Front Line Focus | Quick Guides for 2025

Tearing Down Silos

Reimagining the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus

Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief Institute

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About the Humanitarian and Development Landscape Series

This guide is part of the **Humanitarian and Development Landscape** series, a collection of guides designed to supplement the HADR Institute's course. Each guide in the series delves into a critical aspect of humanitarian and development work, providing both foundational knowledge and practical insights. *Principles in Practice* illustrates how ethical frameworks guide decision-making in challenging environments. Together with other titles in the series, it supports a holistic understanding of the humanitarian landscape – from localisation and anticipatory action to protection and development linkages – as taught in the HADR Institute's courses. Participants in the **Humanitarian and Development Landscape** course and other practitioners are welcome to use these guides to reinforce learning, explore case studies, and engage with current best practices in the sector. This integrated series reflects the HADR Institute's commitment to advancing professional education and grounding it in real-world application.

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The HADR Institute is a not-for-profit humanitarian organisation dedicated to strengthening local capacity, enhancing disaster resilience, and supporting community-driven responses to crises.

Our mission is to equip individuals and organisations with the skills, knowledge, and resources needed to respond effectively to humanitarian challenges while upholding human rights and dignity

We operate across multiple regions, with a focus on the Pacific Islands and Southeast Asia, bridging the gap between policy and practice in humanitarian response. Through a combination of research, field programs, and training courses, we integrate localisation, anticipatory action, and community leadership into our initiatives.

By collaborating with local NGOs, community-based organisations, and international partners, we strive to advance humanitarian effectiveness and promote ethical, people-centred aid.

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Introduction

In an age of *permacrisis*, the lines between emergencies, chronic poverty, and conflict are increasingly blurred. Humanitarian, development, and peace efforts are no longer sequential phases but overlapping endeavors that must work in tandem. The original *"tearing down silos"* vision of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) nexus called for greater coherence and collaboration across these sectors. Today, that vision must expand to address new realities: the imperative to **decolonise** aid power structures, the urgency of **climate resilience**, and the push for **localisation** of aid. At the same time, practitioners are grounding this nexus in standard development frameworks like the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, exploring **anticipatory action** to crises, and integrating with **peacekeeping/peacemaking** initiatives through **conflict-sensitive programming**. This updated edition maintains a practical yet critical voice – blending policy analysis with field insights – to examine how the nexus can deliver better results on the ground. We incorporate fresh thought leadership from across the sector, from progressive voices championing locally led solutions to outspoken critics challenging the nexus orthodoxy. The goal is to provide a candid look at what it will take to make the HDP nexus effective and equitable in today's context.

Key Themes in Focus:

- **Decolonisation and Localisation:** Addressing the colonial legacy in aid and shifting power to local actors.
- **Climate Resilience:** Integrating climate adaptation and risk reduction into humanitarian and development plans.
- **Linking to SDGs:** Aligning nexus programming with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.
- **Anticipatory Action:** Moving from reactive relief to proactive, early action before crises fully unfold.
- **Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, & Conflict Sensitivity:** Ensuring interventions contribute to peace and do no harm in fragile contexts.
- **Shifts in Donor Policy:** Examining how changes in U.S. foreign aid could ripple through the global aid architecture.

With these themes, we will critically assess progress and gaps in implementing a triple nexus approach. Real examples and field-oriented insights will illustrate how policies translate (or fail to translate) into practice. Throughout, we maintain a focus on **pragmatic solutions**: what can be done differently by governments, agencies, and frontline practitioners to truly **tear down silos** and better link relief, development, and peace efforts. The aspiration of the nexus – to *leave no one behind* even in crisis – is more relevant than ever. But it requires confronting tough questions about power, priorities, and principles, as this edition will explore.

Decolonising Aid and Localisation: Shifting Power to Local Actors

Calls to *“decolonise aid”* have grown louder, urging a fundamental shift in how humanitarian and development assistance is conceived and delivered. Decolonisation in this context means dismantling the legacy of colonial-era power imbalances that persist in the aid system.[1]

It questions why wealthy nations and international agencies still dominate decision-making in crises affecting the Global South, and why local communities often have little agency over the aid meant for them. Practically, decolonising aid translates into empowering local and national responders, valuing indigenous knowledge, and ensuring affected populations drive their own recovery and development.

One concrete manifestation of this agenda is the **localisation movement** – the push to shift resources and leadership to local organisations. On the surface, *“localisation”* has been embraced widely since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, with donors pledging to channel more funding to local NGOs. It is an *“admirable goal”* from one angle.[2]

Local actors are usually first on the scene of disasters and conflicts, have access and cultural understanding that outsiders lack, and will remain long after international actors leave.

Strengthening their capacity and role should make aid more effective and accountable to communities. Successful examples include local women’s groups coordinating disaster response and national NGOs taking over service delivery in protracted crises, demonstrating that investing in local response pays off.

However, critics caution that localisation, if done superficially, can become *“suspiciously like language used to avoid talking about the lingering effects of racism”*.[3] In other words, handing off tasks to local partners means little if international actors still control the purse strings and agenda.

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[1] urd.org
[2] thenewhumanitarian.org
[3] thenewhumanitarian.org

In some cases, international NGOs have simply created parallel local affiliates or subcontracted local groups to implement projects, without ceding real decision-making power. True decolonisation requires deeper change – **shifting power**, not just shifting workloads. This includes confronting structural racism within aid organisations, reforming donor grant requirements that disadvantage local agencies, and acknowledging the expertise that already resides in crisis-affected communities.

From a *field perspective*, moving toward locally led response can be challenging but rewarding. Experienced aid workers note that partnering with local responders is often the fastest way to reach people in need and build trust. For example, in a conflict zone, a local NGO with established community relationships can negotiate access and deliver assistance where outsiders cannot. Yet, those local groups often struggle to secure direct funding; they may receive piecemeal sub-grants with heavy reporting burdens that reflect distrust. Progressive donors and INGOs are experimenting with **transformative partnerships** – described by the Humanitarian Advisory Group as partnerships that *amplify the voices of at-risk communities and ensure accountability to crisis-affected populations.*[4] Such partnerships involve sharing power in assessments, planning, and decision-making, not merely contracting locals to implement pre-designed projects. They also mean investing in organisational strengthening on the local side and accepting that locally led solutions may look different than traditional international interventions.

Key shifts required to advance decolonisation and localisation in the nexus include:

- **Shifting Decision-Making** – Involve local leaders in strategy-setting and funding allocations from the start. For instance, displacement responses can establish local steering committees to determine how aid funds are prioritised.

- **Equitable Partnerships** – Replace sub-grants with true partnerships. Co-design programs with local NGOs and share oversight roles. Build in overhead support for local partners so they can grow and sustain operations.

- **Revisiting "Capacity Building"** – Acknowledge that local capacity exists; the issue is often inequitable opportunity. Where capacity gaps remain, approach training as a mutual learning exchange rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge from "expert" to "beneficiary."

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[4] humanitarianadvisorygroup.org

- **Accountability to Communities** – Use participatory approaches that give affected people a voice in evaluating aid effectiveness. Feedback from disaster survivors or conflict-affected groups should directly inform program adjustments.

- **Shifting Funds and Risk** – Donors should increase the percentage of funds going directly to national and local actors (beyond the current 1-2% of humanitarian funding) and adjust risk appetites to trust local partners with large grants. Pooled funds and intermediaries can help route money while managing fiduciary risk, but ultimate control should rest with local stakeholders.[5]

By operationalising these shifts, the humanitarian-development-peace nexus can become not just a coordination framework, but a vehicle for **power balance change**. Decolonising the nexus means those who have the most at stake – crisis-affected communities and their local institutions – drive the agenda for relief, recovery, and peacebuilding. Some aid agencies are beginning to grapple with this. For example, an international NGO in West Africa reported reevaluating its role entirely: *should we exist indefinitely, and how can we justify our presence if local actors can lead?*[6] Such introspection is difficult but necessary to avoid perpetuating paternalistic models under the nexus banner. Ultimately, a nexus approach that is **locally owned** stands a far better chance of achieving sustainable outcomes and fostering genuine resilience.

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[5] orfonline.org
[6] urd.org

Climate Resilience: Integrating Climate Adaptation into the Nexus

Climate change is not a distant threat – it is a crisis multiplier that is already exacerbating humanitarian and development challenges. From protracted droughts triggering food insecurity across the Sahel, to stronger storms reversing development gains in the Pacific, climate-related shocks are hitting vulnerable communities hardest. Any modern nexus approach must therefore integrate **climate resilience**: the ability of households, communities, and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate stresses. This means humanitarian, development, and peace actors planning together for a future of more frequent extreme weather and environmental disruption.

The overlap of climate vulnerability with fragility and conflict is stark. Research confirms that climate change is *"an additional challenge layered upon social and economic tensions that can erupt into violent conflicts"*, and in many cases climate impacts *"probably aggravated or even ignited"* those conflicts.[7]

For example, in parts of the Horn of Africa, repeated droughts have intensified competition over scarce water and pasture, feeding into inter-communal violence. **Strengthening climate resilience in fragile states is therefore crucial to preventing conflict and humanitarian crises**. [8] Investments in climate adaptation – such as drought-resistant agriculture, early warning systems, or flood defenses – have the potential to *"prevent conflicts, overcome crises and stabilise the socio-economic situation"*.[9] However, there is a flip side: poorly planned climate projects can inadvertently fuel tensions (for instance, if one group perceives another is receiving preferential support). This underscores that climate action must be conflict-sensitive (a point we explore later).

In practice, what does integrating climate resilience into the nexus look like? It means breaking out of the mindset that climate adaptation is solely an environmental or development issue. Humanitarian operations are starting to adopt a **disaster risk reduction (DRR)** and **preparedness** lens, recognising that saving lives in emergencies increasingly involves helping communities prepare for climate extremes. Development programs are recalibrating to be "climate-smart," ensuring that new infrastructure or livelihoods are designed for a changing climate. And peacebuilders are paying more

[7] deval.org
[8] deval.org
[9] deval.org

attention to natural resource management and environmental grievances as part of conflict prevention. The EU, for example, has promoted a *“nexus approach”* that jointly addresses climate, human security, and development in fragile contexts and initiatives like the *HDP Nexus Coalition* highlight climate resilience as a priority in regions like Africa.[10].

A field example can illustrate the value of this integration: In a flood-prone region of Asia, humanitarian agencies historically responded with relief aid after each major flood, while development projects separately built dikes or promoted livelihoods. Now, through a nexus lens, those actors collaborated on a **community-based climate resilience program**. Development funds went into elevating homes, improving drainage, and diversifying crops to withstand floods (long-term adaptation), while humanitarian actors pre-positioned supplies and trained local emergency teams (short-term preparedness). After implementation, when an unusually heavy monsoon hit, the community suffered fewer losses and needed less external relief, validating the nexus approach. **Climate resilience served as a common objective that united emergency and development efforts.**

However, significant challenges remain. Funding streams are often siloed – climate finance, development aid, and humanitarian aid come with different timelines and conditions. There is a gap in financing for *“anticipatory”* or preventive actions (addressed further in the next section). Also, agencies need new skills to analyse climate risks and plan across scenarios. One lesson learned is the importance of local knowledge in climate adaptation. Communities have insights into environmental changes and have coping strategies (e.g., indigenous early warning signs) that should inform programs. Unfortunately, past top-down approaches sometimes ignored these insights. A Humanitarian Advisory Group analysis noted how *“historical disempowerment of local methods of disaster tracking”* – for instance, colonisers outlawing indigenous practices – has hampered today’s coping capacities.[11]

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[10] hdpnexus.fightfoodcrises.net
[11] humanitarianadvisorygroup.org

Decolonising climate resilience means valuing and reviving local and traditional knowledge as part of adaptation strategies.

In summary, climate resilience is now a core component of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It provides a unifying purpose: to protect development gains and lives from the ravages of climate change. Practitioners should mainstream climate risk analysis into all nexus programming.

This can involve:

- Joint **climate-risk assessments** by humanitarian, development, and government actors to identify hotspots of vulnerability (e.g., mapping areas where climate impacts intersect with high poverty and conflict).

- Setting **collective outcomes** related to climate adaptation – for example, a multi-agency plan might aim to reduce the number of people displaced by climate disasters in a region by a certain percentage, linking relief, adaptation, and conflict prevention efforts.

- **Flexible funding** that can shift from development to humanitarian use (and vice versa) based on climate forecasts – allowing early action when a climate shock is predicted.

- Incorporating **nature-based solutions** that both build resilience and strengthen peace. For instance, watershed restoration can reduce drought impacts while bringing together divided communities to work on a common goal, building social cohesion.

By weaving climate considerations into the nexus, we not only address a major driver of crises but also open opportunities for innovation. Working at this intersection encourages holistic thinking – viewing human vulnerability in ecological, social, and economic dimensions simultaneously. As climate shocks continue to test the aid system, those efforts that have integrated climate resilience stand out as more sustainable and forward-looking. They exemplify the very ethos of the triple nexus: tackling immediate needs in ways that also reduce future risks.

Aligning with the SDGs: A Nexus for Sustainable Development

A major development in global policy since the early 2010s has been the adoption of the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** – 17 goals agreed by all UN member states as part of the 2030 Agenda. The SDGs provide a comprehensive framework for ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring peace and prosperity. They explicitly pledge to *"leave no one behind."* Yet, the sobering reality is that those *furthest behind* are often people caught in **protracted crises** – conflict zones, displaced populations, and communities facing recurrent disasters.[12]

With less than five years remaining to 2030, progress on the SDGs is badly off-track in fragile states. More than half of the world's extreme poor live in countries experiencing protracted crisis, and these contexts are the very places where humanitarian needs are greatest. The HDP nexus is not separate from the SDG agenda – it is **central** to achieving it.

Traditionally, the humanitarian and development communities operated with different paradigms: humanitarians addressed urgent needs, while development actors pursued long-term objectives like education, infrastructure, and governance reform. The nexus approach challenges this dichotomy, asserting that we must work towards **"collective outcomes"** that fulfill both immediate needs and advance development goals, even during crises. In practice, this means designing humanitarian programs so they can lay groundwork for sustainable recovery, and conversely, ensuring development programs are sensitive to shocks and can protect hard-won gains during emergencies. For example, a nutrition program in a conflict area might shift from pure relief (food distributions) to a combined approach that also supports local agriculture and markets (SDG2: Zero Hunger), thus building self-reliance while addressing hunger. Similarly, a development education project (SDG4) in a refugee-hosting region might integrate psychosocial support and protective measures for children, recognising the humanitarian context.

[12] devinit.org

There is growing recognition among international organisations of the need for such synergy. The UN, World Bank, and EU have all adopted policies endorsing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus *"in order to move towards lasting solutions to protracted crises and to support the achievement of the SDGs in fragile and conflict-affected contexts."*[13] This reflects a paradigm shift: rather than viewing humanitarian aid as a short-term bandage and development as a later effort, they see both as part of a **continuum** or even a simultaneous package. Notably, the UN's "New Way of Working" (introduced around the World Humanitarian Summit 2016) explicitly calls for collective outcomes that organisations commit to achieving together, aligned with SDG targets where relevant. For instance, in a protracted refugee situation, a collective outcome might be: "Within 5 years, X% of refugees and host community youth gain access to quality education and vocational training." Achieving this links to SDG4 (education) and SDG8 (decent work), and requires humanitarian actors (who run emergency education in camps), development actors (who can fund schools and curricula), and peace actors (who address tensions between refugees and hosts) to collaborate.

Despite policy agreements, implementing an SDG-linked nexus on the ground has proven difficult. Development actors traditionally plan multi-year projects with government partners, while humanitarian actors operate on emergency timeframes, often outside government systems for reasons of neutrality or speed. Aligning these approaches involves overcoming bureaucratic hurdles and mistrust. One positive trend is the emergence of **"crisis-informed development planning."** Countries prone to crises are encouraged to incorporate disaster risk, conflict analysis, and humanitarian response capacities into their national SDG strategies. For example, a country's national development plan for SDG6 (clean water and sanitation) might include contingency measures for droughts and cholera outbreaks, developed in consultation with humanitarian agencies. Likewise, multi-donor trust funds in some conflict-affected countries are now co-designing programs that both fulfill immediate humanitarian needs and build infrastructure (e.g., a project that repairs war-damaged water systems while restoring water service – meeting urgent needs and a long-term SDG goal simultaneously).

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[13] devinit.org

From a practical standpoint, aligning nexus activities with the SDGs offers several benefits:

- **Common Language and Goals:** The SDGs provide a universally endorsed set of objectives. Humanitarian teams can frame their efforts as contributing to specific SDG targets (like SDG3 on health or SDG11 on safe cities) to facilitate partnerships with development actors and governments. This common language can help break down the cultural silo between "humanitarian" and "development" professionals.

- **Measuring Impact Beyond Immediate Relief:** By using SDG indicators as part of monitoring, humanitarian programs can track not only output (e.g., number of people given emergency shelter) but also progress toward outcomes (e.g., how many returned to safe housing, linking to SDG11). This pushes agencies to evaluate whether short-term aid is paving the way for longer-term improvements.

- **Holistic Needs Assessment:** The SDGs encourage looking at multiple dimensions of well-being. In crises, applying an SDG lens means assessing needs holistically. For instance, beyond survival needs, consider education, livelihoods, governance, etc., even in an acute crisis. This can identify entry points where development investment during a crisis can reduce dependence on relief.

- **Mobilising Diverse Resources:** Development banks and climate funds, which are keyed to SDG outcomes, can be tapped in crisis contexts if proposals are crafted to meet both humanitarian needs and SDG goals. A good example is the World Bank's IDA18 sub-window for refugees and host communities, which directs development financing to what were traditionally seen as humanitarian settings.

One illustrative scenario is how the nexus can support **SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)** in a conflict recovery context. Humanitarian agencies may be restoring basic services like healthcare (immediate relief), while development programs work on rebuilding the local health system (long-term sustainability) and peacebuilding efforts focus on inclusive governance (to prevent conflict relapse). If all align under the SDG16 umbrella, their activities can be mutually reinforcing rather than working at cross-purposes. Indeed, the idea of *"sustaining peace"* – adopted by the UN – complements the nexus and SDG framework by emphasising that peace is both an enabler and an outcome of development.

Anticipatory Action: Acting Before Crises Hit

One of the most promising shifts in humanitarian practice in recent years has been the rise of **anticipatory action**. Instead of waiting for a disaster to strike or a conflict to boil over, anticipatory action involves taking proactive steps based on predictions and early warnings to reduce the impact on people. As OCHA succinctly defines it, *“anticipatory action is acting ahead of predicted hazards to prevent or reduce acute humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold.”*[14]

In other words, it is about using foresight – data, forecasts, risk analysis – to trigger pre-planned activities that save lives and livelihoods, thereby bridging the gap between disaster risk reduction and emergency response.

The concept is not entirely new; early warning systems and disaster preparedness have existed for decades. What’s new is the development of **pre-arranged financing and protocols** that enable rapid action once certain forecast “triggers” are met. For example, meteorological agencies might forecast a major drought with 80% confidence; rather than waiting for crop failures and hunger to materialise, an anticipatory financing mechanism (like the Start Network’s Crisis Anticipation Window or the IFRC’s Forecast-based Financing) releases funds immediately to aid agencies to distribute drought-tolerant seeds, stockpile water, or provide cash transfers to at-risk families *before* the worst occurs. This approach can massively reduce suffering and economic damage. In Bangladesh, such forecast-based actions ahead of severe flooding in 2020 were credited with protecting thousands of families who, as a result, needed far less post-flood assistance.

Anticipatory action is inherently a nexus approach because it blurs the line between humanitarian relief and preventive development work. It draws on **disaster risk reduction (DRR)**, which is traditionally a development domain (building long-term resilience to hazards), and marries it with humanitarian objectives (immediate impact reduction). The result is a set of interventions that happen in the window **between** early warning and disaster impact. These might include: evacuations and contingency planning (often led by government and humanitarian actors), fortification of infrastructure like dams or dikes (development actors with humanitarian justification), delivery of aid supplies or cash in advance (humanitarians using development funds), or livelihood protection measures like destocking cattle before a drought (which has both economic and humanitarian rationale).

[14] unocha.org

A key element enabling anticipatory action is **data and predictive analytics**. The humanitarian sector is investing in better forecasting models – not just for weather, but also for conflict risk and disease outbreaks. For instance, machine learning models can identify when food security indicators and climate data point toward an impending famine-like situation. The availability of such predictive information has outpaced the humanitarian system's ability to act on it in the past – that's what anticipatory action initiatives aim to change. The United Nations and various NGOs have piloted "anticipatory action frameworks" in high-risk countries. These frameworks define *pre-agreed triggers, pre-agreed actions, and pre-agreed financing*.[15]

Once a trigger (say, rainfall below a certain threshold over 3 weeks) is reached, the plan activates: specific agencies carry out agreed tasks with funds that have been set aside for this scenario. This removes the delays of fundraising appeals and ad-hoc planning in the heat of a crisis. As one overview describes, *"the objective is to empower communities and humanitarians to act earlier and thus prevent, or at least mitigate, acute and imminent humanitarian impacts before they fully unfold."*[16]

From a field worker's perspective, anticipatory action can be transformative. Take the example of pastoralist communities in East Africa who regularly face drought. Traditionally, humanitarians would respond with food aid and animal feed *after* the drought decimated herds and livelihoods. Under an anticipatory scheme, forecasts of poor rains trigger partners to intervene early: supplying fodder, supporting animal health, providing cash to families so they don't have to sell off all their livestock. By acting early, fewer animals die and fewer children become malnourished, meaning the humanitarian response needed later is smaller and recovery is faster. Field staff note that communities greatly prefer this approach – it treats them not just as victims after the fact, but as partners who can take preventive measures when warned of a coming hazard. There are stories of villagers who, armed with an early warning and modest support, dug irrigation channels or stored food in anticipation, significantly softening the blow of an eventual flood or cyclone.

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[15] anticipation-hub.org
[16] anticipation-hub.org

Despite the evident benefits, scaling up anticipatory action faces challenges. One is **institutional inertia and risk aversion** – releasing funds based on a forecast entails the risk that the disaster may not materialise as severely as expected, raising questions of "wasted" resources. Agencies and donors have to get comfortable with probabilistic decision-making, much like the insurance industry. Encouragingly, cost-benefit analyses have shown that even if a few anticipatory actions will overshoot (the disaster is less bad than predicted), overall the approach still saves money and lives compared to reacting late. Another challenge is ensuring that anticipatory actions are **equitable and locally informed**. Just as with any intervention, there's a risk of top-down approaches. The best anticipatory programs involve local authorities and communities in defining triggers and actions. For example, in Nepal, community volunteers are part of flood early warning systems and decide when to activate local contingency plans; international support is then channeled to complement those local actions.

We should also note that anticipatory action is not only about natural hazards. There are fledgling efforts to anticipate conflict and displacement – though predicting human violence is much more complex. Still, tools like crisis risk indices or satellite imagery of troop movements have been used to stage relief supplies in advance of expected conflict escalation. Similarly, in the realm of epidemics, by monitoring disease outbreaks and mobility patterns, aid groups have pre-positioned health supplies and conducted preemptive vaccinations (for instance, anticipating a potential spread of cholera after a cyclone).

For the nexus, anticipatory action represents a practical way to unify humanitarian and development aims: it uses development-style planning and risk mitigation to achieve humanitarian impact (reducing loss of life). It also aligns with peace efforts when it reduces competition over resources post-disaster (thereby lowering conflict risk). Anticipatory action, in essence, operationalises the oft-repeated mantra of *"prevention is better than cure."* As one humanitarian briefing put it, early warning must be followed by early action, yet *"today there is only very scarce funding available for operational anticipation"*.[17]

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[17] cdn.sida.se

– a gap that needs to be closed. Encouraging signs include new funding mechanisms like the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocating some resources specifically for anticipatory action pilots, and initiatives such as the **Anticipation Hub** which brings together practitioners to share lessons globally.

Looking ahead, scaling anticipatory action will require:

- **Flexible Financing:** Donors willing to allocate funds that can be released immediately when modelled forecasts hit thresholds. This might include expanding forecast-based financing pools and parametric insurance for disasters.

- **Better Forecasts and Triggers:** Continued investment in science and data (e.g., climate models downscaled to community level, or conflict forecasting models) and agreed triggers that are context-specific and reliable enough to build trust.

- **Government Integration:** Working with national disaster management agencies to embed anticipatory protocols into their systems, so that early action is part of national response plans (not just a parallel NGO effort).

- **Learning and Evidence:** Rigorous evaluation of pilots to build the evidence base of how much suffering was averted, which helps make the case politically and financially. For instance, documenting that an anticipatory cash distribution prevented a spike in malnutrition provides tangible proof of concept.

Anticipatory action is a critical piece of a reimagined nexus approach – one that does not accept crisis as inevitable, but instead uses foresight to protect development gains and humanitarian outcomes. By acting *before* shocks hit, we reduce the need for massive emergency operations later. It resonates with affected communities' own priorities: people would much rather avoid losing their homes or livelihoods in the first place than receive aid after the fact. As climate change and other risks intensify, anticipatory action offers a path to more *dignified* and *efficient* assistance – a proactive nexus of compassion and pragmatism.

Peacekeeping, Peacemaking, and Conflict-Sensitive Programming

The inclusion of “peace” in the triple nexus underscores that enduring solutions in crises require more than aid and development – they demand addressing the conflicts and insecurities at the root. In practical terms, this means humanitarians and development actors working in tandem with **peacemaking** and **peacekeeping** efforts, and ensuring all programs are **conflict-sensitive** (at minimum doing no harm, and at best contributing to social cohesion). However, engaging with the peace aspect is often the most delicate part of the nexus. Humanitarian actors worry about compromising neutrality by getting too close to political peace processes, while development actors may lack experience in conflict mediation. Let’s unpack these concepts and how they integrate:

Peacemaking generally refers to diplomatic efforts to negotiate an end to conflict. It can involve dialogue facilitation, mediation by neutral parties, or high-level diplomacy by the UN or regional organisations. The UN defines peacemaking as measures to address conflicts in progress, usually through diplomatic action to bring hostile parties to agreement.[18]

For instance, envoys might broker a ceasefire or peace accord (as was attempted in Syria’s talks or the Colombia peace process). While peacemaking is often led by political actors, the nexus idea encourages humanitarian and development actors to coordinate with peacemakers. Why? Because peace agreements often set the stage for humanitarian access and development investment. If negotiators know the humanitarian/development needs, they can incorporate provisions (like humanitarian corridors, or joint recovery funds) into agreements. Conversely, aid actors can support peacemaking by providing data on needs that create urgency for peace, or by offering platforms for community voices (e.g., consultations where citisens from conflict zones share grievances and desired outcomes). In some conflicts, NGOs have played “secondary” peacemaking roles at local levels – facilitating community peace dialogues that complement high-level talks.

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[18] peacekeeping.un.org

Peacekeeping typically involves the deployment of international military and police forces under the UN or regional bodies to maintain peace and security. UN Peacekeeping missions provide a security umbrella and support political processes, helping countries transition from conflict to peace.[19]

Classic examples are the UN missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo or Mali, which protect civilians, monitor ceasefires, and support the implementation of peace agreements. For humanitarian-development actors, working alongside peacekeepers can be beneficial but complicated. On one hand, peacekeepers can stabilise areas enough for aid and development projects to operate (for example, escorting relief convoys or deterring violence that would destroy a development project). They also often engage in activities like disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants, which directly impact community recovery and development prospects. On the other hand, humanitarians guard their neutrality and sometimes need to distance themselves from peacekeeping forces (which might be seen as partisan by some conflict actors). Despite this, in many nexus settings, there is informal coordination – e.g., UN peacekeepers in South Sudan have worked with humanitarian agencies to establish “protective enclaves” for displaced civilians, and development teams have collaborated with peacekeepers on rebuilding infrastructure like courts or prisons to strengthen rule of law (tying into SDG16).

At the core of linking with peace efforts is the practice of **conflict-sensitive programming**. Conflict sensitivity means that any intervention – whether delivering food aid, building a school, or improving water supply – is designed and implemented with an understanding of the conflict context, to avoid exacerbating tensions and ideally to aid peace. The mantra *“do no harm”* (originating from Mary Anderson’s work in the 1990s) is the minimum standard. UNICEF’s guidance reminds us that *“regardless of whether programs are explicitly pursuing peace objectives, their very presence affects the conflict environment,”* so they *“must be designed and implemented with an understanding of the conflict context to avoid doing harm and exacerbating tensions.”*[20]

[19] peacekeeping.un.org
[20] unicef.org

In practical terms, this could mean adjusting a food distribution so it doesn't favor one ethnic group over another, or ensuring a development project hires staff from various clans to promote cooperation rather than suspicion. It also means being aware of *who* controls resources; for example, injecting cash into a local economy could inadvertently fuel corruption or extortion if conflict dynamics aren't considered.

Field workers have many anecdotes about well-intended aid gone awry in conflict areas: a well that was built in a contested territory leading to fighting over water, or an education project that was perceived as indoctrination by one side. Conflict sensitivity seeks to preempt these issues by doing thorough **conflict analysis** before and during programming. This involves understanding key conflict drivers, the interests of different groups, and connectors or dividers in the community. With this knowledge, programs can be tailored: e.g., siting infrastructure in neutral locations, including peace education in school curricula, or timing assistance in a way that doesn't influence an upcoming election. Many organisations now have tools and training for staff on conflict sensitivity. A common approach is the **"3Ps"**: *Profile* the conflict, assess *Power* dynamics, and evaluate *Programming* options for their interaction with conflict. Additionally, agencies are increasingly hiring local peacebuilding experts or liaising with peacebuilding NGOs to inform their work.

Beyond doing no harm, some nexus proponents argue for going a step further: make humanitarian and development programs actively **"peace responsive."** This could mean tweaking projects to maximise peace dividends. For instance, instead of rebuilding a road unilaterally, use the project to bring together opposing groups in the construction process, thereby building relationships. Or ensure that aid to war-affected populations also includes support to host communities to reduce potential resentment and conflict between them. In Colombia's post-accord period, humanitarian agencies worked closely with peacebuilding organisations to ensure reintegration support for ex-combatants was coupled with community development for the villages receiving them – a holistic approach addressing both development needs and potential conflict flashpoints.

The nexus approach encourages humanitarian and development actors to not leave peace exclusively to the diplomats and soldiers. It urges them to think about how their own work can lay foundations for peace. For example, livelihood programs for youth in a conflict-affected region can reduce the appeal of joining armed groups (addressing one root cause of conflict). Health or education services delivered fairly across communities can rebuild trust in governance and reduce grievances (contributing to peacebuilding). Even pure humanitarian relief, when done impartially, can send a message that all groups in a conflict are humanised and cared for, which can have subtle peace-promoting effects.

However, integrating peace has its **dilemmas**. One big one is the concern that tying humanitarian aid to political peace agendas might *"undermine the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality."*[21]

Traditionalists like the ICRC often highlight that humanitarian action must be independent of political goals – they fear that if aid is seen as a tool to build peace (a political outcome), parties to conflict may no longer accept humanitarians as neutral. Hugo Slim and others at ICRC have written about maintaining a *"humanitarian identity"* even as we engage in nexus thinking.[22]

They argue that in many active conflicts, **humanitarian space** – the ability to assist based on need alone – must be preserved, and humanitarian action "should be at the core of the nexus" in such contexts, not subordinated to peacebuilding agendas.[23]

The challenge is to strike a balance: remain principled and neutral in humanitarian response, while coordinating with peace efforts in complementary ways that do not politicise aid. One approach is for humanitarian actors to support peace indirectly, e.g., through facilitating dialogue on humanitarian issues (like ceasefires for aid delivery, or local negotiations to access a village). Indeed, humanitarian negotiations can create *"confidence-building measures and habits of cooperation"* among warring parties, which an ICRC analysis noted are *"intangibles important to peace."*[24]

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[21] tandfonline.com
[22] blogs.icrc.org
[23] blogs.icrc.org
[24] icrc.org

Conflict-sensitive programming is the baseline that everyone in a nexus should adhere to. It has a few practical must-dos:

- Conduct a **Conflict Analysis** at the start and update it regularly. Understand conflict drivers, actors, and dynamics. For instance, know the historical grievances in the area and current trigger points.

- **Do No Harm** check for every activity. **Ask:** Could this intervention create tension? Who might feel excluded or resentful? Adjust plans accordingly (e.g., broaden criteria of affected persons, involve neutral facilitators, or pair aid with dialogue).

- Hire staff, volunteers or use partners from diverse groups to avoid perceptions of bias, and to gain trust across lines.

- Coordinate with peace-focused actors. If there's a UN peacekeeping mission or a local peace committee, share information (while respecting humanitarian independence) so that efforts reinforce each other. For example, if a peacekeeping patrol knows where humanitarians operate, they might patrol that area to deter attacks, improving safety for all.

- **Empower local conflict resolution**: Sometimes, aid projects can incorporate support to traditional dispute resolution or community peace initiatives. Something as simple as including a module on conflict resolution in a livelihood training program can equip community members to better manage disputes that arise, thereby strengthening peace at grassroots.

Ultimately, the nexus ideal is that humanitarian relief, development, and peace interventions operate as **"mutually reinforcing"** parts of a solution.[25] Experience shows they rarely occur in a neat sequence, especially in protracted crises – you might be delivering aid (humanitarian) in one village, building a school (development) in the next, while a ceasefire is monitored (peacekeeping) just beyond. Examples of this on the Thai/Burma border includes development initiatives related to schooling, food relief supplies for refugees and IDPs that is coordinated in close proximity to immigrant border education areas and dialogue occurring in contested areas to support coordination of humanitarian efforts - however in the case of Myanmar there is often a lack of dialogue occurring and involvement of independent third parties with access to facilitate.

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[25] peacekeeping.un.org

Critical Voices: Questioning the Nexus Orthodoxy

On the other side of the debate, there are seasoned experts and scholars who provide **sharp critiques** of the nexus discourse. These critiques are not necessarily against coordination or the idea of linking relief and development per se; rather, they caution against naivety, unintended consequences, and the co-opting of humanitarian action by political agendas.

One line of criticism centers on the risk of **diluting humanitarian principles and effectiveness**. Hugo Slim has argued that adding the "peace" element to the nexus can be problematic if not handled carefully. In a keynote address examining the triple nexus, he quipped that *"the nexus looks like a triangle of everything – especially if we recognise that climate risk and adaptation are in there as part of the SDGs."*[26]

The point here is that the nexus has become so expansive – trying to do humanitarian aid, development, peace, climate, all at once – that it risks becoming unfocused or simply *"jargon"*. He noted how talk of nexus creates *"magic word"* diagrams with terms like "synergies" and "collective outcomes" that sound good in policy, but mean little on the ground.[27]

This critique resonates with many field staff who fear that HQ-level enthusiasm for the nexus might not translate into practical support, and could even burden them with extra coordination meetings and reporting requirements without solving real problems. Humanitarian needs are growing, and in some contexts, the best one can do is to meet those needs impartially. ***Expecting field teams to also simultaneously build peace and run development projects might be asking them to hit several different goals at once in an active warzone***.

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[26] icrc.org
[27] icrc.org

Another critique is that the nexus tends to be **"development-dominated."** This means that humanitarian action – which should be fast, flexible and neutral – might get subsumed under longer-term development agendas and political strategies. Slim pointed out that many view the nexus as a linear *"pathway towards development, and ultimately peace,"* with development actors holding the primary steering wheel.[28] But in many conflict areas, there are no development actors present – only humanitarians – because security conditions prevent longer-term work. In those cases, expecting a full triple nexus is unrealistic; the humanitarians are the only ones able to operate, and their focus **must remain on lifesaving aid**. The critique here is not to abandon the nexus, but to be context-aware: in some places, maintaining independent humanitarian space is more vital than forcing integration with government-led development plans (which might be absent or not trusted by populations). Additionally, Slim notes that responsibility for long-term development lies with governments and development institutions, not humanitarian NGOs.[29]

So while humanitarians can contribute indirectly to development (e.g., keeping children alive and healthy so they can go to school), it's not their job to build roads or reform education systems – that line should remain clear to avoid mission creep. A related concern from critical voices is the **politicisation of aid**. They warn that donors might embrace the nexus rhetorically but primarily to advance their own foreign policy goals. For example, labeling everything under "sustaining peace" could justify directing aid toward governments or areas that align with donor strategic interests, potentially sidelining impartial needs-based assistance. This is a fear especially when military or stabilisation actors co-opt the language of the nexus (as seen in some "comprehensive approaches" where military, political, and aid components are blended). Humanitarian purists argue for firewalling humanitarian funds from such influences – essentially saying: keep a pot of money that is strictly for neutral emergency aid, even as you pursue joined-up efforts elsewhere. Without this, they argue, the unique life-saving imperative of humanitarian work could be compromised by too many conditionalities and objectives.

[28] blogs.icrc.org
[29]

A lack of evidence and clarity. Some researchers note that beyond slogans, there are few rigorous studies proving that nexus approaches lead to better outcomes than siloed approaches. They challenge nexus advocates to demonstrate how exactly a given nexus intervention improved efficiency or impact. Did it reduce mortality? Did it speed up recovery? Or is it just a new buzzword on old projects? There is a call for more honest evaluation. Also, practical questions are raised: Who is in charge of the nexus at country level? (Often unclear, leading to potential turf wars between humanitarian coordinators and development coordinators). How do you measure a "collective outcome" and hold agencies accountable to it, given each has its own mandate and donors? And crucially, who pays for activities that fall in the grey area between humanitarian and development – for example, a 3-year livelihoods program in a refugee camp: humanitarian donors may say it's too long-term, development donors may say the context is too unstable.

A critique from field managers is that the nexus hasn't solved perennial problems like fragmented funding streams. An NGO country director might still have to appeal to 5 different donors – some humanitarian, some development – to fund a comprehensive program, because each donor sticks to their silo. Despite talk of multi-year humanitarian funding or development-humanitarian pooled funds, these are still exceptions, not the norm. The frustration is that *structural incentives* in the aid system (budget lines, reporting structures, career paths) continue to favor siloed approaches, and the nexus hasn't yet overcome these.

So, what do these critical voices propose? They aren't simply naysayers; often they suggest *course corrections* rather than abandonment of the nexus. Some propose a "*nexus lite*" or pragmatic nexus – focus on coordination and information sharing, but don't force integration where it doesn't fit. Essentially, collaborate where you can, but also know when to let humanitarians do their thing separately. Others emphasise protecting humanitarian principles: ensuring that any nexus strategy explicitly reaffirms commitments to neutrality, impartiality, and independence in humanitarian action, so that those are not lost in the mix[30]. This might mean, for example, that even within a nexus program, the humanitarian components are shielded from political conditionality – e.g., relief aid is given purely based on need, even if development aid in the same program is coordinated with government plans.

[30] blogs.icrc.org

Roles and expectations: development actors should not offload the responsibility of achieving long-term outcomes onto humanitarian actors. If a famine is averted by emergency aid, that's a success of humanitarian action, but the development actors must then step up to build food systems resilience to prevent the next crisis – it's not the humanitarians' job to ensure sustainable agriculture in the long run[31] Recognising these delineations can actually improve cooperation (each side knows what it's bringing to the table).

The power of small-scale, context-specific solutions over grand designs. Critics of the HDP nexus often note that successful nexus-like initiatives existed well before the term became popular. For example, in Afghanistan in the early 2000s, some NGOs ran integrated programs providing healthcare (humanitarian) while training local midwives and supporting Ministry clinics (development) even amid conflict – not because of a nexus policy, but because it made sense locally. These were organic solutions. Critics suggest that instead of heavy global nexus frameworks, we should identify and empower such context-driven integrated efforts, nurturing them as models. In effect, let ground reality shape the nexus, not top-down directives.

[31] blogs.icrc.org

Shifts in US Foreign Aid Policy: Global Implications for the Nexus

No discussion of humanitarian and development efforts is complete without considering the influence of major donors – and none is larger than the United States. Recent shifts in U.S. foreign aid policy, especially debates around the restructuring or even dismantling of USAID, have sent shockwaves through the global aid community. The U.S., through USAID and State Department programs, contributed roughly $72 billion in foreign assistance in 2023, accounting for about 65% of all U.S. official aid.[32] This funding supports everything from emergency food aid in Yemen to education projects in Ethiopia and conflict mitigation in the Sahel. When the U.S. drastically changes course on aid, the ripple effects are felt worldwide – potentially undermining nexus approaches that rely on predictable, multi-year engagement in fragile states.

In early 2025, the aid world was confronted with an unprecedented situation: the new U.S. administration ordered a sweeping **pause on foreign assistance**. On January 20, 2025, an Executive Order halted U.S. development aid for 90 days pending a review, with only narrow exceptions for some lifesaving humanitarian relief.[33] This was soon followed by directives putting hundreds of USAID staff on administrative leave, effectively shuttering many operations. As one analysis bluntly summarised, *“Donald Trump’s attempt to align foreign aid with his America First policy is too blunt and will have deadly consequences.”*[34]

The freeze immediately disrupted programs across the globe, from agricultural support in Africa to governance initiatives in Asia, and created chaos in planning for humanitarian responses. The **“immediate mayhem”** crippled efforts to relieve hunger and even *“prevented the distribution of medicines, such as a treatment that stops mothers from passing HIV to their children,”* according to a Reuters report. UN officials and NGOs scrambled to fill gaps, but many activities simply ground to a halt.[35]

[32] reuters.com
[33] betterworldcampaign.org
[34] reuters.com
[35] reuters.com

For the HDP nexus, the implications of such a policy whiplash are severe. Nexus approaches depend on continuity and trust – development projects build on humanitarian gains, peacebuilding accompanies recovery. When a major donor like the U.S. yanks funding suddenly, it can break the chain. For example, consider a hypothetical nexus program in South Sudan jointly funded by several donors including USAID: a multi-year effort to rehabilitate irrigation (development), support displaced farmers (humanitarian), and mediate resource conflicts (peace). If USAID's portion (say funding the irrigation and some peace dialogue work) is frozen, the humanitarian part might continue with European funding, but the overall outcome is jeopardised – farms won't be irrigated in time, frustration may grow, possibly reigniting conflict over water. The stop-start nature of funding undermines the **"collective outcome"** that everyone had signed up for.

Moreover, U.S. aid has often supported critical **peacekeeping and peacebuilding** interventions. A sudden retreat could weaken those. For instance, the U.S. has been a big funder of refugee support in Syria's neighbors and of UN peacekeeping budgets. Cuts or delays there can destabilise host countries or cause peacekeeping missions to scale back patrols, creating security vacuums. This can reverse progress that nexus programs made in linking relief and development under the safety provided by peacekeepers.

Another facet is the potential **dismantling or merger of USAID into the State Department**, an idea floated in policy circles. Proponents of such a move argue it would streamline operations and ensure aid aligns with foreign policy. However, many experts (and bipartisan U.S. lawmakers) have raised alarms that abolishing USAID as an independent agency would harm both U.S. interests and global humanitarian efforts[36]. USAID was created to professionalise development assistance, and over six decades it has developed specialised expertise and a mission distinct from diplomatic or military tools[37]. If that identity is lost, aid could become more transactional – for instance, overtly tied to whether countries support U.S. diplomatic goals. In fact, we saw hints of this in 2025: the administration signaled it might condition aid to certain countries on their political actions (such as accepting refugees).[38]

Critics argue this undermines the core humanitarian principle of aiding based on need, not political quid pro quo. For global humanitarian and development practitioners, the uncertainty in U.S. policy forces contingency planning. Organisations have had to consider scenarios where a major donor is absent or unpredictable. This might accelerate efforts to diversify funding sources – for example, increasing engagement with non-traditional donors (like Gulf states or China) or raising more funds from private sector and philanthropy to reduce reliance on any one government. It also puts a premium on **multilateral funding mechanisms**: funds like the UN's pooled funds or World Bank multi-donor trust funds can buffer individual donor swings if enough donors contribute to them.

The restructuring saga also sparked an important legal debate. USAID's existence is mandated by U.S. law and enjoys Congressional support. Indeed, when the administration tried to purge staff, a U.S. federal judge intervened with a restraining order, blocking the removal of hundreds of employees and questioning the executive's authority to upend the agency.[39]

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[36] brookings.edu
[37] kff.org
[38] reuters.com
[39] betterworldcampaign.org

This legal pushback suggested that a wholesale dismantling of USAID would face significant hurdles. For the moment, signals indicate the administration might step back from outright abolition, possibly opting for partial integration of some offices into State.[40]

Even so, months of limbo have damaged morale and led to a brain drain as experienced staff left. In the field, USAID missions had to pause new programs and couldn't commit to long-term plans, leaving local partners in the lurch.

The global fallout of these U.S. aid shifts can be enumerated:

- **Humanitarian Gaps:** Life-saving aid operations, from food distributions by the World Food Programme to health clinics run by NGOs, faced funding shortfalls. Some had to cut rations or services. Other donor countries and UN emergency funds tried to step in, but the scale of U.S. aid is such that gaps were inevitable. This directly affects crisis-affected populations, potentially worsening hunger or disease outbreaks and complicating emergency responses (contrary to the nexus goal of timely, effective relief).

- **Development Setbacks:** Development projects in dozens of countries saw delays or stoppages. Infrastructure projects halted mid-construction; training programs for farmers or teachers were suspended; budget support to fragile state governments was frozen. These setbacks can stall progress toward SDGs in those countries and even risk reversal – e.g., farmers who didn't get expected support might have poorer harvests, increasing poverty next season. The uncertainty also shakes the confidence of local governments and communities in the reliability of international partnerships.

- **Peacebuilding on Hold:** U.S.-funded peace initiatives, like community reconciliation projects or support to justice sector reform, were similarly affected. In fragile peace processes, momentum is key. A pause in funding can cause loss of trust or momentum among participants. For example, if ex-combatants in a reintegration program suddenly stop receiving training and stipends due to a funding freeze, they may become restless or disillusioned, which is dangerous in a volatile post-conflict setting.

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- **Geopolitical Signal:** These shifts send a message (intended or not) that the U.S. is retrenching from global leadership in development and humanitarian affairs. That vacuum could be filled by other actors – some positive, some perhaps less so. On one hand, other wealthy nations or the EU might increase their contributions (as we saw a bit during previous U.S. withdrawals, European donors stepped up funding for things like UNRWA or climate finance). On the other hand, strategic competitors might use aid to expand influence, which could reshape the principles underpinning aid. For example, if more aid comes tied to geopolitical loyalty or is delivered through narrow bilateral deals, the multilateral, needs-based approach of the current system could erode. For nexus programming, which thrives on collaboration and multilateral coordination, a fragmentation of aid into spheres of influence could undermine joint efforts.

Yet, this crisis might carry a silver lining: it has spurred a reckoning within the aid community about **self-reliance and reform**. The concept of "**localisation**" becomes even more critical – if international funding is fickle, empowering local capacities and resources is all the more vital so that communities are not entirely dependent on foreign aid flows. Additionally, it highlights the importance of **advocacy and public support for aid** in donor countries. The pushback from legislators and courts in the U.S. shows that there is domestic support for humanitarian and development work; making that more visible could safeguard aid from abrupt political swings. Other donors might also rethink their strategies – for instance, Europe has signaled the need to bolster its own development programs and not overly rely on U.S. partnership as in the past.

From a policy analysis perspective, the attempted dismantling of USAID was seen by many as an extreme "stress test" of the international aid architecture. Brookings Institution experts noted it *"would hurt U.S. interests in multiple ways that go beyond the core principle of saving lives,"* including undermining conflict prevention efforts, democracy promotion, and U.S. soft power built up over decades.[41]

Foreign aid has been one of the tools of U.S. influence – building goodwill, opening markets, and forging alliances. A retrenchment not only risks global stability but also cedes that soft power to others.[42]

[41] brookings.edu
[42] reuters.com

For practitioners in the field, these high-level considerations boil down to practical questions: Will funding be available to continue our programs next month? Do we scale down now or hope things resume? How do we explain to a community that promised projects are delayed because of decisions in Washington?

In conclusion, current shifts in U.S. aid policy serve as a stark reminder that the **HDP nexus operates within a political economy**. Funding and support for the nexus can wax and wane with political tides. For the nexus approach to be resilient, it needs broad buy-in and diversification. The episode also underscores the importance of advocacy – the humanitarian and development community must better communicate the life-and-death impact of consistent aid, to prevent such disruptive policies.

As of this writing, many programs have restarted after the temporary pause, but uncertainty remains. The hope is that cooler heads prevail and a middle path is found: perhaps a USAID that is reformed but not crippled or one where many of the programs are transferred and maintained (albeit with modifications and/or budget cuts) in the state department. The world will be watching whether the U.S. recommits to its role, as the alternative – a prolonged vacuum – could set back global humanitarian and development progress by years. For now, nexus practitioners adapt and persevere, finding creative ways to keep crucial work going and doubling down on the principles of effectiveness and equity that no political shifts should be allowed to compromise.

Conclusion: Toward a Nexus that Delivers – Practical Steps Forward

Reimagining the Humanitarian–Development–Peace nexus in light of contemporary challenges is no small task. This exploration has delved into decolonisation and localisation, climate resilience, the SDGs, anticipatory action, peacebuilding linkages, thought leadership debates, and seismic donor shifts. What emerges is a picture of a sector in flux – aware of the need to change, yet grappling with *how* to do so amidst real-world constraints. The nexus is not a panacea or a policy fad to be implemented by decree; it is fundamentally about **collaboration and coherence** in service of communities living through crises. Achieving that demands both **principled vision** and **pragmatic adaptation**.

A number of cross-cutting insights and action points stand out:

- **Re-center Crisis-Affected People:** Whether discussing decolonising aid or aligning with SDGs, the message is to put local people in the driver's seat. A nexus that is locally owned will be more effective and legitimate. Concretely, this means investing in local institutions, sharing decision-making power, and ensuring accountability flows downward to communities, not just upward to donors.

- **Adapt to Context – No One-Size-Fits-All:** The nexus will look different in a conflict, versus a post-conflict recovery, versus a climate disaster scenario. Rigid models won't work. Instead, actors should jointly analyse the context and agree on a context-specific division of labor and sequencing of efforts. In some cases, the priority might be maintaining humanitarian access (with minimal integration with government), while in others it could be supporting a national recovery plan (full integration). The key is continuous context analysis and flexibility.

- **Strengthen Joint Analysis and Planning:** Practical progress can be made by expanding initiatives like joint needs assessments, shared scenario planning, and collaborative strategy development among humanitarian, development, and peace actors. For example, developing a *"common narrative"* for a country – what are the problems, what are root causes, what are risks on the horizon – helps unify efforts.

- **Align Funding with the Nexus:** Money talks. Donors should create financing instruments that encourage rather than hinder nexus approaches. This could include multi-year humanitarian funding (allowing programs to bridge into recovery), development grants that can be utilised in fragile and conflict settings (with quick activation in crises), and pooled funds accessible to diverse actors (including local NGOs).

- **Invest in People and Skills:** A practical issue is that humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding professionals often come from different communities of practice with different training. Joint training programs, exchange schemes, or multidisciplinary teams can build a cadre of *“nexus literate”* professionals. For instance, a humanitarian with some peacebuilding background or a development expert who understands humanitarian principles can act as a bridge in mixed teams.

- **Maintain the Humanitarian Lifeline:** While pursuing integration, never lose sight of the fundamental commitment to humanitarian needs. In plain terms, in an acute crisis, **meeting urgent needs comes first**. The nexus is about not stopping there, but it never says to neglect those needs. Preserving space for impartial relief is non-negotiable. The HDP nexus should enhance humanitarian reach (for example by reducing conflict or building resilience) not constrain it.

- **Use Evidence and Embrace Learning:** We need to continue gathering evidence of what works and what doesn’t. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be geared to track collective outcomes and long-term impacts, not just individual project outputs. And we must be candid when something isn’t delivering. That is where critiques are healthy – they highlight blind spots and force course corrections.

In reflecting on the whole picture, one might ask: Is the triple nexus simply asking humanitarian, development, and peace actors to do what logic and morality have always dictated – work together for human well-being? Yes, in essence it is. Its novelty lies in trying to formalise and systematise that cooperation, which historically has been episodic. Like any big reform idea, it faces inertia and skepticism. But the drivers behind it – protracted crises, climate change, protracted displacement, conflict trap cycles – are not going away. If anything, they intensify the imperative to **break down silos**.

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