What is the Triple Nexus?

The "triple nexus" refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actors. In the UN's "New Way of Working (NWoW)," these actors are expected to work towards collective outcomes over multiple years, when appropriate. The United Nations ongoing reform process envisions UN agencies working in humanitarian, development and peace realms be working together more "cohesively." The approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each sector to reduce need, risk and vulnerability following the recommendations of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and in accordance with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.

The NWoW was originally focused on removing the "unnecessary barriers" hindering the collaboration between humanitarian and development actors (a.k.a. the humanitarian-development divide or the "double nexus"). However, in his statement upon taking office in December 2016, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for "sustaining peace" to be considered "the third leg of the triangle."

Furthermore, 2016 has seen an increase in violent conflicts - the highest recorded in 30 years. This includes lower and middle-income countries, has placed an urgency on these conversations. For the past decades, both the humanitarian and development communities had avoided talking about violence due to concerns of securitizing the space, however, with the SDGs, this has taken a turn.

The concept of the "nexus" is not new. It has been proposed many times under many different names ("linking relief, rehabilitation and development"), humanitarian development nexus etc. Some actors have considered adding other elements in the nexus (like migration, human rights, security, stabilization, etc.) Since the concept's proposal, the international community has been struggling with how to operationalize it.

How has it changed the thinking?

There has been a shift in how the international community talks about violence and prevention – focusing more on equity and meaningful civil society participation and building cooperative behaviour. Reports such as the World Bank-UN "Pathways to Peace" suggest that economic growth is not the driver for peace in every context. There is movement towards harmonization and integration of practices.

Why is it different this time?

Right now, the discussion of the nexus is buoyed by its connection to central processes of the United Nations (UN) – the UN reform, the SDGs, the Grand Bargain and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This momentum is further evidenced by the involvement of the World Bank in the peace and development arena. These drivers increase the likelihood of this concept being implemented.

The Humanitarian-Development convergence:

Humanitarian and development actions converge around the need to prevent, prepare for and respond to crises, especially for the most vulnerable and at-risk populations. Multiannual approaches (Humanitarian Response Plan – the HRP) enable humanitarians to formulate their responses to protracted crises, but they also need to be complemented with development investments designed to meet the needs of the SDGs.

In Senegal humanitarian concerns have been incorporated into the UNDAF (The United Nations Development Assistance Framework) and there is no more a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). This method allows humanitarian and development actors to build on joint planning and bridge the gap between these sectors. The humanitarian imperative has been integrated into a wider agenda and the UNDAF consultations and platforms do include NGOs.

Humanitarian
Actors

Development
Actors

Peace
Actors

The UNDAF is a strategic, medium term results framework that describes the collective vision and response of the UN system to national development priorities and results on the basis of normative programming principles.

Emergency Gap:

Lack of adequate life-saving assistance, including protection, at the right place, at the right time.

External factors

Overloading the plate of the humanitarian sector due to mounting needs, changing geo-political landscape and politicization of humanitarian action – has led to the erosion of the principles and how the sector operates.

Internal factors

Structures, tools and financing mechanisms, our ability to manage insecurity and the humanitarian emergency mind-set. The connection is the way we align ourselves with development and peace objectives. The difference is the alignment rather than the complementarity.

There is tension between humanitarian action in conflict settings and the reform agenda, which aims to drive wide societal structural changes. The risk is reinforcing an existing tendency to politicize humanitarian action, absence of sufficient services, including protection and hampering access to people and not receiving assistance if the people in-need are on the wrong side.

How does this impact NGOs?

- Challenges for humanitarian organisations working outside of the government-controlled areas.

- Increased risks in the humanitarian space.

- Gaps in analysis around protection e.g. Nigeria and Mali.

- Lack of focus on ensuring adequate emergency response capacity, presence and delivery as a stand-alone objective.

What are the challenges?

There are several challenges and concerns that accompany the implementation of the nexus.

The role of civil society There is a lack of engagement of civil society in discussions on
the implementation of the nexus:
- Absence of a formalized seat for civil society at the UN Country Team (UNCT) unlike at the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT)
- Unclear articulation of civil society tole in policies such as the strengthening of the Resident Coordinator position, the creation of the Joint Steering Committee and the link to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

The lack of common vernacular There is no common understanding of problems, definitions and terms. This is true both between sectors and within sectors. Often, assumptions are made, and actors do not come together to discuss these differences."

> The term "resilience" has different interpretations in each sector. For peacebuilding actors, it refers to managing risks and increasing resilience to withstand conflict situations, for development actors it refers to livelihoods and climate change. This can make communication around "resilience" difficult. Often, assumptions are made, and actors do not come together to discuss these differences. A dialogue about differing vocabulary is necessary.

Alignment of plans It is important to note that planning and programming frameworks – the UNDAF and the HRP – have not been systematically aligned with each other in countries. Each framework includes activities, but there is little or no relationship between the plans. The distinction between humanitarian, peacebuilding and development is often artificially reinforced by separate analytical tools, planning exercises and funding mechanisms.

The difficulty of securing funding This is in part because the nexus emphasizes multi-year goals and while many donors fund these programmes, plan their budgets and disbursements on an annual basis. Existing funding mechanisms do not have an instrument for humanitarian-development initiatives. Funding is often related to a specific plan or programme and this does not reinforce the nexus. Without funding it is difficult to achieve collective outcomes. However, the momentum of the United Nations is behind the nexus and donors will most likely be looking to fund projects operating in the nexus.

The lack of systemic implementation While there is pressure for concrete examples and lessons learned in implementation of the New Way of Working, efforts have been ad-hoc and differ from country to country. There needs to be clarity on the what collective outcomes look like in different contexts.

The protection of humanitarian space Humanitarian principles are vital to humanitarian actors operating effectively and on the comparative advantage. The nexus runs the risk of politicizing humanitarian action. It needs to be clear how humanitarian actors can remain neutral and independent despite the linkage to the state that the nexus implies. Without the maintenance of humanitarian space, the access of actors to people in crises will be hampered. Will the humanitarian imperative clash with national priorities?

Is there a positive side to the new policies?

- Scaled-up presence of development actors and programming in protracted crises.

- Sustainable solutions for chronic crises in stable contexts.

- Better complementarity between all international policies without blurring the distinctions on the comparative advantages of each actor/sector.

- Focus on multi-year planning and resourcing, and increase in unearmarked funding for frontline responders.

How can we work together? What are the opportunities for engagement?

Theoretically, harmonization between these sectors can take place. The humanitarian sector has been stretched to a breaking point in some areas, the nexus allows for burden sharing by development and peace actors.

The nexus offers the opportunity for actors from different sectors to learn from each other. There are ways for humanitarian actors to support the work of development and peace actors and humanitarian actors should be weary of assuming that development and peace necessarily leads to politicization. However, it is important to note that collaboration does not always make sense, the protection of humanitarian principles falls on humanitarian actors and the implementation of programmes and working in the nexus must be informed by the context.

Most successful collaboration takes place at the local level and often times, the people in areas of conflict receiving assistance do not care what sector it comes from. The incorporation of multiple actors, when it makes sense, can be seen as an advantage because these actors are contributing to the situation on the ground and bring critical tools and comparative advantages.

Conclusion

There are examples of implementation of the nexus out there, especially by multi-mandated NGOs. However, they need to be captured and analysed. There is a need for context specific, people centered approaches to the implementation process.

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"We can agree on many things, but in practice, the devil is in the implementation detail" – Nina Nepesova

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It is important for civil society to be engaging in this conversation, as these organizations have an opportunity to influence what collaboration looks like. It is important to evaluate the situation and conversation and bring concrete recommendations and influence the conversation.