

Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Afghanistan ACBAR Discussion Paper, November 2018

The commitment to moving from delivering aid to ending need was the main outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit¹ with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 Agenda upheld as a common framework for results through the New Way of Working, also known as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (Triple) Nexus. This approach involves a wide variety of actors, working based on their comparative advantages and over multiple years, to reduce need, vulnerability and risk and increase peace and resilience for a sustainable development. In many of the protracted crisis and conflict settings around the world, NGOs, governments, donors, UN and other partners are considering what this approach means in practice.

After nearly 40 years of conflict and displacement, it is clear that Afghanistan needs a new way forward for peace and sustainable development. The situation is urgent: by September this year UNAMA had reported 8,050 civilians killed and wounded (2,798 deaths and 5,252 wounded²). Poverty is rising, 55% of the population live below the poverty line compared to 38% in 2012/2013³. The conflict has spread in the last two years and a severe drought is affecting many parts of the of the country which has led to the displacement of 223,100 people due to drought and 282,000 people fleeing from conflict until October 2018.

In this demanding context, NGOs are committed to work collectively with each other and their partners towards realizing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Afghanistan. Dialogue on this topic between NGOs and UN and donor partners, has highlighted both opportunities and challenges in this approach. Most importantly, it is clear that any such approach should be developed specifically for Afghanistan, drawing on international best practice but informed by the experiences of individuals and organizations who best understand this complex, challenging environment.

Achieving Collective Outcomes

ACBAR's diverse NGO members already work across the Nexus of humanitarian, development and peace areas. This approach is not a new way of working for operational NGOs. However, there is recognition that NGOs need to be able to work better with each other and with other actors. To do so, they need to be well informed and fully engaged in broader processes related to the Nexus. Approaches to engaging in the Nexus should be properly planned, appropriately resourced and broadly supported, to ensure they lead to real change. Afghanistan has seen many processes of policy development and system reform that have promised much and delivered less. The Nexus is an opportunity for genuine, structural change in professional mentality to be made to better serve the Afghan people. This paper aims to kick off a national debate on the operationalization of the Nexus in Afghanistan.

The Need for Principled Approaches to the Nexus

A principled and needs-based approach must be at the heart of the operationalization of the Nexus in Afghanistan, also for "leaving no one behind" as collective outcome of the SDGs. Due to widespread conflict the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) does not control all parts of the country and in some areas is unable to act as duty-bearer. Engagement and advocacy on the Nexus in Afghanistan should recognize the specific challenges faced, particularly by humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations, when working outside of the government-controlled areas. It also must be tailored to avoid the politicization of aid. In order to continue to meet humanitarian needs throughout the country, approaches to working in the Nexus must intentionally and rigorously preserve space for principled humanitarian interventions. This may mean, at times, developing and funding programmes that do not fit with governmental plans or government-led processes.

Inclusive and Relevant Coordination

Coordination is critical to success and a suitable mechanism should be developed. The UN Country Team does not currently include any representation of NGOs or donors, and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) which includes donors, UN and NGO representatives has a specific humanitarian focus. NGOs call for actors to come together to establish new multi-stakeholder working groups under the Nexus that systematically include

¹ At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, donors, UN and NGOs signed the Grand Bargain, this includes a commitment to strengthen engagement between humanitarian and development actors. The UN and World Bank also committed to a "new way of working" to transcend the humanitarian-development division, which was extended by the Secretary General to include a "Triple Nexus" between humanitarian, development and (when appropriate) peace action.

² UNAMA "Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict 2018" quarterly report, 10 October 2018.

³ World Bank "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS)", 5 July 2018.

representatives from NGOs, UN, private sector, donors and governmental representatives. This should be realized on local provincial levels as well as on a national level.

The Role of Government

NGOs acknowledge that the Government of Afghanistan will have a critical role to fulfill in the Nexus approach - from the articulation of collective outcomes, to developing supporting policies, ensuring accountability and monitoring results. Afghanistan has various policy frameworks including the newly developed Afghanistan SDGs (A-SDGs), local and provincial development plans, Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) and National Priority Plans (NPPs) covering different sectors. There are still many challenges to transform and implement all these policies into action for the Government.

The Role of the UN – Participatory Leadership

In many countries the UN has taken a leadership role in developing multi-stakeholder approaches towards collective outcomes. In Afghanistan the Head of the UN System, as Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General, has a mandate extending over these three areas and therefore has a clear role to play in leadership. Currently, UN-led approaches to the Nexus in Afghanistan are informal and internal. The UN System, donors and other partners should recognize the importance of genuine multi-stakeholder processes that engage national and international NGOs, not only as implementing partners, but as long-term actors who will continue to have an important role as civil society actors and service providers.

The Role of Donors

Donors have a major responsibility for developing appropriate funding models and creating the right incentives for a Nexus approach. Lack of flexible funding will simply reinforce existing divisions between the humanitarian and development areas. A Nexus approach encourages donors to align their funding, through both the multilateral system, as well as through bilateral development cooperation, behind the achievement of collective outcomes. NGOs in Afghanistan call on donors to show leadership in changing their own way of working and approaches for funding. Donors should actively engage NGOs and other actors in discussion around plans to achieve flexible, multi-year, multi-sector financing for projects which work across traditional silos. NGOs acknowledge that new approaches will not be without risk, and that an evidence base must be built for these new approaches. This should be done in an open and transparent manner with new systems and approaches tailored to the local context.

People at the Centre

Some NGOs note that community actors should be part of setting collective outcomes, whereas others say it is the role of NGOs to represent the voice of communities in relevant processes. Either way, Humanitarian-Development-Peace actors as a whole, must ask themselves how they can better ensure people are truly at the centre of their work in the Nexus approach. Without genuine commitment to engage people at community level, processes related to sustainable peacebuilding will fail.

Recommendations to the Government of Afghanistan:

1. Put people at centre of process

Local level data collection and local consultations needs to be systematic, to understand the needs of the population of concern. Top-down planning processes run the risk of being disconnected from real needs on the ground and may not represent the needs effectively in areas of the country where the governance space is contested. Local district and provincial plans need to be linked to national level planning and vice versa. The A-SDGs can be also be used to provide clear indicators and targets for all stakeholders.

Localized implementation processes can help put people at the centre.

2. Make Nexus processes inclusive

Collaboration among multiple actors is required for the Triple Nexus approach to become successful. In humanitarian and development programmes context this means more engagement from humanitarian actors with civil society and implementing partners to identify the needs, coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance and promote accountability for delivery of activities. For development-oriented programming, seeking to bring in civil society at the policy-making stage, rather than purely seeking validation for policy decisions that have already been largely confirmed.

Include civil society and communities in the inception stage of programmes.

3. Ensure Nexus processes protect space for flexible and principled approaches

The Government, especially at a local level, should refrain from interference in operationalization of civil society programmes and the delivery of humanitarian assistance (including the selection of beneficiaries) and should ensure the proper implementation of article 23 of the NGO Law to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided to people in need in a timely manner.

Humanitarian space should be actively safeguarded to fulfill emergency needs.

Recommendations to the International Community:

1. Put people at centre of process

Make assistance based on locally and impartially-evaluated needs and not tied to classifications such as 'returnee', 'drought-displaced' or 'conflict displaced'. In Afghanistan many situations are deeply intertwined, making artificial distinctions is less effective.

Require locally, impartially-evaluated needs to develop programmes.

2. Make Nexus processes inclusive

Donors must maintain an inclusive focus on how they fund programming, not a one-size-fits-all approach. Both short-term, emergency-style funding as well as multi-year funding is required. Donors need to consider whether planning cycles are fit for purpose within Afghanistan's specific context and explore alternative models of financing that better respond to the collective challenges faced in Afghanistan.

Funding fit for purpose should be leading in making aid effective.

3. Ensure Nexus processes protect space for flexible and principled approaches

Donors should adapt their aid approaches to include the real needs on the ground in a meaningful way. This will require donors to increase their engagement to support partners working in contested areas to ensure the protection of principled approaches. Both in relation to guaranteeing people-centred and inclusive approaches are maintained as well as humanitarian principles and space protected. Channeling funds to the Government, World Bank and UN agencies or multi-donor trust funds is not sufficient; political weight must be added to meet the promise of aid.

Make aid meaningful by full engagement with all stakeholders to respond to the real needs of people.

Recommendations to the NGO Community:

1. Put people at centre of process

ACBAR members commit to planning programmes based on local needs analysis and governmental strategies where applicable and appropriate. Evaluations and post-intervention reports will be shared with the Government and donors to contribute to the best possible solution of giving aid on a national and provincial level to meet the real needs of people in a deeply impoverished and conflict-affected country.

Shared responsibility includes data contribution on an implementation level by NGOs working in the field.

2. Make Nexus processes inclusive

ACBAR members commit to engage with the Government and donors on policy development where given space to do so in a meaningful manner and sharing recommendations with the Government of Afghanistan and donors about coordination mechanisms on a national and provincial level.

Shared responsibility includes contribution on a policy level by NGOs with the merit of expertise.

3. Ensure Nexus processes protect space for flexible and principled approaches

ACBAR members commit to work within governmental strategies to the extent made possible within their mandates and principles. That includes reporting to the Government when assistance is provided off-budget.

The NGO community will actively collaborate with stakeholders to safeguard humanitarian space.

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