

Recommendations from the Red Cross EU Office
and the International Committee of the Red Cross

THE EUROPEAN UNION HUMANITARIAN- DEVELOPMENT NEXUS



Post-conflict returnees receiving treated water at the village of Abu Ramad, Eljabaleen locality, Sudan, July 2013.
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THE EUROPEAN UNION HUMANITARIAN- DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Recommendations from the National Red Cross Societies in the European Union (EU), the Norwegian Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The nature of today's humanitarian crisis situations is increasingly complex and transcends the traditional lines between humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Humanitarian emergencies are lasting longer and have become more volatile and multifaceted, putting the traditional division between short-term humanitarian relief and longer-term development to the test. With more than 68.5 million people worldwide forcibly displaced by conflict, violence, or human rights violations¹, and 130 million reliant on humanitarian assistance², the humanitarian system requires additional support to address needs of such magnitude and diversity.

The European Commission has translated its response to long-term crises into commensurable commitments and concrete policy initiatives³ based on the Council of the EU's May 2017 Conclusions on Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus⁴.

In this context, National Red Cross Societies in the EU and Norway, the IFRC, and the ICRC make the following recommendations to the EU and its Member States:

- 1. Guarantee a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance, which fully respects the humanitarian principles, international human rights law (IHRL), and international humanitarian law (IHL).**
- 2. Ensure a high degree of participation and engagement from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).**
- 3. Invest in building the resilience of people and communities, with a focus on local actors.**
- 4. Apply context-specific approaches to all programming within the Nexus.**
- 5. Allocate sufficient, flexible, accountable and transparent multi-year funding.**
- 6. Ensure that humanitarian aid and development cooperation budgets and funding instruments remain separate and independent from each other in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027).**
- 7. Integrate analysis and lessons-learned throughout the Nexus development and implementation processes.**

¹ UNHCR, Figures at a Glance, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>, (last accessed December 2018).

² Council of the EU, Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, Council Conclusions 19 May 2017.

³ Namely, within the guidance document developed by the Commission for testing the Nexus approach in the six-pilot countries

⁴ Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24010/nexus-st09383en17.pdf>

Background

The Humanitarian-Development Nexus (the Nexus) has been on the international aid community's agenda for a long time. However, the debate to find better synergies between humanitarian and development actors has gained increasing traction in international fora in the last few years. In fact, policy and operational measures addressing a joint humanitarian-development approach are being put in place through agreements like the World Humanitarian Summit's (WHS) Grand Bargain⁵ and New Way of Working⁶, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative⁸ (HDPI), and the reform of the UN development system.

In June 2017, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued the Joint Communication "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action"⁹. The approach aims to "increase the impact of EU external action and sustain progress towards EU development, humanitarian, foreign and security policy objectives". It recognises the need to move away from crisis containment to a more structural, long-term, non-linear approach to vulnerabilities; emphasising anticipation, prevention and preparedness. In January 2018, the Council reiterated the linkages between sustainable development, humanitarian action, conflict prevention, and peace building in its Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises¹⁰.

In its May 2017 Conclusions, the Council called on the Commission and Member States to further operationalise the Nexus by implementing this approach in several pilot countries, with a focus on enhancing the use of best practices and the generation of evidence. Humanitarian and development actors are encouraged to have multi-year planning and programming cycles, joint risk and vulnerability analyses, joined-up planning, and coordinated programmatic approaches based on a better understanding of the context of the country of implementation. As follow-up to the WHS, the Commission selected six priority countries, with specific emphasis on situations of protracted displacement, to test the EU's approach to operationalising the Nexus. Each of these countries – Chad, Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda – faces on-going, acute and protracted crisis.

The pilot projects aim to draw on the experience and lessons learned from in-country EU operations, and test new ways of working for EU institutions and EU Member States. The resulting analysis will incorporate joint assessments of the pressures, risks, vulnerabilities and causal dynamics, as well as domestic sources of resilience. Commission staff dealing with development, humanitarian, and external action services are meant to work in close collaboration with representatives of EU Member States, local and national authorities, regional organisations, UN agencies, and CSOs. The type and focus of the partnerships established varies according to the context, promoting an ad-hoc approach to each pilot country. In order to ensure full ownership of the actions, EU Member States should actively engage in the exercise,

⁵ See: <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/3861>

⁶ See: <https://www.agendaforhumanity.org/initiatives/5358>

⁷ See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

⁸ See: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/the-humanitarian-development-peace-initiative>

⁹ European Commission/EEAS, Joint Communication on A Strategic approach to Resilience in external action, June 2017.

¹⁰ Council of the EU, the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises, Council conclusions, 22 January 2018.

both at headquarters and at country levels, taking on joint coordination and leadership with the Commission. In practice however, both CSOs and Member States have been less involved in the launch of the six-country pilot exercise than anticipated.

The EU's approach to the Nexus will also be reflected in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)¹¹, detailed in the comprehensive proposal¹² published by the Commission in June 2018. The MFF (2021-2027) is under increasing pressure to enlarge its scope and do more in specific areas, such as strengthening security and military cooperation, managing migration flows to the EU, and addressing climate change. Commitments to strengthening the humanitarian-development link will have operational consequences, the extent of which remains to be seen.

Our recommendations

In recent years, the world has seen a dramatic increase in conflict and displacement. While humanitarian needs are growing worldwide, today's crises are increasingly protracted and recurrent. They often represent a complex mix of violent conflict, fragility and migration, which is sometimes aggravated by natural disasters, climate change, and environmental degradation. This reality frequently requires development and humanitarian assistance to operate concurrently. However, in the midst of this complex scenario, emergency relief and humanitarian action must continue to be governed by the principles of neutrality and independence.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement¹³ is guided by the humanitarian ideals reflected in its Fundamental Principles¹⁴ and values, which define development as the process by which communities, families and individuals grow stronger, and can enjoy fuller and more productive lives, while becoming less vulnerable. While the objectives of humanitarian aid and development cooperation may overlap, the latter is part of a broader social change agenda.

In the context of protracted crises, disasters, conflicts, and other acute vulnerabilities, it is critical that the EU's approach to the Nexus allows for humanitarian and development activities to coexist when possible, without compromising the humanitarian principles¹⁵ and safe access to affected populations.

To better strengthen the Nexus, development actors must engage with humanitarian actors at an earlier stage of the response, with both seeking synergies. Though the Nexus approach aims to increase cooperation and coherence between humanitarian assistance and development activities, it does not necessarily push for humanitarian and development actors to work under a single framework, but rather to share a common strategic vision with combined objectives.

¹¹ The current MFF expires in 2020.

¹² European Commission, Proposal for 2021-2027 spending programmes for External Action, June 2018.

¹³ The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a global humanitarian network of millions of people that helps those facing disaster, conflict and health and social problems. It is made up of the ICRC, the IFRC and 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

¹⁴ The International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is committed to, and bound by its seven Fundamental Principles: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary service, Unity, and Universality.

¹⁵ As defined by the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO): Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence - see: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/humanitarian-principles_en



El Calvario neighbourhood in Cali, Colombia. A volunteer of the Colombian Red Cross in one of the streets leading to El Calvario neighbourhood – a central spot for gangs, drug-addicts and drug dealers based in Cali, Colombia, September 2011.
© Helkin Rene Diaz



ICRC Myanmar: Rakhine, Maungdaw, Nga Ku Ya village. Red Cross Movement staff get ready to distribute emergency aid to villagers.

While National Red Cross Societies in the EU and Norway, the IFRC and the ICRC recognise the need to reinforce the link between humanitarian action and development cooperation, they make the following critical recommendations to the EU and its Member States:

1. Guarantee a needs-based approach to humanitarian assistance, which fully respects the humanitarian principles, international human rights law (IHRL) and international humanitarian law (IHL).

Humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of the needs of the affected population and fall beyond the scope of political, strategic, military, or economic pressures, in line with the 2007 European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid¹⁶.

The EU's humanitarian aid is guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. All humanitarian projects and programmes operating under a Nexus approach should also be strictly grounded in the humanitarian principles, irrespective of the longevity, depth or type of action. The EU should thus ensure that the Nexus does not become a crisis-management instrument, susceptible to being utilised for political objectives.

IHRL¹⁷ and – where applicable – IHL¹⁸ provide a framework for humanitarian action to reach those in need, while respecting and protecting humanitarian personnel. The EU must not only adhere to these principles, but should also employ all possible means to ensure that they are respected.

The EU's approach to the Nexus should take a strong stand in promoting respect for IHL. In particular, civilians and civilian objects must be protected in all armed conflict situations. Violations of IHL can exacerbate and entrench humanitarian consequences, and result in development setbacks. It is thus essential to guarantee that the rules of IHL are respected by parties to conflict.

2. Ensure a high degree of participation and engagement from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

Civil society plays a key role in responding to humanitarian and development needs, as well as in working towards implementing the “Leave No One Behind¹⁹” commitment. CSOs – and other local and national actors such as National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – are committed to promoting the participation of affected populations in decision-making processes, advocating for transparency and accountability, and contributing to strengthening the link between humanitarian and development programmes. By centralising decision-making, for instance through “collective outcomes”, as suggested by the UN in the New Way of Working, there is a danger that the voices of affected populations will not be heard. It is therefore essential to ensure a high degree of CSO participation and engagement in the decision-making, implementation and monitoring phases of all humanitarian and development programmes.

¹⁶ European Commission, European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, 2007.

¹⁷ International human rights law lays down obligations which States are bound to respect. By becoming parties to international treaties, States assume obligations and duties under international law to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

¹⁸ IHL is applicable in times of armed conflict and aims to limit the effects of armed conflict for humanitarian reasons. IHL does not differentiate between concepts found in aid policies of emergency, early recovery and development.

¹⁹ At the heart of the SDGs there is a commitment to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’ and that no goal is considered met unless met for all.

A greater degree of localisation through long-term investment and structured engagement with local CSOs is absolutely crucial. This will enable predictable and long-standing partnerships, instead of relying on transitory actors. Increased recognition of the key role played by local CSOs can reduce dependency on external actors.

Meaningful CSO engagement should also be applied to the design, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of the six pilot projects chosen to test the EU's Nexus approach. To date, the lack of CSO engagement in the workshops organised by the EU Delegations in country to prepare the six pilot Action Plans is regrettable. Active CSO input would not only add valuable local know-how, but would also contribute to increasing the capacity and resilience of local communities.

3. Invest in building resilience of people and communities, with a focus on local actors.

Resilience can and must be built at various levels; from the individual to the community, and from the locality to the nation. It is multi-faceted, and draws on social cohesion, a healthy environment, economy and community, knowledge and education, and solid infrastructure and social services, as well as specific disaster risk management activities. Resilience is more of a process than an end state, which must be owned and driven by affected communities.

In the context of the Nexus, local people and communities have to remain the primary beneficiaries and stakeholders. When working in protracted, conflict-driven crises and disasters, efforts to strengthen state resilience need to be complementary to community resilience efforts. These efforts should be evaluated in relation to the specific context and situation, always maintaining the wellbeing of people and communities as the key priority. Working with local actors – who are present before, during and after a crisis – increases the probability that both short and long-term objectives will be included and addressed.

The principle of strengthening resilience should hold especially true in situations of protracted crisis, the impact of which is all-encompassing.

4. Apply context-specific approaches to all programming within the Nexus.

Greater collaboration and coherence between humanitarian and development actors in protracted settings are needed. In addition, mutual understanding of the comparative advantages of humanitarian and development actors would help to address the needs of people in a sustainable manner. The implementation of all Nexus programmes should be context specific. In line with the Council Conclusions²⁰, humanitarian and development actors should strengthen resilience, livelihoods, and local capacities, based on an analysis of the social, economic, cultural, and political context.

A context-specific approach needs to be applied to all stages of the project design and implementation, as well as to the monitoring, evaluation, and funding allocation. Additionally, all Nexus actors should integrate gender, age, disability, and diversity perspectives into their programme design, implementation, and monitoring.

²⁰ Council of the EU, Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development Nexus, Council Conclusions, 19 May 2017.

5. Allocate sufficient, flexible, accountable and transparent multi-year funding

Protracted crises, conflict-driven contexts, and recurrent natural disasters have expanded the demands on humanitarian relief and in some instances, negatively impacted previous development gains. Humanitarian actors are increasingly confronted with large-scale needs, in circumstances where essential public infrastructure and services are weakened or absent. Meeting growing humanitarian needs around the world requires an increase in the amount of flexible, multi-year funding allocated to the Nexus.

Funding should prioritise proximity and financial sustainability. It should enable longer-term humanitarian interventions, with embedded transparency and accountability mechanisms. Multi-year funding is essential to the planning and delivery of sustainable programmes addressing both the short and longer-term needs of affected populations. The EU should offer flexible, multi-year financing for responses to protracted crises and recurrent disasters, as well as boost efforts to increase development investment.

6. Ensure that humanitarian aid and development cooperation budgets and funding instruments remain separate and independent from each other.

The management, delivery, and conduct of humanitarian activities need to remain principled, unconditional, and based on assessed needs. These principles must be safeguarded in all funding instruments and budgets utilised to finance humanitarian activities. The EU and its Member States ought to consider longer-term strategic mechanisms supported by predictable and flexible multi-year funding for situations of protracted conflict and chronic crisis. Provisions should be included for early preparedness and ready to deploy mechanisms, such as tools applicable to recurring natural disasters.

In any event, it is paramount that separate budgets for humanitarian and development programmes are ensured in the next MFF (2021-2027). This is fundamental to avoiding the politicisation of emergency assistance and preserving its neutral, impartial, and independent character.

7. Integrate analysis and lessons-learned throughout the Nexus development and implementation processes.

Regular monitoring of the Nexus approach should be conducted to assess the achievements of its programmes and identify underlying lessons. The outcomes of which ought to be integrated in a process of continuous improvement to benefit future programmes and evaluate the Nexus' impact.

Lessons-learned exercises should be conducted in partnership with CSOs, and be based on both performance lessons and results lessons. The former encompassing the procedures and practices used to plan, manage, and implement pilot programmes. The later aimed at assessing the efforts employed to produce planned results, as well as how these results measure up against the initial goals and indicators. A commitment to lessons-learned procedures in the Nexus approach should be integrated into the External Action component of the next MFF (2021-2027).



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