



The triple nexus approach at Felm

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This document is part of an ongoing discussion within Felm and its partners regarding how to define, operationalise and communicate the triple nexus approach, also referred to as the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) Nexus.

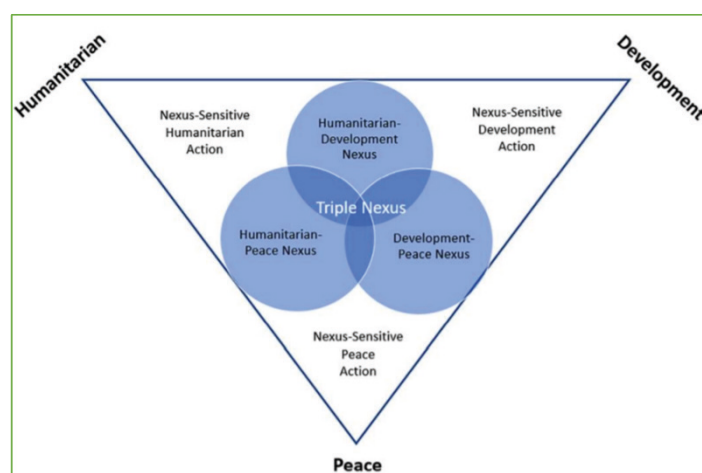
What is the triple nexus approach?

The triple nexus approach refers to cooperation and interlinkages between humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace work. It involves collaboration between these three fields that are often separate in the traditional structures of globalised aid architecture. Subsequently, the concept holds an emancipatory promise: to challenge current funding structures and the existing methods of working in silos.

The idea of building stronger (localised) linkages between humanitarian, development and peace work is not a new one. The contemporary triple nexus approach can be seen as an evolution of concepts such as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) and the New Way of Working (NWOW).

Figure 1 shows how humanitarian, development and peace programming are linked to each other. However, the approach can be interpreted more broadly by integrating nexus-sensitive work under different working modalities instead of creating individual interventions that integrate all the three pillars.

Figure 1. Approach to advancing triple nexus (Howe, 2019)



The cornerstone of the current push towards nexus took place in 2019 when the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD adopted the joint DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. This recommendation is binding for its member countries.

The crux of the matter is in ‘effectively reducing people’s needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need’. As such, the recommendation seeks to operationalise the Agenda 2030 principle of the United Nations to ‘leave no one behind’. In Finland, the DAC Recommendation has led to increased dialogue in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) and within Finnish NGOs surrounding the triple nexus approach.

The dialogues have borne fruit. In March 2021, the Development Policy Committee released an analysis entitled ‘Greater than the Sum of its Parts’. It introduces recommendations for how Finnish actors can improve their practices to implement the triple nexus approach.

Furthermore, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland (MFA) published its guiding document ‘The triple nexus and cooperation with fragile countries and regions’ in the end of 2022. Its purpose was to support implementation of nexus-based programming in development cooperation, humanitarian aid, prevention of conflicts, and peace at the MFA, in embassies and among stakeholders.

Country case: Myanmar

After Myanmar became independent in 1948, a conflict began that continues to this day as the world's longest ongoing civil war. In February 2021 the military took power in a coup and further violence and hostilities have followed. This has created a deteriorated humanitarian crisis with many internally displaced persons. Felm has comprehensive programme work in the country, covering development cooperation, church work, humanitarian aid and peace programming.

One of Felm's partners in peace work is Euro-Burma Office (EBO). EBO works together with many local organisations serving internally displaced persons in the border zones, which are not easily accessible through other channels. EBO supports their partners in providing humanitarian aid because they see it as an important component of peace work. According to EBO, 'You can't have sustainable peace if people can't live or if they don't have rights. If you are doing peace work and people are saying that they need clean drinking water, you can't ignore this.'

To promote the triple nexus approach in Myanmar, flexibility from donors is very important. Local partners need to have the ability to make decisions regarding how to use funds to address what they have identified as the genuine needs within the situation. To have local ownership, local partners need to be the direct decision-makers related to what they want to do in the project.

There should be a long-term plan for resources and funding, since most humanitarian aid funding is based on needs for individual instances. Development cooperation, humanitarian aid and peace work must be able to respond to the needs of people and communities living in the midst of crises in a more coordinated, comprehensive and effective manner. Felm's financing instruments need to take this into consideration and enable work that adapts to contextual changes and needs.

It is also important to have a forum for discussion where the needs of the specific context can be discussed, such as existing Felm's Myanmar country team meetings. There should also be a common understanding of what triple nexus means at Felm, and regions could develop their own comprehensive plans. Also, current internal reporting systems at Felm should be improved to support the triple nexus approach better.

Why is the triple nexus approach needed?

Addressing conflicts, development challenges and humanitarian action in a complementary and holistic fashion has become increasingly relevant for a dire reason: according to the OECD (2019) and World Bank (2019), global poverty increases and accumulates within fragile states. Conflicts significantly impair the ability to reach the Sustainable Development Goals. Along with social and political struggles, environmental degradation has continued. Concurrently, climate change has reached a point where adaptation limits will be exceeded and, subsequently, losses and damages will occur.

There have been several attempts to describe a continuous and reliable transition between humanitarian and development work. The nexus between humanitarian aid and peace programming has been challenging due to neutrality and impartiality aspects in humanitarian aid, though there are also good examples of these benefitting from each other. There are still challenges to link different working modalities due to inflexible funding, different principles of working modalities and mandates of aid actors. Silos still exist, but the aid architecture is changing gradually.

The overarching goal of the triple nexus approach is to find the most appropriate ways of addressing the needs and respecting the human rights of vulnerable people, which benefits from a synergistic and coherent mix of humanitarian, development, and peace building interventions. This combination of approaches is especially valuable in complex conflict situations and in recurring or protracted humanitarian crises. Although conflicts between states have declined after the World Wars, complex internal, localised or hybrid warfare conflicts, escalations and provocations are becoming increasingly common in the modern world (Oxfam 2019).

Albeit being conceptualised and propagated by globalised institutions, the triple nexus approach has developed as a practice organically, from the holistic character of community life in which various needs may manifest simultaneously and influence other needs in different ways.

Therefore, the triple nexus approach is often a method of addressing the felt needs of communities and **increasing the local ownership of action that seeks to advance human rights in evolving contexts**. In other words, triple nexus is about localisation and a driving force in breaking down the longstanding, yet artificial, barriers separating humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and peace work. Success hinges on reworking the interlinkages between donors, beneficiaries, those involved in project implementation, and state officials among others.

NGOs are in an advantageous position when it comes to exploring the approach. First of all, working closely with the beneficiaries of interventions and being able to strengthen locally led design and implementation, the nexus can be built from the bottom up and based on contextual realities of solving challenges. The benefits of the nexus approach need to unfold from practical opportunities to do things better. Second, NGOs have diverse cooperating partnerships that bring together academia, governmental officials, and businesses among others. This is important because the success of the nexus approach builds on diverse knowledge and cooperation. Finally, NGOs operate in networks, and thus have experience of arranging their efforts in a multi-scalar fashion. Namely, the insights of locally led interventions can be refined into evidence to guide international decision-making, or conversely, globalised policies and practices can be transferred to localised settings.

Summary: Why the triple nexus?

- Global poverty increases and accumulates within fragile states suffering from conflicts
- The nexus approach offers an opportunity to tailor responses to best protect vulnerable populations
- The purpose for advancing the nexus approach arises from local needs
- Civil society organisations are in an excellent position to put nexus principles into practice

Country case: Colombia

Colombia has experienced approximately 60 years of ongoing armed conflict and violence. Vast numbers of Colombians have fled their homes, leading to 8 million people being internally displaced. The country also faces challenges related to poverty, natural disasters, and climate change.

Felm partner organisations Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Colombia and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) have been incorporating elements of the triple nexus approach in their work for decades. Peace and reconciliation are also a top priority in Felm's regional plan. Community resilience and gender justice are prioritised in Felm's work in the region, too.

The triple nexus approach reflects the complex reality of the context in which Felm and its partners work. Communities and people do not conceptualise their needs in pieces or separate categories, such as humanitarian aid or development needs. For sustainability and real impact, all elements of the triple nexus are needed. The triple nexus approach promotes community resilience. It also increases local ownership and acceptance.

Due to the nature of the ongoing conflict, the humanitarian crisis in Colombia is not an occasional event but has continued for decades. For instance, the internal refugees are concerned with how to proceed after the humanitarian aid ends as the humanitarian crisis goes on. To address this, it is necessary to have peace work and long-term development projects related to, for example, income generating activities and food security.

Often different organisations provide immediate emergency support and support development work or peace work. Many organisations with different agendas may compete for resources within a community. Additionally, donors might have strict policies regarding what their funds can be used for. There should be funding that is more intended for a triple nexus approach.

Within Felm, there is a need to develop ways to report when an individual project employs the triple nexus approach. Otherwise, there is a risk that Felm may have an incomplete picture of all the work that is taking place. There should be training in triple nexus programming and how to invest in prevention. Additionally, it would be good to have opportunities to exchange experiences between country partners and South-South.

How to apply the triple nexus approach at Felm?

Felm and its partners have been combining the different sectoral practices (humanitarian aid, development cooperation, diakonia and peace) together in their programme work, though the term 'triple nexus' has not been used to describe it. However, despite having experience in combining different sectoral practices, turning the ideas of nexus into a guiding principle and systemic practice is an all but straightforward matter.

Felm acknowledges the OECD DAC's recommendations (2019) on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. These recommendations are central in terms of providing a joint language and framework for actors implementing the triple nexus (e.g., at the country level), particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

The following principles are key in our own process of further developing Felm's approach and practice in triple nexus implementation.

As a multi-mandated organization, Felm is **committed** both at the leadership and operational levels to strengthening the application of triple nexus in our international cooperation. We acknowledge that this a gradual process that requires **capacity development of our own staff and partners, resources and time** as well as **innovation, creativity and piloting** to develop an embedded culture of doing things differently and **strengthen existing good practices**.

There need to be changes in the ways of thinking and working so that we can concretely promote the implementation of triple nexus and step outside of silos. This requires enhancing **analysis, coordination and collaboration** not only across Felm's thematic, regional and country teams, but also with other actors working in the same contexts or sectors. We will focus on **mutual learning together** at Felm and with our partners, as there is a need to learn from experiences (both good practices and failures) to enable the development of the triple nexus approach within the organisation.

Felm aims to apply triple nexus (or double nexus) in **all the programme countries**, if possible, but pays special attention to triple nexus in **conflict-affected countries and regions**, where sporadic violence and protracted crises, multiple displacements, and climate or health disasters are severe problems and where the needs of people are immense. In Felm's operational context, the triple nexus approach will be relevant specifically in programme countries such as Myanmar, Colombia and Zimbabwe.

Felm's approach to triple nexus is **practical and context specific**. The work of the actors, be they humanitarian, development, diakonia or peace, must be based on the needs on the ground rather than pre-existing frameworks and solutions. We acknowledge that some contexts are more conducive to the alignment of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peace work.

Felm applies triple nexus especially at the **project and/or country level**. Specific actions will depend on the context, but can be linked to strengthening synergies between projects, enhancing coordination and **joint analysis**, and developing **integrated programming** in Felm's programme countries. In coordinating and linking different working modalities to each other, it is important to note that at Felm 'peacebuilding' means engaging with bottom-up practices and supporting locally led initiatives and processes related to the space and potential of local peacebuilders to promote peace and reconciliation within their communities and societies.

Felm emphasises the **people-centred approach** in the implementation of triple nexus. Experiences and participation of local people and communities need to be placed high and at the centre of planning and interventions. In Felm the people-centred approach ties together the sectors of humanitarian aid, development cooperation, diakonia and peace work.

The **do-no-harm principle** and the **conflict-sensitive approach** are the foundation of the triple nexus, and Felm applies them throughout the process of designing and planning interventions.

Moreover, **religious and cultural sensitivity** is an important principle in implementing the triple nexus approach in Felm. This also means respecting different religions.

Felm will take into account and focus on the following **cross-cutting themes** when engaging in and implementing triple nexus: gender, climate justice and inclusion. These cross-cutting themes can also be seen as a common thread tying together the different sectors. For example, we are committed to gender equality and active agency of women in design, implementation and assessment of triple nexus. One immediate area of triple nexus intervention is violence against women and children in many conflicts and fragile states.

The agendas for triple nexus and localisation, **and the need to support local programme work**, are very much linked to each other. They both aspire to increase local ownership, resilience and sustainability. Felm recognises the **added value of local actors** in triple nexus. As emphasised in Felm's strategy and global programme, the churches and civil society organisations of the global south play a significant role in implementing diverse work in their own contexts. Through building their capacities and supporting their work, they have a special role in applying a holistic triple nexus approach in the country and community level.

Successful transformation of nexus into practice depends not only on the capacities of Felm and its partners but also on the determination of institutions that administer and finance action. As noted in the critiques of the nexus approach, the existing **governance silos and the inflexibilities of funding instruments work against the implementation of nexus**, which is why Felm needs to **advocate** to bring about changes to these underlying structural conditions. Moreover, Felm should actively engage in dialogue with state institutions on how to set targets and develop metrics concerning the implementation of the approach.

Advocacy efforts, however, need to go beyond state institutions as there exist multiple avenues to work in close cooperation with our peers, for instance in Act Alliance and Lutheran World Federation. Felm must actively seek and create advocacy opportunities with our partners to strengthen the human rights-based, participatory fashion of advancing nexus. Subsequently, triple nexus should be integrated into the workstream of Felm's advocacy work in order to identify key processes and networks through which to share influence.

Furthermore, **the practice-based insights to promote triple nexus** will be adopted in the organisation. For instance, there are identified needs to develop planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms and tools at different levels within Felm to apply the triple nexus approach better and in a more visible way.

Summary: How to apply the triple nexus?

- Guiding principles and localisation of triple nexus are recognised and promoted
- Innovations, piloting and mutual learning are emphasised in the organisation
- Joint coordination and planning are promoted at different levels of the organisation
- Capacity building to understand and apply the triple nexus approach will be carried out
- Ownership to promote triple nexus is shared widely
- Advocacy efforts in triple nexus are integrated into Felm's advocacy work
- A road map with practical key development areas will be developed and implemented

Country case: Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe faces complex humanitarian, socio-economic and political challenges. The country is experiencing a prolonged and deteriorating political, social and economic situation that has hampered development and stability. Some of the key characteristics describing the current situation are political intolerance and violence, passive citizenry and lack

of public trust in state institutions, human rights violations and lack of rule of law, unresolved past hurts, an exclusive economy, humanitarian challenges and international isolation.

Two of Felm's partners in Zimbabwe are Gwai Grandmothers' Group (GGG) and the Zimbabwe Council of churches (ZCC). GGG carries out development work related to the empowerment and care of orphans and other vulnerable children. According to GGG, the organisation has implemented a nexus approach in their work by being able to provide emergency support to flood victims in the area where they had already been working.

ZCC describes the triple nexus approach this way: "It addresses how humanitarian needs are a result of the absence of peace and how development is hindered by violence and how humanitarian aid often take precedence over development. The triple nexus approach takes into account both the immediate and long-term needs of affected populations, and enhances opportunities for peace, diplomatic and human security measures."

ZCC has a programmatic structure that supports the triple nexus approach. Under the Humanitarian Services and Diakonia pillar, ZCC implements a double nexus approach through phases. The humanitarian assistance phase works to meet immediate needs, while the development phase is intended to help the community to recover from the emergency and contribute to the community's resilience to absorb future shocks. Development activities are related to agriculture, livelihood, water, sanitation, health, education, and Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction. The peace element is implemented through the Church, Peace and Just Societies pillar. The dialogical approach is implemented at the local, organised society and policy levels. ZCC's peace work enhances local and community participation and inclusion. Issues that are concerns at the local level are expressed to duty bearers, such as economy, gender justice and election processes, addressing the past hurts and corruption.

Some of the needs raised by Felm's partners are related to capacity development in triple nexus design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation as well as peer learning. There was a request to create a platform for partners to share and exchange their knowledge and experiences.

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