

# The Humanitarian- Development-Peace-Nexus

Recipes for success from the field: time for action

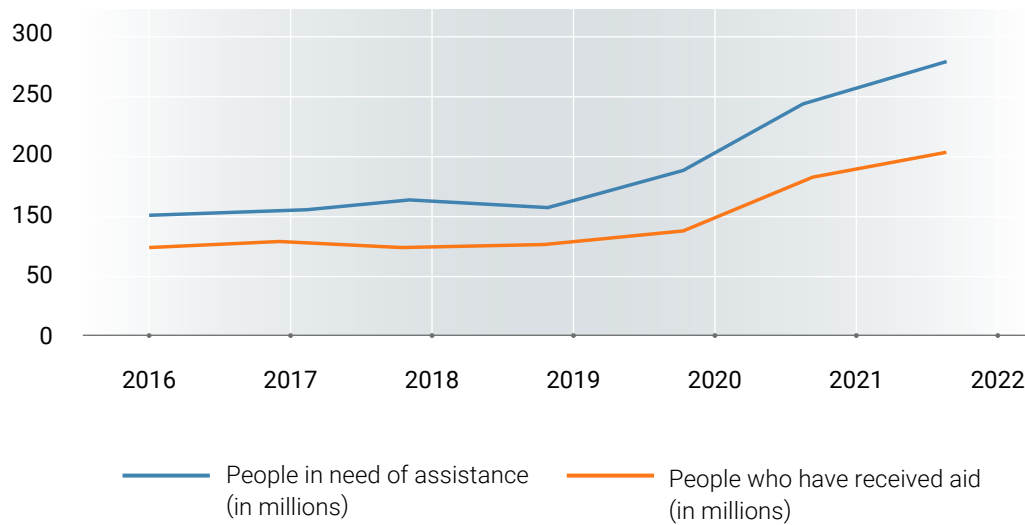
von Lara Horstmann

With the increase in protracted humanitarian crises, there is a growing need for more efficient international cooperation between humanitarian, development and peace policy instruments. The Humanitarian-Development-Peace-Nexus (HDP-nexus) approach aims to overcome institutional dividing lines and achieve more coherent collaboration. While various UN initiatives strategically promote the implementation of the HDP-nexus, the UN Country Teams in South Sudan, Cameroon and Kenya in particular have pioneered the operationalization of the nexus. Bottom-up and area-based approaches, among others, have proven to be recipes for success in the field. Further measures should aim to synchronize existing mechanisms more effectively, intensify knowledge transfer and management, and expand joint analysis processes.

## Recommendations for Donor Countries

- Donor countries should expand expert pools to include Nexus Coordinators to implement country-specific strategies.
- Donor countries should support change management processes and the development of relevant expertise in the long term.
- Donor countries and international organizations should better coordinate their respective cycles for financial, planning and reporting mechanisms.
- Donor countries and international organizations should develop strategies to use data for more efficient nexus work and promote the development of data expertise at all administrative levels.
- Data-sharing platforms should be used strategically to enable shared, data-based contextual analysis, ensure knowledge transfer and prevent fragmentation of institutional knowledge.

## Humanitarian needs development 2016 – 2022



Data Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2016-2022: Global Humanitarian Overview

According to the Global Humanitarian Overview, approximately 274 million people will be in need of humanitarian aid in 2022. This is an increase of 17 per cent compared to the previous year and represents the highest need in decades.<sup>1</sup>

With the increase in protracted humanitarian crises, the need for more effective international cooperation is growing. New global challenges such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on societies affected by conflict, reinforce the urgency of joint, coherent and multidimensional approaches.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace-Nexus (also called Triple nexus) approach aims to overcome dividing lines between the humanitarian, development and peace policy sectors and thereby achieve a more coherent interaction between traditional work in largely separate “silos”. The approach is intended to enable concrete, shared and measurable intermediate results (collective

outcomes) in complex crisis scenarios. In order to achieve this, a wide range of reforms in the UN peace and security architecture and the structures of development cooperation have been initiated in recent years.<sup>2</sup>

On the field level, the UN Country Teams in South Sudan, Cameroon and Kenya in particular, have pioneered the operationalization of the nexus and gained important experiences. These must now be transferred to the existing mechanisms.

### Strategic support for the nexus approach

Unlike previous initiatives, the HDP-nexus goes beyond a programmatic or conceptual approach: it aims at an ongoing structural change of the actors involved. The approach is new and groundbreaking in the sense that it calls for a shift in thinking from old familiar patterns to greater creativity

## HDP-Nexus Partnerships between the UN & the World Bank

In 2019, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) launched a Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding and Partnership (HDPP) Facility within the Peacebuilding Fund. The facility provides targeted funding for joint UN-World Bank activities. It also provides grants to support UN Resident Coordinators, UN agencies, funds and programmes, and UN peace operations to work with the World Bank in crisis situations. This requires the identification of common intermediate objectives. The comparative advantages of both partner organisations are to be leveraged to achieve these goals. For example, as a follow-up to the Pathways for Peace study, the UN and the World Bank, with support from the HDPP Facility, launched a partnership with civilian peace actors in northern Kenya in 2021 to monitor fragility, conflict and violence dynamics. The joint focus is intended to strengthen analytical capacities, facilitate early crisis detection and help actors better coordinate their plans.

and coherence in collaboration and implementation. This requires a departure from the previous practice of planning and implementing projects according to professional dividing lines and silos.<sup>3</sup> Holistic ways of thinking and working must be promoted for successful implementation.

Since players in international cooperation have worked in silos for decades and designed their work according to the rules of the game of international donors, it takes some effort to break up well-rehearsed work processes. For all involved, this requires a comprehensive and complex change management process that is by no means a self-propelling undertaking. Employees and management staff in particular should be given targeted support to shape institutional change in a sustainable way.

This requires, among other things, trainings that strengthen nexus awareness and expertise. Platforms such as the Nexus Academy, which was launched in 2022 to promote mutual understanding, strengthen synergies and operationalize the

HDP-nexus, can make a valuable contribution in this respect.<sup>4</sup> Its target group is diverse and includes staff from UN agencies at country level and in the secretariat, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), bilateral development cooperation and peacebuilding actors.



***The [HDP-nexus] approach is new and groundbreaking in the sense that it calls for a shift in thinking from old familiar patterns to greater creativity and coherence in collaboration and implementation.***

In addition, member states, including Germany, are increasingly sending HDP-Nexus Advisors to partner countries. These advisors are supposed to strengthen the strategic work of the UN Country Teams and are often based in the office of the UN Resident Coordinators. In practice, however, the approach often fails due to the lack of implementation of the proposed nexus strategies. Depending on the country

context, it could therefore additionally prove useful to assign regional HDP-Nexus Coordinators to work on practical implementation at the local level.

### **Bottom-up approach and localization as critical elements for success**

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, Cameroon became the first country to voluntarily commit to the nexus approach. The country is now one of the seven prioritized countries of the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian-Development Collaboration<sup>5</sup>, established in 2017.

In 2017, a group of Humanitarian Country Team and United Nations Country Team members in Cameroon began working on the HDP-nexus. This led to the establishment of a national Nexus Task Force, which was tasked with developing a nexus strategy and implementing it at the community level.

The implementation of the HDP-nexus in Cameroon follows a clear bottom-up approach and aims to create synergies between humanitarian, developmental and peacebuilding interventions in those communities where conditions for successful cooperation of all three nexus components exist (so-called “convergence areas”). With

## **Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Cameroon**

### **1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Joint analysis  
Common understanding of risks, needs and vulnerabilities

### **2. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK**

Inclusive and participative strategic planning  
Identification of collective outcomes

### **3. PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK**

Joined-up programming  
Packages of intervention included in integrated plans of action



### **7. ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK**

Response monitoring and evaluation of collective outcomes

### **6. FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK**

Multiannual, diversified, flexible funding

### **5. COORDINATION FRAMEWORK**

National  
Sub-national  
Local

### **4. OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK**

Areas of convergence

The Roadmap to HDP Collective Outcomes in Cameroon – Analytical & Strategic Frameworks, UN Cameroon, April 2022.

this area-based approach, the work of the actors focuses on a Collective Outcome, which comprises three sub-targets.<sup>6</sup> All HDP-nexus actors commit to working together in synergy in these sub-areas.

In South Sudan, too, an area-based bottom-up approach to the implementation of the nexus has meanwhile gained acceptance and proven its worth. There is already reference to the HDP-nexus and Collective Outcomes in the UN Cooperation Framework (UNCF) 2019-21/22.<sup>7</sup> The Humanitari-



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an Response Plan 2022 (HRP) also refers to the nexus as a core element of coherent cooperation. However, the HRP and UNCF do not cover the same period - the timeframe of the HRP was only changed from one to two years in 2022, while the UNCF has a three-year period. As the documents are produced and adopted at different times, discussions on the HDP-nexus internally and with partners are often out of synch rather than coordinated and parallel.

However, in contrast to other country contexts where nexus initiatives are often perceived as hierarchical, in South Sudan there is largely consensus among civil society actors that sustainable development can only succeed if humanitarian and peace actors work at eye level. This is predominantly due to the positive and neutral perception of the HDP-nexus at the local level, where a

broader external engagement is also often welcomed.

Working with the South Sudan Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF), which was launched in 2018, an HDP-Nexus Advisor is carrying out pioneering work on the country level. The RSRTF's whole-of-system approach<sup>8</sup> aims to implement reconciliation, stabilization and resilience components that work together to build peace and stability. Germany is one of the most important donor countries for this funding model. The RSRTF promotes a program along the HDP-nexus to mobilize the respective comparative advantages of the UN Mission (UNMISS), UN agencies in the field and non-governmental organizations. As part of this, RSRTF partners are implementing comprehensive interventions through area-based approaches aimed at reducing social acceptance of violence while promoting peace. Rather than responding to the symptoms of violence and conflict with individual projects, the Trust Fund promotes the joint efforts of multiple actors working in parallel to address the root causes of conflict – be they political, security, social or economic.

The RSRTF also provides a good example of new, innovative ways to finance nexus initiatives. The funding model acts as a pathfinder for more nexus cooperation and builds on the momentum of global commitments and frameworks to provide better and more flexible funding along the nexus.

### **Enhancing joint analysis processes**

Increasingly complex environments require holistic situational and contextual analyses.

Joint analyses by HDP actors are a key enabler for the effective operationalization of the nexus.<sup>9</sup> They can contribute to a more robust situational understanding and thus to improved tools for crisis prevention and early crisis detection. Likewise, they can lead to greater conflict sensitivity and a more inclusive alignment of UN programs with the Do-No-Harm principle.<sup>10</sup> Here, too, the goal is to overcome silo structures and delineations of mandates.

In Kenya, the UN established a multidisciplinary working group, led by the Peace and Development Advisor and the Senior Human Rights Advisor, to conduct periodic, integrated context analyses along the risk factors for the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The so-called Prevention Group includes both thematic experts from UN agencies and technical experts who support the team with evidence- and data-based analyses.



***Joint analyses by HDP actors are a key enabler for the effective operationalization of the nexus. They can contribute to a more robust situational understanding and thus to improved tools for crisis prevention and early crisis detection.***

However, insufficient technical capacity, especially in the areas of data analysis and information management, is a key problem. This makes it difficult for UN actors to make joint evidence-based analysis standard practice. The development of technical expertise in data science, data analytics and information management to support analytical processes, as well as the promotion of data literacy at all administrative

levels, including leadership, is therefore urgently needed. This will enable joint analyses to be carried out despite increasingly complex conditions, and more robust decisions to be made on the basis of these analyses.



***... [there is a need] for a clear definition or delimitation of actors with whom cooperation is possible and conceivable for all nexus parties. ... [A] mapping of country-specific, relevant actors can help to identify nexus partners and synergies.***

Depending on the context, there is also a need, among other things, for a clear definition or delimitation of actors with whom cooperation is possible and conceivable for all nexus parties. This is especially true with regard to the Peace pillar.<sup>11</sup> In this context, a mapping of country-specific, relevant actors can help to identify nexus partners and synergies. Furthermore, comparative advantages can be worked out, areas for cooperation can be identified and institutional knowledge transfer can be promoted at the same time. The latter is particularly central to enable efficient work in light of the high rotation frequency of the staff of international organizations.

## **Knowledge transfer, data analysis & information management**

New technologies and their data are increasingly used to create complex situation and context analyses. Here, the implementation of the nexus approach requires a secure and efficient exchange of information

## The UN Transitions Project

To support transition processes in the event of mandate change or withdrawal of UN missions, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Peace Operations (DPO), the Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding (DPPA) and the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO) have established a collaborative partnership. The UN Transitions Project was established as a cross-pillar mechanism to support the UN system in planning mandate changes and transitions according to nexus logic. In addition, the mechanism promotes collaboration with relevant national, regional and international partners. By centralizing existing knowledge, the project provides a valuable source of information for nexus activities within the UN system, but only in the context of transitions.

and data between the relevant actors. So far, however, there is neither a system-wide, uniform knowledge management strategy for nexus implementation nor a central knowledge pool for the exchange of successful models and best practices. There are only individual, scarcely interlinked initiatives and schemes with a thematic or country focus.

In South Sudan, the lessons learned and best practices of RSRTF partners were systematically captured and anchored in a knowledge management strategy.<sup>12</sup> However, a systematic collection of data on nexus activities would also be important for the UN system as a whole. This could lead to a context-oriented and adaptive HDP knowledge management model to promote systemic thinking more broadly. In this regard, it would be conceivable to strengthen the role of UN PBSO and at the same time expand existing information platforms, such as the [OCHA Humanitarian Data Exchange](#), the [DPPA-DPO Peace and Security Data Hub](#) or the German-funded [Complex Risk Analytics Fund](#) (CRAF'd), to support Country Teams in collecting data.

## Recommendations

Some UN Country Teams have already developed and implemented successful nexus models. The lessons learnt should now be implemented as standard practice and further measures taken to overcome the still existing significant institutional barriers to the broad operationalization of the nexus approach. The following recommendations should be considered for practical implementation:

### 1. Nexus Coordinators to Support Operationalization at Country Level

While nexus thinking is already widespread at the strategic level, specific support is needed to implement the approach at the local level. In addition to Nexus Advisors who support the development of country strategies, Nexus Coordinators can assist with implementation at the local or regional level, liaising between actors and implementing programs through a collaborative approach.

*Donor countries should expand expert pools for HDP-Nexus Advisors to include Nexus Coordinators, who can support the implementation of country-specific nexus*

*strategies through practical implementation at the local level.*

## **2. Support for Change Management Processes**

Systemic change cannot be brought about with project-based work and thought structures. It requires appropriate change management processes that are supported by donors in a targeted and long-term manner. This can be done, for example, through special HDP-nexus training programs at all administrative levels, as well as through long-term, targeted human resource management strategies and support for further reform processes in the UN system.

*Change management processes should be supported through targeted human resource management, training and support for institutional reform efforts. HDP-nexus modules could be integrated into existing leadership trainings (e.g. UN Senior Mission Leadership Training).*

## **3. Achieving the Greatest Possible Synergy and more Harmonized Sequencing**

To successfully implement the nexus approach, holistic ways of thinking and working need to be promoted at all levels. This includes strategy and planning by bilateral and international donors. It should therefore be a common goal of donors and international organizations to align basic approaches in order to achieve the greatest possible synergy between the available mechanisms.

*Donor countries and international actors should strive for the greatest possible synergy and more harmonized sequencing of existing mechanisms to implement the*

*nexus approach and, for example, align reporting, planning and funding cycles where possible to further reduce structural barriers to operationalizing the HDP-nexus.*

## **4. Developing and Expanding Technical Expertise**

All actors should recognize sustainable and targeted data, analysis and information management as a strategic priority. However, UN Country Teams often reach their (personnel) capacity limits in this regard. In the short, medium and long term, opportunities should be created to provide appropriate technical expertise for existing processes in order to achieve holistic analytical results through multidisciplinary teams consisting of technical and subject matter experts. Especially in the area of joint context analysis, short-term secondments of technical experts can augment UN Country Teams in a meaningful way. At the strategic level, there is also a lack of central knowledge management structures. These should enable long-term institutional knowledge transfer and exchange for system-wide nexus work, independent of personnel rotations. Instead of new technical solutions, existing platforms should be expanded to prevent further fragmentation of relevant knowledge.

*Donor countries should cultivate expertise in data science, data analytics, information management and contextual analysis. In Country Teams, data and information management should be understood as a strategic priority and corresponding strategies should be developed. Existing platforms should be used strategically to ensure sustainable HDP-nexus knowledge transfer and prevent fragmentation of institutional knowledge.*



## 5. Actor Mapping as a Basis for Sustainable Nexus Engagement

The implementation of the nexus approach at operational level has so far been particularly successful where good parameters for nexus cooperation exist. This includes, above all, country contexts where the cooperation of all three nexus dimensions is perceived as positive by civil society and all parties can agree on a definition of the relevant nexus actors to cooperate with. Periodic mappings of relevant actors and initiatives in the respective country context can be helpful for this purpose.

*Country Teams should regularly create mappings of country-specific nexus actors, corresponding initiatives and the relevant data and information landscape. In this way, comparative advantages and potential synergies can be identified and joint, integrated context analyses can be facilitated, even in the short term.*

- [1] UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2022: Global Humanitarian Overview [\[Link\]](#).
- [2] Cf. Carina Böttcher, Andreas Wittkowsky, 2021: Give "P" a Chance: Peacebuilding, Peace Operations and the HDP-Nexus [\[Link\]](#).
- [3] Interview with Marco Kirschbaum, HDP-Nexus Advisor to the UN in South Sudan on 10 June 2022.
- [4] Lead by the UN-DAC Dialogue Group - IOM, INCAF, UNFPA, UN HABITAT, UNICEF, WFP, UNHCR and UNDP; see also Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2022: Nexus Academy. Learning, community, and capacity for HDP solutions. Explainer [\[Link\]](#).
- [5] The Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (JSC) was established by the Secretary-General in 2017. The committee focuses on guiding policy-making and promoting synergies in development and humanitarian action to achieve progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The seven prioritized countries are Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia; see UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration, 2022. The Joint Steering Committee [\[Link\]](#).
- [6] Basic Social Services, Sustainable Livelihoods and Economic Opportunities; Social Cohesion; Local Governance, see The Roadmap to HDP Collective Outcomes in Cameroon - Analytical & Strategic Frameworks, UN Cameroon, April 2022.
- [7] The UNCF 2023-25 is targeted for completion by the end of this year. To this end, donors, international organizations and civil society organizations are working to develop new Collective Outcomes.
- [8] The Whole-of-System Approach is provided with complex institutional structures and procedures by international and regional organizations to ensure internal coherence through a common understanding on a given issue; see Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2022: Whole-of-System Approach (WSA) [\[Link\]](#).
- [9] Interview with Jahal Rabesahala de Meritens, HDP-Nexus Coordinator, UN Cameroon on 10 June 2022.
- [10] "According to the do-no-harm principle, potential negative impacts of development cooperation should be identified, avoided and mitigated at an early stage. Unintended effects can be generated, for example, by the intervention of foreign experts, the distribution of funding and the selection of local cooperation partners." (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2022: Do-no-harm principle [\[Link\]](#)).
- [11] Interview with Jahal Rabesahala de Meritens, HDP-Nexus Coordinator, UN Cameroon on 2 June 2022.
- [12] United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2021: South Sudan Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Reconciliation, Stabilization, Resilience (South Sudan RSRTF). Revised Terms of Reference.

### List of abbreviations

<b>CHA</b>	Center for Humanitarian Action	<b>PBSO</b>	Peacebuilding Support Office
<b>DCO</b>	Development Coordination Office	<b>RSRTF</b>	Reconciliation, Stabilization, and Resilience Trust Fund
<b>DPO</b>	Department of Peace Operations	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>DPPA</b>	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	<b>UNCF</b>	United Nations Cooperation Framework
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team	<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>HDP</b>	Humanitarian-Development-Peace	<b>DAC</b>	Development Assistance Committee
<b>HDPP</b>	Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding and Partnership	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan	<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>INCAF</b>	International Network on Conflict and Fragility	<b>UN-HABITAT</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration	<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>JSC</b>	Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization	<b>UNMISS</b>	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
		<b>WSA</b>	Whole-of-System-Approach

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### Photo

Page 1: Mike van Schoonderwalt, Pexels

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This ZIF briefing is part of a series on operationalizing the HDP-nexus approach in international cooperation.

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