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# THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS AND THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES:

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## COMPLEMENTARY APPROACHES?

## EVENT REPORT

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CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN POLICY STUDIES(CEPS)  
PLACE DU CONGRÈS 1,1000 BRUXELLES

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NOVEMBER 29 2017

# SUMMARY



The event organised by VOICE, with the support of DanChurchAid, brought together more than 120 participants to explore the humanitarian-development nexus and the humanitarian principles as two different approaches and to discuss their articulation as well as their complementarity. Moreover, the event sought to draw lessons from NGOs' experience on the ground and bring in the field perspective, adding a practical-level to theoretical debates.



The panel brought together donors and practitioners from multi-mandated organisations who, with input from the audience, discussed the nexus and its implications for the humanitarian principles at different levels, including policy frameworks, funding streams, and the operational level.

The event was held at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) offices in Brussels, a leading think tank and forum for debate on EU affairs, thanks to the facilitation of Danish Refugee Council.



# KEY FINDINGS OF THE DISCUSSION

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- ❑ There are fundamental differences between humanitarian and development activities. However, humanitarian actors cannot be expected to fully and effectively address protracted crises and cycles of needs alone. Instead, mutual collaboration with development programmes and actors in crisis settings is needed.
- ❑ The implementation of the nexus approach must allow humanitarian and development approaches to coexist, without humanitarian assistance being harmed or the humanitarian principles being compromised. Humanitarian aid must continue to address the most acute needs.
- ❑ The nexus approach aims at building (or strengthening) cooperation between humanitarian assistance and development activities, but it does not necessarily imply humanitarian actors and development actors working under a single framework. Instead, a context-specific approach is essential.
- ❑ Adapted and flexible funding instruments and mechanisms are one element of the operationalisation of the nexus, but alone are not sufficient. Further reflection on funding instruments is needed in the next EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework. Using development funding to address protracted crises is also not a comprehensive solution.
- ❑ The added-value and expertise of NGOs was readily acknowledged by donors (national-level and EU-level) and their participation in implementing the nexus approach is actively encouraged.

## Following the instructive discussion,

### VOICE calls on the European Commission and the EEAS to:

- ❑ **Ensure that henceforth NGOs are involved and participate, particularly at field level, in the operationalisation of the nexus in particular in the 6 pilot countries.** Thanks to their proximity with affected populations, experience in humanitarian aid delivery and development, NGOs can positively contribute to the definition of a context-specific assessment of risks, needs and vulnerabilities as well as local capacities; assessments that are essential in order to establish informed and fruitful cooperation between humanitarian and development stakeholders, including NGOs.
- ❑ **Adopt a flexible and context-specific approach in implementing the nexus** which respects the different mandates and objectives of all actors and maintains needs-based humanitarian decision-making and operations.
- ❑ **Advocate for the respect of the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law**, while ensuring that the nexus encourages other actors, mainly development but also peacebuilding ones, to contribute as appropriate to most-effectively addressing and preventing crises.

# Introductory remarks

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**VOICE President, Nicolas Borsinger** opened the VOICE event traditionally organised on the eve of the European Commission's annual humanitarian Partners' Conference. He introduced the topic, pointing to the timeliness of the discussion in light of the tenth anniversary of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid which reinforced the importance of the humanitarian principles and of the ongoing implementation of the World Humanitarian Summit commitments.



This was followed by an introduction from the moderator for the event, **Ben Parker, Senior Editor at IRIN**. Looking at his own experience working in Ethiopia with the UN and engaging in discussions on "Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development" (LRRD), he noted that the issue is long-standing, with current debates on the humanitarian-development nexus centring on many of the same arguments as these earlier discussions.



He pointed to the political dimensions of the topic, with this event coming in the backdrop of the Sustainable Development Goals, the World Humanitarian Summit, UN reform, the reinvention of the World Bank and the European crisis in facing migration challenges. He also pointed to the ethical nature of the discussion, the imperative to respond to both immediate needs and to ensure solutions last over the long-term. He also underlined the operational implications of bringing humanitarian and development responses together in terms of planning, staffing, funding, and organisational structures, and then invited the panellists to share their experiences and perspectives on the topic.



# Speakers presentations

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Cecilie Winther

Country Director for Ethiopia and Kenya  
DanChurchAid (DCA)



*“The humanitarian-development nexus is a good approach but we are not quite there yet in terms of operationalising it, political will and funding streams are needed”*

Ms Winther discussed the applicability of the humanitarian-development nexus in the Ethiopian context. Ethiopian legislation makes it almost impossible to work with local partners and therefore DCA has moved into co- or self-implementation. They are multi-mandated and their humanitarian and development staff pull together under one common framework.

She gave the example of the EUR 6.1 million, 42-month EU Resilience Building Programme in Ethiopia - RESET II -in lowland, pastoralist Bale, a vulnerable area facing drought, and part of the government's safety net programme which provides cash and food to 8 million people each year. The programme brings humanitarian and development actors together in a consortium and covers WASH, economic empowerment, nutrition, and livelihoods. In late 2016, the consortium applied to activate the so-called crisis modifier, EUR 1.5 million of contingency funding (or 3 percent of total RESET II funding for Ethiopia) set aside to be rapidly distributed if a crisis occurs. However, the EU delegation and ECHO rejected their application on the basis that needs were greater in other areas covered by the RESET II programme. Following productive dialogue with EU colleagues, the consortium opted against using their own organisations' contingency funding or revising their overall budget or activity plan, but managed to access different funding from ECHO and the Danish government. While she sees it as a good tool, the

crisis modifier foreseen the EU funded programme was not sufficient to cover the severity of the crisis.

She concluded that in the case of Ethiopia the nexus is a good approach, combining multi-sector work and multi-year funding. Nonetheless, she noted that there is more to do in terms of operationalising it, with more political will and funding streams needed. Where crises are prolonged, as was the case with the Ethiopian drought, prior planning is needed to ensure funding does not run out too quickly. The nexus ultimately should facilitate the shift from humanitarian action to recovery. Investment in recovery is essential or humanitarian needs will continuously reappear.

Gaëlle Nizery  
Programme Manager  
Unit C1, DG ECHO

*"The expertise of ECHO partners that have been doing humanitarian aid is valued and being learned from"*



Ms Nizery presented the ECHO perspective on the nexus. She opened by saying that structural fragility and the root causes of crises must be addressed with durable solutions involving political actors and diplomatic efforts to break recurring cycles of violence, poverty and instability. Recent EU output (such as the EU Global Strategy<sup>[1]</sup>, the EC/EEAS Joint Communication on Resilience<sup>[2]</sup>, and the EU Integrated Approach) demonstrate the EU's commitment to the nexus approach and the upholding of the humanitarian principles, in line with the Consensus. She argued that ECHO, through its transformational approach to resilience, is striving to address the drivers of fragility and vulnerability. Effective assistance requires a division of labour according to expertise and mandate.

She noted that the EU has begun putting this theory into practice, with Foreign Affairs and Development ministers following on from the Council Conclusions on operationalising the nexus<sup>[3]</sup> in June 2017 by selecting six countries in which to pilot the nexus approach: Chad, Nigeria, Sudan, Iraq, Myanmar and Uganda. The idea is to have a country-led approach that is not driven by considerations from head-quarters, but is country-specific, dependent on context and not driven by only political considerations. She argued that the nexus approach now possesses a greater political commitment to formalise and systematise it than previously, with Member States actively involved. At EU institutional level, the new approach involves bringing concerned services together and agreeing on complementary outcomes and more coherent approaches. She also referred to the ECHO commissioned NRC study on the humanitarian principles in Iraq. The study<sup>[4]</sup> assessed how partners are integrating the principles in their humanitarian assistance in the country and gives examples of tensions of applying a strictly principled approach in a politicised context and provides recommendations. She noted that

development support for recovery is urgently needed there, but that ECHO will not fund non-humanitarian activities that diverge from the principles. In Nigeria, ECHO and DEVCO have developed joint programming. Humanitarian aid continues to be provided and longer term aspects will be considered. Finally, in Sudan, the nexus approach is freeing ECHO funding for response to more immediate and acute needs and augments ECHO's political leverage.

She then detailed how NGOs can contribute to the nexus through supporting policy design, as shown by the constructive consultation with NGOs on the drafting of the Communication on Resilience for example. She also noted that NGOs provide the community-based perspective and added that they can actively participate in EU workshops on the nexus. Finally, she urged NGOs to provide input for the upcoming reconstruction conference in Kuwait in February 2018 on Iraq as a concrete contribution to the nexus.

<sup>[1]</sup>[A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy\(EU\);VOICE contribution to the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy\(VOICE\)](#)

<sup>[2]</sup>[Joint Communication on "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action"\(EC\);Consolidated input from VOICE members in response to the consultation on a new Joint Communication on Resilience\(VOICE\)](#)

<sup>[3]</sup>[Council Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus](#)

<sup>[4]</sup>[Principled Humanitarian Assistance of ECHO Partners in Iraq](#)

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Edouard Rodier  
Director of Norwegian Refugee Council  
(NRC) Europe



*“The challenge of the nexus approach is to accommodate the necessary harmonisation of humanitarian and development action without compromising the humanitarian response”*

Mr Rodier outlined the hurdles in bringing together humanitarian and development action when they have fundamentally different purposes: humanitarian action focuses on vulnerability while development focuses on structural needs. This is a distinction between an action targeting those in need and one targeting those most in need.

Often both humanitarian and development activities are needed simultaneously. A humanitarian phase of action does not smoothly transition into a development phase, instead they overlap temporally and spatially, their relationship is non-linear resembling a spiral or a figure-of-eight, with new deteriorations in the crisis often occurring following periods of improvement and demanding the presence of both sets of actors. Moreover, individual organisations are increasingly multi-mandated.

The problem is the complexity of humanitarian settings where access can be compromised if the principles are not adhered to. He explained that the core work of humanitarians is on the frontline of crises, supporting those most in-need. Humanitarian donors' pressure to ensure their funding is worthwhile is pushing humanitarian organisations towards durable, long-term solutions, even though funding is not sufficient to cover frontline emergency needs. Instead, he argued, good practice is development donors and actors extending the scope of their funds closer to emergency needs and contributing to close the gap with humanitarian aid from their end. This is happening for instance with new EU instruments such as the Trust Funds, as well as with some new instruments developed by

member States cooperation agencies (e.g. AFD in France).

He argued that humanitarian action needs to be singled-out, ensuring that the principles are not harmed and the humanitarian response not compromised. He noted that coordination between actors is currently lacking, with organisations defending their own individual access rather than the access of the humanitarian community as a whole. Greater coordination among stakeholders and a clearer articulation of activities avoids confusion and improves perceptions of the activities, protecting access.

Silvia Croes  
Head of Humanitarian Unit,  
Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

*“A common nexus approach should only be implemented when the context allows for it and when the principles can be upheld”*



Ms Croes outlined that the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants greater complementarity between the humanitarian and development activities but that the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law must be respected.

She argued the nexus should primarily be about enhancing coherence and not necessarily about a common framework. Funding mechanisms enable the nexus approach but they are only tools and should not be common objectives of the nexus. Instead, it is ultimately about creating a common strategic vision through increasing understanding, complementarity and synergy, with the aim of addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people in protracted crises, as well as starting to address the root causes of these crises. This will help ensure continuity and coherence in the assistance provided and foster self-reliance of populations.

In practice, this should involve joint analyses, consisting of common overall situation diagnoses and joint assessments of risks, vulnerabilities and national capacities, and then – if suitable – joint targeting of beneficiaries with the establishment of complementary planning of activities between humanitarian and development actors. This requires longer term humanitarian planning cycles, predictable and flexible funding, and the involvement of transitional development actors at an early stage. The financing of humanitarian action does not alone constitute an implementation of the nexus if development actors are not present on the ground.

She then highlighted potential risks in using the nexus approach. Firstly, the approach should not increase the burden on or enlarge the mandates of humanitarian actors. Rather, development actors should move closer to humanitarian needs and synergies should be sought. Secondly, a joint strategic and operational approach might endanger a

principled humanitarian approach, reducing access. In this light, perception is key. Thirdly, it might impact the rapidity of the humanitarian side of the response and any tools created must be sufficiently responsive.

The Belgian government humanitarian budget can fund projects all the way up to reconstruction processes. They also provide multiyear funding for minimum 24-month programmes. Specifically, the Belgian government is currently reflecting on how to implement a nexus approach in Tanzania. The Belgian MFA has also, commissioned a study on the nexus in Uganda, due in early 2018. She noted that reflection on the nexus approach should be inclusive, incorporating the perspectives of NGOs and the field. They have demonstrated good practice in creating a working group with Belgian NGOs, seeking to understand what the nexus means to their NGO partners.

# Exchange with the audience

Following the panellists' presentations, the audience had the opportunity to react and ask questions. Participants outlined the difficulties in transitioning from humanitarian to development activities due to a lack of development funds, for example in Yemen. Ms Nizery responded that the EU has no "in-between" instrument as such and that the budget for nexus approaches is an issue. Discussions on the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF) will incorporate this debate. She added that ECHO will push the nexus approach in Yemen in view of the complexity of the context, while Mr Rodier added that development donors need to meet calls from the humanitarian community and step-in in the country.

Ms Winther added that in Ethiopia the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) has been essential in allowing transitions from humanitarian activities to development to occur.<sup>[5]</sup> Ms Croes echoed this stating that the CRRF is one example of nexus operationalisation. It involves a strategic vision from early action to the end of a protracted crisis.

Concerns were raised from the audience that although the principles are respected on paper, they may not be in reality. The new EU approach to Resilience gives more importance to 'state resilience', which links to security, defence, and peacebuilding. They questioned how these additional actors will be included in the six nexus pilot countries. They also expressed concerns about the Resilience Communication stating that the EU needs to have a single succinct assessment for each country. This could pressure ECHO to spend in a certain geographic region or a particular country if all EU strategy is focused there.

Ms. Nizery responded by arguing that state and societal resilience are not incompatible with community or individual resilience.



<sup>[5]</sup>The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants from September 2016 endorsed the CRRF as a mechanism for further development by UNHCR, who have now identified twelve pilot countries.

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She stated that ECHO wants to be part of joint analyses but to maintain its specific mandate and ensure community voices are heard. She noted that assessments will be country-led to incorporate knowledge of how different actors work in each context, thereby ensuring ECHO is not dragged into areas it wants to avoid.

Finally, it was mentioned that the involvement of peace and security actors is crucial to implement solutions to conflicts and forced displacements in the political realm. In most cases, all actors are needed as the rule of law, governance and so on need strengthening.

To conclude the discussion, VOICE President, Mr Borsinger, argued while the nexus is about building coherence, sometimes building coherence is inherently incoherent. Combining the two may be like mixing oil and water, and although attempts to combine them have become more rigorous and taken different forms over time (currently the nexus approach), they are still not fully complementary. We should continue to attempt to combine them and build coherence, but understand their fundamental differences.



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



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