

Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens

Soft Launch – Summary Findings

The Nexus has been coined as a term to describe the interaction between humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding efforts and how work in these three areas is undertaken by different actors. Even though in recent years, humanitarian action has largely adopted a more nuanced approach that takes into consideration concepts of preparedness, long-term sustainability and recovery, this is not consistently happening in practice.

The international community still struggles with how to operationalise the Nexus, despite recognition that actors working in humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding efforts have surpassed the traditional lines of what they constitute either as ‘response’ ‘development’ or ‘peace’ activities.¹ There has been significant uncertainty over what the Nexus means both in concept and practice, with issues arising on how to align preparedness with response and development efforts.

Nexus approaches are not yet grounded in a robust evidence base, and the international community continues to struggle with how to operationalise the Nexus in practice.² Most of these conversations have been framed by the viewpoints and experiences of donors and humanitarian agencies, rather than the views and experiences of local actors, specifically women’s rights and women-led organisations (WROs and WLOs), who are central to humanitarian responses, and directly impacted by such decisions. While international NGOs, UN agencies and donors have been slow to adopt this approach, WROs and WLOs at the forefront of humanitarian emergencies have been transcending these divides within their responses, despite this not being acknowledged.³ This is symptomatic of the sector’s wider ways of working, with women and girls being seen as passive victims and spectators to conflict and peace processes, instead of recognised as active agents of change.

ActionAid has undertaken research to fill this gap and bring new insights to the rhetoric, by drawing on the experiences of women and their organisations working across the Nexus to lead responses to emergencies in Haiti, Lebanon, Myanmar and Somaliland to examine how they work across the Nexus, and what these siloes mean to them.

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This research brings together the experiences of women leaders and members of WROs, WLOs and women’s movements who have both been impacted by and led responses to emergencies in their communities.⁴ Within each context, they interrogated why inequalities occur, exploring the synergies between their work within humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities, often working without labels.

The research finds that despite the international community still grappling with the practicalities of the Nexus, WROs and WLOs are, and have been, implementing a ‘Nexus approach’ within their communities – as first responders, but also as key actors of change in development and peacebuilding activities - to work across the Nexus to respond to multiple compounding risks, such as climate change, conflict and rapid-onset emergencies.

It concludes that the international community must invest in local women-led interventions and shift power, decision making and funding to WROs and WLOs who are best placed to understand emergency needs.



Key Findings & Recommendations:

1 Gender Transformative Programming is a first step in addressing inequalities and adopting an integrated Nexus approach. There is a need to undertake comprehensive gendered-conflict analysis at all stages of humanitarian action; with the integration of advocacy, policy building and specific links to women's protection and resilience building across all humanitarian programmes.

Crisis response should always be rooted in gendered and context specific analysis which considers and addresses the needs of the community as a whole. Understanding the context where a crisis is operating (whether induced by risks of conflict or climate change) can help actors understand the root causes of exclusion and discrimination and prevents lapse into greater exclusion and discrimination. Joint, gender-transformative analysis can provide the critical starting point for a response that addresses gender norms and inequalities which contributes to an underlying objective of coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts in order to reduce risks and vulnerabilities effectively.

2 Recognising the role of WROs and WLOs, who have been operationalising the Nexus and supporting their leadership promotes more efficient humanitarian action. WLOs and WROs have been operationalising the Nexus by adopting nuanced and sophisticated ways of linking response, preparedness and long-term sustainability with peace and recovery processes, while addressing systemic inequalities – something currently missed in ongoing conversations around the Nexus.

Donors and the humanitarian community should ensure accessibility of WROs and WLOs to international conversations, invest in capacity building around longer-term and sustainable opportunities and respect the authority and credibility of WROs and WLOs.

3 Dedicated funding and meaningful partnerships with WROs and WLOs are crucial in meaningfully operationalising the Nexus. Despite the fact that WLOs and WROs have been operationalising the Nexus, they're not being given the recognition, space, or funding that they need and should have access to. This includes long-term flexible funding modalities; simplification of funding requirements; the participation of women in development of bids and ensuring appropriate risk matrix.

The '**Leading the Way: The Nexus through a Feminist Lens**' Report will launch in November 2022, in English, Arabic, Somali and Burmese and will be available on the **ActionAid.org.uk** website.

ActionAid is an international charity that works with women and girls living in poverty. Our human rights-based approach aims to ensure that people are drivers of their own change and able to claim the rights they are entitled to. We focus on women and girls because the denial of their rights is a grave injustice and one of the underlying causes of poverty worldwide.

For further information on the Nexus Research or interest in joining the Research launch, please contact Niki Ignatiou, Senior Humanitarian Policy and Research Adviser at: **Niki.Ignatiou@actionaid.org.uk**

References

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- ² Poole, L. and Culbert, V. (2020) Financing the Nexus: Gaps and Opportunities from a Field Perspective. Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, Norwegian Refugee Council and UNDP. Retrieved from: [financing_the_nexus_report.fao-nrc-undp.2020.pdf](https://www.fao.org/3/CA9909EN/990901.pdf)
- ³ Daigle, M. and Ignatiou, N. (December, 2021) Humanitarians and the Women, Peace and Security agenda during Covid-19. Gender and Development Network. Retrieved from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/61b0ec89743ede4f299473cf/1638984841907/WPS+and+humanitarian+FINAL+07.12.2021+TYPESET.pdf>
- ⁴ Primary data was collected through 53 key informant interviews and 18 focus group discussions across each country. 178 women leaders, WROs and WLOs participated in the quantitative survey collection. Those participating in the research identified themselves either as a member of an official WRO and WLO, or as an individual women leader who has supported/volunteered as part of humanitarian responses or responded to a humanitarian crisis within their community.

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