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The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Towards Differentiated Configurations

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List of Acronyms

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCR	Global Compact for Refugees
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
KUNO	Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWoW	New Ways of Working
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Abstract

This paper examines and problematizes recent conceptualizations of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus, which has been proposed as a comprehensive response to protracted crises and, in particular, protracted displacement. It is based on a literature review and primarily addresses those organizations currently experimenting with the idea of nexus programming. The paper aims to encourage a more differentiated debate about the HDP nexus. For that purpose, four aspects that deserve further inquiry are fleshed out and tentatively sketched as determinants for a variety of potential nexus configurations. First, the common conceptualization of humanitarian aid, development and peace as sectoral *silos* is problematized as it emphasizes separations and disregards overlaps. Attention is drawn to ideological differences within each of the three sectors, as they illustrate that differences between and overlaps of humanitarian, development and peace objectives, activities and outcomes are organization specific. Second, inter- and intra-organizational perspectives on the HDP nexus are distinguished, as they provide starting points for *bridging* and/or *breaking* the silos. Third, the disregard of contextual particularities in conceptualizing the nexus is problematized, calling for further exploration regarding the conditions that enable or prevent a nexus approach in a specific context. Fourth, and related to the former, it is argued that the substance of nexus configurations needs to become a more prominent element in the debate. Answers need to be found not only for how the HDP nexus can be pursued, facilitated and institutionalized but with which activities and outcomes it can be substantiated. In conclusion, the paper acknowledges the potential of the HDP nexus to encourage thinking beyond distinct spheres of competence and intervention but warns against the conceptualization and proliferation of a nexus-blueprint.

Keywords

Triple nexus; protracted crises; protracted displacement; silos

Bio

Sebastian Weishaupt holds an MSc in International Development Studies from Wageningen University in the Netherlands. His research interest is focused on humanitarian aid and forced displacement. As a Research Intern, he worked with UNRISD on the project “Integrated Solutions to Protracted Displacement - A Humanitarian/Development/Peace Nexus Approach”.

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The HDP Nexus: A Comprehensive Response to Protracted Crises?

While there is no single agreed definition of protracted crises, the term usually describes environments in which “a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of their livelihoods over a prolonged period of time” (Macrae and Harmer 2004:1), mainly due to perpetual and recurring conflicts and disasters (FAO 2010:12). Afghanistan, which has experienced decades of war as well as frequent weather-induced disasters such as floods and landslides, is an illustrative example of the complex and wide-reaching consequences of protracted crises, not least because the country has been among the largest producers of displacement (Schmeidl 2019). Political considerations as well as limited capacities of states affected by conflicts, disasters and displacement often impede potential pathways out of crises and contribute to its protracted nature (Macrae and Harmer 2004:4). The government of Sudan, for example, has rejected local integration as a large-scale durable solution for forcibly displaced persons (UNDP and UNHCR 2015), while the government of Uganda demonstrated its willingness to support and integrate displaced people, despite its lack of capacities. Due to these and other circumstances, durable solutions for people affected by conflict, disaster and displacement are often absent, forcing them “to live in limbo, their lives on hold” (Aleinikoff 2015:1). In an attempt to address the causes and effects of crises, international, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations intervene in such protracted situations, aiming to save lives, alleviate suffering, mitigate risks and pave the way for durable solutions.

Since “protracted crises have become the new norm” (UN 2015), the need to address the challenges that these situations entail is a prominent concern in the international community. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “the average length of crises with an active inter-agency appeal rose from four to seven years” between 2005 and 2017 (OCHA 2018a:2).¹ As a result of this trend, “close to 90% of humanitarian aid is now going to protracted crises” (OECD 2019). However, humanitarian aid *alone*, that is life-saving emergency relief without long-term prospects for development and peace, is, for various reasons, an insufficient response to protracted situations. Perhaps most importantly, the quality of life enabled and institutionalized by the minimum standards of emergency relief creates dependencies and undermines people’s dignity (Anderson et al. 2012).² Besides that, permanent basic service provision is understood to be the primary responsibility of governments, instead of the international community. Due to these and other concerns, humanitarian organizations, which are usually the first international actors to respond to conflicts, disasters and displacement, are reluctant to provide basic services such as food, water, shelter and protection for an

¹ Climate change might further aggravate this trend as regions are permanently rendered uninhabitable.

² It should be noted that occasionally for aid-recipients, the minimum standards of humanitarian aid imply an improvement in their quality of life. For example, internally displaced persons’ (IDPs) access to education in Colombia increased subsequent to their displacement (Ferris and Winthrop 2010:36). Contrary to that, Weizman (2012) has shown how the minimum standards of humanitarian aid can also be instrumentalized to institutionalize a quality of life at the threshold to what is still acceptable, which he understands as a form of “humanitarian violence”.

indefinite period of time. Therefore, a debate about options to hand-over and phase out “quasi-permanent state[s] of emergency” (Chkam 2016) has emerged.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus is the most recent proposition for a comprehensive response to protracted crises and has been piloted in a variety of contexts, particularly in protracted displacement situations.³ According to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the nexus aims to strengthen “collaboration, coherence and complementarity” between humanitarian, development and peace interventions “to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict” (OECD 2019:4). As such, a nexus approach might be applicable to any context in which humanitarian aid, development and peace interventions are required. The meaning and scope of these three fields of intervention are, however, highly contested. Peace, for example, can be framed in a negative or positive sense, referring to the absence of war and violent conflict or the prospect for peaceful and sustainable development (IASC 2020). Following a positive framing of the peace pillar, an HDP nexus approach could be applied in situations where conflict is merely a possibility or risk, while a negative framing of the peace pillar would limit its applicability to situations of active conflict. Pilots of the nexus in protracted displacement situations in relatively stable refugee contexts such as Turkey (Perret 2019) and Uganda (Jones and Mazzara 2018) point towards a positive framing of the peace pillar, while pilots in conflict-prone countries such as South Sudan (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; Wilkinson et al. 2019) and Mali (Perret 2019) suggest a negative framing. Overall, the nexus pilots highlight the broad and almost universal application of the HDP nexus to different situations of protracted crises, which will be problematized in this paper by pointing towards divergent conceptualizations of the HDP nexus.

Looking back at previous attempts to respond to protracted crises points towards some of the challenges of connecting humanitarian aid, development and peace. *Early recovery*, which promotes the “application of development principles to humanitarian settings” (UNDP 2008), and *Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development* (LRRD), which envisions a transition from emergency relief to stability and long-term development prospects (Mosel and Levine 2014), are only two examples of such attempts.⁴ Since the alignment or collaboration with overtly political development and peace actors can compromise the supposedly *neutral* and *impartial* position of humanitarian organizations, many humanitarians have rejected such concepts (Macrae 2019; Pedersen 2016).⁵ Nonetheless, the debate about the HDP nexus has recently gained considerable momentum

³ The EU has piloted the HDP nexus (with limited success) in Sudan, Nigeria, Chad, Uganda, Myanmar and Iraq (Jones and Mazzara 2018). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has tested a nexus approach in Colombia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Turkey (Perret 2019). Other organizations have also explored the applicability of the nexus in South Sudan (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; Wilkinson et al. 2019), Ethiopia (Ndeda and Birungi 2018) and elsewhere.

⁴ For a genealogical examination of the HDP nexus, see Macrae (2019).

⁵ Guinote (2018) argues that the purpose of interventions and an organization’s modus operandi are the most suitable criteria to differentiate humanitarian and development actors. Since humanitarians operate in protracted crises, address needs beyond immediate physical survival, and negotiate with governments and belligerents, timeframe, types of activities and state-/people-centredness are not reliable identity markers.

and initiated renewed thinking and strategic processes in various organizations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR) and other international strategic guidelines support the ambition of a more holistic and interconnected response to crises and UN Secretary General António Guterres made the HDP nexus a central element of the UN agenda (UN 2017, 2016a).⁶ Therefore, a closer examination of the conceptualization and applicability of the nexus stands to reason.

Recent conceptualizations of the HDP nexus are commonly based on the assumption that humanitarian aid, development and peace frame three distinct and clearly demarcated *silos* that separate specific actors, activities, objectives and budget lines. Even though various concepts with distinct implications for the practices of intervening actors have been proposed to operationalize the nexus, there is no overarching consensus. Whether a nexus response to protracted crises should be facilitated through “collaboration, coordination, linkage, alignment, complementarity, operationality, reconfiguration, fusion, integration or joined-upness” (DuBois 2020:6) is still subject to debate. Departing from this controversy, this paper starts from the assumption that the disagreement about the meaning and objective of the HDP nexus is partly related to its unspecific, almost universal, application. It will be argued that protracted crisis is a category too broad for the development of a practicable concept. While some sort of complementarity between humanitarian aid, development and peace might be advisable in any protracted crisis, differentiation in terms of the configuration of this complementarity is required. Acknowledging the overarching potential of the HDP nexus to encourage thinking beyond distinct spheres of competence and intervention, the paper warns against a nexus-blueprint and advocates for differentiated nexus configurations.

In what follows, the recent conceptualization(s) of the HDP nexus are examined and problematized by drawing attention to aspects that deserve clarification and further inquiry. The examples underpinning the arguments in this paper are drawn from protracted displacement situations, which have also been primarily targeted by recent nexus pilots.⁷ The issues raised in this paper are, however, assumed to apply not only to the conceptualization of the HDP nexus for protracted displacement situations, but to protracted crises more generally. The aim of this paper is to encourage a more differentiated debate about the HDP nexus by moving from a generic conceptualization to more practical and context-specific configurations. To do so, four determinants for nexus configurations are tentatively sketched out. First, the common conceptualization of humanitarian aid, development and peace as sectoral *silos* is problematized as it emphasizes separations and disregards overlaps. Attention is drawn to ideological differences *within* each of the three sectors, as they illustrate that differences between and overlaps of humanitarian, development and peace objectives, activities and outcomes are

⁶ The Agenda for Humanity, guiding framework of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), and the Grand Bargain, which was launched at the WHS, are also worth mentioning, since they include commitments to transcend humanitarian-development divides and aim to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of interventions (UN 2016b; IASC n.d.).

⁷ This paper is a contribution to the project “Integrated Solutions to Protracted Displacement - A Humanitarian/Development/Peace Nexus Approach” which was commissioned by UNHCR and UNDP and carried out by UNRISD: <https://www.unrisd.org/integrated-solutions-protracted-displacement>

organization specific. Second, two distinct but complementary perspectives on the HDP nexus are distinguished. On the one hand, the nexus can refer to an interorganizational level, aiming to bridge the gaps *between* silos. On the other hand, it can refer to an intraorganizational mindset, based on which the scope and implication of activities across all three sectors is (re)considered. Third, the disregard of contextual particularities in conceptualizing the nexus is problematized, calling for further exploration regarding the conditions that enable or prevent a nexus approach in a specific context. Fourth, and related to the former, it is argued that the substance of nexus configurations needs to become a more prominent element in the current debate. Answers need to be found not only for how the HDP nexus can be pursued, facilitated and institutionalized but *with which activities* and outcomes it can be substantiated. While donors and local governments have a determining influence on humanitarian, development and peace interventions, their role is discussed only marginally, giving emphasis to operating actors such as NGOs and UN agencies.

Siloed Ideologies?

Humanitarian, development and peace actors address different issues, work under different mandates and are partly driven by different worldviews and value systems (ideologies). Roughly framed, humanitarians aim to save lives and alleviate acute suffering in situations of emergency; development actors work to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and promote sustainable development; and, peace actors seek to mitigate, solve and prevent violence and conflict. The separation of humanitarian, development and peace interventions, also described as “gaps” or “divides”, has been questioned since the need to transition from life-saving humanitarian aid to long-term development has become particularly apparent in protracted crises situations. While some participants of the nexus debate have advocated the necessity for clear separation, primarily to safeguard the humanitarian space and avoid its politicization (Tronc et al. 2019), others have called for the gaps to be bridged to strengthen synergies between complementary activities (Zamore 2019). These contributions have highlighted the opportunities and risks of blurring the lines between the three sectors, building on generic conceptualizations of humanitarian aid, development and peace. Problematizing these conceptualizations, it will be argued that the ideological diversity within the humanitarian, development and peace communities diminishes the value of strict, generalized and simplistic separations and demonstrates that gaps and overlaps depend on organization-specific ideologies and the activities they entail.⁸ Despite their obvious differences, there are clear overlaps between the activities of humanitarian, development and peace actors, which complicates drawing hard lines and raises questions about a *siloed* conceptualization of the three sectors. Speaking of silos emphasizes separations and suggests that humanitarian aid, development and peace are disconnected spheres of intervention. Thus, communication or cooperation across silos does not occur without facilitation. Looking *within* the silos, the diverse and sometimes conflicting worldviews

⁸ In line with that, Kocks et al. (2018) have proposed an analytical framework that differentiates seven dimensions (or “sub-gaps”) of the humanitarian-development divide.

and value systems will be sketched out in what follows, arguing that the ideologies of humanitarian, development and peace actors cannot be condensed in silos that are strictly separated from each other. Instead, they are diverse and expansive, blurring the lines between the asserted differences of humanitarian, development and peace interventions. From an ideological and partly programmatic perspective, a siloed understanding of humanitarian aid, development and peace is therefore problematic and misleading. Consequently, conceptualizations of the HDP nexus should not only be driven by the intention to work across the three sectoral silos but by a more differentiated examination of the differences and overlaps of organizations' activities and objectives.⁹

The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, which are fundamental for the humanitarian sector (or silo), can be interpreted and operationalized in different ways (DuBois 2020). As such, the humanitarian label is used by various groups to justify different activities and goals. According to Krause (2014), the diversifications or “deregulation of humanitarian action” (p.107) was triggered by the birth of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) during the civil war in Biafra (1967-1970). In disagreement with the public silence of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the founders of MSF provided an alternative reading of the humanitarian principles, which allowed to speak out about the causes of suffering (MSF n.d.). This did not only mark the beginning of a “second generation” of humanitarian action (Barnett 2011), but initiated a debate about its meaning and scope, which already indicates the diversity of the sector and consequently the relevance of organizational ideologies for conceptualizing differences and overlaps of humanitarian aid, development and peace. To give another more recent example: the refugee crisis at Europe's borders has seen the rise of “solidarity humanitarianism” (Rozakou 2017), which is primarily constituted by volunteers who strongly disassociate themselves from established professional humanitarian organizations.¹⁰ They criticize the humanitarian enterprise, that is the institutionalization of solidarity by professional NGOs, and the hierarchical relation between those providing and those receiving aid (Rozakou 2017). Accordingly, the activities and objectives of solidarity humanitarians differ from those of professional humanitarians.¹¹ The situation in Greece and elsewhere along the European borders further demonstrates that the humanitarian label can be, and is, claimed by a variety of actors. The ideological distinctions between these actors and the varying scope of their activities illustrates that there are not only “gaps” or “divides” between humanitarian aid, development and peace but within the humanitarian silo itself. This raises questions about what being *humanitarian* means and encompasses in the context of the HDP nexus, and points towards the significance of organizational ideologies for the conceptualization of connections across silos.

⁹ Here, it is primarily referred to as the activities and programmes of humanitarian, development and peace actors, rather than the institutional structures that underpin them. With regards to funding streams and the budget lines of donors, a siloed conceptualization is quite fitting.

¹⁰ Also see Dunn (2017) for a critical analysis of locally-focused, volunteer-led efforts in the humanitarian response to the crisis in Greece, which she conceptualizes as “vernacular humanitarianism”.

¹¹ It should be noted that the community of volunteers is a very diverse group, which makes it difficult to draw clear lines between their activities and objectives and those of professional humanitarian organizations. For example, some volunteer-run initiatives refuse to collaborate with professional humanitarian organizations, while others establish (non-public) alliances with NGOs (Weishaupt 2019).

The ideological differences within the development sector are similarly vast. Zetter (2019) examined the meaning of *development* in the context of the HDP nexus. Central to his argument is the proliferation of development-led responses to displacement, which emphasize the role of employment and livelihoods for the self-reliance and resilience of refugees and IDPs¹². Drawing from dependency theory¹³, Zetter argues that market-based models of assistance in the periphery (the “global South”) facilitate capitalist penetration and the extraction of surplus value by the metropolises (the “global North”), which reinforces global inequalities and reinstates a quasi-imperial relation of dependency. To some extent, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), established for example in Jordan and Lebanon through a partnership with the European Union (EU), are exemplary of this logic as they seek to institutionalize comparative economic advantages, such as cheap labour, in displacement-affected regions (Howden et al. 2017). Not all development actors are likely to approve SEZs and a nexus that might reinforce dependencies for the sake of economic growth. Zaman (2019), for example, challenges SEZs and, more generally, “paternalistic approaches to assistance embedded in the colonial histories of the humanitarian endeavour and its post-colonial imaginaries” (p.1). Drawing from developmental state theory,¹⁴ he proposes a social economy approach¹⁵ that is based on cooperative modes of production (including displaced people and host communities) and frames international humanitarian organizations as “anchor institutions” which oversee and organize a community-based enterprise cluster through which procurement needs are met. SEZs and humanitarian anchor institutions both point towards a development-oriented solution for protracted displacement. As such, both propositions can be framed as a nexus approach, despite their profound ideological and practical differences. In line with Zetter (2019), this paper calls for a debate about the meaning of *development* in the context of the HDP nexus. The objective of development and how it is pursued through practices and programmes is not unanimously agreed but highly contested. Different understandings, rooted in organizational ideologies, will result in different conceptualizations of the HDP nexus. Therefore, the debate about the meaning of development in the context of the nexus needs to be widened.

The absence of a shared understanding is perhaps most obvious, and in fact widely acknowledged, in terms of the peace component of the HDP nexus. Peace is perceived to be the most recent addition to a long-standing debate about linkages between humanitarian and development interventions (Thomas 2019:21). Nonetheless, it can be argued that peace has already been part of the debate in a less explicit form, for example disguised as “conflict sensitivity”, “do no harm” and “human security” (Macrae 2019). In the context of the recent HDP nexus debate, the peace component has sometimes been framed as

¹² For examples of development-led responses to protracted displacement, see Betts et al. (2016) and Zetter (2014).

¹³ In simplified terms, dependency theory divides the world into developed and underdeveloped states, which are connected in a process of capitalist accumulation and exploitation. The wealth of developed states (the “core”) is understood to be dependent on the exploitation of underdeveloped states (the “periphery”). For a prominent example of this logic see Frank (1966).

¹⁴ In opposition to a laissez-faire liberal state model, a developmental state is actively pursuing development objectives through state policies and regulations. See for example Yi and Mkandawire (2014).

¹⁵ On social economy as an alternative approach, see also UNRISD (2016:Ch. 4).

peacebuilding (World Bank 2017), which the UN understands as “efforts to assist countries and regions in their transitions from war to peace and to reduce a country's risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities for conflict management, and laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development” (UN n.d.). For many NGOs working on humanitarian aid or development, this definition has a rather limited applicability. Therefore, broader concepts more directly applicable to their work have been proposed. Plan International uses “social cohesion” as it provides a more tangible guidance (Lehmann et al. 2019), for example with regards to the mitigation of conflicts between refugees and their host communities. Quite obviously, peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive programming that seeks to facilitate social cohesion are two rather different things. To unravel the ambiguity of the peace component in the HDP nexus therefore deserves further attention.¹⁶

Taken together, the three *silos* that the HDP nexus intends to connect are far from homogenous. They are, instead, diverse and expansive, which objects to a condensed and simplified conceptualization of silos and the gaps or divides between them. As argued, what an organization understands to be the goal of humanitarian aid, development and peace, and how it intends to contribute to achieving these goals, is rooted in their organizational ideology—their origin, worldview and value system. This organization-specific ideology can be complementary with the ideologies, objectives or activities of other actors, but they can also be mutually exclusive or contradicting. Therefore, ideology constitutes the foundation on which ventures into other realms of the nexus and collaborations across silos can be explored. The lessons learned from the operationalization of an organization-specific nexus conceptualization are certainly valuable for other organizations, but they are closely linked to the ways a particular organization understands humanitarian aid, development and peace. What complicates things further is that within one organization one can find different approaches, paradigms and ideological positions, which means the overarching organizational ideology is not completely rigid but can be negotiated, influenced by third parties (e.g. donors) and adapted over time. Without bearing ideological differences in mind, participants of the nexus debate run the risk of talking past each other, assuming shared meaning where there is none. Acknowledging ideological differences and making them explicit, on the other hand, allows for a more differentiated debate about potential linkages and paves the way for a variety of tailored nexus configurations. Therefore, the paper aligns with those voices in the debate that reject a “one-size-fits-all” model and, instead, call for a critical examination of the roles and responsibilities of different actors in a particular context (Kittaneh and Stolk 2018).

¹⁶ At the time of writing, a paper of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) aiming to conceptualize the peace component of the HDP nexus was being drafted. The work in progress was discussed in a webinar hosted by Platform for Humanitarian Knowledge Exchange in the Netherlands (KUNO). It emphasizes the difference between *negative* and *positive* peace and situates various peace-related concepts on a spectrum covering interventions before, during and after conflict (IASC 2020).

Bridging or Breaking the Silos?

In addition to the ideological differences *within* the three silos, and the difficulty this diversity holds for conceptualizing gaps and linkages *between* silos, a lack of definitional clarity is also apparent on an overarching level. Whether the HDP nexus implies collaboration, coordination, alignment, complementarity, fusion, something else or all the above to varying degrees has not been generally determined (DuBois 2020:6). Disregarding minor terminological differences, this paper proposes two distinct but complementary approaches: *bridging* the silos and *breaking* them.¹⁷ Bridging the silos refers to an inter-organizational level (debates between organizations from different sectoral silos), while breaking the silos is intra-organizational (a process of self-reflection). Importantly, these two ways to address the “gaps” or “divides” between humanitarian, development and peace interventions are not mutually exclusive but can be complemented and pursued simultaneously. The juxtaposition of bridging and breaking therefore merely illustrates that the nexus debate and the processes it has initiated takes place at different levels. Depending on where and how the HDP nexus is debated, gaps and divides between and within the silos are going to be addressed in different ways and with different terminologies.

As envisioned by the United Nations, the HDP nexus functions primarily as a mechanism to create connections and complementarities between silos, in this case, the organizational entities of the UN. The formulation of “collective outcomes”, as part of the United Nations’ New Ways of Working (NWoW), is exemplary of the intention to *bridge* the silos as humanitarian, development and peace actors work towards jointly determined outcomes (OCHA 2018b). What defines the HDP nexus in this conceptualization is first and foremost the collaboration or alignment of activities provided by different agencies. The architecture of the UN, and the international community at large, partly explains and justifies this approach to the nexus. Funding structures, which are primarily determined by donors, are, among others, constitutive for institutional separations between humanitarian, development and peace interventions. Humanitarian funding, primarily channelled through NGOs and multilateral organizations, needs to be disbursed quickly to respond to emergencies. This requires fast-track procedures and a tolerance for risk and inefficiencies. Development-oriented funding, on the other hand, is primarily channelled through governments and aims for long-term impacts, which usually implies slower procedures and less risk tolerance. The separation of these budget lines intends to assure reactivity as well as long-term impact of funding.¹⁸ Determined by donors, these separations are outside of the direct sphere of influence of humanitarian, development and peace actors. An alignment of budget lines to create connections and complementarities between silos (bridging) therefore seems to be a reasonable approach for implementing agencies.

¹⁷ Here, only approaches towards the HDP nexus are considered, that is, nexus-affirmative positions. There are however also voices that disregard the nexus, which could be understood as a way of *preserving* or *strengthening* the silos.

¹⁸ For a more comprehensive insight into financing modalities for nexus programmes, see Poole and Culbert (2019).

The fact that the conceptualization of the nexus is not only driven by implementing agencies but by donors (and other stakeholders such as governments) is also demonstrated by the legally binding nexus recommendations recently developed by OECD's DAC. The recommendations formulate guiding principles for complementary programming and financing and are signed by some of the largest providers of aid worldwide (OECD 2019). In line with these guidelines, most donor initiatives aim for an alignment of existing funding mechanisms instead of broadening their scope, or applicability.¹⁹ The high level of earmarked funding, which can only be spent for specific activities or projects, further demonstrates the limited flexibility to allocate funds across the three pillars of the nexus. Such limitations do not only allow donors to pursue their own agenda but reinforce sectoral silos (Poole and Culbert 2019:28). *Bridging* these silos in terms of a nexus approach means working with, and within, the very structures of the international community, building bridges between donors, implementing agencies and other stakeholders. From this perspective, the nexus seems to be a compromise, common ground for stakeholders with different mandates, interests and objectives. For some organizations this search for common ground might also initiate a process of reflection that broadens their field of vision and potentially their practices, which would suggest that the silo's walls are crumbling.²⁰

The deregulation and diversification of humanitarian action, outlined in the previous section, is exemplary for a process of *breaking* the silos as it provided “‘humanitarianism’ with limitless space for growth” (Schusterman 2019:5), stretching into the realms of development and peace. The birth of MSF and, more recently, the consolidation of “solidarity humanitarianism” (Rozakou 2017) have illustrated the “expansionist march of humanitarianism’s telos” (Philips 2019:13), that is a broadening of its scope and ultimate objective. While this process has been heavily criticized, as it led to ambiguities about the purpose and goal of humanitarian action, it demonstrates the venture of humanitarian actors into the realms of development and peace. Similarly, the proliferation of the “resilience paradigm” (Hilhorst 2015), which is based on an understanding of crisis as the new normality that demands prevention- and resilience-oriented humanitarian aid, reflects a blurring of lines. Operating under this paradigm implies “pushing the boundaries of humanitarianism” (Philips 2019) into the realms of development and peace. The nexus refocuses the attention on this process and provides it with a bigger stage. Therefore, some have called for “a future culture and ideology where the mindset within the three sectors is sufficiently cross-pollinated that the differences become technical, not normative and not hierarchical” (DuBois 2020:10). While this future might still be distant, “nexus thinking” (DuBois 2020) can nonetheless contribute to enlarging organizations’ field of vision and cultivating a sensitivity towards the implications one’s actions might have for

¹⁹ Switzerland, for example, discussed a “nexus fund” that channels and compiles funding from all three sectors, but eventually dismissed the idea (FDFA 2019). For an overview of donors’ strategies and instruments targeting the gaps between humanitarian aid and development that is illustrative despite its date, see Steets (2011).

²⁰ It has been noted that reconsidering and reframing an organization’s mandate (and the sectoral silos more generally) can lead to the duplication of processes and the blurring of roles and responsibilities. Taking stock of the advantages and disadvantages of the dynamics the nexus debate has initiated is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. For a critical perspective on the historical trajectory of nexus-related concepts and their implications, see for example Macrae (2019).

the people of concern as well as the activities and objectives of other organizations. This sensitivity requires and reflects a (re)consideration of the silos' walls, reinforcing, bridging or breaking them not based on an essentially limited and narrow mind-set but a holistic consideration of one's actions and objectives in relation to those of others.

Taken together, the three silos of the HDP nexus can either be bridged through coordination mechanisms that strengthen or rewire the connections between humanitarian, development and peace actors, or they can be broken from within as organizations shift their horizon, and possibly their activities, beyond the barriers of these silos. While *bridging* suggests that the problem is insufficient connection, *breaking* suggests that “the problem is the silo, and its power to shape thinking and constrain imagination” (DuBois 2020:10).²¹ Instead of taking sides, this paper emphasizes that the difference is one of perspective. In engaging with the idea of a nexus, dialogue across silos is as important as an examination of the implications one's own ideology and mandate have for the activities of others. The nexus debate has the potential to initiate a process of reflection within all three sectors, which might ultimately cultivate a sensitivity towards the interrelation of each other's objectives, activities and outcomes. As will be discussed in the following, such a sensitivity can be the foundation for differentiated and context-specific nexus configurations.

Towards Contextual Nexus Configurations

Thus far, the solution that the HDP nexus seems to offer for protracted crises has been formulated and discussed on a rather conceptual and abstract level. Consequently, the diversity of contextual differences between situations of protracted crises and its implications for the nexus have received little attention. While various reports have recorded the success and failure of nexus programmes, resulting in endorsement (Lehmann et al. 2019) or dismissal (Tronc et al. 2019), the role of contextual factors in the success or failure of these programmes is increasingly being recognized but has not sufficiently been taken into account.²² In the following it will be argued that contextual particularities of protracted crises situations—such as legal frameworks, needs of people of concern, geographical characteristics of an area, and the presence or absence of violence—are of central importance for the conceptualization and implementation of nexus configurations.

A comparison of protracted urban displacement and encampment highlights the relevance of context for the configuration of a nexus response. Contrary to the prevalent perception, less than one third of all refugees live in camps (UNHCR 2018), which is illustrative for a wider trend towards urban settlement. According to UNHCR, 60 percent of all refugees

²¹ Another overarching differentiation between nexus conceptualizations has been proposed by Pinnock (cited in Perret 2019), who refers to “distinct but complementary” and “merged but principled” nexus action. The first emphasizes the need to safeguard humanitarian principles but seeks complementarity between the two to harness the comparative advantages of humanitarian and development action, while the second emphasizes that humanitarian action should support the SDGs and views “the distinction between humanitarian and development assistance as an obstacle to effective crisis response” (Perret 2019:1). Unfortunately, the original paper was not available to review for the paper at hand.

²² Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019; Wilkinson et al. 2019; Kittaneh and Stolk 2018

and 80 percent of all IDPs live in urban areas (Park 2016). Despite the creeping urbanization of camps, which has been observed by various scholars as a direct consequence of protracted displacement (Jansen 2018; Dalal 2015), the circumstances in camps remain different from those in urban areas. A camp always remains a “mechanism of temporary care” (Jansen 2016), constructed, governed and sustained by the international community to provide basic services, save lives and alleviate the suffering of displaced people.²³ In urban areas, on the other hand, the humanitarian mechanism of care is less straightforward, not least as care and control over the population of concern is complicated by people’s movement and their spread over vast urban areas.²⁴ Lack of oversight also presents challenges regarding status determination and the adequate distribution of aid. Besides that, camps are often (intentionally) established in remote and under-developed areas. Cut off from physical, political and social infrastructures of the government, prospects for development are rather limited. Contrary to that, the informal economies in urban areas have been shown to provide displaced people with livelihood opportunities, which can also enable development on a larger, regional scale. Campbell’s (2006) study on urban Somali refugees in Nairobi concludes that the local economy flourished due to the diverse range of business strategies pursued by displaced Somalis. They engaged in various sectors including transportation, retail and cattle trading to sustain their livelihoods, thereby stimulating the local economy through competition and a diversification of available services.

In addition to the geographical characteristics of an area and the livelihood opportunities it provides, the (arguably simplistic) juxtaposition of protected urban displacement and encampment points towards various factors that shape the roles and responsibilities of the international community, which has ramifications for the conceptualization of the HDP nexus.²⁵ For example, the presence of government authorities and their capacity and willingness to intervene in support of displaced people are crucial (Rubenstein 2015). Among others, they determine if, and to what extent, refugees are included in national systems and development plans.²⁶ In other words, local authorities can limit or enable the development component of the nexus. Also, and perhaps most importantly, the capacities and needs of host communities and displaced people are context specific and therefore essential for the conceptualization of appropriate nexus configurations. Simply speaking, whether the population of concern speaks the same language as the host community or not; whether they have skills that compete with or complement those of locals; and whether they need education, health care or employment makes a difference for conceptualizing a nexus response.

²³ This does not contradict with the fact that the camp and its surroundings might actually become indistinguishable through urbanization, the establishment of small businesses, and other processes of exchange and adaptation.

²⁴ On the politics of humanitarian care and control see, for example, Pallister-Wilkins (2016).

²⁵ For the purpose of this argument, the comparison of protracted urban displacement and encampment merely intends to reflect potential contextual differences between situations of protracted displacement, and more generally protracted crises.

²⁶ For an illustrative typology of HDP responses according to the capacity and willingness of the government to uphold its obligation and responsibility to protect, see IASC (2019).

What this paper tries to emphasize is that there are various contextual differences which have implications for conceptualizing the HDP nexus. The nexus debate has so far paid little attention to these differences. Protracted displacement (and to some extent protracted crises more generally) has been treated as a “static and fixed” phenomenon (Etzold et al. 2019), approached from a generalized and technocratic perspective that disregards geographical, cultural, political and social realities on the ground. The fact that the HDP nexus is not only discussed and piloted as an approach to protracted displacement but to fragility, conflict and disaster more generally highlights its supposedly universal application.²⁷ A nexus blueprint that disregards contextual particularities can amplify some of the risks that the nexus entails. First and foremost, the supposedly neutral and impartial position of humanitarian organizations, which enables them to operate on both sides of a conflict (for example in state-controlled territories as well as outside of those), can be compromised through alignment or collaboration with development and peace actors (Pedersen 2016). In Mali, insufficient inclusion of local actors and the prioritization of (international) security “at the definitive expense of more expansive, long-term peacebuilding efforts” has, for example, led to a “definitive blurring of the lines between peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian activities” (Tronc et al. 2019:18,29). Therefore, Tronc et al. (2019:27) emphasize that “the ‘triple nexus’ can succeed only if peacebuilding-development-humanitarian linkages do not lead to the perception, or the reality, that humanitarian action has been subsumed by a political agenda”. Put differently, the political interests of stakeholders, the engagement of local actors and the presence of conflict and violence are contextual determinants for nexus configurations (also see Howe 2019). Starting with the careful assessment of those, and other contextual particularities, it can be determined if, and how, the HDP nexus should be applied in a specific situation.

It is important to emphasize once more that there is not *the* HDP nexus, but various nexus configurations. While political interests in ongoing conflicts might require humanitarian action to be separated from other interventions (to avoid compromising the access humanitarians have to populations in need of protection), development and peace interventions could still be linked in the form of a “double nexus”. Simultaneously, humanitarian aid can be provided in a “nexus-sensitive” manner (Howe 2019:5), that is to say humanitarian action should consider and minimize potential negative effects on development and peace.²⁸ Other configurations of double-nexus and nexus-sensitive action might be appropriate in other contexts. Beside the useful but still very general nexus recommendations formulated by the OECD (2019), guidance in terms of which circumstances and criteria should inform and determine the configuration of a nexus approach is not yet available. Next to conflict, violence and the political interests of governments, belligerents and international donors, there is a range of factors that are considered in context analyses that inform humanitarian, development and peace programming. Joint analyses—and a focus on local circumstance and capacities in

²⁷ As noted earlier, the list of countries in which the HDP nexus is piloted is long and includes countries such as Somalia (Perret 2019) and Mozambique (Kittaneh and Stolk 2018:17), which are not primarily characterized as protracted displacement situations, but by fragility, frequent disasters and conflict.

²⁸ Nexus-sensitive action (Howe 2019) can be understood as the result of nexus-thinking (DuBois 2020).

addition to expert knowledge (Autesserre 2014) —are therefore promising entry points to assess which nexus configuration might be the most appropriate in a specific context.

Substance of Nexus Configurations

The substance of the HDP nexus has also had a marginal position within a debate that largely focused on mechanisms, instruments and tools for coordination (Schusterman 2019). While “collective outcomes” (OCHA 2018b) are central to the debate and much attention has been paid to how these outcomes might be pursued, facilitated and institutionalized, the question of their substance is apparently thrust aside, to be considered at a later point, when implementing the nexus at country level. Put simply, the debate has produced different approaches to operationalize the nexus (through collaboration, alignment, linkages, etc.), but has fallen short to make explicit what it is precisely that the nexus is supposed to achieve (Schusterman 2019:15). While *substantial*—that is thematic—overlaps between humanitarian, development and peace interventions have been acknowledged, they have not been rigorously conceptualized as entry points for nexus approaches. Infrastructure programmes, for example, are primarily perceived to be development-oriented but can also have positive outcomes for peace and social cohesion through engaging local communities in the processes of planning and implementation (Bachmann and Schouten 2018), while social protection can be supported through emergency cash transfers for forcibly displaced persons as well as capacity-building programmes targeting national systems (DEVCO et al. 2019; O’Brien et al. 2019). Collaboration, alignment, interlinkage or whatever it is a nexus initiative intends to achieve, are assumed to take different shapes within these thematic areas due to the modus operandi of humanitarian, development and peace actors. It is therefore crucial to differentiate between the various nexus configurations that need to be explored further to substantiate and specify their form and applicability.

The relevance of employment and livelihoods for the self-reliance and resilience of refugees and IDPs, which, as mentioned above, is central to development-led responses to displacement, has been considered as a promising thematic entry point. Crawford et al. (2015) proposed a typology to assess and categorize the receptiveness of displacement situations to self-reliance and livelihoods programming, which can inform nexus configurations. The typology considers social, political, legal and cultural characteristics that prevent or enable self-reliance as well as the capacities and resources of displaced people. Based on an assessment of these characteristics, four broad categories for the receptiveness of context for self-reliance and livelihoods programming are framed. On the one end of the spectrum, “it is likely that little is possible beyond care and maintenance or protection activities” (Crawford et al. 2015:40). Here, humanitarian aid might be the priority and humanitarian organizations in the lead. A separation between humanitarian aid, development and peace is likely to be appropriate. While a triple nexus might have negative consequences, such as the politicization of aid, nexus-sensitive action is still advisable (also see Howe 2019:11). On the other end of the spectrum, “there is scope for meaningful collaboration with host governments and an enabling environment for

innovative approaches” (Crawford et al. 2015:40). Here, close collaboration between authorities and various actors from the international community might be productive. The risk for a politicization of humanitarian aid might be low and a triple nexus appropriate. Based on this typology, context-specific nexus configurations focused on employment, livelihoods and self-reliance can be developed and piloted. Macrae (2019) suggests that the applicability of this typology could be adapted and extended beyond its thematic scope, for example to strengthen “shock-responsive social protection systems” (O’Brien et al. 2018). Social protection is indeed targeted by actors across the three sectoral silos and has been shown to “have considerable potential to bridge the humanitarian-development divide” (DEVCO et al. 2019:3). As such, it marks another suitable entry point for a thematic nexus configuration.

A broader conceptual entry-point for nexus configurations is a system-oriented perspective. Looking at urban displacement, Earle (2016) suggests addressing the “divide” between short-term humanitarian aid and long-term urban development by focusing on existing social, political and infrastructural systems. “While humanitarian actors cannot solve structural urban problems, they can operate in ways that better support city systems and establish new frameworks within which future urban development can flourish, while limiting disruption to urban development trajectories” (Earle 2016:221). Such a systems-oriented perspective, or whole-of-society approach, also proves relevant for development and peace actors. Bachman and Schouten (2018) have shown for example how infrastructure has become part of peacebuilding interventions since it facilitates the circulation of public security forces and enables access to services, including humanitarian aid.²⁹ In the context of such projects, infrastructure is understood as a relational concept that provides an opportunity to bring groups (and communities) together in a collective process of planning and construction.

While Earle (2016) developed her systems-perspective with regard to urban displacement, it is applicable and appropriate in other contexts. Due to the complex interaction of humanitarian, development and peace interventions and the operating environment, Howe (2019:10) suggests “moving towards a systems approach” and “systemic theories of change” through which interrelations across silos can be analysed “in a less linear, more holistic manner”. As such, a systems-perspective can be a conceptual entry point to refocus the nexus debate on substance. Answers need to be found not only for how collaboration can be pursued, facilitated and institutionalized but *for what purpose* it is established and *with which activities* and outcomes it is substantiated. Markets, social safety nets, infrastructure, education and health care are only a few thematic entry points that appear in a systems-oriented field of vision which pave the way for various thematic nexus configurations.

²⁹ It should also be mentioned that improved infrastructure can also benefit armed groups.

Conclusion

The HDP nexus is an ambitious idea that is hard to grasp in its abstract form. This paper aimed to unravel the nexus in an attempt to determine entry points for more specific and therefore more tangible nexus configurations that do not confront practitioners with abstract ideas but provide concrete practical guidance for comprehensive approaches to protracted and recurring conflicts and disasters. Certainly, an exploration of existing but implicitly framed nexus configurations will reveal already apparent lessons learned. These lessons can be analysed to establish thematic and context-specific configurations through which thinking and working across and beyond the three sectoral silos can be systematized. A first step in this direction can be the development of thematic typologies for nexus configuration that outline “what can (and can’t) be done in different crisis contexts” (Macrae 2019:31).³⁰ Underlying ideological assumptions about the meaning and scope of humanitarian aid, development and peace should be made more explicit (acknowledging that the principles of an organization might limit their ability to do so). Awareness of ideological differences would, on the one hand, allow to assess possibilities to *bridge* or *break* sectoral silos, and, on the other hand, pave the way for a greater variety of nexus configurations that will need to be measured against the realities on the ground. This implies that a sensitivity towards the nexus—that is towards interrelations and interdependencies between humanitarian aid, development and peace—is cultivated within organizations. This sensitivity will allow for a shared mind-set across sectoral silos through which programming for complex and protracted crisis situations—whether nexus-sensitive action or a double- or triple-nexus pursued individually or as part of a consortium—can become more focussed and systematic. In line with that, this paper rejects a simplistic understanding of *the* nexus, in terms of a “one-size-fits-all” model. The disagreement about the meaning of the HDP nexus, voiced in current debates, points towards obstacles regarding the applicability of such a model and calls for differentiated conceptualizations. Responding to that, this paper tentatively sketched four determinants for nexus configurations:

- *Organization-specific ideologies*, as they determine the differences between and overlaps with objectives, activities and outcomes across the three sectors (for example MSF’s ability to engage in nexus programmes differs from ICRC’s ability due to their specific understanding of the scope of humanitarianism);
- *Inter- and intra-organizational dynamics*, as they provide starting points for bridging and/or breaking the silos (for example UNHCR and UNDP jointly working towards collective outcomes bridges organizational barriers, while individually considering the implications of activities for all of the three sectors might lead to a comprehensive—rather than siloed—understanding of international interventions at large);
- *Contextual particularities*, as they determine the specific needs for humanitarian aid, development and peace as well as the potential for meeting them in a

³⁰ For a preliminary nexus typology looking at the capacity and willingness of governments, see IASC (2019). For a typology to assess and categorize the receptiveness of displacement situations to self-reliance and livelihoods programming, which could inform nexus configurations, see Crawford et al. (2015).

comprehensive/collective manner (for example in Mali active conflict might require humanitarian action to be separated from development and peace interventions to ensure the neutral and impartial position of humanitarians, while closer alignment might be possible in Uganda);

- *Substance*, as it reflects the purpose of the nexus and determines activities and outcomes (for example a nexus programme focused on infrastructure might require different actors and activities than a nexus programme focused on social protection).

These four elements are not ground-breaking but central, and rather elementary considerations of humanitarian, development and peace interventions. As such they are assumed to have considerable implications for the conceptualization and operationalization of the nexus, even though they have not received much attention in the recent debate. Correcting this might complement the abstract and institutional debate with more concrete and practical concerns, moving from a “one-size-fits-all” model to differentiated nexus configurations.

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