



Ready to Change?
Building flexibility
into the
triple nexus

Tilly Alcayna

SPOTLIGHT STUDY

 **ALNAP**

ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises.

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank staff from World Vision, Christian Aid and Norwegian Refugee Council who kindly contributed their time, effort, and insights for this study, including Paul Bakaiwe, Helen Barclay-Hollands, Egide Bashirahish, Bini Boutatini, Philip Galago, Kelly Irakoze, Chantal Kanyange, Christian Kasereka, Anne-Sophie le Mouel, Donat Malemo, Nestor Musumba, Bijoux Namwesi, Beatrice Nijebariko, Pierre Nyenguena, Maureen Philippon, Sarah Pickwick, Ianis Proal, Matt Scott, Camilla Symes, Jolien Van Ooijen, and Stephane Vaugon. Thanks is also given to Niall O'Rourke, David Williams, Cecilia Roselli and Alexandra Levaditis for facilitating the initial contact between the author and the staff participants from the country offices in DRC, Cameroon, and Burundi. A special thank you to all the peer reviewers for their expert advice and considered feedback on the initial draft of the study. Finally, thank you to Alice Obrecht for the guidance and support in this research project and the close editing of the final paper.

Suggested citation

Alcayna, T. (2019) *Organisational Flexibility and Programming Across the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus*. ALNAP Spotlight Study. London: ODI/ALNAP.

ISBN: 978-1-913526-00-9

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Communications management and graphics by Maria Gili and Cara Casey-Boyce

Typesetting by Anil Shamdasani

Copyediting by Anna Brown

Bibliographic editing by Renée Goulet



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Acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
ADP	Area Development Programme
AFD	Agence Française de Développement
ARD	Area Rehabilitation Programme
CBCA	Baptist Church in Central Africa
BOAD	Bureau Ecuménique au Développement
CAR	Central African Republic
CA	Christian Aid
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
FCPA	Fragile Contexts Programme Approach
GBV	Gender-based violence
HPP	Humanitarian Programme Plan
ICLA	Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance
ICPR	Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience
IP	Integrated Programming
ISoLT	Inclusion Sociale dans les territoires les plus impactés par la crise du Lac Tchad
KII	Key Informant Interview
LRRD	Linking Relief Recovery and Development
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NFI	Non-food item
NMFA	Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PBA	Programme-based approach
PVCA	Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit
WV	World Vision

Key Informants

Below is a list of individuals interviewed as part of the research process and who agreed to having their names listed in the report.

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Executive Summary – Flexibility in the ‘nexus’

The importance of linking relief and longer-term development is far from a new idea – it is a pernicious challenge that the humanitarian system has recognised, debated and grappled with for decades. In its most recent formulation, it is known as the ‘humanitarian–development–peace nexus’.

While still largely conceptual, ‘nexus’ programming aims to address acute and chronic needs in a manner that is oscillating or concurrent rather than sequential and linear. This is based on an understanding that crisis-affected populations rarely experience humanitarian and development needs as compartmentalised realities. Nexus programmes also seek to overcome the rigidity of typical humanitarian or development approaches by remaining extremely context-driven and by focusing on evolving local contexts and dynamics. A key component in their ability to do this centres on an agency’s flexibility.

Flexibility, defined as ‘the range and speed within which an organisation can respond to changes in its operating environment’ (Obrecht, 2019, p19), has been lost to some degree in the humanitarian system. In part, this is due to the structures of international aid funding that have historically tackled long-term complex crises with short-term, often earmarked, funding. It is also because of siloed work cultures and differing analytical tools and ways of thinking about problems across humanitarian, development and peace-building staff. As a result there has been a loss of effectiveness in being able to meet oscillating acute and chronic needs.

This study is aimed at agencies interested in working in the nexus and that seek to understand what flexibility looks like, what it can achieve in such contexts, and how it can be achieved.

Three case studies were developed as part of this study from multi-mandate agencies that are developing and delivering more intentional flexible approaches in fragile contexts. These approaches included both anticipatory strategies (considering change that can reasonably be expected to occur in the given context and the corresponding response needed to meet such change) and adaptive strategies (when changes are difficult to anticipate). The agencies profiled were: Christian Aid in Burundi and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as part of the Humanitarian Programme Plan; World Vision in DRC as part of the Fragile Context Programme Approach; and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in DRC and Cameroon as part of the Integrated Programming approach.

All of the agencies profiled were attempting to offer multi-sectoral programmes that could address a range of needs, along with root causes of vulnerability. In terms of anticipatory strategies, which enhance flexibility by planning for alternative options in advance, the different organisational approaches and programme designs fell along a spectrum. At one end, there was an extremely considered and predictive approach based on scenario planning by World Vision; in the middle there was an approach by NRC which classified intervention zones according to different phases and anticipated in which direction a given area was likely to move; and at the other end was a holistic approach to address needs simultaneously run by Christian Aid.

Across the three case studies numerous barriers persisted to responding flexibly as needs changed. One of the biggest challenges was that any experimentation with more flexible approaches suffers from a catch-22 situation: If agencies had not piloted new flexible approaches, then they were often unable to access bigger funding; however, without flexible funding, agencies are limited in how they can experiment in a pilot. Donor interest does not typically materialise in a formal manner (i.e. with funding) until substantial work has been carried out on a new idea.

Other barriers largely related to a gap between funding behaviour and policy commitments to the nexus and flexibility; difficulties in hiring staff with the right skills and mindset to deliver longer-term thinking in crises; and reporting systems which took time and effort inappropriate to the speed with which staff needed to move in fragile contexts. The persistence of these barriers provides further evidence to arguments calling for a need to re-look and re-think how flexibility and working in the nexus need to be addressed at a higher level, in a way that is capable of creating cascading change through the system.

As evidenced by both this study and wider research being undertaken by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the benefits of greater intentionality around flexibility, and especially in fragile contexts, are three-fold.

Firstly, staff know that programming is set up to help them adapt quickly, that they are not in a rigid system, and that success is about listening to and improving alongside the community. When there is supportive leadership and a permissive culture to make changes to original plans, staff report feeling more comfortable in justifying decisions to change or not to change. This is heightened when regular meetings between staff and communities are embedded into programmes so that it is possible to track and anticipate changes in near real-time. Moreover, bringing together cross-functional and multi-sectoral teams to be on hand to address the range of small to large perceived or real constraints that may arise enables discussions on the different and most effective response options to use in a given situation.

Secondly, anticipatory approaches to nexus programming serve to make complex situations less daunting for staff; scenarios or phases have already been thought through and anticipated, and measures are already in place to help prevent emergency situations from derailing the long-term transitions for which agencies and communities are striving. Having a guiding flexible framework, based on a thorough and deep context analysis, and integrating key specialists in humanitarian and development teams within and across sectors in the design of programmes lay the foundation for identifying where smooth transitions between emergency and long-term activities can be made.

Finally, adaptive approaches to nexus programming are critical in maintaining the effectiveness and relevance of a given programme. Across the three organisations, anticipatory planning tended to be stronger than adaptive management. Plans did indeed help to make sense of complexity but these needed to be better paired with adaptive management approaches that would enable greater responsiveness to unpredictable events in the volatile, fragile contexts.

1. Background

Crisis-affected populations always have a combination of immediate and long-term needs. Typically, these needs have been understood, packaged and responded to consecutively: humanitarian response would meet immediate needs, and development activities would then address long-term needs. However, in fragile contexts and protracted crises, such a simplified linear disaster management approach is not appropriate (IPI, 2018). Rather, organisations are required to flexibly switch back and forth between responding to immediate needs and working on long-term needs, as the crisis and priorities change.

Research by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) on adaptiveness in humanitarian action has highlighted that one of the areas where humanitarian agencies are most commonly in need of greater flexibility are in programmes in fragile settings featuring chronic risk drivers and cyclical crises. Put simply, humanitarian agencies struggle to change the services they deliver to support people with severe chronic challenges and vulnerabilities, who repeatedly fall in and out of acute crisis (Obrecht, 2018).

Short-term and long-term needs are seldom sequential or compartmentalised for crisis-affected populations (IPI, 2018) and even in protracted crises, it is 'rare that the entire territory of a country is threatened by the same intensity of armed conflict' (ICRC, 2016). Development and peace-building activities are often possible. Certain multi-mandate agencies working on humanitarian, development and peace-building issues are, in theory, well placed to move between different forms of long-term and acute support. However, in practice they so often fail to do this effectively due to a variety of reasons.

The rigid distinctions between humanitarian, development and peace-building activities are often artificially introduced by funding streams, analytical tools and programme cycles (IPI, 2018; IVCA, 2017; Red Cross EU Office, 2018). Most commonly, rigidity is blamed on the structures of international aid funding which have historically tackled long-term complex crises with short-term, often earmarked, and bureaucratic funding (ALNAP, 2003) – though it must be noted that this is slowly changing with initiatives such as the Grand Bargain. Additionally, working cultures (i.e. plans and activities) differ among humanitarian, development and peace-building actors. There are also unclear trade-offs between the programming that addresses the causes of crisis and programming that attempts to alleviate its effects. The result is that agencies have lost flexibility in responding effectively to a variety of needs.

Re-thinking the flexibility of humanitarian agencies is therefore a critical component in moving the 'nexus' from a policy idea to implementation. The humanitarian–development–peace nexus – the 'nexus' – refers to the interlinkages of humanitarian, development and peace-building aims and interventions and the cohesiveness of the agencies that pursue them (adapted from ICVA, 2018: 1). In order to engage differently in settings with a combination of conflict risk and short-term and long-term challenges, agencies are looking to build flexibility back into their programmes, reduce internal silos, and move to a more holistic approach whereby they can offer a wider range of services that are more responsive to shifting needs. This may require transitioning more smoothly between humanitarian and development activities, and perhaps, where possible, deploying humanitarian relief, development programmes and peace-building simultaneously.

This study seeks to understand how flexible approaches to programming can help organisations to deliver more effective, efficient and relevant responses in contexts that would benefit from the nexus approach. Its particular focus offers a new contribution to the emerging research and evaluation on nexus programming: 1) it looks at the role that organisational flexibility – including both anticipatory approaches and adaptive management techniques – is playing in supporting or inhibiting the actual implementation of nexus-style approaches on the ground; and 2) it focuses on NGOs, who have been largely left out of many policy and implementation discussions around the nexus (Redvers, 2019), and their efforts in operationalising the 'nexus' via intentional flexible approaches. This study is part of ALNAP's broader workstream on flexibility and adaptation within humanitarian action.

2. Methodology

In order to gain an understanding of the approaches most suitable for work in fragile contexts and protracted crises – i.e. nexus-type settings – this case study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the flexibility demands for programmes that address the humanitarian–development–peace nexus in fragile and protracted crises?
2. How are flexible programming approaches defined and used by agencies that are trying to implement humanitarian–development–peace nexus-aware approaches in fragile and protracted crises?
3. What are the key issues that agencies face in enabling changes in programming to address a mixture of acute and chronic needs over time?

Flexible approaches to programming are a new way of working for multi-mandate agencies and they remain in the early phases of implementation and learning. As relatively few organisations are taking an intentional approach to this kind of programming, a purposive sample of multi-mandate organisations in the ALNAP Membership was used in order to obtain information-rich cases. This case study profiles three agencies that are implementing three programmes in fragile contexts.

- Christian Aid’s Humanitarian Programme Plan in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is explored to show some of the challenges of bringing a more flexible approach to nexus programmes.
- World Vision International’s Fragile Context Programme Approach in DRC (as well as in Honduras, Mali, South Sudan and Burundi) is described, exploring the anticipatory and adaptive strategies to make changes to programmes.
- Norwegian Refugee Council’s Integrated Programming in DRC and Cameroon is described, also exploring the anticipatory and adaptive strategies to make changes to programmes.

These profiles are descriptive. This study does not seek to focus on the impact of any specific project, programme or individual organisation. Rather, the aim of this study is to understand the types of organisational flexibility required for doing nexus-aware programming and what contributes to, and inhibits, this flexibility.

2.1 Data collection and analysis

The case studies were built from qualitative data collected from primary and secondary research carried out from July to August 2019.

Primary research via remote key informant interviews was carried out with 21 members of agency staff working at various levels of seniority from across the three organisations: from management to front-line staff in roles related to programming, M&E, finance and strategy, as well as three members of implementing partner organisations working with Christian Aid in DRC.

Secondary data sources included project documents such as proposals, theory of change frameworks, tools, guidelines and frameworks, monitoring data, meeting minutes, lessons learnt, workshop notes, and existing evaluations or reports. In addition, a desk review of relevant literature on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus was carried out to understand the nexus concept in policy and practice, and what it has contributed to wider adaptiveness research. (As the nexus concept is not fully harmonised among actors, some of the secondary sources focused only on the dual humanitarian–development nexus.)

Qualitative data from primary research was analysed using thematic analysis. Dominant themes were identified through the systematic review of interview transcripts. Salient concepts were coded and their occurrence and recurrence labelled using MAXQDA software. Particular sections of ad verbatim narrative have been used to enrich the publication and to ensure the voices of participants are captured and maintained. General conclusions were drawn when they were supported by more than three sources.

2.2 Limitations

Literature review. Very little is published and publicly available as yet on implementing a nexus approach and on translating the theory into practice; this literature review was also undertaken in a short timeframe. The findings are therefore not exhaustive of the literature, but were combined with perspectives from study participants to understand how agencies are defining and are interpreting nexus approaches.

Document review. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) was not able to share much background documentation as the ISoLT programme in Cameroon had only begun in March 2019.

In-country visits. Travel in-country was planned for Eastern DRC but was cancelled due to the outbreak of Ebola in Goma the week before the consultant was due to travel. This was overcome by conducting all interviews with staff remotely. Issues with internet connectivity curtailed two interviews which were then followed up with written correspondence in both instances.

Partnering organisations. Due to time constraints it was not possible to facilitate remote interviews with local partner staff in Burundi (Christian Aid). As Christian Aid largely works through implementing partners, it is important to understand how flexibility has been enabled or constrained and how this may have directly impacted their work with communities; this represents a limitation in perspectives for this study.

Generalisability. The main findings are general enough to show how greater flexibility could positively impact programmes and responses in nexus-type settings. However, it must be emphasised that crises in different global regions, and even in different regions of a single country, vary significantly as each context is unique, and fragile settings are extremely complex.

3. Understanding flexibility and nexus programming

In this section, findings from the literature review are combined with the perspectives of key informants to explore questions around: (1) understanding and developing a framework which accounts for the primary elements of nexus programming; and (2) understanding the kinds of changes (i.e. flexibility) that need to be made to programmes and operations in nexus settings.

3.1 What are nexus programming objectives?

We need to avoid one-year planning 20 years in a row. (Key informant interviewee (KII) 24)

Humanitarian, development and peace-building needs are interlinked in fragile states and protracted crises. Strictly short-term humanitarian style 'band-aid' responses are widely recognised as unsuccessful and inappropriate (IPI, 2018; KII24; KII21; KII5). At the same time, development and peace-building activities are often under-resourced in such settings, as donors are reluctant to invest in such long-term programmes that may be negatively impacted by the cyclical nature of the conflict (NGO Voice, 2017; KII12; KII18). However, whether or not humanitarian action intends to, it all too often goes beyond immediate needs and frequently ends up providing perennial support for basic services (IASC, 2018). As one interviewee pointed out:

In South Sudan, we have been trying to apply development solutions to a humanitarian reality and ended up with year after year of short-term results but no actual long-term pathway [to address] the underlying causes of fragility and instability. (KII24)

The humanitarian–development–peace nexus (often referred to simply as the 'nexus') refers to the interlinkages of humanitarian, development and peace-building aims and interventions and the cohesiveness of the agencies that pursue them (adapted from ICVA, 2018: 1). Though widely discussed in the World Humanitarian Summit, New Way of Working and Grand Bargain, the nexus as a policy concept has largely remained centred on the United Nations and has had little impact in terms of its translation into programming and operations (IASC, 2017).

The nexus approach still remains largely conceptual, with differing definitions, terms, understandings and interpretations of the concept by different aid actors (IVCA, 2017; De Castellarnau and Stoianova, 2018). Generally, nexus programming is understood to have three core characteristics:

1. it attempts to end needs and address root causes;
2. it is not a linear approach;
3. it is context-driven.

3.1.1 Ending needs and addressing root causes

Nexus programmes attempt to **end needs and address root causes** at the earliest opportunity with a comprehensive approach in order to both meet immediate needs and invest in medium to long-term needs (Council of the European Union, 2017; IASC, 2017; Red Cross EU Office, 2018). Nexus programming is not about suspending development programmes in order to rapidly address acute needs. Quite the opposite: it attempts to avoid the funnelling of all energy and resources into emergency response during an acute crisis. It recognises that humanitarian action can ensure that development is maintained, or 'holds' by helping to maintain essential services (IPI, 2018). But whether saving lives, or working in rehabilitation and development, nexus programming keeps in mind the desired long-term change for a given population and attempts to maintain, and where possible improve, existing structures (IPI, 2018; KII3; KII23; KII12).

When the humanitarian, development and security of crisis-afflicted communities are simultaneously addressed, international support has a better chance of creating the conditions for sustaining peace and reducing vulnerability (IPI, 2018; OCHA, 2017b).

Nexus programmes attempt to balance short-term responsiveness with long-term recovery, reaching for transformative outcomes as early as possible (OCHA, 2017a). This requires matching realism in what can be achieved (often with limited resources) with ambition on how to break cycles and ensure that future development and peace-building are facilitated (IPI, 2018). As a study participant illustrated:

In Beni if the militia were to sign peace accords, then the combatants, with an average age of 8–16 will come home – and what will happen then? This created a whole set of new questions which we hadn't thought of before and which were fundamentally important. If you can get programming right, and if you can get them back into school and re-integrated with their families then you can actually break the cycle that sends them back into those militias. (KII23)

3.1.2 A non-linear approach

The nexus is most at play in fragile contexts characterised by episodic violence, multiple displacement, environmental degradation and cyclical weather-related disasters (OCHA, 2017a; Red Cross EU Office, 2018). These contexts are often the result of underlying structural issues, and are typically characterised by intractable violence, perhaps with pockets and periods of stability that lead to cyclical population displacement and returns (ICRC, 2016). They may also experience seasonal weather patterns causing floods or droughts that exacerbate stresses on displaced and traumatised populations and contribute to cycles of vulnerability (NGO Voice, 2017; IPI, 2018).

As humanitarian, development and peace-building needs are constantly oscillating in terms of their priority status in these contexts, nexus programming **does not operate with a linear approach**. Rather programmes either address needs simultaneously, or they have to be able to rapidly switch between immediate and long-term needs as these change in priority (IDS, 2018; IPI, 2018; IASC, 2018; Dadu-Brown and Dadu, 2018). The peace-building element in particular is now understood to work more effectively by 'sustaining and building towards peace at every stage of the peace process' rather than the traditional linear approach of 'successively working towards peace through peacemaking, keeping, building and post-conflict peacebuilding' (Menziez, Popovich and Kondo, 2017, p2).

3.1.3 Context-driven

Above all, nexus programming **is characterised by its emphasis on being context-driven and highly localised**. The 'blueprint' approach is known to be inappropriate and ineffective in complex settings (ODI, 2017; NGO Voice, 2018; Red Cross EU Office, 2018; KII21), and while context analysis has featured in humanitarian programming before, it is paramount to the 'nexus' programming process (OCHA, 2017b; KII23). Very often, local partners and affected populations do not work with the distinctions of 'humanitarian' and 'development' (IPI, 2018; Tronc, Grace and Nahikian, 2019; NGO Voice, 2017). They are the front-line responders and victims in a crisis, and their frameworks for understanding the context, its problems and potential solutions should have more influence on programming than they currently do (NGO Voice, 2018). Durable peace is most likely to be achieved when it grows bottom-up from local foundations (IPI, 2018). Working with local actors – who are present before, during and after a crisis – increases the probability that both short- and long-term need and objectives will be included and addressed in programmes (Red Cross EU Office, 2018; NGO Voice, 2017).

3.1.4 Criticisms and controversies of the nexus concept

The nexus concept is not without criticism and controversy. One of the most important criticisms is the potential for humanitarian aid to be politicised (Redvers, 2019). As the nexus approach seeks to work on long-term issues of vulnerability, for some this can imply significant coordination with the States that govern these populations. This can lead to tensions, as many States have stakes or allegiances within these internal conflicts.

Others criticise the nexus for shrinking humanitarian space through an expansion of development initiatives and leading to a ‘loss of focus and dilemma as regards the role that NGOs are called upon to play’ (Montemurro and Wendt, 2018, p15). Tronc, Grace and Nahikian (2019, p31) recommend, in their case study of Mali, that in some cases humanitarian actors should forcefully reject the nexus, due to concerns about actual and perceived politicisation and be ‘more vocal on the violations against civilians, the politicization of aid, and denounce and distance themselves from practices that create confusion on the ground and harm relationships with local actors’. Ultimately, there is agreement that irrespective of ‘longevity, depth or type of action’, the humanitarian principles and notions of ‘do no harm’ are critically important and need to be upheld whether working in a ‘simple’ humanitarian emergency or in nexus settings (Red Cross EU Office, 2018, p7).

Finally, the overall idea of the nexus is not new. Initially it emerged as the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) in the early 1990s. At first, this concept was understood to sequentially move through the different elements (relief to rehabilitation to development), as the preceding element lay the ground for subsequent elements in a ‘continuum’ (Mosel and Levine, 2014). This was later replaced by the idea of LRRD as a ‘contiguum’ in which all elements (whether relief, rehabilitation or development) could be carried out simultaneously (ibid.). Increased recognition that humanitarian and development actors were working in silos led to the reformulation of the idea as the humanitarian–development divide, and later as the humanitarian–development nexus.

However, a key difference in the contemporary nexus work is how much it has focused on changing aid structures and ways of working in order to produce more cohesive and joined-up interventions (Oxfam, 2019). In the World Humanitarian Summit (2016), the dual humanitarian–development nexus was a major focus of the ‘New Way of Working’, which calls on ‘humanitarian and development actors to work together collaboratively, towards “collective outcomes” that reduce need, risk and vulnerability’ (OCHA, 2017b). Secretary-General António Guterres then introduced the ‘sustaining peace’ element to the nexus, thereby creating the triple nexus of humanitarian–development–peace.

3.2 What are the flexibility demands on programmes implemented in nexus settings?

3.2.1 What we mean by flexibility

Obrecht (2019) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding flexibility in humanitarian action. In brief, flexibility is defined as ‘the range and speed within which an organisation can respond to changes in its operating environment’ (p19). There are two overarching strategies to implement flexibility in operational contexts: firstly, if changes can be reasonably expected to occur in the context during the course of a project, then *anticipatory strategies* can be used; alternatively, if changes are difficult to anticipate in advance, then *adaptive strategies* can be used instead.

The type of change that any given context is likely to face will determine which of these two strategies is most appropriate. Obrecht (2019) outlines these in detail. When implementing flexible approaches, organisations can choose to focus their flexibility in different areas, for example: flexibility in terms of how aid is delivered; to whom; what materials are provided; what overarching sectors or solutions are being offered, and what broader response objectives and roles are being achieved. The framework provides a way of measuring the depth of flexibility in a response, in terms of speed – i.e. the time it takes an organisation to change its response (low speed to high speed), and in terms of the range of changes an organisation is capable of (within a sector or across sectors, superficial or minor adjustments or radical shifts).

3.2.2 How flexibility supports nexus programming

The overarching aim of the triple nexus approach is to transcend humanitarian and development divides in order to meet a variety of immediate humanitarian needs, while reducing long-term risk and vulnerability (OCHA, 2017a; ICRC, 2016). Doing nexus work well – so that it is effective and relevant – will require greater flexibility in addressing different kinds of humanitarian, development and peace-building problems, sometimes simultaneously, and often with greater speed than has been the case in the past few decades. This study is about understanding the approaches to building more flexible systems that are required for nexus programming.

Overall there must be flexibility in providing different support based on changes in vulnerability and needs. Ideally programmes should be able to track changes in real-time (or near real-time) and make rapid adjustments to plans. This may mean the following adjustments:

- **Redirecting assistance or expanding to include new target groups**, for example, including new returnees, recently displaced or host populations (KII9; KII13). This is because the situations are volatile and often involve multiple displacements and returns.
- **Rapidly changing activities and programmes depending on needs and risks** (KII16), for example, markets may be functioning but provision of cash to communities could put them at greater risk, therefore in-kind support would be more appropriate. Or vice versa, markets that were disrupted are able to return so in-kind support should quickly transition to cash in order to support the local economy.
- **Lengthening and shortening planned timeframes for different types of activities** based on shifts in acute or more chronic needs (KII9; KII16).
- **Making changes to an original plan and intervention logic based on new information**, whether or not the programme ends up addressing the same needs as originally intended and being able to transfer budget lines (KII7; KII13).
- **Rapidly scaling up and scaling down activities**, for example, scaling up the cash distributions during a peak in acute needs and scaling down, but still providing some continuity for ongoing training such as livelihoods training (if possible) (KII9). Practically this may mean developing contingency and anticipatory plans on how to maintain support (including the human resources and funding) for long-term needs during a peak in a crisis.

For nexus programming, there is also a great need for **flexibility at the highest strategic level**, to work out collective outcomes across humanitarian–development–peace-building interventions and adapt these through learning. Many of the issues addressed within the nexus are complex, and therefore have no clear, or linear, solution – exactly the type of situation for which flexibility, and in particular adaptiveness, is required.

4. Piloting flexible programming in fragile and protracted crises

If the priority is on remaining relevant by focusing on the context, needs and listening to communities, then whether a programme is humanitarian or development is beside the point. (KII7)

In order to provide useful comparisons, the case studies were chosen from ALNAP Members working in a range of different contexts in one global region: central Africa.

- The Christian Aid case study works both in Burundi and DRC. Burundi is one of the world's poorest nations and is struggling to emerge from a 12-year, ethnically based civil war, which has resulted in intermittent periods of instability and violence. Christian Aid's approach is still being developed and therefore this case study focuses more on the challenges around building more flexible approaches.
- The World Vision case is of a programme – the 'Fragile Context Programme Approach' – that largely draws from the most mature pilot in DRC. For two decades, the eastern provinces of DRC have been the epicentre of what has frequently been labelled 'the deadliest conflict since World War II'. As the conflict has transformed from a regional war into a series of local insurgencies, millions of civilians have been displaced and killed.
- The Norwegian Refugee Council case study draws on pilot programmes in DRC and Cameroon. The Cameroon programme is notable because it is overall a relatively stable lower middle-income country that has three separate crises – the Lake Chad Crisis and related displacement, the Central African Republic (CAR) refugee situation in the east, and the civil war between Anglophone separatists and the Francophone majority – a conflict which, like those in DRC and Burundi, has its origins in socio-political issues rooted in the country's colonial pasts.

4.1 Humanitarian Programme Plan – Christian Aid

This section explores a new programme developed by Christian Aid to address all elements of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus: the Humanitarian Programme Plan (HPP). The HPP is the first attempt to not only engage in nexus work but also to apply some of Christian Aid's work on adaptive management which has been well developed on its peace-building and development side, but largely absent in their humanitarian work (ODI, 2018). The case study explores some of the struggles that Christian Aid faced in moving to a more flexible approach for nexus programming in Burundi, classically a 'development' context, and in DRC, classically a 'humanitarian' context.

4.1.1 Overview

The HPP is a multi-year, multi-sector programme funded by Irish Aid seeking to improve communities' resilience to shocks in conflict settings. Since 2014 Irish Aid has included a specific policy objective for NGOs that are seeking funding, which emphasises linking humanitarian and development approaches in order to build resilience to disasters. Christian Aid developed the HPP with an aim to **tackle violence and build peace** by enhancing **community resilience** mechanisms and meet the **acute humanitarian needs** of men, women, boys and girls most affected by conflict. One of the three objectives of the HPP is to use the Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience (ICPR) approach piloted in Burundi, DRC, South Sudan and Myanmar across 2017–2018. This case study focuses on the experience of the Burundi Country Office working in targeted areas of Southern Burundi (Makamba and Rumonge Province) and the Eastern DRC Field Office and partners who also work on the HPP there.

As the HPP is multi-year, and therefore has a longer lifetime than many programmes, this means it can aim for more ambitious changes to address both acute and chronic needs. It blends acute life-saving activities such as distributions of food and non-food items (NFIs), and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), with seed distributions to try to build long-term food security. Furthermore, Community Action Plans, designed and updated annually via Participatory Vulnerability and Capacity Assessments (PVCA) (i.e. standard components of humanitarian action), help communities to identify other vulnerabilities, and decide on risk mitigation measures and development objectives which the communities can track (KII4). The project attempts to understand the underlying causes of violence and conflict, and to respond to these by establishing community-level peace committees and by encouraging peace-building processes, via the ICPR.

4.1.2 Changes made to enable flexibility

The HPP entailed three major changes to enable flexibility in Christian Aid's partners: 1) the introduction of the ICPR approach; 2) joint monitoring missions; and 3) formalised accountability and feedback mechanisms.

The ICPR is a new and adaptive approach that necessitates regular context and conflict analysis. The ICPR begins with a one-off 'macro' level conflict analysis looking at either the national level (as was the case for Burundi and South Sudan) or, if the subnational-level contexts are distinctive enough, the provincial levels (as was the case for DRC and Myanmar). An initial local-level conflict analysis is carried out, and regularly updated with monthly community-led conflict analyses. This helps to make adaptations to interventions so that they 'contribute to peaceful trends and do not exacerbate harmful ones' (ICPR, 2018, p10).

To enable adaptive learning, Christian Aid Burundi have begun to conduct community visits that include finance and programme staff, as well as colleagues from other thematic areas. The aim of these visits is threefold: to ensure that relevant checks and controls are in place; to increase partner capacity through direct communication with relevant Christian Aid staff; and to learn from partners regarding what is working in the communities (KII9; KII11). The planned regularity, which is not necessarily present in other programmes, has increased the speed at which the Christian Aid Burundi team and partners are making decisions and responding to remain relevant to the community needs.

Furthermore, since 2019 the HPP has introduced formalised accountability mechanisms. Previously, community feedback was gathered in an ad hoc manner during monitoring visits. The new formalised mechanism begins with a community assessment in which the communities outline how they would like to provide feedback (e.g. one-to-one, via a suggestion box, through telephone helplines) and with what regularity (e.g. monthly, or at specific times, i.e. during a distribution). For example, Magara community, in Rumonge Province, requested that helpdesks be present during distributions and that monthly meetings with partners are held via community gatherings to provide feedback (KII9). In these meetings joint discussions are held on any newly arising needs and potential solutions. A report is then passed to Christian Aid to ensure that the feedback is being responded to. However, within this study, there were no examples of major changes in context or needs, on the basis that the feedback mechanism had not generated requests for significant shifts in programming.

4.1.3 The challenges of creating a flexible approach to enable nexus programming

Christian Aid commits to a community for an extended period of time via the HPP. The Community Action Plans, based on a PVCA, are able to progress from year to year, as target communities prioritise and work on actions that are locally appropriate. PVCAs are standard humanitarian programming. According to ALNAP's framework (Obrecht 2019), the flexibility of this design approach can be inhibited by being relatively low speed because major programmatic changes are typically made between annual programme cycles rather than based on more frequent opportunities for reflection and course correction.

A number of other examples of challenges faced by staff and partners in creating a more flexible approach to enable nexus programming were also highlighted during interviews.

Restrictions on changing the use of funds

The funding arrangements for the ICPR were insufficiently flexible to support timely changes to programming as conditions shifted, highlighting a key difference between funding that is multi-year and funding that is flexible. The majority of cases in which the programme was unable to change along with community needs were linked to inflexible finances and restricted budgets. All budget lines have a 10% variance change which does not need prior approval; anything above this, however, needs to go via Irish Aid. Therefore, the majority of decision-making is slowed by the need for joint agreement (KII10; KII4; KII17). The exception to this is for small purely operational changes which do not have budgetary implications and are easily achieved – for example, additional, unplanned training to Peace Committees (KII4); a shift from bean seed to vegetable seed distributions during the 2017 long dry season in Burundi (the latter grow more rapidly and easily) (KII8); an increase in the number of planned distribution sites (within a single distribution week) to accommodate feedback related to access issues for persons with disabilities (KII9); and additions of items in NFI distributions which are not typically distributed, such as iron sheets to help housing reconstruction (KII10; KII9). In these cases programme teams were able to make a change, as is standard practice in humanitarian action, and inform Irish Aid retrospectively (KII4).

In 2016, Christian Aid and partners (CBCA) were supporting the recently returned population of the Bulindi health area in Rutshuru territory, DRC, with a malnutrition programme focusing on improving agricultural productivity. The project was supposed to last for 18 months, with a plan to build a small warehouse to collect and store agricultural products grown by the community cooperative, so that these products could be sold when the community needed income. During the course of the project, a violent incursion from a foreign armed group forced the 1,200 households from the community to flee towards Kanyabayonga in the neighbouring territory of Lubero. CBCA requested that the remaining project funds be used to buy and distribute food to the displaced community in Kanyabayonga. The community also asked that the budget be used to help them with immediate needs. However, when this request was sent to Christian Aid DRC and passed on to Irish Aid, it was deemed that an emergency project specific to this event was needed and that the agricultural funds would remain in suspension for that project (KII6). While the intention was to provide specific emergency funding rather than draw down longer-term support, the delays this can cause when partners and communities know there are readily available sums appears illogical and misplaced in their eyes. In the end, Christian Aid did not secure emergency funding, and the emergency needs had to be met by other international agencies such as Solidarité (KII6). CBCA continued with the agricultural project once community members returned, two months later.

Decision-making

Decision-making can slow the flexibility of the programme due to the number of actors involved in Christian Aid programming in Burundi and DRC. Firstly, there were bottlenecks in getting decisions for changes approved by Irish Aid.

Secondly, as Christian Aid works with community-based committees via local implementing partners, the flow of communication can take some time to reach Field and Country Offices. Study participants gave the example of a community in Shabunda, South Kivu, which for two months had a non-functioning tree cutter, which was meant to facilitate tree-cutting and rebuilding shelters. The problem arose, firstly, because the local resilience committee was no longer functioning. This was further exacerbated as flights to Shabunda were repeatedly cancelled due to security issues, meaning that implementing partners could not counter-verify the issue in the community (KII4).

Finally, once a problem is identified, this must be communicated via a written report to Christian Aid Burundi or DRC, which then discusses adaptations and budget implications with Christian Aid Ireland, and ultimately Irish Aid. The involvement of numerous stakeholders ensures transparency, accountability and a high degree of localisation, but reduces the speed with which programmes can be adapted, especially when communication flows take several weeks (KII4; KII9).

4.1.4 Implications of these challenges

As the programme is reliant on yearly Community Action Plans, funding is quite rigidly allocated, and communication processes are lengthy; the result is that flexibility (certainly in terms of speed) is inhibited. Study participants acknowledged that attempting greater flexibility is a way of working that will be important to both Christian Aid and partners. As such, Christian Aid has increased the joint monitoring missions and formalised community feedback mechanisms to help encourage partners to feel comfortable and confident in identifying and reporting changes within a programme cycle, recognising the need to build a permissive and enabling environment for change to ensure that programmes are remaining relevant to needs (KII9).

4.2 Fragile Context Programme Approach – World Vision

4.2.1 Overview

The Fragile Context Programme Approach (FCPA) part of the Fragile Context Framework adapts, develops and refines multi-sector programming to combine working ‘in’ fragility (i.e., addressing immediate survival needs) with working ‘on’ fragility (i.e., addressing the root causes of fragility), for vulnerable children and families in fragile contexts (see Box 1). The overall vision of the FCPA is that country offices are better able to anticipate trends and changes than they have previously, and that social cohesion increases in communities in order to collaboratively build towards sustainable development (KIII9; KII3).

The FCPA is funded by a mix of private and public funding and was spearheaded by senior management drawn from existing Disaster Management, Transformational Development and Peacebuilding World Vision teams, working closely with ALNAP. The FCPA is part of World Vision’s strategy to deepen its impact in reaching the most vulnerable children, who are predominantly in fragile contexts.

A number of internal and external factors prompted the development of the FCPA. World Vision had already been working on humanitarian, development and peace-building issues across the nexus for several decades, but had been struggling with how and when to adapt activities in the transitional periods between emergency, development and more long-term peace-building; and how to effectively be working ‘on’ fragility

in its humanitarian programmes while preparing for instability in its development programmes. Internally, field offices operating in fragile contexts were arguing that business processes, systems and funding streams that were designed for a development reality were not fit-for-purpose in fragile contexts. Furthermore, they argued that the logframe approaches were constraining programming into five-year thinking, thus rendering context-driven deviation impossible (KII24). Externally, conversations focused on the importance of leaving no one behind, through the World Humanitarian Summit and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This helped to provide further validation to the ongoing internal conversation on the need to shift programming to make it more appropriate and flexible to fragile contexts (KII24). As one interviewee succinctly put it: 'World Vision wished to convert the accidental strength of decades of experience working across the nexus into an intentional strength' (KII24).

World Vision International (WVI) currently identifies 56 countries with fragility; some, entirely fragile; others, with areas of the country that are in fragility (based on OECD and World Bank definitions). It has a presence in 39 of these countries. In 2019, five of the extremely fragile contexts were chosen as the pilot countries for the FCPA: DRC, South Sudan, Mali, Burundi and the city of San Pedro Sula in Honduras.

Box. Getting the right mix: the concept of the 'Three Dials': Survive, Adapt, Thrive

The three 'dials' (Survive, Adapt, Thrive) is a conceptual planning device that the FCPA uses to articulate the range of possible intervention options in its design process (KII23). The idea is that, just as sound dials are adjusted on a mixing deck, the different dials can be adjusted to match the reality and needs of affected populations on the ground. This means that in some contexts activities from all three dials could be occurring simultaneously and all 'dials' would be in play at a given time; in other contexts, a certain 'dial' could be turned up – i.e. more activities within that 'dial' being implemented compared to the other two.

According to this planning device, 'adjusting a dial' means increasing or decreasing activities in response to emerging conditions.

Survive dial: Activities in this dial are focused on saving lives and protecting rights – this is about working 'in' fragility, for instance, with cash distributions or nutrition programmes. When a situation is violent/volatile or in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it is more likely that numerous activities from this dial will be implemented.

Adapt/Recover dial: Activities in this dial focus on rehabilitation, social cohesion, recovery from trauma, access to basic services, re-establishing livelihoods, and focusing on rebuilding (with improvements). They are most likely to be 'dialled up' (i.e. more of these activities implemented) when a situation has begun to stabilise. Even though recovery might take years, it is important to begin recovery activities as soon as possible after the initial crisis and to begin addressing the root causes – this is working 'on' fragility.

Thrive dial: Actions in this dial attempt to deal with the root causes of fragility, to improve social accountability, strengthen broken governance systems, strengthen coping mechanisms and prevent or mitigate future disasters – this is working 'on' fragility. This dial is turned up as a situation stabilises more permanently; and longer term, developmental activities can be initiated.

4.2.2 Anticipatory design

The planning process allows us to make sense of the context and tease out key elements so it is not just a wall of complexity. (KII23)

Overall, the FCPA is based on detailed scenario planning. This looks at the broader context to understand what the main drivers of change are and is complemented by a root cause analysis to understand from where vulnerability originates. The scenarios are therefore determined, at the planning stage, by what the context requires. According to this system, country offices can either decide to adapt an existing programme via the FCPA process or they can create a new programme. This allows teams to logically identify and track key drivers and events that would trigger a change in needs – and thus change programming more flexibly (KII1). The structured method enables the programme team to evaluate alternative views of what may happen in the future and to plan and pivot accordingly (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019; KII24). As described by one interviewee, the anticipatory strategy of the FCPA means that ‘when there is a change in the context, this sends us directly into what we had planned for another scenario’ (KII2).

The Mali pilot programme provides an excellent example of the importance of using such an anticipatory strategy. Despite having been a relatively stable context for a number of years with an established traditional peace process, the World Vision Mali Country Office identified the shifting regional dynamics resulting from the emergence of the militant Islamic State (ISIS) and decided, as part of its scenario planning, to ask itself how it would react, and what resources it would need, if mass violence erupted in Mali. Ten days after this planning session, a massacre happened and the World Vision Mali Office were able to rapidly implement their contingency plan for that area, where they might otherwise have been caught off guard and left unprepared to act (KII23).

Adapting programmes via the FCPA

The FCPA is a structured method that helps teams to work more effectively in fragile contexts. During the pilot phase, teams could either decide to adapt existing programmes or develop a new programme as part of the FCPA. In eastern DRC, the team decided on the former: to put an existing programme – the Area Rehabilitation Programme (ARP) – through the FCPA. The ARP was established in Rutshuru Territory in 2015 based on a modification of a development programme called the Area Development Programme (ADP), which was more typically used in stable contexts. The ARP is a three-year rolling programme that prioritises the involvement of communities in identifying multi-sectoral needs, in designing interventions, and in the ongoing monitoring of needs. It does so via community-based structures such as peace and development committees.

The ARP departs from typical programming in eastern DRC in that community participation was high throughout the design and monitoring of the project. Typical humanitarian programming in eastern DRC is often determined via rapid needs assessments in which community participation is low. Its initial design process took four months of ongoing community engagement to identify both the immediate and long-term needs of the affected populations. Being multi-sectoral, the ARP was designed to meet the combination of needs simultaneously: the most vulnerable households were provided with conditional cash transfers, while the community’s long-term priorities (the desire to increase income and construct schools) were addressed through planned food security activities via cooperative seed initiatives; women’s savings and loans associations and farmer training workshops to understand market dynamics; WASH activities building water pipes and bigger water storage tanks; and child protection providing counselling to traumatised children. During the course of the programme, additional funding was obtained to cover gaps that arose outside the core programme, including accelerated learning (literacy boost project), conditional cash transfers for the building of agricultural collection centres, and sexual and gender-based health programmes.

The ARP already contained many of the hallmarks of the FCPA and the team were used to working with a flexible and multi-sectoral approach. However, putting the ARP through the FCPA design process provided greater flexibility on moving beyond the planned priority needs of the ARP and enhanced the structure and regularity of the context analysis. The ARP, with the addition of the FCPA, would be classified as ‘high range’ according to Obrecht’s (2019) flexibility report, as it uses multi-sectoral programming approaches to address needs, adding and removing service components as required. The ‘high range’ of flexibility is facilitated due to the nature of the funding mechanism of this programme, that is, private funding which is not earmarked (KII23).

Setting the scenarios

Nexus settings are complex by nature and the design process specifically focuses on teasing out this complexity via a logical path. It achieves this, first, by identifying the driving factors and triggers; second, by designing the scenarios and attendant changes that would need to be made; and third, by deciding on the indicators to monitor. For example, in eastern DRC at the time of planning in November 2018 there was episodic violence, the risk of Ebola and the looming elections. The biggest driving factor and major trigger point at that time was the postponed 2016 elections, which if they came to pass, would mark the end of President Joseph Kabila’s nearly two-decade rule. Tensions surrounding whether the elections would be postponed again, or how fair they would be, were extremely high. Based on this, three scenarios were identified, and a menu of pre-agreed options were developed to anticipate the possible changes and ensure that contingency plans could be rapidly implemented depending on the outcomes (KII2; KII3; KII19; KII24).

- **Scenario 1: Current situation continues.** Following the election period there would continue to be some sporadic violence, but the situation would remain largely stable. This scenario therefore focused on the adaptations needed to ensure that the current programme could cover unmet needs. It was decided that WASH in schools was the main gap and that there would be construction of water and hygiene facilities, and establishment of hygiene committees.
- **Scenario 2: Deterioration and decrease of stability.** Post-election violent conflict would erupt and the result would be population displacement as well as disruption and damage to basic social services. This scenario focused on addressing acute emergency needs, by providing cash transfers and general distributions and preparing to scale up into an emergency response should additional funding become available.
- **Scenario 3: Improvement and increase in stability.** In this best-case scenario, the situation would improve as the region stabilised following peaceful elections and there would be a reduction in violence and an influx of returnees. Improved governance would need reinforced community cohesion via the integration of peace-building activities, and this scenario therefore focused on changes needed to cover a sectoral gap and to continue with livelihoods, advocacy and conflict resolution, and to create child-friendly recreational spaces.

Ultimately, in eastern DRC, the context did not significantly change post-election, and did not, therefore, require a dramatic shift in programming. The team therefore followed the plans for Scenario 1 by filling the planned sectoral gap of providing WASH via latrines in schools. The delivery of aid would be classified as ‘high speed’, as they were able to initiate the response rapidly for the context – in less than two weeks – thanks to pre-planned interventions.

4.2.3 Adapting to remain relevant

Agreeing on triggers and indicators

‘Triggers’ are related to the drivers of change in the context and can be a single, time-bound event (e.g. the elections in DRC on 31 December 2018), which may risk becoming rapidly outdated once the event has passed, or from general shifts in context (e.g. an increase in conflict). Typically, triggers and indicators were primarily confined to humanitarian teams and programmes for early warning. As part of the FCPA – which is reaching beyond humanitarian programming – more emphasis was put on the central and underlying role that triggers and indicators have in real-time monitoring. This is a move away from project M&E being used largely for reporting and instead, as is the case here, being used for context monitoring (see Dillon and Sundberg, 2019; and Sundberg, 2019 for a detailed discussion on the use of monitoring indicators). The intention is, as the FCPA is broader than either humanitarian or development programmes, that the practice of monitoring indicators and triggers will become a more mainstream way of working for World Vision in volatile contexts. Furthermore, unlike traditional programming, which only at the outset of a project defines assumptions that could negatively affect its running, the FCPA enforces a continual and adaptive monitoring of assumptions and situations, which includes the ability to add and remove new indicators over time to match the context (KII1; KII2). Three types of indicators are monitored:

- **Programme indicators:** These measure output and outcome (these are similar to typical/traditional programming tools).
- **Context indicators:** These are relatively flexible indicators that can monitor whether a situation is improving or deteriorating. For example, in DRC the indicators were related to population movements and displacement of communities as a result of the elections and increased violence. However, the indicator could also track populations returning, which could be an indication of the situation improving. Numerous indicators exist including markets being re-established, security incidences, presence of armed groups, children from militia coming home etc. Context indicators have traditionally been part of security analysis but as part of the FCPA, they have been incorporated into the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team (KII23).
- **Accountability indicators:** These indicators focus on monitoring how World Vision is interacting with communities and partners.

Monthly context monitoring with communities

Departing from traditional programming, the FCPA embeds the practice of regular, intentional ‘two-way conversations and learning’ between communities and programme staff (KII23; KII19; KII2). These community-based sessions allow programme staff to track progress from month to month (KII19) and ‘take the context seriously, to listen well, to try action, observe, learn and repeat’ (KII24) and to understand the community’s opinion, perspective and behaviour (KII19). It also enables continuous monitoring when the security situation prevents access for programme staff as the community members collect information and update World Vision remotely (KII3). In this way, the FCPA utilises both flexible anticipatory strategies (via the scenario planning) and adaptive strategies (via the monthly context monitoring).

In the eastern DRC pilot, once the elections had passed, the programmes embarked upon the pre-agreed WASH activity in the schools of Rutshuru. However, the planting seasons in February/March, which were typically highly stable and predictable, underwent a drought, causing a reduction in crop growth. This was then followed by sudden heavy rains, which caused further damage and substantial loss to existing crops. The communities alerted World Vision in April that they needed to develop new scenarios related to emerging needs. Programme staff were impressed with how the community internalised the FCPA process:

The communities went even deeper in their analysis of other events that we hadn't seen, and it was very interesting as it was through the FCPA process that we saw that communities started reflecting on issues more strongly. (KII2)

However, by the time these needs had been raised, after the farming seasons in March/April, World Vision had already purchased many of the materials and equipment in order to build two latrines (one for girls and one for boys) in each of the four schools of the intervention area as part of the pre-agreed WASH development project. The fund therefore was no longer available to attend to the newly emerged farming needs, and instead wider savings in the overall programme were used to purchase some initial seedlings. In anticipation of the second yearly planting season (September/October), which would likely also be affected by changing weather patterns, joint planning sessions were held in June and early August 2019 and further seedling distributions were planned; this was part of a disaster risk reduction (DRR) project intervention, to help prevent soil erosion and provide shade which would stop crops being washed away or dying in the sun (KIII9; KII3; KII2). This example provides an illustration of how context monitoring with communities has enabled the World Vision Eastern DRC team to rapidly respond (i.e. within a programme cycle) to newly emerging needs between development and DRR. As the context remained relatively stable, the teams did not have examples of needing to make large change between humanitarian and development activities.

Reassessment of scenarios

The FCPA ensures it remains relevant through frequent context analysis and short implementation cycles via periodic reassessment and creation of new scenarios. The timeframe for reassessment in the pilots was planned for six-month intervals, but as the FCPA matures it is anticipated that reassessment will be context dependent. In Rutshuru, DRC, the original workshop was held in November 2018 and two subsequent workshops were held in June and August 2019, once the original scenario had played through and new needs began to emerge. While the first FCPA workshop in November 2018 had not involved community members, the two subsequent workshops did.

In June 2019 an internal learning event was convened which included ARP staff, community representatives (including project beneficiaries and community leaders), zonal senior management team members, and the FCPA mentor, to identify new trigger events. It was during this event that the community representatives formally put forward the changing climate conditions and the increased military operations against armed groups as probable scenarios that would have large impacts. Then in August 2019 a community reflection workshop was held with community members in Shinda, Nyarukwangara and Kakondo/Busanza villages of Rutshura territory to understand what the effect of these new events would have over the course of the subsequent months. During this meeting an additional event was added: an outbreak of Ebola (as Ebola had recently spread to Goma town was ongoing in Lubero territory which is adjacent to Rutshuru territory). For each of the three scenarios – climate change, military operations against armed groups, and the spread of Ebola – strategies and actions in each of the three dials were identified to meet the potential needs. Communities ranked military operations against armed groups as the most likely scenario with the most significant impacts, followed by Ebola, and then climate change. World Vision DRC has subsequently submitted a proposal for all three scenarios to the Support Office. Through this pilot, study participants shared that they have learnt the importance of regular meetings and discussions with communities to explore and stay on top of contextual changes (KII7).

What happens if a scenario is not planned for?

Participants of the study acknowledged that it is not possible to plan for all scenarios and all eventualities, and there will always be a limit to the anticipatory approach; however, the strength of this approach is that it enables staff and communities to think about a range of possible outcomes. In the first scenario-planning workshops communities were not present, as this was very much a pilot and a test. In the iterative process

of developing new scenarios, in DRC at least, communities have now been involved. In DRC, this led to an expansion of the scenarios: in the first iteration the scenarios were based around a single trigger event (the elections); in the second iteration the staff and communities explored three different scenarios based on three different triggers (military operations, Ebola and climate change) and thus have had the opportunity to think about the different events, effects and potential activities that could be useful while either moving within a dial or across the dials.

In the long run, the intention is that scenario-planning should not be thought of as prescriptive (KII1). Rather, the development of different scenarios helps to avoid the default of putting all energy into humanitarian response and forgetting about the changes needed to address long-term vulnerability (KII23). It does so by unpicking the complexity of a situation and anticipating how, when and where activities from across the dials can be used together. In this way it provides a framework through which to logically explore what needs to be, and can be, addressed across the nexus.

4.2.4 Decision-making

The FCPA enables the potential for rapid changes (radical i.e. between dials, or smaller i.e. across dials) to programmes as the scenarios and the associated activities have been established. If a trigger happened and the team needed to move to one of the planned scenarios, the Field Office was able to start implementing directly, and needed only to inform the Support Office (it should be noted that this was also the case for the ARP programme before it was used as a pilot in the FCPA). This eliminated the typical chain of communication between field offices, national offices and donors that most agencies experience, and sped up the ability of the World Vision Eastern DRC Field Office to implement the anticipated changes (KII3). Furthermore, the Project Officer of the FCPA pilot was given direct contact with the responsible Project Officer in the Support Office, further facilitating the speed of communication and the flexibility of the project as it progressed, with most discussions and decisions being undertaken in less than a week (KII2).

However, the team highlighted that they were unsure whether the process would be as rapid if an unplanned, major disaster or crisis unfolded which was outside one of their anticipated scenarios and exceeded the capacity of the field staff. It must be noted that the likelihood of this happening given the effort and time spent in context analysis and monitoring would likely be small. If this did arise, a more typical crisis response would unfold. As a study participant explained, if the Ebola epidemic had reached Rutshura in early 2019 (i.e. before the community reflection workshop in August 2019 mentioned above) and the field team felt able to respond by increasing the hygiene promotion and sensitisation activities they were already carrying out in their existing routine Ebola prevention activities, then this would not require prior approval (this would be a change within a dial). However, if the Ebola epidemic caused a number of cases that appeared to be spreading rapidly and caused a shift in community suspicion and violent targeting of humanitarians, then this would implicate the security and health teams of the National Office. It would also necessitate its own assessment. In this case, the Field Office would report to the Support Office outlining how the situation had affected the programme, and financing teams would then likely contact the internal donor as well as additional donors across the World Vision partnership, as is standard for new humanitarian crises (KII19).

What happens if you cannot meet a need?

There are always more needs than there is funding available, and many needs relate to infrastructure or basic services which should be provided by government, and thus may be outside the mandate and capabilities of a given agency. In Rutshuru, prior to the FCPA, the community had decided to prioritise building an agricultural collection centre to help the farmer committees manage the stock of seeds (enabling them to be stored and sold at a later price when markets were favourable). At the point construction was set to begin, half of the community members requested that a maternity ward also be built. The programme

team spent time with the community exploring this request. It transpired that it was a request for an additional need alongside the needs related to the agricultural collection centre. World Vision therefore continued with the pre-planned agricultural collection centre, as construction of health centres was outside the mandate of World Vision DRC at that stage, and agreed to help the community find another partner to support the maternity ward (KII19). As part of the ARP, the communities had numerous previous experiences of extra projects and activities being added to the core programme, and thus developed a project proposal for the maternity ward that World Vision helped share.

An interesting issue that this example points to in trying to deliver flexible programming is the need to prevent plans from being changed too frequently. Shifts in community power or focus may occur but might not be aligned with authentic or longer-term priorities of all community members. This is why it is very important to be aware of the power that community representatives or gatekeepers have, and wherever possible, to gather feedback from all members of a community. In the case of the maternity ward there was not a gender split in the need and it was a case of the community requesting the maternity ward as well as the agricultural collection centre. World Vision, via the ARP, has been attempting to ensure that it captures all voices in the regular community-based meetings. Furthermore, the localisation agenda is very important in the FCPA and discussions on where flexibility in programming is possible or not are critical as World Vision tries to engage with communities in new ways (KII2; KII19).

It was very welcome to have the debate with the community because it enabled them to better understand how World Vision try to do their best in trying to identify needs and putting their resources in the right place. This just reinforced the relationship. They understand that resources are limited and that the whole point of this is how to prioritise, stay true to mandate and make sure needs are met. (KII19)

4.2.5 Internal changes to ways of working to enable flexibility

This section explores the five major changes to the ways of working that the Fragile Context Framework (the overall strategic approach of which the FCPA is part) brings. While the section is referring to general changes in the ways of working brought about by the FCPA, precise examples from the pilot cases are given where appropriate.

Mindsets

An important component of flexibility is the capacity of staff to think differently about how to respond to changes, to change their mindset on what successful programming looks like, to use limited resources and budgets with a flexible intention, and to make decisions based on information they have gathered and analysed (KII1; KII19). In trying to understand and monitor a scenario, programme teams are encouraged to think holistically about the context they work in and beyond the limits of traditional sectors. For example, an interviewee reported that when planning for food security, instead of only focusing on markets, the team now tries to think of other elements that could help affected populations, such as providing seedling plantations or focusing more on the environment (KII2).

The FCPA is attempting to build a permissive culture for frontline staff to feel confident about making decisions based on the information they have available (KII23). Previously, key decisions would have been made further up the chain of hierarchy, potentially based on more evidence, but at the cost of reduced speed. But now, as part of the FCPA, staff are encouraged to make decisions based on 'good enough' information and not wait for perfect information (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019).

Funding

World Vision International internally provided the seed money for the FCPA pilots. With 100% budget line flexibility, the seed money could have been used for any of the activities planned in the scenarios. Beyond the pilots, the intention is for both external and internal funding to be used in future programmes implementing the FCPA. Study participants acknowledged that it is less complex and challenging to flexibly use internal funding (which often is not earmarked), compared to grant funding (which may be sector-specific and tightly linked with indicators and outputs) when trying to bring a more flexible approach into programmes (KII7; KII1). World Vision therefore intends to try to increase the level of private and flexible funding to facilitate flexible programming options, while also making the case to donors how the FCPA and flexible funding can be used as a way to address the nexus in programming (KII7).

Changing systems

The Fragile Contexts Framework is also exploring how to build flexibility into budgets, supply chain and IT systems. The FCPA is intending to be able to holistically cover a wide range of pre-identified and newly emerging needs. World Vision is therefore researching, at the National Office level, the amount of reserve funds it may need to hold. To achieve this, calculations are being done on how much it may cost if a great majority of activities from the 'survive' dial are required versus how much activities in the 'thrive' dial would cost, and the difference between the two gives some indication of the amount of reserve funds that are needed. These reserve funds could be accessed by programmes when new needs emerged but funding from their original FCPA budget had been tied up in purchasing materials or equipment on current needs (KII7).

The intention is also to build flexible supply chain systems which will allow 'staff to select, purchase, and transport goods to intended communities using systems that are fast, efficient, and accountable at once' (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019: 16-17). This is likely to involve developing agreements with local suppliers to identify where goods can be obtained locally, prepositioning of goods and also simplifying procurement so that there is a single source from which to make procurement requests if activities need to be delivered quickly. This will be linked with moves to improve digital technologies that will also play a role in communication and monitoring of project areas that staff are unable to access.

Aligning planning processes across development, humanitarian and peace-building

The process of bringing humanitarian, development and peace-building activities more closely together was kickstarted by a joint week-long workshop between Disaster Management, Transformational Development and Peacebuilding World Vision teams. The aim of this initial workshop was to compare the activities in the three elements (humanitarian, development, peace-building) and identify where the similarities lay (KII23). Subsequently, each sector is being brought together to develop a cohesive sector approach that identifies the full range of possible interventions that spans across the nexus and across the 'dials' (see Box 1 on dials). World Vision is working to create a guidance document that outlines the menu of activities that could be carried out in the different 'dials' and the types of triggers that would send programming in one direction or another (KII23). The guidance document is intended to be accompanied by a mentored support approach where global specialists work with local sector specialists to apply the guidance and adapt project models based on the local context (KII23).

Furthermore, activities between different departments (e.g. security, MEAL and programmes) have been aligned. Data that is automatically collected by the security staff has been arranged to be shared and fed directly into the FCPA to aid decision-making. This was not part of programme planning previously (KII23). MEAL teams, who previously may not have looked beyond programme indicators, are also now responsible for ensuring that the new context indicators are measured and used for decision-making in programmes (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019).

Moving beyond the 'blueprint'

The FCPA is working on a different approach to MEAL, which recognises the need for a level of global reporting but balances this with the need for flexible, real-time and contextual information for local decision-making. Much of this new MEAL approach is still under development, including new project proposal, logframes and reporting formats. Three national offices will be undertaking a new learning process to explore different ways to do Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) of the FCPA to ensure that these processes enable and do not hinder flexibility (KII23).

Key questions that are being asked of MEAL responsibilities include: How much is being done to tackle vulnerability and fragility (quantity of programmes)? How well is it being done? Is it making a difference to people's lives? (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019). The FCPA focuses on the critical decisions that need to be made related to these questions and the sources of information that are needed (ideally at the local level) via the addition of the new context indicators. As the context indicators should be generated with the communities, they should be simple to monitor. Moreover, all those involved in the programme (community and World Vision staff) should understand the action triggered by the different indicators. This anticipatory process, therefore, should enable decisions to be taken rapidly. Overall the FCPA seeks to build into programmes a cyclical approach of listening, testing, observing and reiterating (KII24).

Whole-of-organisation change

The intent and long-term goal of the FCPA is for a whole-of-organisation change that entails a greater intentional approach to flexibility and fragility. Specifically, within the pilots, mentors were appointed to act as interlocutors between the field teams and the global organisation to help ensure consistency in understanding of exactly how the flexibility would work. They played an integral role in helping to coordinate the support to the FCPA design in the pilot countries, by liaising with different parts of the organisation (such as strategy) and providing guidance on how budget lines could be used, and what would happen if extra budget were needed (KII1; KII19). To build the whole-of-organisation change, workshops and learning events bringing humanitarian, development and peace-building departments together have been held, and are being planned with increased regularity (KII23; KII7); a specific Senior Management role to oversee the initiative was created; and World Vision is committed to developing and seeking new sources of unrestricted funding to enable flexibility in fragile contexts (KII24; KII23).

4.3 Integrated Programming – Norwegian Refugee Council

4.3.1 Overview

Integrated Programming is a three-phased approach rolled out by NRC since 2018 and designed specifically for nexus settings. The objective is to navigate flexibly through the three phases in a given area in order to link emergency and development activities more smoothly, with the ultimate aim of increasing the resilience and autonomy of crisis-affected communities (KII18). However, NRC has not yet explored the new peace and security component of the nexus as it is primarily a humanitarian organisation that focuses on saving lives and rehabilitating refugee populations (KII18).

Phase 1 relates to acute emergency settings in which multi-purpose cash transfers are used to enable populations to cover a wide range of basic sectoral needs (KII20; KII21). Where markets exist, NRC convenes vendors in 'fairs' so that beneficiaries are able to access a wide range of items; this was especially used in DRC.

Phase 2 is implemented during early recovery and focuses on ICLA (Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance): identity cards, land rights, housing, shelter, livelihoods and education.

Phase 3 is rolled out when the situation has stabilised and there is more of a guarantee that it will be possible to implement a long-term programme that introduces structural investments (KII21). Activities in this phase focus on professional and vocational training for youth and small business owners, via start-up kits and capacity training on financial structures (KII18). There is a strong focus on employment creation that can be integrated into the fabric of the local context. In order to achieve these aims, NRC works closely with government ministries (e.g. Environment and Employment).

While these phases follow a linear logic, similar to the LRRD continuum, they are closely linked and interconnected and the intention is that they complement each other. For example, a transitional Phase 1 area would likely have interventions related to Phase 2 being implemented as well as emergency Phase 1 interventions still being carried out. The Integrated Programming approach, alongside general examples of teams' flexible responses, is profiled in two contexts for this case study: DRC and Cameroon. A focus on a new specific, integrated nexus programme in Cameroon is also given.

4.3.2 Anticipatory design

An initial step of Integrated Programming is to understand different contexts and potential zones of intervention in order to determine which phase of Integrated Programming is most appropriate. NRC has specialised in conflict sensitivity analysis and evaluation teams who investigate the source of a given conflict, to analyse its depth, causes and dynamics (KII21). In DRC, a two-day workshop was held with the Country Office and Area Zone Offices to update and analyse the different contexts across the country. This workshop identified pockets of populations most at risk of displacement, which zones had high humanitarian needs, where the zones of active conflict were, and also which zones were stabilising. This workshop helped to update the Area Zone Offices in DRC on which phase and programme package (i.e. the range of actions) would be most appropriate, and to anticipate events in a given zone, and the likely direction that teams would need to take in order to flexibly move between the phases (KII12). However, as the Integrated Programming approach is nascent, it was felt that there is still work to be done on guidance, clarity of methodology and contextualisation (KII21).

4.3.3 Adapting to remain relevant

Context monitoring: criteria for moving between phases

The criteria for moving between phases are not fixed, and always depend on the particularities of the context. The decisions to move between the phases are based on standard humanitarian monitoring, coordination with the different Clusters and partners, and also feedback from the community (KII21). For instance, if a population is being threatened, susceptible to being displaced in the near future, or if humanitarian needs are particularly high, then Phase 1 is implemented. However, if a zone has not experienced a violent episode or displacement for a certain length of time and qualitative context analysis indicates that the displaced population has a strong will to settle, then the programme approach will evolve into Phase 2 in order to focus systematically on mid-term support. No specific tools for monitoring and evaluation were developed for the Integrated Programme beyond the standard evaluation of severity of needs, mid-term reviews and internal evaluations typically used to adapt programmes (KII21).

The majority of the examples of flexibility given by study participants related to moving from Phase 2 back to Phase 1, and then transitioning back to Phase 2. Most often, multi-purpose cash was given to support households through Phase 1 (KII20; KII21; KII18; KII22). For example, in Kasai Province, DRC, programming had embarked on a mid- to long-term project focusing on access to land, when, at the end of 2018, there was an influx of returning Congolese refugees from Angola. The returnees installed themselves in spontaneous camps and had numerous immediate basic needs. NRC quickly (in less than a month) returned the programming to Phase 1 for this population by providing in-kind distributions. As the criteria

of stability emerged (i.e. the possibility of populations to host, and the interest from displaced populations to stay), NRC conducted an evaluation and transitioned back to more durable solutions found in Phase 2. The transition occurred over the course of two months as a specific strategy was developed, funds were allocated and teams were deployed to aid the displaced population to install themselves in the new location (KII21).

In early 2019 in Cameroon, NRC was aiding returnees from five villages to re-integrate into their original communities with economic and agricultural activities such as creating seedling fields (Phase 2). Incidents of violence caused the returnees to be displaced into a neighbouring community. As the original villages and surrounding farmlands were once again empty, NRC changed the programme target zone to focus on the neighbouring community, and also changed the planned activity as seedling fields required mobilisation and training to succeed. They provided multi-purpose cash transfers to the displaced populations sheltered in nearby schools. Additionally, the seedling fields activity was transformed into 'farmer field' schools to provide skills to displaced populations for when they would eventually be able to settle (KII18). This kind of flexibility is uncommon to other NRC programming and was enabled by the framework of the different phases, which attempt to transition communities into durable solutions as quickly as possible.

Within-sector changes are easy to make

Flexibility in programming was easiest when the problem to be addressed was broadly the same but was resolved by slightly altering the intervention reflecting a moderate, or mid-range level of flexibility (within sector). For example, in Cameroon, a classroom rehabilitation project was planned, but a deteriorating security situation and context analysis suggested that this type of work could expose the community to increased harassment from armed groups. Through discussion with the community, an alternative intervention, which would nonetheless improve the situation for students, was decided upon: instead of structural rehabilitation, NRC would provide school furniture (tables and benches) and school equipment for the students. As the change needed was within the education sector, and the problem was broadly the same as before, sufficient flexibility was offered by the donor and there was no issue in making this programming change (KII22).

4.3.4 Decision-making

NRC interventions often involve many actors, including, at the core, the crisis-affected community themselves, as well as local committees and local state actors. Within the Integrated Programme, there is ample opportunity for feedback and joint decision-making with communities (KII22; KII20). For example, when it became apparent to communities that the procurement process for a drilling device for agricultural activities was going to take more than 45 days, they asked to receive cash instead to help cover their needs (KII22). NRC was able to respond positively to this and provide the cash, while cancelling the procurement order.

However, flexibility of NRC programming is heavily dependent on external donor requirements. As one study participant explained:

For donors for whom we have a project-based approach, we develop specific indicators and donors expect us to meet those indicators. If there are any changes, they have to happen within the flexibility they gave, e.g. changing location, changing a budget line. And, if a change is outside of this then we need their approval. (KII16)

NRC programmes are tightly bound by external donor rules. If the fund is for a given region, then it is relatively easy to change between different zones within the region. However, if the funding is for a specific zone then the discussions to change the zone are lengthier (KII22).

NRC Country Offices also receive unearmarked funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) for its Programme-Based Approach (for more detail on the Programme-Based Approach, see Obrecht, 2019). These funds can be used for emergency or development needs, as the context requires, and are not linked to a specific project or programme. Though they account for a small portion of the annual spend of NRC they are nonetheless important as they allow NRC to intervene with speed after an emergency situation or to begin covering a gap in needs, while awaiting larger-scale funding from traditional donors (KII21). For example, a study participant suggested the kind of ways they can be and have been used:

[These funds can be used] to fund the start-up of community fields to help generate food produce and income, or be used to complement an education programme with additional activities on hygiene promotion and the importance of washing hands, targeting school children in North Kivu as part of Ebola prevention. (KII13)

Participants raised issues that these funds need to be used more strategically and have anticipatory operational plans in place for their use. ‘We need to force Area Managers to have an operational plan to use these funds. But we still have difficulty in doing this’ (KII21). This highlights how flexible funding is only one element – agencies need to use plans and decision-making approaches that operationalise flexibility.

4.3.5 Changes to internal systems to enable flexibility

Certain anticipatory agreements were in place to help the flexibility of programming in terms of speed (KII21). For example, there are new prior agreements with suppliers such as cash providers (i.e. banks) or platforms for the voucher ‘fairs’ (Red Rose) as part of the move to more cash-based programming with the Integrated Programming approach (KII21).

Furthermore, the Integrated Programming approach brings together Core Competence Specialists (technical sector specialists from WASH, shelter, education, ICLA and food security, responsible for strategic direction, quality assurance, mentoring, training and capacity-building of staff). This aim of this is to, firstly, develop the Integrated Programming section of the Annual Strategy and, secondly, to be part of all Integrated Programming project development as an integrated team at the Area and National level. Previously the Core Competence Specialists had been used to working in their sector silo. Now, due to the systematic emphasis on integrating teams there is increased dialogue among these specialists to look into flexible programming options (KII21).

4.3.6 ISoLT – a specific Integrated Programme in Cameroon

The ISoLT (Inclusion Sociale dans les territoires les plus impactés par la crise du Lac Tchad) programme, funded by l’Agence Française de Développement (AFD) for three years starting in March 2019, is a cross-border initiative between Cameroon and Nigeria. AFD are development donors, while NRC specialises in humanitarian response for refugees. This programme therefore emerged from a humanitarian approach but nonetheless integrates, and links, the development needs of the displaced populations (IDPs, returnees and refugees) and host communities affected by the Lake Chad Crisis in the north and far north of Cameroon; and it works as a single complementary programme with NRC Nigeria for returning refugees. Advocacy is a core part of this programme to ensure their safe and voluntary return, and to ensure official recognition and provision of durable solutions to integrate out-of-camp refugees by local authorities. A number of local and government actors are thus involved in the project, which seeks to redress structural and governance issues related to civil documentation, access to housing, land and property, economic re-integration of affected youth and women, access to quality education, and in-kind distributions for immediate humanitarian needs (KII20; KII22; KII18). The key point of flexibility for this programme is its ability to swiftly adapt to emerging humanitarian needs as they arise, and equally, to swiftly return to the long-term path and vision of the ISoLT programme (KII20).

The ISoLT programme departs from typical programmes thanks to a few new factors: namely, local indicators and a team leader role. Locally identified indicators specific to the ISoLT programme were introduced alongside the global mandatory indicators that are part of all programmes. The ISoLT indicators attempt to track the long-term changes that the programme is working towards, for example, how the capacity of the local councils has changed, whether beneficiaries have seen improvements in their access to rights (KII22; KII20).

A team leader role was also introduced to facilitate the coordination with the numerous different humanitarian and development actors involved, and thereby reduce any silos between the humanitarian and development approaches. While coordination roles are not new, the depth with which this role is required to coordinate with different actors is new. The role identifies complementarities between internal NRC sectors (via coordination with sector managers), and other existing humanitarian, development and governmental projects (via existing coordination mechanisms). This is to ensure that ISoLT is working well with other initiatives to cover a wide array of needs simultaneously, in line with national sector policies (KII22). As this programme is still in the initiation phase, the NRC Cameroon Country Office has not yet experienced any situations necessitating flexible changes to target populations, the zone, or aid modalities under this funding.

5. Inhibiting factors to flexibility

The following section focuses on the main internal and external structural issues raised by study participants that prevented programmatic flexibility.

5.1 Internal structural issues

Different interpretations of internal policy can reduce the flexibility (speed and agility) of a response.

Many useful and important internal policies exist to help safeguard transparency and accountability. However, issues arise when not all staff across departments embody adaptive, flexible and context-specific mindsets and when they inaccurately perceive constraints to flexibility based on misinterpretations of what is possible (KII1; KII7; KII19). An example was given from one of the organisations of two different interpretations of policy related to business advances. Project staff were stopped from being able to take business advances as these were not being justified in time, which was creating red flags in the financing systems as money was unaccounted for. The Financing Department therefore only allowed finance staff to take business advances. However, this had knock-on effects causing instances of delays in operational activities. From the perspective of project staff this interpretation of policy was hampering project management, but from the perspective of the finance team it was preventing financial risk (KII19). This tension highlights a need to bring all staff members on board and to sensitise them, through training, to what the trade-offs on flexibility look like and how best to enable flexibility in daily work.

Financial flexibility is quickly used up in procurement and in emergency deployment of staff. When funds are limited and budgets get committed upfront or when items have been purchased, flexibility to meet new and changing needs is reduced. This occurred with World Vision's FCPA when the funds were committed to buying latrines for the WASH project in schools in Rutshuru, but the emerging seasonal challenges required a rapid refocus on farming productivity. To address these needs and to purchase seedlings, wider savings in other parts of the project had to be identified and used (KII19). Such savings may not always be possible and cannot be relied upon (KII1). Emergency deployment of staff can also use up budgets quickly as prices escalate in emergency settings, travel due to road blocks may increase the planned number of days that staff are deployed for, and per diems are used for staff based in one location and deployed to another (KII16; Obrecht, 2018). This shows the importance of unearmarked, contingency or reserve funds, which can be used to cover additional needs when they arise.

Persistent delays related to procurement are not appropriate to emergency interventions and reduce the speed of a response. Responsive and flexible procurement and supply chain systems are critical to a humanitarian agency's flexibility (Obrecht, 2019). Communities do not always have a clear idea of what it is that they need in a given moment, and may request further material which takes time to be delivered. For example, medication was bought by Christian Aid for clinics in eastern DRC to distribute to rape survivors. However, once the nurses received the medication, they indicated that they needed extra medication, which took five weeks to arrive because of the time taken to submit calls for tender and a procurement order to supply the necessary drugs (KII17). Overall, study participants cited that procurement processes still need to be simplified (KII23; KII17; KII19; KII7; KII1). World Vision is exploring single-source procurement processes, pre-positioning goods or having agreements with local suppliers to make sure goods can be dispatched with speed in order to overcome issues with procurement hampering flexibility (FCPA Starter Kit, 2019).

Agencies struggle to hire staff with the right skills and mindset. Staff retention in fragile contexts is notoriously low and there are difficulties with hiring staff with the right mindset for problem-solving and flexibility (KII21; KII4; KII24). Study participants noted that in nexus settings staff need to have skills to work flexibly and use information to make adaptive decisions; to have a mindset to be experimental, think critically, and be willing to take calculated risks; and, ideally to have experience in dynamic situations which have encompassed both humanitarian and more long-term development work (KII18; KII7; KII4; KII24). Agencies, such as World Vision, have begun changing job descriptions for roles such as Country Director, HR Director, Operations Director and Resource Acquisition Director in order to be purpose-written for fragile contexts. This includes core requirements such as recent standard security training (both for national and international staff) and a variety of skills, mindset and experience described above. The hope is that by having a clearer idea of the types of profiles that work well in fragile contexts and identifying the skills to be able to work flexibly, that nexus programmes will be delivered more effectively.

Monitoring and evaluation systems are not nimble enough and still lack the regularity of monitoring needed for rapidly evolving situations. Reporting systems took time and effort that were not appropriate to the speed with which staff needed to be able to move in fragile contexts (KII24). Integrally linked to this was that adaptive learning and feedback were not necessarily built into these M&E systems – a common problem across the sector (Dillon, 2019; Obrecht, 2019). The three organisations in this study attempted to incorporate regular monthly analyses in order to move with the changing needs, however, unless this was planned into programming, monitoring did not always happen with regularity. For example, Christian Aid DRC highlighted that although they may informally encourage regular monitoring updates from the community and from implementing partners, the reality of competing work demands meant that updates were only received at planned intervals (every three or six months) (KII4).

5.2 External structural issues

In policy terms the donors will say the right thing on the stage. Policy commitments to the nexus is one thing but the funding behaviour shows another: funding behaviour is driven by politics and domestic concerns and there is not much we can do about it. Both development donors and humanitarian professionals realise there is a rhetorical gap between global-level nexus policies and funding behaviour, but donors say their hands are tied. (KII24)

There is a gap between funding behaviour and policy commitments to the nexus and flexibility. Policy commitments from international forums such as the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain, and Sendai Framework focus on the importance of investing locally, and on preventative and mitigative actions, which address root causes, and can save more lives than investments in response. Yet, emergency funding is still more readily available than mid- or long-term funding in the majority of fragile and protracted crises such as DRC (KII21; KII4).

Moreover, there are many discussions on the importance of continuity of programming being supported through multi-year funding, yet, multi-year funding does not always, paradoxically, translate as funding which can be used across different financial years (KII9). The HPP, for example, had received multi-year funding, but given that each 12-month cycle was a separate financial year, with defined reporting requirements and across which funds could not be moved, flexibility and the continuity of programmes was constrained.

Thirdly, donors acknowledge the need for flexibility and provide it with regards to changing target zones or populations, but donor priorities and preferences still determine what is financed even when the needs of affected populations may be different. This inhibits agencies' ability to reframe their range of actions (KII16; KII22; KII24). A study participant summarised the issue: 'If we want to be able to have more flexible programming, then donors need to adhere to a more flexible logic' (KII3).

Experimenting with more flexible approaches suffers from a catch-22 situation. Study participants felt that donors were interested in seeing more flexible approaches. However, donors were not willing to fund them until they had seen pilots with demonstrable learning. Donor interest does not typically materialise in a formal manner (i.e. with funding) until substantial work has been carried out on a new idea. If agencies had not piloted new flexible approaches, then they were often unable to access bigger funding. However, without funding, many agencies do not have the ability to pilot new approaches (KII23). The experiences of NRC and Christian Aid in particular highlight the limitations to working in a different, more flexible manner when the funding is not flexible.

There remain externally imposed limits on general operability, and therefore flexibility, in certain contexts. Study participants highlighted that some contexts are less conducive to flexible approaches (KII20; KII22; KII4; KII12). In Burundi, much of the work must pass via local authorities who approve beneficiary groups and can cause delays, thus reducing the speed of programmes and limiting the changes that agencies may want to make (KII11; KII10). The government might not accept that there is a drought and a food crisis, and thereby delay international support (KII10) or governments can suspend NGO activity as happened in Burundi at the end of 2018 (KII9). Where there is high government involvement, flexibility and general operability may be reduced or require different ways of working.

6. Summary of findings: what factors support flexible nexus programming?

Having a high-level global initiative and by appointing a leader over it has helped us address constraints as a whole, rather than constantly being niggled here and there by 'Oh we can't do that because of funding reasons or because we don't have the right people or our business processes are not adapted'. (KII24)

This section summarises the main findings on the factors that support nexus programmes in being able to change to meet evolving needs.

A commitment to the core of the organisation to embed flexible mindsets and approaches is the biggest enabling factor. Both NRC's 2020 Strategy and World Vision's 2030 strategy include a focus on fragile contexts and on breaking down silos between traditional humanitarian and development (and in World Vision's case peace-building) divisions. Study participants felt that mainstreaming flexibility, so it becomes 'business as usual' for organisations supported nexus objectives to end needs by offering a range of services according to oscillating priorities (KII24; KII20; KII1). When there is supportive leadership and a permissive culture to make changes to original plans, staff report feeling more comfortable justifying decisions to change or not to change (KII1; KII19). Mainstreaming flexibility was also supported by bringing together cross-functional and multi-sectoral teams to be on hand to address the range of small to large perceived or real constraints that may arise (KII24; KII20; KII1). In World Vision these teams were comprised of mentors and senior leadership management involved in the FCPA and Fragile Contexts Framework initiative, while in NRC these were the Core Competence Specialists and senior management teams. They worked on changing aspects of recruitment, providing additional sectoral support, identifying resources, clarifying what changes were possible as and when these issues arose in the pilots.

Flexibility works best within a framework that regulates both flexible funding allocation and flexible programming. Many humanitarians are used to strict procedures and planning protocols from donors. This means that *too much flexibility*, especially when it comes to funding, can end up creating confusion on how, when, where and under what circumstances flexible funds should be used (KII21; KII13). This confusion can lead to them being used as a backup fund to cover emergency responses which, in any case, already receive better funding than development or peace-building activities in nexus settings. Similarly, too much flexibility within programmes, when not paired with robust adaptive management approaches, can undermine the overarching goal of the intervention, by not sticking to established tools and models which have been shown to produce results.

When teams understand that the ways they adapt to security issues can also be applied to programming, they will understand that they have more justification to make and request changes. Many study participants highlighted that teams already do some minor forms of adaptive management every day – such as making choices around which route is safest to take to a given location, whether to check in with communities via telephone or in person depending on the movements of armed actors, or the timing of a meeting to fit with community schedules (KII19; KII3; KII23). These are more 'tactical' level choices, whereas nexus programming approaches offer the opportunity for bigger, more strategic adaptations as agencies understand the issues in a protracted crisis or fragile context more deeply. When staff are encouraged and empowered to think historically, creatively, strategically and adaptively about the small and big changes in contexts in which they are working, they are better able to think holistically and take a decision on when to change or not (KII1; KII19).

Plans help make sense of complexity but need to be paired with adaptive management approaches.

Practically, as the first step, creating the time and space for humanitarian and development actors within an organisation to be brought together is necessary (KII23; KII7). Integrating key specialists in humanitarian and development teams within and across sectors in the design of programmes (as experimented via the Core Competence Specialists for NRC, and the Disaster Management, Transformational Development and Peacebuilding World Vision teams, as well as the World Vision mentors) lays the foundation for identifying where smooth transitions between emergency or long-term activities (i.e. across the dials or the phases) can be made. For example, if activities from humanitarian WASH and development WASH models are connected and aligned ahead of time, then even if an unexpected event causes a change in the context, organisations will be able to switch activities smoothly as they will already have identified key points of complementarity and cohesion between the two models and the resources necessary to make the change (KII7). Both NRC and World Vision relied on these kinds of anticipatory approaches and menus of options to make plans in advance for how they might modify programmes according to changes.

However, plans cannot be overly relied on, and will never be a replacement for adaptive management approaches that are more open-ended and responsive to the particular needs and issues that arise through learning and through unpredictable events over the course of a programme. Across the three organisations, anticipatory planning tended to be stronger than adaptive management – but more investment in the latter will be critical for organisations to make best use of flexible funding and achieve successes in the humanitarian–development–peace–building nexus.

Embedding regular meetings between staff and communities helps track and anticipate changes in near real-time. This is built from a foundation of trust. The long-term involvement of the ARP, for example, had created an enabling foundation for the FCPA in which communities trusted that World Vision would take their thoughts on board (KII19; KII2). Trust helps programming in general as communities are more likely to support the intervention and staff in their work. It was felt that many crisis-affected communities who have experienced year after year of transient humanitarian action have lost hope that agencies are really committed to move beyond a humanitarian intervention, and they are thus not always receptive to programmes which ask for their involvement (KII19; KII4). Nexus programming can provide a better opportunity to build trust, but this will take time, given the history of short-termism in how humanitarians engage with communities. The baseline of trust developed by the ARP was strengthened by the intentional, regular meetings embedded as part of the FCPA that created the ‘two-way conversations’ where the communities would raise new ideas, needs, issues and solutions with World Vision staff. It was thus relatively easy to develop locally appropriate indicators that both staff and communities could track and use to make decisions. Communities and staff were on the same journey, monitoring the context together and anticipating changes. This led to situations in which the communities were proactively informing field offices of changes in situation to which the offices could respond (KII2; KII3; KII5; KII9).

7. Conclusion

Intentionally working flexibly in fragile contexts and protracted crises is a challenge. However, it is vitally important for effective and relevant responses to the evolving needs of crisis-affected populations. This research study focused on how flexible programming approaches have been used by agencies trying to implement humanitarian–development–peace nexus-aware approaches and on the key issues faced by agencies in enabling changes in programming.

As outlined, nexus programmes attempt to address acute and chronic needs flexibly and holistically in an oscillating or concurrent – rather than sequential and linear – manner, which seeks to overcome the rigidity of typical humanitarian or development approaches by remaining extremely context-driven, focusing on evolving local contexts and dynamics.

All of the agencies profiled were attempting to offer multi-sectoral programmes that could address a range of needs, and simultaneously attempted to address root causes of vulnerability. At this stage, it is not possible (nor was it part of the research objectives) to ascertain if the programmes enabled the agencies and the communities they were supporting to really push into new directions and break cycles of vulnerability. World Vision, Christian Aid and NRC have all committed to internal global learning events and evaluations to try to understand and share the impacts of their experiences with piloting more innovative flexible and nexus-aware programming.

In terms of anticipatory strategies, which enhance flexibility by planning for alternative options in advance, the different organisational approaches and programme designs fell along a spectrum. World Vision, via the FCPA, represented the end of the spectrum that took an extremely considered and predictive approach through scenario planning. NRC attempted to classify different intervention zones according to different phases of Integrated Programming and to anticipate in which direction (either towards Phase 1 or Phase 3) a given area was likely to move. At the other end of the spectrum, Christian Aid's Humanitarian Programme Plan had planned an overall holistic approach to address needs simultaneously.

In terms of adaptive strategies, the organisations had less developed approaches to taking on new information and then modifying programme theories or identifying new actions. This is unsurprising, as adaptive management is a relatively new area of work and appropriate models are still being developed, typically to suit individual organisations for specific contexts or purposes. From the outset, programme design for all three organisations was based on a conceptual framework that foresaw the work as non-linear and the programmes as adapting and moving between more development-focused or emergency-focused phases and approaches. Adaptive approaches were enabled by regular context monitoring and conflict analysis, which helped field teams to monitor and prepare for changes, for instance, emerging climate change issues in Rutshuru, eastern DRC. World Vision was able to engage in a wider range of adaptations due to the flexible funding available for their programme. Low to moderate changes to meet immediate needs is already a well-developed practice for these agencies. Challenges in adaptiveness were more centred on getting back on track to recovery and changing between sectoral activities – as donor regulations and sectoral interests often produced constraints. But there was also a lack of a space for project teams to consider the overall programme logics behind their humanitarian, development and peace-building work, and how these interlink.

As evidenced from this study, and the wider research undertaken by ALNAP, the power of greater intentionality with flexibility is two-fold. Firstly, staff know that programming is set up to help them adapt quickly, that they are not in a rigid system, and that success is about listening to and improving alongside the community. Secondly, anticipatory approaches to nexus programming serve to make complex situations less daunting for staff, as scenarios or phases have already been thought-through and anticipated, and measures are already in place to help prevent emergency situations from derailing the long-term transitions for which agencies and communities are striving. Third, and finally, adaptive approaches to nexus programming are critical, particularly at the strategic level or level of programme theory/logic. Finding the most appropriate approach to addressing short- and long-term vulnerabilities and their causes in a country is far from linear or straight-forward – and requires more adaptive and open approaches to develop and iterate the best nexus solutions for each context.

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