EU approach to resilience and disaster risk reduction in developing countries: learning from food security crises

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PURPOSE: to propose an approach to resilience regarding food security in developing countries.

BACKGROUND: recent and recurrent food crises in the Sahel region and in the Horn of Africa, where more than 30 million people are suffering from hunger, have underscored the need to work on a long-term and systematic approach to building the resilience of vulnerable countries and populations.

To recall, **resilience** is 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.

The effects of economic shocks, rising and fluctuating food prices, demographic pressure, climate change, desertification, environmental degradation, pressure on natural resources, inappropriate land tenure systems, insufficient investment in agriculture, have, in many parts of the world, resulted in greater exposure to risk, notably from natural hazards. The impact of these global trends is manifested in the increasing number and intensity of natural disasters and crises.

In the case of food insecurity, despite some progress, **one billion people are still suffering from hunger** and the issue is particularly acute in drought-prone areas where most of the population depends directly on agriculture and pastoralism.

The EU is one of the world's largest donors providing life-saving assistance to people affected by various crises. Such assistance is vital, but it is aimed mainly at coping with emergency situations and needs to be supplemented by support to populations at risk to withstand, cope with and adapt to repeated adverse events and long-term stress.

In response to the massive food crises in Africa, the Commission has recently taken two initiatives: **Supporting Horn of African Resilience** (SHARE) and l'"***AllianceGlobale pour l'Initiative Résilience Sahel***" (AGIR).These set out a new approach to building up the resilience of vulnerable populations.

The purpose of this Communication is to **use the lessons from these experiences to improve the effectiveness of the EU's support to reducing vulnerability in developing countries** and to contribute to the international debate on enhancing food security and resilience in a wider sense in the context of international *fora.*

CONTENT: the Commission’s communication considers that it is necessary to adopt a multifaceted strategy and a broad systems perspective aimed at both reducing the multiple risks of a crisis and at the same time improving rapid coping and adaptation mechanisms at local, national and regional level. Enhancing resilience calls for a long-term approach, based on **alleviating the underlying causes conducive to crises**, and enhancing capacities to **better manage future uncertainty and change**.

Experience gained thanks to the SHARE and *AGIR* initiatives: the communication examines the SHARE and *AGIR* initiatives in this regad and notes that they represent an improvement in the way

humanitarian and development assistance interact, boosting the levels of assistance in the short-term, facilitating the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD), as well as demonstrating the commitment of the EU to address the root causes of food insecurity in the longer-term.

These initiatives focus on food security in **sub-Saharan Africa**, but this approach can equally be applied to other regions and other types of vulnerability (for example, regions threatened by floods, cyclones, earthquakes, droughts, storm surges and tsunamis, climate change, or food price increase). There are three key components to this approach, which are further elaborated below:

(a) anticipating crises by **assessing risks**;

(b) focusing on **prevention** and preparedness; and

(c) enhancing **crisis response**.

10 steps to increase resilience: the communication proposes a general framework in the form of measures to strengthen resilience in food-insecure and disaster-prone countries. These measures may be summarised as follows:

1. The starting point for the EU approach to resilience therefore is a firm recognition of the **leading role of partner countries**; it will align its support with the partner's policies and priorities, in accordance with established Aid Effectiveness principles;
2. Action to strengthen resilience needs to be based on **sound methodologies for risk and vulnerability assessments**. Such assessments should serve as the basis for elaborating national resilience strategies, as well as for designing specific projects and programmes;
3. In countries facing recurrent crises, increasing resilience will be a central aim of EU external assistance. EU-funded programmes will be based on **a common operational assessment prepared by humanitarian and development actors**, covering medium to long-term interventions. They will focus on addressing the underlying causes of crises, notably through support for prevention and preparedness activities;
4. The Commission will systematically include resilience **as an element in its Humanitarian Implementation Plans**;
5. The Commission will continue to ensure **maximum flexibility** in implementing its humanitarian programmes. For development funding, in times of unforeseen crises and major disasters, the Commission will seek maximum flexibility in mobilising non-programmed funds ;
6. The EU will pursue an approach that also addresses **security aspects** and their impact on the vulnerability of populations. This will include an active political dialogue with partner countries and organisations in the region concerned.
7. The EU will seek to **replicate existing initiatives such as SHARE and AGIR**, as well as successful projects on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). It will share and exchange lessons with its partners in order to multiply and scale up successful approaches;
8. The Commission will bring forward a Green Paper in early 2013 on the role of **insurance** in disaster management;
9. For countries facing recurrent crises, the EU will work with host governments, other donors, regional and international organisations and other stakeholders to **create platforms at country level** for ensuring timely exchange of information and **coordination of short, medium and long term humanitarian and development actions** to strengthen resilience.
10. The EU will promote resilience in international fora including the G8, G20, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the Rio Conventions, the process for revision of the Millennium Development Goals, the development of Sustainable Development Goals and discussions on the follow-up to the Hyogo Framework for Action of 2005-2015. Resilience will feature as a key theme in its partnerships with organisations and **debates with civil society organisations**.

In the first quarter of 2013, the Commission will prepare an Action Plan to set out the way forward on implementation of these principles.