

USAID/ETHIOPIA RESILIENCE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Brief: Review and Gap Analysis of Ethiopia's Resilience Evidence



This brief summarizes the findings from a review and gap analysis of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Ethiopia Mission-supported resilience-based interventions and outcomes in Ethiopia.

Overview

USAID/Ethiopia has a significant library of more than a decade of USAID-funded research, evaluations, and reports on interventions and resilience outcomes. The Resilience and Evidence Gap Analysis, produced by USAID/Ethiopia's Resilience Learning Activity (RLA), consolidated this documented knowledge and systematically analyzed the library to spotlight effective resilience interventions.

RLA supports learning, collaboration, and research around resilience issues for USAID's resilience partners in Ethiopia. The five-year activity (August 2022–2027) also provides a platform for robust uptake of collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) in resilience programming. RLA is implemented by LINC in partnership with Environmental Incentives and JaRco Consulting, along with additional local and international partners.

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Context

USAID/Ethiopia faces a number of development obstacles, adding to the complexity of its resilience portfolio. Despite this, the Government of Ethiopia and USAID/Ethiopia are making significant progress in addressing food insecurity and climate vulnerability through programming that enhances community resilience against shocks from the household to global level.

Identifying and making sense of the effective interventions found in the Mission’s trove of information is necessary to uncover what USAID-supported efforts lead to more resilient households, communities, and systems in Ethiopia. The Resilience and Evidence Gap Analysis aims to provide USAID and implementing partners with the most focused and relevant resilience findings, including information on the sequencing, layering, and integration of interventions in Ethiopia to date.



Photo Credit: RLA

Methodology

This research looked at interventions across different resilience domains, including conflicts (inclusive of the current social-political situation), the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and drought, and economic and household-level shocks.

Researchers began the analysis by coding and ranking the library of documents, dividing them into categories based on their relevance and rigor. The team then conducted a qualitative textual and content analysis using a strength of evidence matrix to ensure a systematic and consistent evaluative process.

Next, the team conducted a contribution analysis of USAID/Ethiopia’s existing reports and evaluations to investigate evidence of stated outcomes. This approach allowed the team to trace and identify causal links while also interrogating assumptions directly to identify gaps in the evidence or theory of change. By systematically unpacking intermediate steps between the start of an intervention and its resilience outcomes, the team uncovered new insights and variables affecting or confounding outcomes, while further embracing the complexity inherent among communities and systems.

Findings

This targeted analysis allowed for solid comparisons between resilience-related interventions—alone or in sequence—to determine their effectiveness based on the consistency of reporting across sources. The analysis of under what conditions or in what ways USAID/Ethiopia interventions result in more resilient households, communities, and systems consistently revealed:

- **Systems approaches are consistently more impactful than interventions conducted in isolation.** In contrast, evidence of purposeful sequencing, layering, and integration of interventions was far less consistent, highlighting the need to examine further what is and is not working.
- **Early action and spending consistently lead to more cost-effective results, such as avoiding harm, but these approaches can face administrative barriers.**
- **Households and communities have consistent perceptions of greater preparedness or resilience to future shocks when programming leads to bonding** (deepening existing relationships), **bridging** (creating new relationships beyond existing social circles), and **linking** (building relationships with those in power positions) **in social capital** (a person's network of social relationships)—particularly as part of a multi-faceted approach (including intervention sequencing, layering, and integration).

Reviewing evidence or knowledge gaps can be tricky because it involves unknown factors and untested interventions or counterfactuals. The review and evidence gap analysis demonstrated that the collective resilience-related documentation and evidence only sometimes allowed for sufficient comparison between interventions to definitively determine outcomes as effective. This was largely due to monitoring metrics that were not entirely comparable. It is easier to generalize between intervention outcomes when their measuring methods are more aligned. The analysis revealed additional evidence gaps, including:

- **Poor understanding of the effect of sequenced, layered, or integrated resilience interventions** in relation to impact, cost-benefit, or intervention sustainability.
- **Limited information on the sequencing or layering of humanitarian development and peace activities** beyond cash and voucher assistance programming designed to protect development gains.
- **Limited information on how access to finance, market information, and digital services contribute to resilience.**
- **Lack of granularity regarding how natural resource management and climate resilience activities contribute to household or systems resilience.**

Recommended Actions

The analysis of USAID/Ethiopia-supported resilience-building investments and activities led to a presentation of initial findings, a detailed technical report with stakeholder feedback, and a knowledge management portal (the library).

As RLA continues refining its understanding of the data ecosystem and implementing interventions—including resilience measurement, sharing of resilience evidence, and learning—the analysis findings will directly inform work on resilience research and evidence. In particular, the activity will channel uptake of the synthesized resilience evidence and learning through the newly established RLA communities of practice and provide evidence-based support to USAID and the resilience community more broadly.



Lessons Learned

Coordinating Intervention Design

There were notable challenges in attempts to aggregate or consolidate intervention results into thematic buckets for comparison, which points to a need to establish or improve dialogue among implementing partners to, for example, synergize efforts and standardize indicators. This lends credibility to the RLA pillar objective to develop a collective action platform for robust uptake of CLA in resilience programming. This platform for practitioners—segregated into groupings of thematic areas or geographies—would allow technical experts to share meaningful practices and metrics (such as standardized indicators) to help align efforts.

Inclusivity for Buy-In and Participation

Engaging stakeholders at the outset of studies like RLA’s Resilience and Evidence Gap Analysis can result in substantial insights. A roundtable presentation and discussion with stakeholders interrogated, validated, and enriched the preliminary findings of the analysis. Insights, such as including a broader set of resilience factors beyond drought, came from this important input and underscored the importance of having local experts participate in activity implementation.