NRC NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

REPORT

THE NEXUS IN PRACTICE:
THE LONG JOURNEY TO IMPACT

October 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

ABC	Area-based coordination
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	French Development Agency
ANSF	Afghan National Security Force
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
AWG	Access Working Group
BAI	Bureaucratic and administrative impediments
BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CAR	Central African Republic
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHINGO	Cameroon INGO Forum
CLA	Cluster lead agency
COMSEC	Secretariat of Council of Ministers
CSO	Civil society organisations
DCO	Development Coordination Office
DG ECHO	European Commission's Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DI	Development Initiatives
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DS	Durable Solutions
DSRSG/RC/HC	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator

DSTF	Durable Solutions Task Force
DSTWG	Durable Solutions Technical Working Group
DSWG	Durable Solutions Working Group
ECHO	European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GCM	General Coordination Meetings
GDP	Gross domestic product
GFFO	German Federal Foreign Office
GNI	Gross national income
GoI	Government of Iraq
GREDO	The Gargaar Relief and Development Organization
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HDP	Humanitarian, development and peace
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIP	Humanitarian implementation plan
HLP	Housing, land and property
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HO	Humanitarian Overview
HRP	Humanitarian response plan
HTO	Humanitarian transition overview
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee

ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	internally displaced people
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IFI	International financial institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IS-KP	Khorasan province branch of the Islamic State group
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Service
KII	Key informant interviews
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
LIF	Libya INGO Forum
MSF	Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières)
MSNA	Multi-sector needs assessment
NCCI	NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq
NFI	Non-food items
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NNGO	National non-governmental organisation
NNTF	National Nexus Task Force
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSAG	Non-state armed group
NWOW	New Way of Working
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Development - Development Assistance Committee

OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
PHA	Principled Humanitarian Action
PPRD	Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	UN Office of the Resident Coordinator
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
RNTF	Regional Nexus Task Force
RPBA	Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment
RWG	Returns Working Group
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SHACDO	The Shabelle Community Development Organization
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SODMA	Somali Disaster Management Agency
TAG	Transition Advisory Group
TEF	Transitional Engagement Framework
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, sanitation and hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

1 PURPOSE

NRC's water distribution site in Hanano, Somalia, which is part of the larger emergency drought response. ©Abdulkadir Mohamed/NRC

With funding from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), this research aims to examine the operationalization of the Nexus approach, as defined in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) recommendations on the Nexus (OECD, 2019), in five case studies, namely Libya, Iraq, Cameroon, Somalia and Afghanistan. The aim is to examine if and how the Nexus approach has been operationalized in these fragile and conflict-affected contexts, as well as the approach's implications for principled humanitarian action (PHA).[1] While the global policy discussions on the Nexus have remained somewhat theoretical, this research aims to bring practical field examples, good practice and lessons learned to the table to inform evidence-based decision-making on the advancement of the Nexus.

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[1] Humanitarian action in adherence to the four Humanitarian Principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence. https://rb.gy/5vipd

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 FINDINGS FROM THE EXAMINED CASE STUDIES

Nexus: different practices

As already found in previous research,[2] while the Nexus is a clear concept in theory, in practice, there are diverging views on how to operationalise the approach. In examining five diverse case studies, several different approaches to the Nexus emerged, including the Nexus as the development of country-specific tools and coordination mechanisms; the Nexus as a transition process away from the humanitarian response and coordination system; and the Nexus as a policy request for complementary development financing to address the structural causes that drive needs in protracted crisis contexts. These diverse approaches underscore the need for global policy guidance on how the Nexus should be operationalised at country level.

Complementary development investments in fragile and protracted crisis countries

Humanitarian interventions are widely credited with saving thousands of lives in the extremely fragile and protracted crisis contexts of Somalia and Afghanistan. This research, however, highlighted the negative consequences of overreliance on short-term humanitarian interventions that are often provided repeatedly to the same populations without "graduating" these to longer-term outcomes. Interviewees for this report consistently emphasised that humanitarian assistance alone cannot respond to all the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of affected populations in complex, protracted crisis contexts. In line with global policy commitments, there is a need for greater political will to invest complementary development funds that address the structural causes driving needs. With the growing global humanitarian funding gap,

interviewees for this report also raised concerns about the cost-efficiency of continuing to spend millions of dollars annually on humanitarian responses in Afghanistan and Somalia that do not fundamentally improve the status quo, prevent future crises or build the resilience of affected communities.

The Nexus and localization: bottom-up or top-down?

The five case studies demonstrated diverging approaches to localisation and local leadership. The importance of linking localisation commitments and the advancement of Nexus approaches was underscored.

In the transitional case of Libya, national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) were largely excluded from the new post-transition Nexus coordination structure. This was not the case in Iraq, where NNGOs and government authorities were represented in area-based coordination groups (ABCs) and NNGOs were granted seats in some working groups under the durable solutions structure. Despite being heavily affected by the implications of the transition away from a humanitarian response and coordination structure, NNGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in both Libya and Iraq reported a lack of meaningful inclusion and consultation in the transition process, which was described as "top-down and UN driven".

In the protracted crisis contexts of Somalia and Afghanistan, the overreliance on short-term humanitarian emergency interventions was found to create parallel, internationally driven systems that risk eroding local capacities and leadership. Despite challenges of corruption and limited government capacity in these contexts, and donor governments not wanting to legitimize the Afghan authorities, operational actors in both

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2 For example, the 2019 report 'Financing the Nexus' published by FAO, NRC and UNDP (2019): https://rb.gy/u6gf9 and Development Initiatives series 'Supporting longer term development in crises at the nexus', with lessons learned from 1) Bangladesh https://rb.gy/pbic8; 2) Somalia https://rb.gy/spqz5 and 3) Cameroon https://rb.gy/excxt

contexts consistently emphasised that the only sustainable way forward for the response is strengthening local capacities and resilience. The solutions to Afghanistan and Somalia's challenges need to be locally anchored, which supports longer-term development investments in complementarity to principled humanitarian interventions.

In contrast to the other case study in this research, Cameroon applied a bottom-up, localised approach to operationalising the Nexus. National actors, authorities and NGOs were represented in the regional and national Nexus task forces that steer the Nexus process. Rather than a country-wide Nexus transition, a localised approach was adopted to facilitate Nexus approaches in 12 selected convergence areas in the Eastern façade and Extreme North part of Cameroon. This community-level focus and its links to existing municipal development plans were seen by interviewees as positive in fostering local leadership and ownership. It should be noted, however, that activities have not been implemented under the Nexus process in Cameroon and, for that reason, it is not possible to speak about the impact of this bottom-up approach to the Nexus.

Coordination, tools and systems

The case studies highlighted the question of whether Nexus approaches require the development of new tools, structures and coordination mechanisms, or whether the Nexus can be achieved by adapting current systems and coordination architecture.

Despite the appreciation for the localised and area-based approach adopted in Cameroon, the process appeared to have come to a standstill by November 2022. This was found to have been caused by several factors, including the departure of a humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) coordinator appointed by the UN Office of the Resident Coordinator (RCO) and the lack of funding for key positions and processes. Another key factor was the decision to develop a number of tools and coordination structures specifically to support the localised operationalising of the Nexus. This was cumbersome, and despite the considerable resources and the time invested by UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the start of the Nexus process in 2019, the Nexus approach had not delivered any

tangible results to affected communities by June 2023. This led some interviewees to suggest that the Nexus approach in Cameroon should rather have been based on existing tools and systems.

At the same time, this research uncovered an emerging "grey zone" between humanitarian and development interventions. Rather than repeated, short-term emergency assistance, the protracted nature of needs and displacement in contexts like Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq called for more sustainable interventions. This raises questions about which actors are best placed to implement such "grey zone" interventions, as well as how those are best financed and coordinated. The humanitarian cluster system has been relatively effective in coordinating life-saving assistance and protection to people in need during and in the immediate aftermath of conflicts and disasters. The clusters may not, however, be the appropriate structure to coordinate more sustainable interventions in protracted crisis settings and support the strengthening of local capacities to prepare for an eventual transition towards development and recovery responses.

While the development of country-specific tools and coordination may be beyond the capacity of country teams, the current siloed coordination structures between humanitarian and development actors are not fit for purpose and do not incentivise coordinated approaches across HDP actors. This finding speaks to the ongoing system reform agenda, which looks at how to adapt existing systems to better accommodate the "grey-zone" that is missing from the current coordination architecture.

The role of humanitarian actors in the "grey-zone"

Rather than handing over activities or working in partnership with development actors, humanitarian and dual-mandate actors were found to increasingly expand activities into the "grey zone" between the humanitarian and development pillars in protracted crisis contexts. This was justified by the obligation to respond to emergency needs and work towards longer-term outcomes, such as self-reliance and durable solutions in protracted crisis contexts, as well as the limited presence of development actors. This expansion of roles was also exacerbated by the current donor-driven, project-based funding system that leads to negative competition between

implementing actors and fails to foster the necessary collaboration, coordination and synergies across HDP pillars. Humanitarian INGOs were criticised by some donors for using the Nexus approach as a "fundraising tool", and not providing thought-leadership and challenge the status quo to ensure the best possible response for affected populations.

Nexus transitions or humanitarian exits?

Despite clear contextual differences, comparative findings from Libya and Iraq demonstrate similarities in decision-making and implementation processes of the countries' transitions away from a humanitarian response and coordination structure. These lessons can be applied to inform future transitions in other contexts.

The transitions in both contexts were justified by a decline in humanitarian needs and humanitarian funding, as well as the countries' middle-income status. These factors were used to argue that the countries' governments should be able to respond to the needs of their people. In practice, however, government authorities were found to lack the willingness and capacity to provide services and protect all population groups, with concerns that vulnerable groups would be excluded from a system-level, government-led response.

Although there had been prior discussions of a transition away from a humanitarian response in both Iraq and Libya, the transition processes were described as "rushed". There were only four to five months between the endorsement of the decision by the humanitarian country team (HCT) and the deactivation of all clusters by the end of 2022. This short timeframe was found to be inadequate to strengthen technical capacities among government and development counterparts to ensure a responsible handover of coordination responsibilities. Along with the rapid decline in humanitarian funding, the rushed timeline led many interviewees to question whether the process could be defined as a transition, or whether it was rather an abrupt exit of the humanitarian response justified under the "HDP Nexus" or "solutions" agenda.

In both contexts, NGOs also consistently reported a limited space for meaningful influence in the decision-making and implementation processes around the transition, which were found to be driven unilaterally by the UN leadership with support from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Given NGOs' significant operational footprint, this lack of influence was described as a missed opportunity for ensuring that the realities of affected communities were represented in the decision-making process. The lack of a clear strategy or blueprint prior to embarking on the transition further added to the confusion and lack of transparency around the process.

Protection requires special attention

This research found that a dedicated and resourced protection working group was needed in the transitional cases of Iraq and Libya to sustain capacities for protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy following the deactivation of the protection cluster or sector. A separate protection working group is particularly critical in contexts where the government has been a perpetrator of protection violations or where government policies have contributed to the protection risks facing certain groups.

To avoid the centrality of protection becoming a tick-the-box exercise without real accountability mechanisms, the Iraq and Libya cases demonstrate that transition processes need sufficient time and dedicated technical capacities. It is crucial to ensuring that development and government actors are able to design and implement protection-sensitive interventions that prevent the most at-risk population groups from falling between the cracks when there is a transition out of a humanitarian response.

Donors and financing: from policy commitments to practice

Across the examined contexts, donors were found to have taken few steps to accommodate and operationalize the commitments made under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus. Although many donors have made clear policy commitments, these were not found to have resulted in a change of practice at scale.

There was an absence of systemic coordination between development and humanitarian donors in all examined contexts. At times, even development and humanitarian programmes funded by the same donor government appeared uncoordinated and opportunities for coherence

and layered interventions were missed. Donors lacked the flexibility to adapt pre-set priorities to accommodate joined-up planning and actions across the HDP pillars.

Despite policy commitments for development actors to stay-and-deliver, donors were found in practice to lack the political will and risk appetite to invest sufficient development funds in extremely fragile and conflict-affected contexts like Somalia and Afghanistan. In these cases, humanitarian funding was overstretched in an attempt to respond to all needs and provide basic services, without sufficient complementary development investments that address root causes, prevent future crises and promote sustainable recovery and solutions. When development and humanitarian funds were invested in the same country, like in Iraq, Cameroon and Somalia, they tended to target separate geographic areas or different population groups, which did not allow for needed laying of interventions that would support longer-term outcomes and durable solutions for affected populations.

Lastly, it was found that donors have taken few steps to live up to their commitments under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus and make long-term, flexible and predictable financing available in fragile contexts.[3] Many NGOs and UN agencies were said to continue relying on unpredictable and short-term financing, and, in the case of NGOs, highly earmarked, project-based, humanitarian grants.

Definition of the peace pillar

The peace component has been the most contested and least defined of the three HDP Nexus pillars across contexts and has led humanitarian actors to fear potential risks to the PHA and humanitarian space. In the case of Cameroon, a document was drafted in the early stage of the Nexus process, clearly defining the peace pillar as conflict sensitivity and social cohesion, while excluding any responses linked to militarised or security interventions. This clear definition of the peace pillar was found to contribute to high levels of buy-in among humanitarian actors and should be considered as a potentially good practice for other contexts in which the Nexus is being operationalised.

2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Humanitarian and development donors, and other financing actors

1. **Use financing to enable Nexus approaches:** As has been documented in this and previous research (e.g. FAO, NRC and UNDP (2019) "Financing the Nexus"), financing remains a key barrier to advancing the Nexus. If donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) want to put the global policy asks on advancing the Nexus into practice, they should use financing tools to incentivize and scale collaboration and coherence across the HDP pillars. This can happen with existing budgets and through existing funding mechanisms, like pooled funds, multi-donor programs and consortiums. It can also happen through new mechanisms that leverage new sources of financing. Creating more tightly earmarked pots of "Nexus funding", however, is unlikely to advance the approach effectively.

2. **Increase complementary development investments:** Donors and IFIs should increasingly invest development funding in areas that are directly affected by fragility and conflict, with efforts to intentionally layer these interventions with those of humanitarian actors to promote more sustainable solutions and recovery and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance.

   To do so, development donors should consider the following sub-recommendations:

   2.A Increase risk tolerance and ensure shared targeting: Development donors and IFIs should increase their risk tolerance for development investments and ensure that they target the same geographical regions and population groups as humanitarian interventions. The newly released risk sharing framework could represent an opportunity for introducing improvements (ICRC et. al., 2023).

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[3] This is also in line with the findings from the Grand Bargain Review from 2022, which recommended for the signatories to increase the volume and proportion of flexible funding (Metcalfe-Hough et. al, 2023).

2.B Consider alternative partners: Development donors and IFIs should consider increasingly partnering with UN agencies and NGOs when the government is not deemed an appropriate or capacitated partner, instead of freezing development funds or investing in safer regions of the country. This approach may compromise the sustainability of the intervention, as the responsibility for project activities might not be handed over to government authorities. Alternative partners, however, are often the only viable options for operating in extremely fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

2.C Ensure a people-centred approach: To ensure that no one is left behind in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, development actors may need to move away from a state-building approach, where collaboration with a stable government is a prerequisite for investment, to a people-centred methodology that targets the world's most vulnerable.

3. **Improve donor coordination across the HDP pillars:** It is recommended that systemic coordination is ensured between development and humanitarian donors at country level, which should include IFIs wherever possible. This should be accompanied by donor financing modalities that allow for greater flexibility to adapt priorities and ensure coherence between development and humanitarian interventions.

4. **Increase quality funding:** Donors should live up to their commitments under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus and make long-term, flexible, and predictable funding available in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Development donors should consider incorporating crisis modifiers into grants. Flexible funding is also key for real-time responsiveness to needs related to climate-specific vulnerabilities and to allow for the rapid-responses necessary to contend with the uncertainty of the climate crisis.

5. **Make climate financing available:** Some fragile and conflict-affected contexts are also among those most severely affected by the consequences of climate change. For that reason, donor governments should ensure that these contexts have access to climate financing that allows interventions to adjust to the new realities of the climate crisis. To the extend possible, climate actors should be engaged in coordination of responses in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

INGOs and UN agencies

6. **Stick to comparative advantage:** While acknowledging that in certain hard-to-reach contexts, humanitarian actors are the only operational actors, INGOs and UN agencies should avoid using the Nexus to expand their activities mandates. In line with the OECD DAC recommendations, operational actors should stick to their comparative advantage and ask if others would be better placed to respond to specific needs. This may involve a considerable shift in mindset for implementing actors, and relies on development actors stepping up their engagement in fragile contexts. The Nexus approach calls for increased collaboration, coordination and partnership between HDP actors with complementary skills. Consortiums were highlighted as a good practice to foster collaboration and reduce competition between INGOs and UN agencies.

7. **Provide thought-leadership:** NGOs and UN agencies should challenge the status quo and provide thought-leadership to ensure that affected people have access to the highest quality interventions, are enabled to achieve self-reliance, and supported to find durable solutions. There is a need to align global policy asks with actions on the ground, which calls for the courage to "do what we say", even if that means turning down funds or challenging donor positions.

UN leadership

8. Ensure donor buy-in: Financing was found to be a key barrier to operationalization of the Nexus approach. For that reason, it is recommended that the UN leadership cultivate donor buy-in and commitments to fund activities across HDP pillars before embarking on the implementation of Nexus approaches or transitions.

9. Ensure clarity on how to operationalize the Nexus: While acknowledging that some guidance is under development,[4] this research underlined the need for clarity and agreement on how the Nexus is to be operationalized at a country level. This includes agreement on what the approach encompasses, such as whether the Nexus refers to tools, coordination structures and/or processes, as well as a clear understanding of leadership, roles and responsibilities. The need for greater clarity on how to operationalise the Nexus was already a recommendation in the FAO, NRC and UNDP Financing the Nexus report from 2019, which demonstrates a lack of follow up and action.

10. Clearly define the peace pillar: The peace pillar remains the least defined pillar of the HDP Nexus approach and it has been interpreted to mean anything from conflict sensitivity to stabilization and politically negotiated peace processes. As was the case in Cameroon, it is recommended that the peace pillar be clearly defined within the Nexus approach in each specific country context to ensure alignment with humanitarian actors' commitments to neutrality and impartiality. The peace pillar should also be defined at a global policy level in a way that ensures humanitarian actors' ability to adhere to PHA.

11. Address the "grey zone" in ongoing system reforms: The current coordination system, siloed between humanitarian and development actors, is not fit for purpose for the emerging grey-zone in protracted crisis contexts. This should be addressed in the ongoing system reform agenda, either by adapting existing systems or creating new, more appropriate coordination structures, systems and tools. Consortiums and area-based approaches emerged as good practice, and innovative, flexible funding modalities should be tested and brought to scale.

12. Prepare cluster deactivation earlier: In keeping with the reference to good practice in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster Coordination Reference Module (IASC, 2015), HCTs and cluster leads should prepare for an eventual cluster deactivation from the onset of a humanitarian response in order to strengthen national preparedness and response capacities for an eventual handover of responsibilities. Where a deactivation is on the horizon, an adequate timeframe should be established to allow for an effective and responsible transition of responsibilities. To ensure that humanitarian space is preserved, ongoing system reform processes should consider how humanitarian coordination can better link with relevant government structures to avoid creating parallel, internationally driven systems.

13. Improve accountability mechanisms: There should be stronger accountability mechanisms for the performance of UN leadership at the country level. Reviews and evaluations have stressed the need for improved leadership and accountability. The absence of a global performance mechanism, however, has weakened the overall impact of these findings. The creation of an accountability process or tool could help in meeting some of the challenges identified in this research.

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[4] For example, the ISAC Task Force 4 - Guidance note for Global Clusters (2023); INCAF - Coordination across the Nexus in fragile and conflict affected contexts (2021); OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus (2019); IASC Task Force 4 – mapping of good practice (to be published).

UN Country leadership and donors in transitional contexts

14. Ensure a blueprint in advance of transitions: A clear strategy should be in place before embarking on a transition process from a humanitarian to a Nexus and/or development response and coordination structure. A blueprint for the transition makes the process more transparent and clear and facilitates better feedback opportunities on the proposed process from implicated stakeholders. The timeframe for the transition presented in the blueprint must allow for a responsible transition of coordination responsibilities in order to limit any loss of knowledge and expertise.

15. Phase cluster deactivation: Not all clusters are equally prepared or have equally capacitated counterparts to facilitate a transition of coordination responsibilities. In line with the IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module (IASC, 2015), it is recommended that cluster deactivations be phased in transitional contexts against pre-established criteria on improvements in the humanitarian situation and national preparedness to take over responsibilities.

16. Sustain and resource the UN leadership: To ensure consistency in transitions, UN leadership teams and OCHA should be sustained and resourced throughout the process. In cases where OCHA is supporting the transition, it should wait to scale down its response until the transition has been implemented and new coordination structures are in place.

17. Increase inclusivity: While the RC/HC is best placed to lead transition processes, meaningful consultation with NGOs in the design and implementation of the transition process, is strongly recommended. As operational actors with extensive contextual understanding, NGOs provide added value to UN decision-making processes, and yet are too-often excluded from these strategic discussions. It is also strongly recommended that NNGOs and CSOs be included in transitions processes to ensure sustainability and local leadership of new coordination structures.

18. Pay particular attention to protection: Protection should be given particular attention in transitions to government-led development and/or Nexus coordination structures, and an independent mechanism to monitor protection concerns and conduct protection advocacy should be sustained and resourced. This is particularly critical in contexts where the government has been a perpetrator of protection violations or where government policies have contributed to the protection risks facing certain groups. Development and government actors must have measures in place to promote protection sensitive programming to prevent the centrality of protection from becoming a tick-the-box exercise without real accountability mechanisms.

19. Ensure a strong NGO forum: A strong NGO forum was found to be essential in influencing transition processes through advocacy and strategic engagement with the UN country leadership. NGO forums should be resourced throughout transition processes to allow the NGO community to speak with one voice and meaningfully impact design and implementation around transitions.

20. Sustain funding across the HDP pillars: In keeping with the IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module, cluster deactivation should not mean an end to humanitarian funding for a context in which humanitarian actors should remain in capacity to respond to residual needs. For that reason, donors should sustain funding across all three HDP pillars throughout the transition process.

3 INTRODUCTION TO THE HDP NEXUS APPROACH

More and more crises have become protracted, with affected populations continuing to be dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive and sustain themselves. Given this reality, the cost-effectiveness and appropriateness of repeated, short-term humanitarian interventions has come into question. The emerging climate crisis and increasingly protracted situations of displacement further exacerbates needs and challenge humanitarian actors' ability to sustain housing, health, education and livelihood interventions year after year in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This has led to an acknowledgement that more sustainable solutions are needed, with a greater focus on prevention and addressing the structural, root causes of conflict and crisis.

The Humanitarian, Development, Peace (HDP) Nexus (referred to in this document as simply "Nexus") is not a new approach, but rather builds on previous concepts such as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), early recovery and the New Ways of Working (NWOW) agenda. The Nexus gained traction at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), where the UN secretary-general outlined the ambition of working *towards achieving collective outcomes that reduce need, risk and vulnerability, over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors.* In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation, and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) adopted the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.[5] This committed its members to 11 principles for strengthening collaboration and complementarity across humanitarian, development and peace actions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and improving coordination, programming and financing to reduce risks, vulnerabilities and needs.

The OECD DAC recommendations have been widely recognized as a key reference for defining the Nexus approach. The core principle of the Nexus is to always prioritize prevention and invest in development wherever possible, while ensuring that immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met. With humanitarian spending increasing annually for the past decades and the global funding gap expanding, the OECD DAC recommendations introduce an increased focus on prevention with the overall aim to decrease the risks of conflict, disaster and crises that create humanitarian needs. The Nexus approach calls for increased coherence and synergies among HDP actors so as to capitalize on each actors' comparative advantages. It does not imply, however, that humanitarian, development and peace actors should merge their activities, integrate roles or shift resources between the different pillars. Rather, the approach suggests that interventions should be sequenced and layered in line with the respective mandates of each of the actors. In this way, it moves away from the linear understanding in which development and recovery follow a humanitarian response.

To facilitate the operationalisation of the Nexus, the OECD DAC recommendations include a commitment to increase flexibility and risk tolerance in longer-term development and peace investments and make predictable, multi-year financing available in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The approach also encourages joined-up analysis, planning and action. It calls for HDP actors to agree on a set of collective outcomes for a context, aiming to decrease needs and vulnerabilities over a three to five year period. In practice, however, there appears to be less consensus about how the Nexus approach should be operationalised, and it has come to refer to a wide range of processes, coordination structures, programmes and tools.

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5   OECD-DAC members include all the traditional Western donors: the EU, EU/EFTA members states, UK, Japan, Korea, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. https://bit.ly/3RK3jNq

4 METHODOLOGY

The research for this report was conducted between January and June 2023. It examines the operationalisation of Nexus approaches in five case studies, namely Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Cameroon. These case studies were selected to provide a diverse representation of conflict-affected and fragile contexts, at different stages, and with different approaches to operationalizing the Nexus. The findings are based on reviews of key documents and reports relevant to each of the case studies, followed by a one-week research mission to each context to conduct key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant stakeholders, including UN agencies, UN country leadership teams, INGOs, NNGOs, donors and NRC staff. To allow for a free discussion, the individual KII responses have been anonymised, only broadly referring to the overall stakeholder category.

Libya

was selected as a case study context to examine the country's transition from a humanitarian to a development-led Nexus response and coordination structure, with all humanitarian clusters deactivated by 31 December 2022. Interviews for the Libya case study were conducted in Tunis in January 2023.

Somalia

was selected to examine the country's decade long reliance on humanitarian assistance. Interviews were conducted in Mogadishu in February 2023.

Iraq

was selected to examine the country's transition from a humanitarian to a development and recovery response and coordination structure, with all humanitarian clusters deactivated by 31 December 2022. Interviews were conducted in Erbil in March 2023.

Afghanistan

was selected to examine the consequences of the withdrawal of most development funding since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Interviews and research for this case study were conducted remotely in December 2022, May and June 2023 because of security constraints.

Cameroon

was selected to examine a localized and area-based approach to implementation of the Nexus approach. Interviews were conducted in Yaounde in April 2023.

5 KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

HDP Nexus

Refers to the linkages between humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actions, also referred to as the three HDP pillars.

Nexus approach

As defined in the OECD DAC recommendations, the Nexus approach refers to strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity across HDP actors. The approach also aims to capitalize on the comparative advantage of each pillar in order to reduce the number of unmet needs by addressing the root causes of conflict and vulnerability.

Fragile context

This report relies on the OECD definition, which defines fragility as the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate risks (OECD, 2022a).

Conflict-affected context

Refers to contexts that are affected by armed conflict and/or widespread violence.

Protracted crisis

Refers to contexts with at least five consecutive years of UN-coordinated humanitarian responses.

Transition

In this report, "transition" refers to the process of moving away from a humanitarian response and cluster coordination system towards a Nexus and/or development and recovery response and coordination system.

Principled humanitarian action

Refers to humanitarian action carried out in adherence to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

Humanitarian space

Refers to the level of freedom and space for humanitarian actors to conduct operations in adherence with the humanitarian principles.

Collective outcomes

Refers to a set of concrete and measurable results that humanitarian, development and peace actors want to achieve jointly in a country to reduce people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities.

UN leadership

In this report, the UN leadership refers to the leadership of the collective humanitarian and development response, namely the HC/RC, HCT, and UNCT.

IRAQ

A worker on a tomato farm in Al-Zubeer, Basra. ©Ahmed Kaka/NRC

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Iraq has been marked by political instability and waves of displacement since the 1980s, culminating in the US-led invasion of the country between 2003 and 2011. The occupation, which ended in 2011, led to the internal displacement of more than 3.3 million people and caused a prolonged period of instability, sectarian violence, political tension and armed conflict. From 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) controlled vast parts of central and northern Iraq and was responsible for widespread violations, humanitarian needs and the displacement of 5,836,350 people until its defeat in 2017 (IOM, 2021; OCHA, 2023f; Impact International, 2022).

Following a request for international support from Iraqi government to assist and protect people affected by the conflict with ISIL, an international humanitarian response was launched in 2014, with the humanitarian cluster system activated to coordinate the response. Approximately $8 billion was spent in Iraq from January 2014 to December 2022 for emergency assistance that reached seven million people across the country. Since, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection has declined from 11 million at the peak of the conflict in 2017 to 2.5 million in 2022. Over the same period, 4.94 million, or 80 per cent of the 6.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs), returned to their place of origin (OCHA, 2023f).

Population movements over time

1.2M IDPs   **5.0M** RETURNEES

Internaly displaced people (millions) ——
Returnees (millions) ——

IDPs: 0.4 (2014), 2.3, 3.3, 3.0, 2.5 (2018), 1.7, 1.4, 1.2, 1.2 (2022)
Returnees: 0.2 (2015), 0.5, 1.5, 3.4, 4.2, 4.7, 4.9, 5.0 (2022)
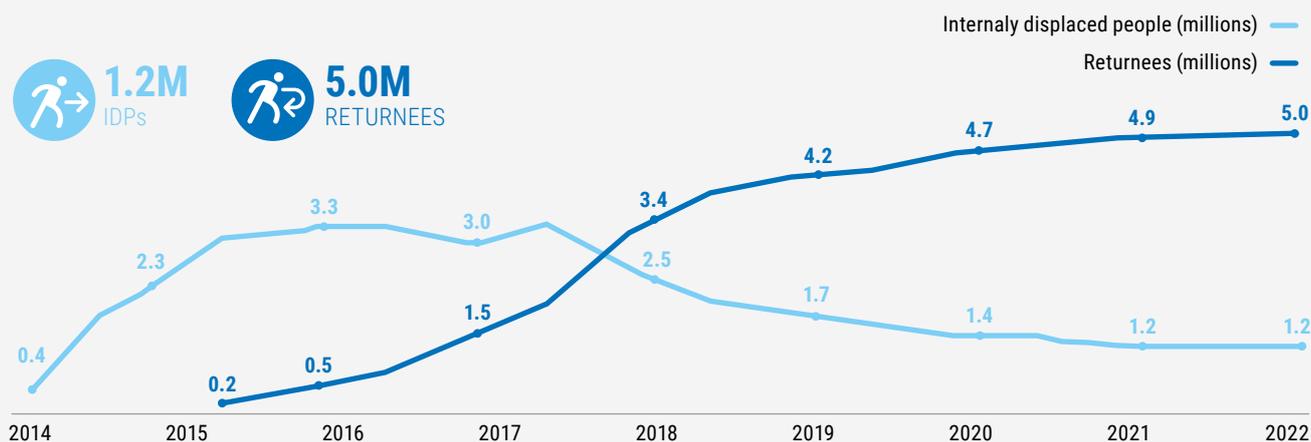
Despite these improvements in the humanitarian situation, 1.2 million people were still displaced at the end of 2022. There are 1.7 million returnees (equal to one-third of all returnees from the ISIL conflict) along with 180,000 IDPs living in formal camps and 550,000 IDPs living outside formal camps in need of humanitarian assistance (Ibid).[6] In interviews for this research, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies stressed that a significant portion of the remaining IDPs are considered to be "difficult cases" that cannot readily return to their place of origin. These include families with perceived affiliations with ISIL, people from marginalised communities, and families whose communities, houses and livelihoods have been destroyed or who are from areas still considered unsafe because of violence, social tensions or explosive remnants of war.[7] A 2021 multi-sector needs assessment showed that only one per cent of remaining IDP households intend to return, which makes large-scale voluntary return of the remaining IDPs unlikely in the near term (REACH, 2022b).
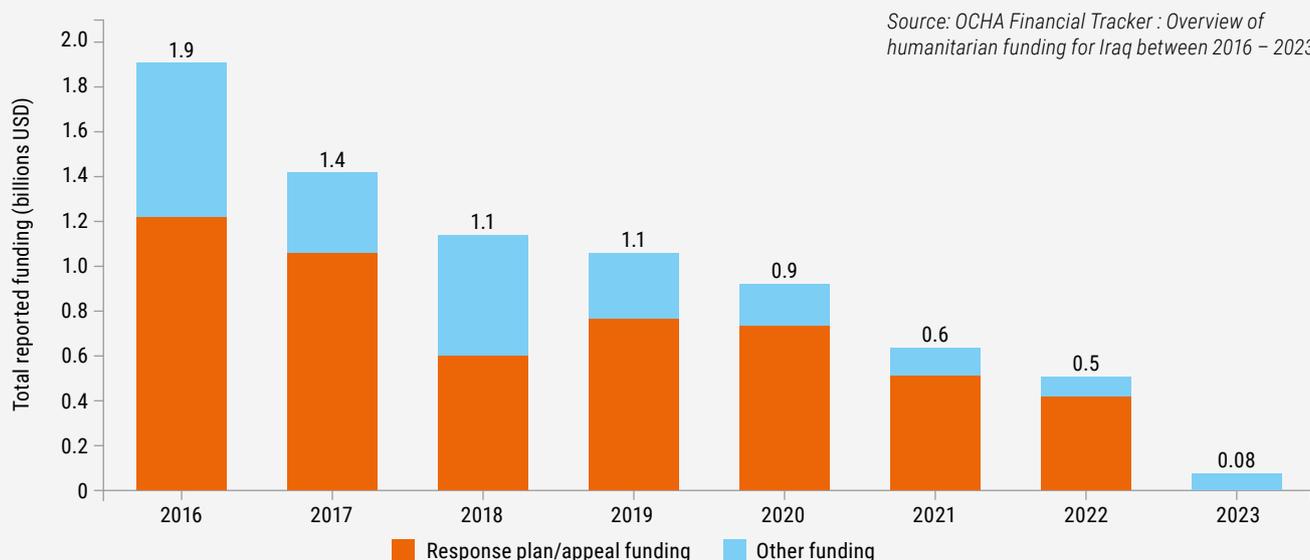
Total reported funding (billions USD): 1.9 (2016), 1.4 (2017), 1.1 (2018), 1.1 (2019), 0.9 (2020), 0.6 (2021), 0.5 (2022), 0.08 (2023)

■ Response plan/appeal funding   ■ Other funding

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[6]   As per the Government of Iraq's policy on camp closures, 25 of 26 remaining IDP camps are located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and one IDP camp in Ninewa Governorate, Federal Iraq. Many formal IDP camps have been closed, but informal settlements remain in Federal Iraq.

[7]   To date, there are still at least 240 areas that are considered by IOM as "areas of no return".

The decline in humanitarian needs, and competing crises elsewhere, has led donors to decrease humanitarian funding allocations for Iraq. A total of $1.9 billion in humanitarian funding was allocated to Iraq in 2016. This number had fallen to $500 million by 2022. At the same time, official development assistance (ODA) from donors from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has also decreased from $2.91 billion in 2017 to $1.81 billion in 2021, when the latest ODA data was available.

Political instability

National elections were held in Iraq in October 2021. The election results were contested, resulting in significant political tension and more than a year of political deadlock. An agreement was finally reached on the election of Iraq's new cabinet and prime minister in late October 2022. Despite the existence of a caretaker government during the post-election period, this government was unable to pass significant legislation, including the federal budget. This led to a paralysation of government institutions and of the ability of governorates to provide services across Iraq (Aljazeera, 2022).

The Federal Government of Iraq (FGI) is based in Baghdad, while the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) governs the Kurdish governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk in Northern Iraq (referred to as Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)). The majority of IDPs, along with 25 out of the 26 official IDP camps in the country, are hosted in the KRI. The existence of two separate government entities, with separate line ministries and administrations, was reported to have complicated the transition from a humanitarian response plan to a development-focused, government-led approach under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ((UNSDCF), hereafter referred to as the "transition"). This is discussed in more detail in the findings section below.

2. PRE-TRANSITION INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE AND AID ARCHITECTURE

Since the start of the ISIL offensive in 2014, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors have launched an international humanitarian response to address the overwhelming needs in Iraq. That same year, the humanitarian cluster system of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was activated to coordinate the humanitarian interventions. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) also created General Coordination Meetings (GCM) to facilitate coordination of humanitarian responses in conflict-affected governorates.

A Returns Working Group (RTW) was established to address the specific challenges related to returns and the reintegration of IDPs in 2016. A Durable Solutions Coordination Mechanism (hereafter, DS structure) was formally established in 2020 under the leadership of the UN deputy special representative of the secretary general/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC). The structure was designed to bring together UN agencies, NGOs and other actors specializing in humanitarian, development, stabilization and peace-building programming and support the government of Iraq (GoI) in implementing its National Plan for Returning IDPs Back to their Liberated Areas (Republic of Iraq, 2020), which had been developed under the leadership of the prime minister's office and was published in 2020.

Durable Solutions Structure in Iraq before the transition

RC /HC

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Inter-agency Durable Solution Strategic & Operational Framework (DSSOF)

National Plan for the Return of IDPs

Durable Solution Task Force (DSTF)

Chairs: IOM - UNDP
Members: UN, NGOs

Goverment Supreme Committee for Relief and Support IDPs

Ministry of Planning (MoP)

Ministry of Migration and Displaced (MoMD)

Donors

Supreme Committee for Relief and Support IDPs
Supervise the National Plan, chaired by MoMD, 17 members
(ministries, REEFATO, COMSEC, NOC/PM Offie, JOC).

Returns Working Group (RWG)

Chairs: IOM - NGO - TBC
Members: UN, NGOs, Donors

Durable Solution Technical Working Group (DSTWG)

Chairs: IOM - UNDP - NRC
Members: UN, NGOs, Clusters, WGs

DSTWG Sub Groups

Housing Land and Property, Faciliated Voluntary Movements, Social Cohesion (TCC), Monitoring and Assessments

Chairs: UN & NGOs
Members: UN & NGOs

Durable Solution area-based coordination groups (DS ABCs)

Chairs: UN - NGOs (Hum - Dev)
Members: UN, NGO

Governor's office / Local Coordination

Sectoral Technical Departments

Governorate Coordination - Coordination established at Gevernor's Office and local goverment coordination level.

As presented in the graphic above, the DS structure included the following main taskforces and working groups:

➡ **Durable Solutions Task Force (DSTF):** Operating under the leadership of the DSRSG/HC/RC, the DSTF is the highest-level of coordination under the DS structure and the main platform where the international community can ensure information-sharing and strategic coherence. The task force is co-chaired by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). Membership consists of UN agencies and one INGO, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and one national non-governmental organisation (NNGO), the Kurdistan Organization for Human Rights Watch.

➡ **Returns Working Group (RWG):** An operational and multi-stakeholder platform on returns, co-chaired by IOM and IRC, with membership including UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), INGOs and NNGOs. The RWG is tasked with monitoring and reporting on conditions in return areas and determining the extent to which progress towards achieving durable solutions has been achieved for Iraq's many returnees.

- **Durable Solutions Technical Working Group (DSTWG):** This group is co-chaired by IOM, UNDP, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and reports to the DSTF. This is a working level group that brings together UN agencies and humanitarian, development, stabilization, recovery and peacebuilding NGOs, while ensuring close linkages with the GoI and KRG. The DSTWG also serves as the secretariat for DSTF. The DSTWG has restricted membership, with the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) facilitating the selection of three NNGOs and three INGOs. Memberships from UN agencies and other relevant entities are processed by the DSTF.

- **Sub-groups under the DSTWG:** These develop guidance and approaches to specific thematic areas, largely building on existing guidelines and standards, articulated around DS objectives. At the time of the writing of this report, there are three sub-groups, namely Housing, Land and Property (HLP); Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding; and Monitoring and Analysis.

- **Area-based coordination groups (ABCs):** These were established alongside the DS structure in 2020 to facilitate localised efforts in addressing specific displacement challenges. ABCs have been created in eight priority zones, namely West Anbar, East Anbar, Kirkuk, Baaj, Mosul, Sinjar, Diyala and Salah-al-Din. Membership includes UN agencies, NGOs and government representatives at governorate level.

Under this initial structure, the IASC humanitarian clusters coexisted with the Durable Solutions structure.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Stakeholders interviewed for this research reported that there had been talks of a transition away from a predominantly humanitarian response to a more development and recovery-oriented response since 2019. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, these discussions were paused and restarted again in late 2021.

Timeline for the transition

Building on the Government of Iraq's efforts to resolve internal displacement, the DSTWG, UN agencies, HDP actors and donors launched an Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Strategic and Operational Framework in June 2021. This was intended to frame international engagement on durable solutions, and to complement the government's 2020 National Plan for Returning IDPs Back to their Liberated Areas. The Framework was designed to serve as an operational roadmap to support durable solutions in Iraq. The Iraqi government asked the UN in 2021 to include a pillar in the UNSDCF on finding solutions to remaining internal displacement. This was seen by the UN as a welcome step by the GoI for addressing the country's displacement challenges and advancing the process toward durable solutions (OCHA, 2023f). In late 2021, the DSRSG/RC/HC and Cluster Lead Agencies (CLA) informed the GoI and KRG that they recommended deactivating the humanitarian cluster system and transitioning the international response towards a development and recovery response.

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) conducted three retreats in 2022 to discuss modalities and planning for a transition of the response in Iraq. The HCT established a Transitional Advisory Group (TAG), which included NGOs, UN agencies, donors and CLAs. The TAG was tasked to focus on operational aspects of the transition and develop a light strategy for the transition, which was endorsed by the HCT in August 2022. At the same time, in August 2022, the DSRSG/RC/HC also asked the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) to deactivate the humanitarian clusters in Iraq by the end of 2022, just four months later. Some of the emergency directors were reported to have reservations about Iraq's preparedness for the cluster deactivation, but by October 2022, as

further clarifications were provided by the HCT, the deactivation was approved with effect from 31 December 2022. Prior to this decision, each cluster had been asked to develop roadmaps for a transition of coordination responsibilities. These were shared in June 2022, and by the end of December 2022, all clusters were deactivated. The agreement as approved by the HCT was for clusters to progressively transfer responsibilities to government counterparts.

Because of the deactivation of the cluster system, a humanitarian response plan (HRP) was not launched for Iraq in 2023. Rather, OCHA released a humanitarian transition overview (HTO), which provides a summary of the remaining humanitarian needs as well as the plans for the further transition (OCHA, 2023f). The HTO was formerly referred to as the Humanitarian Transition Strategy. However, NGOs pushed back on the "strategy" term, arguing that no clear strategy had been presented for the transition, and the document outlined what had been done to date, rather than the plans going forward.

Action Agenda and compact for Iraq

At a global level, Iraq's transition was also affected by the UN secretary general's (UNSG's) Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, which calls for increased collective action on durable solutions and the subsequent appointment of a special adviser on solutions to internal displacement. The special adviser identified Iraq as one of 16 focus countries where conditions are ripe for a concerted push for solutions. This kick-started a country-level process, led by the DSRSG/RC/HC, under a paradigm of "government- and development-led solutions" to displacement. Following a mission to New York, the DSRSG/RC/HC returned to Iraq in February 2023 with two solutions experts, an advisor from the Office of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement and the senior advisor on internal displacement from OCHA. These experts presented a concept note to the DSTF on the next phase of the "Iraq's Solutions Approach".[8] The goal was to agree on a common way forward and outline key building blocks for a more

government- and development-led approach to solutions in Iraq. The concept note included a proposal to develop a Compact on Internal Displacement for Iraq (hereafter the Compact) between the GoI, KRI and the UN to resolve Iraq's remaining displacement challenges. The Compact was to include a costed, three-year plan, with 12 commitments to facilitate access to durable solutions and fully integrate all people affected by displacement into national schemes and programmes in the timeframe of 2023 to 2025. The Compact was to be launched in April 2023, with interviewed stakeholders reporting that a key donor requirement was a GoI commitment to co-finance the plan. The Compact, however, is still being negotiated between the UN and GoI at the time of this writing in June 2023.

4. NEW COORDINATION STRUCTURE

With the deactivation of the humanitarian cluster system on 31 December 2022, the initial plan was for the clusters to transfer responsibilities to relevant governmental authorities. However, during 2022, several cluster leads indicated that government counterparts in KRI and Federal Iraq did not have the necessary capacities or willingness to take over coordination. For that reason, according to interviewed INGOs and UN stakeholders, a handover of responsibilities to the DS structure was proposed on several occasions. However, interviewees said, that the DSRSG/RC/HC and OCHA were adamant that the government should lead coordination of all clusters from the end of 2022, with only the protection cluster planning from the beginning not to handover coordination to government authorities but rather create a separate protection platform.

With the transition in motion, OCHA quickly downsized their setup in Iraq during the course of 2022. This coincided with several key staff members involved in the transition architecture being redeployed to Ukraine and other crises. The OCHA head of office departed in July 2022, followed by the DSRSG/RC/HC two months later. The incoming DSRSG/RC/HC formed a new UN leadership team for the transition in the fall of

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[8]   Titled Government-led, Development-led Solutions Approach, this concept note proposes a shared vision of durable solutions actors in Iraq for a new phase of solutions to internal displacement in the country that reflects the evolving context. This note first provides an overview of the scale and nature of displacement, including conceptual and data-related challenges. It then outlines four key building blocks: strategy, government leadership, financing and UN coordination centered around the idea of a "Compact on Solutions" with Iraq.

2022. This team revisited many of the decisions taken in June 2022, acknowledging that not all clusters would be able to transfer coordination responsibilities to government counterparts after all. As a result of this change, a decision was taken to establish a coordination structure on the basis of the existing DS architecture for a "transitional period" until the government would be capacitated to take full responsibility for coordination in Iraq. However, it should be noted that while the DS architecture was intended to assume some responsibilities from certain clusters during a transitional period, in practice, the DS structure reported not to fully assume the primary roles and responsibilities of any clusters. Currently, specific clusters such as the shelter cluster have been integrated into the housing and HLP sub-group under the DSTWG, and the Iraq Cash Forum is providing technical support to the livelihood DSTWG sub-group. Additionally, some cluster representatives now serve as members of the ABC or DSTWG. Only the mine action sub-cluster appears to have been fully transferred to the government.

A new coordination structure is reportedly being developed by the UN at present to replace the transitional coordination structure, as described above. According to interviewed stakeholders and reviewed documents, it is proposed that the OCHA-led General Coordination Meetings (GCMs) would be transformed into Joint Coordination Forums (JCF) with an expanded mandate. JCFs will be created in governorates with existing (ABCs) and function as the primary coordination body under the new post-transition coordination structure, with a specific focus on supporting the implementation of the proposed Compact. The DSTWG would provide technical guidance on durable solutions to the JFCs. The JFCs are proposed to bring together humanitarian, stabilization, development and peacebuilding actors, along with governorate authorities. Membership would be open to UN agencies, INGOs, NNGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) that are active implementers in the respective governorate. To avoid duplication, the plan is for the ABCs to gradually phase out their activities over a six-month period or less, based on the context and dynamics of each governorate. Given the emphasis on government leadership, the JCFs are proposed to report to the Supreme Committee for the GoI's implementation of the national plan.

While the JCFs will replace the ABCs, the DS structure will otherwise remain intact under the proposed new coordination structure. A concept note for the JCFs has been approved by the DSTF as of July 2023, but the plan is pending final approval from the GoI and has therefore not been broadly shared. Moreover, consultation with the Secretariat of Council of Ministers (COMSEC) was reported to be essential for addressing the action points that demand the federal government's attention and actions.

5. FINDINGS ON THE TRANSITION PROCESS

Through interviews with a range of NGOs and UN agencies, this research examined the positive and negative impacts of the transition from a mainly humanitarian response to a development-led response and coordination architecture for Iraq. As the focus on transitions towards development and/or nexus approaches is increasing, and there is the potential for more contexts to undergo similar processes, the aim of this research is to learn from the Iraq example and capture good practices, as well as points for consideration and improvement.

Justification for the transition

Interviewees reported that the UN leadership cited three main factors to justify the decision to transition Iraq's international response and coordination structure. First, the relative decrease in humanitarian needs and number of IDPs was used to justify a transition to a development-led response. Second, Iraq has seen a steady decrease in humanitarian funding in recent years, with donors citing the improved humanitarian situation and that global priorities were found to be elsewhere than Iraq. Lastly, given Iraq's growing oil revenues (estimated at around $11 billion per month), and its status as a middle-income country, UN leadership and donors also indicated that there was the need and the capacity for greater government leadership and responsibility in the response.

In interviews with INGOs and UN agencies, there appeared to be disagreement on whether the deactivation of the humanitarian clusters was justified by the relative decrease in humanitarian needs. While the HTO data shows that there are still 2.5 million people in need of humanitarian

assistance and protection in the country, the international community did not agree on whether these remaining needs and vulnerabilities were best addressed by a development or humanitarian response. Some INGOs and UN agencies argued that because of the protracted nature of displacement in Iraq, needs were no longer best addressed through short-term humanitarian emergency interventions, and the response should rather transition to a government-led development and recovery response to address the underlying structural causes. Other interviewees argued that 2.5 million people in need is still a significant number and that government authorities do not have the capacity or readiness to provide services and protection to all population groups. Humanitarian INGOs highlighted the remaining 1.2 million IDPs that are considered "difficult cases" and are unlikely to return to their place of origin. Many IDPs therefore continue to live in IDP camps and informal settlements and include vulnerable groups that humanitarian actors fear may not be included in a government-led response, such as families with perceived affiliation to ISIL, female-headed households and marginalised ethnic and religious groups.

Consultation process

Although UN agencies leading the transition referred to the process as "consultative", INGOs consistently reported being dissatisfied with the process and decision-making, as well as the extent of NGO inclusion. INGOs agreed that they had been consulted at key moments throughout the transition process in 2022, but many characterised this consultation as merely "symbolic", with several INGOs reporting that the possibility of their providing feedback was not considered, and the process continued without modifications whenever risks, concerns or suggestions were raised. Some stakeholders also emphasised that consultations tended to happen only once a decision was ready to be validated and that opportunities for influence were limited.

For their part, interviewed INGOs acknowledged that they could have been more aligned and engaged in the transition process at an earlier stage, and that some key moments for providing feedback were missed without opportunity to revisit decisions at a later stage. This was reported to be affected by the short deadline for feedback (often three to five days) established by the UN

Office of the Resident Coordinator (RCO)/OCHA, a deadline which they found to be inadequate. Furthermore, the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) was described as underfunded and with limited capacity to advocate on behalf of its diverse members among NNGOs and INGOs in the country, which impacted the ability of NGOs to "speak with a common voice". There was also a noticeable non-alignment of NGOs, with disagreements as to whether the overall decision to deactivate clusters was justified by decreased humanitarian needs, as described above.

UN agencies also did not find the process to be inclusive. Several representatives emphasised that OCHA and the RCO were "pulling the process towards themselves" and offering little room for cluster leads to affect decision-making around the future of clusters under their leadership. It was furthermore consistently underlined that the transition process had been rushed and appeared to be driven by a unilateral decision by UN leadership, rather than a collective decision informed by developments in the Iraqi context.

The transition timeline and cluster deactivation

An overarching criticism from all INGOs and most UN agencies interviewed for this research was that the transition timeline was too short, inflexible, linear and seemingly rushed. While interviewees acknowledged that a potential transition to a development and recovery response had been discussed on-and-off since the conflict with ISIL ended in 2017, there had been very little action taken until early 2022. As presented earlier in this chapter, only in January 2022 did the former DSRSG/RC/HC indicate his intention to scale down the humanitarian response by the end of the year, and only in August 2022 did the HCT endorse a decision to deactivate the humanitarian cluster system, giving cluster leads and humanitarian actors just four months to implement the transition. Several stakeholders stressed that this timeframe was too firm and linear, with no possibility for renegotiating. This became critical given that neither a new government for Federal Iraq nor the federal budget had been formalised by October of 2022, rendering several cluster leads unable to adequately hand over coordination responsibilities to government counterparts. Interviewees also highlighted the absence of a clear plan in place for the transition and coupled

with the changes in OCHA leadership and DSRSG/RC/HC during the process, this resulted in significant confusion and inefficiency. In the end, the plans for the transition were only drafted in December 2022, as the humanitarian clusters were being deactivated by the end of that month. As mentioned above, the initial Humanitarian Transition Strategy presented did not provide a clear plan for the transition but rather, it outlined the remaining needs and what had been done to date. For that reason, the document was changed to what is now the Humanitarian Transition Overview.

Interviewees also reported experiencing that the RCO and OCHA were closely directing the process. Cluster leads were not found to be given the space and time to make evidence-based decisions on the best transition strategy for clusters under their responsibility, and community consultation was reported as limited, if not absent, from the process. Furthermore, not all clusters were equally prepared or had equally capacitated government counterparts to whom they could hand over responsibilities. This led several interviewed stakeholders to recommend that the cluster deactivation should have been phased based on pre-set criteria for each cluster's preparedness, rather than all clusters deactivating by the same date. With the short timeframe for the transition, concerns were raised that existing knowledge and technical coordination capacities might be lost in the process.

Resource allocation and membership of coordination structure

With the deactivation of the humanitarian clusters, interviewed INGOs and UN agencies expressed concern about the lack of funding and dedicated resources behind the DS structure. For example, under the DSTWG, UNDP and IOM have one dedicated staff member each, while NRC has one staff member with a 30 per cent-time allocation as co-chair of the working group. There is only one dedicated focal point from IOM covering two ABCs (Mosul and Sinjar), while the rest of the ABCs have no funded staff dedicated to coordination, which means that NGOs must find time to allocate to coordination within already stretched staff's time reporting. Given the magnitude of coordination responsibilities and technical guidance, such limited staffing was found to be insufficient by some ABC members.

Protection

Protection has been highlighted as a sensitive cluster for transitions towards development and/or Nexus approaches, given the typical inclusion of government parties' in post-transition coordination structures. For that reason, this research examined the deactivation of the protection cluster in Iraq to understand how the coordination responsibility was transferred and to whom.

From the beginning of the process, it was decided that the protection cluster would not be handed over to the government as was planned for all other clusters. Instead, a distinct protection platform would be created. The protection and human rights platform is co-chaired by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with the latter included to ensure a development focus on human rights. Membership initially included only UN agencies, but a strong pushback from INGOs resulted in the inclusion of one INGO representative, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and one NNGO, the Baghdad Women's Association, both elected by NCCI members. The protection platform aims to "maintain a strategic advisory role at the national level, including in regard to advocacy and technical guidance" (Protection Cluster Iraq, 2022). It has also been tasked with ensuring that the centrality of protection is streamlined throughout the five elements in the UNSDCF. Contrary to the protection cluster, the platform will not include fundraising and the operational coordination of partners. Furthermore, the protection platform will cover the needs of all population groups in Iraq and not focus on the most vulnerable. Protection monitoring will, however, continue, as UNHCR reported having developed a new and broader protection monitoring tool that will ask respondents about access to services in addition to protection-related questions. Interviewed protection actors welcomed this step, which allows UNHCR and protection partners to continue to monitor trends in protection risks and needs, as well as any negative consequences of the deactivation of the protection cluster.

At the operational level, the ABCs are expected to ensure that protection-related strategic guidance, advice and objectives are followed by implementing actors. The aim is for protection partners to report on protection concerns in the ABCs that will then report trends to the protection

platform. The platform can take these trends to the DSRSG/RC/HC who can share protection trends and raise concerns with the GoI (Ibid). Interviewed INGOs expressed scepticism, however, about this model, given the government's presence in the ABCs, which would complicate discussions of protection concerns given that government actors are at times involved in violations and that government policies can contribute to protection risks. With the government proposed to co-chair the JCFs under the new coordination structure for Iraq, the concern about how to raise and discuss protection concerns has only increased. For that reason, despite the perception that the creation of the protection platform is a positive step, compared for example to the case of Libya, the limited membership of INGOs in the platform and the lack of a safe space for protection discussions in the ABCs and JCFs, has led to concerns about the continuing capacity to monitor and respond to protection needs.

INGOs interviewed for this research reported also having found the protection platform to be of limited use since its creation in November 2022. Priorities for the platform were agreed upon in early 2023, but the platform has not made plans to build capacity among relevant development and government actors to ensure that protection be mainstreamed throughout the new coordination structure. The platform was described as "very UN heavy", with INGOs experiencing difficulties making their voice heard. This in part a result of the fact that meetings in the platform tend to be structured around pre-planned presentations and partly because only one INGO and one NNGO are present. There was found to be little accountability, as the platform has difficulties following up on any action or progress made by the GoI. It was also noted that only UNHCR has a dedicated person attached to the protection platform, with other agencies and representatives of organisations in the platform having other full-time portfolios and limited time to allocate to coordination.

Unlike the protection cluster, the two sub-clusters on child protection (CP) and gender-based violence (GBV) were to be handed over to government counterparts. With reference to the GoI carrying the main responsibility for children's welfare in Iraq, UNICEF supported the transfer of CP coordination responsibilities to a Child Protection Sector led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Child Welfare Commission. In the same way, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has been supporting the GBV sub-cluster in handing over coordination to a government-led GBV sector under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs' Department of Combating Violence Against Women for KRI and the Women Empowerment Department at the federal level. In interviews with INGOs, this transition of responsibility to the Iraqi government was considered a main concern of the transition. GBV is widespread in Iraq, with an estimated 1.32 million people (75% of whom are women and adolescent girls) at risk of different forms of GBV (WHO, 2022). Similarly, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has reported major challenges for child protection in Iraq. These include a significant number of cases of unaccompanied children, detention of children, lack of birth registration and civil documentation for children born in ISIL-controlled areas, and GBV targeting children, including sexual violence, exploitation and forced and child marriages (UNICEF, 2023b). With the limited availability of mental health and psychosocial support services outside camp settings in Iraq, INGOs expressed concerns that government authorities would not have the capacity and resources to provide adequate support for children and GBV survivors. They worried that these vulnerable groups could fall between the cracks of Iraq's transition towards a development response. With the cluster deactivation, there are no longer any regularly updated referral pathways or interagency coordination on protection case management, which further add to the lack of ability to address acute vulnerabilities. Despite a significant caseload, interviewees also noted that with the decrease in humanitarian funding and the transition to a system-level development approach, individual protection case management might not be possible under the post-transition structure in Iraq.

Access

Despite the decision to scale down its response in Iraq, OCHA continued to have two offices in Baghdad and Erbil, including three international and several resident staff, while closing its offices at governorate level. As per the Access Working Group (AWG), a strategy endorsed by the HCT clarifies that OCHA will continue to "provide day-to-day operational engagement and support to humanitarian partners negotiating at local and technical levels to gain access to affected people through June 2023". Support, however, would be provided remotely, given the lack of presence in local governorates. With the ongoing transition, it was decided to continue the AWG group, co-chaired by OCHA and NRC for a transitional period. Several interviewees mentioned plans to hand over access coordination to the RCO after June 2023, although there were no concrete plans in place.

Despite the continued access support from OCHA, NRC's field-based managers reported that access negotiations and coordination had largely been left up to the individual INGOs following the closure of sub-national OCHA offices. With many militias operating in Iraq, NGOs highlighted new risks resulting from OCHA's scale-down, including humanitarian actors not speaking with a common voice vis-a-vis the Iraqi authorities, militias and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), and a lack of alignment in access negotiation modalities. It should also be noted that while larger INGOs may have the capacity to take on access negotiations, smaller NGOs might not have the technical capacities to do so.

Role of the government and Principled Humanitarian Action (PHA)

Interviewed stakeholders described the RCO and OCHA as being categorical that post-cluster coordination structures should be led by government authorities. However, many questioned whether the Iraqi government has the capacity and readiness to respond to the needs of the population. They emphasized the instability of the political situation in the country and questioned the degree to which the international response can rely on stable leadership from Iraq's two separate governing entities, FGI and KRG.

While all interviewed stakeholders agreed that Iraq's government has the financial resources to respond to the needs and provide services to the population of Iraq, many underlined that this does not mean that there is the necessary willingness to do so. Funds tend to be centralised in Baghdad, with general issues of these not reaching local government authorities and, for that reason, not translating into public service delivery. Protection and education were highlighted as sectors without adequate capacity and the lack willingness from government authorities, while there was more capacity related to infrastructure development. Some interviewed INGOs also expressed frustration that when programmes were designed for a sustainable handover, government counterparts did not take over the activities as planned. So, although the government has officially signed off on the UNSDCF and has been involved in the transition towards a development response, several interviewees cautioned to see whether the government's words would be accompanied by action.

Interviewed stakeholders in Iraq appeared to have diverging views on the transition's impact on PHA, with some stressing that it might be too early in the transition process to see the transition's full consequences. Interviewed INGO representatives had different views regarding the government's involvement under the new coordination structure. Some emphasised that the longer-term, transitional and recovery programmes that the country needs cannot be implemented without strong government involvement that would ensure the sustainability of the interventions. Others expressed concerns that the government's direct involvement would challenge adherence to the humanitarian principles, as the authorities would have more influence over programming, for example in the selection of beneficiaries or communities targeted for interventions. Such government interference has already been noticed reported by some NGOs, when coordinating interventions in the ABCs.

Donor buy-in and funding for the transition

As part of the extended HCT, donors have been consulted on the plans for the transition since the beginning of the process in January 2022. Interviewed stakeholders reported that there was donor support for the transition, which they had been promoting and waiting for since the transition discussions started in 2019. However, although donors agreed with the decision of the transition, this did not lead to commitments to continue funding the humanitarian, development and peace pillars throughout the transition period.

As presented earlier in this chapter, part of the incentive for the transition was donors' wish to phase out humanitarian funding for Iraq and move towards development and recovery following the decrease in humanitarian needs. For that reason, donors committed to funding the HRP at approximately 60 per cent at the beginning of 2022. It is interesting to note that by the end of 2022, the HRP was funded at 87 per cent because of what interviewed stakeholders described as donors' last-minute concerns that the transition had been rushed and their desire to ensure humanitarian actors' continued to have the capacity to respond to the remaining pockets of humanitarian needs. Despite the decrease in humanitarian funding, stakeholders did not see an increase in development funding to fill the gap. Rather, some development donors, such as the KfW Development Bank and the French Development Agency (AFD), shared plans to deprioritise development grants or loans for Iraq in the coming years. The sentiment among donors appeared to be that with the significant oil revenues and Iraq's status as a middle-income country, a commitment from the GoI to co-invest alongside international donors would be required to continue development investments in the country. A trend to move from development grants towards loans was also noted, with KfW, for example, announcing plans to phase out grants for Iraq by the end of 2024, while making loans amounting to EUR 418 million available for the GoI to fund different line ministries in 2024. There was also a noticeable absence of funding for the peace pillar and, with the exception of e.g. UNDP's support for social cohesion and local-level peacebuilding interventions by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)), the peace component of the HDP Nexus appeared to be largely absent from the planning, funding and programming for the country. This is despite interviewees highlighting that the causes of conflict and displacement cannot be solved without addressing underlying communal tensions and the lack of social cohesion.

Humanitarian funding for Iraq is expected to be largely phased out in 2024 with no financing window for durable solutions and with development funding decreasing as well, donors made it clear that the GoI is expected to shoulder the lion's share of financing for solutions commitments in the proposed Compact for Iraq. For that reason, a Financing Framework for a Solutions Pillar was proposed in the Iraq Solutions Approach concept note. This came with a recommendation that costed government commitments be reflected in the national budget. Interviewees also stressed that the funding from the government would need to come from both standing government funds (e.g. Compensation Fund, Integration Fund, Returnee Fund and the national social protection scheme), as well as additional investments through the budgets of relevant line ministries. Under the same pillar, the establishment of a Multi-Partner Trust Fund on Solutions was also proposed to mobilise international financing for the implementation of the Compact. To date, although some level of interest is being reported, there has so far not been any tangible commitment from the government. The next steps for the transition and the ongoing work on advancing solutions to internal displacement seem to depend on the last mile of political and financial commitments by the government.

Without an HRP, humanitarian actors reported finding it difficult to fundraise for programs in Iraq. Smaller and national NGOs appeared to have been especially affected by the decrease in humanitarian funding, which led some to question the alignment with the localisation agenda and the importance of local leadership in nexus and transitional approaches. Rather than new development actors coming into Iraq and taking over parts of the former humanitarian caseload, interviewed stakeholders reported that it was primarily existing humanitarian or dual-mandate organisations that stayed operational and adapted their interventions towards longer-term development and durable solutions programming. These humanitarian and dual-mandate organisations also increasingly applied for and were granted development funding as a result of the decline in humanitarian funding. Some INGOs stressed, that with both

humanitarian and development organisations applying for development funding, competition between NGOs and between UN agencies had increased, and there were some expressions of lack of trust in the UN agencies leading the transition, as they were seen to keep a large share of remaining, available funding for their own agencies. Moreover, under the OECD DAC recommendations on the HDP Nexus, donors committed to making long-term, flexible and predictable funding available in fragile contexts. However, in the case of Iraq, INGOs did not report an increase in quality funding. With more reliance on development grants, they also emphasised the lack of crisis modifiers and built-in contingencies in case of setbacks or a new crisis in the unpredictable context of Iraq. Increased multi-year and flexible funding was highlighted by several NGOs as essential to advance durable solutions and nexus approaches in the country.

Despite the political instability and societal tensions in Iraq, the HTO and current structure do not include any contingencies in case of setbacks or outbreaks of new crisis or conflict. Interviewees expressed doubts as to whether there would be appetite among donors to allocate humanitarian funding for Iraq again, and there seemed to be a sentiment that it would be very difficult to get humanitarian donors re-engaged in Iraq once the door on humanitarian funding had been closed following the transition to a development-led response. This is in line with the justification given for the transition based in the significant revenues of the Iraqi government, supporting the UN agency and donor argument that the GoI must take the lead in responding to the needs of its population.

Despite the transition away from a humanitarian response, the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) group was reported to have continued in Iraq, with humanitarian donors meeting regularly to coordinate priorities. However, there did not appear to be structured processes of coordination between development and humanitarian donors. NGO representatives also reported that the development and humanitarian wings of donor governments often did not appear to effectively coordinate and collaborate among themselves, citing examples of humanitarian and development staff not communicating with each other, humanitarian and development offices in separate physical locations, and a general lack of synergies and ability to hand over caseloads.

Adaptability of NGOs

While NGOs pointed out that Iraq's transition had been rushed and without a clear strategy behind the process, it should also be noted that some interviewed donors expressed frustration with humanitarian NGOs' lack of preparedness for that an eventual transition. Despite years-long discussions about a transition and the discussions of concrete plans throughout 2022, most NGOs were unable to adapt their approach and had no plans in place to phase out their humanitarian response. Donors described how most NGOs appeared to be surprised by the rapid decrease in humanitarian funding and were struggling to adjust to the new funding realities. It was furthermore reported that some NGOs were unable to prioritise remaining humanitarian needs and did not realise that there would be insufficient humanitarian funding to respond to all the needs and vulnerabilities in the country. NGOs were also criticised for being unable to speak with a common voice and provide thought-leadership for the transition. Rather than proposing solutions and proactively steering the transition process, some interviewed donors experienced NGOs as '"voiceless". The NGO forum NCCI was described by all interviewed parties as weak and of limited use in terms of strategic leadership for NGOs around the transition process, which might also explain NGOs' lack of alignment and common positioning.

6. CONCLUSION

In the case of Iraq, the outcomes of interviews with NGOs and UN agencies demonstrated how both the justification behind the decision to transition from a humanitarian response towards a development and recovery response as well as the process itself was challenged.

While humanitarian needs have decreased in Iraq since the 2017 end to the ISIL conflict, the humanitarian community remains divided as to whether the transition was justifiable. Some argue that the remaining protracted needs are best addressed by government-led development interventions. Others say that, while the government might have the financial means to lead a response to remaining humanitarian needs, there are concerns regarding its capacity and preparedness to do so. This research also showed that, while there had been some level of discussion since 2019 of a transition of Iraq's

humanitarian response towards a recovery and development structure, very little was done to prepare for a deactivation of the humanitarian cluster system. The transition happened within a one-year period, with the majority of planning and implementation taking place during the last months of 2022. This short and inflexible timeframe was found to be insufficient to ensure that government counterparts had the capacities needed to take over the coordination responsibilities of all clusters by the deactivation date of 31 December 2022. While NGOs had been consulted throughout the transition planning in 2022, many characterised this consultation as merely symbolic in what they described as a unilateral UN-driven decision-making and planning process. NGOs' inability to speak with a common voice and strategically engage the UN leadership on the transition did not help this problem. Interviewed stakeholders also emphasised that there was no strategy in place for the transition, with the new coordination structure and the Compact still being negotiated between the UN and the GoI seven months after the clusters deactivated. The rapid downsizing of OCHA and the changes UN leadership was found to add to the lack of clarity and confusion around the transition process.

Donors' support for a transition away from a humanitarian response in Iraq did not lead to commitments to continue funding the three HDP pillars throughout the transition period, with both humanitarian and development funding found to have decreased for the country. There was also a reported lack of coordination between development and humanitarian donors, with an absence of coordination even within the same donor organisations. There seems to be a consensus among donors that strong co-financing by the GoI will be required, with future financing of durable solutions programming through the Compact depending on the action, commitment and leadership of the Iraqi government.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED – IRAQ

Based on the findings presented in this research of Iraq's transition, the following country-specific recommendations and lessons emerge for further reflection and action:

Plan for transitions: Given the magnitude and implications of the transition away from a humanitarian response in Iraq, a clear strategy and blueprint should have been in place from the beginning of the process. Such a plan would make it clear who to hand over coordination responsibilities to, obtain informed buy-in from national and international agencies, and outline a new coordination structure to replace the cluster system.

Phased cluster deactivation: Not all clusters were found to be equally ready to deactivate and hand over coordination responsibilities to government counterparts by end 2022. For that reason, cluster deactivations should be phased against pre-set criteria for readiness. Cluster leads should also work to strengthen capacities and prepare for an eventual deactivation at a much earlier stage.

Protection cell: Given the sensitivities of protection in transitions to development approaches, the example of Iraq should be followed in ensuring a separate protection cell under transitional coordination structures, to ensure continued capacities to monitor protection risks, coordinate protection responses and raise concerns with relevant government authorities. As in Iraq, such protection coordination should be conducted with independence from various entities.

Strong NGO forum: NGOs in Iraq were unable to collectively and proactively engage in the strategic discussions on priorities in a scaled-down or phased-out humanitarian response. This underlines the importance of a strong NGO forum that can align NGO advocacy efforts to counter the UN narrative that otherwise seems to dominate the transition.

UN leadership: The UN country leadership should have a more inclusive approach to decision-making around transition processes, with more consultations with NNGOs, INGOs and affected communities. There should also be sustained UN leadership throughout the transition process.

LIBYA

©Zaid Al-Jabari

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Following the Arab Spring uprising in Libya that ultimately led to a change in government following the death of former leader Muammar al-Qaddafi in October 2011, Libya was thrown into more than a decade of political instability, tension and armed conflict fuelled by geopolitics, the fight for control of resources (including oil revenues), and ethnic and religious divisions. Today, two separate governments govern Libya, namely the Tobruk-based Government of National Stability governing the eastern part of the country and the UN-recognised Government of National Unity based in Tripoli with control of the western parts. The UN-brokered ceasefire agreement of 2020 led to a decrease in large-scale armed conflict, but lower-level clashes, political fragmentation and insecurity continue, not least

following the postponement of parliamentary and presidential elections in December 2021 (USIP, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2022).

The relative stability that began with the 2020 ceasefire has led to a steady increase in the number of internally-displaced people (IDPs) returning to their areas of origin in Libya, and by August 2022, totalling 695,515 returnees. Estimates indicate that in 2022, 134,787 people remain internally displaced, a decrease from 316,000 IDPs in October 2020. These people face severe barriers for returning, including the destruction of their houses and a lack of access to services (HO, 2023). There are divergent views on the methodology used for the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and the 2023

Severity of humanitarian conditions and number of people in need

Source: Humanitarian Overview for Libya, 2023

Humanitarian Overview (OCHA, 2022; HO, 2023), which makes comparison of needs misleading due to different targeting for data collection,[9] stakeholders interviewed for this research agreed that overall humanitarian needs have decreased in Libya with a January 2022 REACH multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) estimating that 2.5 million people still need humanitarian assistance and protection. Many pointed to the persistent instability in Libya resulting in returnees need of continued support for housing, livelihoods and basic services such as healthcare and education (REACH, 2022a).

Libya is located along the primary migration route from Africa to Europe and remains a main transit and destination hub for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Reports indicate it is among the most dangerous and deadly migration routes. It is estimated 600,000 migrants and refugees live

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9   The HNO looked at humanitarian needs among Libyans and non-Libyans alike, but the HO only targeted Libyans for data collection.

in Libya, but only 41,000 of them have been registered by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).[10] All irregular migration is criminalized in Libya, which is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol, and there are no legal avenues for asylum seeking, regularization or resettlement in a third country, leaving many people to stay de facto illegally in Libya. Taking advantage of the collapse of the security sector and judiciary system during the years of armed conflict, militias and non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have created a sophisticated international smuggling and trafficking economy, and the commodifying of migrants and refugees "through kidnapping, arbitrary detention, extortion and torture", making up 3.4 per cent of Libya's GDP (IOM, 2017; ECCHR, FIDH, LFJL, 2021). International non-governmental organisations (INGOs), UN agencies and donors consistently underscored in interviews the vulnerability and protection risks for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers (hereafter referred to as non-Libyans). These elements are also emphasised by the UN fact finding mission on Libya that "found reasonable grounds to believe that crimes against humanity were committed against Libyans and migrants throughout Libya in the context of deprivation of liberty. Notably, the Mission documented and made findings on numerous cases of, inter alia, arbitrary detention, murder, torture, rape, enslavement, sexual slavery, extrajudicial killing and enforced disappearance, confirming their widespread practice in Libya (UN Human Rights Council, 2023)." Furthermore, a multi-stakeholder roundtable of donors, UN agencies and INGOs concluded in December 2022 that Libya is in a "protection crisis".

Adding to the unaddressed needs is the shrinking humanitarian space in Libya, with INGO staff increasingly experiencing intimidation, surveillance and arrests by Libyan authorities. INGOs' ability to assist vulnerable populations is also severely limited by access restrictions and administrative impediments, including paralysing banking and liquidity restrictions and the suspension of visas for international aid workers. This also complicates the assessment and documentation of humanitarian needs in many parts of Libya, including the country's south.[11]

2. NEXUS TRANSITION PROCESS IN LIBYA

According to interviews conducted for this research, the process of transitioning from a humanitarian to a humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) Nexus response (hereafter referred to as the Nexus transition) in Libya started in 2019 with the creation of an HDP Nexus Working Group chaired by the World Food Programme (WFP) and with a diverse membership, including donors, UN agencies, the World Bank (WB), INGOs and local actors. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supported the Nexus transition process by funding a Nexus advisor attached to the working group and its coordination. The working group defined three outcome areas (governance, economic and basic services) and Sabha, which is located in south Libya, was chosen as the geographic focus for a Nexus pilot (ICVA, 2022). An area-based assessment was undertaken by REACH in Sabha, where a joint visit was organised for working group members in 2021 to discuss Nexus ambitions with local municipal authorities (OCHA Libya, 2021). The assessment, however, was never used for programming because of access restraints in Sahba, and the working group decided instead to focus the pilot on IDP returns in Tawergha in northern Libya (IASC Result Group 4, 2021a). Still, the pilot was never implemented and several interviewed stakeholders described how the working group, with more than 100 members, did not result in meaningful discussion, appeared to lose its purpose, and proved an ineffective structure for strategic engagement on a potential Nexus transition in Libya.

The WFP chair of the working group left Tunis in early 2022, and the group was dissolved in June 2022, with the responsibility for advancing the Nexus transferred to the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO). Interviewed stakeholders reported that the previous work and outcome areas were not taken into account under the RCO's leadership. Rather, a joint Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-Development Coordination Office (DCO) Financing Landscape Analysis was conducted in 2020 and a first UN Common Country Analysis was carried out in 2021. The analysis was the basis for the

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[10] Data shared by the Libyan INGO Forum (LIF).

[11] Private and confidential LIF briefing paper, available upon request.

1	2	3	4
Peace and governance	Sustainable economic development	Social and human capital development	Climate change, environment, and water

Source: UNSDCF for Libya (UN Libya, 2022)

development of two new collective outcomes approved by the Libyan government, namely, migration management and durable solutions for IDPs (UN Libya, 2022). INGOs reported that the drafting of the collective outcomes was a top-down, UN-led process, with consultations largely taking place once the final version had been proposed in March 2022, without being explicit about the fact that these collective outcomes were part of a larger architecture, planned to replace the humanitarian structures as part of a Nexus transition.

In spring 2022, a representative from the headquarters of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) visited Tunis with a mission to "evaluate the nature and size of the future response" for Libya. It was decided that a new humanitarian response plan (HRP) would not be issued for 2022 and that instead the 2021 HRP would be extended until the end of 2022. This was the period when most interviewed INGOs reported being introduced to the idea of shifting the Libya response from a humanitarian to a Nexus structure, with INGOs, under the leadership of the Libya INGO Forum (LIF), requesting a blueprint or plan for such a transition. At the same time, OCHA started to downsize its operations for Libya during the spring of 2022. In June 2022, a UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Libya covering 2023 to 2025 was approved and signed by the Libyan government. The plan includes four strategic priorities as presented below (Ibid).

A plan for the transition away from a humanitarian response towards a Nexus response was finally presented to and endorsed by the humanitarian country team (HCT) in September 2022. The plan called for the end of the humanitarian cluster system and HRP by 31 December 2022 (four months later) to be replaced with a new Nexus coordination system,

structured around the two collective outcomes for Libya—migration management and durable solutions for IDPs—and the UNSDCF. In the blueprint for the transition, the proposed new coordination structure, shown below, called for an HDP Advisory Group to replace the HCT, with membership expanded to include elected representatives of humanitarian, development and peace INGOs. Rather than clusters and sectors, the new structure proposed a working group for both collective outcomes, as well as working groups for the four pillars under the UNSDCF.

As seen in the proposed structure above, some INGO's were invited to participate in the two working groups on collective outcomes and the HDP advisory group. INGOs also have seats on the three area-based coordination groups as well as the working group on access and a newly created protection cell. The remaining working groups' membership is limited either exclusively the UN or the Libyan government along with the UN. INGOs reported that they advocated for their representation in the Development Partners Dialogue. It is worth noting that participation of national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) is not mentioned in the proposed Nexus coordination structure. In a Community of Practice Network Event in July 2023 that examined Libya's Nexus transition, a representative from the RCO explained that NNGOs were not included for their own protection, given the restrictive operating environment for national actors in Libya.

The RCO and donors justified the Nexus transition by the decrease in humanitarian needs following the 2020 peace agreement, allowing for a transition towards recovery, stabilisation and development. Donors and UN agencies also consistently referred to Libya's status as a middle-income country, which should allow for the Libyan government to respond to the needs of its

UN development and humanitarian coordination structure

H-D-P Nexus Advisory Group
(RC/HC, UN agencies, donors, elected INGOs/INGO,
From all groups under the transition structure)

UN Country Team
(RC/HC, UN agencies)

Development Partners' Dialogue

Access WG
(UN, donors, INGOs)

Data Analysis & Assessment WG
(UN, donors, INGOs)

Rapid Response Mechanism
(UN, donors, INGOs)
*HC activates if emergency

Area-based Coordination Group
(UN, donors, INGOs)

DSRSG-RC/HC Integrated Office
HAT   RCO

PSEA WG
(RC/HC, UN agencies, and Partners)

Gender WG (UN)

Youth WG (UN)

Comms WG (UN)

OMT (UN)

UN Migration Network (UN)

Local authorities' counterparts
(shares operational information and identify joint priorities for action)

Protection Transition Group
(Same members as Protection Sector, Until end March 2023)

PMT (UN)

M&E WG (UN)

UNSDCF Steering Committee with the Government

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

CO1 IDDS
(UN, donors, INGOs)

population. Interviewed INGOs described the decision as a joint UN and donor ambition, as donors had wanted to end humanitarian funding for Libya with many interviewees referring to competing priorities elsewhere, such as in Ukraine and Afghanistan. There was also consistent mentioning of internal pressure from "high levels within the UN system" to demonstrate a Nexus transition based on a UNSDCF in the country. This perceived pressure from "New York" led to a push to produce specific transition documents within certain timeframes. Lastly, interviewees emphasised that the Libyan government was interested in a development response that would be increasingly directed bilaterally through government authorities, rather than an international humanitarian response that would largely operate outside the authorities' influence and control.

3. FINDINGS

The findings from interviews conducted with key stakeholders, including UN agencies, donors and INGOs on the Nexus transition in Libya are presented below. Interviews were primarily conducted in January 2023 during a research mission to Tunis, with a few additional interviews done remotely.

The transition process

In interviews with INGOs, donors and UN agencies, there was consensus that the relative decrease in urgent humanitarian needs in Libya justified a transition from a humanitarian towards a Nexus response. Most stakeholders agreed that it made sense to increasingly move away from short-term, humanitarian emergency interventions and redirect the focus towards more long-term recovery and development. Interviewed INGOs, however, emphasised that there are still pockets of residual humanitarian needs, especially among vulnerable groups, including an estimated 600,000 migrants and refugees (see "protection" section below), and that the root causes of the conflict and instability have not been fundamentally addressed, thereby requiring a response across humanitarian, development and peace actors. It was also emphasised that while Libya is a middle-income country with substantial oil revenues,[12] it is questionable how such resources are distributed, and interviewees also underlined the low capacity at all levels of the fragmented Libyan government, where two separate government structures persist. Nevertheless, the relative stability experienced since the signing of the peace agreement has allowed many displaced Libyans to return to their place of origin and overall humanitarian needs to decrease (despite some disagreement regarding data – see footnote 5).

Rather than challenging the justification for the Nexus transition, interviewed INGOs, without exception, found the consultation, leadership and decision-making processes around the transition problematic, a view that was only partially shared by donors and certain UN agencies.

First, INGOs generally experienced the decision-making process around the Nexus transition as top-down and largely UN-dominated, with limited opportunities for meaningful NGO influence and a lack of clarity about how NGOs would fit into the proposed transition plans. INGOs were consulted at various stages, but they said they were given extremely short deadlines for providing input, and, in many instances, lacked a broader context regarding the implications of what they were feeding into seemed missing. For example, for the UNSDCF, collective outcomes and blueprint for the Nexus transition, INGOs were given very short deadlines to provide feedback, ranging from a few days to 7–10-days. For a transition of such magnitude and scale, with wide-ranging consequences for the operations, funding and coordination of INGOs engaged in the Libya response, such short timeframes were found to be inadequate to provide responsible and meaningful feedback. In addition, several NGO representatives also emphasised that they were only consulted once the various documents were in the final drafting stage and that their feedback was rarely considered in a meaningful way by the UN leadership.

Secondly, although there had been some level of engagement on Nexus approaches in Libya since 2019, many INGOs described the transition process as rushed, with only four months between the HCT's presentation and approval of the transition plan in September 2022 and the deactivation of the humanitarian cluster system at the end of December 2022. INGOs found this time to be insufficient to ensure the capacity building and training needed for handing over coordination responsibilities to the Libyan authorities or development actors. There was also a lack of clarity about where the lines of accountability would lie and exactly who each cluster would handover responsibilities to. The risk of knowledge and capacities being lost in the transition was emphasised by several interviewed INGO and cluster leads.

Third, as OCHA prepared the Nexus transition plan for RCO to implement, the changing leadership and downsizing process in the organisation's Libya office was found to significantly affect the transition process. Interviewed stakeholders named five different heads of OCHA during the course of 2022, which

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[12] Libya's crude oil production averaged nearly 1.2 million barrels per day during 2021, and Libya's oil revenues reached $22 billion in 2022. Oil revenues make up an estimated 98 per cent of government revenue. https://bit.ly/3PHlv7B

contributed to diverging messaging, views and direction for the humanitarian side of the Nexus process. As a part of OCHA's downsizing of the Libya response, only a few international staff remained, further complicating the effort to conduct a responsible deactivation of the cluster system.

It is worth noting that interviewed donors did not share the same level of concern as INGOs bout the consultation process around the Nexus transition process. Donors reported having been meaningfully consulted and understood that the UN leadership could not meet all the expectations of the diverse stakeholders involved in the Libya response. Furthermore, one interviewed donor emphasised that INGOs should have been engaged in the strategic discussions around the transition at an earlier stage. INGOs, for example, only shared their input and feedback with the donor community only in October 2022, after some donors had already shared their input on the blueprint for the transition with the RCO.

The new coordination structure

When asked about the new Nexus coordination structure, INGOs expressed concern about the limited NGO membership of several groups, including all the four working groups under the UNSDCF, as well as an array of thematic groups under the UN Country Team (UNCT). Many emphasized again, the top-down, UN-heavy approach of the structure and found this to be a missed opportunity, as NGOs remain the primary implementers across the HDP Nexus pillars in all geographic parts of Libya. More so, several stakeholders found the lack of NNGO representation problematic and in contradiction with broader Grand Bargain commitments. If the Libya response is to become more sustainable, it must be reflective of the response on the ground. That includes capacity building and inclusion of national NGOs. Some stakeholders even questioned if it was possible to have an HDP Nexus approach without investment in localisation and without the meaningful inclusion of local civil society, which continue to face increased scrutiny, regulatory ambiguity and restrictions in the absence of international counterparts in-country to serve as additional shields from interference.

On the other hand, stakeholders referred to established contingencies in the transition as positive given the instability in Libya. The plan included pre-agreed contingencies in case of a significant deterioration of the security situation or natural disasters. It also included the possibility of launching a flash appeal and/or mobilising other emergency funding mechanisms, such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), if necessary. Several donors, however, expressed doubts as to whether humanitarian funds would be made available for Libya again, given strong donor motivation to disengage from humanitarian support for the context, noting that 'the global need is not in Libya'.

Protection

As part of the HDP Nexus transition, all clusters were dismantled by 31 December 2022 and replaced by the new coordination structure based on the UNSDCF and the two collective outcomes for Libya. However, interviewed INGOs and donors consistently raised concerns that not all clusters and sectors were equally ready or appropriate for such handover to coordination groups that could involve inclusion of both the Libyan government and development actors. Protection was consistently highlighted in interviews as a particularly sensitive sector where the scale and intensity of needs continued to persist. As described in the context section above, Libya is experiencing a protection crisis, with significant risk of protection violations and reports alleging perpetrators often being duty bearers, NSAGs and criminal groups. Interviewees underscored the vulnerability of undocumented Libyans and non-Libyans who continue to face protection risks, including arbitrary arrest and detention, coercion, violence, human rights violations and denial of access to basic services such as health care, education and social protection.[13] Many stakeholders emphasised the need for a continued protection coordination mechanism, with dedicated technical protection expertise and a safe space for openly discussing and addressing protection concerns. They also stressed the need for a dedicated protection group to effectively transition the core functions of the protection sector to the new Nexus structure, which would include development actors and government authorities.

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[13] https://bit.ly/3F4yKdy

The original transition plan did not foresee the continuation of a dedicated protection coordination group, but rather, it was argued that the centrality of protection should be mainstreamed throughout the proposed new Nexus structure, including the UNSDCF. In the final draft blueprint shared with INGOs, they were given the choice of either a protection or an access working group. Despite these being extremely sensitive issues in the Libyan context, it was stressed that the available resources did not allow for a continuation of both groups. In interviews with the UN leadership for the transition process, the sensitivity of the protection sector was acknowledged, but it was also questioned whether the country would need a humanitarian protection response with individual case management, or whether the centrality of protection mainstreamed in the various working groups throughout the new Nexus coordination structure would be sufficient. However, interviewed INGOs and donors underscored the lack of national capacity and the frequent unwillingness of authorities to ensure the protection of many communities at risk of violations, which makes their inclusion in system-level development activities under the UNSDCF questionable. For that reason, there was a consensus that at-risk Libyans and non-Libyans would risk falling between the cracks of the proposed transition structure. Several interviewed protection specialists also stressed that without a protection coordination group with dedicated capacities, it would be impossible to monitor protection needs, conduct protection advocacy and train development actors on how to include protection sensitivity in their programs. Interviewed stakeholders repeatedly emphasized the need to move beyond rhetoric for the centrality of protection.

By the time of interviews for this research in January 2023, INGOs, in partnership with protection sector lead agencies, had significantly scaled up advocacy for a dedicated protection coordination group as they found it unlikely that protection risks would be adequately centralized and monitored through integration in collective outcomes or within the four UNSCDF pillar working groups. A protection coordination group would also ensure a responsible transition in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and other global policy guidance that holds that protection be given special and due consideration in any transition planning. IASC guidelines furthermore stipulate that core sector functions

be clearly delineated with outlined accountabilities. In the case of the protection sector in Libya, it was still unclear which ministry or government counterpart the sector was being handed over to. The Libya INGO Forum (LIF) supported the lead agencies of the protection sector in conducting a survey in early 2023, asking INGOs and UN agencies how the centrality-of- protection approach under the new Nexus coordination structure was being carried out. The majority of INGO and UN agency respondents believed that dedicated technical capacities would be needed to monitor and respond to protection risks in Libya, with 90 percent of respondents answering that a protection working group should be maintained in the new Nexus architecture. Respondents were also unsure where to address protection concerns under the proposed new coordination structure, according to a final note that the LIF and the lead agencies of the protection sector submitted to the HCT.

Because of the intense pressure and evidence collection by the LIF and INGOs, it was finally decided that a protection transition task force (PTTF) would continue for three months until March 2023, with the task to provide the UNCT with "recommendations on how protection risks and gaps (if any) should be filled going forward". As a result of the LIF's scaled-up advocacy and documentation and recommendations presented by the PTTF, it was finally decided in April 2023, to create a "Protection Cell" under the Nexus structure. At the time of this writing, the terms of reference for the PTTF are being approved by the HDP Nexus Advisory Group. No dedicated funding has been allocated, but under the existing proposal, the group is to be chaired by the previous protection sector lead agencies: DRC and UNHCR, with the LIF serving as a second co-chair to offset resource constraints and support coordination and advocacy efforts. INGOs hope this arrangement allows for protection risks in Libya to be meaningfully and responsibly addressed as the transition planning continues.

Access

Another important structure under the humanitarian cluster system has been the access working group (AWG), due to the increasingly restrictive access environment for international humanitarian actors operating in Libya. As a result of widespread visa restrictions, most international actors are based in Tunis while relying on remote management and partnerships

with local actors to implement humanitarian activities inside Libya. Humanitarian actors reported having challenges assessing and reaching the most vulnerable populations in Libya with project implementation presenting challenges with regards to the documentation of the remaining pockets of needs.

Unlike the protection sector, the AWG was the only structure from the humanitarian coordination architecture that was not discontinued with the deactivation of the cluster system in 2022. Rather, the AWG is planned to continue into 2023 and will be co-chaired by OCHA and the LIF. This was appreciated by interviewed donors and INGOs alike who found it essential in helping INGOs coordinate their approach to the Libyan authorities and advocate with a common voice against the current visa restrictions, lengthy registration processes and other administrative and financial impediments.

Many interviewees were also hopeful that the inclusion of development actors in access coordination could improve the negotiation position of humanitarian actors vis-à-vis Libyan authorities. In other contexts, humanitarian actors tend to experience improved access to affected populations compared to development and peace actors because of their adherence to the humanitarian principles and their direct assistance to communities. By contrast, in Libya, there appears to be a limited engagement from the authorities towards international humanitarian actors, who tend to operate with a low profile and with limited interaction with the Libyan government. On the contrary, development actors working with or through the Libyan authorities experience less suspicion and therefore may have better access depending on the type of activity (as seen in other contexts, interviewees reported easier access with health or education projects than human rights, protection or good governance related interventions). Although coordinating access collectively for humanitarian, development and peace actors operating according to different principles and mandates will not be without its difficulties, the majority of INGOs interviewed saw this expansion of the AWG as a positive step

and confirmed the importance of continued investment in access coordination under the new Nexus transition structure.

Impact of sanctions and other impediments

The landmark UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2664 provides a humanitarian exemption to the UN asset freeze on Libya. Although the passing of the resolution at the end of 2022 was a watershed moment, it only provides coverage for humanitarian actors and not development and peace actors. For that reason, this research sought to understand if sanctions and counterterrorism measures differently impact humanitarian, development and peace actors and their ability to operate and collaborate under a Nexus approach in the country.

The research found that although only humanitarian interventions are exempted under resolution 2664, humanitarian, as well as development and peace actors, reported severe financial access challenges, caused by the impact of sanctions regimes as well as anti-money laundering (AML) and counterterrorism financing (CTF) laws. Transfers into Libya continue to be regularly blocked by financial institutions, and humanitarian actors still face unpredictable delays when transferring funds into the country. For the resolution to take effect, states and regional bodies need to implement UNSC resolution 2664 into their own domestic legislation, which is expected to take time and there is also a need to socialise the exemption to the private and financial sector providing comfort and assurances of the coverage of the exemptions.

In addition to the bank de-risking for international transfers into Libya, the research also found that most NGOs are constrained by the Libyan govern-ment's application of financial access measures under the justification of AML and CFT laws.[14] This stems from recommendation 8 guidance from the Financial Access Task Force (FATF), which "re-quires laws and regulations that govern non-profits be reviewed to avoid abuse of terror financing". The FATF regulations, however, also require that a risk-based approach be applied to

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[14] Regulation No 3 of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), *Concerning the Control of Opening Accounts for Nonprofit Organizations and Institutions* was issued in 2016, but only started to be enforced in 2020, with increasing enforcement over the last 24 months. This regulation gives the central bank the right to: approve or reject the bank account for any non-profit organisation (NPO) working in Libya; hold any incoming funds, grants, or payments for services that NPOs may provide; prevent withdrawals of more than LYD 1,000 LYD/$223 in cash – in a country, and a context, where most transactions are cash-based.

NGOs when implementing AML and CFT measures, and the Central Bank of Libya's (CBL's) implementation of recommendation 8 does not align with FATF's "risk-based guidelines" and are found to hinder legitimate NGO activities. The impact on programming is compounded by domestic restrictions that limit humanitarian organisations to withdrawing around $200 per day. Therefore, all interviewed INGOs reported that their programs in Libya were severely affected by the lack of access to cash and financial services.

According to LIF, the challenges of bank de-risking outside Libya have been a recurring challenge since 2014. A survey of INGOs conducted in late 2022 showed that INGOs needed to transfer approximately $5.9 million into Libya over the course of 2021, but only $2.7 million in approved funding was successfully transferred. At the time of the survey, 70 per cent of INGOs were experiencing transfer delays of more than four weeks. Between February and September of 2022, there was an increase of almost 20 per cent in reported delays via intermediary banks. The most common reasons for these delays were compliance with AML, compliance with CT (counter-terrorism) legislation or requests for additional documentation, with 75 per cent of surveyed INGOs reporting having to provide out of the ordinary documentation to their financial institutions to prove how funds would be used. Inside Libya, more than 70 per cent of surveyed INGOs were affected by the CBL policy change limiting withdrawals/transfers. According to the LIF survey, INGOs were able to access less than half of the funds they needed in 2022 ($1.3 million vs. $2.7 million). The total amount affected by delays and blockages was $7.6 million.

Most interviewed stakeholders agreed that counterterrorism measures and sanctions would not be a major challenge, particularly in relation to the HDP Nexus transition, as humanitarian actors were already experiencing significant challenges, and development actors have the same do not have less financial access compared to humanitarian actors in Libya. The only potential challenge envisaged for development investment in Libya could be the scale of their interventions, which might require the transfer of larger sums into Libya than for humanitarian actors. However, development funding was not found to have increased to fill the gap from the decrease in humanitarian funding following the HDP Nexus transition.

Several interviewed stakeholders highlighted the Libyan authorities' preference for development programs over humanitarian interventions. This may be the result of an array of factors, including the authorities' desire to prevent the country from having a reputation as a humanitarian aid recipient context and the fact that development funds tend to be allocated bilaterally through government line ministries or entities, allowing more opportunities for government control and influence. This may render some forms of development funding to be less affected by domestic financial and administrative impediments.

Humanitarian principles and the role of the Libyan government

A greater role for the Libyan government in responding to the needs of its population is an important component of the Nexus transition, as increased government partnerships and government engagements are integral parts of the transition towards a development and recovery response. This, however, leads to questions about the protection of humanitarian principles and humanitarian space. While interviewed humanitarian INGOs expressed understanding for the fact that more collaboration with the Libyan government authorities is the way forward to ensure a sustainable response that works towards self-reliance and durable solutions, some also expressed concerns about the potential level of influence and interference from the Libyan government with regards to humanitarian priorities and activities under a Nexus response. INGOs acknowledged that development actors are not obliged to adhere to the humanitarian principles and often do work bilaterally through the government, but they stressed the importance of ensuring the integration of do-no-harm and centrality of protection in development approaches. That would involve, for example, avoiding the creation of pull factors for return to areas that are deemed unsafe or ensuring equal access to government-supported services for Libyans and non-Libyans alike.

According to interviewees, the proposed transition is in line with the Libyan government's view that the country no longer requires an international humanitarian response, as its social protection system can respond to the needs of the Libyan population. However, stakeholders consistently expressed concern that such a

government-led response might not sufficiently address the needs of the most vulnerable, including non-Libyans. Furthermore, interviewees stressed that although the Libyan government has officially signed on to the UNSDCF, the level of buy-in, capacity and willingness of the government authorities might be insufficient to deliver on its objectives. For example, as part of the transition, staff from the Ministry of Social Affairs were trained in the summer of 2022 to take over the responsibility of collecting and analysing data on needs and vulnerabilities in the country. However, the trained staff have not collected any data since the training (country-level needs assessments for humanitarian contexts are conducted at least twice yearly to inform the HCT's decision-making). The two separate governments in Libya and the fragmented political structure further complicate collaboration and responsibilities by Libyan authorities.

Funding the Nexus approach

Following the announcement of the HDP Nexus transition plans, the largest humanitarian donors, including the European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), either scaled down or stopped humanitarian funding for Libya. Interviewed UN representatives estimated that no humanitarian funding would be available for the country in 2024. This research also found that there is no plan in place for how activities across the HDP pillars will be funded during the Nexus transition process. It seems that most humanitarian funding will stop completely, leaving only development funding available for Libya when existing grants expire. At the same time, although development donors like the EU Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) will continue to provide development funds, development funding does not appear to have been scaled up to "take over" from the lower level of humanitarian funding for the country. Several INGOs also expressed concern about the political nature of development funds, with European donors often observed to push certain political consideration,

including those related to migration, that challenge humanitarian actors' adherence to the humanitarian principles.

Rather than new development and peace actors entering Libya to support the Nexus transition, traditional humanitarian actors have expanded the scope of their activities towards longer-term recovery and transitional interventions, according to interviews with INGOs. These traditional humanitarian actors have, for example, decreased short-term activities such as cash and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), while increasing their interventions related to legal assistance and psychosocial support. These findings are not in line with the Nexus approach as outlined in the OECD-DAC recommendations, which state that each actor is to "stick to their comparative advantage".[15] Interviewed representatives of humanitarian INGOs justified their decision to stay in Libya rather than engaging in a handover to development actors by citing their existing knowledge, networks, and experience from years of previous work in Libya, as well as the remaining humanitarian needs might not be addressed based on vulnerability and at individual case management level in a development response. They noted that new development actors have not entered the Libya. context and therefore there was limited scope for handing over caseloads to or building partnerships with development actors. With the decrease in humanitarian funding and the transition towards an HDP response, humanitarian actors appear to be operating in a transitional grey zone between humanitarian and development approaches, rather than development actors coming in to take over previously humanitarian caseloads or complement the remaining humanitarian response.

In the OECD-DAC recommendations on the HDP Nexus, donors committed to increasing long-term, flexible and predictable funding for fragile contexts like Libya. The purpose behind this approach is to enable better links across HDP actors by allowing humanitarian, development and peace approaches to co-exist simultaneously, rather than only sequentially. Interviews with INGOs and donors suggest, however, that quality funding has not increased for Libya to support the Nexus transition. With few exceptions (e.g.,

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15   https://bit.ly/3RK3jNq

the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), SIDA and Italy were mentioned as having allocated multi-year grants for Libya), the majority of donor funding is still short-term, inflexible and of limited predictability. As financing is acknowledged globally to be a main barrier to the implementation of the HDP Nexus, the findings raise questions regarding the extent to which donors are meeting their global commitments to the Nexus in the case of Libya,[16] as a transitional response towards recovery and development will require longer-term funding perspectives that also remain flexible to changes in the context. A precursor for Nexus approaches would furthermore be that development and humanitarian funding were allocated to the same geographic areas of Libya. This research found, however, that development donors have not invested long-term development funding in the same geographic locations and in support of the same vulnerable populations as their humanitarian donor counterparts, raising doubts as to their level of commitment to the HDP nexus approach in the country. Interviewees raised concerns that donors appear to maintain the siloed status quo for funding of activities in Libya, despite Nexus narratives claiming otherwise.

With the deactivation of the humanitarian structure, the previous Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) group for Libya was discontinued, and there is currently no coordination forum that brings humanitarian and development donors together. LIF reportedly continues to organize ad-hoc meetings with the GHD representatives, but these meetings are much less frequent. This has resulted in a lack of coordination among donors and a lack of clarity on funding across the HDP pillars, complicating efforts to identify opportunities for collaboration and coherence in line with the ambitions of the HDP Nexus approach. Some humanitarian donors also noted that several development donors from states committed to the OECD-DAC recommendation have not adapted their approach and do not coordinate their investments in Libya with other donors. The same few donors were often mentioned as supporting a Nexus approach in Libya, including SDC, ECHO, Japan and USAID, which also tended to be the donors represented in working groups under the Nexus coordination structure.

4. CONCLUSION

The major push for the transition towards a Nexus coordination model and response in Libya appears to have come from donors and the UN leadership. The main factors were the decrease in the numbers of IDPs and people in need; the desire of donors to end humanitarian funding for the country with the emergence of competing humanitarian needs elsewhere; and Libya's status as a middle-income country that would allow the government to cover remaining humanitarian needs through its social protection programs and internal budgets. Although critical to the lack of nuance, risk of deterioration of the context and concerns about protection falling between the cracks of the Nexus transition, INGOs overall understood and largely agreed with this direction for the Nexus transition. Rather, INGOs consistently appeared dissatisfied with the transition speed, process and the lack of nuance around ensuring that the transition was unfolding in a meaningfully way that could adequately respond to remaining residual needs without risking regressing on positive steps made to date.

The process around the Nexus transition was unanimously described as UN driven. INGOs did not feel adequately included in transition plans and the selection of collective outcomes. They felt that they had been only symbolically consulted when the UN had a final draft proposal, without their concerns and feedback being adequately considered. INGOs also described the process as rushed, with only four months to prepare the deactivation of the humanitarian cluster system and without clarity on handover responsibilities. In this light, the process appeared to be more an abrupt exit for humanitarian coordination and funding, rather than a "transition" towards an HDP Nexus approach.

INGOs and donors consistently and strongly expressed concerns about the capacity to address protection concerns under the proposed Nexus coordination structure. The lack of a dedicated working group on protection combined with the central role for the Libyan government in the transitional coordination structure created a real risk that there would not be an effective accountability mechanism for the centrality of protection. This was exacerbated by the transition

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16   https://bit.ly/3rBms9s

timeframe, which did not allow sufficient time to strengthen protection sensitivities among development actors and the Libyan authorities. There were also concerns that the lack of dedicated technical capacities to support protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy would result in the protection needs of Libya's most vulnerable populations falling between the cracks. The Libyan government's lack of service provision and protection to non-Libyans was a particular cause of concern, with fears that such marginalised groups would largely be excluded from development interventions under the UNSCDF. For this reason, the final decision to create a protection cell until the end of 2023 was welcomed, although interviewees felt it should have been included in the structure from the beginning of the transition, with allocated resources – as opposed to an afterthought following a scaled up advocacy by INGOs and protection leads, which required them to stretch resources thin.

A division was noticed between the INGOs and the UN leadership (RCO and OCHA). This was noticeable in the diverging versions of the decision-making processes around the Nexus transition and its potential consequences. INGOs expressed particular frustration about the lack of meaningful consultation and influence on the transition, as well as the lack of clarity on who to hand over responsibilities to with the deactivation of the cluster system. With a strong common voice and organisation through the LIF, INGOs managed to push back on certain proposals, most noticeably the discontinuation of a protection working group.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED – LIBYA

➡ **Phased cluster deactivation:** The Libya case demonstrates that not all clusters are equally ready or appropriate for simultaneous deactivation as part of a Nexus transition process. For that reason, cluster deactivations should be phased on the basis of pre-set criteria, such as the capacity and willingness of government and development actors, as well as potential context-specific sensitivities.

➡ **Protection requires particular attention:** The Libya case demonstrates the particular sensitivities around protection and highlights the risks of protection needs falling between the cracks in transition processes. Given the ongoing protection crisis in Libya, it was not found that adequate steps had initially been taken to ensure the centrality of protection within the UNSDCF and collective outcomes were sufficient to ensure the protection of vulnerable groups, including non-Libyans. While the newly established PTTF was a welcome step in addressing this gap, it is recommended that Protection functions are clearly included in the transition coordination structures from the beginning of transition processes to ensure adequate protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy capacities going forward and to prevent loss of technical capacities in the transition.

➡ **Localisation:** Given the shrinking civic space in Libya, the Nexus transition is an opportunity to strengthen local capacities and leadership in line with the Grand Bargain commitments. It is recommended that NNGO representatives are included in the coordination structure.

➡ **Donor buy-in:** As financing remains a main barrier to the implementation of the Nexus, it is important to ensure donor buy-in from the onset of an HDP transition. For that reason, continued funding should be ensured for responses to remaining humanitarian needs, in complementarity with investments in development and peacebuilding, rather than a full stop to all humanitarian funding streams.

➡ **Increased donor coordination:** To live up to their commitments under the OECD-DAC recommendations on the Nexus, donors should increase the coordination and collaboration of the HDP pillars in Libya and make long-term, flexible and predictable funding available.

➡ **INGO coordination:** A strong INGO forum proved essential in allowing INGOs to speak with one voice and influence the Nexus transition process. It is recommended that a resourced and capacitated INGO forum be in place in transition contexts to counter otherwise UN-heavy decision-making processes.

CAMEROON

Reading moment between students in an elementary school in Souza. ©Daniel Beloumou / Education Cannot Wait

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Until recent years, Cameroon was predominantly considered a development context, with an estimated 37.5 per cent of its population living under the poverty line in 2020 and status as a low-middle-income country, enjoying considerable stability compared to neighbouring countries in the conflict-affected Lake Chad region. However, since 2014, Cameroon has increasingly been marked by several humanitarian crises and a mounting humanitarian response, with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) setting up activities in the country in 2016 (OCHA,

2023d; DI, 2020). Cameroon is today severely affected by three concurrent humanitarian crises, as presented below, that affect nine out of ten regions of the country. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), 4.7 million people, or one-sixth of the country's population, are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection as a consequence of these three crises, and the country has more than two million displacement-affected people, including 968,000 internally displaced people (IDPs), 550,000 refugees and 495,000 returnees (OCHA, 2023d; OCHA, 2023e).

Overview of the "three humanitarian crises" in Cameroon

❷❶ Cameroon is affected by a separatist conflict in the North-West and South-West (NWSW) regions of the country. This is rooted in a long-standing perception of marginalisation by the minority English-speaking population, which since 2016 has led to an increasingly violent conflict between non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the Cameroon Government Forces. As of 2022, the conflict had led to the displacement of 715,000 people in Cameroon and Nigeria, as well as reports of grave protection and human rights violations and limited access to services for the civilian population, including health care and education. The NWSW regions are characterised by an increasingly difficult operational environment for humanitarian actors, with security risks if perceived by NSAGs as being aligned with the government,[17] and contrarily, risks of program suspension and persecution if seen as supporting NSAGs outside government-controlled areas (Inter-Agency Mission to Cameroon, 2020). This was, for example, the case when the government suspected Doctors Without Borders (MSF) of being too closely linked to the separatist NSAGs and suspended MSF's operations in the NW region in December 2020, leaving thousands without access to health care (MSF, 2021). MSF suspended their programs in the SW region in 2023, following the arrest of four staff members in December 2021 (MSF, 2022; HRW, 2023).

❷❷ Since 2014, the Far North region of Cameroon has been impacted by an armed conflict with Boko Haram and other NSAGs, which has spilled over from the protracted crisis in the wider Lake Chad Basin and severely affected the border regions between Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon. The conflict is rooted in multiple factors, including poverty, corruption and marginalisation of Muslim populations. In Cameroon, the crisis has been exacerbated by the longstanding underdevelopment of the Far North, where 73 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and the fact that political power and economic resources have been historically concentrated around the central regions of the country (DI, 2020). The Far North has been affected by clashes between NSAGs and security forces, as well as attacks on civilians and security personnel, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and abductions of civilians by Boko Haram and other NSAGs. As a result, 385,000 civilians seeking safety have been displaced to other parts of Cameroon (OCHA, 2023d).

❷❸ Cameroon's East region has received a large number of refugees fleeing the escalating violence in the Central African Republic (CAR). This led the international community to launch a humanitarian response to the crisis in 2014. In recent years, humanitarian funding to the East has decreased because of the protracted nature of the displacement and competing needs in the Far North and NWSW regions. However, the number of CAR refugees continues to increase year after year, with the total reaching 353,362 in 2022. The large refugee population is straining already limited resources, infrastructure and public services in the remote region and risks creating tension with the local host population (Ibid).
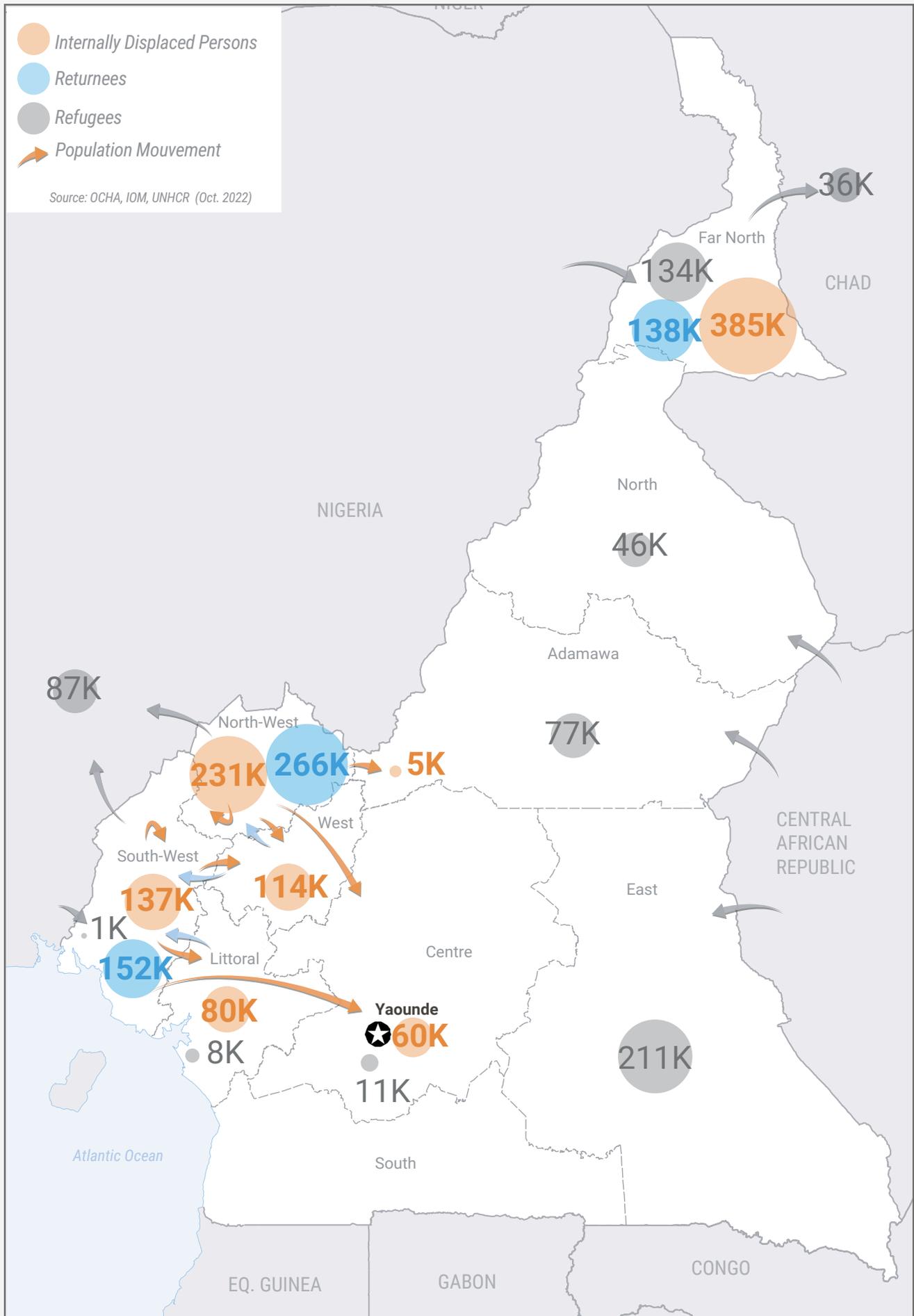
2. INTRODUCTION TO THE NEXUS IN CAMEROON

At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, where the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus concept was introduced as a part of the New Way of Working agenda, the Cameroonian government was the first state to volunteer to implement the approach. For this reason, Cameroon was selected as one of seven priority countries by the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian-Development Collaboration, established by the Secretary-General in 2017 (UN Cameroon, 2022a).

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[17] In 2019, UNDP supported the Cameroonian Government in formulating the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) for the NWSW regions. An Inter-Agency Mission to Cameroon concluded that UNDP's involvement in the implementation of the PPRD in collaboration with the central government could expose other aid actors to "risks of misperception, and impact on humanitarian access to vulnerable communities who are dependent on life-saving aid". The committee also found "a sharp increase in violence against the civilian population and humanitarian partners" had been reported following an initial UNDP mission to Buea in the SW region in late June 2020 (Inter-Agency Mission to Cameroon, 2020).

Displacements overview

Legend:
- Internally Displaced Persons
- Returnees
- Refugees
- Population Mouvement

Source: OCHA, IOM, UNHCR (Oct. 2022)

36K — Far North
134K
138K
385K — CHAD
North
46K
Adamawa
77K
NIGERIA
87K — North-West
231K
266K
5K
West
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
South-West
114K
East
137K
1K
Centre
152K
80K
Yaounde
60K
8K
211K
11K
South
Atlantic Ocean
EQ. GUINEA
GABON
CONGO

Creation of Nexus Task Forces

As a Nexus priority country, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and UN Country Team (UNCT) started to work on ways to implement the Nexus in Cameroon, and in 2019 a National Nexus Task Force (NNTF) was created with endorsement from both the HCT and UNCT.[18] This task force was charged with developing "*the HDP Nexus approach in Cameroon and its operationalization at the community level*" (Ibid). The aim of the NNTF was to provide strategic coordination and decision-making while steering the implementation of the Nexus approach in Cameroon. The Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) appointed an HDP coordinator at P5 level, who was tasked with leading the NNTF together with a regional HDP advisor from OCHA. As of 2022, the NNTF included more than 100 representatives from the government, UN agencies, national and international NGOs, states, donors, the World Bank and the private sector.

Selection of convergence zones

The NNTF initially looked at all three crisis-regions of Cameroon, namely the refugee crisis in the East, the Boko Haram conflict in the Far North and the Anglophone conflict in the NWSW regions. However, in interviews for this research, there appeared to be a consensus among non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors that the NWSW regions would not be "ready" for a Nexus approach, given the lack of acceptance there of the central government and the risks of further constraints to the operational environment and access if NGOs were to be perceived as working in alignment with the government. Several interviewed NGO representatives referred to the Presidential Plan for Reconstruction and Development (PPRD) that had been branded as a "Nexus project".[19] This plan had led to increased security risks for international aid organisations because of their perceived alignment with the central government, as the separatist NSAGs were unable

to distinguish the PPRD activities implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from other development and humanitarian programs (Inter-Agency Mission to Cameroon, 2020). For that reason, NGOs pushed back on the inclusion of the NWSW regions, and it was finally decided, in a first phase, to focus the implementation of the Nexus approach in the Far North region and the Eastern Front, covering the North, Adamawa and East regions.

Two Regional Nexus Task Forces (RNTF) were created in 2020, with OCHA and PLAN International co-chairing the Far North RNTF, and OCHA, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Danish Refugee Council DRC) co-chairing the Eastern Front RNTF.[20] The vision for implementing the HDP Nexus approach was bottom-up, and in this light, the RNTFs were created to coordinate humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors' interventions at the municipal level. A process was undertaken to identify convergence zones in both the Far North and Eastern Front, which would be municipalities targeted in the first phase of the Nexus approach. The NNTF established criteria for the selection of these convergence areas, including municipalities affected by shocks or protracted crisis, displacement-affected populations; engagement with and commitment from the local government and communities; and existing capacities stemming from the presence of HDP actors. On this basis, 23 municipalities were identified in the Far North, six of which were selected as convergence areas (iMMAP, 2022a). Twenty-one municipalities were selected in the Eastern Front, from which an additional six convergence areas were selected (iMMAP, 2022b).

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[18] The original Nexus Task force consisted of 15 representatives from MINEPAT, MINAS, World Bank, CHOI and RCO.

[19] The PPRD was jointly developed by the Government of Cameroon (MINEPAT and MINFI) and UNDP. The aim of the plan is to address the immediate needs of the affected populations in the NWSW regions. The goal is to: (i) restore social cohesion;(ii) reconstruct and rehabilitate basic infrastructure; and (iii) revitalize the local economy. To ensure transparency in assisting the NWSW regions, the Cameroon government designated UNDP as the implementing partner and fund manager of the PPRD (https://bit.ly/45fYNJA).

[20] Because of the limited presence and limited coordination capacity of OCHA in the East compared to the Far North, DRC was added as a third co-chair in 2023 to support JRS in the coordination of the Nexus implementation.
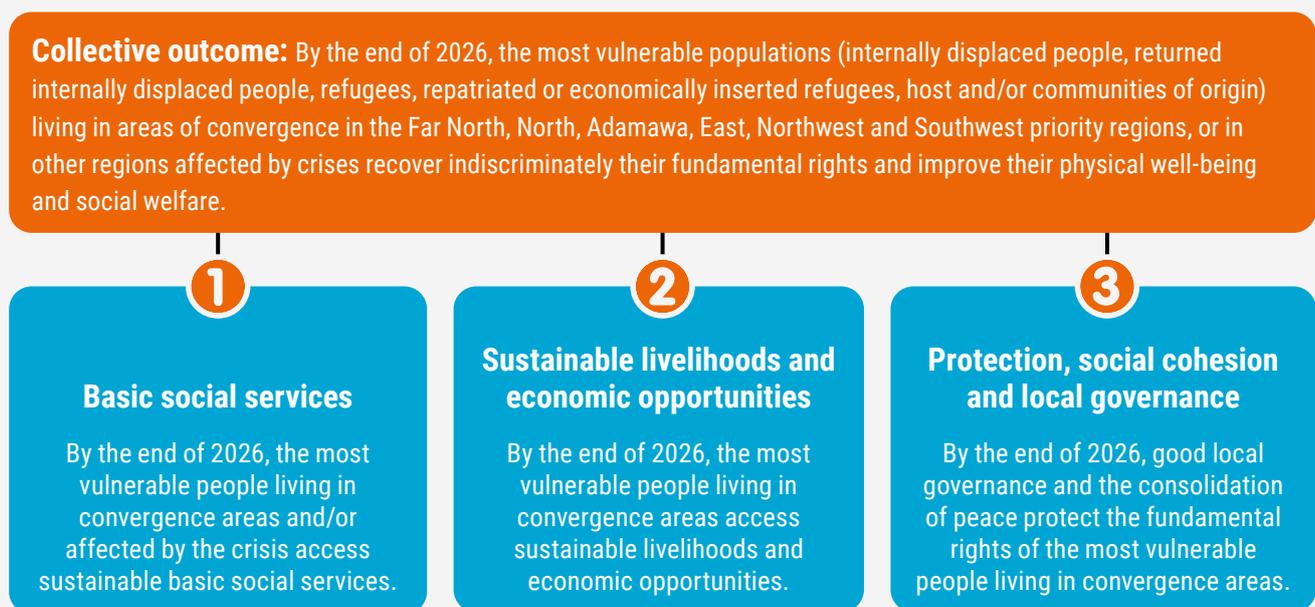
3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEXUS

To guide the implementation of the Nexus in Cameroon, a joint context analysis was conducted in 2019 based on a Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA) methodology.[21] This context analysis aimed to "build a shared understanding of the risks, needs and vulnerabilities of the populations affected by forced displacement" (UN Cameroon, 2022a). The analysis was the basis for the development of the "Road to the HDP collective outcomes in Cameroon" (Ibid). Under this roadmap, five tools were outlined to be developed to guide the HDP Nexus approach in Cameroon.

First, on the basis of the outcomes of the joint context analysis conducted in 2019, the NNTF agreed to create one collective outcome along with three sub-outcomes, with an overall focus on durable solutions for communities affected by forced displacement:

Second, a decision was taken to conduct a joint analysis in the six convergence areas of both the Far North and Eastern Front, allowing for a common understanding of the context, vulnerabilities, needs and existing capacities.

A joint analysis was conducted in the Far North convergence area of Logone-Birni by a Nexus Analysis Group formed under the NNTF in February 2022, with results presented to the municipal authorities in November 2022 (UN Cameroon, 2022b). A second joint analysis was planned for Mandjou and Garoua Boulaye in the Eastern Front, however the activity had not taken place at the time of this writing in July 2023 because of a lack of funding and resources for the exercise. As a result, only one joint analysis has been conducted in the 12 convergence areas.

The remaining planned tools included a programmatic framework with a catalogue of intervention activities to be carried out by humanitarian, peace and development actors to contribute towards the achievement of the collective outcomes; the development of monitoring and evaluation tools to measure the progress of interventions and inform adjustments as needed; and joint action plans developed with communities and authorities based on the outcomes of the joint analysis in each of the convergence areas. Although some steps have been taken toward developing these remaining tools and objectives, they had not been put into action at the time of this writing.

Collective outcome: By the end of 2026, the most vulnerable populations (internally displaced people, returned internally displaced people, refugees, repatriated or economically inserted refugees, host and/or communities of origin) living in areas of convergence in the Far North, North, Adamawa, East, Northwest and Southwest priority regions, or in other regions affected by crises recover indiscriminately their fundamental rights and improve their physical well-being and social welfare.

① Basic social services

By the end of 2026, the most vulnerable people living in convergence areas and/or affected by the crisis access sustainable basic social services.

② Sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities

By the end of 2026, the most vulnerable people living in convergence areas access sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities.

③ Protection, social cohesion and local governance

By the end of 2026, good local governance and the consolidation of peace protect the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable people living in convergence areas.

Source: The road to Humanitarian Development Peace Collective Outcomes in Cameroon (UN Cameroon, 2022a)

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[21] The methodology has been developed jointly by the EU, and WB Group to conduct joint assessments of recovery and peacebuilding priorities in countries affected by conflict and fragility. This methodology has been used in more than 20 countries to date (UN Cameroon, 2022a).

4. FINDINGS ON THE NEXUS IMPLEMENTATION IN CAMEROON

Cameroon is often highlighted as an example for Nexus implementation, based on its bottom-up, localised approach. With the Nexus gaining traction in more and more contexts globally, the research on Cameroon seeks to highlight lessons learned and examine whether other contexts could incorporate good practices from Cameroon to inspire implementation elsewhere. It also seeks to better understand and document risks, challenges or reflections that should be considered in future Nexus approaches.

The peace pillar and principled humanitarian action (PHA)

Across contexts, the peace component has been the most contested of the three HDP Nexus pillars and led humanitarian actors to fear potential risks to the humanitarian principles and humanitarian space. The peace pillar has also been the least defined pillar in the Nexus, leaving room to interpret peace to encompass interventions focused on everything from social cohesion, conflict sensitivity and community mediation to militarised, political or security approaches. In the neighbouring Sahel region, in particular, the peace component has been interpreted by some actors to include stabilisation. With its declared goal of re-establishing the functions and authority of a legitimate state through security interventions, stabilisation is inherently a political and often militarised processes. Since stabilisation projects often include components of providing assistance to meet the civilian population's basic needs and re-establish state-provided services, humanitarian actors have expressed concerns that NSAGs and affected communities will be unable to distinguish humanitarian interventions from stabilisation efforts. This could impacts humanitarian access to communities in affected areas that are not covered by re-established public services and may be in need of assistance and protection.

In the case of Cameroon, the NNTF released a document at an early stage in the Nexus process, drafted jointly with the international NGOs (INGO) forum for Cameroon (CHINGO), entitled "Peace in the Nexus in Cameroon" (UN Cameroon, 2020), which clearly states that *"responses consisting of, or directly and expressly linked to, the use of force are not included within the Nexus in Cameroon."* Rather, peace is understood as conflict sensitivity, local capacity building and social cohesion. Interviewees found that this way of defining the peace component was helpful in obtaining support from humanitarian actors for the Nexus approach in Cameroon, as they had fewer concerns about its impact on PHA. While interviewees reported that few peace actors were involved in the Nexus approach in Cameroon, the clear definition of the peace pillar was found to allow discussions to move past the negative impacts of the Nexus on the humanitarian principles and towards constructive ways to align priorities across HDP pillars.

The research also sought to understand if the Nexus approach had negatively affected PHA and humanitarian space. Most interviewed NGOs, UN agencies and donors did not find the Nexus approach in Cameroon to have significantly affected the respect for PHA in the Far North and Eastern Front. At the same time, they emphasized that the situation would have been much different if the Nexus approach had been implemented in the more sensitive NWSW regions. With the PPRD initiative being branded as a Nexus initiative, a principal concern was the alignment between development actors and the central government in these regions, which risked confusing politically supported development processes and neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian assistance in the minds of NSAGs and communities. The PPRD also had a strong focus on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructure, and NSAGs were known to target public infrastructure such as schools and health centres, potentially putting civilians at risk of being targeted for receiving government-supported services. The issue speaks to the inherent tension of the Nexus approach, with development actors frequently preferring to work bilaterally through governments, which are at times parties to conflicts, while humanitarian actors operate in a needs-based manner and independently of government influence.

With the inclusion of the government and development actors in the Nexus approach in Cameroon, some expressed concerns that the Nexus might give way for the government of Cameroon to increasing its influence over decision-making on humanitarian intervention modalities and targeting in convergence areas, given the important role local government authorities were planned to have in priority

setting and the creation of action plans. Some donors also expressed concerns that the selection of geographic convergence areas based on HDP criteria required a compromise with the humanitarian needs-based approach in which people are targeted for assistance solely based on the urgency of their needs. Donors feared that this collective targeting under the proposed Nexus approach could result in scarce humanitarian funds being allocated to areas where a consensus could be reached between HDP actors rather than where humanitarian needs were most urgent. Some interviewees also emphasized that aid tends to be politicised in Cameroon and that the Nexus approach could risk legitimizing the government's labelling of certain conflict-affected areas as "development contexts", where development aid allocated through the government would be considered the most appropriate means of intervention, rather than a context appropriate for humanitarian assistance and protection delivered in accordance with the humanitarian principles.

Localisation and bottom-up approaches

As opposed to Nexus approaches in other contexts, where the processes have been criticised for being too UN-driven and for excluding meaningful participation by NGOs, interviewed national non-governmental organizations (NNGOs) in Cameroon were very positive with regards to the Nexus implementation process in Cameroon. NNGO representatives reported having been included, informed, and meaningfully consulted throughout the Nexus process and cited the important role the HDP coordinator had played in this regard. NNGOs are represented in the national and regional Nexus task forces and they emphasized that Cameroon needs a local level response to avoid dependence on international assistance. NNGO representatives also spoke of the essential role local authorities play in coordinating across the Nexus and stated that no other actors would be able to provide such local-level coordination. Where other Nexus transitions have focussed on national level coordination systems, the Nexus implementation in Cameroon has from the outset focussed on a community-level response, which was seen as positive when interviewing both national and international stakeholders.

Dedicated human resources to coordinate Nexus approaches

Without exception, all actors interviewed for this research highlighted the critical role the HDP coordinator had played in the Nexus approach in Cameroon. Interviewees stressed that it had proven essential to have a dedicated senior staff member with the necessary experience and credentials to lead the multi-stakeholder Nexus process. His personal motivation and drive were also credited as crucial in bringing diverse actors together and advancing Nexus ambitions in Cameroon. However, since the HDP coordinator ended his mission with the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) in October 2022 that position has not been refilled. Other critical positions related to the Nexus implementation, such as a monitoring and evaluation advisor deployed through NORCAP and a Nexus advisor seconded by Japan to the RCO, are also vacant. Interviewees reported that the coordination of the Nexus approach had completely stalled following the departure of the HDP coordinator, with UN agencies and NGOs lacking funding, dedicated human resources and legitimacy to take on the extensive task of coordinating the Nexus approach in Cameroon. With only one NORCAP secondee attached to the RCO with a focus on localisation, and no plans or funds to fill the position of HDP coordinator, many interviewees were concerned that the implementation of Nexus approaches would not advance and that the accomplishments made to date would be wasted. While appreciating the important role the former HDP coordinator had played, several interviewees also highlighted the risk of having the entire Nexus process depend on one person's capacity and engagement, rather than being linked to existing positions, systems and structures. There was also frustration that so much time, energy and resources had been invested in the Nexus approach, without a commitment to fund the Nexus process in the future. For example, several interviewees highlighted that if the joint analysis conducted in Logone-Birni were not used to draft a Nexus action plan soon, the data would become outdated, especially for humanitarian interventions that require up-to-date assessments of needs and vulnerabilities, hence rendering the work contributed to the assessment wasted.

Structural setup

While interviewed stakeholders expressed appreciation for the inclusion of humanitarian and development NNGOs and INGOs in the Nexus process in Cameroon, interviewees consistently raised that the heavy structure had led to a slow and cumbersome implementation process. Several NGOs and donors reported that the Nexus process started in 2019 and by April 2023 the development and implementation of action plans had not begun in any convergence zones. Many of them were of the opinion that in creating the Nexus structure in Cameroon, the mechanism became overly heavy and bureaucratic, with interviewees suggesting that the Nexus should have utilised and adapted existing frameworks instead, for example to use the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) to assess needs and set priorities, rather than creating a separate and parallel analysis under the Nexus coordination structure. The development of specific tools for the Nexus in Cameroon, as well as the investment in inclusion of a diverse group of local and international stakeholders, proved to be a time-consuming exercise. Some expressed concerns that there would not be any tangible results from the time and resources invested in the Nexus, especially following the departure of the HDP Nexus coordinator, which had led to a paralysation of the process. There were also concerns that the Nexus would not deliver anything but an additional coordination mechanism.

On a positive note, the Nexus approach was credited with bringing local government authorities into the coordination of the response in humanitarian settings, where coordination had otherwise been known to exclude governments. Local government authorities were included in the RNTFs and in the selection of convergence areas, and some local authorities were described as actively engaged in the Nexus process. The plan was also to align the Nexus action plans with municipal development plans. Several interviewees emphasised the fact that local authorities at the municipal level are elected by the communities and not appointed by Yaounde, which makes them more representative of the communities they serve. At the same time, several stakeholders were not convinced about the real engagement and buy-in of the central government. Some highlighted how the government had been sceptical towards humanitarian actors and how the Nexus approach could prove a welcome narrative for it in presenting Cameroon as a development or recovery context, rather than a country in the midst of several protracted humanitarian crises.

Donors' buy-in and financial support of the Nexus

Despite donors' commitment to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC's) recommendations on the HDP Nexus[22] and bilateral statements of support for the Nexus approach, financing has been documented as one of the main barriers to the implementation of the Nexus globally (FAO, NRC and UNDP, 2019).

During interviews, donors consistently reported that they had not been brought into the Nexus process from its onset and they had not been requested to fund Nexus action plans resulting from the joint analysis to be carried out. They had also not been approached to fund other costs related to the Nexus, except for requests to fund some positions in the RCO. It was not possible to find a single example of a donor that planned to fund the implementation of Nexus action plans in the convergence areas. This was because of a variety of reasons. Some donors cited not being convinced with the way the HDP Nexus had been interpreted in Cameroon or did not have enough information to be willing to fund eventual plans. Some, particularly development donors, emphasised that they already had three-, four-, or five-year plans in place and would not at this stage be able to adapt these according to priorities agreed upon in eventual Nexus action plans. Some bilateral donors had strict, pre-determined thematic priorities set by their capitals (e.g. food security, education or health), which may not match the priorities for the convergence areas. Some humanitarian donors argued that the scarce humanitarian funding in Cameroon should be allocated where humanitarian needs are most severe and that those places do not necessarily coincide with the convergence areas where a certain level of stability and security is required for humanitarian, development and peace actors to all be present.

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[22]   https://bit.ly/3RK3jNq

Interviewees reported that the HDP Coordinator in 2022 had circulated the idea of establishing a humanitarian, country-based pooled fund (CBPF) under the leadership of OCHA or another in-country fund to finance initiatives across the HDP Nexus pillars. However, several interviewed donors expressed scepticism with regards to a CBPF or HDP fund, as they preferred to have control over how funds were used, and any support for the proposed funds would be based on the eventual composition and decision-making structure for the fund. Interviewed donors also all reported not having been approached to support the Nexus approach in Cameroon from the beginning of the process. For that reason, the action plans to be developed in each of the convergence areas would have to rely on existing, funded projects, which would presumably leave limited space for adaptation to accommodate new ideas for Nexus synergies.

Despite donors' commitment to greater coherence between development and humanitarian funds in the OECD DAC recommendation on the Nexus, this research found an overall lack of alignment and coherence between donors' humanitarian and development portfolios in Cameroon. Most interviewed donors had either exclusively humanitarian or development funding available for the country. For that reason, they could not finance interventions across several Nexus pillars through their own funding streams. When donors had both development and humanitarian credits for Cameroon, structural barriers within donor organisations often prevented synergies, coherence and joint priorities, for example, because of different implementation time frames, geographic priorities and working modalities, as well as different line ministries and thereby competing priorities. USAID, for example, mainly funds health interventions through its development allocations for Cameroon, while the humanitarian interventions of its Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance's (BHA's) are not restricted to health-intervention, which were reported to make synergies challenging. In the case of the EU, the European Commission Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) is planning its programmes through the annual humanitarian implementation plan (HIP) and prioritising the most urgent needs in the NWSW and Far North regions, while the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) plans for three to four years, with limited flexibility to adjust and very limited overlap with the geographic priorities of

ECHO. A similar lack of synergies was reported for German assistance to Cameroon, with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) having an office in Yaoundé, while the German Federal Foreign Office's (GFFO's) humanitarian interventions are overseen from Berlin. In general, it was found that coordination between donors' own development and humanitarian wings took place on an ad-hoc basis and was often based on personal relationships, rather than structured, systemic processes. For coordination and alignment of priorities between different donors, it was reported that the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) had started bringing together humanitarian donors from EU member states and the United Kingdom monthly, with the occasional inclusion of BHA. There were, however, no reports of systemic coordination between development donors or between development and humanitarian donors, which complicates the alignment of funding priorities across the HDP pillars as per donors' commitments to the approach. The lack of coordination also makes it challenging to obtain a full picture of funding flows to Cameroon.

In the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus, donors also committed to making more long-term, predictable and flexible funding available in fragile contexts. For that reason, NGOs were asked whether they had experienced such an increase in quality funding in Cameroon. NGOs reported that, with few exceptions, most grants were still short-term (maximum a year), and that funding flexibility was limited. SDC and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) were repeatedly highlighted as attractive humanitarian donors because of the long timeframe (one to three years) and flexibility of their grants. Several donors and NGOs reported that Cameroon is not a priority context given its middle-income status and competing crises in neighbouring countries. This had led to de-prioritisation, for example, of the refugee response in the Eastern region.

Because of the protracted nature of the crises in the Far North and Eastern regions, many NGOs and UN agencies emphasized the need for longer-term investments that would address the crises' root causes and strengthening resilience, recovery and development. In line with the Nexus concept, humanitarian emergency funding should be complemented with development funding in the crises-affected parts of Cameroon

to avoid exhausting already stretched humanitarian budgets. Although there is bilateral, multilateral and international financial institution (IFI) development financing in Cameroon, there appear to be limited synergies across these investments and limited alignment with humanitarian funding, as development donors often allocate funds bilaterally through the central government to strengthen government capacities, while humanitarian projects mainly target the Far North and NWSW regions, where the government has less reach. Lastly, it was found that rather than humanitarian actors handing over protracted caseloads to development actors, several humanitarian or double-hatted organisations operate in the space between the humanitarian and development pillars, responding to both emergency needs, as well as strengthening the capacities and resilience of local actors through longer-term interventions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Cameroon case study is an example of a Nexus methodology that has taken an inclusive, bottom-up and localised approach rather than, as seen in other case study contexts, a top-down, UN-centric, nationwide approach. The very inclusive Nexus approach fostered buy-in and support among NGOs and UN agencies for the Nexus approach in the selected convergence areas in Cameroon. The collaborative and consultative approach of the UN leadership was not least appreciated by NNGOs that saw the Nexus approach as a step in the right direction in achieving the localisation commitments. The interviewed humanitarian actors shared limited concerns regarding the impact of the Nexus on PHA because of the clear definition of the peace pillar from the onset of the process and the agreement to exclude the sensitive NWSW regions from the Nexus approach in Cameroon.

Despite these positive steps and the momentum created for the Nexus approach, the large investment of time and resources has not yielded any tangible results more than three years into the process for the people affected by conflict and displacement in the Far North and Eastern regions of Cameroon. This research found that the lack of implementation of activities under the Nexus approach was largely caused by three factors:

First, the creation of a dedicated and separate Nexus coordination structure and the prioritizing of the development of new tools specific to the Nexus approach in Cameroon proved time consuming, cumbersome, and potentially too ambitious. Rather than creating such parallel structures and tools, it some interviewees suggested increasingly to base Nexus approaches on existing structures and tools, potentially adapted to fit the specific context purpose.

Second, the departure of the HDP Coordinator resulted in a standstill of the Nexus implementation and it appears that the Nexus process ran out of steam midway, before the implementation had taken off. While the finding underscores the importance of dedicated human resources to steer and coordinate Nexus approaches, it also underlines risks when an investment of such magnitude is linked to one position or person, rather than sustainable structures and processes.

Lastly, and possibly most significantly, there appears to have been a complete lack of donor support and buy-in for the Nexus approach in Cameroon, leaving key Nexus positions, processes and eventual action plans unfunded. Despite their commitments to the OECD DAC recommendations on Nexus, donors appeared to be unwilling to adapt their priorities and ensure the alignment of development and humanitarian funding streams to ensure the implementation of Nexus approaches in the convergence areas. Without funding, the Nexus will not advance beyond coordination and information sharing. For that reason, donor buy-in and engagement is essential from the onset of the Nexus process.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED − CAMEROON

Based on the findings above, the following country-level recommendations and lessons were identified for Cameroon.

➔ The research demonstrated how a dedicated, senior-level position had proven crucial in moving the Nexus approach forward in Cameroon. Leaving the HDP Coordinator position vacant risks letting time and resources invested by NGOs and UN agencies go to waste. For that reason, it is recommended that a replacement for the HDP Coordinator position be recruited to lead the Nexus implementation process in Cameroon.

➔ While there are many positive elements to highlight in the localised, inclusive and bottom-up Nexus approach adopted in Cameroon, these elements could fail to become an example of good practice if the Nexus approach remains unable to produce tangible results in the convergence zones. For that reason, the methodology should be simplified, for example, by piloting the approach in fewer convergence zones before scaling up, and, to the extent possible, utilising existing tools and systems rather than creating separate, new tools that are specific to the Nexus approach in Cameroon.

➔ The Cameroon example demonstrates that the buy-in of donors should be guaranteed from the outset when piloting Nexus approaches to ensure that eventual actions will be funded and thereby implemented. Before creating more joint assessments and action plans, donor support should be sought to finance eventual activities across the HDP pillars in the convergence zones, even if that means that existing funded programs have to be adapted.

SOMALIA

One of NRC's water point for the displaced communities in Baidoa, Bay region. ©Abdulkadir Mohamed/NRC

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Since the fall of the Siad Barre government in 1991, Somalia has experienced one of the world's most complex protracted crisis, fuelled by political instability, armed conflict, social tensions and the impacts of climate change-induced droughts and floods. The three decades of humanitarian crises have resulted in widespread displacement and humanitarian needs, high levels of poverty, failed government institutions and lack of resilience of the population to absorb risks (DI, 2021; OCHA, 2023).

Somalia was often referred to as a "failed" or "fragile" state in the early 2000s, with several consecutive and unsuccessful attempts to form a functioning government. The region of Somaliland declared its independence in 1991,

and the Puntland region declared self-rule in 1998, with these two regions experiencing relative stability and safety compared to the southern and central parts of the country. A new Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was elected in 2012, with a successful transfer of power cementing the position of the FGS following the 2017 elections (DI, 2021).

Taking advantage of the power vacuum and fragility of the Somali government and security services, the Islamist Al-Shabaab group gained a stronghold in Somalia in the early 2000s. Al-Shabaab's area of control peaked in 2011, with the group controlling significant parts of south and central Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu and the important port town of Kismayo. Despite
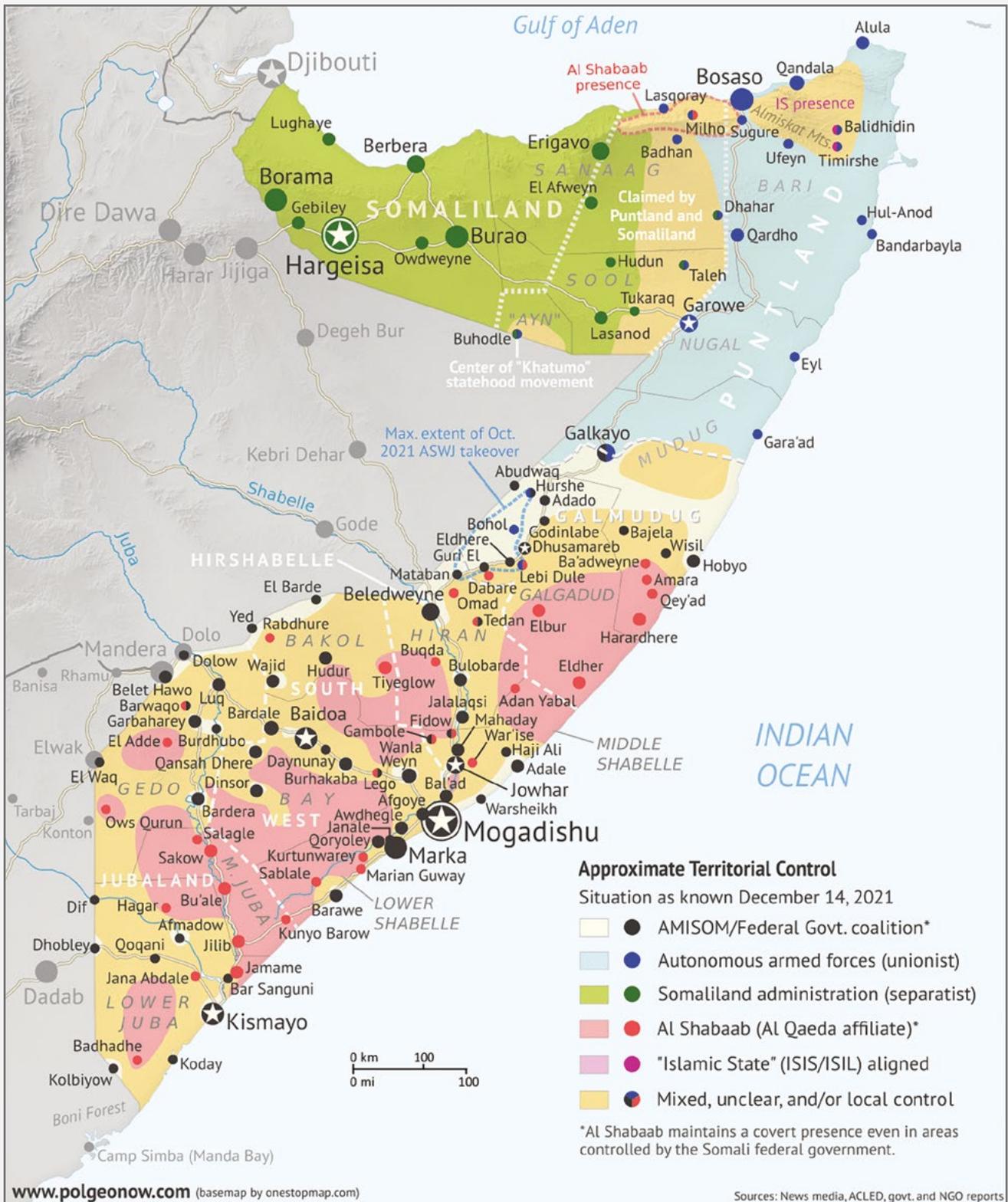
military interventions led by the African Union (AU) with support from Western partners, Al-Shabaab has proven resilient and continued to control large parts of rural areas in south-central Somalia, while the government mainly has maintained control over urban centres. The Somali government launched an offensive against Al-Shabaab in August 2022 and successfully regained territories in the southern and central parts of the country, which according to sources interviewed for this research, had been the overarching priority for the FGS (ICG,2023; Klobucista et. al., 2022).

2. PROTRACTED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

A combination of extreme drought, rising food prices and conflict led to a famine declaration in Somalia in 2011, and nearly 260,000 people lost their lives. The country experienced another prolonged drought in 2016 and 2017, but a timely humanitarian response is widely credited with preventing a repeat of the 2011 famine catastrophe. Currently, Somalia is affected by its worst multi-season drought in 40 years, surpassing that of 2011 and that of 2016 to 2017 in terms of duration and severity, with six consecutive failed rainy seasons as of June 2023. The failed harvests and loss of livestock, coupled with the increase in global food prices and the consequences of armed conflict, have led to high levels of food insecurity and projections of famine in the Bay Region and Mogadishu (OCHA, 2023). As of June 2023, approximately 6.6 million people, out of a total Somali population of 16.9 million, are projected to experience acute food insecurity (IPC level 3 or above), including a projected 1.8 million acutely malnourished children (IPC, 2023b).

Along with the devastating consequences of droughts over the past years, the consequences of the armed conflict between Somali government forces and Al-Shabaab has contributed to the displacement of Somali people. The country now has an estimated three million internally displaced people (IDPs) (UNHCR, 2023a). More than a million people were displaced in the second half of 2022 alone, with IDPs predominantly reporting that they fled their homes because of the drought (50 per cent) and insecurity and conflict (47 per cent) (Somalia Health Cluster, 2023). There is a significant trend in IDPs fleeing rural areas to seek refuge in one of 2,400 IDP settlements in urban or peri-urban areas, while IDP returns occur at an extremely limited rate (UNHCR, 2023b). This contributes to Somalia having one of the highest urbanization rates in the world, leading to problems of evictions and conflict over land tenure.

The consequences of weak government structures and poor infrastructure are also reflected in the lack of access to basic services. More than 6.4 million Somalis are without access to sufficient water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, only 30 per cent of the population has access to health care, and more than three million children are out of school (OCHA, 2023a; UNICEF 2023a). The

2023 humanitarian needs overview (HNO) found that 8.25 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, a situation which requires an international response valued at $2.6 billion (OCHA, 2023a). Given the ongoing armed conflict between Al-Shabaab and Somali government forces, humanitarian actors reported experiencing an extremely difficult operational environment, with limited access to the most affected, hard-to-reach areas outside urban areas. With few exceptions, Al-Shabaab has not allowed international humanitarian actors to run projects in areas under their control. As a result, assistance has focused predominantly on government-controlled areas.
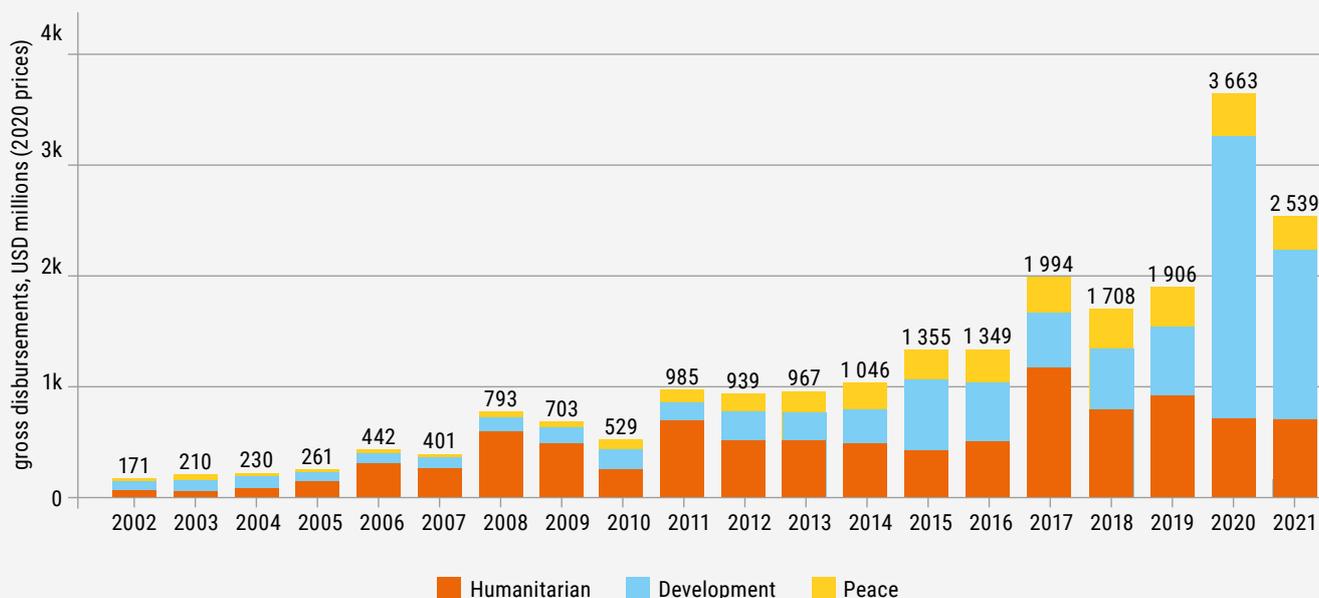
3. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The humanitarian response in Somalia is coordinated through the humanitarian cluster system, with a total of eight active clusters under the humanitarian country team (HCT), including camp coordination and camp management (CCCM); education; shelter and non-food items NFI; food security; health; nutrition; protection; and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). To tackle Somalia's enormous displacement challenges, the FGS has issued a durable solutions strategy for 2020 to 2024 (The Federal Government of Somalia, 2021). A durable solutions task force has also been created under the Federal Ministry of Planning, with additional durable solutions working groups (DSWGs) created in some federal states, bringing together development and humanitarian actors. The Somali government has also issued a 2020 to 2024 National Development Plan for the country (Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, 2020). Many donors and UN agencies interviewed for this research, however, emphasised that the government-led development aid architecture is under review by the FGS and Somali parliament, and there were reports of many discussions as to which ministry was to spearhead durable solutions work at federal and state levels.

Funding for the humanitarian response in Somalia amounted to $2.21 billion in 2022, covering 85.8 per cent of the humanitarian response plan (HRP), according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA's) Financial Tracking Service (FTS). The largest humanitarian donor by absolute volume

Somalia - ODA by HDP nexus pillar (2002-2021)

Chart: gross disbursements, USD millions (2020 prices), stacked bars by Humanitarian, Development, and Peace.

Year	Total
2002	171
2003	210
2004	230
2005	261
2006	442
2007	401
2008	793
2009	703
2010	529
2011	985
2012	939
2013	967
2014	1 046
2015	1 355
2016	1 349
2017	1 994
2018	1 708
2019	1 906
2020	3 663
2021	2 539

Legend: Humanitarian · Development · Peace

was the US, which funded 54.8 per cent of the response, or almost $1.2 billion, followed by Germany (5.5 per cent) and the EU (4.9 per cent) (FTS, 2022a). As data for development investments in Somalia is not available for 2022, the latest possible comparison of development and humanitarian funding for the country dates to 2021, where The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that official development assistance (ODA) for that year amounted to $2.5 billion, with 60 per cent ($1.5 billion) allocated as development assistance, 28 per cent ($706 million) as humanitarian assistance, and 12 per cent ($302 million) for peace. As presented in the graph below, however, humanitarian funding has historically exceeded development investments in Somalia. Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries[23] shouldered the largest share of funding for Somalia in 2021 with 59 per cent of the total ODA, followed by multilaterals (24 per cent) and non-DAC donors contributing only 4 per cent of ODA flows to the country (States of Fragility, 2022).

Somalia reached Decision Point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in 2020 and cleared its arrears to international financial institutions (IFIs) in March of that year. This allowed it to once again access important sources of international development financing. Since then, Somalia has established agreements with the African Development Bank (AFB), the World Bank (WB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These achievements were highlighted by many interviewed stakeholders as positive steps towards increasing the ratio of development investment to complement humanitarian relief efforts in the country. Most of the development investments in Somalia are allocated bilaterally to its public sector (about 50 per cent of ODA in 2021), with foreign development aid representing 27 per cent of Somalia's national budget. The ratio of ODA received to gross national income (GNI) in 2021 was 33 per cent, one of the highest in the world (UN Somalia, 2021; OECD Statistics, 2023).

Interviewed stakeholders emphasised that, despite being severely affected by the consequences of climate change, Somalia has limited access to climate financing. This, they said, was mainly the result of the lack of government capacity at both the federal and state levels to implement programs and policies, as well as a lack of data from Somalia, and a reluctance of climate finance institutions to invest

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[23] List of DAC countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

in extremely fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It was also stressed that the FGS has not exhausted all climate financing avenues and lack a national finance mobilization plan to address climate change both in mitigation and adaptation activities (UN Climate Change, 2023). For example, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) estimates that only $48.2 million in GCF financing will be made available for Somalia as of 2023, which is significantly lower than for other countries in the Horn of Africa, such as Kenya ($256.1 million) and Ethiopia ($297.5 million) (GCF, 2023). This is despite Somalia being ranked as one of the countries most vulnerable and least ready to improve its resilience to climate change (ND-GAIN, 2023).

4. FINDINGS

Somalia was included in this research to examine the consequences of a decades-long humanitarian response in a protracted crisis context and the extent to which commitments made under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus are implemented in extremely fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Status of the humanitarian response in Somalia

In interviews with UN agencies, international non-governmental organisations (INGO)s, national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) and donors there appeared to be a consensus that the quality of the international humanitarian response in Somalia is poor. While acknowledging that humanitarian emergency interventions have saved thousands of lives, interviewees stressed the negative consequences of Somalia's decade-long reliance on short-term humanitarian assistance. Without sufficient complementary investments in longer-term programs that address the root causes of vulnerability, prevent future crises, build community resilience, and work towards durable solutions for the country's significant displaced population, current levels of humanitarian funding was found to be inadequate. Despite the protracted nature of the crisis in Somalia, with many IDPs displaced for years or even decades, interviewees consistently shared examples of short-term interventions, such as food assistance, water trucking and the provision of temporary shelters that have been repeatedly distributed to

DANWADAAG CONSORTIUM

The Danwadaag Durable Solutions Consortium was created in 2017 and works with the FGS and communities to enhance progress towards durable solutions and the (re)integration of displacement-affected communities in Somalia. The consortium is led by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Concern Worldwide, ReDSS, the Shabelle Community Development Organization (SHACDO), the Gargaar Relief and Development Organization (GREDO), the Juba Foundation and the Northern Frontier Youth League (NoFYL) as members.

The Danwadaag consortium was repeatedly highlighted as an example of good practice for durable solutions programming across the humanitarian and development nexus, since it addresses the displacement-specific vulnerabilities in the physical, material and legal safeties of IDPs as well as the issue of social cohesion in urban and peri-urban centres. Interventions are based around housing and land tenure security; ensuring sustainable access to basic services; rights; and livelihood opportunities. Activities are implemented with a focus on government leadership and the fostering of a more conducive environment for durable solutions and community engagement to ensure relevance and ownership of the program. These long-term interventions were paired with a crisis-modifier component that would ensure immediate needs were met during crises and investments into long-term progress were preserved. The consortium is also contributing to research on durable solutions, mainstreaming learning to the wider humanitarian response in Somalia.

the same displaced populations without more sustainable solutions taking over. Many reasons were mentioned to cause such overreliance on emergency humanitarian assistance, with interviews highlighting that the recurrent, urgent humanitarian needs have not permitted a refocusing of efforts towards longer-term interventions as well as the lack of government capacity to take over service provision from humanitarian actors. They also highlighted the siloed humanitarian and development coordination architecture and the lack of donor appetite to invest longer-term development funding in the country.

One of the most significant consequences of the overreliance on repeated humanitarian interventions have been the changes in the social fabric of the Somali society, according to interviewees. The internationally driven humanitarian response was reported to have taken agency from affected communities. Many IDPs, despite years of short-term assistance, have not come closer to achieving self-reliance or durable solutions, and many have adopted negative coping mechanisms. Examples were given of how people displacing to urban areas to access humanitarian assistance, where they become dependent on food distribution, while losing access to their farmland. Interviewees reported that rather than receiving support to create livelihoods and rebuild sustainable lives, many IDPs remain passive recipients of humanitarian assistance, often through programs designed without consultation with the affected communities. The project-based, externally driven approach was reported to erode local capacities, as it builds new, temporary, internationally driven, parallel structures, without taking existing capacities and local leadership into account. Such approaches may be required at the onset of a humanitarian crisis, but many stakeholders questioned whether this was the best course of action in a protracted crisis context, like Somalia. Lastly, it was repeatedly mentioned that humanitarian assistance becomes a pull-factor that contributes to people's decision to displace into urban areas. As most humanitarian actors can only access urban centres, IDP camps in urban or peri-urban settings become the best option for survival for many of Somalia's approximately three million IDPs. With the extremely low return rate of IDPs in Somalia, interviewees agreed that programming should be designed sustainably from the beginning, which is often not the case.

Complementary development assistance

Interviewed actors consistently stressed that the solution to the protracted and cyclical crises in Somalia is not short-term, emergency assistance, which only addresses the symptoms and not the underlying structural causes creating needs. Diverse stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that Somalia needs parallel longer-term development investments in prevention, resilience and the strengthening of local capacities. Several interviewees reported that there is currently some momentum among donors to increase investments in longer-term efforts in the country. This was also evident from the financing flows presented earlier in this chapter, revealing how development funding has started to reach levels equalling or exceeding those of humanitarian funding. Still, most UN agencies and NGOs said they relied mainly on short-term, project-based humanitarian grants. This may be because most development funding is allocated bilaterally through the FGS, as is the case for the majority of WB funding, and, as a result, becomes less visible. A significant amount of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships' (DG INTPA's) funds was, for example, allocated to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and its security-focussed operations. At the same time, some interviewed donors expressed frustration that even when longer-term development funds were made available to NGOs and UN agencies, they often continued to implement short-term activities towards the end of the grant lifespan and did not link up development-focused programming to other humanitarian-funded portfolios within the same implementing organisation.

A precondition for increased alignment between development and humanitarian programming would be to target the same geographical areas and population groups. Donors reported that most development investments target the central government, urban centres, or relatively stable regionals such as Puntland and Somaliland, while the most severe humanitarian needs are found in peri-urban and rural areas of the south-central part of the country. Interviewed development donors stressed that development programs require sustained access and a certain level of security. This has resulted in development and humanitarian actors often not targeting the same geographical areas, except for some larger cities. Some donors also stressed that there is too much risk for them in investing in south-central

Somalia because of the conflict with Al-Shabaab and the limited government capacity, which would limit the sustainability of interventions. For that reason, while appearing to agree that development funding is needed to prevent a continuation of the cycle of humanitarian needs in Somalia, many bilateral development donors expressed not having the risk appetite and political willingness to invest development funds at the needed levels in the south-central part of the country.

Coordination of HDP Nexus actors

Despite significant development and humanitarian interventions in Somalia, all actors interviewed for this research reported very siloed coordination mechanisms, with development coordination falling under the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the humanitarian response under the HCT and cluster system. The durable solutions task force and working groups were highlighted as the only examples of formal coordination structures that bring together actors across HDP pillars. While the humanitarian cluster system was reported to coordinate humanitarian interventions, an absence of formal coordination was reported among development actors. Interviewees linked this to the Somali government's anticipated review of the country's development aid architecture and coordination system, which was expected to establish a formal coordination structure under the government's leadership. The lack of development aid architecture was also reported to have resulted in a lack of a coherent strategy behind development investments. Some development donors stressed, that without sufficient legislation and coordination in place, they did not have the necessary reassurances to invest more development funding in Somalia. They also expressed frustration over duplication and parallel efforts between different development interventions. A case that was highlighted as an example of good practice was the US Agency for International Development's (USAID's) establishment of an ad-hoc resilience working group that brought their development and humanitarian partners around the table to discuss, exchange and coordinate resilience-related interventions. This, however, did not appear to be systemic across other donors.

According to interviews with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), there have been some attempts to launch HDP Nexus approaches in Somalia. A Nexus Task Force was created in 2021, with three priority pillars endorsed by the UNCT in June 2022: climate, water and environment; durable solutions; and anti-corruption. This Nexus Task Force appeared to focus on the UN's engagement with the FGS to enforce collaboration between HDP actors. Interviewed NGOs, along with some UN agencies, however, did not to appear to be aware of, involved in or consulted on the initiative, and the Nexus Task Force was not mentioned in interviews with actors outside the Resident Coordinator (RC)/Humanitarian Coordinator's (HC's) office. The RCO does, however, co-lead the national durable solutions working group jointly with Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), in partnership with the Government's Durable Solutions Unit at the Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development.

Funding

This research shows that a certain level of consensus is building among donors that longer-term investments in durable solutions, resilience and social protection is needed in Somalia. Learning from the 2011 famine response, the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and USAID were reported to have been in the driver's seat in pushing for this shift towards longer-term interventions. The WB has also made significant investments in Somalia, including, for example, to the Multi-Partner Fund, and in 2022 it signed off on a $58 million International Development Association (IDA) contribution for transport and infrastructure interventions. Donors, including the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)/INTPA, FCDO, WB, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Netherlands and USAID had established a durable solutions group. Several stakeholders underscored that this refocus is also a question of cost-effectiveness. With the growing global funding gap, it is unsustainable to continue spending more than a billion dollars annually on a humanitarian response in Somalia that does not fundamentally improve the status quo. While it is crucial to sustain humanitarian funding to address urgent humanitarian needs, complementary funding is needed to help displaced people achieve solutions and address

root causes that generate new needs. Many stakeholders also highlighted the difficult operational environment in Somalia, leading to risks of diversion of aid and problems of gatekeepers to the most-affected populations, which further adds to donors' concerns in investing in the country. It should be noted that with every new emergency, donors pushed to convert longer-term, durable solutions funding into short-term humanitarian emergency assistance, which was found to eroded gains and creating significant setbacks.

As part of the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus, donors committed to making more long-term, flexible, and predictable funding available in fragile contexts. Despite increased recognition among key donors that longer-term interventions are needed, most interviewed UN agencies, INGOs and NNGOs described a continued, overwhelming reliance on short-term, project-based, unpredictable grant cycles. FCDO, USAID and ECHO were highlighted as donors that had made multi-year humanitarian funding available with a focus on durable solutions, resilience and climate change adaptation. Interviewed INGOs reported general flexibility amongst humanitarian donors but characterised humanitarian funds as reactive rather than proactive. Several interviewees for example stressed that although the current drought crisis was predicted, funds were only released when famine alerts were raised, despite the lessons learned from the 2011 famine of the importance of an early response.

Rather than development actors coming in to complement humanitarian interventions, traditional humanitarian and dual mandate actors were said to increasingly moving into the "grey zone" between humanitarian and development activities, with these actors increasingly applying for and receiving development grants. The reason cited for choosing traditional humanitarian actors for some development grants were their operational experience, reputation, and access in Somalia. Development grants were seen as much less flexible, with many more conditions attached than humanitarian grants. There were some examples of crisis modifiers being built into agreements on development grants, which was considered good practice by implementers given the volatility of the Somali context.

Competition and lack of thought-leadership

While this research found there to be agreement on the poor state of the current international response, caused by, among other factors, a lack of adequate, complementary development interventions, some donors expressed criticism of implementing NGOs and UN agencies for not challenging the status quo and engaging in thought-leadership for the response in Somalia. Many interviewees reported high levels of competition among implementing actors, rather than coordination, collaboration and alignment. Donors also reported that NGOs and UN agencies rarely turned down funding, even when other actors would be better placed to respond, citing a lack of incentives to exit or scale down in the current aid architecture. Some stakeholders referred to NGOs and UN agencies as being "business-like" actors, more concerned with sustaining funding levels and positions than bringing principled reflections or proposing innovative response modalities. National stakeholders also highlighted the perception that humanitarian actors were more accountable to donors than affected populations, with pre-determined programmes being implemented, rather than listening to the priorities of the affected communities. These dynamics were also found to be exacerbated by the current donor-driven aid architecture that pushes cost-efficient programming over innovative, layered interventions that work towards longer-term outcomes.

Stakeholders consistently cited as a good practice the use of consortia. These were found to limit some of the unhealthy competition among NGOs and foster transparency, innovation and collaboration among diverse actors contributing according to their comparative advantage and expertise. They also highlighted how transparency among consortium members fosters opportunities for learning that can be mainstreamed outside of the consortium. This model of working, however, requires additional funding for efficient consortium management to ensure the harmonization of approaches, which several donors are still reluctant to allocate.

BRCiS CONSORTIUM - BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES IN SOMALIA

Stakeholders interviewed for this research consistently drew attention to the BRCiS consortium as an example of good practice for innovative programming adapted to Somalia's protracted crisis context.

With funding from FCDO, the consortium was created in 2013 as a "never again" initiative in the wake of the 2011 famine. The main aim of the consortium is to strengthen community resilience, with a strong focus on community engagement and accountability. Activities are co-designed and implemented through active contributions by affected communities over a four-year period. Crisis-modifiers and community-based early warning systems are built into projects to create the ability to quickly respond to emerging crises and take preventive action, while building communities' resilience to absorb shocks.

The BRCiS consortium has received funding from multiple development and humanitarian donors to layer interventions and ensure complementarity. The consortium is led by NRC and has eight national and international members.

For more information, visit:
https://bit.ly/3tgH73l

Role of the government and local actors

Interviewed actors described the FGS as having limited capacities to generate tax revenues for service provision. Some ministries were described as having an insufficient capacity to provide leadership and coordination for international interventions. However, some positive trends were also noted, for example the Durable Solution Department within the Ministry of Planning that has developed a forward-thinking strategy and ensures collaboration between humanitarian and development actors to address the challenges of long-standing displacement. Although at the early stages, the recently reformed Somali Disaster Management Agency (SODMA) has also been taking commendable steps, coordinating both humanitarian and development actors' interventions in response to Somalia's recurrent humanitarian crisis. Nevertheless, several stakeholders reported that the international aid system, led by the UN, has become a government-like actor, planning, deciding and providing most core services and serving as one of the few quality employers in the country. The government was reported to be involved but not the driving force behind the aid system.

There was agreement among interviewees that collaboration with the FGS is challenging because of clan dynamics, high levels of corruption, and complicated relationships between the federal government and individual states. Many interviewees, however, highlighted that the only way forward for the country was to embed interventions locally and to strengthen capacities so that responsibilities could be handed over after the immediate humanitarian response. The government was also seen as the only actor with the legitimacy to coordinate and set country-level standards for interventions in key sectors such as health and education.

There were also calls to look at broader domestic resources rather than just focusing on foreign aid in response to humanitarian and development needs. Many interviewees highlighted local governments, the private sector, and the extensive Somalia diaspora as key actors to engage. This was also linked to the localisation agenda and the need for the Somali people to propose and drive solutions rather than relying on the foreign aid architecture. Simply allocating funds through NNGOs was not found to be an adequate solution to localisation, as the composition of NNGOs

mirror the structure of INGOs, staffed principally by dominant clans among the urban elites and dependent on international aid funding. As such, NNGOs were not found to represent affected communities and allocating funds through them risks further creating dependencies rather than reducing these towards greater self-reliance. Instead, interviewees stressed the importance of consulting and co-designing interventions with the active participation of the affected communities.

Humanitarian Principles

One of the concerns raised in global policy discussions on the HDP Nexus approach has been the potential implications on principled humanitarian action (PHA) and the humanitarian space, with the mix of different actors operating in accordance with different principles in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Therefore, this question was examined in interviews with stakeholders to understand if collaboration between humanitarian and development actors was seen as a risk to the humanitarian principles.

Most interviewees stressed, that since development actors tend to work closely with the government, increased collaboration between development and humanitarian actors could lead to increased security risks for humanitarian actors, as they may no longer be perceived as neutral, independent and impartial by armed actors. Some stakeholders also said that increased collaboration across the Nexus pillars could lead to confusion among affected communities and armed actors as it could become hard to differentiate principled humanitarian actors from development actors operating in collaboration with the FGS, and thereby creating increasing risk for humanitarian actors and shrink the space for principled humanitarian responses. Despite these risks, most stakeholders stressed that increased collaboration and alignment between humanitarian and development interventions is essential. They argued that the country is a state-building context, where a solely humanitarian response cannot address the structural underlying root causes of conflict and crises, and complementary development programmes are considered crucial to bring the country out of its protracted crisis. Some UN agencies and INGOs stressed that in an extremely fragile and conflict-affected context like Somalia, development actors must move

closer to humanitarian actors and ensure that development interventions do not negatively affect humanitarian access and space. This was further supported by the extreme levels of humanitarian needs, which obligates humanitarian actors to focus on life-saving activities in the most severely affected areas, while development actors need to complement the humanitarian interventions with sustainable, long-term programming.

As highlighted in previous sections of this chapter, most interviewed actors stressed the importance of increased coordination with the FGS and local governments to ensure ownership of the response and to strengthen local capacities. However, such government coordination could be seen to challenge the perceived neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors. In this regard, some stakeholders noted that all actors have an obligation to coordinate with the government and foster locally-led solutions, while ensuring space for principled humanitarian interventions. This was required to continue to operate in a principled and needs-based approach, with the ability to target the most affected communities for humanitarian assistance and protection without being influenced by political decisions around targeting.

Lastly, several stakeholders emphasised how the humanitarian principles are already being challenged in Somalia. This was based on the inability of most humanitarian actors to reach people in need outside government-controlled and urban areas. It was also based on the lack of thought-leadership, innovation and persistence in ensuring that sustained efforts to increase access in hard-to-reach areas. Government actors' attempt to influence the selection of people targeted for humanitarian assistance was also reported to be significant. The lack of direct access has led humanitarian actors to conduct needs assessments remotely (via phone calls or based on lists from community leaders), which many interviewed stakeholders reported has led to aid diversion.

5. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates the consequences of decades of reliance on short-term humanitarian assistance in Somalia without sufficient complementary investment in longer-term programs that prevent future crises by addressing root causes, building community resilience and working towards sustainable solutions for displacement-affected populations. Interviewed NGOs, UN agencies and donors appeared to agree that while the internationally driven humanitarian system has been successful in saving thousands of lives, short-term humanitarian interventions do not fundamentally provide a solution to the protracted crises in the country. For that reason, there were repeated calls for complementary development investments with a strong focus on strengthening local capacities to ensure sustainability and engage affected communities in the project design and implementation. However, despite commitments under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus to making long-term funding available in fragile contexts, donors appeared to lack the risk-appetite and the political willingness to invest adequate development funds in Somalia. Furthermore, under the current project-based, competitive aid architecture, INGOs and NGOs were found to not sufficiently challenge the status quo of the current international response in Somalia and work to ensure synergies across the HDP pillars.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED – SOMALIA

From interviews with donors, UN agencies, NNGOs and INGOs in Somalia, the following recommendations are made for further reflection and action:

➡ In line with the HDP Nexus approach, the Somalia case study calls for more investments in preventative action that addresses the root causes of conflicts and disasters, in complementarity to continued funding of address urgent humanitarian needs. The hope is, that with more resilient, self-reliant communities and capacitated government institutions, the scale of future humanitarian crises will decrease, making any future response more cost-efficient and dignified.

➡ While there is limited investment in Nexus approaches in Somalia, the case study revealed a need for a collective roadmap or strategy between development and humanitarian actors to ensure shared vulnerability criteria for target populations, common priorities and geographical overlap for interventions. A formal coordination mechanism should be created between development and humanitarian actors and donors in Somalia. Many actors highlighted area-based coordination as an ideal structure to ensure field-level coordination across HDP actors.

➡ This case study further demonstrates the need for donors to live up to their commitments under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus and make more long-term, flexible and predictable funding available in Somalia. This will require increased risk-appetite and political willingness from donors, as well as the ability for development donors to work through alternative partners, such as INGOs and UN agencies, when the government is not deemed an appropriate and/or capacitated counterpart.

➡ This study underscores the need to move away from the project-based, competition-driven aid architecture and incentivise collaboration, coordination and coherence between operational actors. This could be done, for example, by supporting consortia that have both humanitarian emergency capacities and longer-term programming that increase resilience and anticipatory action and works towards durable solutions and the self-reliance of Somalia's displacement-affected communities. Some of these preventative interventions should be funded by climate financing, and it is recommended for the international community to make climate financing available to extremely fragile contexts like Somalia, which are among those most severely impacted by the consequences of climate change.

AFGHANISTAN

Reading moment between students in an elementary school classroom in Souza (Littoral region). Souza, Cameroon, December 2021.
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1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Afghanistan has suffered from four decades of conflict, economic and political instability, and the compounding impacts of climate change. These factors have resulted in one of the worst protracted humanitarian crises in the world. The Taliban's takeover of the country in August 2021 marked a fundamental shift in the political and economic landscape and the start of a new era characterised by rapid economic decline, spiralling humanitarian needs and severe restrictions on the fundamental rights of women and girls.

Afghanistan's leadership has been repeatedly contested for decades, with some governments bolstered by the presence of international forces, and numerous conflicts have caused widespread displacement within the region. In September 2001, an international military intervention, led by the US, was launched, in an attempt to overthrow the Taliban regime. Following the retreat of Taliban leaders in December of that year, a transitional administration and an interim government was established with support from the UN, and parliamentary elections were

held in 2005 for the first time in more than 30 years (PBS, 2021). The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established in 2002 as a special political mission to assist the Afghan people, with a focus on political affairs and relief, recovery and reconstruction (UNSC, 2002; UNAMA, 2023). Armed conflict between the Taliban and the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF), supported by US and allied troops, continued across the country between 2002 and 2021. There were many development gains during this period, including increased access to education, improvements in women's rights, reductions in child mortality, and better access to basic services (WB, 2023). However, humanitarian needs remained high, with 6.3 million people in need in December 2018 and the conflict driving severe protection concerns, including attacks on health and education facilities, targeted killings, kidnapping and the forced recruitment of children.

After almost two decades of military presence in Afghanistan, the US signed a peace deal with the Taliban in February 2020, known as the Doha agreement, that outlined the conditions for the withdrawal of foreign troops from the country. Although the initial withdrawal timeline outlined in the Doha agreement was extended by a few months, the US and its allies withdrew the remaining military groups from the region in August 2021. This troop withdrawal paved the way for the Taliban's rapid takeover of the country, with the group seizing control over the capital Kabul on 15 August 2021.

The Taliban's establishment of a new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan marked the end of the 20-year conflict between the Taliban, ANSF and foreign forces, and triggered a significant shift in the political and socio-economic landscape. The end of major hostilities improved the overall security situation, although concentrations of conflict remained, particularly in Panjshir, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul provinces (OCHA, 2023b). Furthermore, violence continues to disrupt civilian life as the non-state armed group (NSAG), the Khorasan province branch of the Islamic State group (IS-KP), retains a strong presence in eastern Afghanistan and engages in targeted attacks (EUAA, 2022). Under the current authority's leadership, the country has seen a rapid deterioration in the economic landscape. This has led to a drastic increase in the number of people affected by poverty, estimated at 90 per cent of the population in 2023 (IRC, 2023). There have also been reductions in human rights protections, especially the fundamental basic rights and freedoms of women and girls. The Taliban has not been recognised as the legitimate government by the international community or any individual state.[24] Almost all embassies in Kabul closed in August 2021, and remain shut, ending formal diplomatic relations with the country. The EU, India, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye are among the few G20 countries that retain an embassy and diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. [25]

Members of the Taliban are also subject to UN sanctions, states' bilateral sanctions and designations under counterterrorism measures, contributing to the end of diplomatic relations with the international community. More than 100 individuals connected with the Taliban are sanctioned under UNSC Res 1988, and the US has designated the Taliban as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. As the humanitarian situation escalated in late 2020, the impact of sanctions and counterterrorism measures severely restricted the country's access to the global financial system. This and financial access challenges presented the largest barrier to the humanitarian response (NRC, 2022). As a result, the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted Res 2615 in December 2021 to facilitate the emergency humanitarian response by excluding funds needed for humanitarian activities from UN sanctions on Taliban members.

[24] This report will refer to the Taliban as "the authorities".

[25] In addition, as of December 2022, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Qatar, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the United Arab Emirates also had embassies open in Kabul.

2. HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Afghanistan is facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, with two-thirds of the population, a staggering 29.2 million people, relying on humanitarian assistance to survive in 2023 (OCHA, 2023c). Whereas conflict was previously the main driver of humanitarian needs, the current crisis is driven by multidimensional and compounding factors, including an economy on the edge of collapse, high inflation, unemployment, the impact of repeated droughts and natural disasters, and the near collapse of public services. There has been a 54 per cent increase in the number of people in need since 2021, predominantly in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), where the number of people in need has grown by 40 per cent, and protection, where there has been a 25 per cent increase in need. The return of the Taliban as the authorities in Afghanistan has resulted in severe restrictions on the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and girls, reversing many of the gains achieved over the past 20 years. Women face almost total exclusion from public life, with measures introduced to prevent their access to education, work and freedom of movement impacting the livelihoods of female-headed households with some reports suggest that almost all such households face food insecurity (OHCHR, 2023; WFP, 2022).

Recurrent natural disasters and the impacts of climate change are also driving displacement (IDMC-GRID, 2019). Twenty-seven million Afghans were estimated to have been affected by natural disasters in 2022, with flooding, earthquakes and drought affecting people's access to livelihoods (UNDP, 2023). In 2018, the country suffered one of its worst droughts in decades, triggering the displacement of more than 370,000 people, a similar number to those displaced by the conflict that year (IDMC-GRID, 2019). People suffering from failed harvests in underserviced rural areas moved to urban areas in search of livelihood opportunities, and people ended up living in scattered informal camps on the outskirts of Qala-e-Naw and Herat, and the capitals of Badghis and Herat provinces. Food insecurity levels in Afghanistan are some of the worst in the world. Twenty million people are predicted to face acute food insecurity of IPC 3 and above in 2023, including 6.6 million people at emergency IPC 4 levels of food insecurity, one step away from famine (IPC, 2022).

After decades of conflict, there were nearly 6.6 million people internally displaced in Afghanistan as of December 2022 (IDMC, 2023). These internally displaced people (IDPs) often live in protracted displacement, with 38 per cent of them in informal settlements (UNHCR, 2023c).

Source: Financial tracking service (UNOCHA, 2023)
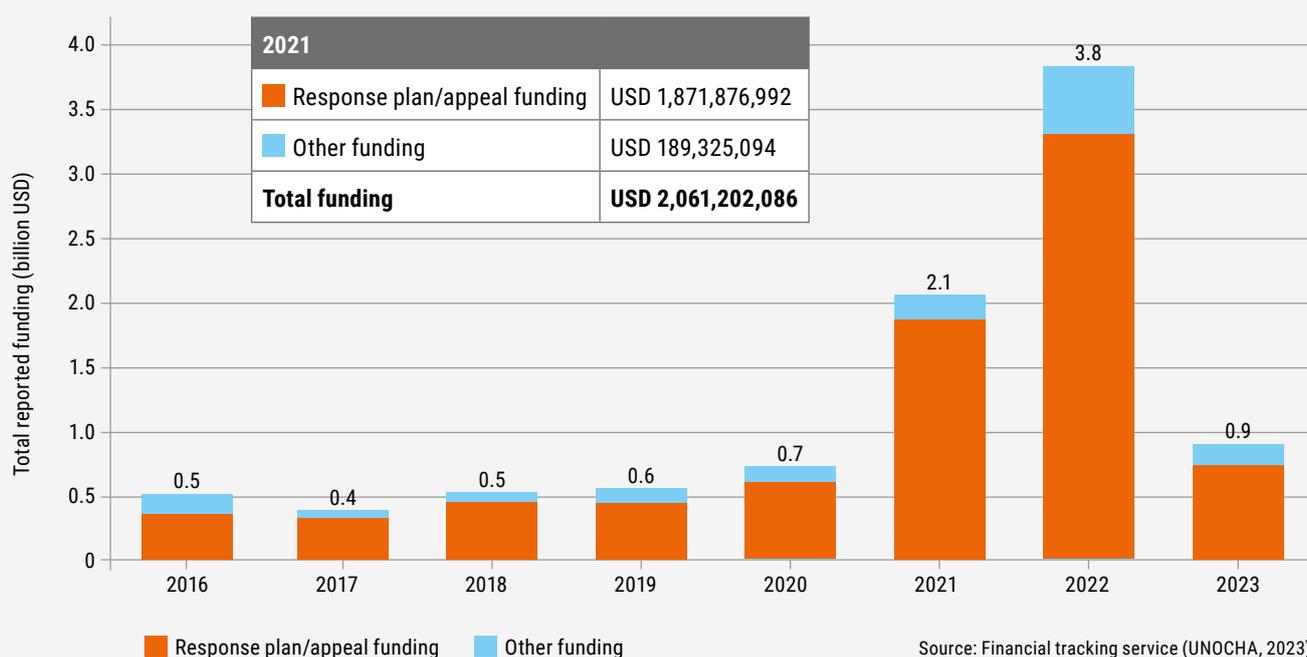
IDPs are under pressure from the authorities to return to their areas of origin even when they are ill-equipped to do so because of a lack of livelihood opportunities (ADSP, 2022). Despite overall improvement in the security situation and increased humanitarian access, including to provinces that had been inaccessible for decades, the humanitarian operating environment remains severely restricted (UNHCR, 2023c). Bureaucratic and administrative impediments are continuous, with humanitarian programmes facing increasing employment restrictions (namely the exclusion of women) and pressure from the authorities to disclose sensitive information. Humanitarian organisations are under pressure to accept a degree of operational oversight from the authorities that is not in line with principled humanitarian assistance.

3. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

After the Taliban took control of the country in August 2021, international development funding and bilateral development assistance, which had accounted for about 75 per cent of the previous government's funds and about 40 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), were suspended (CSIS, 2022). The Afghan Central Bank reserves, amounting to $9.5 billion, were frozen alongside international loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other actors. Essential public services, especially in the health and education sectors, had relied heavily on foreign aid, leaving them severely constrained and on the brink of collapse (Devex, 2023). As a result of the freeze in development funding and the ending of diplomatic relations, humanitarian funding and responses remain one of the only forms of foreign engagement with the country. It is predominantly humanitarian actors who remain operational in Afghanistan, with many development actors withdrawing or pausing their operations since August 2021. Those that remain are mostly coordinated under the UN Country Team (UNCT).

Development funding represented the largest proportion of foreign aid to the country prior to August 2021, more than funding for humanitarian and peacekeeping activities. Between 2010 and 2020, development funding averaged 52 per cent of the yearly foreign aid received. It only accounted for 37 per cent of the total foreign aid to the country in 2021, however (OECD, 2022b). The reduction in development aid and the economic crisis contributed to a stark increase in humanitarian needs in 2022. This resulted in the launching of the largest ever, single country humanitarian response plan (HRP) for Afghanistan in 2022, totalling more than $5 billion to respond to humanitarian needs and support basic service provision (UN News, 2022). The UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan was launched in January 2022 to outline the UN response and extend the objectives of the HRP to address basic human needs and preserve social systems (Lang, 2022). These activities are widely referred to as "humanitarian plus" interventions and are implemented independently from the authorities.

The country is facing a drastic funding shortfall in 2023, with only 14 per cent of the $3.23 billion HRP funded as of July 2023 (FTS UNOCHA, 2023). The humanitarian response is coordinated through the cluster system, with six active clusters under the Humanitarian Country Team including: shelter/non-food items (NFI), food security, health, WASH, education, and protection, which hosts four sub-clusters in child protection; gender-based violence (GBV); housing, land and property (HLP); and mine action.

There are multiple pooled funding mechanisms in place for the response in Afghanistan. The humanitarian response is supported by the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund, which is managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). There is also the World Bank-administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and the UN Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) that was introduced to fund UN agencies participating in the Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) and had a budget of $50 million in 2022 (STFA, 2023). The ARTF is a multi-donor fund established in 2002 to provide coordinated development assistance allocated bilaterally through the government that paused all programming in August 2021. Funds began to be re-allocated to UN agencies in 2022 for essential service provision and livelihood support. The ARTF had a balance of $980 million as of May 2023, $370 million of which was allocated to UN agencies' health, food security and livelihoods projects (ARTF, 2023).

4. NEXUS IN AFGHANISTAN PRIOR TO AUGUST 2021

Under the previous government, there had been attempts to operationalise the nexus for several years, with efforts to increase coordination between humanitarian and development actors underway prior to August 2021 (IASC Result Group 4, 2021b). A UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Afghanistan was under development at the start of 2021 to outline the UN's approach to sustainable development in the country between 2022 and 2025, which was to include increased collaboration across the HDP Nexus pillars. Similarly, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (ACBAR) - an independent coordination body of about 180 national and international NGOs - outlined in its strategic plan for 2020 to 2022 that one of its three advocacy objectives was to "support members to influence issue-based policy processes across the Nexus" (ACBAR, 2023). Nexus discussions remained focused on improving collaboration between HDP actors, rather than joint programming, with the security environment preventing transition to development activities in some regions (Samuel Hall, DACAAR, 2020). Regarding the peace pilar of the HDP Nexus, discussions were underway at the start of 2021 to develop a platform for collaboration between UNAMA, the political mission focused on political affairs, relief, recovery and reconstruction, and the UN Country Team (UNCT), a coordination entity of UN agencies operating in the country, to support peace efforts and underpin durable solutions. Although Afghanistan was not fully operationalising the HDP nexus approach under the previous government, the Taliban takeover led to an abrupt end to Nexus thinking, with most peace and development actors, including development financing, withdrawing, leaving humanitarian funding and humanitarian actors to respond to the diverse and multidimensional needs of the Afghan people.

5. FINDINGS

Afghanistan was included in this research to demonstrate the implications of a "reverse" nexus approach. Prior to the Taliban's return to power, the country received substantial development assistance, implemented through the government, in complementarity to short-term, needs-based humanitarian assistance. Nexus approaches were widely discussed in this context, and initiatives were underway to operationalise greater collaboration between development and humanitarian actors in the response. Following the Taliban's takeover, however, development assistance was immediately withdrawn, and two years later, there is still a void of development actors, financing and programming. For that reason, this research seeks to assess the implications of the withdrawal of development actors, understand the challenges actors face in implementation without an internationally recognised government counterpart, and the extent to which the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) recommendations on the Nexus can be applied in a context like Afghanistan.

Status of the international response

Interviewed stakeholders consistently highlighted that the current international response in Afghanistan, which is largely dependent on short-term humanitarian interventions, is inadequate to address the vast humanitarian needs and does not address the root causes that create the cyclical, repeated vulnerabilities. Since the Taliban takeover, there has been a shift towards short-term, emergency and community-based interventions, even from the few development actors that remain operational in the country. Stakeholders cited that livelihood assistance has been replaced with emergency food provision, large-scale education programming is now limited to community-based approaches, and large-scale infrastructure projects that were halted in August 2021 have not been resumed. It was also cited that actors previously implementing large-scale urban planning projects and formalising urban settlements are now operating through NGO partners, with programming limited to small-scale community-based interventions, such as

installing solar panels or repairing individual school buildings. In a country that has one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the world (Ministry of Urban Development, Afghanistan, 2015), interviewed stakeholders reported these community-level interventions are inadequate for preventing further displacement as informal settlements grow without access to basic services and therefore remain unsuitable for long-term settlement.

Interviewees viewed the current emergency response approach as driven predominantly by what was referred to as a "politicised aid environment within Afghanistan". They characterised that environment as one in which international actors refrained from mentioning and implementing "development" or "infrastructure" activities because of donors' concerns that such responses would benefit the authorities. Activities that go beyond purely emergency responses, such as livelihood assistance, are widely referred to as "humanitarian plus" or "basic needs" programming to avoid using development terminologies that trigger donor restrictions, leading some to suggest that an entirely new vocabulary and approach has been devised for the international response in Afghanistan.

The restrictive operating environment, with extensive interference by the authorities, and a high level of humanitarian need are also seen as preventing a longer-term response approach. There was widespread recognition among interviewed actors that the donor community is in a challenging position given the authorities' relentless interference and their violations of human rights, which aid actors do not want to be seen to endorse, yet, it was repeatedly questioned if the curtailing of development assistance was the most effective response. Furthermore, there were some suggestions that Afghanistan should be in an early recovery phase because the end of major hostilities, but the political environment was preventing effective development investments in recovery programming.

Several interviewees raised serious concerns about the longer-term implications of the current approach for the Afghan people, the donor community and the wider region. Many interviewees highlighted that humanitarian needs will continue to escalate and the population's reliance on humanitarian aid increase without efforts to address the drivers of

needs, including efforts to improve the economic situation, to secure livelihoods and to take preventive actions regarding the impacts of climate change. The absence of longer-term development interventions was also seen as a potential cause of donor fatigue in the near future, with some stakeholders raising concerns that those funding the response in Afghanistan could become frustrated at the lack of improvements and development gains and redirect the humanitarian funds to other contexts. Some donors raised similar concerns, suggesting that the lack of relationships and interaction with the authorities, and the limited operating environment, could mean that funds would be more effective in other contexts.

Respondents mentioned that unless more sustainable interventions designed to achieve self-reliance and durable solutions were established, there could be potential consequences for the stability of the wider region. Stakeholders cited that research has demonstrated how populations without access to education, stable livelihoods and economic opportunities can create conditions conducive to increases in recruitment for extremist groups. With several NSAGs operating in the region, concerns were raised that these actors could gain influence if people's living conditions continued to worsen without long-term economic prospects.

Humanitarian principles and access

This research was not intended to examine in detail specific organisation's operations in the face of access restrictions, but to understand differences in access across HDP actors and how their different principles and approaches affect synergies and collaboration across the Nexus. The ability of international actors to operate in a principled manner and adhere to humanitarian principles in Afghanistan has been at the centre of the international community's discussion of the humanitarian response in the country since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The humanitarian space in Afghanistan has been severely restricted by persistent interventions of the authorities, including bans on female aid workers, requests for beneficiary information and demands to the selection of beneficiaries and staff. It should be noted that the operating landscape changed significantly over the duration of this research. Interviews began in December 2022 before the authorities introduced

restrictions on women working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies and before they issued edicts calling for the rapid handover of education activities to local NGOs. However, the interviews were finalised in June 2022, after these conditions were in place.

Some interviewees referred to the restricted operating space as affecting the funding environment for development activities and longer-term funding. Donors interviewed mentioned they are hesitant to provide longer-term grants given the instability in the access environment and the lack of further assurances that principled programming can continue in Afghanistan. However, interviewed international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and UN agencies contested this perspective. They emphasized that although the operating environment is incredibly fragile, it is still possible to provide assistance in a principled manner. Interviewees reported how actors remaining in Afghanistan had shown significant resilience and adaptability in staying and delivering assistance without contradicting humanitarian principles, despite continuous and increasing interference by the authorities.

Concerns were raised on the impact of the lack of distinction between humanitarian and development responses in the country, with some suggesting it could lead to an erosion of the humanitarian space and affect access negotiations. With humanitarian actors being relied upon to implement more development-type activities, closer coordination with the authorities is required, with some respondents suggesting that this could erode the impartiality and independence of humanitarian actors if, in the absence of development actors, they remain the sole interlocutors. The restriction of the humanitarian space is also compounded by the authorities' reportedly limited knowledge of the humanitarian principles, humanitarian law and the differences between development and humanitarian processes and architecture. Interviewees reported that there have been significant efforts to engage with officials on these topics. Such engagements were seen as beneficial at the provincial level, however, due to the authorities' incohesive structure, some interviewees suggested that this knowledge does not filter beyond individual interlocutors. The shift in decision-making power from Kabul to Kandahar, the alleged residence of Taliban

Supreme Leader Haibatullah Akhundzada, was also noted, with respondents emphasizing that the international community has limited engagement or influence in Kandahar and on national policy.

Currently, the nature of different actors is not necessarily reflected in different levels of access to people in need. Stakeholders reported that the programming type and proposed budget had a greater impact on access, with agencies proposing longer-term interventions with larger budgets being more successful in gaining approval from provincial authorities. Respondents linked this to the authorities' increasing frustration with the short-term nature of most programmes and their perception that this approach is inadequate for addressing the needs of the population.

Development and the nexus

Interviewees stressed that, as a result of the operational, political and funding environment, there are no nexus approaches or development interventions in Afghanistan. The donor position towards Afghanistan has resulted in a total absence of development programming because of the reputational risks associated with any perceived support for the authorities and concerns that development assistance will legitimise or benefit them. For that reason, the distinction between humanitarian and development actors was described as arbitrary in the Afghanistan context, given that both are implementing similar activities and short-term programming. Ultimately, respondents emphasised that there would be no meaningful development interventions without a fundamental shift in the political approach towards the country. Given the improved security situation, some felt that there were opportunities for greater engagement on peace components of the Nexus. In reality, however, UNAMA's engagement with the authorities on human rights, governance and rule of law were reported to have made limited progress.

Respondents highlighted the need to compare the current void in development assistance to the situation before the Taliban took control of the country. Social infrastructure in Afghanistan was heavily reliant on development financing from the international community prior to 2021, including essential services like water, health care, education and critical infrastructure. With

NGOs and UN agencies now providing fundamental services without coordinating with government structures, some interviewees stressed that creating parallel service provision systems could contribute to reducing the country's institutional capacity and further weakening the socio-economic infrastructure over the long term. Interviewees also mentioned that under the previous government, durable solutions had been a major priority for donors, NGOs and UN agencies, and that funding, approaches and coordination mechanisms were aligned to realise durable solutions throughout the response. However, durable solutions objectives have been deprioritised and any capacity, institutional knowledge and progress made on those initiatives have largely been lost.

Some humanitarian and development donors interviewed recognised the limitations of the emergency response. They reported attempts to coordinate strategies for longer-term sustainable approaches, although the political appetite to support development assistance remains limited. The Afghanistan Coordination Group was established in May 2022 to coordinate non-humanitarian assistance and includes government donors, international organisations and UN agencies. The group drafted a joint Framework for International Partners to guide a collaborative approach to supporting basic needs beyond emergency aid. Similarly, the UN published a two-year strategic framework for 2023 to 2025 focusing on three priorities as prerequisites for sustainable development: sustaining essential services, creating economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods, and strengthening civil society and human rights. However, some questioned the effectiveness of these strategies without political impetus from the international community to fund and implement these plans. Similarly, questions were raised about the practical implementation of such approaches given the absence of a government counterpart, with many citing the lack of technical expertise in key ministries, given the exodus of large numbers of public servants since 2021. Even if there was a shift in the political appetite for coordinating with the authorities, the officials now running ministries were reported to have limited experience in running an administration and lack the resources, knowledge and capacity to function effectively or absorb bilaterally allocated development assistance.

Although there was recognition that the country experienced a fundamental shift in August 2021 and that a transition period was to be expected, many interviewees expressed frustration that after two years, more progress had not been made on implementing sustainable solutions and plans for the return of development assistance. Several stakeholders stressed that some development interventions are possible without directly benefiting the authorities, such as implementing through private companies and paying salaries directly, and more exploration of these opportunities with donors is needed. However, interviews also raised that without broader improvements to the economic situation these interventions could have limited impact. Some also challenged the perception that increased development assistance would lead to more public support for the authorities, suggesting that there was limited evidence for that position.

Coordination on durable solutions

Given the absence of development funding and programming, many interviewees considered there to be large overlaps between the actors implementing emergency response activities and those involved in basic needs programming. Humanitarian discussions continue under the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), with development coordination falling under the UNCT. Given the current situation, however, respondents felt that in practice many of the same individuals sit on both coordination mechanisms, except for a few large UN development agencies that are absent from the HCT. For that reason, respondents felt there is a relatively good understanding of the discussions and coordination across HDP actors in Afghanistan.

Coordination between actors on achieving durable solutions is one of the remaining forums bringing together development and humanitarian actors to look at longer-term outcomes and objectives in the country. A durable solutions working group (DSWG) was recently established, co-chaired by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and under the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (HC/RC) with representatives of the UN agencies operating in country and some INGOs. At the time of the interviews in June 2023, the structure of the group was still evolving, but comprised of one national group and five sub-national groups that

were reported to be less active. The high-level of representation in the DSWG led some INGOs to report that the group was not conducive to open discussions and was challenging to navigate. As the group remains in its infancy, there is still no agreed upon strategy or position on engagement with the authorities, hindering the group's operationalisation of ambitions for durable solutions for Afghanistan. Until there is decisive UN leadership on this issue, it is unclear how functional the group will be, given that some form of engagement with the authorities is a prerequisite for durable solutions. Interviewees also mentioned the weak coordination between the DSWG and the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster, which is affecting the durable solutions approach to evictions and the ability of the humanitarian community to engage and coordinate on forced evictions. The establishment of the group also made it clear there has been a loss of institutional knowledge within both the international community in Afghanistan and the authorities governing the country. Some references were made to a previous DSWG but there was no institutional knowledge of how this group functioned, however, or of the interactions with the previous government. This limited its ability to draw insight or lessons learned on durable solutions engagements in Afghanistan.

Although coordination between NGOs was reported to have improved with regards to bureaucratic and administrative impediments (BAI), some interviewees stressed, that there is limited coordination on longer-term strategic planning and programming. Given the fact that the authorities' permissions are localised and fragile, they emphasized that the restrictive and delicate operating environment had eroded trust between organisations as concerns arise that sharing information could affect access. It was felt that the traditional humanitarian coordination mechanisms are too large for sensitive discussions on basic needs support or infrastructure programming as donors are concerned this type of assistance is benefiting the authorities. For that reason, thinking on potential durable solutions approaches and more development programming generally remains within organisations or bilaterally with donors. Some mentioned the Asian Durable Solutions Platform as having the potential to facilitate these conversations.

Engagement with the authorities

Interviewed actors stressed that engagement with the authorities is essential for both the humanitarian response and for progress towards sustainable and effective development assistance. Several stakeholders outlined that engagement with the authorities was happening with technical counterparts at a provisional level, ranging from sustained dialogue to more formal interactions. The authorities' decentralised structure made engagement at a national level challenging, with organisations reporting limited entry points or influence. The absence of diplomatic relations and formal dialogue with the authorities has led some stakeholders to regard themselves as proxies of the international community in Afghanistan. Some of them feel that humanitarian aid has become a political tool replacing international diplomacy.

Stakeholders were consistent in saying that the absence of high-level government leadership at the international level and a common position on how to engage with the Afghan authorities is hindering all actors' ability to respond in Afghanistan. They sympathised with donors' views that it is an extremely complex situation to navigate. They also shared aversion for the authorities' behaviour towards women and on human rights issues. They repeatedly expressed, however, that organisations operating in Afghanistan have shown adaptability, resilience and persistence in continuing to respond in a principled manner despite increasing interference from the authorities. Ways for humanitarian actors to engage with the authorities without comprising their operational independence have been demonstrated and documented.

There were, however, concerns raised on the long-term impact of the continuing marginalisation of the authorities on the ability to meet the needs of the population and achieve durable solutions outcomes. Some interviewees reported that the political unwillingness of donors to allow development actors to engage with the authorities was causing coordination to be delegated to humanitarian actors for engagements necessary to achieve longer-term development objectives. Some interviewees emphasized that humanitarian actors' closer cooperation with the authorities could lead to an erosion of their impartiality and independence. Closer proximity to the authorities could

potentially affect their ability to meet the needs of those that the authorities themselves overlook. Respondents stressed that coordination with the authorities is critical for durable solutions and development objectives to be realised. The risks must be considered, however, when relying on humanitarian actors to fulfil these goals in the absence of coordinated engagement by development actors or donors. For that reason, many interviewees stressed that the impasse between the international community and the authorities must be urgently addressed. There was consistent recognition that a transitional period was necessary following the Taliban's return to power. After two years, however, there was a need for clear, coherent and aligned donor and UN positions on engagement and coordination with the authorities. Stakeholders underscored that avenues must be sought for any form of dialogue between the authorities and the international community. A technical level engagement was sighted by some as a possible entry point that would alleviate the pressure on those operating in the country. Interviewees consistently stated that engagement with the authorities does not equal recognition or legitimisation, and many questioned the benefits and potential consequences of continuingly isolating and alienating them.

Many interviewees also raised concerns about the donor-linked politicization of aid in Afghanistan and the consequent absence of development funding, shrinking humanitarian budgets and donor restrictions on programming modalities. Some respondents felt funding decisions are being made in reaction to the authorities' behaviour, either to influence behavioural changes or over concerns about actors' ability to operate in a principled manner. They reiterated that humanitarian assistance should not be used as a substitute for diplomatic engagement and solutions. The independence of humanitarian organisations was questioned in this context. Some respondents suggested that all aid in Afghanistan was political, given the fact that programming modalities are heavily influenced by donors' position towards the authorities.

Funding

Almost all actors interviewed for this research cited the funding environment as a major barrier for the current international response in Afghanistan and for determining the outlook of the HDP nexus. Diverse informants mentioned that Afghanistan is facing a "funding cliff", with the uncertainty of future funding preventing longer-term strategic planning. NGOs reported that there is limited multi-year funding, especially beyond health and education programming, and substantial uncertainties about funding allocations for the coming year. For that reason, some feared that there would be an inability to prevent worsening humanitarian needs and questioned the effectiveness of short-term interventions that do not tackle their underlying causes. Without longer-term funding to address the impacts of climate change, ensure macro-economic development and stabilise livelihoods, many felt the situation would continue to deteriorate, with a real risk of famine, given that 3.4 million people are experiencing Emergency IPC Phase 4 levels of food insecurity (IPC, 2023a). Although some interviewees recognised that strategic discussions on longer-term support in Afghanistan had begun in different forums, there was a consensus that these were of limited value without a political commitment from the international community to provide longer-term development funding to realise the objectives.

There have been attempts to ensure that some previously allocated bilateral development funds still being used to support the Afghan people via changed modalities. All bilateral government support has ceased, but after an initial freezing of funds in 2021 several organisations have shifted development funding through UN agencies to projects supporting basic needs. Some mentioned that new funding partnerships were under discussion between large-scale development banks and INGOs. However, respondents questioned the feasibly of these funding arrangements with INGOs lacking the capacity and expertise for such projects. Development banks also raised concerns about the tendency of INGOs to pool funds from multiple donors into projects, which can reduce the traceability of grants, and, as a result, make liability to specific donors more challenging. For INGOs, managing funding from development banks requires different controls and reporting requirements from those for traditional institutional

humanitarian and development government donors, as well as different operational expertise. This can mean INGOs have to significantly invest in the proposal phase and the programming implementation. Interviewees reported that for that reason direct partnerships between development banks and INGOs are an unrealistic way to replace the void in institutional government development financing.

Some interviewees mentioned that there are ongoing discussions on the utilisation of the STFA for longer-term stabilisation efforts and durable solutions. The Fund was established to support UN agencies participating in the TEF with a focus on activities addressing basic human needs and preserving social systems to complement emergency humanitarian assistance. As many of the donors are the same as those funding the humanitarian response, however, the question remains as to whether alternative approaches to principles, access and engagement with the authorities are possible when using these funds.

6. CONCLUSION

The Afghanistan case study demonstrates the consequences of relying solely on short-term humanitarian interventions to address diverse recurrent needs, without complementary investments in longer-term development interventions that prevent further crisis and address the root causes creating those needs. Without shifting the approach, the country is likely to remain in a cycle of repeated protracted crises. While humanitarian actors provide life-saving assistance, these interventions do not fundamentally improve the situation of affected Afghans. Stakeholders stressed the urgent need for stronger leadership on engagement with the authorities, which is essential for improving the operating environment of the current response and making any future progress towards achieving durable solutions for Afghanistan's significant displaced population. After two years of the authorities' rule, interviewees stressed that international political progress on implementing a strategy for engagement with the authorities is overdue. Such engagement does not automatically equate to a recognition of the authorities or legitimise their behaviour.

Humanitarian organizations providing assistance to the quake-affected families in Spera district of Khost province.
© Maisam Shafiey / NRC

Although some donors recognise the limitations of the short-term humanitarian response, this research demonstrates that a significant shift in the international political approach towards Afghanistan is needed to facilitate sustainable development solutions. Whilst there is evidence that initiatives are underway to develop strategies to reintroduce longer-term assistance, it was repeatedly emphasised that these strategies will only be beneficial with sufficient resourcing, funding and political support from the international community to implement and operationalise them. For that reason, while the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus stipulate that humanitarian assistance should focus on life-saving interventions, meaning that development actors should stay and deliver, Afghanistan remains a case of a reversed Nexus. With the withdrawal of development actors and funding, Afghanistan is suffering from the fact that only short-term humanitarian assistance is available to address needs, without complementary investments in long-term sustainable solutions. The return of development actors is essential, not only to ensure the cost-efficiency and sustainability of the response, but

also to allow humanitarian actors to maintain a level of operational independence and distance from the authorities. This is critical to ensure that humanitarian actors can continue to safely and effectively reach populations and groups that are marginalised by the authorities.

International donors need to consider the wider implications of the current international response, which conflates the longer-term objectives of development assistance with repeated, short-term humanitarian assistance and service delivery. The current limitations to coordination and consultation with the authorities in Afghanistan risk creating parallel systems that undermine the socio-economic development of the country and further adds to the dependency on humanitarian assistance. In a region that faces the interference and threats from NSAGs, addressing the basic needs of the population is critical to preventing further instability in Afghanistan and the wider region.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED - AFGHANISTAN

The following recommendations for Afghanistan were highlighted from the interviews:

➡ **Engagement with the authorities:** International leadership is urgently needed to outline a coherent approach for engaging with the authorities and for opportunities for technical level diplomatic engagement. The humanitarian leadership, in collaboration with the donor community, must devise and implement a coherent engagement policy and strategy with the authorities at both the regional and provincial levels. This is not only essential for alleviating the pressure on actors currently operating in Afghanistan, who are some of the sole interlocutors with the authorities. It is also essential for progress towards longer-term sustainable assistance and development interventions. The donor and broader international community must determine and realise the next steps for politically acceptable levels of engagement with the authorities to maintain humanitarian peace. Interviewees suggested that paving the way for sustainable development assistance to return technical dialogue to key ministries was a way for the international community to begin to reestablish such engagement. Importantly, interviewees consistently stressed that engagement with the authorities does not equate to legitimisation or mitigate the need for accountability for human rights violations committed by the authorities.

➡ **Political commitments to provide longer-term and flexible funding:** Interviewees stressed that the response in Afghanistan can only address rising needs with suitable, long-term, flexible funding. The strategies for supporting Afghanistan beyond reliance on emergency humanitarian assistance were found to have limited impact unless they are adequately funded and bolstered by political support from the international community. Diverse interviewees stressed that those operating in the country have demonstrated that a principled response is possible. Development funds are needed to address the root causes of needs and reduce the burden and reliance on humanitarian assistance. Interviewees cited the sole provision of humanitarian funds in effect in Afghanistan is not only ineffective at preventing recurring protracted crises but also potentially damaging to the security of the wider region. Afghanistan is on the brink of famine and faced with the presence of NGAGs. The absence of sustainable assistance to address socio-economic conditions, including deteriorating living conditions, could create conditions conducive to recruitment by extremist groups.

➡ **Protection of humanitarian space:** As donors and implementors begin to explore interim, sustainable development funding options for Afghanistan, appropriate safeguards must be introduced to protect principled humanitarian space. Channelling development assistance and funding through humanitarian actors is not a viable long-term option for addressing the needs of the population and achieving durable solutions and development objectives. Humanitarian assistance must remain at a level of operational independence from the authorities to ensure that the needs of Afghans' marginalised by the authorities continue to be met.

6 CONCLUSION

Some of the drought-affected households living in Luglow IDP settlement in the outskirts of Kismayo town.
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Several different modalities for the operationalization of Nexus approaches emerged from this research: the Iraq and Libya case studies examined transitions from humanitarian to Nexus and/or development responses and coordination structures; the Cameroon case study analysed a localized, community-level implementation of Nexus approaches, developed in parallel to existing coordination systems; and for Somalia and Afghanistan, where Nexus approaches have not gained footing, the case studies looked at the consequences of an overreliance on humanitarian assistance, without sufficient complementary development investments to address the root causes of protracted crisis and fragility.

While country-specific conclusions were presented in each of the case study chapters, the following section seeks to draw conclusions across the five contexts. First, a comparative analysis of the Iraq and Libya cases allows for conclusions and lessons on the transitions from humanitarian responses to Nexus and/or development responses and coordination structures. Second, the conclusions for the Cameroon case study are presented, followed by a comparative analysis of experiences in Afghanistan and Somalia. Finally, some cross-cutting conclusions across all five case study contexts will be drawn. Given the significant contextual variations in the case studies, some of the conclusions are context-specific and may not be fully applicable in other contexts. The findings can be used, however, as a starting point to identify opportunities and challenges where similar modalities of operationalizing Nexus approaches are considered or applied.

6.1 TRANSITIONAL CONTEXTS – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS FROM IRAQ AND LIBYA

There are clear contextual differences between the Libya and Iraq case studies. A comparative analysis of the findings from this research, however, highlights several similarities that can inform future transitions from a humanitarian to a Nexus and/or development response and coordination structure.

In both cases, the transition was justified by a decrease in humanitarian needs, in the number of IDPs, and in humanitarian funding. It was also justified by the fact that both countries are considered middle-income and their governments are assumed to have the resources to assist and protect people in need. At the same time both cases demonstrated that governments, despite having the necessary financial resources, may not have the capacity or willingness to provide services to all population groups. This led to questions as to how residual humanitarian needs in Iraq and Libya would be best addressed. Some interviewees argued that given the protracted nature of displacement, needs would be best met through government- and development-led approaches that sustainably address the root causes of displacement and promote self-reliance and durable solutions. Other interviewed actors emphasised that the most vulnerable and marginalized groups may not be included in or benefit from a development response that is focused on the strengthening of government-led systems and that some level of individual, needs-based humanitarian response should be sustained during a period of transition.

The short timeframe of the transitions and rapid decline in humanitarian funding, with the HRPs being phased out for both contexts, led to questions about whether the process could be defined as a transition, or whether it was rather an abrupt exit of the humanitarian response justified under the "HDP Nexus" or "solutions" agenda.

There were also clear similarities in the decision-making, planning and leadership of the transition in these two contexts. In Libya and Iraq, the decision to transition the response and coordination structures was described as unilaterally driven by UN leadership (the RC/HC with support from OCHA), with limited space for meaningful input and influence from NGOs, UN agencies and cluster leads. There had been prior discussions on a transition away from a humanitarian response in both countries. The transition processes, however, were described as rushed, occurring within a four to five month period. This timeframe was insufficient to strengthen technical capacities among government and development counterparts so they could adequately take over coordination responsibilities. There was also no clear strategy or blueprint in place to guide the transitions, which led to significant confusion about the coordination process and who responsibilities would be handed over to. This was further exacerbated by changes in UN leadership during the transition period.

This research also identified some noticeable differences between the two transitional cases.

First, the experiences demonstrated the importance of having a clear post-transition coordination architecture in place in advance of a transition. In Iraq, the humanitarian cluster system was deactivated at the end of 2022 without clarity on the post-transition coordination architecture. A new government-led coordination structure and Compact on Internal Displacement for Iraq[26] was still being negotiated between the UN and the Government of Iraq (GoI) in mid-2023. The lack of a clear handover strategy risked causing a loss of technical capacities previously embedded in the cluster system. It also meant that there would be insufficient opportunity to strengthen the capacities of the new coordination counterparts, as these stakeholders remained unidentified. In Libya, by contrast, the proposed new coordination structure was relatively clear in the months prior to the transition. This made

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26   The compact was proposed as a part of the Special Adviser on Solutions to Internal Displacement's selection of Iraq as one of 16 focus countries for solutions.

the process and handover of responsibilities more efficient and likely reduced the loss of technical capacities previously embedded within the clusters.

Second, although the HDP Nexus terminology was used to frame and structure the transition and coordination process under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in Libya, Iraq's transition was framed around durable solutions and linked to the UNSG's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement. The high-level stakeholder engagement appears to have added to the complexity of the transition in Iraq, where several decisions pertaining to coordination and financial structures are still pending more than eight months after clusters were deactivated. At the same time, this underscores the fact that although transition processes may be approached with different lenses, many of the practical implications and challenges remain the same regardless of the framing.

Third, with a strong INGO forum in Libya, NGOs were able to speak with a common voice and influence some key decisions. NGOs in Iraq appeared less aligned in their advocacy towards the UN leadership spearheading the transition. This was a result both of the reported weakness of the NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq (NCCI) and the differing views among NGOs on the justification for the transition in the country. A strong, aligned NGO community was found to be a key counterweight to the tendency of the UN leadership to make decisions unilaterally, without sufficient consultation and the meaningful inclusion of other relevant actors. Since NGOs are the primary implementers of humanitarian and development activities in both countries, their direct interactions with affected communities and their understanding of the contexts makes them well-placed to inform the decision-making and implementation of the transitions and ensure that vulnerabilities and needs are not overlooked. The lack of NNGO inclusion was found particularly problematic, as a future response should be embedded in local capacities to ensure sustainability and local ownership.

Finally, in both contexts, protection was found to require special attention. Interviewees emphasised the importance of maintaining a separate, dedicated, and resourced protection working group in transition coordination structures, with a sustained capacity for protection monitoring, analysis and advocacy. A

protection platform was planned as part of the new coordination structure from the onset of the transition in Iraq. This, however, was not the case in Libya, where a protection cell was only created following sustained pressure and advocacy from the Libya INGO Forum (LIF) and INGOs. Considering the ongoing protection crisis in Libya, a protection working group should have been included from the outset and not as an afterthought. To avoid the centrality of protection becoming a tick-the-box exercise without real accountability mechanisms, the Iraq and Libya cases demonstrate that transition processes need sufficient time and the provision of dedicated technical capacities to ensure that development and government actors can design and implement protection-sensitive interventions, ensuring that the most at-risk population groups do not fall between the cracks when transitioning out of a humanitarian response. This is critical in contexts where the government has been a perpetrator of protection violations or where government policies have contributed to the protection risks facing certain groups.

6.2 LOCALLY DRIVEN NEXUS APPROACH – CAMEROON

Compared to the cases of Iraq and Libya, Cameroon took a distinctly different, locally driven approach to the HDP Nexus. While NGOs experienced a lack of consultation and meaningful inclusion in Iraq and Libya, NNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies reported an inclusive process in Cameroon, which fostered buy-in, collaboration and support among diverse HDP actors. Most interviewed stakeholders found this localized approach, in which Nexus approaches were only pursued in selected convergence areas in the Eastern façade and Extreme North parts of the country, to be positive. It also allowed for the meaningful inclusion of local authorities and communities in the planning process, which added to its potential sustainability.

Unfortunately, this research found that the implementation of Nexus approaches in Cameroon ran out of steam before any implementation of activities was realized in the convergence areas. This was caused by several factors, notably, the decision to develop a significant number of separate tools, processes and coordination platforms specific to the Nexus approach in Cameroon. This proved very time-consuming, so much so that no action plans or

activities had been developed or implemented in any convergence areas more than three years into the process. For that reason, the Nexus approach had not yet delivered any tangible results for people affected by conflict and displacement in the country. This raised the question as to whether country teams should develop separate Nexus tools and coordination structures, or whether existing tools can be adapted to support the operationalization of Nexus approaches. The Nexus approach in Cameroon was also largely driven by a humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) coordinator under the RCO and after his departure in October 2022, the process appeared to have come to a standstill. While the Cameroon case demonstrates the importance of dedicated staff to driving forward and coordinating Nexus approaches at a country level, it also highlights the risks of basing a Nexus process of this magnitude on one position or person, rather than integrating it into sustainable structures and processes.

Lastly, this research found that the lack of donor buy-in to fund the Nexus approach in Cameroon added to the standstill, with planned joint analyses and key positions left unfunded. With all the resources and time invested in the Nexus process, including the development of tools and vast coordination structures, donor commitments to see the process through should have been obtained by the UN leadership from the outset. It was furthermore not possible to identify donors that were willing to fund the eventual implementation of activities identified under the joint action plans in convergence areas, and donors appeared unwilling and/or unable to deviate from pre-established priorities to accommodate joined-up humanitarian and development planning and programming. Despite global policy commitments to advance HDP Nexus approaches, siloed donor structures—where humanitarian and development budgets, priorities, and objectives are set by different government departments—and political limitations became a principal barrier to advancing the operationalization of the HDP Nexus in Cameroon.

6.3 OVERRELIANCE ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE - SOMALIA AND AFGHANISTAN

The OECD DAC recommendations hold that prevention should be prioritized always, and development whenever possible, in fragile contexts. The cases of Afghanistan and Somalia were included in this research to examine the extent to which development actors and donors live up to this commitment. In both cases, the research found an overreliance on humanitarian assistance. Despite consistent calls and evidence for the need for complementary investments focused on prevention that would address root causes and pursue longer-term, sustainable outcomes, there have still not been sufficient investments in these types of longer-term interventions.

Somalia

Somalia has been heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance since the 1990s. While acknowledging that humanitarian emergency interventions have saved thousands of lives, the research highlights several negative consequences of this decades-long reliance on short-term humanitarian assistance. Such assistance often targets the same population groups repeatedly without "graduating" them to more sustainable support that works towards achieving self-reliance and durable solutions. The changes in the social fabric of Somali communities were another negative consequence. Affected people experienced a loss of agency, becoming passive recipients of humanitarian assistance. While internationally driven life-saving interventions are needed in the onset of a humanitarian crisis, it was questioned whether parallel structures that do not tend to take existing capacities and local leadership into account are the best approach in a protracted crisis context, like Somalia. All interviewed development and humanitarian operational actors called for more complementary investments into longer-term outcomes that would build the resilience of communities and local structures and prevent future humanitarian crises.

At the same time, this research found that some momentum is building among donors to invest in longer-term efforts in Somalia, including durable

solutions and resilience programming linked to climate change adaptation, early warning and prevention. With the recent relative stability of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), more development investments and loans have started to flow into the country. Still, most longer-term development funds were reported to be allocated bilaterally through the FGS, while most UN agencies and NGOs continue to rely on unpredictable and short-term financing, and, in the case of NGOs, highly earmarked, project-based humanitarian grants. Furthermore, while donors acknowledged the need for investments into longer-term outcomes in Somalia, they lacked the risk appetite and political willingness to invest development funds outside of relatively stable urban areas under government control. This limited the possibility for coordinated approaches and geographic alignment with humanitarian responses. The absence of development interventions in the areas that are most dependent on humanitarian aid has left the responsibility for promoting resilience and recovery primarily with humanitarian actors, and in practice has contributed to the continued reliance on traditional humanitarian response modalities for lack of an alternative. With the growing global humanitarian funding gap, it is unsustainable to continue to spend more than a billion dollars annually on a humanitarian response in Somalia that does not fundamentally improve the status quo. The provision of humanitarian funding to address urgent humanitarian needs is crucial, but complementary funding is also needed to help displaced people achieve solutions and address the root causes that generate new needs.

Afghanistan

Prior to the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, the country received substantial development assistance. This was provided through the government in complementarity to short-term, needs-based humanitarian assistance, often to support basic service provision and supplement the governments' operational budget. Investments in durable solutions and discussions about Nexus approaches took place, with initiatives underway to operationalize greater coherence between development and humanitarian actors. Following the Taliban's takeover of power, however, donor governments did not want to be seen to recognize or legitimize the authorities, and development assistance to

Afghanistan was immediately withdrawn. This led to huge gaps in basic service provision, especially health care, which had previously been highly reliant on foreign development assistance (ICRC, 2022). The result was a significant shift towards short-term, emergency, and community-based interventions, even by the few development actors still operational in the country.

The immediate withdrawal of development funding in a country that was reliant on international funds for core service provision and the government's operating budget contributed to the collapse of the Afghan economy and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in a country in which two-thirds of the population depend on humanitarian assistance to survive. To counter the economic collapse, some development investments were rechanneled through NGOs or UN agencies as "humanitarian plus activities". These encompassed both direct service delivery to address basic human needs and the channelling of salaries to public sector workers to preserve social protection, both outside of coordination with government structures. Many interviewees stressed that this parallel, unsustainable, internationally driven system could erode Afghan capacities, risked further weakening the country's socio-economic infrastructure and required the use of inordinate amounts of humanitarian financing. Additional research and reflection could be useful on options for the provision of development assistance in fragile contexts where collaboration with government authorities is not deemed viable so that donors can ensure that development actors are able to stay and deliver.

As in Somalia, while humanitarian assistance has been lifesaving, short-term, emergency interventions have not fundamentally improved the capacities and resilience of affected Afghan communities. Many interviewees emphasised that humanitarian needs in Afghanistan are likely to continue to increase if complementary development funding is not provided to maintain the basic functioning of the economy and address the root causes behind cyclical crises and chronic vulnerabilities.

Afghanistan is a severely politicized aid environment marked by shrinking humanitarian space and relentless interference by the authorities. In this environment, humanitarian actors reported being exposed to additional risks due to the lack of presence and engagement by

diplomatic missions and development actors, which has forced them to engage in closer direct coordination with the authorities. This, along with the blurred lines between humanitarian, "humanitarian plus" and development-type activities, was found to be a key risk to the perceived neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors. More than two years after the change in leadership in Afghanistan, many interviewed stakeholders highlighted the importance of international political willingness to develop a strategy for engagement with the Afghan authorities and a return of development actors. This would allow humanitarian actors to maintain a level of operational independence and distance from the authorities, as well as an easing of humanitarian budgets. This was seen as critical to ensure that humanitarian actors can continue to safely and effectively reach people in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection.

Given the absence of development programming, some interviewees referred to Afghanistan as a case of a reversed-Nexus approach in which development actors have been unable to stay and deliver and humanitarian interventions and humanitarian funding are stretched to respond to all needs, humanitarian and beyond, of the population, part of which stem from the economic collapse caused by the retreat of development finance.

6.4 OVERARCHING, CROSS-CONTEXT CONCLUSIONS

From the case studies undertaken for this research, some overarching findings that cut across the five contexts emerged.

Lack of donor commitment

Across the examined contexts, donors were found to have taken few steps to accommodate and operationalize the commitments made under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus, including adapting their funding strategies to ensure greater coherence and alignment between development and humanitarian interventions. Many donors have made policy commitments outlining their alignment with the OECD DAC recommendations, but this has not resulted in a change of practice at scale.

First, the research found that country-level coordination and alignment between development and humanitarian donors was absent in most contexts. There were also several examples of a lack of coherence and coordination between development and humanitarian departments within the same donor organisations, let alone effective coordination across different donors. While there are forums, such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), that bring humanitarian donors together, there were no examples of systematic, country-level coordination between development and humanitarian donors in any of the five case studies. The lack of coordination across humanitarian and development donors was already a key finding of the 2019 research "Financing the Nexus" (FAO, NRC and UNDP, 2019), with competing country-level priorities hindering advancements of the Nexus.

Second, the OECD DAC recommendations call for increased investment in prevention and development in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This would require development actors to stay and deliver and make complementary investments in longer-term outcomes. The policy request is clear. The research, however, found that development donors often lack the political will and risk appetite to invest in development programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts like Somalia and Afghanistan. As a result, humanitarian funding is overstretched in attempting to respond to all needs and provide basic services, without sufficient complementary development investments that address root causes, prevent future crises and promote sustainable recovery and solutions. This underscores the need to explore innovative financing instruments that are more suited to protracted crises and that can catalyse and facilitate solutions in these contexts. When development and humanitarian funds were invested in the same country, like in Iraq, Cameroon and Somalia, they also tended to target separate geographic areas or different population groups. This did not allow for the necessary coherence across the HDP Nexus pillars to layer interventions and longer-term outcomes for the benefit of affected populations.

Lastly, the OECD DAC recommendations commit donors to making more long-term, flexible, and predictable funding available in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Many NGOs and UN agencies, however, reported that they continued

to rely on unpredictable and short-term financing, and, in the case of NGOs, highly earmarked, project-based humanitarian grants. It was also found that donors often lacked the willingness to compromise on pre-set priorities to fund layered Nexus approaches co-designed with affected communities, as in Cameroon.

The "grey-zone" and HDP Nexus coordination

This research uncovered what many interviewees referred to as the "grey zone" between humanitarian and development interventions in fragile and protracted crisis settings. In these contexts, the attempted differentiation between short-term, emergency humanitarian interventions and development cooperation was found to create siloed coordination structures that did not leave room for or incentive coordinated approaches across HDP actors.

This research also found that several humanitarian and double-hatted organisations, rather than handing over protracted caseloads to development actors, operate, in this "grey-zone" between the humanitarian and development pillars, responding to both emergency needs, while also working towards longer-term outcomes, such as self-reliance and durable solutions. This expansion of roles into more development-like action was justified by the protracted nature of needs and displacement in contexts like Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq, which does not call for a sole reliance on repeated, one-off, short-term emergency assistance. Rather, it requires complementary sustainable interventions that contribute to strengthening local capacities and ensuring a more dignified response for affected communities. Humanitarian, or double-hatted organisations, were also found to have the context knowledge, networks, access, and operational experience to serve as the preferred partners for interventions that bridge the gap between humanitarian and development assistance. This aligns with the conditions for humanitarian budgets, which tend to be more risk-tolerant than those for development financing. The question remains, however, whether such "grey-zone" interventions should be funded by humanitarian or development budgets, and donors appear to have adopted different approaches to this question.

The emerging "grey-zone" also raises the issue of how to best coordinate and finance interventions across the HDP Nexus in protracted crisis contexts. The cluster system has been relatively effective in coordinating life-saving assistance and protection to people in need during and in the immediate aftermath of conflicts and disasters, and donors have provided humanitarian financing accordingly. The findings from this research, however, raise questions as to whether the cluster system is the appropriate structure for coordinating more sustainable interventions in protracted crisis settings and supporting the strengthening of local capacities to prepare the ground for an eventual transition towards development and recovery responses. This then leads to another, perhaps more difficult, question: if not the humanitarian cluster system, then what alternative coordination structure would be appropriate for bringing actors together across the HDP pillars? This research has demonstrated that the current siloed humanitarian and development coordination systems are not fit for purpose for the "grey zone" between development and humanitarian interventions in protracted crisis contexts. Creating separate, additional tools, systems and coordination mechanisms on an ad hoc basis, as in Cameroon, however, is too cumbersome and time consuming for most country teams. With protracted crises in 36 countries, affecting 74% of all people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2021 (DI, 2022), this finding speaks to the ongoing system reform agenda, which looks at how to adapt existing systems to better accommodate longer term solutions.

While it's beyond the scope of this research to reach a conclusion on the complex issue of future coordination structures, interviewed stakeholders highlighted area-based coordination mechanisms as a good practice for bringing actors together across HDP pillars. They also underscored the need to move away from the project-based, unpredictably financed, competition-driven aid architecture and instead incentivise collaboration, coordination, and coherence between implementing partners. For example by supporting consortiums that have layered interventions, funded by both humanitarian and development financing, with humanitarian emergency capacities and programming that work towards longer-term outcomes.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

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In addition to the country-specific recommendations found at the end of each case study chapter, the following cross-cutting recommendations have emerged from the findings for this research. They are presented for further consideration and action by the specific actors addressed.

Humanitarian and development donors, and other financing actors

1. **Use financing to enable Nexus approaches:** As has been documented in this and previous research (e.g. FAO, NRC and UNDP (2019) "Financing the Nexus"), financing remains a key barrier to advancing the Nexus. If donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) want to put the global policy asks on advancing the Nexus into practice, they should use financing tools to incentivize and scale collaboration and coherence across the HDP pillars. This can happen with existing budgets and through existing funding mechanisms, like pooled funds, multi-donor programs and consortiums. It can also happen through new mechanisms that leverage new sources of financing. Creating more tightly earmarked pots of "Nexus funding", however, is unlikely to advance the approach effectively.

2. **Increase complementary development investments:** Donors and IFIs should increasingly invest development funding in areas that are directly affected by fragility and conflict, with efforts to intentionally layer these interventions with those of humanitarian actors to promote more sustainable solutions and recovery and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance.

To do so, development donors should consider the following sub-recommendations:

2.A Increase risk tolerance and ensure shared targeting: Development donors and IFIs should increase their risk tolerance for development investments and ensure that they target the same geographical regions and population groups as humanitarian interventions. The newly released risk sharing framework could represent an opportunity for introducing improvements (ICRC et. al., 2023).

2.B Consider alternative partners: Development donors and IFIs should consider increasingly partnering with UN agencies and NGOs when the government is not deemed an appropriate or capacitated partner, instead of freezing development funds or investing in safer regions of the country. This approach may compromise the sustainability of the intervention, as the responsibility for project activities might not be handed over to government authorities. Alternative partners, however, are often the only viable options for operating in extremely fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

2.C Ensure a people-centred approach: To ensure that no one is left behind in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, development actors may need to move away from a state-building approach, where collaboration with a stable government is a prerequisite for investment, to a people-centred methodology that targets the world's most vulnerable.

3. **Improve donor coordination across the HDP pillars:** It is recommended that systemic coordination is ensured between development and humanitarian donors at country level, which should include IFIs wherever possible. This should be accompanied by donor financing modalities that allow for greater flexibility to adapt priorities and ensure coherence between development and humanitarian interventions.

4. **Increase quality funding:** Donors should live up to their commitments under the OECD DAC recommendations on the Nexus and make long-term, flexible, and predictable funding available in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Development donors should consider incorporating crisis modifiers into grants.

Flexible funding is also key for real-time responsiveness to needs related to climate-specific vulnerabilities and to allow for the rapid-responses necessary to contend with the uncertainty of the climate crisis.

5. **Make climate financing available:** Some fragile and conflict-affected contexts are also among those most severely affected by the consequences of climate change. For that reason, donor governments should ensure that these contexts have access to climate financing that allows interventions to adjust to the new realities of the climate crisis. To the extend possible, climate actors should be engaged in coordination of responses in fragile and conflict affected contexts.

INGOs and UN agencies

6. **Stick to comparative advantage:** While acknowledging that in certain hard-to-reach contexts, humanitarian actors are the only operational actors, INGOs and UN agencies should avoid using the Nexus to expand their activities mandates. In line with the OECD DAC recommendations, operational actors should stick to their comparative advantage and ask if others would be better placed to respond to specific needs. This may involve a considerable shift in mindset for implementing actors, and relies on development actors stepping up their engagement in fragile contexts. The Nexus approach calls for increased collaboration, coordination and partnership between HDP actors with complementary skills. Consortiums were highlighted as a good practice to foster collaboration and reduce competition between INGOs and UN agencies.

7. **Provide thought-leadership:** NGOs and UN agencies should challenge the status quo and provide thought-leadership to ensure that affected people have access to the highest quality interventions, are enabled to achieve self-reliance, and supported to find durable solutions. There is a need to align global policy asks with actions on the ground, which calls for the courage to "do what we say", even if that means turning down funds or challenging donor positions.

UN leadership

8. Ensure donor buy-in: Financing was found to be a key barrier to operationalization of the Nexus approach. For that reason, it is recommended that the UN leadership cultivate donor buy-in and commitments to fund activities across HDP pillars before embarking on the implementation of Nexus approaches or transitions.

9. Ensure clarity on how to operationalize the Nexus: While acknowledging that some guidance is under development , this research underlined the need for clarity and agreement on how the Nexus is to be operationalized at a country level. This includes agreement on what the approach encompasses, such as whether the Nexus refers to tools, coordination structures and/or processes, as well as a clear understanding of leadership, roles and responsibilities. The need for greater clarity on how to operationalise the Nexus was already a recommendation in the FAO, NRC and UNDP Financing the Nexus report from 2019, which demonstrates a lack of follow up and action.

10. Clearly define the peace pillar: The peace pillar remains the least defined pillar of the HDP Nexus approach and it has been interpreted to mean anything from conflict sensitivity to stabilization and politically negotiated peace processes. As was the case in Cameroon, it is recommended that the peace pillar be clearly defined within the Nexus approach in each specific country context to ensure alignment with humanitarian actors' commitments to neutrality and impartiality. The peace pillar should also be defined at a global policy level in a way that ensures humanitarian actors' ability to adhere to PHA.

11. Address the "grey zone" in ongoing system reforms: The current coordination system, siloed between humanitarian and development actors, is not fit for purpose for the emerging grey-zone in protracted crisis contexts. This should be addressed in the ongoing system reform agenda, either by adapting existing systems or creating new, more appropriate coordination structures, systems and tools. Consortiums and area-based approaches emerged as good practice, and innovative, flexible funding modalities should be tested and brought to scale.

12. Prepare cluster deactivation earlier: In keeping with the reference to good practice in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster Coordination Reference Module (IASC, 2015), HCTs and cluster leads should prepare for an eventual cluster deactivation from the onset of a humanitarian response in order to strengthen national preparedness and response capacities for an eventual handover of responsibilities. Where a deactivation is on the horizon, an adequate timeframe should be established to allow for an effective and responsible transition of responsibilities. To ensure that humanitarian space is preserved, ongoing system reform processes should consider how humanitarian coordination can better link with relevant government structures to avoid creating parallel, internationally driven systems.

13. Improve accountability mechanisms: There should be stronger accountability mechanisms for the performance of UN leadership at the country level. Reviews and evaluations have stressed the need for improved leadership and accountability. The absence of a global performance mechanism, however, has weakened the overall impact of these findings. The creation of an accountability process or tool could help in meeting some of the challenges identified in this research.

14. **Ensure a blueprint in advance of transitions:** A clear strategy should be in place *before* embarking on a transition process from a humanitarian to a Nexus and/or development response and coordination structure. A blueprint for the transition makes the process more transparent and clear and facilitates better feedback opportunities on the proposed process from implicated stakeholders. The timeframe for the transition presented in the blueprint must allow for a responsible transition of coordination responsibilities in order to limit any loss of knowledge and expertise.

15. **Phase cluster deactivation:** Not all clusters are equally prepared or have equally capacitated counterparts to facilitate a transition of coordination responsibilities. In line with the IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module (IASC, 2015), it is recommended that cluster deactivations be phased in transitional contexts against pre-established criteria on improvements in the humanitarian situation and national preparedness to take over responsibilities.

16. **Sustain and resource the UN leadership:** To ensure consistency in transitions, UN leadership teams and OCHA should be sustained and resourced throughout the process. In cases where OCHA is supporting the transition, it should wait to scale down its response until the transition has been implemented and new coordination structures are in place.

17. **Increase inclusivity:** While the RC/HC is best placed to lead transition processes, meaningful consultation with NGOs in the design and implementation of the transition process, is strongly recommended. As operational actors with extensive contextual understanding, NGOs provide added value to UN decision-making processes, and yet are too-often excluded from these strategic discussions. It is also strongly recommended that NNGOs and CSOs be included in transitions processes to ensure sustainability and local leadership of new coordination structures.

18. **Pay particular attention to protection:** Protection should be given particular attention in transitions to government-led development and/or Nexus coordination structures, and an independent mechanism to monitor protection concerns and conduct protection advocacy should be sustained and resourced. This is particularly critical in contexts where the government has been a perpetrator of protection violations or where government policies have contributed to the protection risks facing certain groups. Development and government actors must have measures in place to promote protection sensitive programming to prevent the centrality of protection from becoming a tick-the-box exercise without real accountability mechanisms.

19. **Ensure a strong NGO forum:** A strong NGO forum was found to be essential in influencing transition processes through advocacy and strategic engagement with the UN country leadership. NGO forums should be resourced throughout transition processes to allow the NGO community to speak with one voice and meaningfully impact design and implementation around transitions.

20. Sustain funding across the HDP pillars: In keeping with the IASC Cluster Coordination Reference Module, cluster deactivation should not mean an end to humanitarian funding for a context in which humanitarian actors should remain in capacity to respond to residual needs. For that reason, donors should sustain funding across all three HDP pillars throughout the transition process.

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