various international development partners, discretionary decision-making powers should be assigned to implementing partners to use such contingency funding but should be guided by clear criteria on how such authority can be used.

11. Ensure that knowledge and data collected from the EUTF research and evidence facility (REF) and monitoring and learning system (MLS) is retained after the EUTF's termination to further improve the design of resilience interventions and use the knowledge and data acquired to further improve indicators for resilience-related support

- Ensure the wealth of knowledge and data accumulated by the EUTF's MLS and REF remains accessible to inform the design of future resilience support, and to this end determine where the current MLS and REF should be institutionally stored once the EUTF ends.
- Continue to fund research initiatives as well as learning events that deepen insights on how to support resilience efforts and further strengthen the scope and robustness of the indicator framework for capturing resilience results including enhancing the collection of baselines and outcome data.

12. Ensure the continued availability of experienced staff to design and accompany resilience-related interventions and retain proven practices of setting up task teams comprising staff from EUDs, geographic desks and thematic sections across DG INTPA and other concerned EU services

- In view of the growing need to address resilience in protracted crises countries across the globe, ensure that knowledgeable and motivated EU staff - both at HQ and EUD level - is retained after the termination of the EUTF to support the design, implementation and monitoring of future SO2-type interventions.
- The EUTF built up a modus operandi that featured drawing staff from across different HQ geographic and thematic units, from EUDs and from other EU services (FPI, ECHO) to work as a de facto task team in support of designing and accompanying resilience interventions. Ensure that this way of working is not lost and will continue as a good practice for addressing future resilience interventions.

D. Sustainability of resilience interventions

13. *Wherever possible, programme and project designs should include explicit attention to promoting localisation through the strengthening of public authorities at national and local levels, and by further engaging local NGOs, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and the private sector*

- The sustainability of resilience-related support to vulnerable communities, can only be realised if national institutional structures, including public authorities at the national and sub-national levels, local NGOs and CBOs, associations and private sector organisations participate fully in interventions funded by the Commission.
- Programme and project designs should make explicit how interventions will engage with, mobilise and strengthen public authorities and relevant national NGOs, CBOs and other community-based structures. Those designs should also look beyond public sector interventions and try to involve local private actors. A thorough capacity diagnostic exercise can be useful to pinpoint potential entry points for support and areas for priority attention.

14. *With a view to the sustainability of resilience-strengthening interventions, ensure that project designs include an explicit exit strategy even for engagements which, upfront, appear to require a very long-term commitment of EU support*

- Resilience interventions should include an exit strategy developed as part of the initial design that considers options for eventual withdrawal and handover to public authorities, local NGOs/CBOs or other international organisations. Such an exit strategy should set out the preconditions for exit and the processes through which an exit could take place. It should also be reviewed and updated during the course of implementation.
- While certain engagements will require a long-term support commitment from the EU, thinking about an exit is recommended because it can help identify upfront the actors whose capacity would need to be strengthened, as well as gaps in legal frameworks, strategies or operational processes that would need to be enhanced to ensure sustainability.

E. Strategic targeting of the support

15. *Use the available knowledge from across EU institutions and from non-EU actors to thoroughly examine how best to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities through a more strategic engagement*

- With the ending of the EUTF, and with considerable knowledge and experience gained and many lessons learned, the EU should reflect how such support can be integrated into a wider EU strategic engagement in the HoA region.
- Strategic entry points for interventions could be specific corridors in line with the Global Gateway perspective; specific population groups which are at risk of being undermined by radical groups, or vulnerable communities for which the drivers of forced displacement are most acute, potentially leading to a broader destabilisation in the region.
- A strategic analysis of possible engagements should identify the strengths and comparative advantages of the EU to act, but also the limitations the EU is facing in view of shrinking humanitarian budgets and less partners the EU can work with.
- The EU and EU member states should use their comparative advantages to explore options for enhanced collaboration and joint action on resilience-related engagements through Team Europe Initiatives.