

BACKGROUND PAPER

“HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS” AND CHILD PROTECTION:

Sharing responsibility for children’s protection – addressing risks and vulnerabilities through cohesive partnerships



THE ALLIANCE
FOR CHILD PROTECTION
IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

“Humanitarian-Development Nexus” and Child Protection:

Sharing responsibility for children’s protection – addressing risks and vulnerabilities through cohesive partnerships

A background paper for the 2019 Annual Meeting for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action

The problem.

Over the last quarter of a century we have witnessed an increase in both the magnitude and the duration of humanitarian crises around the world. There are currently more crises that last longer and affect more people globally, than a decade ago. In 2018, a staggering 131.8 million men, women and children are estimated to have been affected by humanitarian crises, a figure that is likely to remain as high in 2019 (UNOCHA, 2019). Amongst those affected, there have been unprecedented levels of forced displacement both within and across national borders. In 2014, the population of displaced persons approached 60 million for the first time since World War II, a figure that increased to 65.3 million in 2015 and hit a historic high of 70.8 million in 2018 (UNHCR, 2019). Given that the average humanitarian crisis now lasts for nine years, much of the displacement experienced is protracted (UNOCHA, 2018).

The demands on the humanitarian community are overwhelming. From 2005 to 2017, the number of active crises requiring support from the international community rose from 16 to 30 (UNOCHA, 2018). Despite record levels of global humanitarian funding, \$22 billion in 2018, an increase from \$17.1 billion in 2011, funding shortfalls are considerable with gaps of 40% in UN-led humanitarian response plans (UNOCHA, 2012, 2019). Given the long duration of many crises, humanitarian approaches focused narrowly on saving lives and alleviating suffering are being challenged.

Looking to the future, armed conflict will likely continue to be a main driver of humanitarian crises, given the failure to successfully address root causes of conflict (UNOCHA, 2018). The wars in Yemen and Syria continue to rage whilst Cameroon is on the brink of civil war, Afghanistan experiences deadly fighting and the peace deal in South Sudan, although a welcomed advance, is viewed as fragile (Malley, 2018). The root causes of conflict are not only political but also climate-crisis related. Water is now considered a primary driver of conflict globally. In 2017, access to, and control over, water played a central role in 45 conflicts around the world (UNOCHA, 2018).

In addition to conflict, extreme weather events are forecast to become an even greater cause of humanitarian needs in the coming years. The World Economic Forum predicts that extreme weather events, the failure of climate-change mitigation measures and natural disasters will be among the top five global risks in terms of likelihood and impact in 2019 (World Economic Forum, 2019). Currently, over twenty countries are categorised as being at high risk of experiencing drought, cyclones and floods in 2019 and the likelihood that El Nino events will take place next year, and in years to come, is high (UNOCHA, 2019).

Conflict and climate-crisis related events are occurring against a backdrop of increased vulnerability. The vulnerability of populations to the impacts of humanitarian crises are increasing due to global trends including climate change, poverty and population growth (UNOCHA, 2019). This means that long-lasting crises are expected to continue, so too will the increasing numbers of persons affected.

The solution: a new way of working?

Humanitarian actors alone cannot stem the tide. Despite years of reform, the humanitarian sector continues to fall short of meeting humanitarian needs (Bennett, Foley, & Pantuliano, 2016). It is now acknowledged that collaboration must be intensified between humanitarian, development and peace actors to collectively reduce fragility, address insecurity and decrease the vulnerability of people living in crisis-prone contexts. Humanitarian assistance must be viewed as one part of the picture.

At the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, humanitarian, development and peace actors agreed to a New Way of Working (NWoW) to transcend the divide that exists between the sectors (UNGA, 2016). The NwoW calls upon actors to work more “cohesively” in partnerships in order to meet humanitarian needs and simultaneously reduce risks and vulnerabilities (UNOCHA, 2017). This interlinkage between humanitarian action, sustainable development and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, has been referred to as the “humanitarian-development nexus”.

The “nexus” approach aims to define and achieve collective outcomes that are based on a common analysis as well as prevention and response measures. The approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each sector to reduce needs, risks and vulnerabilities along the humanitarian-development continuum in accordance with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (ICVA, 2017).

The “nexus”: more than just a buzz-word?

Critics point out that the divide between humanitarian response, development and peace building has existed for a long time and that concept of a “nexus” is not new. The concept has been proposed before under different names, for example as ‘linking relief with development’ (see VENRO, (2006) and Ramet, (2012)). What is different this time is that the “nexus” is being discussed in connection to a number of processes central to the United Nations – the reform of the UN, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Grand Bargain and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (ICVA, 2017). Current momentum behind the approach is further evidenced by donor endorsement and the involvement of the World Bank in the peace and development arena.

What does the “nexus approach” mean operationally?

Since the concept’s arrival, the international community has been struggling with how to operationalize it. Despite many discussions, workshops and briefing papers, many international NGOs and national NGOs are still grappling with what a “nexus approach” means for UN agencies, international NGOs, national NGOs and those receiving assistance (ICVA, 2017). A recent Save the Children study conducted in the Horn of Africa, for example, found moderate to low knowledge about the New Way of Working; more than half of the 51 actors interviewed had never heard of the term before (SC, 2018).

In an effort to provide direction, practical steps to implement the New Way of Working have been suggested by the IASC Peer 2 Peer team (what was formerly known as the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT)). These steps include the following:

1. Supporting joint analysis of needs, vulnerabilities, and risks, and of capacities to address them by strengthening coordination between the Humanitarian Country Team and the United Nations Country Team. Humanitarian and development actors should share their information and analyses to arrive at a shared understanding of the situation that needs to be addressed.
2. Promoting joint-up programming. Humanitarian and development actions should be complementary in order to achieve collective outcomes, avoid gaps in programming, and minimise duplication.
3. Aligning of planning cycles. Efforts to make Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) multi-year instead of annual gives a unique opportunity to understand the coherence between the HRP and the UNDAF and to put forward a more sustainable solution for affected communities’ problems.
4. Requesting human resources and political support from headquarters when necessary.
5. Partnering with national actors to respond to humanitarian needs to strengthen national leadership and ownership.

The “nexus approach”, therefore, seeks to forge operational and policy alignment between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors and enable them to work towards shared goals.

What does a “nexus approach” mean for humanitarian child protection?

First and foremost, a “nexus approach” for humanitarian child protection actors means acknowledging that the responsibility for ensuring children’s protection must be shared with actors from the development and peacebuilding arenas. It is through cohesive partnerships with these actors that we can more effectively prevent risks children face by address underlying vulnerabilities and more effectively respond to protection concerns by engaging with existing capacities and systems.

This approach of building cohesive partnerships necessarily embodies strengths and weaknesses, and it presents opportunities as well as threats to humanitarian child protection work. It is through an exploration of these that we can better identify what implications the approach has for our work. Below we identified some strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to provide a starting point for reflection:

Strengths

- It encourages us to break out of our ‘humanitarian child protection’ silo and partner with development and peacebuilding actors;
- It encourages a comprehensive analysis of risks to children’s wellbeing and protection including identifying root causes of risks and vulnerabilities for children and their families;
- It can lead to more effective use of resources and sustainable outcomes;

Weaknesses

- Many organisations have separate humanitarian and development sections and thus have internal divides to overcome;

- Issues of leadership, accountability, and decision-making are unclear in the nexus approach (CHA, 2019);
- The “nexus” terminology causes confusion amongst some responders;

Opportunities

- It encourages responders to see the problems from those on the ground, for whom a humanitarian-development distinction doesn’t exist (ICVA, 2017);
- Collaborating with diverse actors, such as the World Bank, may open up new avenues for future funding;
- The approach may increase the flexibility of donor budgets to align by objectives as opposed to projects (CHA, 2019);

Threats

- It is challenging in countries where governments are unwilling to address risks facing particular groups of children, for example asylum seeking, refugee and internally displaced children;
- It increases the potential for the polarisation and instrumentalisation of aid; there is a risk that political motives can become intertwined with humanitarian responses (CHA, 2019);
- Tensions exist between the guiding legal frameworks for humanitarian response (IHL) and development (sovereign law).

In practice, what a “nexus approach” means for humanitarian child protection has not yet been clearly defined. An electronic database search conducted using the terms ‘child protection’ and ‘humanitarian-development nexus’ only yielded one result: a UNHCR-UNICEF document that explores the integration of refugee children into national child protection systems and national legal and policy frameworks in East Africa and Great Lakes Region (UNHCR & UNICEF, 2018).

Moreover, a considerable percentage of the abstracts submitted for this 2019 Annual Meeting made no mention of the nexus in their description. This does not mean that aspects of the nexus approach are not being implemented. Humanitarian child protection actors have long been aware of the importance of using an approach that addresses urgent protection risks for children affected by crises and also builds capacity to better respond to future protection concerns (Save the Children UK, 2008; Theis, 2012; Wulczyn et al., 2010). In fact, efforts to strengthen child protection systems are described as central to humanitarian child protection action, as is evidenced in the *Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action* (2019). What the lack of documentation clearly shows, however, is that the nexus terminology has yet to be adopted by the humanitarian child protection community, and agreement is still needed on what else using the nexus approach entails for humanitarian child protection actors.

How do we operationalize the “nexus” in humanitarian child protection action?

Using the implementation guidance provided by the IASC Peer 2 Peer team, the following could be put forward as a starting point for discussing what operationalizing the nexus could entail for humanitarian child protection actors.

At the level of analysis, it could mean ensuring that joint analyses of needs and capacities is conducted:

- identify immediate protection risks for children and their families;
- explore root causes of the protection concerns identified. This necessarily involves sectoral knowledge outside of traditional areas of child protection

expertise. It also involves an analysis of contributing factors to conflict and extreme weather events;

- identify existing local and national capacities that can be reinforced to prevent and respond to issues identified. This includes not only identifying components of child protection systems at different levels but also an assessment of the social services and child protection workforce;
- review national and local policies relevant to child protection, particularly for children that may face discrimination in a given context (e.g. internally displaced, refugee, stateless children).

At the level of programming, it could mean ensuring that joint programs:

- are led by teams that are as local as possible, as global as necessary;
- reinforce existing local and national capacities and systems for children’s protection;
- address urgent, immediate protection concerns facing children affected by crises;
- address root causes of risks to children’s protection and their vulnerabilities;
- are sensitive to drivers of climate change and include a focus on climate change mitigation where possible;
- are conflict sensitive and where possible include a focus on conflict resolution and the promotion of peaceful coexistence;
- include a focus on emergency preparedness.

What else could operationalizing child protection in the humanitarian-development nexus entail? Are there additional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the “nexus approach” that we should be taking

into account? Where do we see the biggest gaps between our current ways of working and operationalizing the “nexus approach”?

These are questions that will be central to this year’s Annual Meeting of the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (Alliance). It is hoped that by convening members of the Alliance around the theme of the humanitarian-development nexus, we can come closer to identifying a way forward for the sector. During the course of the meeting, child protection practitioners and organisations from all around the world will present different aspects of their work as it relates to the “nexus approach”, allowing us as a community of practice to reflect on what’s working well, what we have learned and what the areas for improvement are. We hope to end the meeting with a concrete set of recommendations for the sector to take us towards more meaningful operationalization of the “nexus approach”.

References

- Bennett, C., Foley, M. & Pantuliano, S. (2016). *Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era*. London.
- CHA. (2019). *Roundtable: The Nexus in Practice*.
- ICVA. (2017). *The "New Way of Working" Examined: An ICVA briefing paper*. Geneva: International Council of Voluntary Agencies.
- Malley, R. (2018). 10 Conflicts to Watch in 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/10-conflicts-watch-2019>
- Ramet, V. (2012). Linking relief, rehabilitation and development: Towards more effective aid. *Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Union*.
- Save the Children UK. (2008). *A "Rough Guide" to Child Protection Systems*. London: Save the Children UK.
- SC. (2018). *Addressing the Humanitarian-Development Nexus in the Horn of Africa*. Save the Children.
- Theis, J. (2012). *Notes on Child Protection Systems in Fragile States*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/wcaro/english/Notes_on_child_protection_systems_in_fragile_states_-_May_2012.pdf
- UNGA. (2016). *One humanity: shared responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, A/70/709 (2 February 2016)*. New York, NY, USA: United Nations General Assembly.
- UNHCR. (2019). *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018*. Geneva: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- UNHCR, & UNICEF. (2018). *Bridging the Humanitarian-Development Divide for Refugee Children in Eastern Africa and the Great Lakes Region: Mapping existing national child protection practice*. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- UNOCHA. (2012). *World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2012*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).
- UNOCHA. (2017). *New Way of Working*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).
- UNOCHA. (2018). *World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2018*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).
- UNOCHA. (2019). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019: United Nations Coordinated Support To People Affected by Disaster and Conflict*. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).
- VENRO. (2006). *Linking relief, rehabilitation and development: Approaches and financing instruments to improve the transition between relief, rehabilitation and development co-operation*. (Lieser, J and Padberg, A and Runge, P and Schmitz, P, Ed.). Verband Entwicklungspolitik Deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e.V. (VENRO).
- World Economic Forum. (2019). *The Global Risks Report 2019: 14th edition*. Geneva: World Economic Forum (WEF).
- Wulczyn, F., Daro, D., Fluke, J., Feldman, S., Glodek, C. & Lifanda, K. (2010). *Adapting a systems approach to child protection: Key concepts and considerations*. New York: UNICEF.