



FROM SURVIVING TO THRIVING

1st October 2023

Background

Many of the challenges the world is facing today can only be addressed through multi-stakeholder collaboration and through transformative locally-led solutions. Business as usual is no longer an option.

According to the August update of Global Humanitarian Overview¹ 363 million people worldwide are in need of humanitarian assistance, and \$55.2 billion is required to reach 248 million people out of that. So far, donors have provided \$15.8 billion (29%) of funding and that means a large number of people will remain deprived of humanitarian assistance to recover from shocks. According to the 2023 Global Humanitarian Assistance report, more than half of all people in need over the past five years live in just 10 countries facing protracted crises. Approximately 83% requiring humanitarian support now live in countries facing protracted crises.

On the one hand, there is a growing commitment to channel more funds to local and national actors, and on the other, donors are increasingly spending more ODA on hosting refugees within their own countries. This is happening at a time when people requiring assistance, mainly in the Global South are facing conflict, impact of climate and/or socioeconomic vulnerability. That underlines the necessity of a nexus approach to strengthening the resilience and self-reliance of communities who face frequent shocks either by natural or human-induced disasters and thereby are unable to break the structural barriers of poverty and vulnerability.

It seems a very timely initiative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to organise a Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus conference on 5-6 October 2023 in Copenhagen.

It's commendable that the organisers are making sure of having adequate in-person representation of local and national actors. The background paper of the conference rightly acknowledges, 'there is a greater need for locally-

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led solutions and the leadership of local actors, who are present before, during, and after a crisis, and therefore well situated to take a more holistic and integrated approach to humanitarian, development, and peace programming'. The three stated objectives, presented below, keep local actors at centre stage:

1. Improving coordination and collaboration across the HDP nexus, including by integrating local actors into planning and processes from the outset to advance locally led solutions.
2. Strengthening the institutional capacities and collective resilience of local actors to more effectively and sustainably end cycles of crisis.
3. Maximising the effectiveness of existing funding streams across the nexus (including how to incorporate and leverage climate finance) and identifying opportunities to overcome barriers for local actors in accessing higher quality nexus funding.

A4EP Perspective

Alliance for Empowering Partnership(A4EP) is a network of independent and locally grown civil society organisations in the global south and global activists and practitioners advocating to transform aid architecture based on community realities.

¹<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2023-august-update-snapshot-31-august-2023>

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Since becoming a signatory of the Grand Bargain in September 2020, A4EP has always been a strong advocate for a nexus approach and raised concerns when the Nexus workstream was dropped without much consultation. In its seminal paper 'A Grand Bargain 2030'² developed to influence the Grand Bargain 2.0. A4EP argued for the need to have a nexus approach by setting up humanitarian goals, aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sendai Framework Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) and the Paris Agreement. To seek durable solutions for the communities at risk and prevent/mitigate frequent erosion of development gains made through development projects in at-risk communities. A4EP continued its advocacy on the nexus in its most recent paper "A Grand Bargain is No Longer an Option but a Necessity"³ which was developed to influence the Grand Bargain 3.0 process. A4EP is very pleased that the recommendations influenced the GB 3.0 document.

The majority of local and national actors do not follow a siloed approach. They develop their programme according to the challenges facing the communities they work with. However local and national actors face: 1: systematic erosion of their institutional capacity due to poor resourcing, 2: lack of direct quantity and quality funding, 3: unequal power relationship with International actors, 4: the constant brain drain from local and national actors to international actors and 5: shrinking space to operate due to government and international regulations. This has reduced the majority of them to remain as just subcontractors and implementers instead of being involved in making decisions that impact their communities and to be managers of the process of transformation.

A4EP recommends following actions:

Political commitments and humanitarian diplomacy

There are many different actors, state and non-state, in every conflict, especially in protracted crises. What is clear is that there are some actors, including state actors, who are fuelling the conflicts by providing weapons and discreet strategic support to the warring parties and at the same time providing humanitarian aid. There is little interest in seeking early and durable solutions due to geopolitical interests and economic gains. This is leading to millions of

people being kept in the most vulnerable situations leading to increased gender-based violence and violation of their human rights. A4EP recommends the following:

1. Adhering to International Humanitarian and Human Rights law.
2. Placing the humanitarian imperative above other considerations. The principle of 'Neutrality' should only be put to use to ensure access to every pocket of the affected population and should not stop humanitarian advocacy to seek early solutions.
3. Upholding dignity and safety of individuals and communities in any Nexus approach, ensuring not only that immediate protection needs are met, but that communities affected by crises also experience prolonged periods of stability and appropriate dignity and safety so that they do not only survive but thrive.
4. Stopping seeking funding from warring parties, and should instead ask for reparation.

Funding

The current pattern of access and control of financial resources is a key barrier for localisation, seeking sustainable solutions and also creates a new pattern of aid colonisation. A4EP recommends the following:

1. While delivering firmly on their localisation commitments, the international actors should also reassess their fundraising strategy in the Southern countries. Ideally, they should stop being competitive with local actors for resource mobilisation within their own countries.
2. Prioritising flexible and multi year funding directly through different country level funding mechanisms to local/national organisations that are the first responders who are already present when crises occur and have specialised knowledge and skills so they can better analyse the context, manage risks and stay and deliver.
3. Incentivising international intermediary actors, particularly those with capabilities across humanitarian, development and peace actions, to also invest in equitable partnerships with local actors with the ultimate goal of gradually ending dependence on humanitarian assistance by fostering self-reliance and resilience;
4. Prioritising working with local and international partners who have the flexibility to adapt programming as the context changes and will sustain their engagement until local capabilities are sufficient to

²<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/grander-bargain-2030>

³<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/shrink-needs-grander-bargain-no-longer-option-necessity>

ensure people's survival, dignity, security and human rights

- Investing in community institutions and on communities' resilience to seek solutions. Investment is needed to strengthen collective capabilities at the country level so that local actors and communities are able to deal with the shocks and develop locally-led solutions.

De-colonising responses and stopping the brain drain

For far too long the solutions have been prescribed from outside that have not worked. A4EP recommends following:

- Helping local actors to strengthen their intellectual capital to come up with sophisticated planning and action in response to the complex problems they face.
- Supporting and reinforcing local coordination mechanisms rather than impose international mechanisms that are expensive, create barriers to the participation of local actors and are at odds with the local context.
- Ensuring International actors reflect on the pattern and purpose of their presence in the countries, which should largely be to facilitate and complement local actions instead of being prescriptive.
- The International actors should be stepping back and leaving space for local actors to take their rightful place and be in the driving seat instead of being back seat drivers in their own development processes and finding solutions in their own environment.
- Having intellectual freedom to seek locally-led solutions. This can only happen if they are able to attract and retain quality staff. This can be achieved by reducing the country-level salary disparity and making more financial resources available to local actors for the compensation and social security of frontline workers. According to the State of the Humanitarian

System (SOHS)⁴ report by ALNAP, INGO staff get at least six times more salaries than staff of local/national actors and UN staff get even more.

- Acknowledging the critical role the frontline workers play, and they should be supported accordingly. Bring in cost-efficiency in the humanitarian sector to utilise more resources on the affected population instead of solution providers.

Localise climate discourse and innovation

The climate discourse is often quite sophisticated and jargonised where local actors usually don't find a place. A4EP recommends the following:

- Localising the climate discourse and making essential services available to local actors to help the communities move towards positive adaptation.
- Advocating for a disaster audit of every mega infrastructure development project as otherwise, that may add to risk and cause displacement.
- Supporting locally-led innovations that enable community-led nexus actions in building their own resilience. There is already evidence on impactful actions on the ground such as the so-called survivor and community-led crisis response (sclr) approach that enable affected people to prioritise, decide, lead and manage their own actions using micro-grants provided. Such kinds of innovations just need more support to scale up.
- Investing more in technology to facilitate anticipatory action. This could be done by developing digital maps with the help of drones, historical satellite imageries and AI & ML. Such digital maps will help to understand the evolution pattern of risks and thereby facilitate correcting development programmes and prepare for anticipatory actions.

Finally, the entire humanitarian architecture should be solution-centric, instead of inadvertently being resource-centric hence need to be people-centric instead of agency sustainability-centric.

⁴<https://sohs.alnap.org/help-library/2022-the-state-of-the-humanitarian-system-sohs---summary>



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