Event Report

Building resilience in fragile contexts: how can peace, humanitarian and development approaches connect better in practice?

Bond Resilience Learning Group

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About Bond

Bond is the civil society network for global change. We bring people together to make the international development sector more effective. bond.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Overview

Without action, more than 80% of the world's poorest people will be living in fragile contexts by 2030[1]. In a context of increasing conflict and a concentration of extreme poverty in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, we need to understand how resilience can be built most effectively in places characterised by protracted and cyclical crises. Strengthened policy and operational coherence by humanitarian, development and peace actors will be essential.

To this end, the Bond Resilience Learning Group brought together diverse speakers from these fields to create a platform for information sharing, discussion and reflective learning. The discussions addressed a number of thematic topics that resonate for the sector as we grapple with the challenge of building resilience in fragile contexts, and what it means, practically, to work in the context of the 'triple nexus'[2]:

1. **Locally-led approaches to working in fragile contexts**
2. **Joint context analysis to shape integrated programming**
3. **What needs to change in our operating model?**

What did we learn?

- We heard a number of examples of initiatives that are working to transfer power and decision-making to crisis-affected people. These reinforced the need to think about peoples' needs in a more nuanced way, crisis-affected people have many needs, but also to be more aware of existing capacities and ability to contribute to their own recovery and development pathway. They also demonstrated that it is feasible to have community-managed activities and still remain in line with stringent accountably requirements of donors.

- For crisis affected people, what does it mean to be 'resilient'? Resilience means having the skills and capacity to look after yourself whilst knowing how and where to ask for support when needed.

- The latest research on partnering with local organisations highlighted a number of lessons. Effective partnerships are built on long-term engagement (and trust), include developing institutional capacities not just project-based financing, and provides multi-year funding so local actors can put forward their priorities. They build in reflection spaces and review of roles within partnership. More sustained and transformative partnership could be enabled by grants that combine crisis response, organisational development and civil society strengthening.

- We are all grappling with the challenge of ensuring that context analyses are both comprehensive and practical, also how to translate information into programming decisions. Shared reflections included; the *how* is as important as the *what*: a process of data gathering that is consultative, locally-led, includes diverse stakeholders and builds in feedback/accountability mechanisms can facilitate dialogue between different actors, foster duty-bearer responsibility and ensure impact is shaped and determined by the communities that are most affected by crises.

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[1] OECD State of Fragility Report 2018 https://www.oecd.org/dac/states-of-fragility-2018-9789264302075-en.htm
[2] See OECD, DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-DevelopmentPeace Nexus, OECD/LEGAL/5019
https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf

- To meet needs and address drivers of change, context analyses should take into account root causes. Information is needed on natural and human made risks, consideration must be given to capacities as well as vulnerabilities, and it is always vital to take a gendered and conflict sensitivity lens.

- Having a comprehensive context analysis is not enough; it needs to be translated into action. Elements that supported the application of analysis included: decentralising decisions and empowering field staff and partners to act on context analysis, building in review mechanisms for continuous learning, getting donor buy in for programme and logframe changes at the start of contracts, employing and investing in staff with context analysis remits and expertise so that scenario mapping and monitoring can be an ongoing exercise.

- Contexts can change significantly in a short space of time and participants identified adaptive management as an important way of addressing this. In terms of organisational culture, this means a shift to decentralised decision-making and to continuous learning. Impact assessments over the longer term instead of project-based evaluations, outcome-based monitoring rather than output/activity tracking, building in learning and reflection time, and resourcing learning separately from projects can all enable a learning culture.

Implications

Achieving meaningful impact in these contexts has profound implications for how we work and the culture we need to cultivate as a sector and as organisations:

- A range of skills, expertise and partnerships are required to work across the nexus. These will not always sit in one organisation; partnerships and collaboration will be necessary. We will need to develop coordinating and collaboration mechanisms to support pooling expertise.

- Participants recognised the useful avenue joint context analysis offered for furthering a nexus approach. There is a need for more dialogue and the exchange of skills, tools and data itself especially between dedicated peacebuilding organisations and humanitarian/development agencies.

- To enable learning, we need a culture that accepts (but learns from) failure. This has implications for the behaviour of implementing organisation's but also needs to be practically supported e.g. changes to donor compliance and contracting requirements including reviewing approaches to risk management. Donors should adopt a standardised risk model for due diligence using a tiered/graduated approach rather than pass or fail.

- We need to put in place incentives to ensure that affected populations are involved in the design, delivery and monitoring of programming, with local actors leading the process. Donors have a key role to play here, in setting the standards for people-centred programming.

- Adaptive management will require trust and a relationship between donors and implementing agencies that facilitates open dialogue and the renegotiation of contracts. This would be bolstered by flexible, multiyear and integrated sectoral funding.

Panel 1: What is the role of civil society and how can we ensure locally-led voices and experiences shape nexus implementation?

Resilience building interventions achieve stronger and more sustainable outcomes when local civil society participate or lead. Nevertheless, in fragile settings (often dominated by humanitarian funding) local civil society and government are treated with suspicion, largely due to challenges of impartiality, power devolution, remote management and security[3]. The speakers and participants brought their experience to discuss: how local civil society actors in conflict-affected situations can be supported better by international NGOs; what are the challenges for local civil society and pathways to localisation; and finally, how affected population understand crisis, their aspirations and their practices.

Challenges:

- Localisation agenda has too often been driven by cost reduction aims rather than true system change based on values, effectiveness and transformational aspirations.
- Donors moving to **fewer larger contracts hampers localisation** as it doesn't allow for smaller or national NGO to engage with contracts (or only as sub-contractors).
- Fragile settings are dominated by humanitarian funding, which has its own frameworks and restrictions, which often represent barriers for CSOs access to funds.
- **Risk aversion and due diligence is considered a huge barrier for localisation.** Additionally, **the siloed and hyper technical structure** of the aid system can lead to a lack of confidence by local humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors to engage in conflict reduction work.
- INGOs/donors are **representatives of larger society** and have in them the **same unequal power relationships and detached leadership** which is linked to power imbalance, so transformational change is challenging.
- We don't do what we preach. For example, capacity building is top down, and doesn't note existing capacity of local actors. Additionally, crisis **affected populations' opinions often aren't considered**.

Good practices:

- Focus on agency of people in crisis situations and enabling local voices to dictate what constitutes a crisis as opposed to international bodies defining them especially in places characterised by local conflicts, division or internal displacement. **Empowering of local actors** through focus on **survivor/community-led response (SCLR)** is a practical way to address this.
- Ensure the views of people in crisis shape programming interventions, this is likely to have an impact on what support is prioritised and reshape investments across response strategies vis-à-vis resilience building given humans have a multi-faceted lived experience and do not separate their needs along humanitarian-development-peace silos.
- A **collective approach to capacity strengthening** is required especially in relation to developing institutional capacities, paired with multi-year funding so local actors can put forward their own priorities. Build in reflection spaces and review of roles within partnership.
- Propose combining crisis response, organisational development and civil society strengthening grants for more sustained and transformative delivery.
- Recognise and build on horizontal level accountability. We need mechanisms that encourage a **collective learning processes and giving up of privilege**. One idea was promoting 4 days work

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3 ODI 'Time to let go', 2016 https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10422.pdf

and 1 day volunteering in local charities for INGOs and donor leadership to keep contact with lived experience.

Enablers:

- The **localization agenda should not be confined to the grand bargain** timeframe but championed as a process that links humanitarian reform to and aligns with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction and climate reforms.
- Need for **clusters to enable local representation** e.g. co-chair roles, financial support to participate and consideration of language and terminology to foster meaningful participation.
- We need to provide **evidence that localisation** can deliver deeper impact (long term, holistic and wider society

Panel 2: The questions you ask shape what you do: Can a different approach to context analysis facilitate nexus programming?

This panel considered context analysis tools and practical steps for supporting nexus approaches within the design of programmes and national strategies (see the *Resources* section for links to some of these). There was strong consensus on the importance of comprehensive context analysis that saw vulnerabilities and capacities holistically rather than along humanitarian, development and peacebuilding silos. Additionally, that this analysis was an ongoing process in which scenario planning, monitoring and responsive adaptive management should be built in from the beginning.

Challenges:

- Too often we **work in siloed ways using different assessment timeframes, data units and methodologies pre-disposing the sector to intervention along existing hum-dev-peace lines** and creating an information barrier to nexus approaches. We also still see the artificial separation of natural hazards and human-made crises which lacks a nuanced understanding of how these risks overlap, exacerbate or lead to one another especially in fragile contexts and protracted crises.
- **How to incorporate root causes analysis and wider historical and socio-economic data into assessments that are often project bound and short notice.** This lens is vital to drive a focus on both current needs/exposure to risks and what sits behind as the drivers that unless tackled sustainable, resilience development and lasting positive peace cannot be built.
- Non peace-building actors often work in conflict areas rather than on conflict drivers and thus even in fragile contexts do not routinely include a conflict lens as part of their context analysis.
- Even where quality comprehensive context analysis exists questions remain on the translation into action. How to ensure uptake of context analysis within agencies, how to facilitate the responsible sharing of data to support other's work, how to establish systems and processes for scenario monitoring so that adaptive programming approaches can be driven by primary local stakeholder/community driven context data?

Good Practices:

- **The process is as important as the content.** Consider how stakeholder-led processes, which include the government and private sector wherever possible, can improve how information is collected and the accuracy/usefulness of the data for determining programme work. If done

effectively and considering issues of inclusion and meaningful participation it can also be a space for improving consensus, collaboration and stakeholder relationship building.

- Awareness of the fact that risks affect different people differently based on pre-existing inequalities that shape their vulnerability and capacity. More emphasis is therefore needed to ensure **cross-cutting concerns like gender, protection, conflict sensitivity** are embedded in context analysis approaches in order to make visible these different experiences and thus different needs.

- **At a minimum do no harm should always be factored into how and what data is collected.** A noted example of this is that in protracted crises/fragile contexts conflict sensitivity should be mainstreamed and wherever possible opportunities seized to support locally driven positive peace processes.

- **Accessible living analysis of the operating context**. With consideration for responsible data use further develop mechanisms for joint data collection including, where possible, through use of open source technology. This can also drive more bottom-up locally led analysis, improve transparency and accountability for investments based on community prioritised needs and strengthen the role of local actors in shaping context knowledge used by iNGOs, the UN system and bilateral institutions.

Enablers:
- There is **buy-in for "good-enough" analysis that is user-friendly, timely and practical yet offers an encompassing approach**. With this is a growing recognition that this needs to be driven by local knowledge and expertise thus strengthening investment in participatory and accountable mechanisms. We need to breakdown the systems and structures that disenable this.

- **Information must lead to action. To do this changes to organisational structures are needed** e.g. decentralise decisions and empower staff and partners to act on context analysis, build in review mechanisms for continuous learning, get donor buy in for programme and logframe changes at the start of contracts, employ and invest in staff with context analysis remits and expertise etc.

Panel 3: What needs to change in our operation model to effectively deliver a nexus approach?

There is growing agreement within the international community that it is necessary to achieve greater complementarity across efforts in fragile contexts, and to work towards a set of shared collective outcomes in these places. Questions remain, however, about how this can be operationalised, both within and between different stakeholders, and scaled up. The debate of how to operate in fragility (i.e. across the nexus) is not necessarily new. It requires an approach that ensures we remain true to the principle of leaving no one behind and that is realistic in acknowledging and planning for the trade-offs and challenges in working in these contexts and in looking to better integrate our activities across sectors and NGOs in fragile contexts. The speakers and participants brought organisational experience of working across the nexus to discuss ideas on what needs to change.

Challenges:
- **Integrating the peacebuilding angle**, which can often get left off. This is a challenge to the humanitarian/development sectors who have more traditional built joint initiatives **to integrate**

approaches of 'do more good' (going beyond Do No Harm) and a need for **flexing and adapting within a context between different modalities**.
- **Achieving the right funding model**, which is often harder for the peacebuilding (or integration of peacebuilding) sector both in terms of amount available and stability. Working across the nexus will require **longer timeframes** and the **establishment of networks whose sole purpose is to build collaborative action**.
- **Having the right skills and expertise** to work effectively across disciplines is often a challenge. Working across the nexus will **require a mindset and culture change in many NGOs** and will need **strong buy in from local offices and teams** who are given the **appropriate level of autonomy and incentives to be flexible and adaptive**.

Good Practice:
- The need to better **involve/work with civil society**, especially young people, and to find new and interesting partnerships which must move from the contractual to being more transformative.
- Agencies could potentially consider using their comparative advantages by sharing and drawing on a pool of **skills and expertise** between different agencies where they can co-exist, collaborate and coordinate to enhance impact (a nexus eco-system). They can work together in nexus contexts which by their very nature of needing multiple interventions, can draw in different actors who need to be interdependent, so they increase dialogue with each other. The UN system should have a key role in supporting this collaboration and integration.
- Re-examine issues including **risk appetite and management,** basing this on context analysis, community acceptance and trust.
- There is also a need for further learning between areas of the nexus, especially between peacebuilding and humanitarian/ development sectors in relation to codification of standards and ways of working.
- It is clear that challenging the model means challenging our own **bias and establishing monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms that reshape power imbalances.**

Enablers:
- **The DAC Recommendations** set a strong course for how government's consider nexus approaches within their ODA contributions. Alongside the Grand Bargain commitments these can be levers for structural change across the sector
- **The nature of crises means new solutions are needed.** To meaningfully address the drivers of poverty, inequality and fragility as part of Agenda 2030/SDGs the sector is rightly questioning how to have impact/support change in the most challenging operating contexts. It provides a strong push for innovation and creativity and to break the silos that are become obstructive barriers to necessary transformation.

Panel 4 Reflecting on the day: What is becoming clearer to you?

The closing panel was an opportunity to reflect on the issues discussed throughout the day, making links to broader policy and practice debates and trends within the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. It was intended to provide a challenge to the attendees and the sector in thinking about how we take forward the discussions.

What have we learnt?
- The centrality of taking a people centred approach, rooted in local realities, experiences, expertise and local stakeholders was a key theme of the day.
- Adaptive programming is a non-negotiable for working in fragile contexts.

- Fragility cannot be solved by one actor; we need to collaborate. The different approaches to coordination across sectors provides a challenge. For example, the development sector does not have the cluster system process of the humanitarian sector. The language, norms and standards differ across sectors.

The broader context
- The OECD DAC recommendations on the nexus indicates the buy-in from donors to working better across the humanitarian, development and peace-building sectors. However, changing the way the system works takes time especially turning intention into action. The DAC recommendations and the International Network on Conflict and Fragility provide key political platforms for the nexus to be delivered.
- We need to identify the financing processes that best facilitate good practices for working in fragile contexts. Donors can enable this people-centred approached by incentivising and financing this way of working. How they are currently, or could in future, do so is an area for further exploration. How can financing processes enable adaptive management, risk sharing for innovation and localisation?
- Building resilience in fragile contexts requires long-term investment – 10-15yr funding pots – increased risk tolerance, and programmes designed around results/outcomes not activities. The activity list should not be restricted at design stage and processes for revision built in from the beginning.
- There are multiple pathways to building resilience in fragile contexts. Learning platforms will be key enablers in allowing us to learn and build evidence on the approaches, skillsets and partnerships that are effective.

Conclusion

This event provided a stimulating and productive space for practitioners and sector stakeholders to come together to explore effective programming in protracted crises and how our approaches and thematic expertise need to be reshaped in order to deliver more comprehensively across the triple nexus.

Below are key resources discussed on the day and this communique will feed back into the work planning of the Bond Resilience Learning Group, Humanitarian Group and Conflict Policy Group to explore what further discussions would add value. We are aware that a number of agencies and communities of practice are exploring this and other related topics and would welcome conversations for future collaborations or joint initiatives moving forwards.

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Resources

1. Saferworld research: Localising humanitarian action in conflict-affected situations: Learning from locally-led crisis response in Myanmar, Syria and Uganda (to be published in 2020)
2. Local to Global Protection case studies and research https://www.local2global.info/research
3. World Vision conflict sensitivity tool https://www.wvi.org/peacebuilding-and-conflict-sensitivity/publication/world-visions-conflict-sensitivity-tools
4. Oxfam vulnerability and risk analysis tool http://vra.oxfam.org.uk/
5. Conciliation Resources gender sensitive conflict analysis http://c-r.org/resource/inclusion-practice-examining-gender-sensitive-conflict-analysis

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