



Education in emergencies is a key priority of the EU's humanitarian work. Pupils in a class receiving a lesson on mathematics at Lufunda Primary School in Mpati/North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Photo: NRC/Christian Jepsen

## PUTTING THE NEXUS INTO PRACTICE – THE EU'S HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

In order to put the nexus concept into practice, adjustments have to be made at all levels of the programming cycle – from information sharing to financing. Our author explains what this means for the work of the EU Commission and how integration is to result in more effective action in addressing protracted crises.

By Christos Stylianides

The European Union's work on saving lives, eradicating poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has evolved through the decades, responding to the different challenges and adapting to the evolving realities. We observe that humanitarian crises often last for multiple years, demonstrate regional spill-overs and force people to abandon their homes for long periods. At the same time, the prevalence of violence and conflict fuels instability that continuously undermines humanitarian and development efforts.

Reality therefore shows that a traditional, largely compartmentalised approach, where the European Union's humanitarian, development and peace activities are separated from one another, does not correspond to the challenges we currently face in our neighbourhood, in Africa or across the globe – wherever there are anthropogenic or natural disasters. Due to the protracted nature of crises, human-

itarian, development and peace work often take place at the same time. The key philosophy behind the nexus therefore is about rising up to the current challenges, maximising our potential and finding lasting solutions for protracted crises. It aims at bringing all sides of a crisis together – the response and prevention spectrum.

The EU's humanitarian work is, by definition, an immediate action to alleviate suffering. However, our work is conditioned greatly by the root causes and drivers of crises. Without peace and stability, our humanitarian and development actions will often be undermined. The nexus is an attempt to act with short-term as well as longer-term strategic objectives, targeting root causes of fragility, vulnerability and conflict, strengthening livelihoods and, in turn, building local capacities for risk reduction, resilience, conflict prevention and other durable solutions.

### FROM SHARED UNDERSTANDING TO CO-ORDINATED ACTION

What does this mean in practice? Above all, more information sharing between humanitarian, development and political actors, joint missions, shared needs and vulnerability assessments, increased integration of conflict sensitivity and more complementarities in programming. This could materialise in shared outlooks of crises, and subsequent division of labour, in the strengths of each actor. For example, in disease outbreaks, the nexus approach for the humanitarian community means engaging more in anticipation as well as in emergency preparedness and rapid response. For development actors it implies focusing more on risk analysis and system adaptations after emergency interventions.

It is also a question of efficiency. If development actors can come in and build on existing

humanitarian interventions, that automatically avoids duplication. And things are made easier if actors have a shared understanding of the crisis, the needs, the existing interventions, and what everyone is doing. This also makes an eventual transition from humanitarian to development action smoother – without people falling through the cracks.

This is precisely what we have been doing in our pilot Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus approach with EU Member States in six countries – Sudan, Iraq, Nigeria, Uganda, Myanmar and Chad – since mid-2017. We are working closely together to design a comprehensive understanding of vulnerabilities in specific protracted crises and to agree on common objectives and complementary programmes by various EU Services and Member States, always in line with the respective mandates. This also strengthened our co-operation with the Member States.



*Incorporating conflict sensitivity in all external EU action is key in putting the nexus into practice*

In Northeast Nigeria, for instance, we have been funding a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) programme on livelihoods, agricultural inputs and small-scale livelihood starter kits, to complement the World Food Programme (WFP) in the food assistance they provide to the most vulnerable during the dry season. For example, these starter kits help people to start generating their own income and foresee trainings. The EU's development funds (EU Trust Funds) are also supporting the FAO in a complementary longer-term action for a programme addressing more sustainable livelihoods in the same area.

Humanitarian work, in turn, can also benefit from closer links with development and peace-building actions. Incorporating conflict sensitivity in all external EU action is key in putting the nexus into practice. Humanitarian actors therefore could develop their own analytical capacity, while drawing experience from non-humanitarian actors, on how interventions can be more conflict-sensitive. Local systems and communities have a role to play here. Additionally, humanitarian civil-military co-ordination has the potential to improve the

interaction between the humanitarian and security communities, allowing for better access, while increasing the protection of those most in need. Finally, in order to promote respect for International Humanitarian Law, we might need to interact more or differently with the political, diplomatic or even security actors.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE EU'S HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES?

As humanitarians, our number one priority is protecting people. The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence are our compass, our gospel and our best chance in fulfilling our mission. They are what gives us our credibility, and thus they are not negotiable. At the same time, we have an obligation to explore avenues of collaboration in order to be as effective as possible in protecting and saving lives. Seeking complementarity with development and peace work – be it in having common vulnerability and needs assessments or in identified division of labour – does not go against our humanitarian principles. In more and more cases, humanitarian, development and peace work all take place simultaneously. Thus, we are trying to find links while at the same time preserving the separate identities of our work, and of course, most importantly, the independence of humanitarian aid.

Obviously, the context matters and will define the scope of collaboration. While humanitarian aid must not be used as a vehicle for stabilisation efforts, it is important to identify clearly the opportunities and the potential challenges of its inclusion in peace-building efforts. The absence of peace, after all, jeopardises not only the safety of our humanitarian workers in the field, but also our overall efforts to save lives.

### WHAT IS GOING TO CHANGE THROUGH THE UN REFORM?

The vision of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres on the organisation's reform is clear and I am fully behind it. While this process concerns several dimensions of UN work, it targets a structural emphasis on enhancing the humanitarian-development-peace-building continuum. These important reform initiatives, which came into force as of the 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2019, are broad, spanning from the repositioning of the UN development system to the review of the peace and security architecture and to UN internal management.

### THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT

The European Consensus on Development entitled "Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future" was adopted in June 2017. It is the cornerstone of the EU's development policy, intending to provide a framework for a common approach to development policy, aligning the Union's development policy with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2017 Consensus replaces the first EU Consensus adopted in 2005 that was formulated against the background of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

For information see:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf)

The impact on the humanitarian domain is expected to be significant, but we will have to wait for the reform's rollout and transition period to see how profound it will be. What is crucial is that we use this period to identify lessons learnt and the way forward. To this end, we are gathering specific examples from our field offices to monitor and assess how the structural reforms impact our daily work.

### CLOSELY LINKED TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the Sustainable Development Agenda, which calls for action by all countries to improve the lives of people everywhere. Our humanitarian work contributes greatly to this end for several SDGs – including those on poverty and hunger eradication, quality education, sustainable cities and communities, climate action and partnerships. In parallel, EU development policy has the SDGs at the heart of its actions world-wide.

Overall, around one third of the EU annual humanitarian aid budget is used to provide emergency food assistance, making the EU one of the world's major donors in this sector. The EU provides humanitarian food assistance to victims of food crises around the world and invests massively in the response to the countries facing risk of famine (Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen) in an integrated approach that includes our development action.

Poverty and hunger eradication rests greatly on the ability of people to withstand and



EU Humanitarian Aid funds the provision of therapeutic food and other essential medicines at the Nutrition Center in Nigeria that is run by the NGO Alima to provide care to internally displaced persons and the host populations who have welcomed them.

Photo: 2018 European Union

overcome devastation, either from anthropogenic or natural disasters. Enhancing the resilience of people – including in urban areas – so that they don't start from zero after a disaster is crucial in giving them a fighting chance to survive and ultimately prosper. This goes beyond the provision of shelter, food and access to social support systems. It includes the building up of skills, infrastructure, sustainable urbanisation strategies, disaster risk reduction planning and preparedness, with the useful input of both humanitarian and development actors.

Education in emergencies is a key priority of our humanitarian work. In the last four years, we have increased the humanitarian budget allocation for this issue eight times, and this year we are spending ten per cent of the EU humanitarian aid budget on projects that focus on education in an emergency context. This means providing out-of-school, displaced and other vulnerable groups of children with the protection and opportunity to continue learning during a crisis so that they are protected from forced labour, conflict and sexual violence, forced marriage and radicalisation, while at the same time ensuring that they can continue their education when the situation allows – either in their host country or back home. Our humanitarian work on this is complemented by the EU's development assistance on education, as highlighted in the European Consensus on Development (see Box on page 15).

At the same time, the EU, as the leading humanitarian and development donor, is a key driver for stronger partnerships and collective, multilateral action against global challenges, such as climate action, refugee and migration crises and conflicts.

### MORE FLEXIBILITY IN FUNDING NEEDED

Thanks to the nature of our humanitarian actions – the need to respond quickly to disasters – EU humanitarian aid can rely on flexible funding to address new needs. However, EU development funding does not boast similar flexibility, as it rests on longer-term outlooks. At the same time, with the average timeframe of displacement now at well over 17 years, a lot of humanitarian aid is effectively dedicated to protracted crises, which compromises our capacities in other humanitarian crises. Part of the nexus process is to review the flexibility and complementarity of funding, by making non-humanitarian instruments take a larger share in protracted crises.

Flexibility is a key element of the next EU Multi-annual Financial Framework which spans the period from 2021 until 2027. The aim is not only to support EU actions with the required and sufficient funds, but to also help mobilise and incentivise private funds and other actors. This includes greater complementarity between objectives, but also new

development financing tools such as insurance, concessional loans and contingency funds, and working together with private sector actors.

At the same time, it is important to ensure the availability of predictable funding for early responses at the local level. Also scope has to be provided for anticipatory actions in situations deemed appropriate and justified in order to avoid suffering of livelihoods – such as for instance, for seasonal payments in drought-prone locations.

### RETHINKING EXISTING INSTRUMENTS

The EU's Global Strategy foresees a joined-up approach to its development and humanitarian assistance in every possible instance to “fight poverty and inequality, widen access to public services and social security, and champion decent work opportunities, notably for women and youth”. The Commission has outlined its vision for enhanced co-operation and focus on building resilience and combating fragility and protracted crises in a series of Communications, where complementarity and coherence between its humanitarian, development and peace and stability actions are crucial.

More specifically, the 2017 joint European External Action Service (EEAS)–Commission Communication proposed to rethink how our existing instruments respond to risks and vulnerabilities, and in turn how they can be used to address fragility and protracted crises in the most effective and coherent EU action.

The Communication proposes four building blocks to incorporate resilience into the EU's external action: improving the analysis of risks, underlying causes and resilience factors, a more dynamic monitoring of external pressures to allow early action, integrating the resilience approach into EU programming and financing of external assistance, and EU co-operation with multilateral and bilateral institutional partners.

The nexus is an attempt to enhance EU coherence, use each action's strengths to save lives and help the most vulnerable world-wide to prosper. It is common sense, and lays the foundation for more effective EU action in addressing protracted crises.

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