

**NEXUS-LOCALISATION-RESILIENCE PROGRAMMING:
Are they connected and what does it mean in practice?
February 2024**

Abstract: This briefing paper looks at what problem(s) ‘nexus approaches’ are supposed to address. It then explains how a ‘nexus approach’ or, as some prefer, ‘resilience programming’, is fundamentally reliant on local actors’ agency, and therefore directly linked to the active inclusion and support for local and national actors that the ‘*localisation/national ownership/local capacities for peace*’ commitments imply. It provides an overview of identified good nexus- or resilience programming practices, which are very similar to those supporting ‘localisation’. It acknowledges multiple good examples around the world, but also lists key factors that make the international aid system still unfit to enable this more systematically.

I. LONG ATTEMPT – PERSISTENT CONFUSION

Formally (re-)introduced at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the call for more or better nexus-programming revamped the extensive 1990s discussion about ‘*linking relief, recovery and development*’ (LRRD). Such linking worked relatively well in disaster risk reduction programming. But overall, in the 15-20 years in-between, the international aid system did not succeed in systemically embedding such linkages. A significant change happened in the world however: most of the crises that cause large-scale humanitarian needs and deeper poverty, have now become recurrent or protracted, and more of them are related to violence and war. Understandably then, a new element was added: peacebuilding or, as we prefer ‘*violence- and conflict reduction and peace-support work*’. The double nexus of relief and development has become a triple one. The underlying rationale is evident: To reduce the escalating humanitarian needs around the world, violent conflicts need to be resolved or at least transformed into non-violent political competition. Only then can there be ‘durable solutions’, and a chance to address poverty and low human development indicators at scale.

The call for more nexus-programming is also related to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, a year before the World Humanitarian Summit. Several of the goals relate to basic needs (water, health, no hunger...) and Goal 16 concerns peace and justice.

In 2023, the OECD DAC confirms the desirability of a nexus-approach with its ‘*Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*’. By then, some bilateral donors meanwhile had already initiated internal initiatives for a stronger ‘whole-of-government approach’ (WoGA), sometimes reorganising their staff from the ‘humanitarian’, ‘development’ and ‘peace’ departments to sit more closely together, around a regional focus, to facilitate more active internal collaboration.

The connection between ‘humanitarian action’ and ‘peace support action’ is contested however by some humanitarian actors.¹ Many ‘humanitarian’ actors are comfortable with being asked to work with ‘conflict sensitivity’ and their intervention also aiming to maintain or restore ‘social cohesion’.² They do not however want to see a link between humanitarian action and political mediation processes, or more

¹ Fitzpatrick, M. et al 2021: *Making the Nexus Real. Moving from theory to practice*. Feinstein International Center p.7

² Perceptions vary: in multi-mandate organisations there is less apprehension than in those whose core business is clearly humanitarian action. Südhoff, R. et al 2020: *The Triple Nexus in Practice. Challenges and options for multi-mandated organisations* p. 21

explicit violence reduction and conflict-transformation work; let alone with peace support operations (with peace monitors and peace keepers), stabilization missions or state building. This is seen as a risk to the principles of impartiality and neutrality and of politicisation of humanitarian action.³ Some therefore prefer to stay with the ‘double nexus’ of humanitarian-development, rather than the ‘triple nexus’ that includes peace support work. Understandable as it is, such position may underestimate to what degree also ‘development’ is political e.g. in public expenditure choices governments make. It also incorrectly downplays the by now strong transformational ambitions embedded in humanitarian action e.g. regarding gender, age, minorities, social and economically marginalized and excluded people. And is less tenable for ‘multi-mandate organisations’, who are the majority of those providing humanitarian assistance.

In practice, many aid workers remain confused about the why, what and how of ‘nexus programming’, find the discussions and recommendations too theoretical, and feel that it is an unhelpful complication of their already challenging work. Notwithstanding various practical programmatic efforts, it is far from a mainstream approach in the international aid sector.

Moreover, the policy- and practice agendas have continued to expand, and at least three other important issues ask for clarity about their connection with nexus programming:

- **Climate crisis adaptation:** Global heating impacts are becoming an ever bigger source of impoverishment, forced ‘migration’, and violent conflict over shrinking resources. Climate crisis adaptation is clearly a developmental but in several contexts of shrinking resources also a conflict-management issue, that cannot be addressed with ‘relief’ aid.
- **Localisation:** Notwithstanding claims that there is no ‘agreed definition’, the central meaning is clear in the 2016 Grand Bargain agreement: better support and reinforcement of national and local actors, instead of replacing or subordinating them. Localisation addresses the problem of an excessive internationalisation that undermines national ownership and capabilities, and maintains a structural inequality between international and national actors that contradicts the professed claims by international agencies of ‘solidarity’, ‘assistance’ and ‘empowerment’. As the following sections clarify, nexus- or resilience-programming requires local actors exercising agency, with international agencies, sooner rather than later, in supporting, not leading, roles.
- **Human rights:** Several development and a few relief agencies have a ‘rights-based approach’, and no difficulty in integrating this into a nexus- or resilience programming approach.⁴ Most humanitarian actors on the other hand do not actively connect with human rights work, partially because few master the nuances between protected rights of non-combatants and rights of belligerents in international humanitarian law; more generally because of an interpretation of the ‘neutrality’ principle, under which human rights approaches are seen as too ‘political’, to be toned down into practical but more de-politicised ‘protection’.⁵

II. WHAT PROBLEM(S) DOES NEXUS-PROGRAMMING SEEK TO ADDRESS?

It is always relevant to ask what problem a certain policy- or practice initiative seeks to address, a ‘why’ question that sometimes never got clearly stated or gets forgotten.

So far, we have been able to identify three important reasons, which are partially related: the growing financing gap, siloed international aid, more structural impacts.

1. **Addressing the growing financing gap:** The World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016, and notably the resulting Grand Bargain commitments, were strongly influenced by the earlier publication, in January 2016, of the report on Humanitarian Financing. This put the finger on

³ The political debates about ‘humanitarian access’, ‘humanitarian corridors’, ‘humanitarian pauses’ etc. for Gaza, in October and November 2023, show how easily humanitarian action is politicised in conflicts that matter to those with political power.

⁴ See e.g. *Through a Different Lens. ActionAid’s resilience framework*. 2016

⁵ There is admittedly more attention to ‘minorities’ among humanitarian actors today e.g. Roma from Ukraine and Roma and others in Turkey following the 2023 earthquakes, compared to after the 2002 Gujarat earthquake when Muslim and Dalith minorities sometimes chose to leave, but on other occasions clearly were pushed out of Hindu-dominated villages.

the growing financing gap between global humanitarian needs and the globally available finance for humanitarian response – a gap that has only increased since 2016.

Humanitarian aid originally intended to ‘save lives’ and address the more immediate, critical needs. It was not intended to address the deeper causes of humanitarian protection- and other needs. However, particularly in the increasingly protracted situations of violent conflict and high insecurity, development actors have tended to pull out or development funding is suspended. This has led to the expansion of the practical interpretation of ‘humanitarian action’ into ‘early recovery’ (with funding from humanitarian budgets), and even into ‘peace support’ work, further stretching humanitarian budgets already inadequate to cover global needs.⁶ This becomes profoundly costly and ultimately ineffective.⁷ A strategic goal of nexus programming therefore is to reduce humanitarian needs, so that humanitarian actors can scale down or withdraw altogether (OECD DAC 2023:8) In protracted crises, the issue then is no longer to avoid the ‘gap’ between humanitarian and development programming, but for development actors to operate simultaneously with humanitarian actors – and if development actors are unable or unwilling to do so, for ‘development funding’ to be made available to ‘humanitarian actors’.

2. **Reducing siloed international aid:** International aid is astonishingly fragmented, across a multitude of agencies mostly competing for limited resources, making ‘coordinated action’ a virtually impossible and costly task. Foundational are the separation and siloes of budgets, requirements, procedures, but also purposes, approaches, time horizons, worldviews and mindsets⁸ between ‘humanitarian’, ‘development’ and ‘peace support work’. Nexus-programming therefore is an attempt to reduce these departmental separations. No bilateral or multilateral donor has done away with them. The argument is that each has relevant strengths, so nexus programming is the attempt to enhance the complementarity and coherence between these different ‘instruments’.
3. **More comprehensive approaches for more structural impacts:** The vision of strategic success of a nexus-approach contains elements such as: reduced humanitarian needs, a sustained reduction in violence, social cohesion maintained or re-established, people having access to education and livelihoods, no one left behind, stronger gender equality, more participatory governance, stronger respect for human rights, and overall stronger local capabilities to deal with ongoing and new challenges and shocks. This of course resonates well with the Sustainable Development Goals.

This resonates well with approaches conceptualised to achieve greater ‘resilience’. *“Over the past few decades, it has become increasingly clear that conflicts and disasters are affecting the poorest and most vulnerable people in greatest numbers. They often face a complex array of threats, which need to be addressed by taking a holistic view and considering problems and their answers in relation to each other. Resilience building offers a response to these increasingly complex realities. It widens the focus to include shocks and stresses such as natural resource degradation, epidemics, political oppression, violent conflict or economic crises. It promotes a rounded analysis of the issues, together with an integrated approach to*

⁶ H. Slim sees 21st century humanitarianism as having taken on an ‘exponentially broad agenda of action’, with attempts to ‘design aid programmes that run up and down Abraham Maslow’s famous pyramid of human needs, whilst applying the latest insights of Western social theory in the process’. *Solferino 21. Warfare, civilians and humanitarians in the twenty-first century*. 2022:179

⁷ “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.” (Gronkjaer, L. 2023: *The Nexus in Practice. The long journey to impact*. P.9)

⁸ For example, humanitarian actors tend to refer to local ‘NGOs’, while development and peace support actors tend to refer to the same organisations as ‘civil society’. ‘Civil society’ tends to have more positive connotations than ‘NGOs’. Obviously, in practice the question will be whether a local non-governmental entity behaves as a mere service provider or as a more societally engaged agency. Note however that international actors may influence the self-image of a local non-governmental organisation, turning socio-political activists into depoliticized humanitarian actors, as we have seen with various Syrian non-governmental organisations.

dealing with them that includes and goes beyond the more conventional disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation approaches.”⁹

No one agency can do this by itself – it requires intentional collaboration for such collective outcomes.

III. NEXUS PROGRAMMING IN PRACTICE

There is, not yet, clarity and agreement on how the nexus is to be operationalized at country level. (NRC 2023:14) Notwithstanding, the 2023 OECD-DAC guidance, and other nexus-oriented studies¹⁰ identify a number of good practices:¹¹

Joint and participatory analysis (more ‘problem analysis’ rather than ‘needs assessment’)

- A joint, risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience (OECD DAC 2023:7; Fitzpatrick 2021:5-6; FAO et al 2019:8) An analysis of drivers of conflict and of risks needs to be complemented by one of drivers of peacefulness and opportunities.¹²
- Provide opportunities for affected populations to articulate the risks, vulnerabilities and unmet needs that affect them, as well as the causes and drivers of their predicament, to become more resilient. And strengthen their voice and participation (OECD DAC 2023:9)

Longer-term, flexible, risk tolerant, people-centered, adaptive, programming

- Design longer-term development and peacebuilding programming that is flexible and adaptable to future risks and that incentivizes partners to remain present in crisis situations (OECD DAC 2023:9)
- Recognise that peacebuilding and development efforts should be risk tolerant and address root causes of conflict and crises, including in active conflict contexts (OECD DAC 2023:9)
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance is adaptive and contributes, where appropriate, to conditions that are suitable for taking up development efforts, including by supporting community resilience building activities (OECD DAC 2023:10) Ensuring that it is, as a minimum conflict-sensitive and gender sensitive (idem 2023:9)

Financing for collective outcomes

- Align financing with agreed collective outcomes where appropriate, while recognizing that each aid sector may also have priorities that fall outside of collective outcomes (OECD DAC 2023:10-11) Pooled funds, multi-donor support for programmes and implementing consortia are possible approaches to incentives more collaborative action for collective outcomes (FAO et al 2019:9; NRC 2023:12) Planning for collective outcomes does not have a strong track record, neither among operational agencies nor among donors, (FAO et al 2019:6) and many donors lack the flexibility to adapt pre-set priorities to accommodate joined-up planning and actions across the HDP pillars. (NRC 2023:12)
- More development funding needs to be invested by donors and international financial institutions (IFI) into fragile and conflict-affected areas., to promote more sustainable solutions and recovery and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance. This implies moving away from a state-centered to a people-centered approach. Such development funding needs to be targeted to the same geographical regions and population groups as humanitarian interventions. ((NRC 2023:12-13)

⁹ ActionAid 2016: *Through a Different Lens* p. 3

¹⁰ FAO, NRC, UNDP 2019: *Financing the Nexus. Gaps and opportunities from a field perspective*; Development Initiatives, FAO, NRC 2021: *Development Actors at the Nexus. Lessons from crises in Bangladesh, Cameroon and Somalia. Synthesis report*; Südhoff et al 2020: *The Triple Nexus in Practice. Challenges and options for multi-mandated organisations*. Center for Humanitarian Action; Fitzpatrick et al 2021: *Making the Nexus Real. Moving from theory to practice*, Feinstein International Center; NRC 2023: *The Nexus in Practice. The long journey to impact*

¹¹ Fitzpatrick et al also point out that programmatic good nexus practices are very similar to those used by the ‘resilience’ and ‘disaster risk reduction’ (DRR) practitioners (2021:6)

¹² See e.g. Van Brabant, K. *Bougainville Peace and Development Analysis. Findings and emerging priorities*. UNDP & Interpeace

- Such financing would not be sequential, with development funding coming in after humanitarian funding. There would rather be more simultaneous humanitarian, developmental and peace-programming. (Development Initiatives 2021:vii)

Longer-term, flexible, financing

- Predictable, flexible, multi-year financing wherever possible, involving the diversity of actors to support collective outcomes, and avoid sharp fluctuations in funding that can destabilise communities or countries. (NRC 2023:12) Provide sufficiently flexible funding for operational actors to learn, adapt, stop things that do not work and scale up those that do (FAO et al 2019:8) Flexibility and adaptiveness are also emphasized in Fitzpatrick 2021:6.
- To be more fit-for-fragile and conflict affected contexts, development funding should become more anticipatory, flexible and risk tolerant. (Development Initiatives 2021:ix) And humanitarian funding should resist dropping longer-term approaches by prioritizing immediate absolute funding shortages (FAO et al 2019:7)
- Reducing pillar-based and thematically earmarked funding is something donors have a major role to play in. (Fitzpatrick 2021:7-8), This should not lead to the nexus being seen as merely an opportunity to tap into funding from other sources to do more or less the same (the same risk applies to climate adaptation finance). Money is then no longer the means but becomes the purpose. With such mindsets and behaviours, a nexus approach becomes a driver of competition not of collaboration for collective outcomes.

Orchestration of the collaborative effort to collective outcomes

- The orchestration of the efforts of multiple organisations to approach a problem-situation in a given context holistically, with each playing to its strengths, and while respecting their independence and own mandates or missions (Fitzpatrick 2021:6) The appropriate pillar emphasis is context dependent (Fitzpatrick 2021:8) This requires a different type of orchestration: currently, the humanitarian and development coordination mechanisms are elaborate but more often than not separate (NRC 2023:11), and transitions from the humanitarian cluster system to a more government-led development cooperation coordination, e.g. in Iraq, happen too fast (NRC 2023:11) It is still unclear whether the best approach is to adapt existing mechanisms, or create new ones which tends to take much time and effort (NRC 2023:10)
- Protection is the one thematic cluster that may need to be retained after a transition to more development-oriented coordination, to avoid it becoming neglected. (NRC 2023:15)
- Support local and national authorities, including legitimate non-state authorities, to provide leadership of coherent humanitarian, development and peace actions. (The UN Resident Coordinator can play that role if government is unable or unwilling). But also think and act beyond the government, recognizing capacities and sources of resilience within communities and civil society. (Development Initiative et al 2021: vi; OECD DAC 2021 and 2023:7-8) ¹³

Multi-actor partnerships

- Including with local government, where the central government may be weak, unwilling, or itself involved in the conflict, but also with a diversity of relevant non-governmental stakeholders and actors (Development Initiatives et al 2021:vi) Most must be longer-term partnerships, but shorter term collaborations can be envisaged for responding to immediate or specific needs. (Development Initiatives 2021:vi)

Internal work in multi-mandate agencies and donor administrations

- Internal work in multi-mandate organisations and aid administrations on how they will put into practice a double and triple nexus approach, across departments or divisions. Areas of possible attention are, for example, to ensure a strategic and flexible 'linking relief to development' (LRRD) approach as a baseline for peace work; to recheck if comprehensive

¹³ OECD DAC 2021: *Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance*

conflict analysis capacities are in place; if a streamlined conflict sensitivity approach has been established, and/or whether a strategic local partnership approach is in place. (Südhoff et al 2020:29)

- Decision-making needs to be very context driven. (Development Initiatives 2021:ix) Donors should delegate decision-making to the country, rather than keep it in the capital (FAO et al 2019:7)
- Institutional capabilities to design more nexus-based programming (FAO 2019:9) Skilled individuals, who are able to analyse evolving contexts sufficiently well, and understand both humanitarian, development and possibly peace programming, i.e. are ‘nexus literate’ or ‘nexus trilingual’. The risk is that this becomes yet another burden on already overstretched individuals, who now need to broaden even further their range of expertise. (Fitzpatrick 2021:6)

IV. NEXUS-LOCALISATION-RESILIENCE

Somewhat remarkably, the various studies and OECD DAC recommendations do not speak in very explicit terms about the relationship between nexus programming and localisation/locally led development. In its rather top-down, UN-led, coordination- and donor-financing oriented version, nexus programming can be seen as primarily an agenda for international aid agencies. This is appropriate inasmuch as ‘the problem’ derives from the siloed structures of international aid.

The studies are clearer however about the important role of local actors when they focus more on the collective outcomes. As we have seen, these relate to ‘sustainability’, ‘greater resilience’ to shocks, ‘participatory governance’ etc. This refers us again to the strategic goal and the vision of (more strategic) success (or at least meaningful progress): “*the only sustainable way forward for the response is strengthening local capacities and resilience*” (NRC 2023:10) For now we have a lot of project successes but these rarely add up to strategic success.¹⁴

A 2020-2021 internal learning process within the Swiss Development Cooperation also confirm this intrinsic connection between nexus programming and localisation. “*This seems to be the right overall approach for nexus programmes to be context specific and locally owned, as well as an entry point to localisation. (...) Localisation is at the center of a HDP nexus.*”

And if we look at the good practices mentioned in Section III, then we see much convergence in the good practices identified for a nexus approach, resilience programming, and in support of local and national actors.

V. GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES BUT NOT SYSTEMICALLY ENABLED

Much is being done that goes in the direction of ‘resilience’ strengthening programming. Generally, this is easier when there is a higher degree of stability and security in the context but it is also attempted in more volatile situations.

- Following the end of the recent intense drought in the Horn of Africa for example, the emergency support to semi-pastoralist to keep a core of their livestock alive, is now being complemented by rangeland protection measures, local fodder production and -storage when possible, and sometimes the introduction of camels as more drought tolerant animals.
- Though Jordan hosts around a million refugees, there are many ‘developmental’ actions next to ongoing humanitarian aid, formally enabled by the 2016 Jordan Compact.¹⁵
- After the massive 2015 earthquake in Nepal, aid agencies took the opportunity to ‘build back better’, not only through now earthquake resistant housing and schools, with adequate WASH facilities, complemented, for example with the expansion of drip irrigation to save water and

¹⁴ See GMI 2023: *Project Success Yet Strategic Failure? Local leadership and localisation in relation to governmental actors.*

¹⁵ See e.g. IASC no date: *Country Brief on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus – Jordan.*

other support for rural livelihoods, as well as land registration for men and women.¹⁶ But also in volatile situations, there are real efforts.

- Several humanitarian actors run ‘multisectoral’ programmes, combining for example light- and medium-repairs to houses and WASH infrastructure, with perhaps cash for transport to health services and psychosocial support, and grants to restart small-scale businesses. In Kharkiv oblast in northeast Ukraine, in an ongoing war, aid agencies are testing the viability of a more circular economy for housing repairs and reconstruction, through the reuse of rubble.
- Here and there a donor may issue a call for nexus- or resilience oriented programmes, from a consortium of key actors or one entity that would facilitate and keep on track a multi-stakeholder process. Interesting, but still very exceptional, is the Nexus Response Mechanism of the EU in deeply divided and violent Myanmar.¹⁷ A similar nexus approach is now recommended for the relatively stable and somewhat more secure protracted crisis in northern Syria.¹⁸

Structurally however, the international aid system is still not fit-for-resilience oriented programming through collaboration for collective impact. Core blockages to practice what repeatedly have been identified as good practices over decades, all relate to the top-down, hierarchical, impatient and predictability seeking nature of most of the international aid system. Among them

- Inter- and intra-agency turf protection: Should the situation in e.g. Lebanon today be framed as one of widespread poverty, or as a humanitarian crisis? Irrelevant as this is for all the struggling people in Lebanon, it can be a prolonged bone of contention and rivalry between UN agencies or departments of a bilateral or multilateral donor, as on the answer depends who gets the formal ‘leadership’ over the wider action. Institutional, and possibly individual, interests can significantly override the focus on ‘purpose’. Similarly, there is not more ‘whole-of-government’ in aid-recipient countries than in the aid-providing ones. There too disconnects between ministries and governmental thematic departments can exist – and very difficult to reduce.
- Too centralized decision-making: Not only bigger strategic decisions, but also programming priorities and emphasis, and certainly budgets, remain often decided in remote international headquarters of aid donors and -agencies, but also in the capital-city offices of national governments. That is not enabling for context-driven, adaptive, programming. Some donors decentralize more of their decision-making (but do not always decentralize the all the budgets), but the potential benefits of this can remain only partially realized because they do not deploy enough staff to provide the in-depth attention required. Within countries, further decentralizing decision-making to the subnational level is needed, to the different stakeholders in a smaller socio-geographical space. Aid donors should recognize this from their own countries, where the general trend has been of decentralized budgets and decision-making by ‘regions’, provinces, ‘départements’, cantons or constituent states in federations.¹⁹
- Too impatient: Any work that seeks to go beyond surface impacts has to be longer-term. But the majority of funding in volatile situations remains shorter-term. Inevitably, recipients of the funds are will then not really engage with the deeper structural issues, as they do not know they will have the funding to stick with it. Most donors also provide only partial funding, not the full budget, meaning that operational agencies need to find matching funding from another source. Which may or may not be dependable for the medium-term? Even if in practice, there is successive shorter-term funding, 3 x 1 is not equivalent, from a practitioner point of view, to 1 x 3. (Three times funding for 1 year carries intrinsic uncertainties about programming

¹⁶ Helvetas & Solidar 2019: *The Humanitarian-Development Nexus. Lessons learned from the 2015 Nepal earthquake.*

¹⁷ [Homepage - Nexus Response Mechanism](#)

¹⁸ COAR & Aid Fund for Northern Syria 2023: *Systemic Resilience in Practice. Opportunities to support area-based, community-level resilience mechanisms and conflict-sensitive programming in northern Syria.*

¹⁹ The current farmer protests in several European countries, are another at-home example of how people can experience remote decision-makers, in this case EU Commission bureaucrats translating the ‘green deal’ into regulations for farmers, as totally out-of-touch with their realities.

continuity, that one time funding contractually committed to for 3 years, does not.) However, as a colleague once said: *‘the international aid system is highly impatient’* – it wants to see ‘results’ quickly. Problematically, quick ‘results’ and ‘quick impact projects’ may turn out to be superficial and fleeting results and impacts – not changing anything, so that we need to continue funding ongoing symptom treatment.

- **Overdesigned and insufficiently flexible ‘projects’:** Nexus- or resilience approaches, aiming for more holistic and deeper structural impacts require multi-stakeholder and process work. There is a long history of experience based advocacy for this. In 1986, the OECD published *‘L’aide par projet. Limites et alternatives’* by Bernard Lecomte, a mostly forgotten critique of overdesigned project thinking that from a top-down perspective seeks to ‘deliver results’ largely or exclusively defined by external actors. ‘Overdesigned’ means that the objectives or outcomes, the intervention logic, the time frame and budget are all so pre-defined and fixed that the living context needs to fit into the project, not the project adapt to a living context. Unfortunately, reality does not always respect our plans. His alternative, based on decades of experience, was RAD, *‘recherche-action-développement’*, the principles and practices of which correspond very much with what in English is called *‘participatory-action-research’* (PAR). In this approach, key stakeholders are active agents in diagnosing the problem(s) and why previous attempts to address it have not been more effective; they discuss and decide on priority actions and are the protagonists in doing what is under their control, and take part in convincing other relevant players to do what is their responsibility and in their area of influence. It is an iterative, multi-stakeholder process, that needs to maintain direction, but of which the rhythm (workplan), milestones, and major ‘results’ are not fully fixed a priori by the external actor.²⁰ That requires more flexibility, which sometimes is associated with ‘programmes’ as compared to ‘projects’; it also requires strong adaptive management or *‘agility’* as it is named in the private sector. Some international donor can handle changes to how the intervention was originally designed, though it can sometimes take weeks and even months to get contract amendments formalised, but few have real budget flexibility, beyond no cost-extensions and perhaps a budget top-up. The Global Learning for Adaptive Management Initiative at the ODI has not (yet) had that much influence.²¹ And yet many international donor governments have had to practice adaptive management, at home and at scale, in their emerging responses to the COVID-pandemic, under pressure from and in constant consultation with different domestic stakeholders.²² Why believe that radically detailed planning is possible in aid-recipient contexts when in our own often more stable and ordered societies we often have to review and adjust – significantly?

Is loosening tight control not risky? Humanitarian actors sometimes find development actors too ‘risk averse’, although risk aversion has definitely increased also in humanitarian action over the past 25 years. At heart, much of this is less about ‘risk’ than about ‘*uncertainty*’. Interestingly, in USAID’s 2022 Risk Appetite Statement, ‘risk’ is not framed in the usual manner as a combination of probability & impact of a threat, but as *‘the effect of uncertainty on the agency’s objectives’*. From this very different starting point, risk *‘can present potential opportunities, not just negative outcomes, that can threaten or enhance the likelihood of a set of objectives. Using this definition of risk, the agency emphasises the importance of continual weighing of risks against performance, cost, and short- and long-term benefit.’*²³ Being averse to uncertainty is not a very useful survival tactic in a world in which uncertainty and unpredictability are exponentially increasing.

²⁰ Process approaches and adaptive management have long been advocated for e.g. J. Farrington, D. Mosse and A. Rew 1998: *Development as Process. Concepts and methods for working with complexity*. ODI; or all the reflective work on ‘problem-driven-iterative adaptation’ approaches (PDIA), led for over a decade now by the Harvard Kennedy School [PDIA Toolkit – Building State Capability \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.kennedy.harvard.edu/centers/development/working/pdia-toolkit-building-state-capability)

²¹ [The Global Learning for Adaptive Management initiative \(GLAM\) | ODI: Think change](https://www.odi.org/en/publications/the-global-learning-for-adaptive-management-initiative-glam-odi-think-change/)

²² GMI 2021: *Has COVID Taught Aid Administrations about Adaptive Management?* [HAS+COVID+TAUGHT+AID+ADMINISTRATIONS+ABOUT+ADAPTIVE+MANAGEMENT.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](https://www.gmi.odi.org/en/publications/has-covid-taught-aid-administrations-about-adaptive-management/)

²³ USAID 2022: Risk Appetite Statement p. 3 [Risk-Appetite Statement | Document | U.S. Agency for International Development \(usaid.gov\)](https://www.usaid.gov/press-releases/2022/risk-appetite-statement)

- A proliferation of plans and coordination platforms: Humanitarian, development and peace support action in a country each have their own ‘coordination’ mechanisms, some of them in parallel to those of the government. Even where a bilateral donor supports both humanitarian action and some development work in the country, no connection may be made between both types of action. National governments have their own plans, and planning and budgeting processes, and typically are ‘encouraged’ and supported by international aid agencies to rework them into formats the latter are used to, or to add those of the international aid community. All of this becomes a very time consuming and costly effort, after which more time is needed to explain how every proposed action fits under one or more plans and policies or is in line with certain guidance from the coordination platform – rather than explaining how it is eminently adapted to the finer nuances of a particular, dynamic, mostly subnational, context.

Secondly, participation in ‘coordination platforms’ does not necessarily lead to collaboration for collective impact. ‘Coordination’ in practice may not go beyond avoiding duplication, adopting the same standards and ensuring that someone has a reasonable overview of who does what where. Collaboration for collective impact needs to be much more intentional, with different actors reducing their individualism in active service of the shared goal. There exists solid reflected practice about collective impact approaches and how to facilitate and ‘lead’ them – which goes well beyond the prevailing practices of national government and aid coordination platforms.²⁴

Thirdly, bottom-up, context-tailored nexus- or resilience programming inevitably invites a socio-geographical framing rather than the sectoral and thematic structuring of national governments and much international aid: *‘the clusters may not 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.’* (NRC 2023:10) ‘Area-based’ programming fits better the realities and practices of local authorities and other local actors. Note that the subnational level with its local authorities, is also seen as a central player in progressing towards the SDGs.²⁵

- Staff competencies, staff time and turnover: Finally, how to develop that ‘nexus literacy’ or ‘trilingualism’ among staff; have people with technical and thematic experience who also have or can develop in-depth knowledge of sub-national contexts; who have the time to regularly go out and listen to a variety of stakeholders, and act as connector between them when needed rather than dealing with paper work and communications in the office - and who stay for a longer period? (Within GMI we have solid humanitarian and peace-support experience, and some with participatory governance and multi-stakeholder processes that is relevant to much development work: we can switch between these ‘universes’ but know each favours different perspectives, competencies and ways of working.)

Much deeper structural changes will be needed in the international aid sector, to enable context-informed and resilience-oriented action, in which multiple local stakeholders and actors can actively participate, for deeper, somewhat more structural, impact. The aid system is showing its limitations. More transformational reform is needed, now.

Global Mentoring Initiative (GMI) is a values-based and purpose-driven consultancy and advisory service. Collaboration, within and between organisations and with other stakeholders, for public good purposes, is one of our core competencies.

Creative Commons License Attribution: You can distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon this work as long as you credit GMI for the original creation.

Suggested citation: **GMI 2024: Nexus-Localisation-Resilience Programming. Are they connected and what does it mean in practice? Begnins, Switzerland**

²⁴ See e.g. the Collective Impact Forum of FSG and the Aspen Institute. [Collective Impact Forum - FSG](#)

²⁵ Global Task Force of Local and Regional Governments, UN-Habitat, UNDP 2016: *Roadmap for Localising the SDGs. Implementation and monitoring at subnational level.*