

The Triple Nexus in Practice: Toward a New Way of Working in Protracted and Repeated Crises

A Synopsis

December 2019



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About the study

This pamphlet summarizes select findings and recommendations from an independent review of the “new way of working” and the “triple nexus” of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding links. The review was commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with support from the government of Norway, and carried out by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University. The review is based on interviews with over 300 individuals from United Nations (UN) country teams, governments, and civil society. Country visits were undertaken to Chad, Nigeria, and Somalia in 2018. Follow-on visits to Ethiopia and Lebanon in 2019 have provided additional evidence and insights. The study draws on an extensive review of written materials, including unpublished/confidential documents. Key informants in more than 20 countries contributed to the study.



Background

In 2016, global policymakers convened in Istanbul, Turkey for the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit (WHS). They came to confront a critical policy dilemma: what is, or should be, the role of humanitarian action in a world beset by “permanent emergencies” that do not end, in which the root causes are overwhelmingly structural and political?

The consensus that emerged was twofold. Firstly, policymakers agreed that improvements within the humanitarian system were vitally needed if that system was to keep pace with the multiplication and increased duration of emergencies around the world. Secondly, they agreed that no amount of internal reforms would suffice: achieving durable solutions would require better ways of working not only among humanitarians, but among and between humanitarians and their counterparts in the development and peacebuilding communities.

That consensus prompted global leaders to formulate a Commitment to Action to implement a “new way of working” within humanitarian contexts, and especially within protracted or repeated crisis situations. They envisaged three

fundamental shifts in the way the international community traditionally operates in chronically fragile settings, to approaches that:

- | 🌀 Reinforce, rather than replace, local systems and solutions.
- | 🌀 Transcend the humanitarian-development divide.
- | 🌀 Anticipate, and act upon, crises before they emerge.

Since 2016, policymakers and practitioners at both global and country levels have set out to operationalize these three objectives. Although it is still too early to evaluate the outcomes of these efforts, it is possible to identify the kinds of early changes in behavior and approaches that are—and are not—emerging. What follows is a distillation of findings gleaned from a wide range of countries experiencing repeated or protracted humanitarian crises.

Promising Developments

The overall conclusions of our review are positive: behavioral change is occurring along each dimension of the new way of working.

There is no shortage of promising efforts to support rather than supplant national and local systems.

The first objective of the new way of working is to reinforce rather than replace national and local systems. The agenda envisages a major shift toward building the capacity and resilience of national and local actors—state and community—to prevent, respond to, and resolve humanitarian emergencies before they become chronic. This does not mean that using country systems will be possible in each and every case: for example, where governments lack presence in conflict-affected zones or are unable to respect humanitarian principles, or where local civil society is weak or absent, the immediate humanitarian imperative to save lives cannot be jeopardized in favor of longer-term localization and development goals. However, the review finds instructive practices in many different settings in which the use and strengthening of domestic systems has been complementary to humanitarian principles and to lifesaving objectives. These include:

- Adopting legislation or policies aimed at integrating refugees into public systems.
- Supporting public services and safety nets to become “shock resistant”—that is, agile and scalable in the face of shocks or crises.
- Forging direct links between humanitarian cash programming and national safety nets.
- Creating clear guidance on the circumstances in which support can be provided to national recipients (state and non-governmental) while respecting humanitarian principles.

- Incorporating capacity building and responsible transition strategies into funding and programming agreements.
- Passing on or providing multiyear and core funding to national/local partners.

 **Chad:** The government has “nationalized” refugee schools, which now teach the Chadian curriculum and are formally part of the public education system. The number of Chadians enrolling in the schools has increased precipitously.

 **Ethiopia:** With support from international partners, the government is expanding its Productive Safety Net Programme, including by making urban residents as well as displaced persons eligible, and by embedding “shock resistant” elements into the scheme.

 **Lebanon:** The technologies and transfer systems used to provide cash and food vouchers to refugees are being incorporated into the government’s safety net program for vulnerable Lebanese.

 **Norway:** Norway is one of the few donors that have issued specific guidelines on applying humanitarian principles, covering support to national and local systems.

 **Yemen:** Rather than setting up entirely parallel delivery structures, the international community has opted to “shadow align” its support with Yemen’s pre-conflict welfare institutions.

More, and more effective, collaboration is emerging among humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding (HDP) actors.

The second overarching objective of the new way of working is to transcend the humanitarian–development(–peacebuilding) divide by working toward collective outcomes, over multiyear timeframes, on the basis of comparative advantage. The review finds that a step change along these dimensions is beginning to occur on the ground, with real progress emerging on joint analysis, planning, and operational links. We judge that a principal reason for this is the growing commitment to “reinforce rather than replace,” as noted above. Governments and development actors, in particular, feel that the renewed humanitarian commitment to localization gives them greater space to link humanitarian action with development funding (which generally has to show national ownership and some form of durable institution building). Momentum is also resulting from the high-level support provided to the new way of working in the form of the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration (JSC). The JSC, drawing on early results of this study among other inputs, has held several discussions of enablers, barriers, and corrective measures to address traditional divides.

Promising examples of such measures identified during the review include:

- Incorporating “collective outcomes” and “common chapters” into strategic plans on the basis of a shared analysis—and in some cases merging plans altogether.
- Building country-level platforms that bring together all key stakeholders—including government, the UN, donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international financial organizations (IFIs), community groups, and affected persons—under a common decision-making umbrella.

- Strengthening the nexus capacities of resident coordinator offices (RCOs).
- Integrating humanitarian concerns into the analyses and funding arrangements of IFIs.
- Undertaking area-based and multisectoral approaches that address challenges across the triple nexus.
- Supporting pooled funds that span the double or triple nexus.

 **Lebanon:** The UN and the World Bank have established a “compact” of shared priorities around which they plan to collaborate over the next several years. The upcoming common country analysis (CCA) will be undertaken jointly with the World Bank’s country assessment.

 **Mauritania:** The partnership framework between the UN and the government integrates humanitarian and development planning streams, replacing the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). It contains several collective outcomes that humanitarian and development actors are committed to pursuing jointly.

 **Nigeria:** In Borno State, UNDP and the World Health Organization are administering a holistic area-based program aimed at developing community recovery and resilience, reestablishing local governance, and (re-) introducing conflict-resolution mechanisms.

 **Uganda:** The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) secretariat brings together government, humanitarian, development, donor, and civil society actors into a single country platform.

 **Sudan:** A UN mission worked with country-based partners to identify sustainable development goal (SDG) “accelerators,” which have since been integrated into government development plans, the UNDAF and the HRP.

 **Denmark, the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden** have developed joint strategies and funding facilities to incentivize cooperation across traditional divides.

Efforts to prevent and prepare for crises before they emerge are growing in number and in sophistication.

In countries experiencing humanitarian emergencies in the period 2017–19, the majority suffered some form of additional shock after the initial emergency occurred. The “Agenda for Humanity” and the WHS commitments call for particular attention to be paid to such shocks, because failure to anticipate them is a primary driver of high costs—both in human lives and in financial terms. The cyclical or predictable nature of many shocks, such as drought or the risk of displacement from conflict, makes preparedness efforts both possible and necessary to disrupt the state of “permanent emergency.”

There is progress on this score, including by:

- Supporting governments to put in place clear procedures and decision-making processes for risk mitigation, early warning, and dispute resolution.

- Using human rights and peacebuilding mechanisms to catalyze and support national ownership of prevention.
- Prioritizing economic recovery and equitable service delivery in at-risk areas.
- Incorporating risks and contingencies in CCAs, HRPs, and UNDAFs, and crisis modifiers in partnership agreements.
- Expanding insurance mechanisms to cover conflict-spillover risks.

 **Afghanistan:** The 2018 HRP in Afghanistan is notable for including concrete contingencies that would necessitate adjustments to the response strategy, two of which came to fruition that year: namely, the occurrence of a major drought, and the inability of development partners to deliver on their commitments.

 **Colombia:** The government is providing additional preventative support to local authorities in areas most affected by risks relating to a legacy of conflict, trafficking, and a lack of state presence. The support aims to restart economic production and strengthen public service delivery while also fostering reconciliation and cultivating a culture of peace.

 **Mali:** Several donors have incorporated crisis modifiers into development programs in affected or at-risk areas to ensure that implementing partners are able to respond rapidly to rising risks or deteriorating circumstances.

 **Somalia:** Several federal member states have established alternative dispute centers to settle disputes and address grievances before they escalate.

 **Switzerland:** The Swiss government plays an important role in championing approaches to disaster risk reduction that integrate prevention, response, and recovery into a holistic strategy.

Constraints and challenges

As the above examples suggest, many promising developments are underway—but deep challenges remain. Many of these examples are still in the pilot phase, with unclear avenues for scaling up. There are few contexts where all key enablers are present simultaneously. There are also many examples of missed opportunities. Frustration that change is occurring (too) slowly is widespread, and there is concern that momentum may be stalling. Perhaps most fundamentally, the scale of the challenges facing affected countries continues to overwhelm even the most ambitious reform efforts.

The review identifies the following challenges as especially critical.

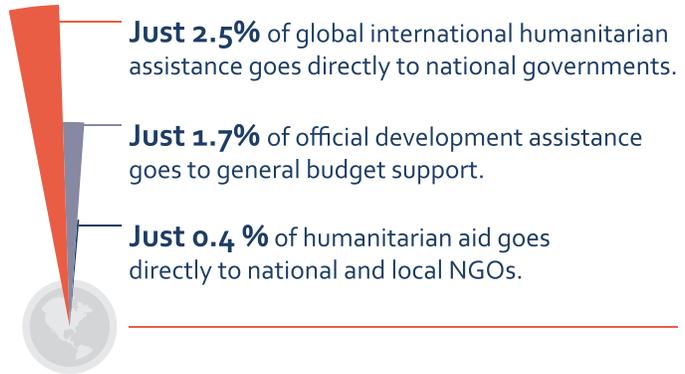
Efforts to work with and through country systems remain the exception rather than the rule.

Most affected governments lack the capacity and resources to absorb affected populations into existing public

systems. Without ample support, they often pay a political price for trying to do so. Nonetheless, beyond a handful of important but select examples, many donors and aid agencies continue to resist the idea of channeling support through country systems, including in cases in which national or local actors have sufficient absorptive capacity and accountability and humanitarian principles are not at risk.

Budget support is minimal, and falling.

It is difficult to overstate the fiscal constraints facing affected countries. Yet just 2.5 percent of global international humanitarian assistance is channeled directly to national governments. On the development side, aid channeled in the form of general budget support is minimal and, in recent years, falling: from \$4 billion in 2010 to \$2.5 billion by 2016, when it accounted for just 1.7 percent of official development assistance (ODA). This lack of direct support constricts governments' ability to provide equitable services and protection to affected communities.



Slow progress on civil society support. Although some progress is occurring, national and local NGOs continue to receive less than 1 percent of humanitarian aid directly from donors. Country-based pooled funds provide a crucial conduit for indirectly localizing support (having reached a target of 25 percent of resources passed on to local actors) but often lack a critical mass of funding. Meanwhile, the benefits of core funding and multiyear funding are rarely passed on to national actors. Decision-making power remains highly centralized within the UN and the major international NGOs.

Lack of support for establishing “whole-of-government” systems for response and recovery. Outside of disaster response, there is little systematic learning on good practice in establishing national systems for crisis response and recovery that span financial, personnel, and procurement systems and specify the relative roles of the center of government, line ministries, emergency agencies, and subnational authorities.

Lack of clear transition strategies. Most plans and programs lack clear benchmarks for transitioning away from parallel services or for cultivating a growing role of the state over time.

There are remarkably few incentives for collaboration at country level.

Although progress is occurring, achieving greater coherence across the HDP nexus remains an uphill battle. Remarkably few incentives exist to facilitate joined-up interventions. Critical barriers include:

Lack of strategic focus. While there are good examples of collective outcomes emerging, many remain too generic and contain little reference to strategic priorities such as building national capacity to drive sustainable outcomes in the medium term. Although HRPs are growing in sophistication, donors and governments often perceive multiyear plans as comprising two or three single-year plans, rather than aiming to build resilient systems and capacities over time. Meanwhile, there continue to be many cases of disconnected and duplicative UN planning—between UNDAFs or United Nations Country Frameworks (UNCFs), HRPs, Refugee Response Plans (RRPs), Peacebuilding Priority Plans, and other mechanisms. These place a capacity burden on national counterparts.

Lack of clarity in leadership mandate and functions. The role of resident coordinators (RCs) and humanitarian coordinators (HCs) is crucial in realizing the new way of working, but they are effective only when they have the capacity and mandate to link development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding issues. The UN Development System (UNDS) reforms and new UNDAF/UNCF guidelines provide opportunities to address coordination and capacity gaps, but they remain in the early stages of roll-out.

Fragmented funding. Among the most commonly cited constraint when it comes to bridging silos is the continued fragmentation of funding. Many donors do not allow humanitarian and development funding to be pooled behind shared strategic objectives. There is also a geographic separation between humanitarian and development financing, with the latter largely bypassing populations affected by humanitarian crises in many countries.

Cultural divides. There continue to be conceptual and cultural divisions separating humanitarians and development actors. For instance, World Bank staff feel that humanitarian agencies often do not sufficiently prioritize national institution building. Humanitarian staff feel that Bank programs are still slow and that the Bank overestimates government capacity to implement. At country level, the UN Country Team (UNCT)/HCT and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) appear to inhabit “two worlds apart.”

Prevention and preparedness remain afterthoughts in (too) many cases.

The moral and business cases for paying greater attention to prevention and preparedness are by now well established. Yet about \$1.30 is spent on disaster risk reduction in fragile states for every \$100 spent on disaster response. Similarly, conflict prevention was the focus of just 2 percent of ODA channeled to fragile countries in recent years. The new OECD-DAC recommendation on the nexus calls on donors to “prioritize prevention.” Doing so will require grappling with several key impediments:

Overall, very few government or international plans or projects include contingencies. Government protocols for effective prevention, emergency, and recovery are often absent or ineffective, and very few national development plans make room for contingencies. Nor are critical plans such as UNDAFs, HRPs, and RRP truly agile—there is frequently no clear procedure in place for adapting UN entity activities in the event of a shock. Similarly, while some donors utilize instruments such as crisis modifiers, most funding partnerships leave little if any space for contingencies.

Financing for conflict spillovers is lacking. Anticipatory financing has moved forward in relation to natural disasters but less so for conflict-induced emergencies. Moral hazard is a prominent concern, but does not apply to affected countries that have simply suffered because of conflict spillovers from their neighbors. The World Bank’s new windows for crisis response and for refugee-hosting countries go some way toward addressing this gap. But there are various types of crises they do not cover.

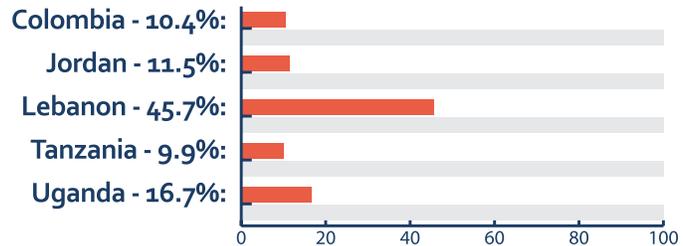


**NATURAL DISASTERS
ARE OCCURRING**

5 TIMES THE
RATE THAT
THEY WERE **4**
DECADES
AGO

Debt is a rising risk. There are growing warning signs that a new debt crisis is forming in fragile countries. Yet the proportion of ODA provided as loans to countries experiencing humanitarian crises has increased by almost ninefold since 2007. Efforts to manage these debt levels are forcing governments to make impossible choices between pursuing “fiscal consolidation” and maintaining or increasing social spending levels.

Many crisis-affected countries are struggling with a growing debt burden. In 2017, interest payments alone consumed significant percentages of government revenue



Recommendations

1. Ramping up capacity in national and local systems.

The review finds that government leadership is a critical success factor, whether or not state systems are used in the short term. We recommend that international actors:

Provide concerted support to governments that commit to building national and local capacity to respond to repeated and protracted emergencies. A key finding of the review is that prioritizing government ownership is appropriate wherever key government sponsors genuinely support humanitarian principles, even when the state lacks capacity and strong accountability mechanisms. In these cases (e.g., Somalia), most funds and services will still be provided outside state structures, at least over the near and medium terms. But the government can be involved in setting priorities and standards for such parallel service delivery, while being supported to build its own capacity and accountability over time. In other situations, significantly more funding can flow through government systems and government-NGO partnerships.

Focus on capacity gaps for emergency response. Critical capacities the review identifies as especially important to help governments to put in place include:

- Emergency budgeting and procurement rules.
- Planning and analysis processes that incorporate humanitarian needs and potential contingencies into development plans.
- Whole-of-government coordination structures that bring together emergency-management agencies, line ministries, ministries of finance and planning, subnational authorities, and, where appropriate, justice and security agencies.
- Systems and incentives for deploying or retaining civil servants in crisis-affected areas.

- Rules for fiscal transfers to local governments that take into account population movements and other consequences of crises.

Assist governments to gradually achieve nation-wide basic services and social protection systems, in line with SDG commitments to leave no one behind. The absence of capacity (and in some cases, will) to provide equitable and sustainable services to affected or marginalized communities goes a long way toward explaining why indefinite parallel services are a reality in the first place.

Provide greater core support and multiyear funding to national and local civil society. Particularly in contexts where working with or through state systems is not feasible or appropriate, UN agencies could commit to passing an equivalent ratio of their own multiyear funding to NGO partners within one year of their commitment. This should be accompanied by guidelines laying out clear expectations.

2. Consistent follow-through in bridging silos.

There are very good examples of transcending humanitarian–development and humanitarian–development–peacebuilding divides; but every country under consideration also has examples of avoidable gaps and duplications. To develop more consistency, we recommend:

Moving toward one comprehensive planning discussion with government and local stakeholders whenever possible. A key concern among country teams, governments, and donors is the proliferation of analytical and planning processes, many of which duplicate or compete with one another. Moving away from this reality does not require that there be only one plan for a given country, but rather that there be a holistic, coherent vision for resolving a given crisis to which all relevant plans contribute, as appropriate. An inclusive CCA provides a strong starting point for all sectors to develop such a vision. Collective outcomes, when formulated within a nationally led process, can be an effective organizing principle for uniting stakeholders around common priorities.

Staffing up and supporting RCs and RCs/HCs to play a bridging role. We suggest establishing three levels of support to RCs and RCs/HCs, as part of the rollout of the new UNDAF/UNCF guidelines and the UNDS reforms in crisis-affected contexts. The first calls for more senior strategic advice to be provided to RCs/UNCTs aimed at helping the latter to link national development, humanitarian, security, and justice sectors, where governments wish to do so. Simultaneously, efforts could be made to enhance the “people pipeline” of technical experts and advisers that can be deployed to strengthen nexus capacities in RC offices and country teams, including by building on efforts underway within the UNDS reforms and lessons learned through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors. Finally, we recommend treating UNDP-supported country support platforms as a crucial “public good” that can reinforce empowered RCs and the whole UN system.

Investing in coherence. We recommend investing in efforts to bridge the silos at country level, in line with the new Development Assistance Committee (DAC) recommendation to “provide appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for cost-effective coordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture.” We suggest that donors might improve the incentives for bridging silos and for achieving collective outcomes if they:

- Adopt combined development–humanitarian(–peacebuilding) country strategies

- Provide guidelines on application of humanitarian principles to national recipients (state and nongovernmental) and
- Ensure that developmental and humanitarian budget lines can be pooled.

We further recommend that International Development Association (IDA) deputies ask for a review of development–humanitarian–peacebuilding links and the UN–World Bank partnership during IDA 19 to identify good practices that can be made more consistent.

3. Mainstreaming anticipatory approaches.

Although prevention is at the forefront of global policy discussions, a step-change has yet to take place in practice. We recommend:

Making contingency planning in UNDAFs/UNCFs, HRPs, World Bank Country Partnership Frameworks, and project agreements the norm. Specifically, key partners should establish a clear process for responding effectively when a new crisis emerges or an existing situation deteriorates—for instance, by establishing and empowering a committee composed of representatives of government, UN agencies, donors, and NGOs to adjust a certain percentage of activities or funding in the face of an emergency.

Adapting the IDA Crisis Response Window (CRW), the Risk Mitigation Regime (RMR), and the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) to address conflict spillovers and contingencies. Notably, the CRW does not provide for deferred-drawdown operations that can agree on assistance in advance of a shock, nor does it address conflict-spillover in a comprehensive manner. The CRW, RMR, and GCFF should be modified to address the spread of conflict. Moreover, the RMR could be adapted to be more flexible by refraining from identifying situations three years in advance and by using additional funds on clear national prevention objectives and strategies, including upstream prevention.

Advocating greater support for insurance and contingent financing mechanisms. Insurance mechanisms still cover only 5 percent of natural hazards in developing countries. Governments and partners should push the envelope in devising multilateral rules and instruments that reflect the diversity of challenges countries face, including countries dealing with crises imposed by regional external dynamics. In addition, infrequently utilized contingency financing mechanisms, such as France’s countercyclical loan facility, should be explored and used.

Holding a UN–Multilateral Development Bank–IMF retreat on the missing middle and fiscal and macroeconomic linkages. The review found an absence of mechanisms to help countries cope with macroeconomic challenges. A retreat with the UN and the IFIs would be useful in addressing the many fiscal and macroeconomic factors involved in crisis response, such as fiscal-decentralization linkages and debt management. Follow-up meetings could focus on a set of concrete thematic issues, such as balancing national priorities for political and economic reform, reconciling divergent approaches to social protection, and addressing rising debt distress in fragile political situations.

**Cover photo: Rohingya refugees in the
Kutupalong Rohingya Refugee Camp in Cox's
Bazar, Bangladesh, 2018. ©UN Photo/KM Asad.**

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726 Broadway, Suite 543
New York, NY 10003
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