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Connecting the pieces of the puzzle: THE EU'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS

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Development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors are increasingly called upon to work together to address protracted and complex crises and strengthen community resilience, building on their comparative advantages. This 'triple nexus' between humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and development has become a critical component of international efforts. For the European Union, the nexus will become even more relevant in the context of the programming of its new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)–Global Europe, and a post-COVID-19 world.

Development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors face challenges to implement the triple nexus and to align their approaches. This paper helps them understand the EU's thinking on and approach to the triple nexus, to find effective ways to work together while respecting each other's mandates.

A triple nexus approach means interactions at the EU institutional or headquarters level as well as with international partners, vertical exchanges between funding institutions and the field, and horizontal exchanges at field level. We outline a number of principles that can guide these complex interactions effectively and address implementation challenges.

We also offer guidance on how actors at headquarters and field level can implement the nexus throughout the different support phases, highlighting the building blocks of a triple nexus approach. Operationalising the triple nexus requires experimentation and creativity, as well as a good dose of pragmatism. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but, ultimately, working in an integrated way will require changes in mentalities and ways of working, as well as learning from experiences in other contexts. Moreover, it is key to always maintain a people-centered approach.

Table of Contents

List of Boxes

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

BBB	Building Back Better
CHA	Centre for Humanitarian Action
COHAFA	Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid
CPPB	Conflict prevention and peacebuilding
CSF	Conflict Sensitivity Facility
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships (formerly DG DEVCO, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development)
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FPI	Service for the Foreign Policy Instruments
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HQ	Headquarters
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IHL	International humanitarian law
JHDF	Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	Nexus Response Mechanism
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPBA	Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment
RSF	Regional Stabilization Facility

RSS	Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UN	United Nations
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Executive Summary

This note was produced to promote an exchange of views among Member States in the COHAFA on the operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) or 'triple nexus' approach, as well as to provide an accessible document to the EU's institutional partners working in peacebuilding, development and humanitarian assistance on the EU's thinking and conceptual understanding of it. As both these groups and the EU are increasingly challenged by the need to work together more closely, it is important for all actors involved (including non-governmental actors) to understand their respective efforts in implementing the triple nexus and how best to interact with each other in this regard. This note is based on desk research of expert analysis on the nexus and it complements the EU's internal efforts in providing guidance on the operationalisation of the triple nexus. It lays out the rationale for a triple nexus approach and sheds light on the different dynamics and challenges to be considered at field level, at headquarters and between these two levels.

The triple nexus approach refers to the objective of strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace actors (the three 'pillars' of the nexus), in an effort to strengthen the **resilience** of communities and support **prevention** efforts. The approach seeks to capitalise on the comparative advantages of each pillar to the extent of their relevance in a specific context and in line with each actor's mandate and principles. The nexus is a critical component of international efforts to tackle growing fragility trends and protracted conflicts globally and it brings valuable opportunities to change existing approaches and have a transformational impact on the ground. These efforts become even more relevant in a post-COVID-19 world.

In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted recommendations on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to provide a comprehensive framework able to incentivise and implement more collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations (see Annex). These recommendations are key in terms of providing a 'common language' and 'rules of the game' to the different actors implementing the triple nexus in a given country (EU, NGOs, international partners).

We highlight exchanges and interactions at three levels when designing and implementing the triple nexus approach, each bringing along its own challenges and opportunities:

- There are interactions at the **institutional or headquarters level**, meaning the intra-EU institutional exchanges, as well as those between the EU and the Member States. Each institutional actor has its own policies and instruments that ideally should complement each other when applying a triple nexus approach.
- There are also **vertical** exchanges, which concern the interactions **between funding institutions and the field at large**. EU delegations, Member States' embassies, agencies and (international) non-governmental organisations ((I)NGOs) have their respective tasks and accountability mechanisms, experiences and ways of working.
- Finally, there are the **horizontal** exchanges at field level, namely the interactions **between institutional representatives and implementers** on the ground and their relationships and interactions with local and national government institutions and international partners.

Taking account of these different exchanges and interactions and trying to manage their interconnectedness comes with challenges but has also the potential of mobilising synergies that need to be explored and harvested.

There are a number of principles to consider when a triple nexus approach is put into practice, namely:

- **A context-specific engagement:** some contexts are more conducive to the alignment of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding than others.

- The **do-no-harm** principle and a **conflict-sensitive** approach are the foundation of the nexus and need to be applied throughout the entire process of designing, planning and implementing the triple nexus approach.
- **Promoting EU added value:** the EU's implementation of the triple nexus aims to closely involve EU Member States, building on the Working Better Together and Team Europe approaches, as well as relevant international and local stakeholders at country level.
- **Engagement via a well-articulated but flexible intervention logic:** based on consultations for a shared understanding of the objectives in a given country or context, **a clear, well-articulated but nevertheless flexible intervention logic based on a theory of change** should ideally be designed.
- **Cross-cutting issues:** throughout the engagement, there is a need to pay attention to cross-cutting issues with a focus on gender, environment and human rights.
- **Division of labour:** the very nature of the triple nexus is based on a multi-actor approach requiring intense interaction and coordination, as well as a clear division of roles and responsibilities based on each actor's comparative advantages, capacities and resources.
- **Respecting the principles and mandates of the different actors involved:** humanitarian, development and peace actors have their own mandates, principles, interlocutors, programmes, procedures and methods. These should be respected while they join up constructively in a people-centered approach.

This note also discusses the challenges specifically related to the peace element of the triple nexus vis-à-vis humanitarian principles, an aspect generally seen as posing the greatest challenges to the implementation of the nexus. There are particular concerns related to the protection of humanitarian principles. But the note also discusses overarching challenges to the operationalisation of the nexus in all its aspects. These include amongst others the risk of disconnects between field realities and triple nexus approaches conceived at HQ level, the limited capacity for solid context/conflict analysis and the lack of adequate resources and incentives to implement collaborative approaches. Taking the triple nexus approach forward is ultimately about making the whole system think and work differently, which presents considerable challenges beyond the debates happening at HQ level among donors and the NGO community.

We end the paper by providing some guidelines for the different actors involved in the nexus at field and HQ level concerning:

- **Getting started**

Before operationalising the triple nexus (joint analysis and planning phase), the different actors involved need to have a common understanding of the objectives and priorities in a given country, as well as a clear division of labour and accompanying coordination mechanisms.

- **The operationalisation of the nexus as an inclusive process**

Including and building the capacities of local partners (beyond other international partners present on the ground) is a crucial element to consider when implementing the nexus, as they have valuable expertise and should be in the driving seat in the response, so as to foster resilience.

- **Ensuring flexible funding to implement the nexus**

Funding is crucial to the success of the nexus, as siloed budgets and a lack of flexibility often hamper operationalisation on the ground. There are a number of approaches and innovations that can be considered to allow for more synergies and complementarities between the different aspects of the nexus, including more flexible funding mechanisms underpinned by adaptive approaches to programme design and management or pooled funding mechanisms. The role of the Team Europe approach, which pools resources from the EU institutions, the Member States, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

(EBRD) and European development agencies, in the operationalisation of the triple nexus also needs to be explored further.

- **Organisational change, resources and incentives**

Beyond tools and instruments, organisational change and training/capacity building for staff are paramount for a successful operationalisation of the nexus, to ensure that nexus work is institutionalised rather than personality-driven. Resources are required for such capacity building.

- **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and lessons learnt**

There is a need to learn more from various experiences (both good practices and failures) to enable the triple nexus approach to be rolled out in other contexts. A knowledge base needs to be built around country-led processes to operationalise the triple nexus in different contexts to allow for cross-fertilisation of experiences.

1. Introduction

Building on the 2019 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the triple nexus (OECD 2019, see Annex), the EU is strengthening its internal efforts to reinforce the linkages between its humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding and development efforts. This orientation note is written for actors both inside and outside the EU's institutional and operational context. First, it framed a discussion and facilitated an exchange of views among EU Member States in the COHAFA. Second, it is addressed to the EU's international peacebuilding, development and humanitarian partners. This includes multilateral and bilateral organisations (such as development agencies) as well as (I)NGOs, which are increasingly challenged by the need to work more closely together so that humanitarian aid, peace efforts and development assistance are better linked and can reinforce each other – the essence of what is called the *triple nexus*. This note aims to make these actors more familiar with the EU's thinking and conceptual understanding around the triple nexus and how the EU institutions envisage to promote it to make their engagement in protracted crisis, climate-related emergencies and conflict contexts more effective.

Section 2 lays out the EU's efforts in implementing the nexus so far and the rationale for a triple nexus approach. Section 3 then sheds light on the operational principles to be considered, the specific challenges related to the peace element of the nexus and some of the common challenges to be considered at field level, at headquarters and between these two levels. Sections 4, 5 and 6 dive into the various practical issues that need to be recognised and the steps to be followed when implementing the nexus approach, namely joint context analysis; joint planning; coordination mechanisms; the use of flexible funding mechanisms; adaptive management; technical capacities and finally, M&E, lessons learnt and good practices. Several references to practical experiences concerning the implementation of the triple nexus concept are included. The last section provides some guidelines for the different actors involved in the nexus at field and HQ level.

2. A call for a triple nexus approach

The international community is facing increasingly complex and protracted crises, as well as the massive humanitarian consequences of conflicts and disasters, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the United Nations (UN) Global Humanitarian Overview (2021), the number of people in need has increased nearly four-fold over the past decade, from 62 million in 2012 to an expected 235 million in 2021 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) 2021). New approaches are urgently needed, as these developments result in a steadily growing funding gap for humanitarian action. The **March 2021 European Commission Communication on 'the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles'** raised the alarm and called for more integrated approaches while respecting humanitarian principles (European Commission 2021).

In this context, strict distinctions between sectors are less and less relevant. The EU has been advocating a more integrated approach between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and political engagement over the past 20 years – but not without conceptual, political and institutional challenges. Building on the Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) Communication in 1996, which departed from a rather linear approach to the linkages between humanitarian and development assistance, the EU has sought to implement the nexus by developing an extensive policy framework over the past 10 years:

- 2012 Communication on the EU approach to resilience;

- 2016 Communication on Forced Displacement and Development ('Lives in Dignity: from Aid-dependence to Self-reliance');
- 2016 A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy;
- 2017 The New European Consensus on Development;
- 2017 Communication on a Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action; and
- 2017 The Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises.

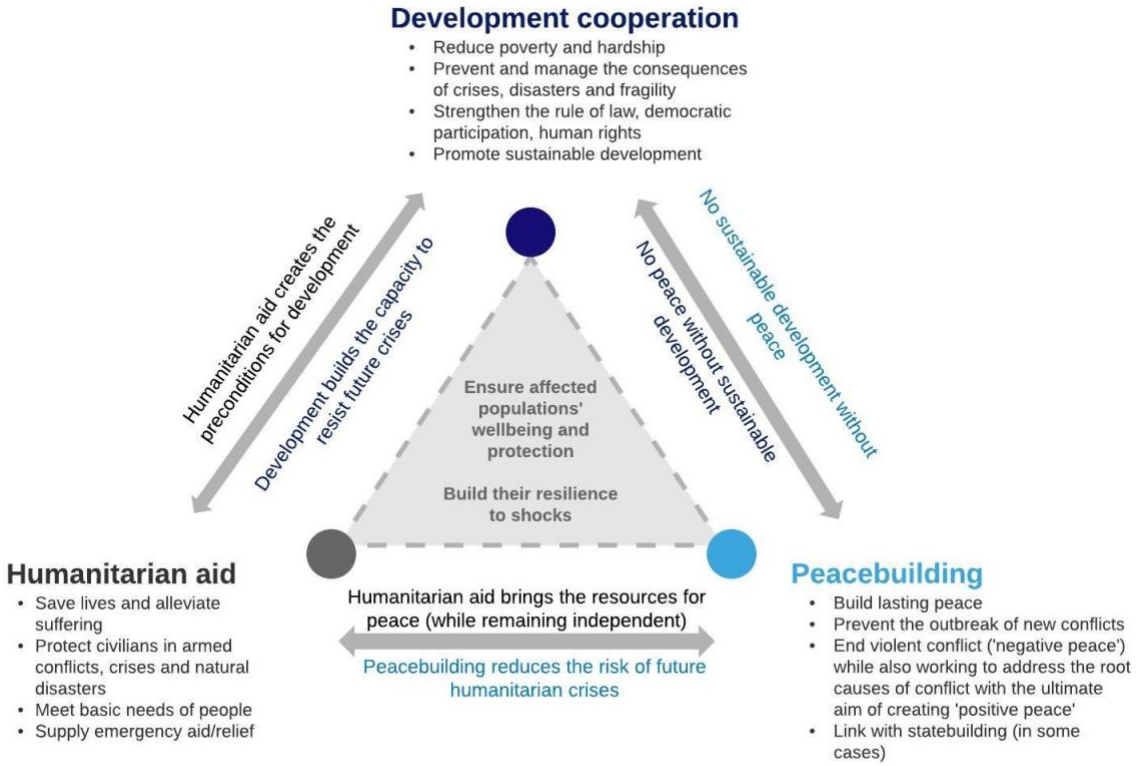
Following the adoption in 2017 of **'Council Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus'**, six **pilot countries** were selected by the Commission in consultation with Member States, namely, Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Myanmar and Iraq, to further operationalise the nexus by systematising cooperation and enhancing the use of best practices and the generation of evidence (Council of the EU 2017).[1] The Council extended the humanitarian-development nexus to the 'triple nexus' by adding the peace element in 2018 (European Commission 2020). The EU's piloting of the triple nexus originates from its own learnings, which complement efforts at the international level to move towards a new way of working, such as the above-mentioned **2019 OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus** (see Annex).

Most recently, the above-mentioned March 2021 **European Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action** committed the EU to step up its work to link humanitarian relief with development and peacebuilding, recognising that humanitarian aid is not designed as a long-term solution to the needs of people impacted by crises (European Commission 2021). The ensuing Council Conclusions on the EU's humanitarian action welcoming the Communication affirmed the need for a more consistent and effective implementation and operationalisation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach (Council of the EU 2021a).

Three rationales inform EU (but also global) triple nexus initiatives. **First, development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors all have the same broad objective**, namely to contribute to the protection and well-being of affected populations and to improve their resilience to external and internal shocks (see figure 1). Structural and transformative development and peacebuilding are often possible and necessary to achieve lasting peace and avoid the occurrence of humanitarian needs (OECD 2019). Prevention is thus at the heart of the triple nexus and it binds the three pillars. **Second**, **humanitarian, development, and – where appropriate – peace and security actors are more effective and have a more lasting positive impact**, particularly in protracted crises, when they coordinate their efforts instead of operating in silos (International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) 2017). **Finally**, **for target communities, the distinction between humanitarian, development and peace and security efforts is artificial.** Fragmentation based on the way donors organise resources undermines their capacity to fulfil the interconnected needs of vulnerable people (Murphy 2018). Thus, capitalising on the comparative advantages of each pillar – to the extent of their relevance in the specific context – has the potential to reduce vulnerability and the number of unmet needs and address the root causes of conflict (OECD 2019).

[1] Joint humanitarian-development-peace frameworks are also in place in response to the Syria crisis in Lebanon and Jordan.

Figure 1: Linkages between development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding



Source: Adapted from Medinilla et al. 2019.

Yet, despite a strong EU normative framework, a lack of clear and common understanding of what the 'nexus' is supposed to achieve and how it should be implemented in different contexts remains a bottleneck. One of the challenges to the operationalisation of the nexus concerns the need to recognise the specificity of the humanitarian mandate and principles and the need to keep it separate from broader (geo-)political objectives. Both the necessity to work in a more integrated way and principled humanitarian action have to be contextualised in the reality on the ground, which is often more complex, despite good intentions, than the policies designed in headquarters.

There will be an even greater push for collaboration to deal with the humanitarian and developmental consequences of COVID-19 (as well as its consequences on stability), as the EU, its Member States and multilateral and other relevant actors at headquarters and on the ground will have a role to play in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, in line with the 'build back better and greener' approach.[2] COVID-19 has been a strong driver behind the **Team Europe approach**, which aims to leverage the collective resources of the EU institutions, Member States and their implementing agencies, development finance institutions, the EIB and the EBRD, and enhance coordination and coherence. As underlined by the March 2021 European Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action, there is scope and urgency to leverage the EU's and Member States' collective impact by coordinating efforts and ensuring complementarity and by promoting a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. Council Conclusions on Team Europe in April 2021 called upon Team Europe to continue responding jointly to the crisis, taking into full consideration the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the integrated approach (Council of

[2] Building Back Better (BBB) is a strategy aimed at reducing the risk to the people of nations and communities in the wake of future disasters and shocks. It was first officially described in the United Nations' Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015 and has since then been massively used as a narrative globally for the post-COVID-19 recovery.

the EU 2021b). Similarly, an April 2021 European Parliament report on the role of the EU's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic insisted that the momentum gained from the common Team Europe approach in terms of joint analysis, joint programming and joint implementation must translate into a new standard for cooperation in the fields of humanitarian aid and development policy, both in law and in practice (European Parliament 2021).

3. Principles and challenges to be considered

We highlight exchanges and interactions at three levels when designing and implementing the triple nexus approach, each bringing along its own challenges and opportunities:

- There are interactions at the **institutional or headquarters level**, meaning the intra-EU institutional exchanges, as well as those between the EU and the Member States. Each institutional actor has its own policies and instruments that ideally should complement each other when applying a triple nexus approach.
- There are also **vertical** exchanges, which concern the interactions **between funding institutions and the field at large**. EU delegations, Member States' embassies, agencies and (I)NGOs have their respective tasks and accountability mechanisms, experiences and ways of working.
- Finally, there are **horizontal** exchanges at field level, namely the interactions **between institutional representatives and implementers** on the ground and their relationships and interactions with local and national government institutions and international partners.

Taking account of these different exchanges and interactions and trying to manage their interconnectedness comes with challenges but has also the potential of mobilising synergies that need to be explored and harvested.

Above all, **there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach**, but collaborative action provides possibilities for a more effective engagement to the benefit of those in need – a leading idea which should never be taken off the table. Bearing this in mind, this section outlines some principles for and challenges to the operationalisation of the triple nexus.

3.1. Key principles and considerations

- **A context-specific engagement**
  A context-specific and country-led implementation of the triple nexus is indispensable, as some contexts are more conducive to the alignment of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding than others (OECD 2019). This calls for a clear understanding of the context based on mutual exchange and analysis of the stakeholders involved in decision making and implementation. A targeted joint analysis is preferable to a standard tick-box exercise that could replicate failed strategies. This can lead to a more ambitious approach in some contexts, while in others a more modest engagement might be advisable.

- **Do no harm**
  The do-no-harm principle and a conflict-sensitive approach are the foundation of the nexus and need to be applied throughout the entire process of planning and implementing the triple nexus approach. Similar to all interventions in international cooperation, the EU's assistance (including humanitarian aid) has intended and unintended consequences and an impact on the local context and dynamics. For example, providing humanitarian aid to displaced populations while not caring for the needs of close-by local communities creates tensions. Interventions can also affect political dynamics and economic relations, which explains the need for a suitable analysis of the conflict context and a good understanding of the interaction between the intervention and the context. The extent to which the government should be engaged, for instance, depends

greatly on the context. It is indispensable to act upon this understanding, so as to minimise negative impacts and, where possible and appropriate, maximise positive impacts (OECD 2019).

- **Conflict sensitivity**
  The triple nexus needs to be designed and implemented in a conflict-sensitive manner. There is a push within the EU for more conflict-sensitive action. With the creation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) - 'Global Europe' – the new EU instrument for external action – the EU has indeed stipulated that, for countries and regions in crisis or post-crisis and for fragile and vulnerable situations, a conflict analysis needs to be conducted to inform the programming. A conflict-sensitive assessment was tested in one of the EU's pilot countries for the triple nexus, **Uganda** (see Box 1), and seen as a positive step to avoid unintended negative impacts on peace and conflict dynamics ('do no harm'), while maximising the positive impact on sustainable peace. Various funding agencies are testing approaches to strengthen conflict sensitivity, such as the UK in **Sudan** (see Box 1) which is also one of the EU's pilot countries for the triple nexus.

Box 1: Piloting a conflict-sensitive approach in Eastern Africa

Uganda: The EU and the Member States conducted a joint conflict sensitivity assessment of the refugee situation in Uganda, through a participatory approach, which built on extensive work conducted by civil society organisations on conflict sensitivity in Uganda. After identifying the root causes of tensions and risks for violence, the role(s) of different actors, the conflict and gender dynamics at play, and the capacities to prevent violence and build peace, the civil society organisations provided recommendations to the EU on how to improve the conflict sensitivity of its current approach and assess options for further engagement in a nexus way. These recommendations fed into the joint EU-Member States analysis.

Sudan: The Conflict Sensitivity Facility (CSF), funded by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for a pilot period of one year, was established in 2021 to support donors and implementing agencies in Sudan to be more conflict sensitive. In doing so, the intention is to help organisations focused on delivering humanitarian and development assistance to avoid unintentionally feeding conflict, and maximise their potential contribution to peace, through innovative approaches, relevant analysis, safe spaces for discussing complex dilemmas, sharing learning and targeted capacity support. It acknowledges the fact that, despite growing awareness and interest in conflict sensitivity, many donors, aid organisations and coordination mechanisms do not have adequate systems, tools and policies. Moreover, humanitarian and development aid workers lack the time, knowledge or resources to invest in a sufficient understanding of the context and to understand how to provide aid in a more conflict-sensitive way. Ultimately, the facility is based on the premise that conflict sensitivity support is more effective when it drives a cultural shift in how aid workers think about their work and the country where they are working.

Sources: EC and EEAS internal information and CSF Sudan

- **EU added value**
  The EU's objectives in response to a given crisis should be decided in close consultation with the EU Member States, building on the **Working Better Together** and **Team Europe** approaches, pulling together Member States' expertise, comparative advantages and resources. Member States can indeed play an important role in terms of leveraging the operationalisation of the nexus. The EU should also involve all relevant international and local stakeholders at country level from the very start of the process when implementing the nexus, i.e. early on in a crisis, whether through joint needs assessments, studies, workshops or facilitation.

- **Engagement via a well-articulated but flexible intervention logic**
  These consultations for a shared understanding of the objectives in a given country should ideally lead to **a clear, well-articulated but nevertheless flexible intervention logic based on a theory of change**. The intervention logic and theory of change need to be formulated as inclusively as possible and adapted to changing contextual circumstances. They also need to consider cross-cutting issues with a focus on gender, environment and human rights. A gender analysis for a better understanding of the risks of exploitation and abuse, and the do-no-harm approach to formulate the intervention logic, are part of the process.

- **Division of labour**
  The very nature of the triple nexus concept is based on a multi-actor approach requiring intense interaction, coordination and mutual support and collaboration. A clear division of roles and responsibilities (both geographically and thematically) based on each actor's comparative advantages, capacities and resources is an important starting point for the rest of the process to be successful. Clarifying this division of labour right from the start is therefore essential.

- **Respecting the principles and mandates of the different actors involved**
  Humanitarian, development and peace actors have their own mandates, principles, interlocutors, programmes, procedures and methods. Development cooperation for instance prioritises ownership of the partner country and alignment with its strategies, while humanitarian assistance is based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, which are central to establishing and maintaining humanitarian access and providing assistance and protection according to needs. These should be respected while all actors join up constructively in a people-centred approach.

3.2. Clarifying the peace dimension in the triple nexus

It is worth reflecting on the peace element of the nexus (and on the roles of the respective actors more generally – see Box 2), as it is generally seen as posing the greatest challenge for the implementation of the nexus. The triple nexus builds on the humanitarian-development nexus, which was promoted by the EU earlier and is much better established. As the nexus was implemented in a lot of conflict- and crisis-ridden environments, civil society actors have repeatedly emphasised the importance of jointly clarifying the 'peace element' of the humanitarian-development nexus among EU institutions and how it is meant to be achieved by humanitarian, peacebuilding and development actors in different contexts (Thomas 2019).[3] This call stems from fears in the humanitarian community that humanitarian principles might be compromised by more political objectives. As was informally suggested by peacebuilding actors consulted in the context of producing this document, a Consensus for Peace, similar to the consensuses on Humanitarian Aid and on Development, could bring more clarity and would be welcomed in this context.

[3] The external evaluation of EU support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding (CPPB) (2013-2017) also recommended clarifying the EU's ambition and conceptual framework for CPPB and promoting it across all EU institutional actors dealing with external action (Particip 2020).

Box 2: A commentary on the roles of the respective triple nexus actors

'While development and peacebuilding have a natural overlap, many humanitarians have long resisted calls to embrace peacebuilding as part of their work. And yet most humanitarian interventions are at least partly needed because of conflict. This challenge needs to be addressed as a major priority. Meanwhile, too many peacebuilders misunderstand the genuine challenges humanitarians face, in integrating peacebuilding into their frame of reference. So there are bridges to be built from both sides.'

Comment from Phil Vernon on appointment of the new UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, 13 May 2021.

Sources: Vernon 2021.

Achieving a common understanding of what 'peace' means with all actors involved is paramount. Yet getting associated with political or security actors can become problematic for humanitarian staff and undermine the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence**. International humanitarian law (IHL) cannot be compromised and is therefore a key element of the nexus in conflict settings.** Civil society actors have shown, however, that it is possible to do 'nexus work' without clashing with humanitarian principles, depending on how peace is defined and the context.

The peace element is necessary to promote development: it is the one element that binds the loose parts of a transformative process together to navigate out of conflict, crisis and fragility. A distinction needs to be made between achieving **'positive peace'** (i.e. to address underlying structural drivers of conflict, strengthen positive state-society relationships and achieve human security) – which can be supported by conflict prevention, diplomacy, mediation or peacebuilding – and '**negative peace**' or the absence of active violence, which can be supported through **stabilisation** or support to **security**. While the absence of violence is important in the short term, sustainable peace can only be achieved through addressing the root causes of conflict and genuine conflict transformation while operating in a conflict-sensitive way. A difference can also be made between '**Peace**' (achieved by high-level diplomacy and political dialogue) and '**peace**' at community level. It is crucial to show that 'peace' in the EU implementation of the triple nexus is not only about peacekeeping or support to security sector reform, but also about **human security,** so as to alleviate concerns in the humanitarian community. The ways of contributing to peace can take many different forms and do not take away from the core mandate of humanitarians. The comfort zone for humanitarian actors lies in 'soft' peace and support to community-based dynamics. The triple nexus is about understanding that all actors are working towards a shared goal and how humanitarian action can contribute to local resilience and capacities for peace – it is about 'plugging long-term ambitions in short-term assistance'.

Based on a shared understanding of 'positive peace' at the local community level, promoting the integration of the peace element in the nexus may encourage stronger support for humanitarian action. It is vital to take into account humanitarian aspects at the level of peace, while high-level diplomacy and political dialogue is also crucial. The structural causes or risks of conflict are often political in nature, hence the importance of addressing root causes and acknowledging the political dynamics in these contexts. Political/diplomatic engagement may need to be mobilised to advocate for humanitarian access, or to initiate a dialogue on the need to respect IHL. Furthermore, peace actors' comprehensive context analyses revealing obstacles and capacities for peace often also reveal humanitarian and development needs and priorities and can thus be useful for humanitarian and development actors. This is where synergies and complementarities can be found. Yet it is also worth noting that certain (extreme) contexts – in which the government is completely absent (or party to the conflict) and cannot guarantee access and delivery of services – call for humanitarian aid to be provided alone, on a transitional basis, to help people in need.

In summary, the EU can maximise the impact of its actions in support of peace by using existing policies and instruments in a coordinated and synergetic way. This is in line with the integrated approach to conflicts and crises as outlined in the EU Global Strategy (2016).

3.3. Steps to be taken to operationalise the nexus

The triple nexus clearly provides opportunities for improving the implementation of humanitarian, peacebuilding and development work on the ground. But implementing the triple nexus approach, which is still in its early stages, does not come without challenges, as lessons learnt from Somalia show (see Box 3). Being aware of those challenges is of paramount importance because collaborating across the three areas takes extra effort. The following list of potential bottlenecks and challenges, representing only a selection of what can obstruct a successful triple nexus approach, highlights what needs to be addressed:

- **Avoid a purely top-down approach:** There is a need to address the actual problems on the ground beyond simply following broad policy directives. **Considering field views and realities** is thus crucial, as research has shown that disconnects can exist between the approaches conceived at HQ level (e.g. EU institutions with the inputs of Member States' policies), which are aimed at a better integration of humanitarian, development and peace action, and the actual implementation in the field, exemplified by the realities faced by practitioners on the ground (Medinilla et al. 2019). The intervention logic needs to be informed by and tailored to the needs and objectives on the ground.
- **Reduce barriers to the implementation of the triple nexus:** Actors involved in implementing the nexus need to see an interest in it and not see it as just another task. Practitioners so far tend to see the nexus as a **mere bureaucratic requirement imposed by headquarters**, adding to their administrative burdens without matching the complex realities on the ground (Medinilla et al. 2019). This is where **institutional and administrative incentives** play an important role: there is a strong need for an incentive system that is geared towards collaborative action, joint analysis and strategy (Medinilla et al. 2016).
- **Enhance capacity for context and conflict analysis:** So far, there has been **limited capacity for solid context/conflict analysis in EU delegations**, despite the need to systematise joint conflict analyses across the different humanitarian, development and political departments of EU delegations and ECHO offices on the ground (e.g. through regular joint missions and exchange of information) (Medinilla et al. 2016; Particip 2020). Context/conflict analysis now forms part of the EU's programming cycle and, where possible, should be done jointly. This requirement needs to be flanked with adequate support measures for EU delegation staff and teams on how to conduct such a context/conflict analysis. The EU delegation in Myanmar, for example, has started to work successfully with such a support measure.
- **The nexus is not a technical question nor simply a policy issue**: Tools (such as joint analysis) are not enough in themselves to secure change. Despite the consensus in favour of the triple nexus and numerous policy frameworks, institutional realities show **that the discursive commitment is not always matched by the resources, leadership and enthusiasm needed to operationalise the triple nexus**. A different approach to planning, and ultimately funding, is required (see section 5).

Box 3: Lessons from Somalia

Somalia's context is very specific as foreign assistance is part of a fragile equilibrium and humanitarian and development aid is critical to political stability. Somalia's network of funders for humanitarian aid, peacebuilding and development is a dense maze of foreign and regional donors, UN agencies, NGOs and implementing organisations.

There is a tendency for **path dependency**, meaning that agencies, NGOs and implementing organisations tend to focus on specialisation and the effective delivery of assistance, but often only in their respective domains. In some cases, they are keener to maintain their niches in the Somali aid environment than to pursue the most pragmatic responses to the needs of beneficiaries.

While international organisations have started to promote the coordination of humanitarian, development and security and peacebuilding action in the country, there is still a **mismatch between rhetoric (or ambition) and the contextual reality**. Funding organisations have not changed their siloed funding approach and implementing organisations lack incentives to bridge the gap between their sectoral specialisations.

Most actors agree that the current political situation warrants reforming or even redirecting international support, but this consensus has not always been followed by sufficient reflection on the **interests and incentives** at work in the international support community that can either drive or block different ways of working.

Localising the triple nexus, connecting it with local governance initiatives and involving community leadership offers opportunities. For a long time, much energy and investment has gone into planning top-down processes in Somalia, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that the greatest potential for 'success' lies at a local level, (i.e. federal member states and districts). But this requires seeing Somalia in a different light (beyond the seemingly endless state of crisis and humanitarian dependence), flexibility in funding and adaptive approaches to programme design and management.

Source: Medinilla et al. 2019.

4. Building blocks of a triple nexus approach

This section dives into the initial steps needed when implementing a triple nexus approach, namely joint analysis, joint planning and coordination. These are fundamental steps to guarantee aligned objectives and ensure that adequate structures and mechanisms are in place before implementation. They need to involve all relevant actors at country level.

4.1. Joint context analysis

EU partners (multilateral and bilateral organisations, (I)NGOs, etc.) need to know that **joint programming** is now the 'preferred approach' for EU country programming for 2021-2027. While this mainly concerns the collaboration and programming between the EU and its Member States, there is a genuine will in the EU institutions to follow an inclusive process and to work more jointly with a variety of stakeholders both at country and HQ levels (partner countries' governments, civil society organisations, local authorities, the private sector, non-EU donors, the UN, international financial institutions, etc.) in this new round of programming. This is important for both the joint conflict/context analysis and joint planning (see next section).

Joint context analysis is a necessary first step for developing a shared understanding of the context among the actors involved in the nexus. Systematic context analyses carried out jointly by humanitarian, development and peace actors are paramount for identifying risks, needs, vulnerabilities, potential conflict dynamics, underlying causes, coping capacities and resilience at different levels.

There is a strong rationale for the joint context analysis to be multi-stakeholder and carried out in an inclusive way:

- The proactive participation and strong involvement of **EU Member States** and relevant **EU services** (EEAS, DG INTPA, DG NEAR, FPI, ECHO), **both in headquarters and in the field,** based on a clear division of labour and clear coordination mechanisms upfront, are paramount for leverage. Knowledge in headquarters can feed into the analysis, but a context-specific implementation requires the drive to come from the field level whereby the EU delegations play a lead role.
- The inclusion of **local actors and affected populations, civil society, NGOs, government structures** (at national and decentralised levels, insofar as they exist) is crucial to avoid a top-down EU engagement. Identifying conflict drivers starts at the local level and the role of local expertise and knowledge as well as the involvement of communities at this stage of generating the analysis are thus paramount. Yet local actors should be involved in a meaningful way in ongoing dialogue and, if possible, in monitoring mechanisms.
- **Other regional and international actors, including the African sub-regional organisations and the UN,** can be relevant informers and provide useful resources. The Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA) – supported by the EU, the UN and the World Bank – is a concrete example of how to operationalise the triple nexus.
- Innovative partnerships with the **private sector** can advance the triple nexus and should be actively pursued when appropriate. For example, private sector actors might have privileged access to different conflicting parties not available to other actors.

In addition to consulting these actors, there is a rationale when conducting a joint context analysis to **consider past interventions,** so as to draw lessons (e.g. the extent to which they were conflict-sensitive) and to **map relevant ongoing interventions by partners** in the domains of security, political and diplomatic relations, humanitarian aid and development, so that synergies can be sought. The joint analysis should be updated on a regular basis so as to remain useful and relevant.

4.2. Joint planning and programming

Joint planning follows joint analysis and is ideally done between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors involved to ensure coherence, complementarity and synergy among them. **Joint planning is an essential step towards operationalisation as it can help foster coherence and coordination** between development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors, both at HQ and field level. Joint planning takes place principally as a horizontal process at field level. Interactions with headquarters take place regularly but mostly in support of this horizontal process.

Joint context analysis and strategic planning feed into the **EU's common Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus Action Plan** at country and regional level.[4] This document, which ideally is formulated under the lead of the national/local authorities, takes into account knowledge, experiences and lessons learnt from past engagements and defines collective outcomes to which different stakeholders can contribute while operating according to their respective mandates and objectives.[5] To this end, the HDP Nexus Action Plan ideally defines a division of labour under the overall lead of the local authorities and/or government for the respective activities and coordination mechanisms to make implementation work. Areas of intervention (both geographic and thematic), possible implementation mechanisms and an indicative schedule are spelt out, as are the contributions of the stakeholders involved based on each actor's capacities and resources.[6] The Action Plan also takes into account complementarities and synergies with other actors, i.e. international and regional actors, civil society and local actors. It should be easily adapted if the situation changes.

It should also be ensured that such an action plan does not end up 'in the drawer' but is used by all actors involved and integrated with other planning and programming processes in the country, so as to avoid making it an additional bureaucratic requirement or 'tick--box' exercise. For this to happen, leadership and ownership at field level (including across sections in EU delegations), as well as – ideally – country leadership need to be solicited.

For the EU, the operationalisation of the triple nexus and the overall nexus Action Plan need to be linked as much as possible to the **programming of the above-mentioned NDICI for 2021-2027**. All relevant EU services are involved in this NDICI programming process, which represents an opportunity to create synergies (including through the Team Europe initiatives[7] and joint programming) and, ultimately, deliver on the nexus. As underlined by the European Parliament in an April 2021 report on the role of the EU's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus has to be a priority in the programming of the NDICI-Global Europe in fragile countries (European Parliament 2021).[8]

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4 The formulation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Action Plan at country and regional level is a new initiative by the EU. Experiences gained from the EU Joint Humanitarian-Development Framework (JHDF), designed a few years ago, will need to be drawn on when implementing the HDP Action Plan.

5 The OECD-DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus defines a collective outcome as 'a commonly agreed measurable result or impact enhanced by the combined effort of different actors, within their respective mandates, to address and reduce people's unmet needs, risks and vulnerabilities, increasing their resilience and addressing the root causes of conflict' (OECD 2019). Collective outcomes can first be defined internally between the relevant EU services but whenever relevant and possible, other actors (Member States, like-minded partners, civil society) should also be involved.

6 This should include a discussion about exit strategies for humanitarians with development and political actors right from the start.

7 Team Europe initiatives are the flagships of the Team Europe approach, guided by the political and policy priorities of the EU. They aim to support transformational change by delivering concrete results for partner countries, making the EU and its Member States the partner of reference in a priority area. They draw on a mix of funding/support modalities, tools and partners and get support both from the EU budget and from EU Member States and European development finance institutions.

8 The Parliament called on the Commission's DG ECHO, DG INTPA and DG NEAR to implement complementary programmes suited to local contexts and local opportunities, whenever possible, in order to mutually reinforce the different aspects of the nexus (European Parliament 2021).

Good timing is essential to make an effective link between joint planning and programming. The different timelines of the Humanitarian Implementation Plans and the Multiannual Indicative Programmes on the development side, or between the Nexus Action Plan and the programming process, work against this need. The timing issue needs to be addressed at the leadership level of the EU and any other international funding organisations working in this nexus domain.

Working jointly with other actors from outside the EU context does not come without challenges. It requires a dose of experimentation and creativity and a long-term engagement to make it work. The example from Nigeria, described in Box 4, provides some useful learning.

Box 4: Collaborating on the triple nexus - an example from a pilot country: Nigeria

In Nigeria, the EU joined efforts to pilot and strengthen the triple nexus approach led by the UN. First, in 2016, DG DEVCO (today DG INTPA) involved DG ECHO in the **Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment** (RPBA), which included the World Bank Group and the United Nations. It then supported (together with Germany, Sweden and the UK) the **Regional Stabilization Facility** (RSF), a financing facility developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to facilitate the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin (RSS) of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) (UNDP 2020). The Facility brought all major (political, military, diplomatic) stakeholders together for the Nigeria-related window of the engagement.

In addition, DG DEVCO partnered with and awarded funds to **civil society organisations** that DG ECHO had collaborated with for a long time and which had the necessary experience, skills and contacts to access difficult areas. The work then evolved from pure humanitarian work to an approach that included immediate response, development and peace work. However, as the conflict in the North-East of Nigeria created a complex crisis and access was reduced for humanitarian and development partners in Borno State in 2018, collaboration with other international stakeholders became increasingly difficult. This showed that there was, and still is, a huge number of different actors involved (humanitarians, development practitioners, diplomats, political advisors, military experts, federal and state governments, UN agencies, NGOs), with different interpretations and understandings of the situation. Humanitarian, development and peace activities remain separate interventions for most stakeholders, which can lead to confusion and problems, as well as a lack of trust.

Yet, **opportunities for improvements** exist and need to be supported. As the UN embraced the humanitarian-development-peace nexus concept, it could play a leading role. Efforts are being made to build trust between all nexus actors. Nigeria's Minister for Humanitarian Affairs is actively participating in this process. For example, the 2018 Stabilisation Strategy adopted for the wider Lake Chad Basin region is one of the mechanisms that could potentially gather more international stakeholders around an effective and operationalised triple nexus. While the reinforced collaboration between DG ECHO and DG INTPA can inspire other key (local and international) partners to step up efforts in Nigeria, the conflict is complex and expectations about nexus results should remain realistic for the short and medium-term.

Source: EU 2020.

4.3. Coordination mechanisms

Coordination can range from regular exchanges of information, joint meetings between people working on different instruments, collaboration at key moments in the programming cycles of each financial instrument, sharing expertise and knowledge to joint strategies and programming. EU efforts should be embedded in broader donor coordination to enhance efficiency. In some EU pilot countries, a technical assistance facility was set up, enabling the enhancement of coordination in country (see also the section on technical capacities). **The appropriate level of coordination will depend on the local context and on capacities on all sides.** Where feasible and if capacity allows, national authorities should lead these coordination mechanisms.

Coordination all too often takes place in silos with stronger coordination mechanisms on the humanitarian than the development side (Dalrymple and Hanssen 2020). Triple nexus coordination across sectors remains difficult overall. But there are encouraging examples of efforts made by international actors to break such silos at country level. **Nexus task forces** have for instance been established in some countries, such as **Chad**, where a task force, co-chaired by the EU and Switzerland and including bilateral donors and development banks, guides the operationalisation of the triple nexus and reinforces coordination between various partners on the ground. The OECD-DAC Recommendation on the HDP nexus serves as 'common language' and common methodological framework among donors in Chad (which is considered a 'flagship country' in this regard).[9] Similarly, in **Cameroon**, UN agencies have made significant progress by putting the nexus into practice across the UN system under the leadership of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator through the establishment of a so-called Nexus Task Force. Lessons learnt from working through the Taskforce are discussed in Box 5.

It is worth noting that, while coordination between organisations can be challenging, coordination within organisations/agencies (e.g. within EU institutions) can be just as complex and therefore important to consider. There is often a strong internal division between staff members with responsibilities for development and humanitarian assistance in most donors and implementing agencies (Dalrymple and Hanssen 2020). In **Cameroon**, DG INTPA and ECHO have been cited as an example of good internal coordination, particularly in terms of mobilising funding jointly under EU trust funds and for the Pro-Resilience Action project in the East and Adamawa regions, through regular communication with headquarters, joint planning and prioritisation (Dalrymple and Hanssen 2020). The ability to coordinate is obviously dependent on the context and staff capacity. Coordination takes considerable time and effort to build trust, on the basis of which a meaningful dialogue can take place. Coordination mechanisms can also enable cross-fertilisation across different institutional actors and funders as well as non-governmental organisations and, where possible, government (Thomas 2019).

[9] The 11 OECD-DAC recommendations serve as a basis not only for the preliminary situation analysis, but also for the definition of priority actions as well as to evaluate the progress made.

Box 5: Triple nexus coordination mechanisms: Lessons from Cameroon

In 2019, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator established the **Nexus Taskforce** co-chaired by OCHA and UNDP to facilitate joined-up planning between HDP actors as part of the joint UN-World Bank initiative to pilot the triple nexus in three countries. The Taskforce is composed of UN agencies, government representatives, international and national NGOs and donors. According to a Development Initiatives report, '[t]he challenge with establishing nexus-focused mechanisms in other contexts has often been the perception that the nexus is the responsibility of humanitarian actors'.

The Task Force's primary objective is for humanitarian, development and peace actors to converge, coordinate and synchronise interventions in selected areas ('areas of convergence') at the municipality level, based on specific criteria and crisis dynamics. It also seeks to strengthen coordination between actors at municipality, departmental and national levels. The Taskforce has helped prioritise the actions to be taken among a broad spectrum of organisations, including government institutions and implementing NGOs.

While it is too early to fully assess the effectiveness of the Taskforce, it offers a platform for regular joint analysis, information sharing and review of strategic priorities, which were largely absent in Cameroon. Some of the key messages emerging from the Development Initiatives research include:

- **Coordination structures at the local and regional levels are crucial** for an effective response and for reaching the most vulnerable people in crisis-affected regions.
- **Cross-government buy-in and participation of all relevant ministries are crucial to the success of the Taskforce**, and it is vital that international actors expand their relationships with the government to cover a range of ministries in support of this.

Source: Dalrymple and Hanssen 2020.

5. Funding, adaptive management and technical capacities

The extent to which the implementation of the nexus is successful depends on the extent to which the activities to achieve collective outcomes can be managed and funded adequately. Funding organisations (including the EU) often ask implementing actors for triple nexus approaches, but their policies and budgets often tend to be siloed and, in practice, lack the flexibility for a nexus approach. For instance, humanitarian and development aid have different timeframes and lines of funding (annual for humanitarian aid; multi-annual country or thematic programmes) and different sets of rules and eligibility criteria, creating a heavy burden for NGOs. This explains the **urgency to work through more flexible funding mechanisms underpinned by adaptive approaches to programme design and management**.

Joint and flexible funding

Joint funding modalities, pooling mechanisms, blending and the harmonisation of funding rhythms have been found to be crucial for the operationalisation of the triple nexus. In order to support the effective implementation of the triple nexus, funding modalities need to go beyond each actor's specific modalities and instruments and reconcile them wherever possible. A **coordinated and coherent use of funding instruments** (ensured during the formulation of actions) and the **predictability and continuity of funding** are very important.

Approaches to incentivise joint and flexible funding are needed both at various levels and between various actors. For example, beyond interactions between funding institutions and the field, attention needs to be paid to local

actors and **funding opportunities that can be mobilised at country or regional level.** Local organisations that are already present when crises occur are usually first responders and have expertise, specialised knowledge and skills, which justifies prioritising funding to these organisations. They also benefit from trust and legitimacy within communities, as well as access, which is very important in conflict-affected areas. In that context, the above-mentioned March 2021 European Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action announced that the Commission would step up its support for **localisation.** This includes, increasingly, taking into account country and context specificities, as well as leveraging different instruments in line with the triple nexus, including by supporting localised financing models, such as multilateral pooled funding mechanisms with a strong focus on mobilising local responders.

The degree of responsiveness in triple nexus contexts will depend on the availability of flexible funding. EU Trust Funds (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis or 'Madad Fund', EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa) have been instrumental to operate in a more flexible manner as well as to better link humanitarian assistance and development cooperation and adopt a nexus approach. They will however cease to exist by the end of 2021.

Learning from the past, the EU has created a single funding instrument as part of its **new seven-year funding cycle (2021-2027)**, the **NDICI**[10], which is supposed to be more flexible and able to fund rapid response, civil security and development activities. It has a limited (non-programmable) rapid response pillar for crisis management, conflict prevention and resilience building. As part of strengthening resilience, rapid response actions will increase coordination, coherence and complementarity between humanitarian aid, development actions and, where relevant, peacebuilding. The aim is to maintain a quick response capacity, similar to that provided by the IcSP (Friesen et al. 2020). When a crisis arises, this relatively small amount of money is meant to allow for a rapid reaction to help the transition and link humanitarian aid and development assistance. This pillar could thus represent an opportunity to implement the nexus. The practice of working with this mechanism still needs to be developed based on forthcoming guidance.

Humanitarian activities, however, continue to be funded from a separate **Humanitarian Aid Instrument** and there will be no possibility to fund such actions from the above-mentioned (non-programmable) response pillar. Coordination between the Humanitarian Aid Instrument/DG ECHO and the NDICI/DG INTPA will be crucial to ensure complementarity and a smooth transition from relief to sustainable development.

Adaptive management

A number of more localised innovations both in programming and in pooled funding of triple nexus approaches are being piloted by the EU, which will bring **more flexibility and more bottom-up, collaborative solutions,** as the examples from Nigeria and Myanmar highlight (see Box 6). This will ultimately make these approaches better able to adapt to the context on the ground. **Problem-driven and adaptive approaches** are critical in order to grasp local opportunities (e.g. area-based or territorial approaches experimenting with locally-led planning processes; crisis modifiers) and ensure that long-term development interventions are backed by short-term reactive management.

[10] The NDICI merges ten previously existing external instruments into one instrument, including the Development Cooperation Instrument and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), the EU's instrument funding civilian crisis response, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Box 6: Changing funding patterns - Examples from pilot countries: Nigeria and Myanmar

In **Nigeria**, the EU designed the Borno Support Package in 2017, blending humanitarian and development funding to improve the resilience of conflict-affected populations. The EU funding package combines short-term humanitarian aid with long-term development support instruments (ECHO, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa). The EU Delegation in Abuja pooled its humanitarian, development and stabilisation/peacebuilding specialists in a geographic working group to design the funding package for Borno State. The EU Delegation in Nigeria promoted area-based approaches through a combination of political negotiation with State and local authorities and a capacity, willingness and ability assessment of local partners (Perret 2019).

In December 2019, the Delegation to **Myanmar** launched the 'Nexus Response Mechanism' (NRM) to address the conflict. One key feature of this tool includes a funding mechanism. The NRM specifically aims to provide support to conflict-affected populations, displaced populations, host communities and returnees. First, it is co-funded by INTPA and ECHO with ongoing collegial consultation with the EEAS. Second, it operates a flexible adaptive approach, allowing regular assessment and reallocation of funds. According to the Deputy Head of Cooperation at the Delegation to Myanmar: 'If activities don't work, because the context of the conflict is changing, we can stop the action and move resources from one place to another. This type of flexibility is fundamental to work in an uncertain context'. It is a rapid tool which can work at different levels and has proven very relevant and effective in the COVID-19 context. (European Union 2020).

Technical capacities

The triple nexus approach also requires **specific technical capacities and so-called 'nexus skills'** among professionals who work across the different areas, especially in leadership or management positions (Thomas 2019). Technical training among staff is also a way to promote such nexus skills and a change in perspectives and mentalities. Some EU pilot countries have had positive experiences with technical assistance facilities (e.g. an EU Trust Fund Technical Cooperation Facility which has been implemented in different countries) which provide research, studies or support to nexus task forces and donor coordination. More effective and more fluid coordination mechanisms can help make the triple nexus approach work but lessons learnt from Myanmar show that the management of such operations should be institutionalised to make them work fully (see Box 7).

This should be complemented with efforts to stimulate **incentives** for promoting joined-up approaches and institutionalising the triple nexus approach. Appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for cost-effective coordination across humanitarian, development and peace architectures was also recommended by the OECD in its recommendation on the HDP nexus.

Box 7: Institutionalising the nexus approach: the case of Myanmar

Effective coordination and successful implementation are often too dependent on personal relations and the expertise and motivation of individuals. Lessons learnt from the EU Delegation in Myanmar show that delineating clear **Standard Operating Procedures** (SOPs) is fundamental for ensuring that nexus work (i.e. information-sharing, joint analysis, joint missions) in delegations is **institutionalised rather than personality-driven**. Having these SOPs endorsed by the Head of Delegation significantly contributed to cementing nexus work across the Delegation and ECHO field Office in Myanmar.

Source: EC and EEAS internal information.

6. M&E mechanisms for learning and better accountability

Experience has shown that nexus approaches generate incremental gains (Medinilla et al. 2019) and there is a degree of 'learning by doing'. Adequately capturing this experience is crucial for stimulating further promotion of the triple nexus. The 2019 OECD-DAC Recommendation on the triple nexus also stressed the need to **invest in learning and evidence** from engagements across humanitarian, development and peace actions in sectors and thematic areas of common interest. Improving monitoring and sharing information on the status of the implementation and the challenges faced is crucial both to **stimulate learning** and to **support adaptive management** and regular updates of the analysis.

The **evidence base** from various sources needs to be built and shared, including examples of where the implementation of the nexus has worked; examples of innovation and experimentation; and positive and negative impacts of implementing nexus projects in different contexts/sectors. Documenting and sharing examples of cases where the triple nexus has generated more efficient responses can also help to create incentives for the implementation of the nexus. The **creation of a triple nexus knowledge hub** within the EU, or jointly with other funding agencies, for capturing relevant lessons learnt and sharing of experiences should be considered to stimulate learning across the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the triple nexus.

An important element of learning are the **monitoring systems** that are included in project and programme implementation. As a rule of thumb, for initiatives implemented in highly dynamic contexts, programmes and their monitoring need to be **adaptive in their design and promote iteration** and learning. In order to track progress, monitoring needs to go beyond output level results and include collective outcome indicators. Monitoring frameworks should ideally be complemented by context indicators, based on regular context analysis and perception surveys (Perret 2019).

New mechanisms are also being piloted to strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms in rapidly evolving (conflict) contexts to better inform funding agencies and enable them to act and respond early on when situations change. An example from Myanmar is presented in Box 7.

Most importantly, it is vital that actors involved in the implementation of the nexus have a certain degree of realism and pragmatism. The situation on the ground very rarely evolves or improves in a linear manner, especially in conflict-affected areas. Conflict may suddenly erupt again, requiring a transition back from development assistance to humanitarian aid. This makes M&E mechanisms and flexibility all the more crucial.

Box 8: Testing new M&E mechanisms for accountability in Myanmar

Although the situation in Myanmar is currently very volatile, the testing of new M&E mechanisms in this context remains a valuable experience for other countries on how to approach the triple nexus. It is worth noting that the triple nexus approach implemented by the EU always takes place in the context of wider country dynamics, which the EU cannot influence but must take into account to design, plan and implement a context-specific approach to the triple nexus.

In December 2019, the Delegation to Myanmar launched the '**Nexus Response Mechanism**' (NRM), which includes a dedicated funding mechanism. This fund has a so-called **'Third Party Monitoring'** component, aimed at strengthening the monitoring system. It informs joint decision making and embeds due diligence criteria in the NRM. As such, the EU Delegation is assisted by a team of experts who have no further stake in the programmes in the country. These experts regularly provide analysis of EU-funded programmes to keep monitoring the evolution of conflict dynamics and to check against due diligence criteria approved by the Delegation in advance. They also produce quarterly monitoring reports on EU-funded projects, keeping the pulse on project effectiveness and pertinence in a constantly evolving conflict and context. This analytical capacity provides a unique source of information to the Delegation, which used to rely on other international sources of information.

Source: EU 2020.

7. Suggestions for the way forward

After shedding light on the rationale for operationalising the triple nexus across the EU and with external partners, we have highlighted the key principles and challenges to be considered in this process. We have also laid out the various steps to support the implementation of the triple nexus (joint analysis and planning, coordination, funding, adaptive management, technical capacities and M&E). This final section provides guidelines for the different actors involved in the nexus at field and HQ level, for each stage in the operationalisation of the triple nexus.

Joint analysis, planning and coordination

- Achieving a **common understanding of what 'peace' means** with all actors involved is paramount. A **European Consensus for Peace** would be welcomed in this context.
- **EU services** (EEAS, INTPA, NEAR, FPI, ECHO – both at HQ and in the field) **and Member States** (and other international and local actors whenever relevant and possible) should agree on collective outcomes and shared priorities on how to link peace, humanitarian aid and development for the short, medium and long term in a given country, leading to a **clear and flexible intervention logic based on a theory of change and an HDP Nexus Action Plan**.
- There should be **clarity** within the relevant EU services (EEAS, INTPA, NEAR, FPI, ECHO) on who should lead and coordinate the process. This **division of labour** should be complemented by coordination mechanisms, including at field level, with the support of EU delegations and ECHO field offices.
- **EU institutions should continue to work with Member States** to raise their awareness and involvement regarding the methodology and the implementation of the RPBAs on the ground. The **involvement of EU Member States** in the coordinated implementation of the nexus is also key.
- **Intense coordination with humanitarian, peacebuilding and development** NGOs is paramount as they are key to making the triple nexus a success. They should be involved early on, at the analysis and planning stages.

- The EU should **work with/through the national government whenever possible**, while recognising that this might not be possible in certain contexts, e.g. certainly not if the government is a party in or even the source of the conflict.

The operationalisation of the nexus

- Activities should be designed as early as possible with **local partners** in the driving seat and as an integral part of the response, with the ultimate goal of gradually ending dependence on humanitarian assistance by fostering self-reliance and resilience. Indeed, while local organisations may not be familiar with the jargon, they operationalise the nexus already, and their **expertise and knowledge** at grassroots level are invaluable. Governments and local authorities should be engaged meaningfully, in order to strengthen national and local ownership and governments' leadership and governance capabilities. Communities and community-based organisations, including civil society, should also be enabled to respond effectively. This includes **investing in their capacities and funding** these organisations, in line with the localisation agenda. The expertise of local organisations/implementing agencies should be leveraged to alleviate the lack of capacity for the context/conflict analysis.
- **Joint planning and the HDP Nexus Action Plan should be linked as much as possible to the EU (joint) programming process**. Indeed, the NDICI programming for 2021-2027 represents a key opportunity to create synergies and deliver on the nexus. Timing is essential to make that link and needs to be addressed, so that the various programming documents in a given country are better synchronised.

Funding the nexus

- **EU institutions need to be ready to take more risks** to fund nexus programmes, whether in terms of flexibility, pooled funding or funding opportunities for local actors and civil society. The NDICI should support local actors and NGOs to carry out their essential triple nexus work at community level and to access funding in all three pillars. Funding nexus programmes also requires creating incentive structures in calls for proposals that encourage collaboration.
- **The EU and the Member States** should ensure as much as possible that the **Team Europe approach** enables their funding instruments to be aligned with the triple nexus. The triple nexus ultimately has a similar rationale to Team Europe in terms of pooling resources, coordination and coherence. As underlined by the March 2021 European Commission Communication on the EU's humanitarian action, the continuing presence of conflicts and the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 only heighten the need to expand these efforts – mainly through even stronger cooperation between the EU, its Member States, their diplomatic network and finance institutions, building on the Team Europe approach. Drawing on positive lessons from the 2014-2020 programming period, the EU will continue to strengthen synergies and complementarities among the different actors and EU services while respecting humanitarian principles.
- **Modalities beyond Official Development Assistance (ODA**) should be explored and mobilised, including from the private sector – provided these do no harm.

Organisational change, resources and incentives

- EU institutions, Member States and other actors implementing the nexus (e.g. NGOs) need to pay more attention to **organisational change** (recruitment/procurement/conflict sensitivity) and to **training/capacity building** for staff on implementing the nexus in programming. This includes recruiting people who are able to bridge the different domains, i.e. sectoral (peacebuilding, development, humanitarian) as well as political/ technical, while also understanding the humanitarian principles; or training people so that they are ready and able to do so. Resources are required for such internal capacity building.
- Each of the actors needs to **look beyond their own immediate responsibilities** and consider how their actions fit in with those of others working in the same context but from a different perspective.

M&E and lessons learnt

- Developing a **methodology** is necessary to enable the triple nexus approach to be rolled out in other contexts. EU institutions at HQ and field level (and Member States) should build a **knowledge base** around country-led processes to operationalise the triple nexus in different contexts (challenges faced on specific aspects such as coordination or funding, best practices etc.). Identifying **best practices** can also help to roll out joint context/conflict analyses in different contexts.
- **As underlined by the May 2021 Council Conclusions on the EU's humanitarian action (Council of the EU 2021a), EU institutions could do more to draw lessons from the EU's nexus pilot countries** and share this information not only with the actors involved in the specific country but more widely, to allow for cross-fertilisation of experiences and a solid knowledge basis for the operationalisation of the nexus. Evidence of complementary funding in the **pilot countries** can be drawn on and replicated in other contexts.
- **Member States** can share their experience and approaches in terms of implementing the triple nexus. They could for instance learn from each other in terms of funding instruments and nexus programming.
- Given that **trust funds** are perceived as a useful implementation modality to bridge humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities and 'fill the gap', **EU institutions** should reflect on lessons learnt from the various EU trust funds for the implementation of the NDICI.

Annex – OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus[11]

The OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus was adopted by the DAC at its Senior Level Meeting on 22 February 2019. It was developed in response to the call for strengthened policy and operational coherence by humanitarian, development and peace actors, reflecting commitments across key global frameworks including Agenda 2030, the Sustaining Peace resolutions and Agenda for Humanity, among others.

The DAC Recommendation aims to provide adherents of the triple nexus with a comprehensive framework that can incentivise and implement more collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations. It provides a common set of eleven principles to guide and support stakeholders, in their capacity as donors, development cooperation actors and stakeholders in the international community, and an approach that prioritises **'prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action when necessary'**. The eleven principles are the following:

- Undertake joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience and the identification of collective outcomes incorporating humanitarian, development and peace actions;
- Provide appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for cost-effective coordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture;
- Utilise **political engagement and other tools, instruments and approaches** at all levels to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace;
- Prioritise prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met;
- Put **people at the centre**, tackling exclusion and promoting gender equality;
- Ensure that activities **do no harm**, are **conflict sensitive** to avoid unintended negative consequences and maximise positive effects across humanitarian, development and peace actions;
- Align joined-up programming with the risk environment;
- Strengthen national and local capacities;
- Invest in **learning and evidence** across humanitarian, development and peace actions;
- Develop **evidence-based humanitarian, development and peace financing strategies** at global, regional, national and local levels, with effective layering and sequencing of the most appropriate financing flows;
- Use predictable, flexible, multi-year financing wherever possible.

In order to effectively reduce people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities and the humanitarian caseload, the DAC Recommendation aims to strengthen the engagement of a diverse range of actors, based on their respective comparative advantage, a shared understanding of risk and vulnerability, coordination and programming. This approach should be supported by the right kind of financing, drawing from diverse funding sources to ensure that the right resources are in the right place at the right time.

[11] Despite the fact that not all EU Member States are part of the OECD-DAC, this Recommendation represents relevant guidance for the operationalisation of the triple nexus (OECD 2019).

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