

INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OF THE LINKAGE OF HUMANITARIAN AID AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (NEXUS)

The increasingly protracted nature of conflicts and humanitarian crises is creating new challenges for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. Environmental incidents are occurring with ever greater frequency and demand a response that involves not only simultaneously applying different international cooperation approaches but also ensuring linkages between emergency relief and long-term development goals. An independent evaluation formulated a series of recommendations on how to strengthen and promote this nexus at the institutional and operational level.

BACKGROUND

According to a World Bank forecast, 46% of the global poor will live in areas characterised as fragile by 2030 (World Bank 2018: *Fragility, Conflict and Violence Overview*). Efforts to halt this trend currently focus on using the instruments of humanitarian aid and development cooperation in tandem. The UN refers to this practice as the 'New Way of Working'.

Harnessing the complementarity of these instruments generates more sustainable outcomes and systematically reduces the need for and cost of humanitarian aid in the future. During the 1980s and 1990s, the assumption was that emergency relief, reconstruction and civic capacity-building constituted a progressing linear continuum. This assumption has since been superseded by an approach based on the simultaneous and complementary use of different measures. However, the practical application of this know-how at the institutional and operational levels leaves many questions unanswered.

An independent evaluation, commissioned by the SDC and performed by the Nordic Consulting Group, explored the complex subject of 'the nexus' and formulated a set of recommendations for the way forward. The evaluation ran from 2013 to 2017.



EVALUATION FINDINGS

For several years now, the SDC has actively promoted the simultaneous deployment of different instruments in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda. Earlier efforts to secure institutional change tended to originate from bottom-up initiatives launched by individual SDC actors on the ground. In many places, staff endeavoured to work around the apparent institutional barriers inherent to existing instruments and organisations by coordinating their activities on an ad hoc basis.

Positive findings

The evaluation found several indications that the nexus approach has already been successfully adopted in a number of regions. One such example is the joint programming between Humanitarian Aid and South Cooperation in the Horn of Africa, Mali and Myanmar. The SDC also plays a pioneering role when it comes to cooperation with non-

Key recommendations

- Create and communicate a common institutional definition of the nexus
- Build an evidence base and include real-life examples of the nexus approach
- Facilitate the planning and enhance the performance of joint operations and activities
- Enhance joint decision-making committees within SDC and with corresponding partners of the Swiss Federal Administration



governmental organisations (NGOs) and multilateral partners by spearheading efforts to identify synergies and thus generate more sustainable outcomes.

The evaluation also found that the SDC's job rotation principle was particularly conducive to working in the nexus. Regular internal transfers to other sectors and geographical contexts enable all members of staff to familiarise themselves with the full set of SDC instruments. As a result, project managers can put together teams who are well-equipped to handle challenges of all kinds and have the necessary skill set to work in the nexus. While these findings are promising, improvements could be made in certain areas.

Institutional barriers

The overly centralised decision-making and reporting structures of the SDC were in some cases found to hinder the adoption of an agile nexus approach. This situation is further exacerbated by the centralised structure of other governmental institutions involved (migration,

peacebuilding and economic development). As a result, evaluable nexus outcomes are a rarity.

The evaluation team carried out a benchmarking exercise which identified three actors whose experiences could contribute to future SDC work: (1) The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), which has successfully applied the nexus approach to its policies and strategies; (2) the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), which carries out joint evaluations of humanitarian and development-relevant measures and enjoys greater flexibility in terms of their funding mechanisms; and (3) Caritas, a Swiss NGO, whose decision-making structure allows for a flexible combination of different types of funding instruments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation issued a total of nine recommendations designed to advance the use of the nexus approach within the SDC.

1. Develop a common understanding of the nexus

The SDC has already started working on an institutionalised definition of 'nexus'. The new definition will describe this approach as the integrated usage of instruments (both bilateral and multilateral) of humanitarian aid and development cooperation. The term 'integrated' refers here to the 'simultaneous application of instruments in the same context in order to augment, effectively intertwine and operate synergistically [...]'.

The next challenge is to institutionalise and communicate this definition among SDC staff and partners. The evaluation therefore strongly advises the SDC to organise workshops and training courses both at the cooperation offices and at the head office specifically tailored for staff members and partners.

2. Joint framework credits for nexus activities

The evaluation recommends that the SDC should build a strong case to lobby Parliament for a future nexus. It states that humanitarian aid and development cooperation framework credits should be increasingly unified with a view to facilitating 'integrated' interactions and uniform reporting. The SDC's operational divisions should promote a more holistic and flexible approach.

3. Facilitate a united organisation at head office

The SDC should encourage the creation of joint decision-making committees in its cooperation offices and head office. Committee members should include both humanitarian aid and development cooperation staff. This approach is especially recommended in countries and regions experiencing protracted crises. The evaluation also recommends that the SDC should strive for deeper connections with other international cooperation actors (human security, peacebuilding and economic cooperation).

4. Encourage decentralised reporting lines

The lines of reporting on all international cooperation activities in a given country or region should be decentralised. Not only does such a structure promote a shared understanding of different approaches, it also fosters cooperation and joint strategy implementation.

5. Build an evidence base and specific examples of the nexus in practice

In order to counteract political pressure and to bolster public support for international cooperation, SDC should actively communicate that the nexus is a forward-looking approach particularly suited for projects in fragile contexts. This will require the SDC to systematically demonstrate by evidence-based, clear, real-world examples how the results of the nexus approach lead to more efficient, effective and sustainable outcomes for those living in fragile situations.

6. Institutionalise joint context analysis and seek common outcomes

The SDC should give greater weight to the nexus when conceptualising new programmes. This should include joint contextual analysis and the identification of areas where projects may fall short in terms of the 'Leave no one behind' principle that underpins the 2030 Agenda. The linkages that have been established between humanitarian and development-led efforts in the Horn of Africa could serve as a point of reference here.

7. Strengthen internal coordination of efforts to promote nexus partnerships

Providing members of staff with targeted information will allow the SDC to actively promote the use of the nexus approach in its cooperation work with multilateral and global actors. This will yield long-term outcomes and offer Switzerland feasible exit strategies from its emergency relief engagements.

8. Encourage partners to develop and pursue innovative approaches

The SDC should step up its support for those partners who adopt innovative practices. In addition, multi-donor funding and coordination mechanisms between the SDC and its partners should be expanded. Greater engagement coupled with ongoing outcome monitoring enhances the relevance and effectiveness of nexus collaboration in partner programmes and can help to bolster the longer-term resilience of communities living in fragile contexts.

9. Leverage the role as an important and principled donor

Partner organisations see the SDC as a trustworthy and engaged donor who is committed to ensuring that the action it takes does not have negative consequences ('do no harm' principle). The SDC should capitalise on its status as a principled and often primary donor in order to foster and strengthen coordination between humanitarian aid and development cooperation actors working in fragile contexts.



LOOKING AHEAD

In its official response to the evaluation report, the SDC's senior management signalled its agreement with eight recommendations out of nine. Senior management proposes that the following actions should be taken:

- Revision of the **institutional definition of the nexus** so that it reflects the state of the art and meets the requirements for achieving collective outcomes. **The revised definition will also include examples**, use straightforward language and be shared with all members of staff. Wide-ranging communication of the definition should lead to the systematic inclusion of measures in the Global Programmes at both the planning and implementation phases.
- To advance institutional understanding of the nexus, **joint analyses of the activities performed by the various divisions within the cooperation offices** and by external partners is to become common practice.
- A seminal **step** shall be the creation of **joint operation committees** comprised of development and humanitarian aid representatives.
- In the interests of further enhancing mutual understanding, **exchanges** between humanitarian aid and development cooperation staff **will continue to be promoted**.
- In the future, cooperation strategies will present the goals of each instrument as part of a **common outcome framework**. In addition, joint reporting lines within the cooperation offices are to be set up.
- Programme and strategy evaluations will pay greater attention to institutional linkages, i.e. the nexus. This will make it possible to **identify context-specific nexus approaches that could be operationalised in future projects and programmes**.
- Coordination with other donors will be used to highlight the advantages of working in the nexus.



- The senior management disagrees with the recommendation to merge IC framework credits. While the senior management acknowledges the potential of this move, its opinion is that this issue should not be examined until work begins on the 2025–28 dispatch. As things currently stand, **it makes sense to maintain separate framework credits** for development cooperation and humanitarian aid as these reflect the instruments' different mandates and working practices. Furthermore, credit lines are already sufficiently permeable to allow the SDC to address the evaluation's recommendations.

Publication

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