



## Applying a nexus approach to transcend the humanitarian-development-peace divide.

How differently do we need to work to leave no one behind?

### LAB DEBATE AT THE EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT DAYS 2019



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### EVENT REPORT

Tuesday 18 June 2019



# SUMMARY & KEY MESSAGES

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VOICE organised, in cooperation with INTERSOS and EPLO, a lab debate during the European Development Days 2019. Representatives from different organisations across the humanitarian, development and peace sectors shared their views on how to better operationalise the nexus in protracted, fragile and conflict-affected contexts. They discussed ways to better work together in order to address root causes of crises and reduce peoples' needs.

The key messages of the event are:

- **NGOs need to be more involved in the nexus;**
- **Development actors and instruments need to be present earlier and in a more flexible way in protracted crises;**
- **There is still no consensus among actors regarding the peace component of the triple nexus;**
- **The implementation process of the nexus and change should be driven and informed by the field reality.**



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# INTRODUCTION

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VOICE Director Kathrin Schick, the debate moderator, stressed the importance of having a dialogue about the nexus with colleagues from the development and peace sector on the occasion of the EDDs. Most of VOICE's members have been working in the humanitarian and development fields for many years and Kathrin believes it is essential to use this momentum to advance with the nexus approach. Kathrin also highlighted that VOICE is doing a study on NGOs' perspectives on the nexus which will be published soon.

The moderator presented the panellists and asked them why they believe there is a need for a nexus approach, what are the challenges to the nexus in their area of work and how the humanitarian, development and peace actors can work better together to have a real impact in the field.

# Hugh MacLeman

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Policy Advisor, Crises and Fragility  
Global Policies and Partnerships Division  
Development Co-operation Directorate  
OECD

Hugh highlighted two main reasons why there is the need to strengthen coherence between humanitarian and development and how the OECD is working towards that goal.

First, Hugh pointed out that nowadays half of the extreme poor, 836 million people, are living in fragile countries and according to the OECD, this number is expected to increase. Therefore, there is a risk that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be achieved, and amongst them the commitment to leave no one behind and to try to reach those people furthest behind first.

OECD DAC countries have increased the Official Development Assistance (ODA) to fragile countries to 65%. However, increasing funding is not enough. There is a need to strengthen coherence between humanitarian, development and peace actions because the nature of crises has changed and the way humanitarian and development actions are structured is not working well enough.

The humanitarian system was designed as a 6-week intervention but crises today are increasingly protracted – lasting on average 17 years. The design of the humanitarian system does not meet reality anymore and the system has been stretched beyond its capabilities, to not only do crisis response and lifesaving assistance but also to address the drivers of humanitarian crises. Humanitarian actors do not have the resources, the right people and the right tools to do so, but development colleagues do. However, the development system also needs improvements. It has retreated from sub-national levels and community investments and it is now aggregating much more focus to the national level.

There are also problems related to peace and conflict prevention: there is a lack of understanding of what it really is, and also a massive underinvestment (only 2% of ODA flows). There is a need to think about why there are not a lot of investment in peace and conflict prevention and how incentives to do so can be changed.

The second reason why we need to look at the nexus and the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP)

coherence is related to dynamics between bilateral actors, the UN system, NGOs and civil society. 77% development-focused ODA in fragile context goes through bilateral mechanisms. Bilateral actors need to engage more in the process of making HDP actions more complementary.

In February 2019, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) adopted a recommendation on the HDP nexus, an important step considering that the OECD does not adopt recommendations very often - this was the 7th in the last 60 years. It incentivises DAC members to step up and change how they contribute to nexus programming instead of just financing it. The recommendation also aims to have the UN system and NGOs consider and engage with the bilateral actors because they are significant development actors in their own right.

The recommendation was built on several years of work and consultations with different actors, including VOICE. It consists of 11 principles that should be put in place collectively and in a common framework. All DAC members have adhered to it and the OECD wants other organisations to join because working together is the key to make the nexus approach effective.



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# Pedro Campo Llopis

## Deputy Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Myanmar

Nowadays, humanitarian aid is being used to respond also to protracted crises, where long-term needs have to be addressed. In his view, the humanitarian instruments are not sufficient to do so, therefore, new ways of working need to be developed to address these new challenges. In 2017, the Council adopted Conclusions asking EU delegations to demonstrate results in terms of improving the nexus and Myanmar was selected as one of the six countries for a EU nexus pilot. These Conclusions gave delegations a push; a capacity to operate and to innovate.

Pedro illustrated the geopolitical situation in Myanmar and stressed the complexity of the crises the country has been experiencing almost since its independence. At Delegation level, the EU has three institutions working on different issues: DEVCO on development, ECHO on humanitarian aid, and EEAS on political issues and dialogue. Together, they have created an action plan, where they try to focus on two basic things: first, to develop a joint analysis and vision of the problems they encounter and secondly, to try to develop a mechanism for joint programming.

These may seem the basic and logical things to do but it is quite difficult when there are three institutions with different mandates and decision-making processes. Crucially, all three institutions agreed that unless they simultaneously conducted a humanitarian action and a dialogue with the government to try to address the causes of conflict, they could not operate in Myanmar.



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They have created a Standard Operating Procedure that the Head of Delegation has declared as mandatory, which includes joint hearings, peer reviews and joint operations in conflict areas. They have also created a new tool, the Nexus Response Mechanism that will probably be implemented in October and consists of using development funds to address crisis situation with three key elements:

1. The due diligence criteria: closely monitor the conflict areas and have a strong scrutiny of the policies being implemented;
2. Use an incremental approach: start the programme on a small scale and if successful, then top it up. Starting large-scale programmes in conflict areas is not advisable because of uncertainty and the challenging political context;
3. Have a collective decision making process: even if funds come from DEVCO, there is a consultation process with the EEAS and ECHO.

The EU delegation to Myanmar is presenting all relevant documents to headquarters in the hope that different DGs will appreciate their positive experience and that it will inspire other Delegations to move in the same direction. Pedro stressed that it is not just up to the Commission to work on the nexus approach but, called on the NGO community to do its part in advocacy at all levels.



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# Alda Cappelletti

## Director of Programmes, INTERSOS

Humanitarian assistance is set to save lives and alleviate suffering of populations in emergencies, while development is more about addressing the chronic vulnerabilities, the systemic structural issues. The main difference between humanitarian and development action is at the core of the nexus approach. Through the nexus, the humanitarian imperative is integrated into a wider agenda which includes addressing chronic vulnerabilities, political insecurity, and peace.

Humanitarian and development actions can be complementary, and the nexus approach presents opportunities and positive elements but every context is different and before deciding what type of approach should be applied in a given context, an analysis in terms of political dynamics, social and economic dimensions and the risks associated with a given approach needs to be done.



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NGOs believe that the alignment between humanitarian and development is positive for certain protracted crises where long-term activities can better support solutions for chronic needs. This is the case for large-scale displacements, such as the refugee crisis in the Middle East and in South Sudan/Uganda. In these contexts, having humanitarian action linked to durable solutions can support not only the displaced population but also host communities, leading to a better integration between the two groups.

However, it is possible to identify many risks for principled humanitarian action in the nexus, particularly in contexts of complex emergencies where the State is party to the conflict. In those cases, a state-driven and a state-focused agenda goes naturally into tension with principled humanitarian

action. The concrete consequences of the nexus in the field can be seen in Northeast Nigeria, where the government has been pushing for a narrative that 'the conflict is over' and that NGOs and humanitarian organisations should support the government in the rehabilitation phase and in capacity building. However, the situation in the field is very different. There are still 1.8 million people displaced, even civilians that are now living in accessible areas find themselves in garrison towns and NGOs are prevented from reaching people outside these towns. This government action makes it almost impossible for humanitarian action to be principled since it curtails the impartiality and independence of humanitarian actors while denying them access to reach those in need. NGOs are concerned that the government will instrumentalise their work. For INTERSOS, the nexus should be a process led by the government because it is the main actor responsible for providing basic services to the population.

Alda clearly underlined that context is key and in some contexts development actions are not appropriate, such as during a huge humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian actors should maintain enough independence to ensure the primacy of the principles of impartiality and neutrality to be able to operate.



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# Sonya Reines-Djivanides

## Executive Director, EPLO

Sonya highlighted the importance for the three sectors to address people's needs, to do no harm and to understand that they need to work differently together to do better. An increasing number of countries are not cycling out of conflict and current tools and practices are not sufficient to meet these challenges.

Since the greatest humanitarian and development needs are coming from situations of crisis and violent conflict, the peace component of the nexus cannot be ignored. Some people get slightly nervous about the peace component, in part because of the type of responses that we are used to thinking about when addressing conflict in particular places.

The peace community sees the peace component of the nexus as involving a people-centred approach: listening to and working with the people affected by the crisis, supporting local civil society, ensuring that actions are conflict-sensitive so that they do not exacerbate the conflict dynamics in a particular setting. It is about increasing the coordination and integration of actions to be more effective in addressing people's needs and human security, supporting local initiatives for peace and resilience, and doing joint conflict and peace analysis.

The wariness of some with regard to the peace component comes from the potential inclusion of hard security approaches. The peace component must not involve hard security, militarised approaches because they can have a counter-productive impact on local peace and conflict dynamics and they also pose significant risks to humanitarian actors.

Although humanitarian and development actors are not peacebuilders, they can contribute to peace. It is important to think about how to incentivise people to work better together, where these incentives should come from and what they should look like. Without incentives to change how they work (including through flexible and long-term funding), it is likely that the different actors will continue to work in the same way. Ultimately, it is in the interest of the people that we are trying to help and support, that we fully integrate peace into the nexus, in order to have a more positive and sustainable impact.



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Sonya appreciates the work the EU is doing in Myanmar because it shows that not all policies have to be made in headquarters. The EU Delegation to Myanmar has created something that is very fitting for that particular context and she hopes the process of operationalising the nexus will not be led only by Brussels but that inclusive pilots can substantially feed into it from the bottom up.



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# Q&A WITH THE AUDIENCE

In the discussion with the audience, questions were raised related to funding the nexus. Panellists agreed that the nexus approach does not require more overall funding but it rather requires actors to think about ways to work differently, like funding different sectors or actors, to better address peoples' needs and the root causes of crises and the importance of using the right instruments.

There is a moment of opportunity now with the MFF 2021-2027 with the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. It foresees a rapid response pillar where the three sectors would have the space to work more closely together. It will only work with real joint thinking between the relevant Commission services. The new instrument should remain as flexible as possible to be able to better respond to crises. The importance of keeping a separate humanitarian instrument was stressed to safeguard principled humanitarian action. Moreover, in order to operationalise the nexus in complex emergencies it is necessary to have multiyear funding.

Unfortunately, there are many competing political agendas shaping the EU's approach to peace, development and humanitarian aid. On the one hand, many Member States advocate for the next MFF to be flexible and to have fewer constraints but on the other hand there are others passing white papers to earmark funding for migration and border control, which would reduce the flexibility of the development instrument under the next MFF. Moreover, there is a proposal for a European Peace Facility to fund military training and equipment in partner countries. This new dynamic will impact the people trying to work together for peace and conflict prevention.



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A participant from a multi-mandate NGO pointed out that there is a will from development actors to work in fragile and conflict areas but often donors are reluctant to invest in development projects in such

areas. Panellists agreed that donors could take more action and invest more in development in fragile and conflict contexts such as in Syria. The nexus requires humanitarian and development actors to work in the same place at the same time therefore, development actors need to recalibrate risks, and invest more in those countries. Moreover, donors should look more into developing financing strategies that do not only look at overall ODA flows but also at public and private, international and domestic flows of financing.

The audience also raised questions related to dilemmas linked to how to operate when national governments are complicit in human rights violations and crimes against humanity or cases where the national government does not recognise that there is a humanitarian crisis and denies the suffering of its people.

Regarding Myanmar, there is a recent UN report threatening to pull out funding from Myanmar because it believes the government is complicit in genocide. The issue still needs to be addressed but this shows the importance of having, within the nexus approach, a due diligence mechanism and a third party to assess projects. In Myanmar, there is also the



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issue of government denying humanitarian actors access to conflict areas. The EU has recently withdrawn from a large agricultural programme in Rakhine because of the lack of travel authorisations. Sometimes, the government is part of the problem and it is unacceptable for humanitarian actors to be denied access to those in need, hence the importance of keeping humanitarian action principled. There are tools in the humanitarian toolbox of delivering humanitarian assistance to maintain its needs-based approach, including cross border working and other ways.



VOICE (Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies) is a network representing 85 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. VOICE is the main interlocutor with the EU on emergency aid and disaster risk reduction.

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