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Seizing the Nexus

Recommendation's full potential

The triple nexus approach rallies the broadest-ever coalition for change in fragile and conflict-affected settings. As such, implementing the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus can help steer the “paradigm shift” or system-wide change called for at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. For this to happen, however, adherents must seize and sustain the strategic momentum that has been building around the DAC Recommendation.

This chapter first presents evidence of the momentum behind the nexus approach in general and the DAC Recommendation in particular. Next, it presents how adherents are translating the DAC Recommendation into their own institutions' policies and strategic approaches. It goes on to show that, while the DAC Recommendation is emerging as a widely accepted common standard, there is a continued need to disseminate its principles to a wider audience among DAC and UN Adherents and beyond, ensuring jargon-free and practice-oriented messaging. Finally, since implementing the DAC Recommendation is not an end in itself, the chapter explores the work that lies ahead at strategic level to better define what success looks like.

1.1. A widely accepted common standard

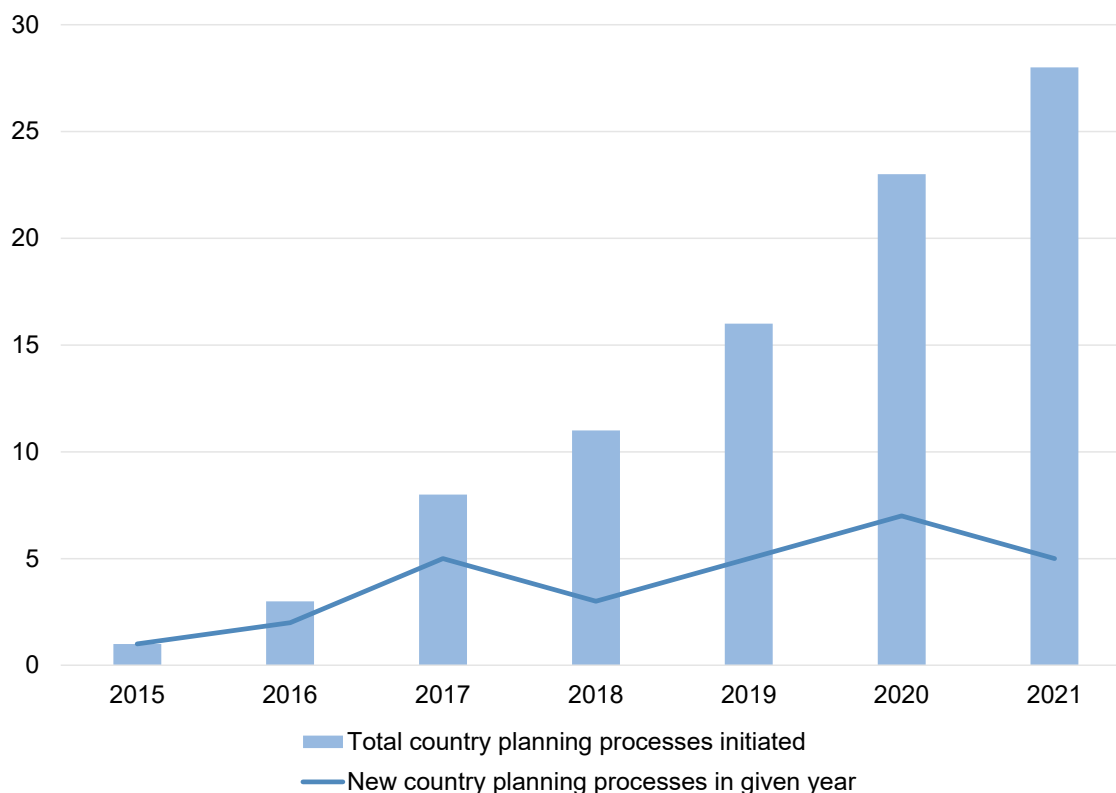
The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (hereafter DAC Recommendation) aims to enhance the impact of international engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings by providing its adherents a common set of principles to guide their approach. Experience from recent years with the nexus approach is already providing a substantive proof of concept that implementers of the DAC Recommendation can tap into and bring to scale. In addition, with the adherence of United Nations (UN) entities, the policy dialogue about implementation is expanding to the multilateral system, allowing for a more consistent and meaningful execution of the nexus approach. The DAC-UN Dialogue on implementing the DAC Recommendation has been an especially effective policy framework to start channelling the efforts of a growing, committed and active humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) community.

Visible change at country level

The DAC Recommendation builds on a change process that has been incrementally building up at country level over decades.¹ Global-level shifts beginning in the mid-2010s help explain the acceleration in recent years of country-level processes. Joined-up country planning processes across the HDP nexus, which began in 2015 in Haiti, are now taking place in 25 countries and contexts, according to mappings by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the European Union (EU). Figure 1.1 illustrates the steady increase in the number of contexts where the nexus approach is being piloted, providing tangible evidence of the momentum for the nexus approach at field level.

Figure 1.1. Country-level implementation of the HDP nexus is increasing

Joined-up planning and programming have been initiated in new countries and contexts every year since 2015.



Note: In general, the year that a country reports as the launch of its nexus pilot initiative is when a decisive step was taken in joined-up planning and programming processes that often were initiated earlier. The number of new country planning processes in any given year, indicated by the thin blue line, should be considered as indicative.

Source: For EU pilot projects, the EU Department for International Partnerships collected and provided information in the form of unpublished documents. For pilot contexts and countries initiated by UN RCs to operationalise the UN's new way of working: Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2021^[1]), Mapping Good Practice in the Implementation of Peace Nexus Approaches: Synthesis Report, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-11/ASC%20Mapping%20of%20Good%20Practice%20in%20the%20Implementation%20of%20Humanitarian-Development%20Peace%20Nexus%20Approaches%2C%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf>; UN (2018^[2]), The New Way of Working – Country Progress Updates (webpage), <https://www.un.org/jsc/content/new-way-working>

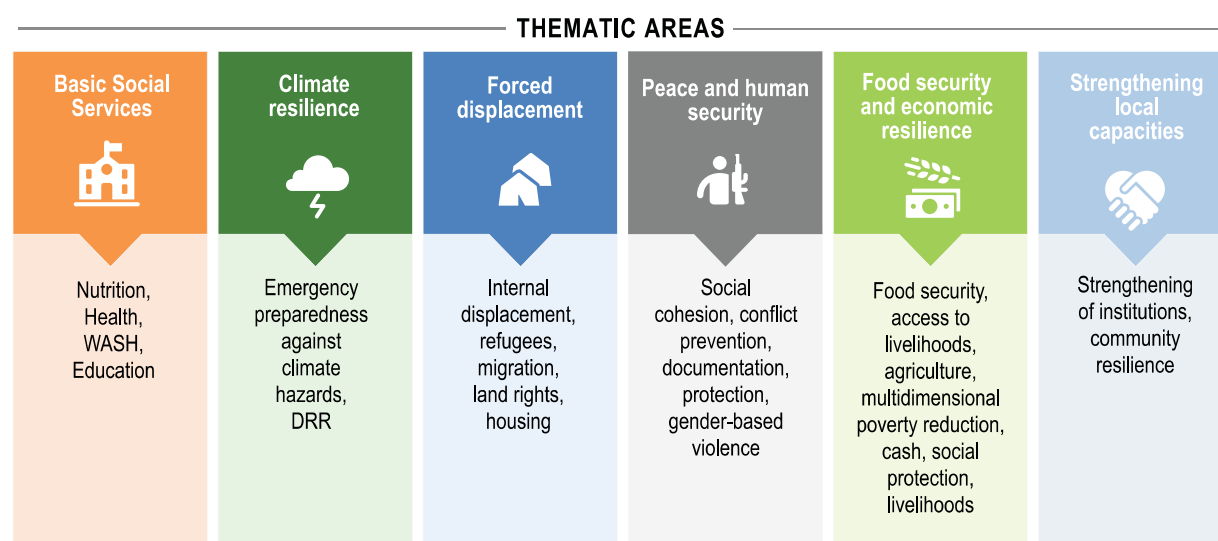
This accelerating pace of country-level implementation is linked to two main global-level processes in particular. First, on the margins of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the UN Secretary-General and executive heads of eight UN entities committed to implement a “new way of working” for humanitarian and development actors to carry forward the vision and “deliver better outcomes for people by moving beyond meeting their needs in the short term to reducing them over time” (UN, 2016^[3]). This concept now guides the efforts of UN entities across the three pillars of the HDP nexus and of the World Bank Group at country level.² Advancing the new way of working involves establishing predictable and joint situation and problem analysis; better joined-up planning and programming; leadership and co-ordination by an empowered UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) with adequate capacity and resources; and financing modalities that can support collective outcomes (UN OCHA, 2017^[4]). These different processes are also occurring in the context of the broader reform of the UN development system, whose ambition is to make it “fit for the purpose, opportunities and challenges presented by the 2030 Agenda”, notably through a reinvigorated RC system and a new generation of country teams (UN, 2018^[5]).

Second, a similar process has been taking place simultaneously within the EU. On 19 May 2017, as part of the EU's new strategic approach to resilience, the EU Council strengthened its commitment in a set of "conclusions" on operationalising the HDP nexus, encouraging the European Commission and EU member states to take forward joint analyses and, where possible, joint planning and programming of humanitarian and development partners (Council of the European Union, 2017^[6]). A particular innovation in this regard was the explicit inclusion of a conflict prevention and peacebuilding component that requires humanitarian, development and peace actors to work together to address the root causes of fragility, vulnerability and conflict and to build resilience. In the 2017 European Consensus on Development, EU development partners also reinforced the principle of joint planning mentioned in the 2006 Consensus. This principle "puts joined-up EU and EU Member State actions at the heart of the implementation of development cooperation efforts" (Koenig and Brusset, 2019^[7]).

Out of the 25 countries and contexts serving as pilot for the new way of working and/or the EU nexus pilots initiative (Infographic 1.1), 19 (or 76%) are categorised by the OECD as fragile contexts. Most of the pilot countries and contexts (13) are in sub-Saharan Africa; six are in the Middle East and North Africa region, four are in Eastern Europe and Asia, and two are in South America and the Caribbean. Stakeholders across the nexus are focusing joint planning and joined-up programming efforts on a range of thematic areas to varying degrees. The most common of these is peace and human security (e.g. promoting social cohesion, enhancing people's safety and security, and addressing gender-based violence), with 16 pilot contexts featuring efforts in this area. Joint efforts also focus on food security and economic resilience in 15 of the pilot contexts; on access to basic social services in 14; on forced displacement in 13; on efforts to strengthen the coping capacity of local systems and the resilience of communities in the face of climate change in nine; and/or on other factors of risk in seven of the pilot contexts.

Country-level processes have largely developed organically, building on existing mechanisms and planning processes. This also means that the success of such processes so far remains highly dependent on a combination of sustained and committed leadership from RC/HC and/or European leadership and co-ordination; key partners' willingness to commit; and in many cases, the roll-out of a robust humanitarian co-ordination architecture. There remains much untapped opportunity cross-fertilisation across contexts.

Infographic 1.1. Nexus pilot countries: an overview



Sub-Saharan Africa

COUNTRY	FRAMEWORK	YEAR STARTED	THEMATIC AREAS OF THE PILOT
BURKINA FASO	NWOW, EU	2017	
BURUNDI	NWOW	2021	
CAMEROON	NWOW	2019	
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC	NWOW, EU	2020	
CHAD	NWOW, EU	UN 2017, EU 2020	
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	NWOW	2019	
ETHIOPIA	NWOW	2018	
MAURITANIA	NWOW	2018	
MOZAMBIQUE	EU	-	
NIGERIA	NWOW	EU 2017, UN 2018	
SOMALIA	NWOW	2020	
SUDAN	NWOW, EU	2019	
UGANDA	EU	2018	

EU: European Union pilot initiative | NWOW: New Way of Working

South America and the Caribbean

COUNTRY	FRAMEWORK	YEAR STARTED	THEMATIC AREAS OF THE PILOT
COLOMBIA	NWOW	2020	
HAITI	NWOW, EU	EU 2015, UN 2021	

Middle East and North Africa

COUNTRY	FRAMEWORK	YEAR STARTED	THEMATIC AREAS OF THE PILOT
IRAQ	NWOW, EU	2021	
JORDAN	NWOW	2016	
LEBANON	NWOW, EU	2017	
LIBYA	NWOW	2019	
WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP*	NWOW	2020	
YEMEN	NWOW, EU	2016	

Eastern Europe and Asia

COUNTRY	FRAMEWORK	YEAR STARTED	THEMATIC AREAS OF THE PILOT
AFGHANISTAN	NWOW, EU	2020	
MYANMAR	NWOW, EU	2020	
PHILIPPINES	EU	-	
UKRAINE	NWOW	2017	

EU: European Union pilot initiative | NWOW: New Way of Working



THEMATIC AREAS

*Thematic areas under development

Note: The thematic areas in the infographic represent a synthesis of key objectives defined through joined-up processes involving actors across the nexus, mainly in the form of collective outcomes. The table indicates whether these are processes conducted in pilot countries of the New Way of Working, the EU Nexus pilot initiative, or both.

Source: See Figure 1.1 for all the list of sources.

A growing, committed and active triple nexus community

The adherence of seven UN entities (and counting) is a sign that the DAC Recommendation is having an impact beyond its original signatories. It has emerged as a widely accepted, shared global standard to foster change in how organisations act and interact, including by building a growing HDP community that shares a commitment to and common principles for improving lives and outcomes. Box 1.1 describes the nexus approach and aims of each of the seven UN adherents.

Beyond strategic commitment, the expanding collaboration between DAC and UN adherents is already delivering early results. The DAC-UN Dialogue on the implementation of the DAC Recommendation, launched by the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) in line with the outcome document of the Partnership for Peace high-level Roundtable in October 2020, serves as a problem-solving platform. Co-led by the United States and the World Food Programme (WFP), the DAC-UN Dialogue more broadly aims to foster joined-up implementation of the DAC Recommendation in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Its work has been driven through two work streams:

- The trilingualism work stream, co-led by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aims to “ensure that the right people are deployed in the right place and at the right time and are doing the right things to support more joined-up complementary nexus approaches to tackling the drivers of fragility”, according to the (unpublished) January 2022 “offer document” of the DAC-UN Dialogue. This entails supporting a step change in the capacity of staff at all levels to understand how to engage with stakeholders from the humanitarian, development and peace pillars, as well as ensuring enhanced understanding of opportunities to strengthen coherence and complementarity. The first objective of this work stream was to produce an integrated nexus training package, knowledge platform and ongoing support facility through the establishment of the Nexus Academy. The official launch of the academy was in February 2022.
- The co-ordination in countries work stream, co-led by Belgium and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), aims to provide a shared space where stakeholders involved in the HDP nexus can exchange on instruments for joint context analysis and joined-up programming in line with the DAC Recommendation. It also provides country support upon request. To date, it has identified Mozambique and Niger as pilot countries and has engaged UN RCOs. This workstream also has launched a series of webinars focused on processes and tools to improve in-country planning and co-ordination.

Box 1.1. The United Nations adherents to the DAC Recommendation and the HDP nexus

Between October 2019 and November 2021, seven UN entities submitted applications and were accepted by the OECD as new adherents to the DAC Recommendation. In addition, in February 2021, the UN Deputy Secretary-General announced that the UN Secretariat fully subscribes to the Recommendation. These developments have further strengthened the strategic momentum around it and enhanced its significance.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

The Nexus Academy, delivered as a common good on behalf of the DAC-UN Dialogue and hosted by the UNDP, facilitates joint learning and knowledge exchange to accelerate nexus approaches. The UNDP also provides global leadership on nexus approaches through its roles in the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration, the IASC Results Group on the nexus, and the trilingualism work stream of the DAC-UN Dialogue. At regional and country level, the UNDP has been promoting operationalisation of the HDP nexus through tailored support and is developing differentiated approaches in Afghanistan, Myanmar and elsewhere to ensure that development approaches that complement ongoing and vital humanitarian response are maintained.

United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat)

UN-Habitat fosters integrated approaches for urban areas in the HDP nexus to address root causes and drivers of conflict such as land and spatial inequality; promote sustainable urban development and area-based approaches; support urban recovery and inclusive multi-level governance; and facilitate social inclusion in cities. To align further with the HDP nexus, it is strengthening the UN system-wide approach to sustainable urban development and supporting urban profiling that ensures participatory, locally-owned and tailored governance processes. The agency has also provided assistance to local governments and cities to engage in UN-supported processes, including the elaboration of Common Country Analyses and Cooperation Frameworks³ and managing displacement.

World Food Programme (WFP)

On the co-ordination side, the WFP is committing to joint analysis and programming at country level, including collective outcomes that reduce humanitarian needs; strengthened co-ordination between agencies and within the WFP alongside global and headquarters-level policy development that promotes HDP approaches; advocacy for the centrality of food security for longer-term, sustainable peace and development outcomes; and capacity strengthening on nexus approaches, among other actions. Initiatives in programming include ensuring full investment in relevant work plans, particularly those related to conflict sensitivity, as well as a focus on the role of the nexus in famine prevention and redesigning of programmes.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF's *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* and revised Core Commitments to Children in Humanitarian Action include key commitments and considerations on linking humanitarian, development, conflict sensitivity, and contributions to peacebuilding and social cohesion. The recently conducted *Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming* provides insights and recommendations for practical improvements in UNICEF's approach to strengthen the coherence and complementarity of programmes within its dual mandate.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The IOM has been conducting an evaluation of different countries' implementation of the nexus to identify best practices. The IOM is also mainstreaming the nexus approach through advisors, staff training and internal capacity development. The HDP nexus is also part of a broader framework that will be submitted for approval and has been shared with regional offices to ensure it becomes part of the UN Common Country Analyses. The IOM Migration Crisis Operational Framework already promotes stronger linkages between its sectors of assistance in the humanitarian, peace and security, and development areas.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

UNFPA programming engages partners at individual, community and national levels including by strengthening the capacities of local women and youth groups and government authorities to enhance basic services and address inequalities. The HDP nexus has been streamlined into its programming, and operational and structural shifts have taken place to further align with the nexus.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

UNHCR is building stronger synergies with HDP actors to prevent or mitigate conflict and protracted displacement; work towards common objectives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and ensure the inclusion of refugees, IDPs, stateless persons, and returnees into development planning and programming. It has considerably increased its engagement with multilateral development banks and bilateral development actors on the HDP nexus, including to develop a shared understanding of the root causes of crises and protracted forced displacement. The [Global Compact on Refugees](#) and the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 offer an opportunity to assess progress and chart the way forward towards implementation of the HDP Recommendation in protracted displacement situations.

Source: Interviews and written consultation with UN adherents.

1.2. The triple nexus as change management

Much can be learned from the way adherents are already taking forward the nexus approach. While many adherent organisations have started integrating the triple nexus approach into their strategic and policy frameworks, they also need to ensure that their institutional systems and processes are adapted to implementation of this approach. The DAC Recommendation can serve as a compass for such institutional change. A review of internal processes finds three broad institutional approaches in use: grand strategies, bottom-up approaches and targeted measures. For each adherent, timing, capacities, political will and an assessment of its individual trajectory will dictate which change strategy is most appropriate. Some of the necessary changes require a profound shift in institutional mind-set. In particular, there is an opportunity to reframe integrity and risk and think about how the nexus can increase accountability to taxpayers.

Updating organisational policies to integrate the nexus approach

It is a fundamental principle of international norms that every adherent must ensure that its own policies and practices are consistent with the norms. In consequence, DAC and UN adherents have been progressively revising their strategic plans and policies to ensure consistency with the DAC Recommendation. For example, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the EU, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Korea, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States have all explicitly outlined specific positions and ways of working to enhance the coherence of their efforts across

the HDP nexus. Most DAC adherents have reported new or ongoing ways in which they are incorporating the HDP approach into their internal processes and policies. For example, Denmark has had a joint strategy for co-ordinating humanitarian and development assistance since 2017, which was further revised in 2021. Sweden's 2016 policy framework and the United Kingdom's 2015 aid strategy, both of which predate the adoption of the DAC Recommendation, are additional examples of close alignment with the principles of the DAC Recommendation.⁴

Adherents are managing nexus-friendly change in various ways

Across bilateral providers of official development assistance, humanitarian and development programming is often managed by separate siloed entities or different ministries and agencies. Bilateral co-operation agencies tend to have programmatic and budgetary control over humanitarian and/or development activities but limited influence on diplomatic and security engagement in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Relatedly, DAC members' efforts to improve whole-of-government co-ordination in fragile and conflict-affected contexts do not necessarily translate into greater programme coherence across the HDP nexus.⁵

Nevertheless, there is evidence that many adherents have started making the necessary operational changes to implement the triple nexus approach. The different types of initiatives undertaken at headquarters level to promote change reflect each organisation's institutional opportunities and constraints, which are especially dictated by support from the political leadership, the capacity of current institutions to absorb the change or intervention, and the existence of a policy window (OECD, 2019^[8]). Adherents' strategies to promote change and move forward towards the nexus can be grouped into three broad types of activity:

- **Grand strategy approaches** involve extensive legislative redesign efforts or other types of strategic initiatives aimed at rethinking organisational processes and rewiring institutional frameworks. While they requires a unique combination of circumstances, several major bilateral and multilateral actors have nonetheless adopted this type of approach. Notable examples of such strategic initiatives include the United States' Global Fragility Act of 2019 (Hume et al., 2020^[9]; Yayboke et al., 2021^[10]); the World Bank Group's *Fragility, Conflict and Violence Strategy 2020-2025* (World Bank Group, 2019^[11]); the Global Compact for Refugees of 2018, with the UNHCR acting as institutional sponsor; and Belgium's 2018 general policy note on international development (OECD, 2020^[12]).

Example: The Global Fragility Act, enacted by the United States in 2019, requires joined-up humanitarian, prevention and development programmes to promote conflict prevention and stability when relevant. It sets out commitments to improve the global, regional and local co-ordination of relevant international and multilateral development and donor organisations; to include specific objectives and multi-sectoral approaches to reduce fragility; and to adopt approaches that ensure national leadership where appropriate as well as participatory engagement by local and national actors.

- **Bottom-up approaches** drive incremental reform by cultivating internal coalitions for change, promote iterative joint learning and gradually integrate new approaches into the broader organisation. This type of approach is a deliberative process entailing sustained effort and the search for opportunities and internal champions. Unlike the grand strategy approach, a bottom-up approach does not necessarily require early commitment from the strategic top of the organisation; rather, middle management or policy functions may initially facilitate and foster their emergence. Examples of this approach include Switzerland's nexus learning journey (Box 1.3); the Global Affairs Canada internal nexus working group; UN-Habitat's new collective results framework that promoted a shift of mind-sets; and practical action at programme level by Sweden and the United Kingdom (FAO, Development Initiatives and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021^[13]).

Example: Switzerland's nexus learning journey was designed as an iterative process to move from a double to a triple nexus understanding through learning from good practices and analysing bottlenecks. Focus discussions among headquarters staff and field interviews helped Switzerland generate the broad buy-in and ownership that are crucial for nexus operationalisation. The thinking process has been mainstreamed, and concrete proposals for change as well as the continued deployment of nexus advisors are being discussed.

- **Targeted measures** give strategic impetus to the nexus approach in critical areas such as staffing and training, funding mechanisms, co-ordination structures, operational tools, and new relevant partnerships. This approach is more circumscribed but allows for effective action and can be intra-organisational and/or inter-organisational.

Examples: There are multiple noteworthy examples of the target measures approach including Germany's new transitional development assistance instrument; Sweden's deployment of nexus advisors; the multi-dimensional context analysis tools developed by various bilateral and multilateral donors; the Nexus Academy, a common good developed within the DAC-UN Dialogue with support from the UNDP; the UNICEF Guidance for Risk-Informed Programming; Korea's design of a new HDP nexus strategy; the commissioning of external evaluations of nexus-related effectiveness by several UN adherents, among them the IOM and UNICEF; and the inclusion of nexus-related monitoring indicators as part of the new generation of strategic plans by various UN adherents.

Some of these critical changes require profound adjustments in not only rules, but also institutional mind-sets, as existing flexibilities are not always used. There may be an opportunity in terms of how integrity, risk and effectiveness are framed as part of accountability to taxpayers. One revealing comment from interviews was that “sometimes it seems that more energy is spent chasing the USD 2 not accounted for, than ensuring the USD 2 million is spent on the right thing”.

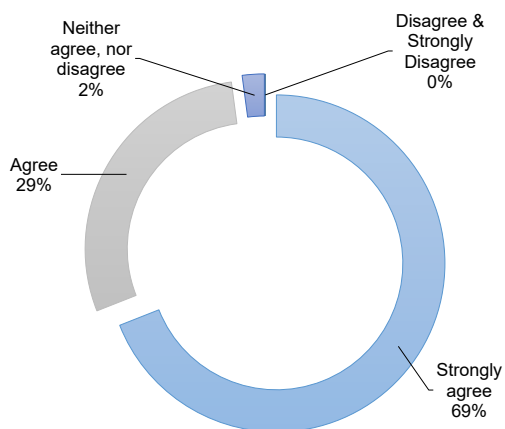
1.3. Bridging the gap between support and implementation

There is broad acceptance of the value of the nexus approach. Despite this, disseminating the DAC Recommendation's principles widely remains an important priority to translate it into concrete actions that inform organisational processes, partnerships and programming. It is important to keep the messages jargon-free and practice-oriented.

Broad acceptance of the value of the nexus approach

The Nexus Interim Report Survey, undertaken for this report, found that a commanding majority of respondents — 98% — agree or strongly agree that a coherent approach to humanitarian, development and peace activities offers more potential benefits than risks or drawbacks.

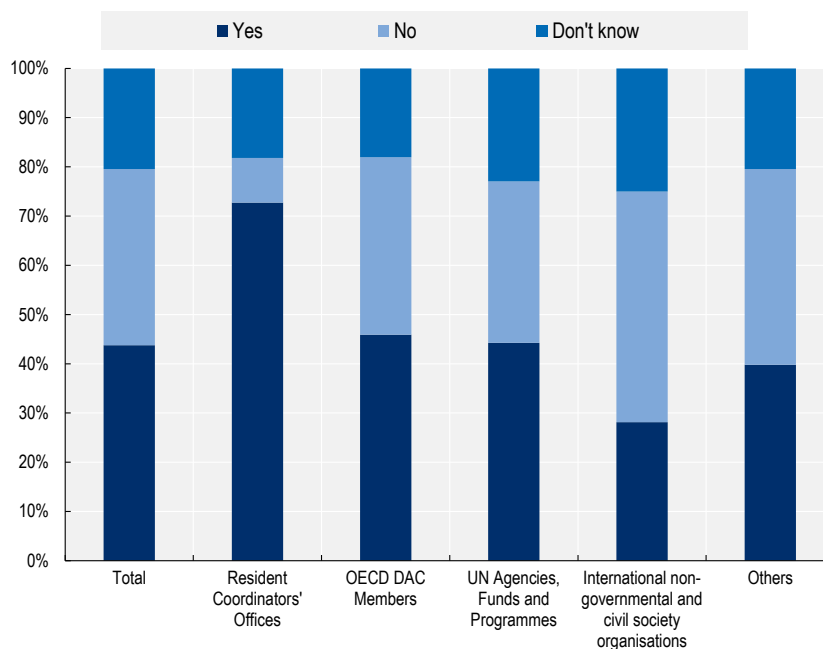
Figure 1.2. Perceptions of the nexus approach's risk-to-benefit ratio



Note: The figure shows the degree to which survey respondents agreed with the following statement: “Overall, I believe that a coherent approach between humanitarian, development and peace activities carries more potential benefits than potential risks or downsides.”
 Source: Nexus Interim Report Survey

Moreover, 44% of all respondents said they see a change in coherence and complementarity following the adoption of the nexus approach – and this score reaches 70% among respondents most likely to be involved in nexus planning and co-ordination activities (such as those in roles supporting RC/HCs).

Figure 1.3. Perceptions of contributions of the HDP nexus approach to a coherent and complementary collective response



Note: The figure shows survey responses, by type of organisation, to the question: “Have you seen any change in the coherence and complementarity of the collective response as a result of adopting a nexus approach in your geographic area of responsibility?” Answers are broken down by respondents according to where they work – in a UN RC office (RCO); a DAC member; a UN agency, fund or programme (AFP); an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) or civil society organisation (CSO); and others
 Source: Nexus Interim Report Survey

Disseminating the DAC Recommendation's principles remains a priority

While there is broad acceptance of the nexus approach, a review of policy literature and consultations with INCAF members show a continuing need to disseminate the DAC Recommendation's principles to a wider audience, both among adherents and beyond. One of the most frequently heard comment from those consulted for this report is that the DAC Recommendation did not come with an instruction manual for proper implementation – although some adherents have started to fill that gap (Box 1.4). A related challenge, discussed in section 3.1, is to reassure humanitarian actors that in politically charged contexts, co-ordination across the triple nexus takes into account the need to preserve humanitarian space. In other situations, applying the HDP nexus approach can also seem daunting, as it demands a thorough reassessment of current practice. How, then, can humanitarian, development and peace actors judge whether they are effectively implementing the triple nexus approach? This concern appears to be very much alive among DAC adherents to the Nexus Recommendation.

Moreover, adherents to the DAC Recommendation represent a diverse set of institutions ranging from bilateral and multilateral organisations to ministries, executive agencies and bilateral development banks, each with its own organisational culture and areas of expertise. As a result, the extent to which one organisation's practical guidance for implementing the DAC Recommendation aligns with the policies of others is of understandable concern to adherents. The good news is that the survey and literature review conducted for this report found little evidence that organisational differences among adherents are resulting in conflicting interpretations of the HDP nexus approach. This common ground reflects the fact that many of the concepts set forth in the DAC Recommendation have emerged over the course of many years, if not decades.

Nevertheless, a fundamental question remains to be answered: How can actors know that their adopted approach is, in fact, applying the triple nexus? In this regard, the development of jargon-free and practice-oriented messages can help practitioners at country level focus, first on the core elements that matter most for the collective implementation of the nexus approach. Interviews with nexus specialists from some DAC members suggest that such distilled messaging on the core features of the triple nexus approach are already common practice in some organisations and can provide effective support to country-level activities. Box 1.2 compiles the core features cited by respondents in these interviews. A review of recent guidance developed to help field practitioners apply the triple nexus approach confirms that these elements are widely perceived as critical (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2020^[14]; CARE Canada, 2019^[15]; Hövelmann, 2020^[16]; Zamore, 2019^[17]; FAO, Development Initiatives and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021^[13]).

Box 1.2. How do you know you are effectively “nexus-ing”?

A triple nexus approach that contributes to more effective interventions in fragile and conflict-affected contexts should aim to incorporate all of the following core features:

- a long-term focus on reducing overall vulnerability and unmet needs and addressing root causes of crises
- sustained efforts to foster inclusive country leadership and support local capacities
- a priority focus on those most at risk or left behind, with support for equal fulfilment of basic needs for all and gender equality
- consideration and active management of risks including conflict sensitivity and do no harm
- an approach, operational set-up and/or financing mechanisms that help navigate short-term realities and the evolving context without losing sight of long-term development perspectives
- awareness of the interventions of other humanitarian, peace and development actors and joint efforts to prioritise, focus on comparative advantages and enhance coherence.

Note: The 11 principles of the DAC Recommendation are an indivisible whole. This presentation of what are identified as core elements is not a redefinition of the agreed HDP nexus framework, but rather the starting point for a journey that involves all facets of the DAC Recommendation.

Source: Interviews and written consultation with adherents.

1.4. The challenge of defining success

The triple nexus approach is a means, not an end. It needs to be founded on a clear vision of what collective success looks like that can be evaluated and evolve based on joint learning. Indeed, how success is defined can evolve over the course of the nexus learning journey. It is thus important to carve out space for this discussion to happen among adherents at both policy and high-level decision-making level.

Box 1.3. Building a coalition for change: Switzerland’s learning journey approach

Switzerland provides a useful example of a deliberately bottom-up approach to nexus-minded organisational change and demonstrates how the definition of success in implementing the nexus approach evolves over time. The process started in 2018 when the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) commissioned an independent evaluation of its implementation of the double (humanitarian-development) nexus. The evaluation covered staff from all SDC departments at the agency’s head office and the field and included field visits and data collection from various contexts. The evaluation, published in 2019, concluded that the SDC is viewed as “a principled donor with a strong focus on context” and advised the agency “to enhance a conducive institutional set-up at head office in order to institutionalise the nexus approach and make it less person- and opportunity-driven”.

The SDC’s management endorsed the recommendations, prompting the agency to embark on what it termed a learning journey. This process was designed to learn from good practices and analyse bottlenecks with the aim of fostering organisational learning about how to implement the nexus approach. Gradually, the process incorporated questions around how to better integrate the peace pillar of the nexus into the SDC approach. A core group that consults regularly with a broader set of nexus constituents carries the process forward. The main steps of the process include a review of state-of-the-art examples from the field that Switzerland is contributing to as well as numerous interviews of field and headquarters staff and non-governmental organisation partners. Various intermediary steps were built into the process to disseminate learning and build buy-in across the organisation.

Concurrently with the initial phase of the learning journey, SDC management decided to reorganise the agency and integrate the nexus approach into its change strategy. As a demonstration of strong political support for the nexus approach, this served as an additional catalyst for change. The active participation of headquarters and field staff has helped increase acceptance and ownership of the process within the organisation. The SDC is also preparing in-depth sessions on specific thematic areas that need attention such as climate change, forced displacement and education, peace and governance, and equality. The conclusions of these sessions will be published in a report that will also present ideas on how to move forward, building on the strong collective momentum.

Source: Nordic Consulting Group Denmark (2019^[18]) *Independent Evaluation of the Linkage of Humanitarian Aid and Development Cooperation at the Swiss Development Cooperation*, <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/independent-evaluation-of-the-linkage-of-humanitarian-aid-and-development-cooperation>; 2021 interview with SDC staff.

Success must be defined in operational, as well as in strategic terms

The implementation of the DAC Recommendation as a framework for progress will require the development of pragmatic, realistic and measurable objectives for reducing humanitarian needs, risk and vulnerability in relevant contexts. From this standpoint, adherents define success in implementing the nexus in two complementary ways, namely in terms of changes in the way of working and in the achievement of sustainable outcomes improving lives in fragile contexts. This two-pronged approach is also seen in the different ways adherents are starting to monitor progress against the nexus approach, discussed in Chapter 2.

A focus on shifting the way of working and on achieving outcomes that benefit people offers a useful set of benchmarks. However, defining what success looks like involves broader collective, strategic questions. Indeed, DAC adherents have found that while some of their structures and policies need to be adjusted, it is often culture and political economy rather than hard barriers that need to be addressed. These include achieving enhanced inclusion of the peace dimension and peace actors; greater attention to building

coherence and complementarity between (rather than just within) institutions; and creating the right institutional mind-sets and incentives.

A pragmatic approach is needed

Case studies show that field actors in various contexts tend to set unrealistic collective outcomes, establish unfeasible indicators of success or turn a blind eye to unavoidable obstacles (Veron and Hauck, 2021^[19]; Zürcher, 2020^[20]). This suggests that stakeholders need to infuse joined-up planning and programming with realism, focus and humility (Brown, 2020^[21]). A more pragmatic approach is also needed when developing guidance for the implementation of the nexus approach. There is a tendency to formulate guidance on the nexus approach that is too abstract and not sufficiently connected to everyday working realities in fragile contexts (Südhoff, Hövelmann and Steinke, 2020^[22]). In the absence of applicable approaches, however, there is a risk that nexus implementation will simply involve changing the labels of activities already in current practice.

Box 1.4. Organisational guidance on operationalising the nexus: The example of Sweden

Among available guidance documents to help field practitioners apply the triple nexus approach, that of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), stands out as a particularly useful available example for other adherents, by aligning closely with the logic and scope of the DAC Recommendation.

Sida issued its guidance note after the DAC Recommendation was adopted and following the 2019 OECD Development Co-operation Peer Review of Sweden, which identified a need for a more systematic approach to linking humanitarian with development work. The guidance note aims to provide concrete guidance to Sida staff and guide the agency's dialogue with partners and other donors. It builds on Sida's analysis of its own good practices in co-ordination, analysis and financing at country level and reviews what Sida should do across the three dimensions of the nexus to operationalise the DAC Recommendation's principles. For example, the Sida guidance note points out opportunities for engagement with multilateral partners on the HDP nexus such as the EU, UN and World Bank nexus pilot approaches.

More recently, comparable efforts have started to develop among other DAC adherents, including Canada, Italy and the United States.

Source: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2020^[14]), *Guidance Note for Sida: Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*, <https://cdn.sida.se/publications/files/sida62325en-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus.pdf>.

The HDP nexus approach has largely developed organically, and the DAC Recommendation provides an opportunity to set clear and measurable system-wide expectations. At both country and global level, the most successful models have been largely driven by self-selecting coalitions of willing individuals and institutions identifying specific, practical opportunities. This is the obvious and best way to start, as it provides opportunities to test out approaches before moving to scale. It is now time for a wider set of actors and resources to engage, particularly beyond the UN system. Ultimately, any definition of success must be (co-)owned by the people affected by crises or fragility or their legitimate representatives.

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Notes

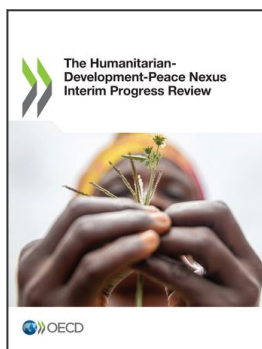
¹ For a comprehensive overview of the lineage of the triple nexus approach from different perspectives, see, among other source materials, <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/ngo-perspectives-on-the-eus-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus>; https://www.dropbox.com/s/smy3t02ovt5y6mm/SGDE-EDRMS-%239939660-v1-Triple%20nexus%20in%20the%20DRC_final_EN.pdf?dl=0; and <https://csopartnership.org/resource/localizing-the-triple-nexus-policy-research-on-humanitarian-development-and-peace-nexus-in-9-contexts/?wpdmdl=17681&refresh=61c273ffbd36d1640133631>.

² The UN has also established the Joint Steering Committee to guide policy setting and foster synergies in humanitarian and development action to achieve progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. See https://www.un.org/jsc/sites/www.un.org/jsc/files/general/tors_of_the_jsc.pdf. Additionally, under the banner of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative, the UN and World Bank Group have jointly committed to “identify collective outcomes and deliver comprehensive and integrated responses to countries at risk, in protracted crisis and post-crisis situations”, including by sharing data, joint analysis and assessment of needs, and “aligned multi-year planning”. The UN-World Bank Fragility and Conflict Partnership Trust Fund supports implementation of the initiative, which is described in more detail at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/the-humanitarian-development-peace-initiative>.

³ For further information on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Guidance, see <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/united-nations-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-guidance>.

⁴ For more detail, see the 2019 review of efforts by Sweden and the United Kingdom to implement the nexus approach, published by Development Initiatives at <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/key-questions-and-considerations-for-donors-at-the-triple-nexus-lessons-from-uk-and>. Another overview is the 2019 OECD Peer Review of Sweden at <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9f83244b-en>.

⁵ This paragraph reflects findings from a survey of bilateral partners at both headquarters and field level, which INCAF conducted in 2017 to identify programmatic progress in implementing nexus approaches. These findings were presented and discussed at a meeting of the International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection in 2018. A recording of the event is available at <https://phap.org/PHAP/Events/OEV2018/OEV180911.aspx?EventKey=OEV180911>.



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