

Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

Unpacking the 'Peace' Component of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Gathering Civil Society Input

Tuesday 21 May 2019
Brussels, Belgium

MEETING REPORT

The overall objective of the meeting was to provide an open space to share perspectives and explore ideas on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in particular with regard to its 'peace' component. Civil society representatives with expertise in humanitarian, development and peace actions were invited to share their input and recommendations on how the EU should approach and operationalise the nexus.

The meeting gathered sixteen civil society experts working in the areas of humanitarian aid, development co-operation and peacebuilding. It was also attended by policy-makers from the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission (EC). Discussions were held under the Chatham House Rule. There was no attempt to generate a consensus and this report contains the key points which were made by the civil society participants.

The Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The third phase of the CSDN will last from 2017 to 2020. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

I. Understanding the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

The following comments and recommendations relating to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (hereafter, 'nexus') were made by civil society participants:

- It is paramount for actions across the nexus to be driven by local needs and initiatives rather than by the political priorities of the EU.
- It is crucial for the 'peace' component of the nexus not to consist in 'hard security', militarised approaches to conflict issues, as these approaches tend to make it more difficult to carry out integrated work across the nexus and they tend to pose risks to implementers (in particular humanitarian actors).
 - For example, EU and EU-supported military engagements in the Sahel can make it more difficult for civil society actors across the nexus to carry out their activities. As 'hard security' actors (including peacekeepers) tend to be perceived as a party in the conflict, this risks undermining how humanitarians are perceived if the two are associated. Conversely, peacebuilders focus on human security and protection, with communities at the centre of their approach, which makes it less problematic for humanitarians to work with them.
 - It is important for actions across the nexus not to be driven by a desire to provide cover for a 'hard security' / military engagement with a parallel 'softer' engagement involving civil society organisations (CSOs).
- The 'peace' component of the nexus should be understood as referring to human security and the promotion of 'positive' peace (which involves supporting local initiatives for peace and addressing the root causes of conflict) rather than 'negative' peace (which is limited to the absence of violence).
 - There is a difference between peacebuilding and stabilisation actions. Stabilisation actions can sometimes undermine long-term positive peace prospects, including by making it harder to adopt a transformational approach to address the root causes of conflict.
 - The concept of resilience can be useful to reflect on how humanitarian, development and peace actions can contribute to sustainable collective outcomes through coordinated and integrated actions seeking to empower local communities.
- Any detailed understanding of the 'peace' component of the nexus should be context-specific so as to be adapted to local realities, understandings, needs and initiatives and so as to ensure that actions are conflict-sensitive. It is therefore key to understand how local populations understand what 'peace' is and what it would entail for them, and to adapt EU and civil society frameworks to how they assess and define the issues that affect them.
- Any external action (across the nexus and beyond it) must be conflict-sensitive so as to do no harm and to maximise its positive impact.
 - A nexus approach may not be suited to every context and it is therefore important not to adopt a nexus approach if it is harmful.
- In order for actions across the nexus to be adapted to the needs of local populations and to local dynamics, it is important for the EU to enhance how it listens to, actively involves and supports CSOs (in particular local CSOs) as part of its funding and policy decision-making processes and in the design, implementation, monitoring and implementation of projects.

- It is vital to ensure that local populations do not fall into ‘support gaps’ because of a lack of coordination and integration across nexus instruments, especially around transitional periods (e.g. people receiving humanitarian assistance as long as they are IDPs but no longer receiving any support as soon as they get back to their communities).
- Supporting the capacities of local CSOs (including through core funding and capacity building) and promoting the local ownership of projects is particularly important.
- Actively engaging with local community structures can be very helpful (although it is important to ensure that this does not perpetuate the marginalisation of certain groups). For example, local peace committees can be key partners across the nexus because of the role they can play in preventing conflict by ensuring that local populations understand how development and humanitarian aid is allocated and by informing external actors on the needs of the population.
- Funding instruments across the nexus should be more flexible and adapted to local needs (e.g. multi-year funding is often key for humanitarians to be able to have a more sustainable impact in contexts affected by protracted conflicts and to be able to create connections with the actions of development and peacebuilding actors).
- Funding instruments should adequately address the need for CSOs to be conflict-sensitive and to invest in robust (joint) conflict analysis. They should also provide CSOs with more flexibility to use funds relating to one component of the nexus (e.g. funding for a humanitarian action) to cover supporting activities relating to the other components of the nexus (being able to receive funding from more than one EU instrument to cover the different nexus components of a single project could be another option).
- Supporting an enabling environment for CSOs is key. The EU should systematically defend opening the civic space for civil society in its dialogue with partner governments and it should actively engage with CSOs across the nexus, in particular at the delegation level.
- It is important for external actors across the nexus (including donors and implementers) to share the same analysis of the conflict dynamics in a given context. This is helpful to avoid doing harm, to coordinate their actions more effectively and to actively work together toward positive outcomes more efficiently.
- It is necessary (a) to mainstream conflict sensitivity and to develop the capacities for conflict sensitivity – and for positive contributions to peace – of humanitarian and development actors, and (b) to support, fund and promote the work of peacebuilders. It is indeed crucial to recognise the specific work of peacebuilders and to adequately support and fund it. Humanitarian and development actions cannot substitute the work of peacebuilders.
- It can be possible for implementers across the nexus to integrate their work and go beyond carrying out complementary actions.
 - Participants cited examples of conflict contexts where peacebuilding organisations directed some of their efforts toward humanitarian and development actors in order to share their expertise (e.g. on conflict analysis), provide training (e.g. on conflict sensitivity and conflict prevention), and work together to achieve collective outcomes (e.g. on addressing some of the root causes of conflict or on setting up early warning systems relating to issues which are relevant across the nexus).
 - Although humanitarians and development actors are not peacebuilders per se, it is important for them to go beyond doing no harm and to actively contribute to peace whenever and wherever possible, including by helping to address issues relating to the root causes of

conflict (e.g. access to water, hunger, etc.) and / or by helping to foster dialogue between communities.

- Peacebuilders engaging in community-level dialogue activities may be seen positively by all parties in a given conflict, which can make it easier for humanitarians to work with them without risking their neutrality and impartiality.
- It is important to acknowledge the differences in the mandates of humanitarians, development actors and peacebuilders.
- It would be easier for CSOs to coordinate with the EU across the nexus if there was a clear lead on the issue on the EU side, and if the EU developed its internal capacities relating to the nexus, in particular with respect to human resources with expertise in conflict analysis and conflict prevention across the institutions. The relevant EU institutions in Brussels should also work more closely with the various sections in the EU delegations across the nexus to ensure that issues are identified and addressed jointly.
- By coordinating and working together across the nexus, CSOs can be more efficient and reduce costs, and this can also defuse perceptions of competing with each other to receive grants. Fostering exchanges between CSOs across the nexus could also lead to more coordination for advocacy activities toward donors.

II. Operationalising the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

The following comments and recommendations relating to the operationalisation of the nexus were made by civil society participants:

- As each context is different, carrying out conflict analysis integrating gender analysis is necessary to understand whether or not to apply a nexus approach, and if so, how to do so.¹
- A nexus approach can be implemented both by a single organisation (as part of a multi-dimensional project) and by different organisations coordinating / integrating their engagements.
 - In the latter case, it is helpful to set up a coordination system, and it is important for such systems and initiatives to be adequately funded (this was illustrated with the example of a civil society facility connecting donors, implementers and local populations and providing analysis, training and support to overcome obstacles across the nexus in South Sudan).
 - Participants cited examples of the successful use of a nexus approach to address issues relating to social cohesion (including between refugees / internally displaced people and host communities) and community dialogue, civil protection, food security and livelihoods, access to resources, gender equality, youth engagement, human mobility, building infrastructure to connect communities, and the provision of health services.
- There are risks in adopting a nexus approach when progress is not being made at the same pace with regard to the implementation of all components of the nexus. It is therefore essential to ensure that no component 'lags behind' and hampers the work carried out across the rest of the nexus.

¹ See the [report](#) from the CSDN Policy Meeting on 'Reviewing the EU's conflict analysis practices – Gathering civil society input', October 2018.

- In particular, although some donors increasingly require CSOs to comply and/or coordinate with partner governments as part of a nexus approach (e.g. in the Sahel), these partner governments do not always carry out the reforms which are expected of them and which are necessary to improve their accountability. This lack of progress on the political dimension of the peace component of the nexus therefore entails risks for the civil society actors which have diligently adapted their way of working under the nexus by doing more to comply and coordinate with the partner governments. The EU should therefore systematically try to ensure that its partner governments adequately follow up on their commitments relating to nexus implementation and serve as enablers for CSOs.
- Moving forward on the nexus without sufficient capacities and/or understanding of how to ensure the conflict sensitivity of actions can be harmful.
- The EU is weaker structurally with regard to the peace component of the nexus given its dependence on (and the importance of) EU Member States in relation to peace and conflict issues. In order to achieve significant progress on the peace component of the nexus, it is therefore important for EU Member States not to pursue objectives that may have an impact that is counter-productive to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, development and / or humanitarian efforts (e.g. in relation to migration or counter-terrorism issues).
- It would be helpful for development actors to be involved 'earlier' in conflict situations so as to help support humanitarian and peacebuilding actions through relevant development projects.
- It would be helpful to reform some of the structural incentives in the aid sector that make it harder to adopt a nexus approach, including incentives relating to the need to spend funds by specific deadlines, to avoid risks, etc. The EU and other donors can also play a key role in providing incentives for CSOs to work together across the nexus (e.g. using dedicated multi-year funding to pressure recipients to work together).
 - Path dependency dynamics can hamper positive reforms in agencies and organisations, and it is helpful to take this into account when reflecting on incentives and institutional change.
- In some cases, it may be preferable for the peace and humanitarian components of the nexus to be integrated at a certain level (e.g. national), but to remain separated at another level (e.g. local). For example, keeping a separation at the local level between peacebuilding and humanitarian actions can sometimes ensure that beneficiaries do not see their participation in peacebuilding activities (e.g. in peace committees) as conditional to the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- It is important to maintain a nexus approach for the monitoring and evaluation of actions, and not only for their design and implementation, in order to have a full understanding of their multi-dimensional impact.