development
initiatives

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**key questions and
considerations for donors
at the triple nexus: lessons
from UK and Sweden**

report

Contents

1. Introduction

Crises are the expression of underlying and ongoing problems. Reducing the incidences, severity and impacts of crises demands a concerted, multi-faceted approach: working at the 'nexus' between emergency response and longer-term approaches to reduce peoples' vulnerabilities and risks, including poverty and insecurity.

This has been long understood and is reflected in the commitments of the Sustainable Development Goals to "leave no one behind". It has gained renewed focus as a policy agenda since the 2016 Agenda for Humanity called for humanitarian and development actors to work together to achieve 'Collective Outcomes' for people.[1] This was followed by the creation of a United Nations Joint Steering Committee to pilot a "New Way of Working": collaborative, multi-year approaches drawing on the comparative strengths of multiple actors.[2] Building on this, in February 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) published its recommendation on the 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus',[3] adding peace to the previously dual nexus to create the so-called 'triple nexus'. This provides a set of working principles for DAC members and a common reference point for all relevant organisations (Box 1).

Financing is crucial to realising all these commitments – not just to provide funding for interventions, but to enable and incentivise collaborative and coherent working. Bilateral government donors have a central role to play in supporting, shaping and catalysing system-wide and context-specific coordination and action. However, for many donors, funding and financing approaches to the nexus are still catching up with the policy agenda. Sharing learning both within and between donors, and including their partners in this, will make this process more efficient and effective.

All donors face similar questions at strategic, principle and practical levels, situated in the political context of their official development assistance (ODA) agendas. Strategically, what scale of ambition should they aim for in the spectrum from complementarity to coherence; to what extent is the focus on system transformation as well as internal change? In terms of principles, how do they maintain neutral and impartial humanitarian action while pursuing peace and development priorities? Practically, how can they balance top-down approaches with contextually tailored initiatives? Ultimately, they all face the same central challenges: what is possible within their structures and resources and what works for affected people?

This report is part of a series of studies intended to share emerging lessons and approaches as donors evolve their application of their nexus commitments. Drawing on the findings of two reports which look in detail at Sweden and the UK's respective approaches, it draws out key lessons, examples and questions of wider relevance to other donors and agencies.[4] It examines findings under three areas of donor operation:

the policy frameworks that guide their work; the programme and allocation cycle through which it is implemented; and the organisational structures and systems that enable it. It is clear that just as there can be no template for putting the nexus into practice in-country, nor can there be a single model for donors, whose political contexts, architecture and resources vary widely. The intention of this series is therefore to shed light and provide insights from several different donors – starting with Sweden and the UK – in order to stimulate and inform open dialogue and considered action.

Box 1: A note on terminology

This paper uses 'nexus' or 'triple nexus' as short-hand terms to refer to the connections between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding approaches. It aligns with the definition in the OECD DAC recommendation:[5]

'Nexus approach' refers to the aim of strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity. The approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each pillar – to the extent of their relevance in the specific context – in order to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict.

Achieving collaboration, coherence and complementarity means quite different things to different actors. We understand the three ambitions to sit on a spectrum from complementarity to coherence, with complementarity being the minimum requirement for approaching the nexus. At the higher end of the spectrum, the nexus can fundamentally challenge existing divisions between humanitarian, development and peace systems, encouraging stronger coherence and working towards shared outcomes. The three pillars are not exclusive or fixed – donors and agencies may need to employ and move between them at different times and in different contexts. We also recognise that there are three dual nexuses within the triple nexus – the well-established humanitarian–development nexus as well as the development-peace and humanitarian-peace nexuses.

We are clear that working 'at the nexus' to make these connections is not an end in itself, but a means to addressing and reducing people's unmet needs, risks and vulnerabilities, increasing their resilience, addressing the root causes of conflict and building peace. However, as noted in recent research on financing the nexus at the country level, the scope and ambitions of the nexus are not yet clear.[6] Further clarification is required as to whether the ambitions of the nexus are to work on technical issues within humanitarian and development programming of limited scale and impact or to address more fundamental challenges in terms of engaging with the political economy.

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2. Policy frameworks

Top-level policy and strategy framework

Common observations

Donors' overarching visions for their international official development assistance (ODA) help to set the rationale, intent and broad parameters for coherence and connections between humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and political dialogue in crisis contexts. As multi-year framework documents, these tend to pre-date the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) recommendation, but many of its enduring themes, particularly those on risk and resilience, are reflected within both Sweden and the UK's high-level strategies.

Both donors have been actively engaging in nexus discussions on the global stage, most recently with the DAC in developing the triple nexus recommendation, with the UK acting as co-chair of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) in the negotiations leading up to the recommendation. Engagement with two strategic issues – resilience and fragility – have laid the foundations for their engagement. Sweden and the UK were both early, proactive and committed champions of resilience approaches as a central component of the humanitarian-development dual nexus.[7] Both donors have also increased their strategic focus on – and funding for – engaging in fragile contexts, and on addressing conflict and instability as a prerequisite for sustainable development, providing a clear rationale for making the connections between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts.

Building synergies with the peace aspect of the nexus poses challenges for donors and implementing agencies alike, especially concerning the humanitarian-peace dual nexus. More progress is noted in the development-peace dual nexus through, for example, efforts to integrate a peace lens into development programming. The existence of these challenges not only results from commitments on the triple nexus being very new and less developed but also reflects tensions between political agendas around security and stabilisation and needs-based principled humanitarian assistance. There is a demand for more thought about the types of peacebuilding or security activities that are relevant and appropriate to the nexus, and those that are not, as well as the limitations of the nexus concerning humanitarian assistance given the risk of alignment and the challenge of extending focus beyond addressing severe needs in the context of finite resources.

Notable practice

Both Sweden's Policy Framework (2016) and the UK's Aid Strategy (2015) lay the foundation for the triple nexus by reflecting the "leave no one behind" imperative of Agenda 2030. Sweden's Policy Framework sets out the aim of ODA as creating

"preconditions for better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression", [8] and the UK Aid Strategy states that the UK "will lead the world in implementing the Leave No One Behind Promise and […] will prioritise work that targets the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, the most excluded, those caught in crises and those most at risk of violence and discrimination".[9]

While the respective roles of humanitarian, development and peace support are indicated in both donors' ODA policy frameworks, they also demand complementarity and interplay between them as a minimum and aim to promote the role of development actors in building resilience and responding to risk. Sweden's overarching ODA policy framework sets out the ambition of "increasing the resilience of societies and opportunities of people, and thus reducing the risk of humanitarian crises and preventing protracted crises".[10] The UK's Aid Strategy (2015) and its Humanitarian Reform Policy (2017) focus on resilience, with the latter stating the intention to "bring together humanitarian and development funding to support education, jobs, health and social protection given the protracted nature of crisis and harness humanitarian and development responses for a bespoke response to crisis".[11] Building on this, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has developed a focus on protracted crises, recognising the need to address the risks and drivers of crisis and longer-term livelihood needs, as well as providing humanitarian response.[12] Cementing this broader focus on crisis and risk that extends beyond humanitarian assistance within official policy would strengthen uptake further.

In terms of the connection with peace, the current Operational Plan formulated by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) connects to the Policy Framework and sets the explicit objective of developing "methods, ways of working and routines that enable an effective interplay between humanitarian assistance and long-term development, including peacebuilding contributions," although, as the next section explores, progress towards realising this objective is, so far, patchy.[13] The UK Aid Strategy (2015) shifted the agenda towards focusing on conflict and stabilisation and integrating a peace lens into development programming. The policy framework could go further to explicitly cover ambitions for building the complementarity of peace work with humanitarian assistance, in a way that safeguards humanitarian principles.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. The top-level policy frameworks of both donors pre-date the DAC recommendation. As we shall see in a later section, a top-level policy steer that is broadly conducive and not contradictory to working at the nexus is sufficient for action. Do donors now need to formally write the triple nexus into top-level policy, in order to send a stronger statement of intent? If so, this must be at the level of overall ODA policy, to ensure ownership is not seen to rest solely in the humanitarian domain.

2. National interest is an inevitable part – either implicit (in the case of Sweden) or explicit (in the case of the UK) – of the rationale for directing development and peacebuilding and stability support. How can policy frameworks help to reconcile this with risk-informed and needs-based prioritisation?

Translation of policy into operational strategy

Common observations

The nexus can be both a daunting and an abstract concept for many donor staff, and application and ownership of it can be patchy between and within ministries and departments. For joined-up approaches to become routine practice, top-level steers and commitments need to be translated into operational strategy and guidance. This 'missing middle' between top-level policy and context-specific practice was evident in both donors, and filling it is a work in progress. The process of doing so is an opportunity to build common understanding between the three 'legs' of the nexus (humanitarian, development and peace) and constructively confront any problematic differences in points of departure. Conceptual clarity is a prerequisite for effective operational guidance.

Notable practice

Both donors have recognised the need for and are in the process of conceptualising and/or creating common guidance and tools for staff across departments to understand what the triple nexus means in practice and to delineate what the expectations and options are for their agencies. Developing and formalising these tools will need to involve generating buy-in for them across the relevant ministries and departments, beyond the staff who have been traditionally working on crisis prevention and response, and consulting and communicating with implementing partners in the process. Striking a balance between providing the necessary central guidance to systematise approaches while continuing to encourage country teams to respond flexibly to the context will be key.

Country-specific or regional strategy processes also offer critical opportunities for translating broad ODA objectives into practice for both donors. DFID develops joined-up country strategies covering all aspects of the nexus, while Sweden's humanitarian strategies are ring-fenced from country strategies, as a means of preserving humanitarian principles. Both approaches can be compatible with realising nexus commitments – building in ways to systematically make connections with development and peace, both in process and content. For example, in Sweden's ring-fenced model, there is a dedicated chapter on development connections in each humanitarian plan, with cross-departmental discussions built into the process. At the same time, the country strategies for development assistance are starting to integrate crisis-risk considerations, though this could be made more regular, routine and consistent.

DFID uses a unique 'Business Case' model which encourages a comprehensive organisational approach to programme design and planning. The current Business Case template includes sections on risk and conflict sensitivity, though there is scope to broaden this focus and cover the full spectrum of nexus-related issues in programme planning. As a first step towards this, the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHASE) within DFID has recently developed a programme design and business case checklist which prompts teams to consider approaches for joined-up assessments, programming and flexible funding.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. Many donors already have a 'forest' of operational guidelines and tools, from gender to conflict sensitivity and accountability. As they work to fill the 'missing middle' of operational guidance on the nexus, they face the practical question of how to do so in a way that makes sense of and is coherent with existing guidelines and tools, rather than adding to or getting lost among them. This may require either the consolidation or rethink of existing tools and guidance, or the production of a new set.

2. Resilience approaches have been critical in laying the groundwork and imperative to work at the nexus. There is now a need for clarity on the distinction between resilience and the broader triple nexus to avoid confusion among staff and suspicion that it is just a repackaging (see Section 1 for definition of resilience). There is no commonly held distinction of these terms between donors and agencies and so co-developing this clarity would be beneficial.

3. Programme and allocation cycle

Assessments and analysis

Common observations

Common action must be based on a common understanding of what the problem is: working at the nexus demands assessments and analysis which take account of the full set of risks, needs, vulnerabilities, coping capacities and contextual factors. This can be in the form of complementary or joint analysis exercises. Recent in-country research on collective international efforts to work at the nexus found that in general, there was not enough robust joint analysis of risks, systems and root causes. This meant that risks and needs might be "under-recognised and under-prioritised".[14]

Notable practice

Sweden and the UK use different constellations of assessment methods to diagnose situations and requirements, with different degrees of join-up. Both donors undertake country assessments every four years using standardised multi-dimensional or disciplinary methodologies to inform country strategies.[15]

Sweden's multi-dimensional poverty analysis (MPDA) approach forms the basis of its overarching analytical approach for its country development plans. It defines multi-dimensional poverty as something that "deprives people of the freedom to decide over and shape their own lives [...] Lack of power and choice and lack of material resources form the essence of poverty".[16] A recent update of the definition explicitly incorporates risk and vulnerability and adds human security as a fourth dimension of poverty, an important first step to system-conscious, risk-informed analysis which now needs to be routinely and fully applied and regularly revisited in the four-year period. As explained above, humanitarian analysis is a separate annual process based on comparable cross-country metrics of need, but one which involves, and should inform, country teams' understanding of and response to the changing context.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) brings comprehensive analysis of seven different areas together under a single tool.[17] Country Development Diagnostics provides a solid shared analysis. The 'Business Case' process requires consideration of all dimensions of the diagnostics. Country assessments are updated regularly during the four-year period and monthly and quarterly humanitarian meetings review allocations in light of internal and external analysis on changing needs and vulnerability. For both donors, ensuring that the perspectives of affected populations feed into programme

design, monitoring and evaluation is crucial, through, for example, the establishment of beneficiary feedback mechanisms from the outset.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. How can donors ensure that being risk- and resilience-informed is central, rather than peripheral, to development analyses and therefore to programming plans?

2. Frequency and synchronicity of analysis matter in high-risk contexts. Development analyses tend to be on a four-year cycle but humanitarian analyses for some donors are annually and regularly reviewed, as situations change fast. Development analysis timeframes therefore need to embed opportunities for the frequent and ongoing analysis that is necessary in volatile situations.

Programming approaches

Common observations

The nexus is better understood in practice than in concept. Other case studies of system-wide coordination and implementation have found that practical action at the programme level made more sense than policy definition at the headquarters level[18] – perhaps unsurprisingly so, for something that must be context-specific.

In Sweden and the UK, it also appeared to be true: bottom-up collaborative solutions focusing on context-specific problems were outpacing the development of systems and protocols. In both cases, although practical examples fit into a broad set of different programming types, there is no top-down blueprint. Instead, approaches are rightly developed according to the specific situations and opportunities.

Box 2: Sequential and simultaneous programming

For the purpose of this study series, DI uses the following definitions.

Sequential programming is the delivery of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding responses in sequence, passing on the baton as the context moves into and out of crisis. This includes transitional funding where development and peacebuilding investments allow humanitarian assistance to transition out.

Simultaneous programming is the delivery of humanitarian, development and peace programmes at the same time in the same context. This can involve closely joined programmes and more parallel, complementary approaches. It includes preventative approaches where development and peacebuilding investments address the risk of crisis as well as resilience approaches in situations of chronic crisis.

Sequential approaches are most evident in disaster contexts, where points for handover are perhaps easier defined than in conflict contexts. DFID has several tools and programmes which support both scaling up in development contexts to meet emerging crisis needs[19] and ensuring that development programmes can be shock-responsive and adapt nutrition and social protection programming. Sweden's recent response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, which sought at the very outset to agree a phased approach to long-term development, might also provide a model for transitional planning in rapid-onset disasters.

Simultaneous approaches are relevant in both disaster and conflict contexts and include continuing humanitarian response at the same time as supporting peace dividends; investing in longer-term livelihoods approaches and enhancing social protection; investing in prevention through resilience, preparedness and integrating a peace lens into development programming to address crisis risk. Yemen is an example of a situation where both donors are exploring simultaneous programming, despite the highly constrained environment. For DFID, this takes the form of looking at how to align social assistance and humanitarian cash. For Sweden, it is about finding ways to support demonstrable peace dividends in the critical window following the peace agreement.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. Given the proliferation of practical examples, donors now need to focus on learning from them and sharing that learning internally and externally. Experience seems to be held within country or programme teams and there is a lack of basic systems for documenting these, let alone conducting rigorous learning and sharing. This is an obvious priority for both and applies to all donors.

2. Based on this learning, how can donors develop a practical menu of programming options in different types of situation while maintaining context-responsive and tailored innovation without creating a restrictive blueprint?

Funding models and instruments

Common observations

A high degree of fungibility combined with delegated authority seems to be more important than creating specific funds or mechanisms to work at the nexus. This creates the scope for country teams and implementing partners to respond to changing situations and risk profiles and to be supported to trial new approaches in difficult settings. Specific pots and facilities focusing on one aspect of the nexus can also clearly incentivise risk-informed programming and targeted interventions but have the potential to create siloes unless a systematised approach to building complementary is taken. For both donors, funding for peacebuilding activities constitutes a small proportion of official development assistance (ODA) (4.2% for Sweden and 5.1% for the UK in 2017). This raises the question of whether a greater proportion of ODA should be allocated to peacebuilding

activities in order to deliver on the peace aspect of the triple nexus at scale and truly address the underlying causes of crisis.

For effective delivery of the nexus agenda, development programmes need inbuilt mechanisms enabling them to scale up and down in response to crisis. However, specific contingency mechanisms tend to focus on scale-up of crisis preparedness and response programming, rather than scale-up of development or peace approaches. Holding development contingency funds is discretionary for country teams and there are countervailing pressures to ensure that funds are fully allocated. While central contingency financing mechanisms are vital for responding to rapid-onset humanitarian needs, it is equally important to expand the scope of reserve funding – whether as a separate or sub-funding window – to address anticipatory and preventative activities or respond early to long-term needs in crises.

Both donors have focused their efforts primarily on grant-based funding. Innovative and blended instruments are a much smaller part of the portfolio in crisis contexts and include support for insurance and guarantee-based models.

Notable practice

Both Sweden and the UK have a high degree of inbuilt flexibility and decentralised decision-making in their development (and for the UK, humanitarian) funds. This has enabled country teams to direct funds to respond to the risks, longer-term causes and consequences of crises.

For Sweden, examples of country teams using this decentralised flexibility include using development assistance both to support the humanitarian pooled fund in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and to scale-up sustainable responses for Rohingya refugees and host communities in Bangladesh. At the same time, at headquarters level, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has recently created a small resilience fund within its humanitarian budget (approximately 6% of the total budget) to ring-fence funding for discrete projects which did not quite fit the severe humanitarian needs profile, but which development programmes were not yet able to pick up, or in places where there was no development funding, such as parts of the Sahel. However, this fund is clearly a limited stopgap.

Decision-making on allocation within country budgets is also highly decentralised in both donors. DFID country directors have within their four-year budgets the flexibility and the option to move funds around in response to contextual changes, apply for access to underspend from other programmes and to access contingency funding through an Internal Risk Facility embedded into programme design and/or a central Crisis Reserve fund. DFID's Internal Risk Facility allows for pre-authorised scale-up to be built into programming budgets and partner agreements, though it has primarily been used in humanitarian programmes, such as the 2017 drought response in Somalia, and not exploited as an option for development programmes. In both donors, stronger organisational tools and guidance on use of flexible development funding to address crises would help broaden use of contingency funds beyond humanitarian programmes.

1. Most contingency financing mechanisms enable the scale-up of humanitarian programmes and focus on immediate response, so what can be done to broaden the uptake of similar mechanisms in development/peacebuilding funding to support a more anticipatory, adaptive and flexible response?

2. Making the most of flexibility and decentralisation is largely discretionary for country teams – how can this be a systematic consideration, accompanied by common clarity of what opportunities and mechanisms are available?

Partnerships

Common observations

Donors fund others to implement their strategies, so which partners they choose to support – and how they work with them – is central to putting nexus commitments into practice. State authorities, multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) each need to be supported to bring their comparative advantages to bear to reduce risks and find lasting solutions. Although state authorities play a crucial role in this, in fragile contexts – for several reasons, including reputational and fiduciary risks and where states are parties to conflict – donors tend to channel less funding via the state. Instead, multilateral organisations, primarily UN agencies, receive the large part of funding but could be better incentivised and supported to collaborate within themselves and with each other. Sharing clear expectations and co-learning with them and with non-governmental organisation (NGO) partners, as well as supporting their staffing capacities on the nexus, would help to advance implementation of nexus commitments.

Notable practice

Both donors have track records in engaging partners to develop new policy applications and pilot innovative new programme approaches. Sida is actively promoting discussion and encouraging action on the nexus with its NGO partners, including through partnership fora specifically on the subject of the nexus. Programming at the nexus is specifically detailed in the Humanitarian Unit's new NGO guidelines,[20] which among other cross-cutting requirements, asks that organisations set out and report how they will "do no harm" in terms of conflict sensitivity and how they will work to bridge the humanitarian-development divide and complement its humanitarian response with longer-term development interventions. There is also a focus on sustainability (addressing root causes of vulnerabilities) and on exit strategies (a requirement for NGOs applying for multi-year support). However, there is still a need for routine and joined-up communication of nexus-related expectations of all recipients of core and programme funding, beyond humanitarian and – from the partners' perspective – clarity of what support they can expect in this regard.

DFID is at an early stage of thinking through how multilateral and NGO partnerships can strategically align with commitments on the nexus. The SMART Rules Partnership

Principles recognise the importance of ensuring that partners contribute to peace and security and cover sustainability issues. There is, however, scope to expand these or new partnership guidelines to more broadly cover the role of partners in risk, flexible and adaptive programming, resilience, preparedness, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding and to promote coherence, collaboration and complementarity across humanitarian development and peace programmes in-house and with partners.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. Flexible funding is key to allowing partners the space to iterate and innovate, but at the same time there needs to be clear requirements and accountability to ensure that partners will make connections within and between themselves. How can this be built into contracts without restricting partners or adding to reporting burdens?

2. Supporting and incentivising multilaterals (UN agencies) to work collaboratively within and between themselves across humanitarian, development and peace programmes will require concerted efforts, including linking core and country/programme-specific funding. Can donors work together as a collective at the global level and in-country to achieve this?

3. How can donors expand their repertoire for working with local and national state authorities wherever possible, supporting them to effect transformative change as well as being technical partners, while being conscious of potential tensions with humanitarian and peace objectives?

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

Common observations

All donors and agencies are on a nexus learning curve. Central systems for capturing and sharing learning are vital so that ad hoc initiatives and practice can inform wider approaches. Internally, within and between donors' relevant government ministries, mapping who is doing what where – including data on funding flows – would enable connections to be routinely made. Learning from quality evidence which integrates beneficiary feedback also needs to systematically feed back into practice, with donors supporting iterative and adaptive programming over appropriately long timeframes.

The question of qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating success remains challenging at the implementation level, with agencies in-country struggling to define collective outcomes that are both broad enough to encompass multiple dimensions, but detailed and realistic enough for accountability. So far, this does not appear to have been a major focus of discussion within these two donors, although DFID is aware of this challenge and considering options for developing a menu of holistic outcome-level indicators as well as further exploring how beneficiary feedback can inform and link with efforts to measure progress against these indicators.

Both donors are invested in developing their thinking and learning. Sweden has undertaken two recent evaluations on its progress in making connections between humanitarian and development – one internal, conducted by Sida, and the other external, conducted by the Swedish National Audit Office. Both were indicative of and revealed a high degree of commitment to progress, the picture of which was mixed. DFID has established internal networks and developed guidance to share learning on nexus-related issues between cadres or policy expertise areas providing country-level staff with technical support.

DFID and Sida are both exploring ways to support adaptive programming, though so far, their approaches are iterative and experimental and far from becoming standard practice. Sida is adopting a new learning-based adaptive approach to results-based management, which focuses on long-term sustainable results and encourages real-time changes. Pilots for adaptive programming and budgeting under its Africa Department intend to provide wider learning.[21] DFID has developed adaptive programming tools and its Better Delivery department is investigating flexible alternatives to log frames used in results frameworks.

Iterative learning and meaningful monitoring require resources from both partners and donor offices. Unearmarked and flexible support to agencies can help, but in the context of wider funding scarcity, this is often in competition with programming needs. Sida supports some systems-level learning through its 'methods support' budget line and at the programme level, has built this into some agreements: INGO support under its strategy for sustainable peace includes humanitarian mediation programmes in the Central African Republic, DRC and Mali, which explicitly includes a learning component on the humanitarian-peace nexus, a model which could potentially be replicated as an alternative to relying on unearmarked funds or programme overheads to fund learning. DFID has similarly embedded learning mechanisms at the country programme level. In Nigeria, for example, an internal 'education and emergency learning lab' has been established to facilitate designing education programmes in conflict-affected areas.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. To make connections and track progress, donors need to develop internal information management systems that work within their own existing structures. But might there be common approaches that donors can share?

2. How can donors constructively engage in the collective outcome discussions in-country and adapt and adopt these for their own common results frameworks? How else might they share learning on developing outcome-level indicators on resilience, peace and inclusion?

4. Organisational structures and systems

Structures, leadership and staffing

Common lessons

Sweden and the UK are quite different sized donors, with an annual official development assistance (ODA) spend of US$5.8bn and US$19.4bn, respectively, in 2018,[22] and different administrative scales and structures to manage this. The various departmental and agency divisions within the two donors do not present insurmountable obstacles to a joined-up approach but do demand regular communication and routine co-working at all levels.

There is a need for direction from the most senior levels, reflected in official policy, that ensures that working at the nexus is an agency/ministry-wide expectation and priority rather than the domain of one leg or department. At the same time, much rests on in-country leadership to spot and respond to changing risk profiles and opportunities and to 'dare' to forge new connections. Engaged country leadership is also necessary for both donors to support and influence other parts of the international system. Donors cannot shift the centre of funding gravity or the incentives for change on their own.

Systems only go so far and having terms of reference and incentives in the right places as well as staff with the right skills is key. This needs to be integrated into recruitment, placement and performance management. In-country presence covering all aspects of the nexus in the form of multidisciplinary teams (UK) or nexus experts (Sweden) with technical support from the centre is crucial. A lack of in-country presence or treating the nexus as an optional 'add-on' results in missed opportunities.

Notable practice

Within the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), there has recently been a clear steer from the highest levels of management that advancing the triple nexus is a collective responsibility – the directors of all departments have set this out as a joint priority for Sida, in keeping with the Policy Framework and the DAC recommendation. At the same time, they have mandated and resourced a specific cross-departmental and cross-specialism 'nexus working group' within Sida.

Within DFID, cross-team technical communities of practice on issues of relevance to the nexus (for example, resilience and protracted crises) and changes to staffing structures are also helping to forge connections. Emerging changes to the organigram are helping to support greater collaboration across humanitarian and development departments. For

example, placing a Conflict Advisor within the International Financial Institutions Department (IFID) is helping to build synergies and strengthen DFID's work in the private sector in fragile and crisis contexts outside of mainstream development. As another example, a Humanitarian Advisor has been placed in the Social Protection department within the Policy Division, helping to forge stronger links between humanitarian response and longer-term development programming.

DFID has moved towards a model of using multidisciplinary teams at the country level to ensure the right expertise is in place, including in Nepal, Nigeria, Syria and Yemen. Some country offices have also set up programme boards where Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) can talk through and identify additional resources needed for coherence and complementarity. Both approaches have proven value but are yet to be systematised in all phases and types of crisis.

In answer to multidisciplinary staffing capacity gaps, Sida has taken the move to prioritise recruitment of 10 resilience- or nexus-focused staff members – new posts created in mid-2019 and deployed to country or regional offices.[23] They have been recruited to have the skillset, prior expertise and the official job description to be able to support and catalyse work across the nexus.

Key questions and considerations for donors

1. Dedicated staff capacity, incentives and working groups are necessary to forge and drive forward joined-up approaches, but how can this be balanced with mainstreamed responsibilities to avoid the nexus being seen as the responsibility of a select few rather than the responsibility of all?

2. An effective approach to the nexus in crisis contexts requires that country staff adopt a flexible approach to programming and partner arrangements but working flexibly requires a degree of risk. How can flexibility be achieved by donors with a low risk appetite which disincentivises individual staff to adapt to contextual change?

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The two studies of the experiences and approaches taken by Sweden and the UK highlighted a diverse range of policies, practices and challenges. There is a shared commitment to action and a mixed picture of progress. The studies clearly show that there is no single model for putting the nexus commitments into practice and therefore these need to be developed according the particularities of each donor. Nonetheless, several common suggestions emerged which are relevant for all donors and should be considered as they seek to implement the Development Assistance Committee's triple nexus recommendation:

Overarching policy and operational strategy

- Donor policy frameworks often indicate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding priorities. Separation can be necessary to maintain a principled humanitarian approach, though to build the necessary foundation for the nexus, it is critical that **policies include an explicit steer to build complementarity as a minimum, and where appropriate to the context, to build coherence and collaboration**. Incorporating flexible and crisis- and risk-informed priorities into development policies are key aspects of this.

- While there is a longer history of connecting humanitarian and development approaches through resilience, **building synergies with peace demands further consideration**. In order to protect need-based assistance from political imperatives, **donors need to define parameters for relevant and appropriate peace and security approaches, and equally, the limits of the nexus concerning humanitarian responses**.

- To fill the gap of the 'missing middle' between top-level policy and operational country, regional and sector strategies, **developing operational guidance on the nexus is a critical step for transforming this agenda into action**. Clarifying key concepts and associated terms is a prerequisite for this and requires confronting different internal conceptions of the purpose of official development assistance (ODA). It will be crucial here to balance the provision of central guidance to encourage a systematised approach with efforts to maintain unrestrictive, context-responsive and tailored innovation.

Programming and allocation cycle

- Joined-up action must be based on a comprehensive and common situation analysis – bringing together the multiple dimensions of risks, vulnerabilities and needs. These **crisis and risk-informed assessments need to be regularly reviewed, well-synchronised and central to all strategic allocation processes**.

- Programming on the nexus has developed organically in response to opportunities in specific contexts, rather than being driven by a top-down blueprint. **There is a clear need to document, learn from and share these programming examples within and between donors** to develop an evidence base and to develop and refine models. This requires investment in both internal systems within donors and specifically supporting partners to build learning into their programming.

- The benefits of integrating contingency and risk financing mechanisms into humanitarian programmes are clear in terms of enabling scale-up in response to contextual change. **The challenge now is to broaden the uptake and standardise the use of these mechanisms in development and peacebuilding programmes**. Decentralised decision-making and flexible funding can allow country teams significant scope to respond to new contexts or analysis. This now needs to become routine rather than discretionary.

- Systematically integrating risk, resilience, peacebuilding and inclusion and identifying appropriate qualitative and quantitative outcome-level indicators and beneficiary feedback mechanisms in the programme design and quality assurance phase is a first step to measuring progress on the nexus. Drawing upon learning from donor's own programming and efforts to build 'collective outcomes' at the country level, **donors should iteratively co-develop with partners a menu of outcome indicators on risk, resilience, peacebuilding and inclusion**.

- For donor partnerships with non-governmental organisations and multilateral agencies to strategically contribute to the nexus, **it will be vital that donors work collectively at global and country levels to co-develop and clearly communicate shared expectations on risk, resilience and peace outcomes with partners, and integrate these into partner performance agreements and reviews** in a way that genuinely supports and encourages effective programming rather than increasing report burdens.

Operational structure, leadership and staffing

- Strong leadership on the nexus is fundamental to progress. **It will be critical that the highest level of donor management identifies and communicates the nexus as a cross-organisational collective priority**, directly mandating existing or new internal learning and technical working groups on the nexus.

- Donors must ensure that **staff with the right skills are in the right places and are given enough time to invest in identifying opportunities and making connections**. This can be done by investing in training, cross-team learning and inter-team deployments as well as embedding expectations on risk, resilience and peacebuilding in staff performance management systems. Supporting dedicated staff leadership on the nexus will be crucial, by establishing multidisciplinary teams from the outset of and in all phases and types of crises, and/or appointing dedicated staff with the skills and responsibilities to support and catalyse colleagues and partners to implement the nexus.

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Notes

[1] Agenda for Humanity: 5 Core Responsibilities 24 Transformations, https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/ (accessed 4 December 2019)

[2] As yet, there is no international consensus on the definition of 'collective outcomes'. For the purpose of this research and drawing upon the 'key elements' articulated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, a 'collective outcome' is understood to refer to a jointly envisioned outcome which has the aim of addressing vulnerabilities and risks and requires the combined efforts of humanitarian, development and peace actors, among others.

[3] OECD, 2019. DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Available at: https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf

[4] Development Initiatives, 2019. Donors at the triple nexus: lessons from the United Kingdom. Available at www.devinit.org/publications/donors-triple-nexus-lessons-united-kingdom. Development Initiatives, 2019. Donors at the triple nexus: lessons from Sweden. Available at www.devinit.org/publications/donors-triple-nexus-lessons-sweden

[5] See endnote 3.

[6] Poole L. and Culbert, V., 2019. Financing the nexus: Gaps and opportunities from a field perspective. Page 19. Available at: https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/financing-the-nexus-gaps-and-opportunities-from-a-field-perspective/

[7] See, for example, DFID and UK Aid, 2017. Saving lives, building resilience, reforming the system: the UK government's humanitarian reform policy. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659965/UK-Humanitarian-Reform-Policy1.pdf; and Sida, 2016. Designing Relief and Development to enhance resilience and impact.

[8] Government of Sweden, 2016. Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance: Government Communication 2016/17 Available at: https://www.government.se/legal-documents/2017/05/policy-framework-for-swedish-development-cooperation-and-humanitarian-assistance/

[9] DFID, 2015. UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478834/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf

[10] Government of Sweden, 2016. Policy Framework for Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance: Government Communication 2016/17. Page 60. Available at: https://www.government.se/legal-documents/2017/05/policy-framework-for-swedish-development-cooperation-and-humanitarian-assistance/

[11] DFID, 2017. Saving lives, building resilience, reforming the system: the UK government's humanitarian reform policy. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/659965/UK-Humanitarian-Reform-Policy1.pdf

[12] DFID, 2017 (internal document). Protracted crises discussion paper.

[13] See endnote 9.

[14] See endnote 6.

[15] In the case of Sweden, these are called 'country development plans'.

[16] Sida, 2017. Poverty toolbox: MDPA Poverty analysis. Page 5. Available at: https://www.sida.se/contentassets/4ecfd42348644d32abbfdccbed6f15c0/mdpa_poverty_analysis.pdf

[17] This includes assessment modules on conflict, resilience and service delivery, with optional modules on fragility, humanitarian, inclusion, governance and human development, including risk.

[18] See endnote 6.

[19] This involves including crisis modifiers in the recently concluded multi-year Building Resilience to Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme. See http://www.braced.org/ (accessed 4 December 2019)

[20] Sida, 2018. NGO guidelines: for non-governmental strategic partner organisations to the Humanitarian Unit at Sida.

[21] OECD, 2019a. OECD development co-operation peer reviews: Sweden 2019. Available at: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/oecd-development-co-operation-peer-reviews-sweden-2019_9f83244b-en#page1

22 Donor tracker profiles for UK and Sweden, https://donortracker.org/country/united-kingdom and https://donortracker.org/country/sweden (accessed 27 November 2019)

23 These posts are deployed to Ethiopia, DRC, Burkina Faso/Sahel, Bangladesh, Sudan/South Sudan.

24 Development Initiatives, 2019. Donors at the triple nexus: lessons from the United Kingdom. Available at www.devinit.org/publications/donors-triple-nexus-lessons-united-kingdom. Development Initiatives, 2019. Donors at the triple nexus: lessons from Sweden. Available at www.devinit.org/publications/donors-triple-nexus-lessons-sweden

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