



Final Report

**Designing an Academic/Practitioner Roundtable on the
Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus**

SIPAU9001_006_2025_1
Capstone Workshop in Sustainable Development

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Professor Dirk Salomons, our esteemed faculty advisor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). Professor Salomons' decades-long experience across the United Nations system and his unique insights into the intersection of policy and humanitarian practice have been instrumental in shaping the direction and depth of our work. His mentorship, thoughtful guidance, and unwavering support provided a solid foundation for our research and reflections throughout the duration of this capstone project.

We are equally grateful to the UNDP Crisis Bureau's Nexus Academy, whose commitment to advancing integrated approaches through the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus continues to inspire our work. This project would not have been possible without the generous support, leadership, and expertise of Romano Lasker (Nexus Academy Manager), whose vision and engagement were vital to our collaboration.

We also wish to thank Natalie McCullough (Learning Analyst), Maxence Verpraet (Research Analyst), and Johanna Wassong (Intern) for their invaluable contributions, responsiveness, and encouragement throughout the research process.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of a collaborative capstone project between Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) and the UNDP Crisis Bureau’s Nexus Academy, aimed at deepening the understanding and advancing the operationalization of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus. Through an integrated research approach that combined a thorough literature review with nineteen expert interviews from both the Global North and Global South, the project explored how the HDP Nexus has evolved in practice, where alignment exists between academic and operational perspectives, and what strategic actions can enhance its impact. The project’s ultimate objective was to support the Nexus Academy’s ongoing efforts to foster “trilingualism” between sectors by laying the foundation for an academic-practitioner roundtable and a centralized Nexus Knowledge Hub.

Findings indicate a widespread recognition of the HDP Nexus as a promising framework for addressing complex, protracted crises in a more coordinated and sustainable way. Stakeholders across sectors expressed growing commitment to integrated approaches that bring together humanitarian relief, long-term development and peacebuilding. Key strengths of the Nexus approach include improved cross-sectoral collaboration, joint planning efforts, the emergence of shared risk assessments, and innovative funding arrangements in certain contexts. Encouraging examples such as integrated social protection responses in Jordan, localized coordination mechanisms in Cameroon and area-based planning in Somalia show how the Nexus can lead to practical improvements when supported by coherent policy frameworks and committed leadership.

At the same time, the research revealed several recurring challenges that affect implementation. These include sector-specific mandates, fragmented financing systems and capacity gaps in conflict-sensitive and adaptive programming. While interest in integrating the peace dimension has grown, a shared definition and operational guidance are still in development, leading to uneven engagement across settings. Furthermore, the need to meaningfully engage local actors, community organizations, displaced populations, local governments and civil society was consistently emphasized across interviews. These actors are well positioned to offer context-relevant insights and sustained engagement, yet they are often underrepresented in decision-making processes.

The report puts forward a set of tailored, forward-looking recommendations for various actors. For national and local governments, the focus is on institutionalizing Nexus principles within development and crisis response planning. Donors are encouraged to provide flexible, multi-year funding that enables joint programming and supports locally driven solutions. UN agencies are advised to realign internal incentives toward shared outcomes and enhance inter-agency data systems. International NGOs are encouraged to act as facilitators of locally informed strategies and invest in decolonial approaches to partnership. Financial institutions are urged to develop

Nexus-compatible tools that blend humanitarian, development and peace financing. Across all actors, the report stresses the importance of joint learning platforms, conflict-sensitive design and sustained investment in localized capacity.

In addition to providing strategic recommendations, this report also directly supports the upcoming Nexus roundtable and informs the broader institutional goal of building a lasting Nexus Knowledge Hub. By bridging theoretical insights with practical experiences, the project offers actionable guidance for strengthening integrated responses to crisis settings. As the Nexus approach continues to evolve as a consequence of being rolled out further and scaled up more, this work highlights the value of inclusive dialogue, flexible systems, and locally anchored leadership in shaping more resilient and effective pathways forward.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND AND RELEVANCE OF HDP NEXUS

The Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus, or the triple Nexus, was established at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, as part of the ‘New Way of Working (NWOW),’ in an attempt to address the need for solutions to increasingly complex and protracted crises. It has been conceptualized by the OECD-DAC (OECD, 2019):

“At the center of strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts, is the aim of effectively reducing people’s needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need.”

A nexus approach seeks to foster stronger collaboration, coherence, and complementarity among humanitarian, development and peace actors. By creating a joint approach the Nexus can address immediate needs while simultaneously reducing risks, mitigating vulnerabilities and tackling the root causes of crisis.

2.2 CAPSTONE CLIENT AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

SIPA's Capstone Workshop projects aim to apply the practical skills and analytical knowledge which the students learn in the classroom, to a real-world issue. The goal of this capstone project is to assist the Nexus Academy in organizing a dynamic practitioner-academic exchange that will foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between these two essential communities.

The Nexus Campus, within the UNDP Crisis Bureau's Crisis Academy, was established in September 2021, as part of the follow-up to the 2019 OECD DAC recommendation on the Nexus. The academy is headquartered in the UNDP Crisis Bureau and supported by a core team of three staff members: Romano Lasker, the Nexus Academy Manager; Maxence Verpraet, Research Analyst; and Natalie McCullough, Outreach Specialist in the Crisis Bureau.

The Nexus Academy advances the integration of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts, prioritizing the idea of "trilingualism" between the policy sectors. The Nexus Academy, situated within the Crisis Academy, focuses on learning, community and action, underscoring the academy's commitment to building capacity and enabling practical solutions. The Nexus Academy has developed a flagship training programme on the HDP nexus that brings together DAC members, the UN system, NGOs, and a wide range of stakeholders – which seeks to foster a shared understanding of nexus approaches, ensuring that organizations and their staff have the knowledge, skills, and capacities needed to translate these approaches into practical actions. Beyond the "learning" objectives, the Nexus Academy also aims to build a "community" between nexus practitioners, as well as trying to impact "action" on the ground. This means ensuring that the Nexus Academy facilitates discussions on the latest practice and policy, and that nexus practitioners at the global, regional and field level can update each other on how to best operationalize the nexus approach.

2.3 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the collaboration is to assist the Nexus Academy of the UNDP's Crisis Bureau in organising a dynamic practitioner/academic exchange that will foster collaboration and knowledge sharing between these two essential communities. This exchange will be manifested in a roundtable that would bring together nexus practitioners who have participated in the Nexus Campus trainings with academics and think tank professionals. The aim of this roundtable is to introduce a semi-regular platform for dynamic exchanges between practitioners and academics, fostering sustained engagement.

Key deliverables include a detailed work plan, a draft report, a literature tracker, an interview tracker and thematic analysis, as well as a concept note for the roundtable and final presentation. This roundtable is scheduled to take place in late 2025. This project directly supports the Academy's goals of advancing nexus principles while strengthening global capacities to respond to complex crises through sustainable and integrated approaches. Additionally, as part of its program, the Nexus Academy is aiming to consolidate and centralize knowledge on the concepts and operationalizations of the HDP Nexus. The capstone project will provide the starting point for the collection of primary and secondary research for the establishment of a Nexus Knowledge Hub. The Capstone Project deliverables will also contribute to key databases for the establishment of a Nexus Knowledge Hub.

3. METHODOLOGY

To support the UNDP Crisis Bureau's Nexus Academy in developing a replicable academic-practitioner roundtable, the SIPA team employed a mixed-method research approach aimed at capturing both the theoretical and operational dimensions of the HDP Nexus. The goal of the research was to better understand the barriers to integrated Nexus implementation and to identify where academic research and practical experiences converge—or diverge.

Desk Research formed the first phase of this methodology. Beginning in January 2025, the team conducted an extensive literature review of academic articles, institutional reports, and practitioner publications, with particular attention to contributions from the Global South. Sources included materials from the Nexus Academy's internal library, Columbia University's academic databases, and publications from multilateral institutions such as UNDP, OCHA, DPPA, the African Union, and the World Bank, as well as global think tanks and civil society organizations. The team reviewed research outputs across the three Nexus pillars, tracking findings by thematic focus (e.g., food security, displacement, governance), institutional affiliation, and geographical orientation (Global North/South). Key insights were coded and cataloged using a tracking system agreed upon with the client.

The second phase of the research involved semi-structured interviews with 19 experts across academia, international organizations, NGOs, and think tanks. Respondents included both Global North and Global South stakeholders actively engaged in Nexus-related work. The interviews were analyzed using thematic coding, mapped across twelve categories—six core areas (definitions, challenges, success stories, research gaps, stakeholder engagement, and operational tools) and six cross-cutting themes (peacebuilding, governance and politics, climate change, forced displacement, donor influence, and international humanitarian law). These interviews

helped contextualize the desk research, surfacing how Nexus implementation plays out differently across regions and institutional mandates.

Together, the desk research and interviews offer a comprehensive evidence base to inform the roundtable’s design and content. By bridging academic insight with lived experience, this research design aims to ensure that the roundtable discussions, and the broader Nexus Academy programming, are grounded in both theory and practice.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW / DESK RESEARCH FINDINGS

The literature on the HDP Nexus reflects a growing consensus on its potential to address complex, protracted crises through integrated approaches. However, operationalizing the Nexus remains challenging across multiple dimensions. Persistent issues include siloed mandates, fragmented leadership, and inconsistent institutional engagement. Short-term, inflexible financing models often constrain cross-sector collaboration, and the peace component remains underdeveloped and inconsistently integrated. Monitoring and accountability systems are weak, with few standardized indicators or shared frameworks. Additionally, debates continue around localization, sequencing versus integration, and the political risks of Nexus programming. Scholars including Minji Ju, Sophia Swithern, and others also highlight how donor-driven agendas and structural power asymmetries hinder inclusive governance and limit the agency of local actors. The following review expands on these thematic challenges through case studies and recent analyses.

Coordination remains a central obstacle in operationalizing the HDP Nexus. Scholars argue that the divide between humanitarian and development sectors is less an operational reality and more a product of institutional structures and mandates (Shusterman, 2019; Lie, 2020). These silos create fragmented leadership, unclear roles, and inconsistent integration of peacebuilding efforts. Evaluations have shown that in contexts such as Iraq and Bangladesh, peacebuilding remains marginal to humanitarian and development planning, undermining the overall impact of international interventions (Siddiqui & Guiu, 2024; Khan, 2024). Structural reforms—such as aligning mandates, improving inter-agency communication, and addressing the political sensitivity of peace work—are widely seen as necessary steps toward a more cohesive approach (Brown et al., 2024; Baroncelli, 2023; Morinière & Morrison-Métois, 2023). Lilly (2024) adds that without such systemic reforms, the Nexus risks becoming a short-lived policy fad—conceptually promising but operationally stalled by persistent institutional fragmentation.

Case studies illustrate how these coordination issues manifest in practice. Dieckhoff (2020) describes how humanitarian negotiations in Syria became entangled in political and military agendas, undermining neutrality. The ECDPM and Particip GmbH (2022) found that in Chad and Sudan, coordination mechanisms lacked clarity and institutional support, with actors operating in silos despite shared goals. Yet there are encouraging examples: HDP task forces in Cameroon and area-based approaches in Somalia demonstrate how localized, structured collaboration can support more coherent Nexus programming (Swithern & Schreiber, 2023).

Funding challenges remain a critical barrier. Despite political endorsement of integrated approaches, donor financing continues to be fragmented, short-term, and sector-specific. Flexible, multi-year funding that supports collective outcomes across the three pillars is still rare (OECD, 2022; Poole & Culbert, 2019). In Chad, CAR, and Ukraine, siloed donor strategies have hindered alignment with shared priorities. Positive examples such as the distribution of LPG in Cox's Bazar show what is possible through coordinated funding aimed at reducing environmental stress and social tensions (Joireman & Haddad, 2023). However, in most protracted displacement settings, rigid funding structures—including earmarked donor allocations and a lack of contextualized planning—limit the potential for adaptive, conflict-sensitive governance (Cho et al., 2024; Tschunkert et al., 2023). Overall, scalable models for pooled or joint financing remain limited.

The peace component of the Nexus remains conceptually weak and inconsistently applied. One core issue is the absence of a shared definition of peace—whether it involves violence prevention, reconciliation, or governance reform—which limits integration across sectors (Brown et al., 2024). In practice, peacebuilding goals are frequently deprioritized. For example, in Iraq, counterterrorism agendas overshadowed longer-term efforts such as reconciliation and support for returnees (Siddiqui & Guiu, 2024). In fragile contexts, securitized approaches to aid further erode neutrality and trust. Humanitarian actors like Doctors Without Borders (MSF) often refrain from engaging in peace processes where impartiality may be compromised (Lizzola, 2022).

Joireman and Haddad (2023) observe that humanitarian actors are often expected to support peace through environmental or resource-based interventions. Yet these efforts frequently lack the conflict sensitivity and social cohesion strategies that would make them effective. In countries like Mali and South Sudan, peacebuilding has become entangled with political or military agendas, compromising both aid legitimacy and the credibility of peace initiatives (Pedersen, 2021). Pedersen (2021) argues that clearer distinctions are needed between peacebuilding and broader state-building or counterinsurgency efforts to safeguard humanitarian principles.

Strategic tensions further complicate Nexus implementation. Ongoing debates center around whether interventions should be sequenced or integrated. While integration is theoretically more holistic, it also risks politicizing aid and undermining trust—especially when peace objectives align with political agendas (Pedersen, 2021). In fragile contexts where conflict, displacement, and environmental degradation are tightly interlinked, simultaneous interventions may be unavoidable (Joireman & Haddad, 2023).

Localization remains a contested space. While frameworks frequently emphasize inclusive, locally led processes, implementation often reflects top-down, donor-driven approaches (Cho et al., 2024). The involvement of host governments introduces additional complexity—some are critical for long-term sustainability, while others raise concerns about neutrality and access.

Case studies from Yemen and Nigeria illustrate the benefits of engaging local stakeholders. Collaboration with civil society organizations such as the Basamat Development Foundation and the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN) has helped align aid delivery with community priorities. These examples highlight the importance of grounding Nexus programming in local realities and strengthening locally led solutions.

In conclusion, the literature reflects both a growing consensus around the transformative potential of the HDP Nexus and a sober recognition of its persistent operational challenges. Fragmented mandates, siloed funding streams, and the underdeveloped integration of the peace component continue to undermine coherence across humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. While promising practices such as area-based planning and pooled financing have emerged, most Nexus initiatives still struggle to move beyond pilot phases into sustained, scalable programming. Addressing these challenges will require more than technical coordination; it demands a reconfiguration of institutional incentives, sustained investment in local capacity, and a commitment to long-term, inclusive approaches. Without such changes, the Nexus risks remaining an aspirational ideal rather than a practical tool for durable solutions.

Measurement and accountability remain underdeveloped aspects of the Nexus. Despite increased attention to cross-sector outcomes, standardized indicators—particularly for peace-related results such as social cohesion and conflict sensitivity—are still lacking. Roles and responsibilities across agencies are often unclear, and local peace actors are underutilized in monitoring systems (Morinière & Morrison-Métois, 2023; McCandless, 2021). According to the Swithern and Schreiber (2023), incompatible data systems and reliance on donor-driven metrics further hinder the development of shared accountability frameworks. While adaptive governance models offer the potential for real-time learning and course correction, they rarely function as intended due to limited investment in monitoring infrastructure and staff capacity (Cho et al., 2024). Efforts by ODI/ALNAP and others emphasize the need for inter-paradigm learning and inclusive, locally informed monitoring approaches to improve evidence use and system-wide learning.

5. INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The analysis of 19 interviews conducted for this report reveals the evolving nature of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. Respondents largely agreed that while the Nexus has transitioned from an aspirational concept to a broadly recognized framework, its operationalization remains uneven. Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the 2019 OECD DAC Recommendation, rhetorical commitment and institutional awareness have grown significantly. However, the persistent gap between theoretical frameworks and practical application continues to dominate discussions.

Several consistent challenges emerged across interviews. Chief among them is the persistence of siloed institutional approaches, particularly at the field level, which undermines coordination efforts despite the existence of frameworks for collective outcomes. Operational cooperation often falters due to restrictive funding mechanisms, institutional competition, and unclear role delineations. Respondents noted that humanitarian actors frequently dominate Nexus discussions, sidelining development and peace actors and reinforcing existing sectoral power imbalances. Notably, the peace component remains underdeveloped, further weakening the intended synergy across the three pillars.

Capacity and skills gaps were another major concern. Although technical knowledge of the Nexus has improved over time, critical deficiencies remain in areas such as conflict-sensitive programming and cross-sector planning. Many respondents also criticized the superficial rebranding of existing projects as "Nexus initiatives," often motivated more by donor reporting requirements than genuine integration. Skepticism toward major agencies and donors was common, with accusations of resistance to true coordination in order to retain control over resources.

Building on these insights, respondents highlighted several recommendations. Strengthening field-level integration through joint planning and shared accountability was seen as essential. Balancing the three pillars requires deliberate efforts to include peacebuilding actors alongside humanitarian and development actors. Furthermore, flexible, multi-year funding mechanisms must be expanded, and local leadership must be elevated, with greater investments in conflict sensitivity, adaptive programming, and systems thinking across all sectors.

Despite these challenges, some examples of progress were noted. In one country, appointing a dedicated Nexus lead revitalized coordination efforts and restored government leadership, enhancing inter-agency communication and legitimacy. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), provincial-level institutionalization enabled local authorities to assume responsibility for Nexus coordination bodies. Similarly, Ethiopia's Peace Support Facility was cited as an effective example of operationalizing Nexus principles by integrating stabilization, humanitarian assistance, and development efforts in conflict-affected regions including Tigray, Amhara, and Afar.

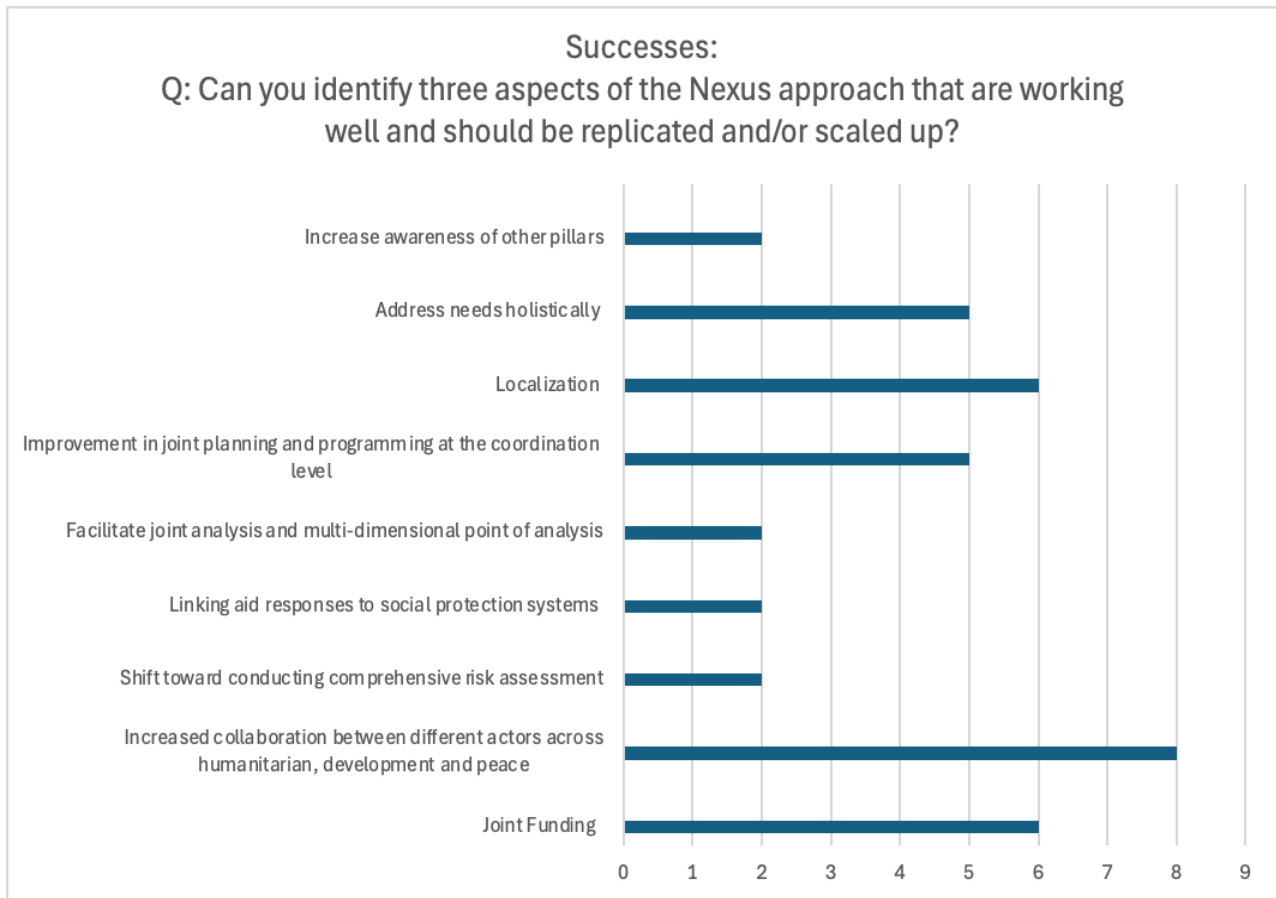
Respondents also emphasized the critical role of donor behavior. For instance, the United Kingdom's integrated funding model in Jordan, especially concerning humanitarian and social protection cash transfers, was recognized for strengthening national systems and promoting efficiency. Conversely, donors maintaining rigid internal silos were seen as contributing to fragmented coordination efforts and a disjointed funding landscape for local actors.

Turning to the peace dimension specifically, interviewees stressed the importance of embedding peacebuilding more centrally within Nexus operations. While some successes were noted with "small p" peace initiatives—community-level efforts fostering social cohesion, such as livelihood programs in Cameroon—"big P" peacebuilding, which addresses political conflicts at state levels, remains deeply challenging. Complex political environments like Yemen and Syria illustrate how political divisions and donor restrictions can fragment and paralyze peacebuilding efforts. Many respondents emphasized that peace must be fully integrated into the Nexus rather than treated as an optional or secondary concern.

Further insights emerged when respondents were asked to identify aspects of the Nexus approach that are working well and areas needing improvement. While the majority identified successful elements, three respondents saw no successful aspects at all. Among the positive developments, respondents cited improvements in joint funding, cross-sector collaboration, comprehensive risk assessments, alignment of humanitarian and development planning, and greater attention to social protection systems. Effective shared funding models, facilitated joint analysis, increased localization, and more dynamic stakeholder participation were noted as particular strengths.

Nevertheless, substantial shortcomings persist. Respondents highlighted the need for stronger joint activities, better Nexus approaches in refugee-hosting countries, improved UN coordination, and the dismantling of institutional barriers. Challenges also include funding uncertainty, weak operational capacities, insufficient joint programming, marginalization of peacebuilding and stabilization efforts, and lack of comprehensive monitoring systems. Some practitioners questioned whether the Nexus approach can be meaningfully implemented in settings where governments neglect minority needs, while a few academics expressed skepticism about its transformative potential altogether.

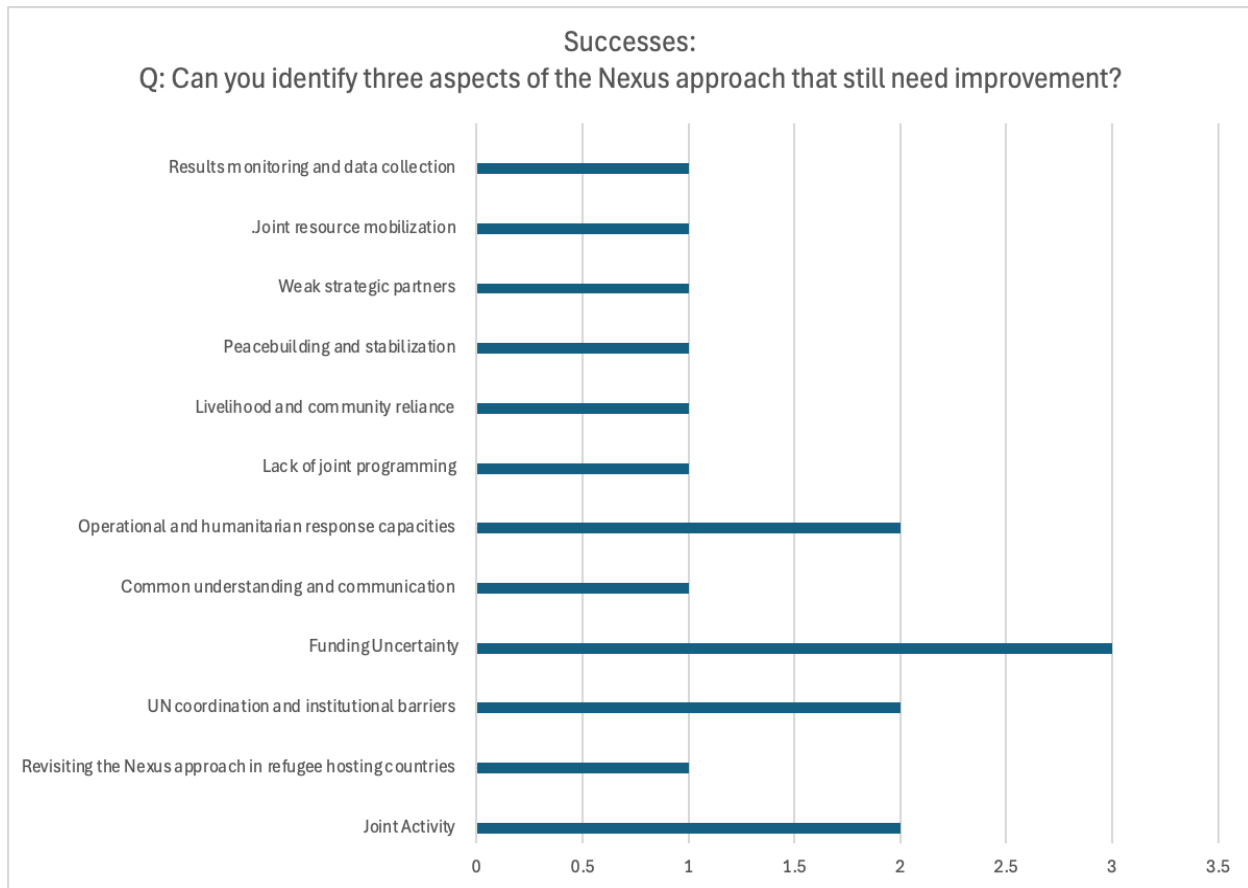
Figure 01¹



Building on these observations, respondents were also asked to identify persistent challenges and barriers to Nexus implementation. A recurring theme was the lack of coordination among humanitarian, development, and peace actors, exacerbated by siloed mandates, sector-driven planning, and institutional fragmentation. In fragile and crisis-affected contexts, the dominance of short-term humanitarian imperatives often marginalizes longer-term development and peacebuilding goals.

¹ Chart 01 summarizes the interview responses to the question: “Can you identify three aspects of the Nexus approach that are working well and should be replicated and/or scaled up?” The chart presents nine key aspects that were each identified by at least two interviewees. The most frequently cited aspect was “Increased collaboration between different actors across humanitarian, development and peace” (8 mentions), followed by “Joint Funding” and “Localization” (6 mentions each), and “Improvement in joint planning and programming at the coordination level” and “Address needs holistically” (5 mentions each). Several other aspects, including “Shift toward conducting comprehensive risk assessment,” “Linking aid responses to social protection systems,” “Facilitate joint analysis and multi-dimensional point of analysis,” and “Increase awareness of other pillars” were each mentioned by 2 interviewees.

Figure 02²



Donor financing structures also emerged as a major obstacle. Short-term, inflexible funding streams tied to specific sectors discourage adaptive, integrated programming, especially for local actors who are expected to meet cross-sectoral objectives without commensurate control over resources. Furthermore, the marginalization of the peace pillar remains a critical concern, with peace-related goals often overshadowed by humanitarian and development agendas or narrowly framed within security narratives, thereby undermining neutrality and community trust.

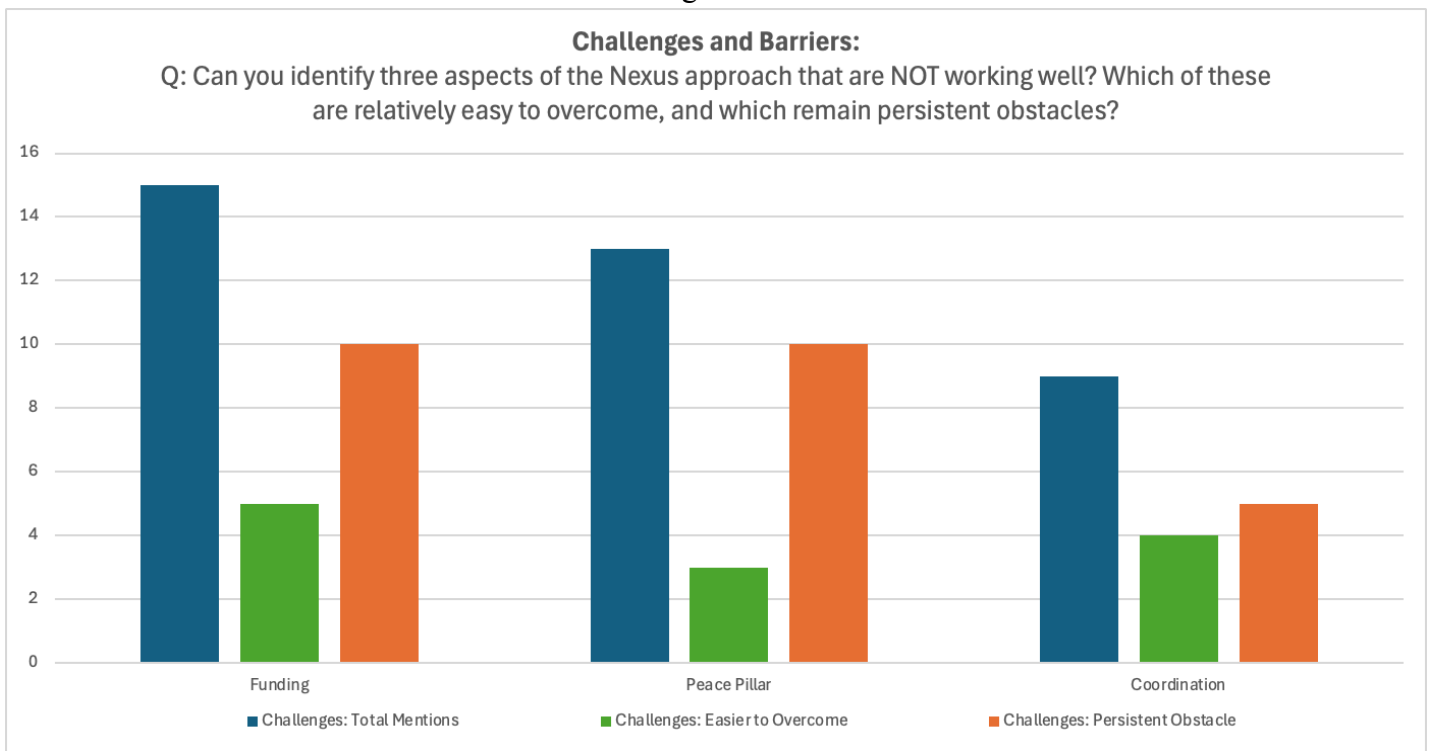
Institutional incentives and staff mindsets further inhibit integration efforts. Organizational structures continue to reward vertical outputs rather than cross-sector collaboration. High staff turnover and limited institutional memory restrict the development of a Nexus-oriented culture.

² Chart 02 displays the interviewee responses to the question: “Can you identify three aspects of the Nexus approach that still need improvement?” The chart outlines twelve areas identified as needing further attention or refinement within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus framework. “Funding Uncertainty” was the most frequently mentioned issue (3 mentions), followed by “Joint Activity,” “UN coordination and institutional barriers,” and “Operational and humanitarian response capacities” (2 mentions each). Other areas such as “Revisiting the Nexus approach in refugee hosting countries,” “Common understanding and communication,” “Lack of joint programming,” “Livelihood and community reliance,” “Peacebuilding and stabilization,” “Weak strategic partners,” “Joint resource mobilization,” and “Results monitoring and data collection” were each mentioned by one interviewee, indicating a broader range of challenges perceived by individual stakeholders.

Even at the local level, actors are often excluded from strategic planning and lack sufficient authority to drive Nexus initiatives.

While some challenges, such as siloed working cultures, may be overcome through strong leadership and inclusive planning, others, such as financing constraints and the weak integration of peace, are deeply structural. Transformative changes in coordination, funding, and operationalization are needed for the Nexus to fulfill its promise.

Figure 03³



When asked about research gaps in the Nexus field, interviewees emphasized the need for more actionable, context-specific studies. A key concern was the lack of political will to act on existing research, necessitating stronger policy recommendations to overcome entrenched resistance. Interviewees called for more concrete case studies documenting both successful and failed Nexus implementations, particularly focusing on the role of local actors and the private sector in crisis contexts. Integration of climate change into Nexus frameworks was also identified as a critical gap, given its growing relevance to humanitarian and development challenges.

³ The chart displays three thematic challenges—Funding, Peace Pillar, and Coordination—along with the number of times each was mentioned (15, 13, and 9 respectively). For each theme, responses are further divided into those identified as easier to overcome (5 for Funding, 3 for Peace Pillar, 4 for Coordination) and those seen as persistent obstacles (10, 10, and 5 respectively), highlighting both frequency and perceived difficulty.

Further research is needed to develop standardized monitoring and evaluation frameworks for long-term impact assessments, as current tools remain fragmented and sector-specific. Several respondents stressed the importance of examining how the Nexus approach functions in politically sensitive environments, asking critical questions about when and where Nexus programming is most effective. Addressing these research gaps will be vital for strengthening the adaptability and sustainability of the Nexus approach.

Interviewees also reflected on the actors missing or under-participating in Nexus efforts. Many pointed to the limited involvement of local actors, displaced populations, and community organizations, which hampers truly inclusive planning processes. National and local governments were inconsistently engaged, and some respondents raised concerns that Nexus initiatives often remain externally driven rather than emerging from national priorities. Private sector actors and academics were also seen as underutilized, and poor internal coordination within humanitarian and development organizations was flagged as a persistent weakness. These gaps highlight the urgent need for more genuine, inclusive engagement with all stakeholders.

Finally, when asked about influential literature shaping their views on the Nexus, respondents cited works emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder cooperation across humanitarian, development, and peace efforts. Case studies such as the Strengthening Livelihoods and Resilience (SLR) project in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Recharge Pakistan Project were discussed as illustrative examples by interviewees specializing in international economic development, and climate and disaster risk. However, differences in values among humanitarian, development, and peace actors continue to create divisions, undermining cooperation. Interviewees also warned of the risk of technological and cultural disconnects between international actors and local communities, underscoring the need for more grounded, inclusive approaches.

Taken together, the interview findings point to both the growing maturity of the Nexus concept and the substantial systemic and operational barriers that must be addressed for its transformative potential to be realized. Without greater attention to structural reforms, inclusive engagement, and political realities on the ground, the Nexus risks remaining an aspirational vision rather than an operational reality.

6. ANALYSIS: IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

The analysis of both desk literature and interview responses on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus reveals several critical gaps that hinder its effective implementation.

Policy Coherence:

As the peace dimensions are often sidelined or poorly integrated with humanitarian and development initiatives, leading to fragmented interventions. Operational coordination remains weak, with institutional silos, competition, and unclear roles undermining holistic approaches. Funding mechanisms are also problematic, with peacebuilding consistently underfunded and donor structures separating humanitarian and development budgets, making long-term, flexible programming difficult. Local actors are often underutilized, despite their critical role in ensuring sustainable peacebuilding, while data and accountability mechanisms are insufficient, with the absence of standardized indicators for peace outcomes. Regional and institutional differences further complicate implementation, as seen in contexts like Jordan and Myanmar, where political sensitivities hinder the adoption of the Nexus framework. Overall, to enhance the viability of the Nexus, stronger coordination, integrated funding, clearer peacebuilding metrics, and greater local engagement are essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Other identifiable gaps within the desk literature and interviewee responses include a lack of policy coherence between development, peace, and humanitarian actors. There is the implementation of development programs (i.e. Future Democratic Republic of Congo Strengthening Livelihoods and Resilience (SLR) and PayGo, CFW program, and others), without effective cooperation between peace and humanitarian actors. In the example of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen, there were development programs that were beneficial; however, they cannot provide effective long-term internal stability and cannot effectively provide assistance to displaced areas because of a lack of collaborative efforts and inputs from peace and humanitarian actors. These development programs require effective operational coordination within the HDP Nexus Approach in order to respond to vulnerable communities facing displacement and heightened violence due to internal political, economic, and social instability.

Institutional incentives and internal systems further constrain integration efforts. In many organizations, staff are still evaluated on vertical outcomes rather than shared, cross-sector goals. High turnover and limited institutional memory weaken continuity, while the organizational culture required to sustain Nexus approaches—one grounded in collaboration, learning, and accountability—remains underdeveloped.

Implementation Related Issues:

Despite growing consensus around the potential of the HDP Nexus, its implementation continues to face deep-rooted challenges across operational, institutional, and strategic dimensions. The most persistent gap is the fragmentation between humanitarian, development, and peace actors. Coordination remains limited due to sectoral mandates, incompatible institutional logics, and weak leadership for integrated programming. In practice, this often results in parallel efforts rather than coherent, mutually reinforcing strategies particularly in crisis-affected contexts where short-term humanitarian responses dominate.

Researchers and practitioners identified power imbalance and structural inequalities during the implementation process. Specifically, the power imbalance is evident in the dominance of international organizations over local actors. The voices and opinions of local people were excluded throughout the whole process from initial project planning to evaluation and marginalized groups were not given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Research articles have emphasized the need for a decolonial rethinking to ensure that the nexus approach does not perpetuate these inequalities (Müller-Koné et al., 2024). A change in mindset is required to effectively integrate local perspectives and knowledge into the nexus approach. Instead of a top-down, Global North centered process, the international community needs to work from bottom up.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems are not yet equipped to support Nexus implementation. Sector-specific indicators, fragmented data systems, and limited investment in adaptive learning hinder the ability to track collective outcomes or adjust programming in real time. Without integrated monitoring frameworks, efforts to assess Nexus performance and promote accountability remain weak. Strategic and political tensions continue to affect the Nexus's viability. These include debates around sequencing versus integration, the risks of embedding peace within humanitarian operations, and the imbalance between donor-driven planning and meaningful local leadership. Without addressing these deeper structural and political dynamics, the transformative potential of the Nexus will remain out of reach.

Despite increasing interest in the HDP Nexus as a pathway to more integrated responses in crisis-affected contexts, its viability continues to be challenged by a combination of policy incoherence, fragmented implementation, and power imbalances. A central issue identified across both literature and interviews is the persistence of silos—across mandates, funding channels, and institutional structures—which prevents humanitarian, development, and peace actors from working in a truly coordinated and strategic manner. While frameworks exist to promote integration, the reality on the ground is often one of parallel processes shaped more by bureaucratic constraints and legacy systems than by shared objectives.

Furthermore, key research gaps in the HDP Nexus field include the lack of political will to implement existing research, the need for actionable policy recommendations, and the absence of concrete case studies examining successful and failed applications of the Nexus approach. Additionally, the integration of climate change within the Nexus framework remains underexplored, and there is a need for standardized monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess long-term impacts. Financing models, the role of peacebuilding, and the operationalization of the Nexus in fragile states also require further investigation. Moreover, more research is needed to understand the contextualization of the Nexus approach in politically sensitive environments, particularly its effectiveness in specific contexts. Addressing these gaps will improve the Nexus approach's adaptability and sustainability in addressing global crises.

Operationally, coordination remains a work in progress. Disconnects between humanitarian and development actors—both across and within organizations—are compounded by fragmented data systems, unclear accountability frameworks, and a lack of shared indicators. This makes it difficult to track progress against collective goals or to adapt interventions based on real-time evidence. While some regional contexts, such as Ethiopia or Lebanon, show greater alignment between donors, governments, and local actors, these cases remain the exception rather than the norm.

Funding Structures:

Funding structures further entrench these silos. Financing remains predominantly short-term, inflexible, and tied to single-sector priorities. This restricts adaptive programming, discourages collaboration, and undermines efforts to plan across the three pillars. Multi-year, pooled, or joint funding models remain limited, and these limitations are especially pronounced in fragile settings, where the need for flexibility and cross-sectoral alignment is greatest. Funding mechanisms are a key barrier. Financial flows remain highly compartmentalized—tied to specific sectors, short-term cycles, or donor agendas—with limited access to pooled or flexible funds that could support adaptive, cross-pillar programming. This is particularly problematic in fragile settings like South Sudan or Yemen, where rigid financial instruments clash with the complex, evolving needs of communities. Moreover, peacebuilding remains especially underfunded and underdefined, often sidelined in favor of stabilization or security-focused interventions, which can dilute its purpose and weaken trust among local actors.

Peace Dimensions:

The peace dimensions emerged as one of the most critical gaps in implementation. It lacks clear operational guidance, consistent political support, and dedicated financing. Peacebuilding is frequently sidelined or treated as politically sensitive, and in some contexts, it is narrowly framed

or conflated with security and state-building agendas. This not only weakens its integration but also raises concerns around neutrality and legitimacy, making peace the least developed and most fragile component of the Nexus.

Local Stakeholder Engagement:

In addition, there is a need for local actor engagement in order to assess how development, peace, and humanitarian actors can provide assistance to high-risk areas, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Nigeria, Pakistan, and other locations. It is valuable for stakeholders within the HDP Nexus to work with local stakeholders and local grassroots organizations in order to further assess the local market systems, areas in need of immediate emergency assistance, assessing the current local resources, the dynamics of conflict and violence, and other important factors in order to have a thorough country review.

Local engagement, meanwhile, is more rhetoric than reality. Across multiple sources, the exclusion of community-based organizations, displaced populations, and local governments was consistently flagged. Even when local actors are consulted, their participation is often symbolic, failing to influence program design or resource allocation. The absence of real partnership not only undermines legitimacy but also limits sustainability. Interviews pointed to a fundamental disconnect between global Nexus discourse and local knowledge and priorities—a gap that is especially visible in politically complex environments or areas with limited governance structures.

Ultimately, the most significant obstacles to the Nexus approach are structural and systemic. These include institutional inertia, donor-driven planning processes, and insufficient political will to shift power toward local leadership and multi-actor collaboration. Without tackling these deeper issues—including how we define success, allocate resources, and measure impact—the Nexus risks becoming a technical buzzword rather than a genuine shift in how aid is delivered in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the comprehensive analysis done to the interviews findings and that of the literature review, the following strategic and actionable recommendations have been tailored to key actors involved in the HDP Nexus. They include both short-term and long-term suggestions, and identify potential entry points for future programming and research.

7.1. NATIONAL/LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Short-Term:

- Establish national coordination mechanisms: Create or strengthen inter-ministerial coordination bodies to harmonize humanitarian, development, and peace policies at national and sub-national levels.
- Facilitate structured dialogue with local actors: Ensure inclusive consultations with community-based organizations, local leaders, and affected populations to inform HDP programming and ensure contextual relevance.

Long-Term:

- Institutionalize Nexus-based planning: Integrate HDP principles into national development and peace frameworks, including national budget planning and crisis response strategies.
- Invest in local data systems: Build local capacities for data collection and monitoring to improve local ownership and evidence-based decision-making.

Entry Points:

- Country-specific peace and development plans (e.g., Nigeria's National Development Plan 2021–2025).
- Decentralization and governance reform programs.

7.2. DONORS

Short-Term:

- Provide multi-year, flexible funding: Prioritize adaptable funding that enables integrated, context-specific, and long-term programming across sectors.
- Incentivize collaboration: Fund programs that demonstrate coordination between humanitarian, development, and peace actors, using joint assessments and shared outcomes.

Long-Term:

- Reform financing structures: Transition from siloed aid budgets to pooled or Nexus-aligned funding mechanisms that accommodate cross-sectoral collaboration and adaptive approaches.
- Support local actor leadership: Allocate direct funding to local organizations and provide capacity-building support for meaningful engagement.

Entry Points:

- Grand Bargain 2.0 commitments.
- Nexus-aligned pooled funds (e.g., UN Multi-Partner Trust Funds).

7.3. UN AGENCIES

Short-Term:

- Improve inter-agency coordination: Strengthen UN Resident Coordinator leadership to ensure joint planning and delivery, and develop shared outcome frameworks.
- Operationalize peacebuilding: Embed peacebuilding guidance and indicators within humanitarian and development programs, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Long-Term:

- Redesign internal incentives: Shift performance metrics from sectoral outputs to collective, cross-sector outcomes. Encourage collaborative leadership and adaptive management.
- Advance integrated data systems: Develop interoperable data platforms across agencies to improve real-time decision-making and accountability.

Entry Points:

- Cooperation Frameworks and Common Country Assessments (CCA/UNSDCF).
- New Generation of Joint Programmes.

7.4. INGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Short-Term:

- Strengthen grassroots partnerships: Engage local actors as co-creators and co-implementers of Nexus programs, rather than subcontractors.

- Align organizational strategies: Conduct internal reviews to identify and dismantle siloed approaches, and promote cross-pillar teams and budgeting.

Long-Term:

- Champion decolonial approaches: Advocate for systems change that rebalances power toward local actors, including through local agenda setting and equitable governance of aid.
- Invest in localized learning systems: Promote peer-to-peer learning platforms and participatory monitoring and evaluation that prioritize local knowledge and solutions.

Entry Points:

- Localization commitments from the Grand Bargain.
- NGO consortia and national coordination mechanisms.

7.5. INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIS)

Short-Term:

- Support risk-informed, conflict-sensitive financing: Embed peace and conflict sensitivity into financial instruments for fragile states.
- Coordinate with humanitarian and development actors: Align investments with HDP priorities through joint analysis and planning.

Long-Term:

- Develop Nexus-compatible financing instruments: Design tools that blend humanitarian, development, and peace financing (e.g., contingent credit lines, results-based funding tied to peace indicators).
- Facilitate national policy reform: Assist governments in aligning fiscal and public financial management systems with integrated, inclusive development plans.

Entry Points:

- Country Partnership Frameworks (World Bank).
- Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) strategies.

a. Cross-Cutting Recommendations for All Actors

Short-Term:

- Adopt joint conflict and context analyses: Use shared risk assessments to identify priorities and guide programming.

- Develop shared indicators and MEL frameworks: Create common metrics for Nexus outcomes, particularly peace outcomes, and track progress collaboratively.

Long-Term:

- Invest in systems change: Shift from short-term project-based approaches to systems thinking, supporting institutions and ecosystems that can adapt and respond to crises over time.
- Advance research on Nexus impact: Explore the political economy of aid in Nexus implementation, the role of local actors, and new models of accountability and adaptive management.

7.6. POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING OR RESEARCH

- Comparative country case studies: Explore how different political contexts (e.g., Jordan vs. Myanmar, DRC vs. Yemen) shape Nexus implementation and identify enabling conditions.
- Metrics for peace: Develop practical indicators for peacebuilding that can be integrated into HDP frameworks.
- Decolonizing aid research: Examine the effects of donor-driven planning and propose equitable alternatives rooted in local systems and priorities.
- Localization effectiveness studies: Assess outcomes when local actors lead Nexus programming vs. when they are secondary partners.

8. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The UNDP Crisis Bureau's Nexus Campus and the SIPA Team researched articles and created a Literature Tracker that included articles from practitioners, academics, international organizations, NGOs, and universities, in relation to the Triple Nexus Approach. A suggestion for the UNDP Crisis Bureau's Nexus Academy is to expand and further research can be undertaken for literature entries in the Global South and by expanding the range of source types in the Literature Tracker. The "Knowledge Hub" can include an increased variety of development, peace, and humanitarian journals (i.e. Journal of Development, Journal of Operations Management, Journal of International Peacekeeping, and others), global multi-stakeholder conferences, and keynote speeches in relation to the HDP Nexus Approach. The Literature Tracker can further expand and include its own website that comprises articles, journals, global conferences, key-note speeches, and country-specific case studies that serve as an informational tool for development, peace, and humanitarian practitioners and academics. The literature gathered during this project is predominantly from the Global North and in English, and that we definitely need to widen the scope to include more diversity of perspectives. This diversity may also includes fields of the HDP Nexus that are called by other names, or other nexus that are not widely seen in the same discourse.

The UNDP Nexus Academy and the SIPA Team also created an Interview Tracker consisting of valuable expert research and feedback from practitioners and academics concerning the HDP Nexus Approach. A suggestion for the UNDP Nexus Academy is to continue interviews with practitioners, academics and also include members of civil society organizations, and local non-profit organizations, who are impacted by HDP Nexus Approach interventions in areas including Nigeria, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, and other countries. The Interview Tracker could also be part of the efforts of the Nexus Campus to increase knowledge acquisition and management. Another suggestion could be the creation of a website called, "HDP Nexus Interviews," which includes a global map with distributed "dots" depicting which countries the practitioners and academics (who were part of interviews), conduct their research and work to assist vulnerable communities in high-conflict areas.

The UNDP Nexus Academy and SIPA are creating a practitioner-academic roundtable event to discuss the successes and challenges of the HDP Nexus. A suggestion for the UNDP Nexus Academy is to continue "mock scenarios" where development, peace, and humanitarian actors are required to work with one another to respond to a global challenge (i.e. displacement, unemployment, food insecurity, and more). These mock scenarios that have been conducted by Multistakeholder Cohorts should provide possible steps to incorporate the HDP Nexus Approach. These mock scenarios could serve as a teaching tool in roundtable events, and/or HDP

Nexus conferences and discussions and could be the start of an annual event where this exchange could happen- and could be a win-win for both the UN and for SIPA.

9. CONCLUSION

The SIPA team utilized mixed methodology research to analyze the integration of humanitarian, development, and peace into a holistic approach to address protracted crises, fragile and conflict affected situations. Desk research was conducted during the first phase in which the three pillars were examined. Research articles from multiple databases including Columbia University's library as well as international organizations' resources were analyzed, and the findings were summarized to inform the Nexus Academy to organize its roundtable. Publications highlighted challenges for adopting HDP nexus strategies. While it is widely agreed among scholars that the nexus approach brought a framework to tackle complex, protracted crises with coherent and complementary actions, there were obstacles to the integration and implementation.

During the second phase of the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect information and perspectives from practitioners and academics from the Global North and Global South. The SIPA team was able to conduct 19 interviews, and the information received was used to conduct thematic analysis to compare the similarities in experts' evaluation of the nexus approach and also to contrast discrepancies between the Global North's assessment and the Global South's perspectives. Interviewees advised both promising returns of the nexus approach and the barriers to implementing it. The nexus approach facilitated joint funding, enabled cross-sectoral initiatives, and increased awareness of integrated responses to address the root causes of crises and reduce humanitarian needs. While these initiatives show promise, their impact remains constrained by structural and political challenges. The synthesis of desk research and interview findings allowed the SIPA team to identify gaps in integrating humanitarian-development-peace. Several critical gaps including fragmented actors, sidelined peacebuilding efforts, power imbalance, etc. hindered the HDP Nexus' viability. Recommendations to various stakeholders were presented to facilitate better coordination between actors.

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ANNEX 1: BACKGROUND ON THE HDP NEXUS

The humanitarian-development-peace Nexus, was defined by the OECD-DAC (OECD, 2019), who institutionalized it with their recommendations, as follows:

"At the center of strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts, is the aim of effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need."

The OECD-DAC recommendations also provide a detailed framework to promote the coordination, coherence, and complementarity across these sectors. By leveraging the strengths of each sector, this approach aims to address immediate needs while simultaneously reducing risks, mitigating vulnerabilities, and tackling the root causes of crises. The HDP Nexus aims to include conflict-sensitive approaches, and prevention, in order to build more resilient systems and societies.

The HDP Nexus emerged as a vital part of the 'New Way of Working' in hope that it would provide new answers to protracted and complex crises. The NWOW of working was established in a context of rising humanitarian need, as well as increasing complexity and protractedness of conflicts. For example, appeals for humanitarian assistance have surged from approximately \$9 billion in 2012 to over \$46 billion in 2024 (UNOCHA, 2023). The crises are becoming increasingly complex and difficult to bring to an end. The average humanitarian crisis lasts more than nine years, with many having lasted for decades (GVC & We World, 2020). These were the new realities in which the HDP Nexus approach was developed.

The current political development and changing aid landscape, triggered by the withdrawal of USAID as a major donor, has only increased the need for the nexus approach, as the only tried and tested "New Way of Working". The aid world is facing a fundamental restructuring and the HDP Nexus can be seen as an opportunity to present evidence-backed sustainable approaches. The nexus allows a joint approach between the three sectors, leveraging the strengths of each individual sector.

The humanitarian-development and peace nexus was established to address these protracted and increasingly complex challenges. However, the need for better coordination between humanitarian and development assistance has been recognized for decades, dating back to discussions on linking relief, rehabilitation and development in the 1980s. Additionally, the existing double nexus between humanitarian and development started to address the root causes of conflicts - specifically in protracted conflicts in Syria and Yemen (Keen, 2008). This included projects such as care & maintenance, early recovery and zonal development projects (Crisp, 2001; Macrae, 1999; Crisp, 2003). According to Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2003), this was further solidified in 1992, when the UN Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace introduced the concepts of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and

peacebuilding, emphasizing the importance of coherence among these actions to achieve lasting peace. The 1995 Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda highlighted the devastating consequences of a lack of policy coherence, underscoring that humanitarian action could not substitute for political will. Furthermore, increased emphasis on prevention, disaster reduction and ‘whole government’ approaches paved the way for the HDP Nexus. Recent frameworks on peace also developed in parallel with the NWOW that attempted to ease the addition of the peace dimension, including the ‘sustaining peace agenda’.

Building on these foundations, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit marked a pivotal moment, explicitly advocating for systematic integration of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (Brown et al., 2024). This momentum was further institutionalized in 2019 with the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, which provided a detailed framework to promote collaboration, coherence, and complementarity across these sectors (OECD, 2019). These initiatives have collectively emphasized the need to address immediate needs while tackling root causes and building resilience to prevent future crises.

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ANNEX 2: DETAILS OF DESK RESEARCH RESULTS

The UNDP and SIPA Capstone Team created an Academic Literature Review Tracker referencing articles from practitioners, academics, international organizations, NGOs, and universities in order to evaluate connections with the HDP Nexus Approach. The Academic Literature Review Tracker included articles from development, peace, and humanitarian stakeholders conducting research and field work in high-conflict areas experiencing economic inequality, displacement, political instability, climate change, and other challenges.

ANNEX 3: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

The Thematic Analysis of Interviews includes valuable key findings from nexus practitioners, researchers, academics, and other stakeholders as they provided diverse perspectives on the HDP Nexus Approach in their field of research including international economic development, disaster and risk management, peace and security, displacement, governance and political contexts, and other specific thematic topics.

ANNEX 4: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Questions

1. **State of the Nexus:** From your perspective, how has the HDP nexus evolved since you began working on it? What progress has been made?
2. **Successes:** Can you identify three aspects of the Nexus approach that are working well and should be replicated and/or scaled up? and three that still need improvement?
3. **Challenges and Barriers:** Can you identify three aspects of the Nexus approach that are NOT working well? Which of these are relatively easy to overcome, and which remain persistent obstacles?
4. **Research Needs:** From your perspective, what are the most pressing research gaps in the HDP nexus field? What questions should academics and practitioners prioritize?
5. **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Who are key actors missing (or under-participating) from HDP discussions? Who should be engaged more actively in Nexus-related efforts?
6. **Influential Literature:** What key reports, articles, or publications have significantly shaped your thinking on the Nexus approach?
7. **Additional Interviewees:** Are there other experts, practitioners, or academics you recommend we interview for this research?
8. **Case Studies:** Can you identify a case study that exemplifies a successful (or unsuccessful) application of the Nexus approach? These can be examples by region, by stakeholder, by sector/cluster (i.e. H, D or P or combination thereof)

Specific Thematic Questions (as follow up depending on interlocutor)

9. **Peace Dimension:** How do you see the peace component fitting within the HDP nexus? What are the biggest challenges in integrating peacebuilding with humanitarian and development efforts?
10. **Governance & Political Contexts:** In situations where the government is unreliable or lacks legitimacy, how can Nexus actors effectively implement and sustain their work?
11. **Displacement & Durable Solutions:** What do you see as the most effective and sustainable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) within the Nexus framework?
12. **Climate Change:** How is climate change impacting Nexus operations? What strategies should be prioritized to enhance resilience and mitigate climate-related risks? (Busra)
13. **Policy & Donor Influence:** How have recent policy shifts, such as U.S. foreign aid strategies (e.g., USAID under different administrations), affected the implementation of the Nexus approach?

14. **International Human Rights Law:** How does International Law, global norms and rules impact the HDP Nexus Approach? Can accountability of global human rights be attained?