

Maintaining engagement in fragile contexts

through partnerships with
local faith-based organisations



This collaboration between ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Europa, Islamic Relief Sweden and EU-CORD emphasises the crucial role that local faith-based organisations play in supporting vulnerable communities, especially within fragile contexts.

Together, we highlight the use of the nexus approach, which integrates humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts to address the complex and interconnected challenges faced by the 1.8 billion people living in fragile contexts.

actalliance eu

ACT Alliance EU is a network of European church-based humanitarian and development NGOs that advocate for humanitarian and development policies and actions that enable lasting social, economic, and environmental change.

Case studies from: Kerk in Actie, Christian Aid Ireland, Norwegian Church Aid

caritas europa

Caritas Europa is a network of 49 Caritas organisations, present in 46 European countries, with a heartfelt commitment to analyse and fight poverty and social exclusion as well as to promote true integral human development, social justice and sustainable social systems in Europe and throughout the world.

Case studies from: Caritas Myanmar, Caritas Thailand and Caritas Ukraine.



Islamic Relief Sweden works for fair and sustainable global development. We work to alleviate human suffering in emergency situations and in long-term efforts provide people with tools to be able to take control of their lives.



EU-CORD is a European network of 26 Christian organisations from 12 European countries, working in 87 countries on sustainable development and emergency response. Our vision is that together, we can contribute to a transformed, just, and equal world.

Case studies from: LM International and ZOA.

Background

Almost a quarter of the world's population—1.8 billion people—live in fragile contexts—a figure that could reach 2.3 billion by 2030.¹ The European Union cannot ignore the urgent need for a clear and comprehensive policy and funding strategy to engage in these regions effectively.

While the Global Gateway investment approach may work in some regions, even its proponents recognise that it is not a solution for the complex challenges of fragility. Economic and infrastructure investments alone cannot address the deep-rooted issues of conflict, governance, and systemic inequality that define fragile contexts.

We believe the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (H-D-P) Nexus offers a practical engagement framework. By integrating humanitarian responses with long-term development and peacebuilding efforts, the H-D-P approach provides a pathway to tackle the systemic causes of fragility, build resilience, and ensure no one is left behind.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach aims to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of crisis responses by bridging the gaps between humanitarian aid, development efforts, and peacebuilding initiatives.

For many faith-based organisations, the HDP Nexus is not a new approach but a new language for how many of us work, given our holistic, deep-rooted, and long-term presence in communities.

In these case studies, the 'us' refers primarily to local faith-based organisations and other civil society partners.

These organisations are integral to their communities, embodying their identities and values. Their approach does not fit neatly into the traditional humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding categories. Instead, they adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach by listening to and responding to their community's needs and capacities.

They can leverage their established networks and cultural understanding to implement contextually appropriate and sustainable programmes. They can relay this social capital to governance structures when the context allows.

This long-term sustainable presence of FBOs at the grassroots level — as also recognised by the UNDP Guidelines on Engaging with Faith-based Organisations and Religious Leaders²

— presents a promising solution for how donors can continue to engage in fragile contexts through partnerships with local faith-based organisations.

As recently highlighted by the European Parliament,³ faith-based organisations (FBOs) have the potential to facilitate humanitarian access, and a more systematic engagement with them may help to increase the efficiency of the EU's actions, enabling EU assistance to directly reach vulnerable groups in emergency settings and communities in remote areas. In fragile and politically estranged contexts, FBOs can often successfully maintain their presence in a country even while international NGOs and donors withdraw funding or operational presence on the ground.

In the European context, we also draw on the EU Action Plan on Human Rights & Democracy⁴ (2020-2027) and its encouragement to engage with religious and faith-based actors in areas such as development and peacebuilding.

This short collection of case studies aims to highlight the lived experiences of faith-based organisations working in fragile contexts through nexus approaches. More importantly, it seeks to demonstrate that, with the right support, empowering and sustaining communities in fragile contexts, while challenging, is far from impossible.

¹ <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/unpacking-fragility-insights-from-the-oecd-s-new-states-of-fragility-report/>

² <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-CSO-Engaging-FBOs-RLs-October-2014.pdf>

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0466_EN.html

⁴ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eu_action_plan_on_human_rights_and_democracy_2020-2024.pdf

Islamic Relief Sweden: Pakistan



A youth group meeting in Pakistan (2020)

Since the end of the war in Pakistan's border area, displaced communities have returned home to rebuild their lives under new governance arrangements with the Pakistan state.

Following the prolonged conflict that displaced many communities, Islamic Relief supported the reintegration of these communities and the establishment of local youth and women's groups to foster a sustainable peace framework. Traditional dispute resolution was historically managed by the Jirga, a council of elders, but it had grown increasingly ineffective due to perceived corruption and power imbalances, often alienating young people and women.

Islamic Relief supported communities to set up community and women's organisations and youth groups to represent their needs and interests to local government and law enforcement agencies in an organised, inclusive and democratic way. They trained 12 youth groups, comprising

180 members (120 men and 60 women), in conflict resolution, social cohesion, and negotiation techniques. These groups played a transformative role in their communities by actively mediating disputes and managing issues that had previously fuelled long-standing conflicts, such as disputes over water resources, drug use, education, and even access to vaccination. Notably, the youth-led mediation has led to quicker resolutions compared to traditional methods, which often took years and escalated conflicts further.

A key achievement was the successful mediation of a water dispute, which required the involvement of district police for additional support, illustrating the collaboration between youth groups and formal authorities. This initiative not only expedited

the resolution process but also underscored the growing community acceptance of youth in decision-making roles. Moreover, Islamic Relief complemented these peacebuilding activities with infrastructural support, such as rebuilding water systems destroyed during conflicts, addressing a critical source of tension in the region.

Overall, the program has empowered young people as key community mediators, helping shift societal perceptions toward a more inclusive approach to conflict resolution and governance. Through Islamic Relief's model, youth in Pakistan's border areas are now recognized as influential actors in peacebuilding, fostering a foundation for long-term stability and cooperation in their communities.

ZOA: Ethiopia

Gambella Regional State, one of Ethiopia's poorest states with limited social services provisions and infrastructure, borders South Sudan and so is exposed to the consequences of conflicts in the neighbouring countries which have driven thousands across the border to escape violence and hunger. Over 40% of refugees in Ethiopia are now housed in camps in GRS, with the number of refugees exceeding the host population.

This influx has strained resources and intensified ethnic tensions between the refugee Nuer and the local Anyuua communities. Competition over scarce resources, with aid being concentrated in the refugee camps leaving the host communities largely neglected, combined with ethnic divisions, has led to repeated instances of interpersonal violence that risk escalation into wider clan or ethnic conflicts.

ZOA has worked to build peace by establishing local peace committees and training "peace

promoters" to facilitate dialogue between host communities and refugees, as well as among the different ethnic groups. These dialogues have been crucial in identifying and addressing conflict triggers early, thereby preventing escalation. ZOA has also enabled information sharing between neighbouring committees, fostering trust and cooperation to resolve conflicts more effectively.

Complementing these peace-focused efforts, ZOA has strengthened the capacity of local authorities, provided agricultural

inputs, and created livelihood opportunities for unemployed youth. These initiatives help to alleviate competition over resources and reduce perceived inequalities in aid distribution between refugees and local communities. ZOA's holistic intervention reinforces trust, builds resilience, and promotes peaceful co-existence, exemplifying how faith-based organisations can effectively employ the triple nexus to address complex, interconnected causes of conflict.

Islamic Relief Sweden: The Philippines

The conflict-prone region of Maguindanao, one of five provinces in the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao in the Philippines, has endured decades of armed conflict and clan feuds.



Mural painting in the Philippines as part of a youth-led peace campaign in Mindanao in 2019. 'Lungtad Kalintad' means 'sustainable peace'

The Maguindanao province was created following the signing of the peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front

after a decades-long war in Mindanao. There remains a continuing problem of rido (clan violence) in the area, especially involving young people whose lives have been significantly affected

by the violence. Islamic Relief used its "triple nexus" approach—combining humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding strategies—to support young people as peacebuilders.

Islamic Relief began by identifying and training youth from the conflict-affected communities of Datu Piang, Datu Hoffer and Datu Saudi Ampatuan to become Peace and Development Facilitators. These facilitators underwent training in

conflict resolution, peace advocacy, and mediation, focusing on addressing local grievances and promoting inter-group tolerance. Activities included peace camps and workshops using storytelling, art, and music to deconstruct stereotypes and foster understanding between diverse groups, including Muslims, Christians, and Indigenous people.

Islamic Relief also facilitated the establishment of Barangay Youth Councils, officially integrating youth voices into local governance and decision-making. These councils now

participate in community development planning, conflict prevention, and disaster risk reduction. With these structures, youth facilitators have addressed longstanding disputes, including reconciling conflicting clans and organizing peace-focused events, such as communal gatherings that encourage social harmony.

The triple nexus approach also supported the development of economic opportunities for young people affected by conflict through technical and vocational training and the provision of shared services and equipment.

The program has created notable social changes as well as enormous psychological changes in the young people: youth leaders are now seen as respected community mediators, and inter-group trust has improved. Islamic Relief's faith-informed approach, which aligns with local traditions and values, has enabled the youth of Maguindanao to transform from passive conflict victims to active peacebuilders, establishing a foundation for sustainable peace and social cohesion in their communities.



Young community peacebuilders in the Philippines giving a presentation to school children on communicating for peace through social media (2019)

Caritas Myanmar Caritas Thailand

Karuna Mission Social Solidarity

Caritas Myanmar and Caritas Thailand demonstrate effective regional collaboration in addressing humanitarian needs for displaced populations, including Myanmar refugees in Thailand and IDPs within Myanmar.

The situation is complex and longstanding, beginning with the first refugee influx into Thailand in 1984 and worsening after Myanmar's 2021 military coup.

Refugees from Myanmar face heightened challenges in Thailand, which does not recognise their refugee status as it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Despite this, Caritas Myanmar and Caritas Thailand have strengthened their collaboration over the past decade to support displaced people by addressing urgent needs and fostering resilience.

Caritas Thailand's programming, in place since 2012, follows a "humanitarian in purpose, developmental in approach" philosophy. Key strategies include:

- Addressing immediate needs while providing

refugees with skills for food production, which aids potential repatriation or integration into Thailand's workforce.

- Ensuring that vulnerable refugees are included through tailored activities.
- Engaging 276 refugees as camp-based staff, transferring knowledge in areas like social work, agriculture, and disaster risk reduction to promote self-reliance.
- Integrating social cohesion and peacebuilding into all interventions.

Before the 2021 coup, the two Caritas organisations and their diocesan networks launched successful developmental projects in 28 villages, designated as potential "return sites" for refugees. These projects aimed to bring together skilled refugees,

local communities and IDPs and to foster hope for a better future in southeast Myanmar. However, challenges emerged after the 2021 coup, affecting the achievements made until then. Political instability, global funding shortfalls and access restrictions hindered Nexus responses. Flexibility in procurement processes and donor compliance proved essential as strict policies resulted in delayed assistance delivery, despite the urgency of the situation.

While UN-coordinated humanitarian responses continue in Myanmar, nexus coordination remains weak. Assistance often relies on local networks, including ethnic groups and churches in areas inaccessible to CSOs, who play a crucial role in reaching IDPs with emergency aid.

LM International: Uganda

In 2013, an inter-ethnic conflict between the Dinka and the Nuer started in South Sudan. Meanwhile, Ituri province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) saw a rise in inter-ethnic violence between the Lendu and the Hema in 2017.

Both conflicts involved attacks on civilians by militia and army groups, resulting in severe human rights violations. The violence caused large-scale displacement and prevented farmers from planting and harvesting crops, leading to food shortages. These conflicts, which displaced significant populations, created a refugee influx into Uganda's West Nile and Southwest regions. Challenges included poor sanitation, lack of psychosocial support, youth unemployment,

environmental degradation, and inter-community tensions. LM International intervention in the crisis addressed immediate needs and built resilience and self-reliance in the communities to reduce aid dependency.

Some of LM International's key humanitarian interventions included constructing sustainable latrines in schools, health centers, and households to improve hygiene and sanitation while reducing deforestation. In their development-orientated activity, the Bonga approach was central. This is a community-driven approach which trained youth in life skills, entrepreneurship, and trades like carpentry and tailoring. Participants accessed start-up funds via Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) and promoted sustainable practices like energy-saving stoves, sustainable farming, and tree planting.

The peace pillar of the Bonga approach featured initiatives such as "Sports for Peace," which brought youths from different ethnic backgrounds together, fostering reconciliation and reducing hostilities. Community and religious leaders received training in peace dialogues and psychological support. LM's approach ensured inclusion by allocating 30% of benefits to host communities, as mandated by Uganda's government, thereby reducing tensions between refugees and hosts.

This HDPN intervention reached 30,000 beneficiaries from 2017 to 2019, effectively addressing immediate needs, building resilience, fostering peace, and reducing aid dependency. Sustainability was ensured through the training of local trainers and the establishment of support teams, enabling community-led continuation of activities despite initial funding challenges.



Caritas Ukraine

Since 1991, Caritas Ukraine has been involved in the development of social programmes. The first elements of Nexus programming started to be implemented within certain projects starting from 2014 when Caritas Ukraine began developing humanitarian and peacebuilding programmes as a result of the invasion. A comprehensive nexus approach by the organisation started in 2022 as a result of the full-scale invasion.

Caritas Ukraine is able to work with communities and provide a complex approach of recovery and resilience during a protracted humanitarian

crisis. This is accomplished by their local and long-term presence in the country. Unfortunately, many donors are ready to support complex

projects, but not specifically nexus projects.

The triple nexus is implemented on organisational, programme and project level. Caritas Ukraine ensures cross cutting protection and conflict sensitivity mainstreaming, for example, in project design, activities, MEAL systems, and organisational policies. In Caritas Ukraine's sectoral programmes including food security, Multipurpose Cash Assistance, livelihoods, protection, and social cohesion, amongst others, the strategic planning of each

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programme involves actions in emergency response, stabilisation/recovery interventions, programmes also include multisectoral projects. For example, the Emergency Appeal project in 2022 had both humanitarian aid, stabilisation, and transitional assistance through crisis centres. Community facilitators' work helps to deliver humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable communities and the cash-for-work modality creates fast livelihood for IDPs.

Caritas Ukraine's peacebuilding projects are focused on grassroots dialogue with local communities who have experienced tensions throughout the war, for example through the linguistic divide in the country and the

increase of IDPs in the west of the country. This includes sharing stories of resilience in wartime, creating spaces for communal processing and grieving, and participation mechanisms for local civil society to take part in decision-making.

The Ukrainian government is in a process of reforming social services, education, and health services within the country. Caritas Ukraine is advocating for civil society organisations be eligible

under new public procurement policies to be a provider of state-funded social services. Caritas already runs several medical primary centres and some social services financed by state or communities. The ongoing transformation of the sector during a period of humanitarian crisis shows the need for the engagement of local civil society in these periods of transformation, not only to provide humanitarian aid, but to be actively engaged in rebuilding social systems.



Christian Aid Ireland and interfaith partners: Democratic Republic of Congo

Project Overview

The Interfaith Project for Peace in North Kivu, supported by Christian Aid, is a collaborative effort initiated by a coalition of religious leaders and community representatives. The project aims to equip religious leaders with skills in community mediation and peaceful conflict resolution. The project is run by multiple inter-faith inter-denominational and inter-faith partners at national and regional level, as well as local political, administrative, and customary leaders.

The project involves community dialogues, peace forums, and interfaith visits where religious leaders exchange messages of peace. For example, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese visited a local mosque, while the city's Muslim Imam appeared on the

Catholic Radio of Goma to promote peace.

Context

The project seeks to stabilise North Kivu – ridden with the context of instability and community tensions of recent decades – by encouraging peaceful conflict resolution at the grassroots level through mediation, dialogue, and peace awareness programs led by religious and customary leaders.

Nexus Component: Humanitarian and Peacebuilding Integration

This project exemplifies the humanitarian and peacebuilding nexus by fostering collaboration among religious leaders, community members, and humanitarian groups to address both immediate needs and long-

term peace. These interactions have reduced prejudices, strengthened interfaith understanding, and promoted shared values of tolerance and brotherhood. By supporting communities in crisis, these efforts alleviate tensions, encourage collaboration, and help mitigate vulnerability amid conflict-related displacement.

The project's achievements create a foundation for development by promoting peaceful coexistence, reducing inter-ethnic and interfaith tensions, and ultimately building an environment conducive to development projects, such as agricultural revitalization initiatives. This positive shift in local dynamics showcases the potential for humanitarian actions to pave the way for peacebuilding and community resilience.

Role of Anglican Churches as Faith-Based Partners

The Anglican Church of the Congo Diocese of Goma has played a central, catalytic role in mobilizing diverse faith groups and ethnic communities, advocating for peace and reconciliation across North Kivu. In partnership with local, national, and international organizations, the Anglican Church embodies a unifying, prophetic presence that aligns religious values with

peace efforts. Its influence amplifies the commitment of other denominations, fostering a united approach to peace in a highly volatile region.

What Worked Well

The inclusive nature of the project has been a major strength, bringing together multiple faiths and ethnicities to work toward a shared vision of peace. Joint declarations and commitments by religious

and community leaders have bolstered peace initiatives, showcasing the potential for faith-based collaboration in addressing deep-rooted community tensions. Interfaith dialogues and forums have successfully reduced community prejudices and opened channels for peaceful coexistence, even amid ongoing conflict.



Kerk in Actie and PRICA: Northern Cameroon

The Shared Futures Program for Sustainable Peace, led by Kerk in Actie (KiA), builds resilient, inclusive communities through interfaith cooperation, entrepreneurship, and community-led change. The program fosters peace, social cohesion and prosperity by promoting dialogue and collaboration among diverse religious groups. By equipping marginalised

groups—especially women and youth—with essential skills, it empowers them to overcome socio-economic barriers.

The program is implemented in countries such as Kenya, Pakistan, Egypt, Ghana and Cameroon. In Cameroon, collaboration with PRICA (Programme des Relations Islamo-Chrétienne au Cameroun) has focused on supporting women and young

people affected by scarce resources and the violence and displacement caused by Boko Haram. This context and unsure future perspectives leave them vulnerable to radicalisation.

PRICA and KiA work comprehensively with all community stakeholders, local authorities, and traditional and religious leaders with a stake in the lives of young people & women and can ensure inclusion.

Building on existing community strengths to consolidate peace and resilience

Through this program, women and youth gain skills for income-generating activities in areas like agriculture and sewing, which builds interfaith trust and facilitates healing. Interfaith dialogue between traditional & religious leaders and authorities, as well as preventive conflict-monitoring,



are further supporting peacebuilding efforts.

Despite the high level of needs and insecurity, the project has contributed positively to restore dialogue between diverse faith communities, improved livelihoods, and strengthened social cohesion. The community mobilisation approach also enables the organisation to identify and build on existing foundations for peace:

One participant cites the warm welcome and support of the host community as crucial to his recovery when displaced due to Boko Haram violence. PRICA's connections with the

community therefore enabled members to select him for the livelihoods program.

Considerations for donors

The Program provides pertinent lessons for funding agencies/donors:

- The importance of religious literacy to do no harm: it is essential to understand the role religion has in a conflict.
- Sustained budget commitments: even relatively small long-term budgetary support goes a long way to support actors in meeting the high levels of need in a context

of ongoing insecurity and fragility.

- Security: those providing funds must ensure that support to local actors' security is essential in conflict zones,
- Flexibility in project design and monitoring is crucial for enabling local actors to actively co-design projects based on their unique approaches and for adapting to volatile, fast-changing contexts. Greater integration of funding lines for interreligious and economic cooperation can enhance social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

EOC-DICAC and Norwegian Church Aid: Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), in partnership with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), first began implementing integrated development programming in the North Shewa Zone in 2020. But when conflict broke out, causing widespread displacement and humanitarian need, EOC-DICAC pivoted to provide a humanitarian response alongside its development work while weaving in peace-building initiatives.

Leveraging Faith and Strengthening Civil Society

This wasn't merely the addition of new programs, but a fundamental shift to an HDP Nexus-based approach, reflecting EOC-DICAC's understanding that sustainable development couldn't be achieved without addressing immediate humanitarian needs and underlying conflict dynamics.

To build this HDP Nexus approach, EOC-DICAC drew on its strengths as a faith actor:

- Access in both urban and rural/remote communities through an extensive network of churches and monasteries that serve not just as physical infrastructure but provide a deeply embedded system of trust, cultural authority, community engagement, and feedback.
- Organizational structure specifically designed to support an HDP Nexus

approach with dedicated departments at both field and head office levels to coordinate peace, development, and humanitarian responses and leverage religious and cultural values to enhance program effectiveness and community acceptance.

- Contextual understanding that facilitates conflict analysis of immediate tensions as well as historical grievances and potential future flashpoints. EOC-DICAC has an adaptive system of management

and scenario planning to monitor changing conflict dynamics and adjust programming accordingly.

- Community-led solutions developed through existing church and community structures to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate, inclusive, and sustainable. EOC-DICAC employs bottom-up planning that facilitates the integration of local knowledge into program approaches, which has proven particularly effective in building community ownership and ensuring long-term program success.

Lessons learned for successful HDP Nexus programming in a fragile setting

- Successful implementation HDP Nexus programming is not just about coordinating different pillars, but fundamentally requires embedding interventions

within existing social structures at multiple levels. EOC-DICAC engages from the grassroots level up to government institutions to ensure that interventions are both locally relevant and institutionally supported.

- Adapting programming while maintaining strategic coherence is crucial to success. NCA and EOC-DICAC's experience has shown that a high degree of flexibility is needed to shift programming appropriately in line with shifts in the context in terms of access,

fragility and needs, and funding and compliance structures must enable this.

- Impartiality and neutrality are not just principles but practical necessities that must be demonstrated through consistent actions, transparent operations, and engagement with all stakeholders. In this way EOC-DICAC successfully navigated contested areas, building trust and creating space for effective HDP Nexus work even in a challenging security environment.



Opinion piece

Christian Aid Ireland: Pockets of Peace in Crisis

The Impact of Integrating Conflict Prevention into Humanitarian Resilience Programmes in Fragile Contexts

Irish Aid funded programming implemented by Christian Aid Ireland and its partners.

Report overview

The research paper identified how conflict analysis and social cohesion strategies are implemented in humanitarian activities and highlights how a successful intervention continuum can contribute to violence prevention in local settings.

Executive Summary

Conflict analysis is essential in humanitarian and resilience programs in fragile states. While broader peacebuilding is needed to resolve national or regional conflicts, local conflict analysis strengthens conflict sensitivity, helps communities identify early warning signs, and supports local conflict resolution. Understanding conflict cycles and regional variations informs program approaches: in de-escalation phases, activities can promote long-term peace, while in escalation, they may focus on conflict management. Conflict impacts often disproportionately affect certain

groups, such as youth, women, and displaced persons, shaping the needs and focus of these interventions.

Conflict analysis is crucial for setting realistic resilience goals for communities in conflict and managing their expectations for engaging with local, municipal, and regional stakeholders. Building resilience in programs must align with what communities can realistically absorb, given the multiple, often external, crises they face. Efforts should focus on fostering pockets of peace and resilience amid fragile and volatile conflict dynamics.

Engaging communities, especially marginalized voices, in conflict analysis uncovers hidden conflicts, ensures interventions reflect local needs. Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) are key to preventing reinforcement of existing inequalities tied to gender, age or majority narratives. This approach builds sustainable skills for conflict anticipation and strengthens local cohesion. Peacebuilding should focus on “lateral-

scaling,” sharing knowledge across communities. Scaling up community actions nationally can lead to elite interference and competing interests. Lateral-scaling keeps grassroots challenges central, replicating successful local peace efforts through community-led exchanges.

Reflections for donors

Flexible and Protected Funding: Donors should provide flexible funding for conflict-related work in humanitarian and development programs, emphasising the importance of soft skills and relationship-building, which may be harder to measure but are vital for long-term peacebuilding. Protecting funds for conflict analysis is essential to prevent future conflicts and promote sustainable outcomes.

Longer Funding Cycles: Donors should support investments in conflict prevention and adopt funding cycles of three to five years. This allows time for meaningful progress in building trust and addressing root causes of conflict, with more effective monitoring and evaluation over the longer term.

Opinion piece

EU-CORD: Barriers to Partnership in the Context of the H-D-P Nexus

These reflections draw on conversations held with civil society organisations in Africa and South-East Asia in response to questions about barriers to effective partnerships.

Faith-based organisations (FBOs), particularly local ones, are vital actors in fragile contexts, offering invaluable contributions through their deep community connections and culturally informed approaches. However, their faith-based identity often subjects them to unique challenges, including increased threats to their operations, international sanctions, and a decline in development funding.

Despite their contributions, local FBOs face barriers to being fully recognised and systematically integrated into the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (H-D-P) Nexus framework by donors and policymakers. Misconceptions about their legitimacy or doubts regarding their role as principled humanitarian actors hinder meaningful partnerships.

Donors frequently overlook the voices and inputs of local FBOs during decision-making processes. Within the EU, the situation is further compounded by a lack of dedicated funding for nexus programming and the withdrawal of financial support from politically sensitive or fragile contexts.

Challenges of Current Partnerships

Local communities often feel that imposed Western methodologies and priorities dominate project frameworks. The lack of contextual understanding by external actors can lead to distrust, unintended conflict, and ineffective programming. While donors emphasise rights-based objectives, local partners argue that the focus should align more closely with immediate needs like poverty alleviation and community resilience.

Moreover, traditional donor-driven partnerships perpetuate power imbalances. Northern organisations are often perceived as implementers of donor agendas, sidelining local partners' expertise and practical insights. Such dynamics create feelings of inferiority among local actors and reinforce colonial legacies, fuelling grievances and mistrust.

Pathways to Reframed Partnerships

Addressing these barriers requires a shift towards “true partnerships” built on equality, mutual respect, and shared decision-making. A “roundtable” approach, where

all stakeholders have an equal voice, could foster trust and eliminate assumptions and prejudices. This shift involves recognising and addressing existing grievances, including the colonial histories that underpin many development practices.

Local FBOs have emphasised their ability to identify and address the root causes of poverty. Approaches grounded in local traditions, including the role of family structures and community-led business models, can lead to more sustainable and context-sensitive outcomes. Gender empowerment initiatives, for instance, are more effective when men actively promote cultural shifts that reduce domestic conflict.

Recommendations for the EU and Donors

1. **Increase Engagement with Local Partners:** Conduct joint conflict analyses, planning, and monitoring exercises that integrate stakeholders from all levels, ensuring diverse voices are heard.
2. **Monitor and Learn from Nexus Implementation:** Establish systems to assess the impact of nexus programming, using lessons learned to refine and adapt future strategies.
3. **Provide Long-Term and Flexible Funding:** Adopt funding approaches that prioritise

local needs and support the longer-term goals of the H-D-P Nexus.

4. **Foster Institutional Collaboration:** Promote greater interplay between DG ECHO, DG INTPA, and the EEAS, building on successful examples of cooperation within EU institutions.
5. **Build Local Capacity:** Invest in leadership development, technical skills, and analytical capacities within local FBOs to enable them to lead initiatives effectively.
6. **Bridge Cultural Gaps:** Promote understanding of local traditions, family structures, and faith practices, integrating these into programme design to enhance relevance and effectiveness.
7. **Reframe Power Dynamics:** Move from “shifting power” to “sharing power,” empowering local actors to co-create solutions and shape community outcomes.

Achieving the goals of the H-D-P Nexus requires reframing partnerships to embrace equality, shared understanding, and mutual respect. Empowering local FBOs through inclusive, collaborative approaches will unlock their potential to drive sustainable change in fragile contexts. Through trust-building and the reimagining of relationships, donors and policymakers can support truly transformative partnerships that honour the expertise and agency of local actors.

Faith-based organisations play a vital role in addressing the interconnected challenges of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

Our ability to foster trust, build strong community relationships, and implement culturally sensitive and sustainable interventions has been proven time and again.

Case studies from organisations such as Islamic Relief, Caritas Europa, LM International, ZOA, Christian Aid Ireland, and Kerk in Actie demonstrate the impact of long-term, locally grounded approaches. From youth-led peacebuilding initiatives in Pakistan to resilience-building efforts in Uganda, these examples showcase how FBOs address immediate humanitarian needs while laying the foundations for sustainable development and peace.

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