



Nexus between development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peace work

– On how to use nexus approaches by building resilience, protecting vulnerable people and managing conflict

1. WHY NEXUS IS IMPORTANT

Over the past decade, the world has experienced crises in higher numbers and of longer duration than previously. More people are being affected by natural disasters and conflict, which places them in fragile situations and leaves them vulnerable.

These prolonged fragile situations are posing a challenge to organisations that work with either humanitarian relief or long-term development. Relatively short-term relief aid does not suffice in a drawn-out crisis, and development organisations lack the tools to navigate in such troubled waters. A growing number of CISU's grantees are working in fragile situations. This calls for enabling the users of CISU's funds to take a nexus approach in such circumstances.

The political focus on nexus is also manifested in "The World 2030, Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action", which has the clear aim of linking together development initiatives, not least those in fragile contexts, to humanitarian interventions. For instance, The World 2030 stresses the importance of assisting in areas in geographical proximity to the conflicts. Both development cooperation and humanitarian action are increasingly in need of the nexus approach to draw on the comparative advantages of the various sectors, thus reducing people's vulnerability and poverty. This is taking place within the framework of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the inclusive vision to *Leave No One Behind*.

THE HISTORY BEHIND IT

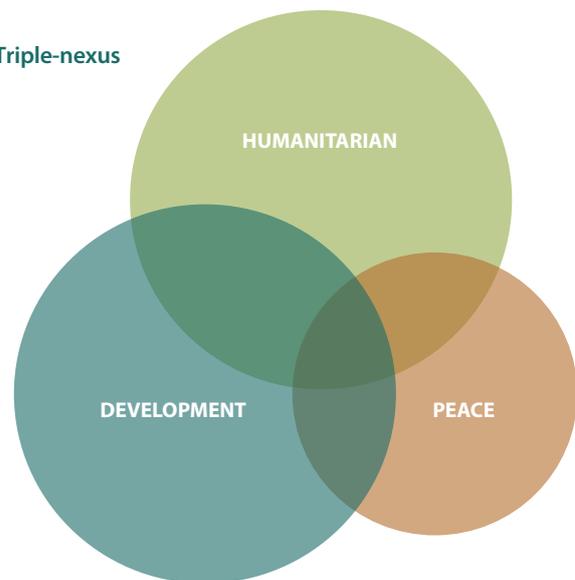
Since the Grand Bargain ("Agenda for Humanity" on humanitarian financing agreed in 2015), the UN has gravitated towards the nexus approach in order to reduce barriers between humanitarian and development assistance. The so-called New Way of Working (NWOW) encourages the various actors in the humanitarian and development field to become better at cooperating in pursuit of common goals, pointing out how the two interact. Since 2016, the UN has also talked about The Triple Nexus and included the term peace, whenever relevant. This concept is referred to by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the HDP Nexus (Humanitarian, Development, Peace). The nexus concept springs from what used to be known as linkages. It represents the latest trend in the debate on how to strengthen coherence between humanitarian relief aid and development cooperation.

2. WHAT IS NEXUS?

Nexus has been defined by the OECD as "interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions", that is, actions that **connect** and that create **coherence** and **synergy**. According to the OECD, the nexus approach springs from the purpose of enhancing **cooperation** and **complementarity**. This means that each civil society actor makes the most of its advantages and strong points in order to optimise the strengthening and scope for action of local civil society. At the same time, one's own intervention should be seen against the background of other interventions in the same context.

Apart from connecting **development** and **humanitarian action**, the third leg in the nexus concept is **peace** and reconciliation. This may be relevant if, for example, there is a conflict or a need to prevent one.

Triple-nexus



Different actors define the nexus concept in a variety of ways. However, some general characteristics are important for CISU to highlight:

- **Simultaneity:** Nexus takes place in a fragile context and refers to the intersection between development, humanitarian and peace work. The emphasis is on creating synergy, e.g. by involving aspects from all relevant sectors, i.e. combining methods slanted towards both development cooperation and relief aid. This can be, for instance, adhering to humanitarian principles and pursuing long-term solutions to a climate crisis, or building capacity to manage a protracted fragile situation.

¹ DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, OECD, February 2019.

- **Transitions:** In the descent from a stable to a fragile situation or outright humanitarian crisis, development actors need to respond to the new context. Ongoing intervention may to be suspended or changed. It calls for different approaches when a crisis is brewing than in a scenario of long-term development. It also requires other competencies of the implementing organisation. After the crisis is over, a shift is needed once again towards long-term thinking, e.g. moving from a needs-based to a rights-based approach. During these transitions, development and relief-aid-oriented methods also coexist.

The nexus framework

The nexus framework consists of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals as well as the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. By adopting the Leave No One Behind principle, the Sustainable Development Goals are especially concerned with vulnerable groups, their needs and rights. At the same time, the humanitarian principles are taken into account in development cooperation in fragile contexts. Thus, the nexus approach is located in the overlap between the Sustainable Development Goals and the humanitarian principles.

Humanitarian work often focuses on unmet needs among vulnerable groups. Needs-based approaches are clearly set out in, for instance, the Core Humanitarian Standard, which is the minimum to be fulfilled in a humanitarian crisis. Development, on the other hand, is primarily about empowerment and securing people's rights. A nexus intervention must relate to both aspects, striking a balance between the needs-based and the rights-based approach by working simultaneously on reducing vulnerability

Analysis of the fragile context

Drawing up a nexus approach first requires an analysis of the various dimensions in play in the context concerned. The OECD's model might be helpful in assessing whether and how a context is fragile:

DIMENSIONS	DESCRIPTION
Economic fragility	Encompasses vulnerability to economic risks, unemployment and unequal growth, among other factors.
Climate and environmental fragility	Encompasses vulnerability to climate and environmental risks, including exposure to natural disasters and consequences of climate change.
Political fragility	Encompasses vulnerability associated with political conflict and oppression, including risks related to political events and lack of participation in decision-making processes.
Security fragility	Encompasses citizens' vulnerability to security risks, such as war, other armed conflict and terror. It springs from social or political violence.
Social fragility	Encompasses vulnerability to risks affecting social cohesion. It springs from inequality in society and limited access to human rights.

and empowering the target group. Thus, the nexus is where the needs-based and the rights-based approach intersect.

This duality is what obliges the nexus to focus on the short to medium term, seeking to satisfy the humanitarian and needs-based priorities, but also taking a development-oriented approach in pursuit of long-term change. Each civil-society actor does this in its own manner by using its knowledge, experience and advantages compared to others. For instance, a civil society actor already dedicated to human rights can include a rights-based approach in its nexus work. What is most effective and how the various elements and actors contribute in the nexus will always depend on the context at hand and the organisation planning the intervention.

3. USING NEXUS IN PRACTICE

Nexus is premised on always prioritising preventative activities. Development approaches should be taken whenever possible, and humanitarian action whenever necessary. This is in keeping with the OECD's recommendation on how to operationalise the nexus. In practice, each civil society actor is to choose its approach in view of its position in civil society and the context at hand. In this manner, nexus contributes to strengthening the sustainable development of local civil societies and to protecting and securing human rights in a fragile context.

CISU supports this by prescribing the nexus for fragile contexts as an approach whose contents should cover the fields of *building resilience*, *protecting vulnerable groups*, and *managing conflict* for the benefit of local inhabitants as well as displaced people.

Read more about the dimensions of a fragile context on the OECD webpages on the *Fragility Framework*³.

² DAC-Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, OECD, februar 2019

³ States of Fragility, OECD, www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/

Choice of nexus approach

Thoroughly analysing the fragility serves to substantiate the choice of an appropriate nexus approach. CISU has identified three focus areas that may help address a fragile context and its consequences for the people affected by it.

- Resilience describes the ability of a person or a system to resist, prevent and recover from a crisis or fragile situation. The concept recognises how people and communities become particularly tough and stick together in times of great difficulty. In fragile contexts, civil society organisations play a key role in strengthening local communities' capacity to respond.

- Protection of particularly vulnerable people: when there is a crisis, or when the space for civil society is restricted, protecting people's rights calls for greater attention. Civil society organisations with local roots can contribute to putting sensitive issues on the agenda, such as looking out for vulnerable groups, including a dialogue with authorities about their responsibility for this.
- Prevention and management of conflicts and efforts to secure sustainable peace, e.g. by creating conditions for dialogue between citizens/rights-holders and authorities, or by making sure that vulnerable groups can participate and be listened to. Once again, civil society plays a key role in fostering dialogue, peace and reconciliation.

The findings of the fragility analysis determine the choice of nexus approach that is most appropriate to the operating scenario at hand. This may cover the following:

DIMENSIONS	RESILIENCE	PROTECTION	CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
Economic fragility	✓	✓	
Climate and environmental fragility	✓	✓	
Political fragility		✓	✓
Security fragility		✓	✓
Social fragility	✓	✓	✓

Each civil society actor should use its knowledge and advantages in the context at hand. For example, a civil society entity already involved in human rights work may incorporate a rights-based approach into its nexus approach.

Nexus in practice focused on resilience

Resilience describes the ability of a person or a system to resist, absorb and recover from a crisis. This includes, among other aspects, the resources and capacities available to prevent, respond and adapt to a changed state of affairs. Accordingly, resilience is not only about stamina to withstand a crisis, but also about social coherence. In fragile contexts, civil society organisations play an important role in strengthening local communities' capacity to respond.

Resilience can be pursued with a variety of aims or target groups:

Focusing on people, that is, at the individual level, with a community or with particularly vulnerable/exposed groups or households. Here are some examples of resilience interventions targeted at people.

- Information and knowledge: e.g. about prevention and risk reduction, disaster preparedness and leadership.
- Skills: mastery of tools that enable action, e.g. risk mapping and analysis.

Focusing on systems and actors, including local systems (an institution, local authorities, community committees), national systems (a ministry, an NGO) and international systems (partnerships, programmes, multilateral organisations). Here are some examples of resilience interventions aimed at building and strengthening systems:

- Setting up structures: early alert systems, risk monitoring, appointment of focal persons and/or disaster management committees in communities.
- Strategies: e.g. policies and guidelines to manage risk or crises, a resilience strategy at the organisational level for a particular intervention or programme.
- Networks: using local networking or established coordination mechanisms and security networks.
- Working on empowerment in order to champion the rights of vulnerable groups.

Strengthening the resilience of systems and persons will require varying degrees of strategic services, organisational capacity and advocacy towards decision-makers. Resilience can, to some extent, be about strategic services, such as infrastructure (e.g. dams that protect against flooding), and above all about organisational capacity (e.g. a community's capacity to assess risk) and advocacy (e.g. dialogue with local authorities on rights and early alert systems).

Nexus in practice focused on protection

In fragile situations, it is important to secure protection of vulnerable population groups who might be exposed to various types of risk, including violence, exploitation and abuse. Protection is concerned with upholding respect for people's rights and dignity. Civil society organisations with local roots can contribute to putting sensitive issues on the agenda, such as looking out for vulnerable groups, including a dialogue with authorities about their duties to this effect.

When working with protection, it is important first to assess what forms of vulnerability affects the population groups involved. Subsequently, it is crucial to develop ways of protecting these vulnerable groups.

Examples of this are:

- In relatively stable contexts with limited space for civil society, where human rights are violated, people and organisations conducting rights-based advocacy may be persecuted, e.g. in terms of restrictions on their freedom of organisation, assembly and speech. Civil society actors can counteract this by putting sensitive topics on the agenda and enter into a dialogue with the authorities.
- In countries with rampant poverty, vulnerable population groups can be especially exposed economically due to both poverty and inequality. They are worst affected by, say, fluctuations in food prices. In this case, a nexus approach focused on protection may serve to work with vulnerable groups, such as children, women, persons with disabilities and minorities, in order to improve their self-supporting capacities and living conditions by means of income-generating activities.
- In very fragile contexts, vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced people and refugees, children, women, persons with disabilities and minorities, can be especially exposed to natural disasters or man-made conflicts. This gives precedence to protecting fundamental rights. This may involve protecting women and children against sexual abuse through organisation and counselling. It can also be about persons with disabilities gaining access to services, and minorities having their human rights upheld.

Nexus in practice focused on prevention and management of conflicts

Violent and protracted conflicts are on the rise in the world, keeping the affected countries fragile. Therefore, working with the nexus is also about how to create interventions that help prevent and manage conflict, and that bring about sustainable peace. Civil society plays an important role in fostering dialogue, peace and reconciliation.

Conflicts can arise against the background of, say, political interests and disagreements, but also as a consequence of struggle for scarce resources. When it comes to addressing conflicts, preventative steps can keep the situation from escalating further or reduce existing levels of hostility.

An intervention taking a nexus approach to preventing or managing conflict may, for instance, focus on:

- Strengthening citizens' involvement and popular participation in democratic processes.
- Setting the stage for dialogue between rights-holders and duty-bearers (authorities).
- Ensuring that vulnerable and exposed groups get a chance to join in and be listened to in negotiations.
- Ensuring respect for and fulfilment of human rights, including advocacy and compliance monitoring.
- Restoring justice focused on reconciliation processes.
- Developing and strengthening accountable and inclusive civil society organisations (applying the PANT principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and transparency).

4. HOW CISU CAN BE USED

Funds: Danish organisations alongside their partners in the South can apply to CISU's Civil Society Fund for support to carry out interventions with nexus approaches. The criteria used to assess the application will take account of the fragile context to determine whether an intervention with a nexus approach falls within the support modalities of the Civil Society Fund. More information on this matter can be found in the Guidelines for the Civil Society Fund [here](#) (in Danish).

Capacity services: CISU's member organisations can contact CISU to obtain advice on how to develop nexus approaches in a fragile context. They can also attend CISU's courses or suggest subjects to be addressed.

If you want to know and do more

- Description of fragility on the OECD platform “State of Fragility Framework”:
www3.compareyourcountry.org/states-of-fragility/overview/0/
- CISU’s Thematic Paper on Fragility (in Danish, see Skrøbelige lande og kontekster): cisu.dk/begreber

Two pieces of CISU advice for working with nexus

- Examine the various dimensions of fragility in depth before formulating a nexus approach and choosing whether to focus on resilience, protection and/or conflict management. Carry out the analysis alongside the local partner. How does each dimension affect the target group?
- Together with the partner, study the *Core Humanitarian Standard*⁴, and reflect on how its Guidance Notes and Indicators are relevant to yourselves as civil society actors and to your nexus approach.

⁴ Read more at: corehumanitarianstandard.org/resources/chs-guidance-notes-and-indicators

CISU’S THEMATIC PAPERS

CISU draws up thematic papers setting out our view of how our member organisations may understand, interpret and apply various key concepts in civil society cooperation.

The thematic papers are based on our practice and experience of member organisations’ international work, our advisory services and courses, as well as our administration of funds open for applications.

The thematic papers are approved by CISU’s Board. They are not carved in stone, but will be revised at appropriate intervals in view of experience gained. Moreover, new thematic papers will be drawn up on other issues.

See the latest version and other thematic papers at:
cisu.dk/temapapirer (in Danish).

