



# The Triple Nexus<sup>1</sup> - Building resilience

## Introduction and Discussions

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**Introduction** *The ‘triple nexus’ is an approach that aspires to transform the way that humanitarian, development and peace activities are planned, implemented and financed in fragile situations to more effectively and coherently meet human needs, mitigate vulnerability, and promote peace – also called building resilience. While the idea of cooperation among the various actors in fragile situations is by no means new, the term - triple nexus - is new and the concept has attracted a lot of attention in recent years, not least because of the substantial increase in people affected by crises.*

*Tana Copenhagen has specialized in providing advice to clients on aid delivery in fragile situations and consequently we have followed the development of the thinking on the triple nexus with keen interest and also been part of delivering and evaluating aid – both humanitarian, development and peace-building – in situations such as Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine, Afghanistan, the Sahel, Yemen and in and around Syria.*

*In this briefing, we will present the context for the increased interest, what the international policies framing the concept say, in more detail present what the nexus means, look at some of the discussions and criticism as well as some of the challenges of implementing or operationalizing it, before concluding with a few initial lessons learned during the relatively short period in which the concept has existed.*

*We hope the briefing will be useful for actors, whether humanitarian, development or peace-building, who work in challenging and fragile situations. It focusses mainly on the principles underpinning the triple nexus that provide a basis for understanding how to work in such situations that can be complemented with readings of experiences from the field.*

<sup>1</sup> This briefing note borrows from research done by Tana for Global Affairs, Canada concerning the [Stabilization-Development Nexus](#), an [ECDPM Discussion Paper 246](#) and an article by [SIPRI](#). Other relevant references are presented as hyperlinks or footnotes in the briefing.

## 1 Context

With over one billion people living in countries affected by state fragility, conflict and/or widespread violence, improving peace and security for all remains a major political and development goal. The drastic increase over the last decade and longer in fragile situations, where conflict, deep rooted poverty, protracted crisis, and protracted displacement challenges coexist, underlines this. There have never been as many forcefully displaced people – as refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs – in the world. OECD/DAC estimates that, in 2030, 80% of the people living in extreme poverty will live in fragile situations. In addition, conflict and related crises are becoming more protracted and more complex and is worsened by climate change. Addressing these challenges should therefore be an international priority.

The [Fragile States Index for 2019](#) ranks Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan and Afghanistan as the nine most fragile countries and they are all examples of complex crises, where a triple nexus approach is necessary, but also in countries like Ukraine, Myanmar, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Jordan and Bangladesh affected by large number of IDPs and refugee such a triple nexus approach could make efforts much more effective.

## 2 Relevant international frameworks

Most importantly, the decades old paradigm of ‘No sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development’ is now enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially in [SDG16](#): “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” as agreed by the world’s leaders at the UN Summit in New York in 2015.

Early 2016 saw another important event; the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). As elaborated in the UN General Secretary’s report to the WHS, [“One humanity: shared responsibility”](#), the summit took place at a time of skyrocketing humanitarian needs, for example, in Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Myanmar, alongside a

historic shortfall in the funding required to meet them. *“Armed conflicts and other violent situations, disasters caused by natural hazards and the impacts of climate change, health threats, soaring inequality and increased fragility marked by extreme poverty and weak institutions are among the factors contributing to the unprecedented spike in humanitarian needs”* – and - it might be added - development and peacebuilding needs as well.

The [outcomes of the WHS](#) were centred around five core responsibilities: 1. Political leadership to prevent and end conflicts; 2 Uphold the norms that safeguard humanity; 3. Leave no one behind; 4. Change people’s lives: from delivering aid to ending need; and 5. Invest in humanity. Hereby committing actors to be more effective and work more collaboratively - and not only provide increased resources - to prevent and end conflicts, ‘end needs’ and build resilience.

Two of the main agreements at the summit were the [“The Grand Bargain”](#) concerning humanitarian financing, but more importantly for this context was [“The New Way of Working”](#) where the main donors and multilateral agencies committed to *“... meet people’s immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability over multiple years through the achievement of collective outcomes”*. This notion of collective outcomes is central to the New Way of Working, summarized in the [“Commitment to Action”](#).

The New Way of Working frames the work of development and humanitarian actors, along with national and local counterparts, in support of collective outcomes that reduce risk and vulnerability and serve as pathways toward achieving the SDGs. Examples of the progress of defining and monitoring collective outcomes can be found in the [Interagency Standing Committee’s reports](#). As an example; one of the four defined collective outcomes for Somalia is: “By 2022 the number of people in acute food insecurity decreases by 84 percent with GAM<sup>2</sup> rates reduced by 5% and sustained below the emergency threshold”. But a weakness of the collective outcome strategy is that there is no agreed way for the joint analyses and joint assessment necessary for defining the collective outcomes, nor is there a robust monitoring framework.

<sup>2</sup> Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) is a measure of acute malnutrition in children aged between 6 and 59 months. GAM measures the percentage of children in

this age range in a population who are classified with low weight-for-height and/or oedema.

Substantial work subsequently to the WHS went into studies of the humanitarian-development nexus not least through increased cooperation between the World Bank and UN. But given the fact that Core Commitment 1 of the WHS was (see above); “Political Leadership to prevent and end conflict” it is noteworthy that less work was done concerning the peace angle of the triple nexus. One exception was INCAF’s (The International Network on Conflict and Fragility working group under OECD/DAC) work on [“Good Development Support in Fragile States, At risk and Crisis Affected Contexts”](#) and the [“State of Fragility Report 2018”](#) and this and the work of the World Bank in cooperation with UN in [“Pathways for Peace”](#) indicates that international attention – justifiably – moved towards interventions to prevent conflict. The report describes how development processes can better interact with security, diplomacy, mediation, and other tools to prevent conflict from becoming violent. In an effort to understand ‘what works,’ it reviews the experience of different countries and institutions to highlight elements that have contributed to peace. Central to these efforts is the need to address grievances around exclusion from access to power, opportunity and security and while states hold the primary responsibility for prevention, other actors must be included, such as civil society, as well as regional and international organisations.

The main importance of this - it may be concluded - is that it is now underlined that, to be sustainable, prevention and conflict resolution can only be achieved through a political process with complementary development and humanitarian actions. It cannot be achieved by a ‘technical’ development process nor by ‘neutral’ humanitarian actions alone.

### 3 The Triple Nexus

In February, 2019, OECD/DAC published [Recommendations on the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus](#), building on the previous work by INCAF as well as the global frameworks mentioned above. It contains 11 recommendations for partners to *“implement more collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations”*.

The recommendations include:

1. Undertaking joint, risk-informed, gender-sensitive analyses of root causes and structural drivers of conflict.
2. Providing appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for coordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture.
3. Utilizing political engagement and other tools to prevent crisis, resolve conflict and build peace.
4. Prioritizing prevention, mediation and peacebuilding and investing in development whenever possible.
5. Putting people at the centre, tackling exclusion and promoting gender equality.
6. Ensuring that activities do no harm and are conflict sensitive.
7. Aligning joined-up programming with the risk environment.
8. Strengthening national and local capacities.
9. Investing in learning and evidence across the nexus.
10. Developing evidence-based humanitarian, development and peace financing strategies.
11. Using predictable, flexible, multi-year financing.

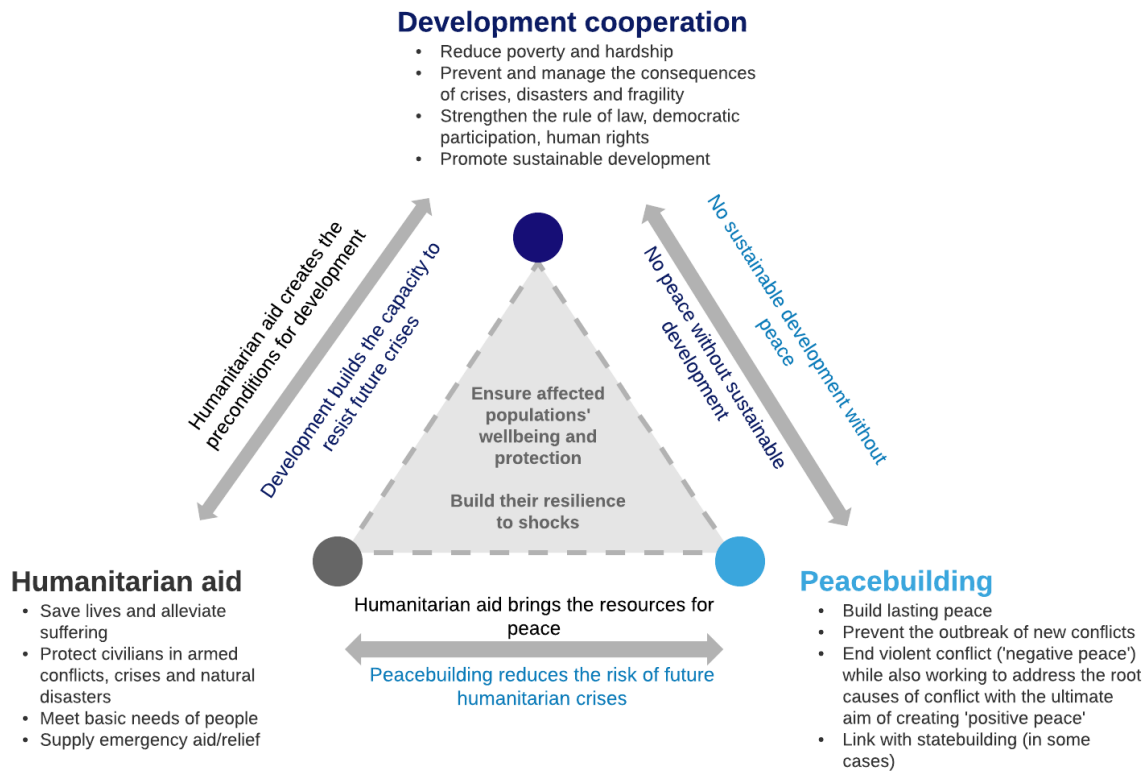
Key here are that joint analyses are the basis for collaborative work – joined-up programming - across the nexus and using political engagement, complemented with other tools, to prevent and resolve crises.

The recommendations provide clear guidance for actors in fragile situations. The challenge is how to provide clear leadership and commitment of actors to the processes, as well as to monitor these.

#### 3.1 Attempt to present the triple nexus in a figure:

There are various figures found in the literature, which attempt to present the triple nexus. One of the best is by [ecdpm](#) and is shown below. The diagram illustrates the fundamental dependencies between peace-building, development and humanitarian assistance. To this, we would add the observation that peace-building is basically a political process.

Figure 1: Triple nexus presented as a figure



### 3.2 A Possible ToC for working with triple nexus in fragile situations

As many development and humanitarian actors use a Theory of Change (ToC) approach in their work, it may also be useful to present a ToC - including pathways and assumptions - for the nexus work. Thus:

**If:**

a) International, national and local actors (humanitarian, development, security, political and diplomatic – governmental and non-governmental) come together to develop and share a joint context, conflict and risk analysis and ...

b) Based on the joint analysis the actors define a political strategy/process for delivering shared outcomes for:

- i. inclusive conflict prevention/resolution,
- ii. building the state - including of security and justice structures, based on an inclusive peace process, including civil society, private sector and relevant regional and international organisations,

- iii. livelihood and employment opportunities and
  - iv. basic social, service delivery, and humanitarian support focussing on building resilience to future shocks, and ...
- c) Local inclusive ownership of the plans is ensured through inclusive political structures e.g. national and local governments, civil society and customary institutions, and...
- d) Joint flexible, coordination, monitoring and funding mechanisms are established

**Then:**

Chances for sustainable peace and development outcomes are increased, and the foundation for meeting the SDGs is established.

## 4 Discussions and criticism

The criticisms and concerns of the triple nexus concept have mostly been voiced from persons and organisations that are part of the humanitarian community. The concerns include the following:

#### 4.1 The triple nexus compromises the humanitarian principles

Humanitarian activities are guided by the four humanitarian principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Several [humanitarian actors](#) have voiced concerns over that humanitarian assistance may be politicised by the cooperation with development and peace actors, not least because these are often seen to be close to or part of government. They see that this could result in a loss of neutrality in the eyes of local communities and potentially mean reduced access to areas in need of humanitarian assistance. Likewise, development actors also seek to strengthen state institutions, and are as such, political projects, as are security and peace interventions. Thus, for humanitarian actors, being part of such political processes may be a threat to upholding the humanitarian principles.

#### 4.2 Broad consensus is lacking

The triple nexus is theoretically expected to bring together policy frameworks across three different actors and promote joint planning for shared outcomes, but when it comes to reality of implementing the triple nexus, practitioners in the humanitarian sector point to a disconnect between high-level declarations and the reality of programming at local level. Some organizations and agencies interpret the triple nexus as an attempt to implement top-down coordination instead of a more bottom-up approach. Others see it as an attempt to train humanitarian practitioners in the methods of development and peace, and vice versa. [Assumptions](#) are being made from within each of the three types of actors about how the others operate and these ‘prejudices’ are often not being addressed.

#### 4.3 Existing funding mechanisms are incompatible with the triple nexus approach

Often funding is tied to humanitarian, development or peacebuilding activities, so there is little funding specifically for nexus programming. In particular, humanitarian funding is often ring-fenced to ensure it is used only for humanitarian purposes and is often only one-year funding, whereas development and peace programming typically is planned for multiple – three to five - years. As such, most funding mechanisms remain incompatible with the triple nexus as one of the core innovations of the triple nexus’ approach is to focus on [multi-year planning and financing](#).

While these points are legitimate concerns and calls for caution in framing the nexus properly given each specific context, they should not prevent any stakeholder from seeking greater synergy between humanitarian, development and peace activities as long as this is not at the expense of the humanitarian space and core mission. Concerning the different time-lines of funding, this is being addressed by several of the leading donors, e.g. DFID.

## 5 Challenges of implementation

One of the most important actors presently in triple nexus initiatives is the UN family. Traditionally UN agencies, funds and programmes have tended to operate as silos with distinct mandates and sometimes even competing around the borders of their mandates and especially for funding. But UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ reform initiatives to increase efforts of UN delivering as one through joint plans and programmes e.g. UNDAF (now renamed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework) and through the formation of UN Country Teams led by a [Resident Coordinator](#), who also in most countries is the humanitarian coordinator, appear to be moving the UN family in the right direction. A recent [review](#) of the New Way of Working in practice concludes that *“within the UN, specific country teams have made progress in making development and humanitarian planning more coherent, through different models of combining and linking plans. A growing number of country teams have identified “collective outcomes”—that is, concrete results that humanitarian, development, and other actors commit to achieving jointly over a multiyear period...”* and that these efforts of more coherence on the ground are being supported by new international, frameworks such as the [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and the [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework](#). But the review also stresses that progress is uneven and that often institutional funding cycles continue to drive humanitarian response planning.

Other studies<sup>3</sup> of the Global Compact on refugees point to the fact that a challenge is that the centrality of a burden and responsibility sharing among both national and international development actors is often not recognised and the leadership of the nexus planning and implementation is not clearly defined. While the World Bank Group and [EU have developed policies for nexus work](#) the burden and responsibility sharing is still often unclear and the International Financing Institutions and bilateral development partners too often leaves the leadership to humanitarian actors or the UN without providing these with necessary development funding and leadership ‘clout’ of the triple nexus planning and implementation.

An important finding of the New Way of Working review regarding peacebuilding is the increased demand from local national governments to request the UN country team to assist them in drawing security and justice actors together with development and humanitarian actors to develop a common vision of development and peacebuilding outcomes that is shared by different parts of government ( e.g. security, justice, finance and planning) and international counterparts. However, the review finds that a clear consensus on the appropriate role of the peace pillar (especially with respect to the “hard”-security component) has yet to emerge, and concerns remain about the potential for humanitarian objectives to be subordinated to security goals.

An in-depth [study](#) of the nexus application in Somalia, where almost all actors agree that the political situation warrants reforming international aid and that bridging the ‘divide’ is critical, concludes that *“silos separating sectors and disciplines in Somalia are still very much the norm”* and *“while international donors are pushing for the coordination of humanitarian, development and security and peacebuilding action as a panacea for dealing with fragile countries like Somalia, there is a mismatch between rhetoric (or ambition) and the contextual reality. There is little in the way of a ‘nexus’ on the ground in Somalia. Nor have donors changed their siloed funding windows, nor are implementing organisations ready to bridge the gap between their sectoral specialisations”*.

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<sup>3</sup> Harild, Niels V.S: *The role of bilateral development partners in supporting the humanitarian-development nexus work in respect*

The study concludes that it is becoming increasingly clear that the greatest potential for ‘success’ lies at a local level, (i.e. federal member states and districts). If Somalia become relatively stable there are good opportunities to use area-based approaches, which advocates for assistance that considers the whole population affected by a crisis – hosts as displaced - living in a specific geographic area to achieve cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination and longer-term programming at a local level. But this requires flexibility in funding and adaptive approaches to programme design and management.

There are examples of International NGOs, which has a dual humanitarian and development, who have reported relative successes in implementing the triple nexus. CARE in North Africa and Middle East [argues](#) that this was only possible when development and peace are approached as bottom-up processes, are rooted in local contexts, take place with local partnerships and make use of networks to pool resources and expertise.

## 6 Triple Nexus – initial lessons

The recent review of the New Way of Working argues that it is too early to fully evaluate the implementation of the triple nexus, as this is still an emergent approach, but the following early and initial lessons learned can be presented:

1. There appears to be an international agreement emerging that implementing the triple nexus when working in conflict affected and fragile situations is a way forward.
2. Although there has been progress among some agencies in overcoming siloed processes and competition, such issues seriously hamper the implementation of the triple nexus.
3. Leadership, burden and responsibility sharing in triple nexus planning and implementation is often not clear and by default left to humanitarian or UN actors without the necessary resources and capacities, while development actors refrain from an active participation.
4. Global policy frameworks and compacts increasingly support efforts of more

*of forced displacement. Forthcoming, Danida evaluation study.*

concerted and coherent efforts across the sectors and actors in fragile situations such as promoted by the triple nexus.

5. Advancing the triple nexus approach should address valid concerns about potential impact on the humanitarian principles.
6. Shared analysis of the needs, risks, vulnerabilities and root causes of conflict would be an important step towards increased coherence and would support collaborative efforts across the triple nexus.
7. While collaborative efforts at international, regional and national levels are important for

facilitating cooperation between humanitarian, development and peace actors, the practical implementation of a local area based approach seems to be a practical way of creating bottom-up defined concrete outcomes.

8. Further work is required to define the scope and purpose of the approach and its mechanisms. This should include better understanding of respective roles across the sectors and where a division of labour, or even integrated actions, can be pursued.

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