

NGO Military Contact Group

Meeting Summary

Civil-Military relations in the humanitarian-development-peace Nexus

25 November 2019

The Nexus policy and operational challenges

Global resources are decreasing while the levels of need remain constant, with the continued risk of escalation due to world trends such as increasing and protracted conflict. In response, the OECD DAC recommendations, adopted in February 2019, aim to strengthen policy and operational coherence by humanitarian, development and peace actors.¹ OECD DAC outlines the approach of “prevention always, development where possible, humanitarian action when necessary” and includes 11 guiding principles covering coordination, programming and financing. OECD DAC offers a framework to facilitate more collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations. However, the framework is purposefully broad in nature as every context presents different challenges and requirements, and thus the framework does not provide an operational model to follow. Some participants highlighted that while working across the Nexus is a valid theoretical approach and that the framework captures the complexities of integrating and coordinating international action, the operationalisation of this poses significant challenges.

The Nexus discussion provides an opportunity to challenge ourselves, recognise the limitations of existing approaches and inform adaption of existing models. There was a recognition that in some instances silos between Nexus actors have formed for valid reasons, allowing specialised organisations to focus on their areas of expertise, and that successful implementation is not ‘everyone doing everything’. Breaking down and subordinating these silos entirely was not seen as advisable in any way, though exploring areas of overlap to find synergies or distinctions between areas of work, creating links and building on the comparative advantages of different actors was mentioned as a potential way forward. Exploring the Nexus necessitates actors to increase information sharing and mutual understanding of missions and mandates of other actors and stakeholders operating within a context. Encouraging mutual learning is an area that still requires further thought and it was suggested that the existing architecture supporting collective learning is not currently sufficient to close knowledge gaps between different Nexus actors. It was also mentioned that exploring alignment and synergies in implementation across the Nexus would only achieve modest collective outcomes at early stages and that all actors would have to be comfortable with this compromise.

The challenges around the way in which the dialogue about operationalising the Nexus is held were also discussed. It was suggested that the dialogue needs to continue at policy level before it can percolate down to the field, as having this dialogue in a field context at this point may be inappropriate, ineffective, and in some contexts, impossible.

At a global policy level, the UNDP supports the backbone of discussions around the Nexus approach, co-chairing the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration

¹ OECD, *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*, OECD/LEGAL/5019 (2019) <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>

and the task force on how to operationalise the Nexus at country level². Roles and responsibilities of who should lead and/or be engaged in these discussions also pose challenges, and it was a point for debate whether and at what point it was appropriate to bring military actors into these discussions, should they wish to be involved.

The case studies of Burkina Faso and Nigeria were presented to highlight the importance of establishing collective outcomes, of building on the comparative advantages of actors in the Nexus, and of supporting financing that bridges the gaps between them. Despite these successes however, it was mentioned that development actors need to work better in fragile contexts. A recent OCHA high-level panel on financing concluded that it is not just more funding that is required but a reduction of need, and that development actors must reach the ‘furthest behind’ more effectively to fulfil objectives of reducing vulnerabilities, mitigating risks and reducing need.

Defining the peace element of the triple Nexus has been challenging as well. The OECD DAC recommendations, because of their broad nature, do not clarify what is meant by “peace” at a policy level and the definition of “peace” at operational level - be it hard or soft – is further contested amongst Nexus actors. The lack of an agreed definition presents a significant challenge for a coordinated approach and compounds the murkiness of the Nexus peace pillar. Furthermore, it was suggested that peace builders are still the missing link in the triple Nexus and that there can be a lack of understanding by humanitarian and development actors about who exactly the peace builders are in fragile contexts. Dialogue between humanitarian and military actors could contribute to further clarity on this aspect.

Implications for principled humanitarian action and civil-military relations

Unclear roles and responsibilities within the Nexus and a lack of agreement of the delineation between humanitarian and development, development and peace actions can pose significant challenges for principled humanitarian action, particularly in upholding the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality. Two areas of humanitarian activity that can overlap with development and peace-building are the delivery of essential services and the promotion of respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The delivery of essential services by humanitarian actors is driven by the humanitarian principles but can also complement peace building activities and can have significant impact on establishing stability in fragile contexts. However, the direct involvement of the military in this area of work can blur the lines between actors, impacting on perception of neutrality and restricting the humanitarian space. It was noted that the delivery of essential services by other actors can be motivated by other factors, such as local authorities wishing to prioritise political outcomes over needs and leveraging the provision of services as a confidence building tool.

Respect for IHL can have a significant impact on the scale of needs, destruction and grievances in conflict-affected contexts and decisions on the conduct of hostilities should therefore be part of the Nexus equation. It is the primary responsibility of duty bearers and political actors to actively promote respect and adherence to IHL.

Humanitarian actors play a role in this regard as well. The protection of civilians and infrastructure as a result of adherence to IHL has clear humanitarian, development and peacebuilding impact. From a

² https://www.undp.org/content/seoul_policy_center/en/home/global-development-issues/humanitarian-development-peace-nexus/

humanitarian perspective, it reduces people's suffering and needs, and it improves the overall security condition which is critical for humanitarian access.

From a development perspective, the disregard of IHL in conflicts heightens the intensity of fighting and may result in major development reversals, having a significant damage on the human development index - Syria and Yemen were noted as having regressed 20 years in the first few years of the conflict.

From a peace perspective, the way in which wars are fought has long term implications on future relationships between communities and arms bearers. For example, in the east of Ukraine water systems span across the line of contact between government and non-government controlled areas. Efforts by humanitarian actors and local authorities to maintain these systems had an immediate humanitarian purpose (provision of water and protecting public health), but, although they did not bring peace, they contributed to prevent development reversals by safeguarding critical infrastructure, and required a dialogue between conflicting parties, which in turn helped to ground political discussions on a tangible issue.

This instance illustrates a scenario of synergy among humanitarian, development (local authorities) and peace/military actors which was possible because it was pursued in a pragmatic and fluid manner. It is important that as we strive for enhanced coherence" in Nexus planning, this should not become a burden or a hindrance on operational activities, creating rigidity and hampering the ability to take a flexible and pragmatic approach to international action, one that is informed by context sensitivities and based on the comparative advantages of the Nexus actors involved at operational level at a given time.