

Explain

ESSENTIAL BRIEFINGS FOR HUMANITARIAN DECISION-MAKERS

THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-
PEACE NEXUS: CURRENT STATUS AND
DISCOURSE

Linking short-term humanitarian assistance with efforts that address the root causes of crisis or support longer-term well-being is far from a novel idea. But framing these issues as a 'triple nexus' of humanitarian-development-peace efforts and objectives, tackling core structural features of the international aid system, is a result of more recent aid system reform discussions, prompted by the World Humanitarian Summit and the 'Leave No One Behind' theme of the 2030 Agenda.

Since 2016, the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus discourse has brought a noticeable cultural shift in the humanitarian sector. The concept has gone in and out of fashion over the years, but through recent nexus work, the long-existing concepts of Linking Relief Recovery and Development (LRRD) and resilience have increasingly moved out of niche circles and into more mainstream, system-wide initiatives. This has sparked structural reforms in several agencies and prompted even more traditional humanitarian actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and development stakeholders such as the World Bank to engage in new partnerships that may have been unthinkable a decade ago. The nexus is back on the agenda, as a planned core theme for Grand Bargain 3.0. This is partly in response to aid recipients continuing to repeat their desire for aid that better enables self-sufficiency and resilience.

There have been promising legislative, policy and structural shifts among donors and operational agencies in line with elements of the HDP nexus.

Significant shifts in policy frameworks on the triple nexus – [most notably the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee \(OECD-DAC\) recommendation](#) – have marked a step forward in connecting humanitarians with approaches to longer-term risk and vulnerability. Some donors have embarked on significant structural changes to remove silos, both at HQ and country level. These include the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), who chose to undertake a major restructuring process, joining together its previously separate humanitarian aid and development cooperation departments to create geographical nexus teams from September 2022. Canada and Sweden used working groups for their nexus reforms, with Sweden using an iterative approach (OECD 2022) to build up cross-team engagement and support regional and country nexus collaboration.

While the nexus as a concept is widely endorsed, a lack of clear theories of change or objectives has created confusion over what the nexus means practically and operationally, making assessing progress a challenge (Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report (GB AIR) 2023).

Two competing interpretations of the nexus as a change process are emerging: one that sees it as a transformative change requiring significant restructuring and wholesale changes to how the humanitarian-development-peace endeavours are conceived; a second that sees it as making more incremental modifications to existing ways of working, or even simply changing the label or reframing of existing practices (ALNAP 2023; OECD 2021). This has contributed to the overall sense that, despite isolated pilots, the nexus has not resulted in the wholesale transformation some feel is needed to achieve better support for people affected by conflict and fragility.

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There have been efforts to strengthen joined-up planning and analysis at country level, but also challenges in connecting meaningfully to development and peace planning processes and in engaging the government.

- As of 2022, joined up in-country humanitarian- development analysis and planning was happening in 25 contexts, with collective outcomes defined in 24 (OECD 2022) and increasing links between Humanitarian Needs and Priorities (HNP)/Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) processes and the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) processes (IASC 2021).
- Humanitarians tend to take the lead on coordination and there have been challenges in connecting adequately to development and peace actors who are less tightly coordinated (ALNAP 2023).
- Multiple sources indicate the ongoing and notable absence of strong government agency participation in country-level nexus coordination and planning (OECD 2022; ALNAP 2023; SOHS 2022).

There has also been significant momentum to address the reskilling of staff, one of the key gaps identified in early evaluations of nexus efforts.

- The importance of 'trilingualism' and the need to skill up for nexus success has been top of mind in recent years, with investments in nexus advisors at HQ and country level and in training initiatives, most notably the [United Nations Development Programme's \(UNDP\) Nexus Academy](#), which has already hosted five cohorts. Going forward, the academy will be broadening connections with peace actors as well as developing a knowledge management platform for its resources and building an evidence agenda to support future training.
- UN agencies, such as UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have emphasised a focus on 'timeframe travellers': skilling staff to be able to work and adjust flexibly across short-term and long-term objectives and programmes (ALNAP 2023).
- Donors have invested significantly in nexus skillsets, with Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) creating specialist nexus advisor posts internally.

Most of the traction made on the nexus has occurred in contexts of forced displacement

- The strongest evaluative examples of coordination between humanitarian and development actors, concrete programming examples and well- developed theories of change for the nexus come from refugee and forced displacement settings (ALNAP 2023).
- The World Bank has now advanced its work on durable solutions in 20 countries through its Window for Host Communities and Refugees, which reached \$2.4 billion under the International Development Association's IDA20 and which includes an ongoing partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to fund the costs of refugee hosting.

- In 2022, the OECD and UNHCR launched a partnership to create a toolkit and guidance documents on operationalising the HDP nexus in forced displacement contexts, due to be completed in 2023.
- Nexus themes are expected to be a major focus in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) Independent Review of the Humanitarian Response to Internal Displacement, through 2023 and early 2024.

Yet overall, there has been less operational progress in implementing the HDP nexus than hoped, due partly to a lack of clear definitions of success or guidance and the absence of genuine leadership buy-in.

- Nearly 75% of survey respondents to the State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) 2022 practitioner survey felt their organisation was doing a 'poor' or 'fair' job on the nexus, while 48% of respondents to the DAC interim review said their organisation lacked a way to measure success on the nexus.
- There is a consistent call for better organisational guidance on implementing the HDP nexus, including addressing how the nexus relates practically to organisational mandate or a specific sectoral focus area, for example health (ALNAP 2023).
- [The 2021 IASC mapping of good practice](#) found 'challenges remain in moving from national-level coordination and planning around the nexus to designing programme-level activities at the subnational level' (IASC 2021) and noted challenges with aligning expectations and thinking around what joined-up programme activities look like.
- While Resident Coordinators (RCs) have a natural role to play in HDP country-level leadership, there are questions about whether recent UN reform processes – which detached the role from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – had left RCs with the adequate staffing, resources and institutional political capital to effectively play this convening role, even for the relatively small portion of development aid that flowed through the UN system (SOHS 2022).
- The lack of adequate high-level political support for the nexus, particularly among UN agencies, is a continuing barrier to the willingness of country-level leadership to advance collaboration with development and peace actors (GB AIR 2023).

One of the more persistent barriers to progress lies in funding channels, which remain largely siloed, although recent years have seen promising changes to donor structures and investments in new mechanisms.

- Denmark, Ireland, Australia, Luxembourg and Finland are the most recent donors to announce increased mixed humanitarian-development funding to their operational partners (GB AIR 2022).
- Despite this, three of the largest humanitarian donors by volume continue to work in structures where humanitarian, development and peace aid are housed and funded separately. 55% of respondents to the DAC mid-term review survey felt their organisation was unable to avoid fragmented, siloed or inappropriately short-term funding (OECD 2022).
- The World Bank continues to increase its spending in traditional humanitarian contexts and with non-state humanitarian partners, including its direct support to UN agencies in managing the Yemen social protection system (SOHS 2022), its work on forced displacement and its Crisis Response Window Early Response Funding,

which has provided \$1 billion to early response in addressing food crises in 20 countries (Development Initiatives 2022; GB AIR 2023).

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There are ongoing challenges with the 'p' in the nexus: conceptualising humanitarian entry points to peace work, debates over securitisation issues ('there are no guns in the nexus') and, at a more concrete level, challenges in linking different timeframes and working cultures.

- While the OECD does not recognise differentiation across peace activities or approaches, in the IASC nexus discussions there is an emerging distinction between 'small p' (peacebuilding) or 'big P' (peacekeeping), with many operational agencies preferring to focus on 'small p'.
- The most accelerated area for integrating peace concerns into humanitarian action is through conflict sensitivity analysis and considering conflict dynamics in programme planning and implementation. Several agencies have developed their own tools for this, in addition to independent agencies such as the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) increasing their use of systems- thinking tools to incorporate conflict dynamics into wider context analyses.

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- There are widespread concerns, but a limited evidence base, for understanding the potential tensions between stronger humanitarian-peace links and humanitarian principles in contexts where the nexus would bring humanitarian actors into closer collusion with state-based parties to conflict. Mali stands out as a clear example where principled humanitarian action was in direct tension with nexus approaches (SOHS 2022), but wider evidence from other contexts featuring 'problem states' is required.
- There are several recent and ongoing initiatives to address the lack of skills and knowledge around peace and conflict in the humanitarian sector, including [an inventory of guidance and tools on peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive approaches](#), produced in 2022 by the IASC Result Group 4 with support from Interpeace. The Peace Responsive Facility, funded by Canada, supports stronger 'peace-responsiveness' in humanitarian actors through [online training](#) and exchange.

Linking to local and national actor leadership is considered the 'nexus glue' yet continues to be a missed opportunity.

- An Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation (IAHE) describes local actors as a 'nexus glue', and yet the focus for most nexus initiatives remains on the practices and relationships between international actors – significant gaps remain in shifting financing, decision-making and ownership to local actors, both civil society and government. As the OECD

interim review notes, the agenda is not on the radar of ‘partner governments.’ (OECD 2022).

- For local actors, who have always worked fluidly and struggled with the rationale behind international aid’s silos, the nexus looks simply like the international system ‘trying to get over the walls it’s constructed for itself’ (SOHS 2022).
- Only 4% of evaluations of the nexus from 2018 to mid 2022 make reference to nexus approaches that reflect local/national leadership (ALNAP 2023).

As the climate sector rises as a potential fourth pillar for more joined up planning, funding and implementation, humanitarian actors need to quickly advance their understanding and engagement with risk aware approaches.

- The increasing scale and frequency of climate- related crises means the links, or lack of them, between the climate finance and policy sectors and humanitarians are increasingly critical, prompting questions as to whether a fourth dimension is needed in the nexus.
- Attention to risk is already present in many nexus approaches, including anticipatory action which is sometimes framed as an example of nexus good practice. Yet the sector needs to hasten its development of systemic risk management frameworks and systems which ‘recognise, connect, and articulate interrelated risks spanning different sectors and stakeholders. It can identify and probe interrelated risks, spanning natural hazard-related disasters, climate change, violent struggle, economic insecurity, and other fragility dimensions – to which HDP nexus approaches can then respond.’ (Peters et al 2023)
- Only 6 out of 90 evaluations on nexus approaches included reference to climate or climate risk and the relationship between climate and conflict remains particularly poorly understood.

Going forward, the sector will likely see more sense- making activities, best practice guidance and evaluations to bring together evidence and learning on different definitions and approaches, particularly when it comes to evaluating the success of the nexus, or articulating what it means for programme design.

- The IASC Task Force on HDP nexus, with ALNAP and UNICEF, will be producing a review of tools and good practices as well as guidance on multiple aspects related to the nexus by the end of 2023.
- The DAC-United Nations dialogue on the nexus continues to be an active area of work between donors and UN agencies on their respective structural and funding reforms. The OECD will produce a 5-year review of the implementation of the DAC recommendation on the nexus in early 2024.

ABOUT EXplain

The greatest learning challenge for our sector is less about capturing lessons and experiences, but creating spaces for humanitarians to absorb and act on what is already known.

Operational decision makers – at all levels – are often the people with the least time to engage with vital new learning and evidence.

That's why ALNAP is piloting new approaches to communicating knowledge tailored to the needs, expectations and preferences of the busiest humanitarians.

EXplain is ALNAP's new learning experience for 2023.

- Straightforward communications to help humanitarian decision-makers make sense of, and exchange on, current evidence and discourse. Key learning and links all in one place: sourced, checked and curated by ALNAP's highly-respected global research team.
- Rich and accessible content, provided in a time efficient way, in an open peercomfortable environment.
- Bringing senior humanitarians more up to date on the latest developments, increasing awareness on the implications for their work, creating confidence as part of continuous professional development.

EXplain is an optimal mix of focused presentations, discussion and sharing of perspectives, with a range of high-quality supporting materials. It gives senior operational leaders a better understanding of what's out there and what they really need to know.

EXplain: simple communication, sense-making, exchange of experience.