

Individual Attitudes towards the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus



Abstract: The research recognizes individual attitudes towards the HDP Nexus, identifies categories of concerns and argues how addressing them can contribute to a meaningful course of action for the future of the HDP approach.

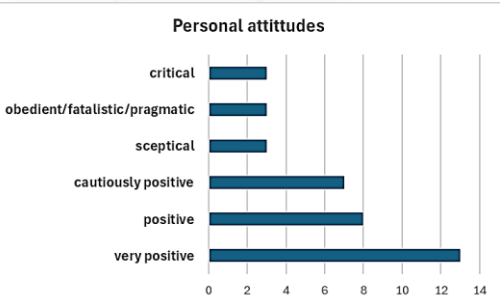
Switzerland: Article 54, Swiss constitution & International Cooperation Strategy define humanitarian, development, peace and the environment as pillars for foreign policy & IC

UN: three pillars of peace & security, sustainable development & human rights

Interviews with 38 individuals from H, D and P

- Actor Groups: 74% FDFA, 2% Foreign govt, 8% UN, 5% Think Tanks and Universities, 3% NGO, 8% ICRC
- Fields: 18% H, 18% D, 13% P, 5% Diplomats, 32% HDP Advisors
- Average of 20 years of engagement, mostly in protracted crises and Fragile & Conflict-Affected States (FCS)

Quote interviewee
With the HDP Nexus, I feel that I have more freedom to use the funding for more holistic approaches and a longer time horizon."



Quote interviewee
"The world has turned upside down."

Genesis of the HDP Paradigm

- Both HD as well as PD paradigms undergo various changes and reforms
- HD: continuum, contiguum and LRRD
- 2015ff sees new momentum: World Humanitarian Summit, Grand Bargain and New Ways of Working
- 2016: Secretary General Antonio Guterres calls for "sustaining peace" to be considered the third leg of the triangle, creating the HDP Nexus paradigm
- 2019: OECD DAC approves recommendations on the HDP Nexus - use sparse financial resources more effectively by preventing conflict towards SDGs

What is the HDP Nexus?

Joint use of instruments, breaking silos, working in a triangle
"Rather void of an inspiring goal"

What is the goal of the Nexus

Peace, development, sustainability, SDGs

Why is it necessary?

We cannot continue as we have been doing, it responds to hopes & needs of the people, according to the Swiss constitution

Quote interviewee
"The HDP Nexus is a mechanic, as a mechanic it is neutral. It needs a compass, a goal."

What is the P in the HDP Nexus?

- Do no harm, conflict sensitivity, social cohesion
- Positive-negative, direct-cultural-structural peace
- Small p and big P, tracks 1,2,3
- Peace work is political work with a political agenda
- Mostly understood as Peace-building, no mention of security, military or peacekeeping

Quote interviewee
"...and then the Nexus – nothing new...."



Quote interviewee
"The concept is abstract, difficult to grasp."

Quote of a Chinese listener:
"This presentation is super interesting, because, you know, this is a typical Western problem that you have created for yourself, you draw these artificial boundaries and now you are having great trouble to overcome them".



Recommendations

1. US policy shift: will it trigger a fundamental IC restructuring?
2. Rework conceptual bearings, why add the P and what is it?
3. How does CH respond in FCS, instrument for fragility?
4. What to do with dilemmas arising from H-D-P divergences?
5. Policy document with step-by-step guide and examples
6. Clear communication re potential institutional restructuring
7. Coordination how? – global, national, local levels
8. Implementing agencies: offer modalities: trust funds & consortia
9. Financing systems: form follows function

DAS Peace & Conflict Program

Final Thesis

Personal attitudes of individuals working in the fields of humanitarian, development and peace regarding the HDP Nexus

Name of Supervisor: Flavia Eichmann / Tania Hörler

**Name of Author: Marina Muenchenbach
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71'623 characters with spaces, 30 pages

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I. Introduction

This research builds on the hypothesis that individuals working in the “fields” of humanitarian, development and peace engagement have personal attitudes, and hopes, doubts, needs, motivations, fears, concerns, thoughts, and questions with regards to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus), and that understanding and addressing these can assist in a meaningful course of action for the future of the HDP Nexus approach. The following chapter II formulates the research hypothesis and the research questions.

The thesis then offers an overview of the available literature on the theoretical / conceptual basis of the HDP Nexus approach as well as a selection of frequently researched or critically discussed aspects of it.

Acknowledging and building on this body of knowledge, this research collected primary data based on a series of 38 interviews that were conducted with individuals working in humanitarian, development and peace situations. Chapter IV describes the methodological approach overall and for the data collection process.

Chapter V provides a summary of findings from interviews. The following chapter VI draws conclusions and offers first ideas of recommendations corresponding to these conclusions. The last chapter contains a structured presentation of recommendations.

II. Research hypothesis and research questions

The **research hypothesis** of the DAS Thesis is defined as follows:

Individuals working in the humanitarian, development and peace “fields” have personal attitudes and hopes, doubts, needs, motivations, fears, concerns, thoughts and questions related to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus). Understanding and addressing these can contribute to a meaningful course of action for the future of the HDP Nexus approach.

Research questions:

- What type of personal attitudes towards the HDP Nexus exist in the humanitarian, development and peace “fields”?
- What *hopes, doubts, needs, motivations, fears, concerns, thoughts and questions* exist leading to more positive, more negative or more neutral attitudes and how can these be categorized?
- Is there a correlation between interview results and specific “fields” (H, D or P) or are they rather spread across “fields”? Are there correlations in relation to other criteria, such as the actor group (e.g. governmental vs non-governmental), age, gender, countries of engagement, or years of engagement?
- What can we learn from findings that emerge from interview results that can contribute to a meaningful course of action for the future of the HDP Nexus approach? Are there issues that - if addressed - could have a significant positive impact?

Looking at personal attitudes may shed light on critical issues and deficiencies of the HDP Nexus approach and point to a need for further adaptations, clarifications, prioritizations, or setting of (clearer) boundaries.

Given the vastness of reports available on the HDP Nexus, the question needed to be asked if there still exists a research gap. This thesis argues that little focus has been given to the impact of “personal” - in contrast to “institutional” - attitudes and that understanding and addressing these may positively influence the future course of action.

The research focuses on **Swiss** institutions and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) working in the fields of humanitarian, development and peace. While the majority of interviewees came from Swiss actor groups, some non-Swiss actors were included because they work in countries or programs where Switzerland is engaged in the HDP Nexus. This was the case for South Sudan, where the author had the opportunity to gain personal experiences with regards to the implementation of the HDP Nexus approach.

III. Theoretical/conceptual basis

The below described literature on the theoretical / conceptual basis of the HDP Nexus consists broadly speaking of two distinct sets of documents: **normative** documents that define the HDP Nexus and its genesis, and **scholarly** articles that present research results concerning critically discussed aspects of the HDP Nexus.

Normative documents: Legal foundations and genesis of the HDP Nexus

Legal foundations

It came as a surprise to the author that interviewees, when asked about the definition of the HDP Nexus, sometimes cited article 54 of the Swiss Confederation. This led to the realization that the HDP Nexus could claim legal foundations, both on national as well as on international level, hence the decision to shortly present them in this chapter.

Article 54 of the Federal Constitution of the **Swiss Confederation** (SWISS-FEDERAL-COUNCIL, 1999)¹ lays the foundation for Swiss Foreign Policy and Swiss International Cooperation, arguably providing a national legal basis for the concept of the HDP Nexus. It states that “the Confederation shall ensure that the independence of Switzerland and its welfare is safeguarded; ... assist in the alleviation of need and poverty... and promote respect for human rights and democracy, the peaceful co-existence of peoples as well as the conservation of natural resources”(SWISS-FEDERAL-COUNCIL, 1999).

The **Swiss International Cooperation Strategy** (IC Strategy)² combines the three fields of humanitarian, development and peace building and adds economic development as a fourth element, constituting the Whole of Government (WOGA) approach across departments. It is of note that the WOGA approach already confirmed the importance of a HDP Nexus approach and even went further by adding a fourth element. The IC Strategy 2025-2028 is in the consultation process by the Swiss parliament and available as a preliminary summary document (FDFA, 2024b). The strategy proposes a total budget of CHF 11.45 million (this may be lowered in favour of military aid) for humanitarian aid (25%), development cooperation SDC (58.6%), for SECO (14%) and peace and human rights (2.4%).

On international level, the **UN Charter** (United-Nations, 1945) preamble states that “We the peoples of the United Nations (are) determined to save succeeding generations from the

¹ 18 April 1999 (Status as of 3 March 2024)

² The International Cooperation Strategy encompasses as departments the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), overseeing the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) as well as the Federal Department of Economic Affairs, overseeing Education and Research (EAER), and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)

scourge of war and ...(and) employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”.

Traditionally, and particularly in the West, the “international machinery” to achieve UN Charta goals has been divided into specialized fields, whereby international cooperation usually encompasses humanitarian aid and development, whereas peace engagement forms a more complex spectrum including security as well as diplomatic and political elements.

Genesis of the HDP paradigm

Since the start of the “new world order” after the second world war, with the emergence of the United Nations and the creation of a multilayered architecture encompassing foreign policy, international cooperation and the advancement of human rights, the numerous elements of this architecture as well the paradigms guiding its system functions have been subject to continuous change.

A comprehensive elaboration of the various paradigm changes and reforms would go beyond the scope of this thesis. It should however be noted that the emergence of the HDP “Triple” Nexus is preceded by the elaboration of Humanitarian-Development (HD) as well as Peacebuilding-Development (PD) “Double” Nexus concepts.

Discussion about the HD Nexus started earlier, some sources place its origins into the 1980s when the separation of humanitarian and development instruments during the Africa food crisis caused a serious funding gap, leading to the emergence of the concept of “Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development” (LRRD).

The Directorate-General for External Policies of the European Union (European-Union, 2012) formulated the concept of LRRD first as a “linear continuum approach” and due to the emergence of protracted crisis abandoned this concept in favour of a “contiguuum approach, which departed from a scenario of simultaneous and complementary use of different aid instruments.” (European-Union, 2012)

The 90s saw an emergence of the peace-development (PD) Nexus. Uvin (Uvin, 2002) formulated this paradigm in 2002 in the first edition of the “Journal of peacebuilding and development”, a journal specifically dedicated to the PD paradigm. His article starts with the remark “The development enterprise spent the first three decades of its charmed life in total agnosticism towards matters of conflict and insecurity”. (Uvin, 2002)

The years from 2015 onwards saw a new momentum on several fronts. World leaders of the development community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United-Nations,

2015) as a joint framework in September 2015 at an historic UN Summit. Included in the SDGs is a commitment to peace with SDG 16 “Peace, Justice and strong institutions”.

In May 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) (United-Nations, 2016) took place in Istanbul, calling to “transcend humanitarian-development divides in a commitment to action”. It laid the ground for the Grand Bargain (GB) (Grand-Bargain, 2016), which called for more flexible, multi-year funding to bridge humanitarian and development efforts and advocated to strengthen localization. At the same time, the “New Way of Working” (NWoW) (UN-OCHA, 2017) initiative (introduced by the UN and World Bank), was launched to promote better collaboration between humanitarian and development actors.

While these initiatives (WHS, GB and NWoW) are now cited as laying its groundwork, none of them yet mentioned the exact term “HDP Nexus”; they focused instead on the HD Nexus. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA, 2017) calls the NWoW a “New Momentum to Tackle an Old Problem.” However, the New Way of Working already uses elements of the later “jargon” of the HDP Nexus. It calls for “working over multiple years, based on the “comparative advantage” of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system, towards collective outcomes³”. It mentions the growing volume, cost and length of humanitarian assistance provision over the past ten years, in large part due to the protracted nature of crises, as important driver and the expectation that the “New Way of Working is particularly relevant to addressing protracted displacement”(OCHA, 2017).

Then, on 13 October 2016, Antonio Guterres was elected by the UN General Assembly to become the new United Nations Secretary-General. In his speech on 12th of December 2016 (Guterres, 2016), he reminded that “our most serious shortcoming ... is our inability to prevent crises. The United Nations was born from war. Today, we must be here for peace.” He demanded that “prevention requires that we address root causes across all three pillars of the United Nations: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights”⁴⁵.

Since then, many HDP actors and scholars associate the upcoming of the HDP Nexus with the demand of SG Antonio Guterres to invest in conflict prevention and include peace as a third leg to form a HDP Nexus, bringing the HD Nexus and the PD Nexus together under one umbrella. The ICVA HDP Nexus briefing paper (ICVA) states that “in his statement upon

3 A collective outcome is described as “the result that development and humanitarian actors (and other relevant actors) want to have achieved at the end of 3-5 years”.

4 Translation by author, this passage was presented in French : « La prévention exige que nous nous attaquions aux causes profondes à travers les trois piliers des Nations Unies: la paix et la sécurité, le développement durable et les droits humains ».

⁵ Note that when speaking about the three “pillars” of the United Nations, the Secretary General does not refer to the HDP Nexus but lists peace and security, development and human rights. The strong impetus on human rights does not appear in the HDP Nexus concept.

taking office in December 2016, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for “sustaining peace” to be considered “the third leg of the triangle.”

In his report to the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council “Peacebuilding and sustaining peace” (United-Nations_SG, 2020), the secretary general reminds member states that “in the twin resolutions adopted in 2016, (they) reaffirmed the primary responsibility of national governments and authorities in identifying and driving priorities, strategies and activities for sustaining peace, at all stages of conflict” and that the UN charter highlights “the critical relationship among peace and security, development, human rights and international cooperation”. He further emphasizes that “the human and financial costs of responding to crisis rather than investing in prevention are unsustainably high”.

The next important step in the genesis of the HDP Nexus was taken by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as the specialized body of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), when approving their *Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* (OECD, 2021) on 22 February 2019. The recommendation states that in 2016, USD 68.2 billion or 65.5% of total earmarked Official Development Assistance (ODA) was spent in fragile contexts and that more countries were experiencing violent conflicts than at any time in nearly 30 years.

The system of Official Development Assistance (ODA) provision is meant to ensure sustainable development and peace but seems caught in a downwards spiral. Although studies describe in detail how humanitarian aid can only be “band aid”, without lasting positive impacts on root causes of needs, the pressure to relieve human suffering “eats away” the “cake” of overall available resources, negatively impacting available funding for development, peace building and conflict resolution.

The OECD DAC recommendation is one of the most important reference documents for the HDP Nexus and contains 11 recommendations across the 3 pillars of coordination, programming and finances, each of them comprising of a specific number of provisions, such as for example joint risk-analysis, collective outcomes, prioritising prevention, putting people at the centre, strengthening national and local capacities or predictable, flexible, multi-year financing.

Since the recommendation was approved, the level of conflict and fragility has unfortunately worsened. The OECD 2022 “report on fragility” testifies that 60% of DAC’s overall allocable aid was given to fragile countries, split into: humanitarian aid (25%), development (63%) and peace (12%), with only 4% of the total spent on conflict prevention. In extremely fragile contexts, humanitarian aid increased greatly, outweighing development

and peace financing (OECD, 2022b). Close to 90% of humanitarian aid was spent in contexts of protracted crises (OECD, 2021).

The International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) was tasked with overseeing the operationalization of the OECD DAC recommendation. It provided an *Interim Progress Review in 2022* (OECD, 2022a), and in March 2024, submitted the final report. (OECD, 2024)

The INCAF final report states that overall, adherents have undertaken significant efforts and made progress in implementing the provisions of the DAC Recommendation. It lists achievements, gives examples and confirms that the concept remains relevant. However, unfortunately, it is amongst others the core idea of prioritizing prevention vis-à-vis development and humanitarian aid which meets some of the “most drastic challenges”.

In the 5 years between the launch of the OECD DAC recommendations in 2019 and the final report of 2024, DAC members official development assistance proportion to prevention decreased, while the share to humanitarian aid further increased. The following paragraphs depict further identified challenges particularly relevant to the thesis at hand.

According to the INCAF final report, “the peace objective of the HDP Nexus ...remains elusive” (Paragraph 32), and development is often absent: “When conflict or violence flare up, or in cases of undemocratic political transitions, development actors tend to withdraw due to their limited tolerance for security and reputational risks” (Paragraph 69).

The report deplores that “humanitarian assistance is becoming the default crisis response tool” (Paragraph 59). In many fragile and conflict affected contexts, “economic or political sanction regimes apply, and humanitarian funds are often simply the most actionable way to stay engaged”. There is another important factor why the provision of humanitarian aid is often the preferred tool: “It is also consensual in public opinion. This makes it a convenient crisis-response tool...it might be less politically fraught to address the visible symptoms of a problem (i.e. humanitarian needs), especially when the risk of doing so is transferred to others, rather than seek to address its drivers”.

The INCAF final report concludes that “the full potential of the DAC Recommendation will not be achieved without a fundamental change in the current crisis response models and architecture”.

The **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** is an adherent to the OECD DAC recommendation and has long been engaged in the development of a HDP Nexus approach for Switzerland. The *State of the Art* report (Klausen, 2021) provides an excellent overview of the intensive learning journey that has taken place. The SDC Thematic Cooperation Division “Peace, Governance and Equality” (PGE), Section “Fragility, Conflict and Human

Rights” summarized results in 2022 in an synthesis report *A Learning Journey on the Triple Nexus* (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC Thematic Cooperation Division Peace, 2022). After the implementation of the SDC “Fit for Purpose” (F4P) exercise, which merged humanitarian and development aid, there seems to be increased momentum to move from the Double HD to a Triple HDP Nexus. At the time of writing the thesis, the PGE division has further engaged on the topic and announced training on the HDP Nexus.

Scholarly articles presenting a selection of frequently researched or critically discussed aspects of the HDP Nexus concept / approach.

When conducting the literature research, the author endeavored to include aspects relevant to the thesis and tried to compare the results of the primary data collection (interviews) with existing scholarly research results. Aspects include amongst others (i) the peace element of the HDP Nexus, (ii) dilemmas, (iii) complexity and coordination, and (iv) financial challenges.

Before shedding light on specific aspects, the author compared if scholars had identified similar categories of problematic aspects. A briefing paper from ALNAP for humanitarian decision-makers (ALNAP, 2023) shall serve as an example. Issues outlined were also mentioned by respondents.

The ALNAP report states that promising legislative, policy and structural shifts (occurred) among donors and operational agencies in line with elements of the HDP Nexus and that several governments undertook efforts to create working groups for their Nexus reforms. The document mentions SDC’s F4P process as well as similar efforts by Canada and Sweden. It further reports that there has been an increase in country humanitarian-development analysis and planning, including the formulation of collective outcomes. Links between Humanitarian Needs and Humanitarian Response (HNP/HRP) processes and the Common Country Analysis (CCA) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) increased. (ALNAP, 2023).

The report attests a lack of clear “theories of change” or “what the Nexus means practically and operationally”, “missing guidance documents or best practice examples”, and a lack of leadership including “often weak Resident Coordinator Offices with little authority”. There is arguably slow progress in linking the HDP Nexus to local leadership.

Lastly, the document mentions “ongoing challenges with the ‘p’ in the Nexus” and, “at a more concrete level, challenges in linking different timeframes and working cultures”.(ALNAP, 2023)

The peace element of the HDP Nexus

Amongst scholars and practitioners, the **peace element** of the HDP Nexus is one of the most discussed topics (Brown et al., 2024), (Norman and Mikhael, 2023).

Siddiqui and Guiu (Siddiqui and Guiu, 2024) analyzed if HDP Nexus programs had positive effects on the three fields of humanitarian, development and peace in the context of Iraq after the ISIS crises⁶. Their results show that, while “humanitarian and development outcomes improved steadily over time, peace outcomes remained poor and relatively unchanged”. They argue that “improvement in the ‘soft’ security elements of peace related to social cohesion and coexistence were superseded by a deterioration in ‘hard’ security elements linked to protection of civilians and security configurations over time”. (Siddiqui and Guiu, 2024)

Dilemmas resulting from different mandates

A further much discussed topic concerns the contradictions and **dilemmas** resulting from the respective different mandates of the humanitarian, development and peace actors.

MSF as early as 2016 (Pedersen, 2016) warned about the risks for humanitarian aid stemming from the Triple Nexus notion. “The imperative of humanitarian action is to save lives and alleviate suffering, and the principles informing this action are those of impartiality, independence and neutrality. Impartiality is instantly undermined when humanitarian aid is given as part of a larger political process and no longer according to needs. It is when humanitarian aid is given in the name of peace building, and no longer based on needs, that the aid becomes political and no longer strictly humanitarian”(Pedersen, 2016).

From a position as Christian Aid’s Peace and Violence advisor, Garcia (Sanchez Garcia, 2023) argues that there is a sense of deep unease among some civil society organizations that adding peace into humanitarian work may compromise their impartiality. Like other humanitarian actors, Garcia reminds that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, peace building took a tendency towards militarization and hard security, making the HDP Nexus particularly risky for humanitarians, for example because humanitarians could be associated with peacekeepers perceived as military personnel.

He states as a second reason why “traditional humanitarian organizations feel weary about fully embracing the Triple Nexus” that “many of them do not have the mandate to work on

⁶ It is important to understand that the HDP Nexus approach in Iraq was meant to achieve Durable Solutions for Displacement - which is a specific HDP Nexus context - and that Siddiqui and Guiu’s research is based on proxy indicators on living conditions in conflict-affected areas as part of the Return Index.

peace”. He suggests, instead of adding peace as a third field, elevating it to an outcome level. This would allow humanitarian work to “create peace dividends and such contribute to peace”. (Sanchez Garcia, 2023)

Garcia’s comment sheds light on a contentious aspect of the HDP Nexus, the risk that implementing organizations perceive the HDP Nexus approach as an invitation to implement all three elements. The thesis at hand argues that this is not what is meant by HDP Nexus. Nexus does not mean that each organization implements all three fields, but that they play their respective instrument in an orchestrated performance, with a defined collective outcome agreed on a strategic level and consisting of a menu of different projects or activities. Implementing organizations can implement as a singular agency or as part of a consortium that works towards a HDP Nexus goal.

Emmanuel et al (Emmanuel et al., 2019) have researched the viability of the HDP Nexus in Mali as part of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative on “Local Perspectives on Peacebuilding, Development, and Humanitarian Action in Mali”. The research is based on a desk study and 130 interviews with proponents of various actor groups.

They conclude that “Mali may indeed be emblematic of a context in which international actors should push in the opposite direction of the “triple Nexus”.(Emmanuel et al., 2019). They have found as one major concern that “it risks politicizing humanitarian action”. - Reasons provided as to why this was the case are that MINUSMA and Barkhane⁷, while being considered as parties to the conflict, were included in humanitarian needs assessments and have provided security for humanitarian actors. Furthermore, “UN agencies engaged in humanitarian activities work only in government-controlled areas, bringing the impartial nature of their activities into question”.

The Mali example in the above case might seem presented as unfairly negative - Mali will also will appear as a particularly difficult context in the interview round of this thesis - however, this and other examples show that there is certainly work to be done with regards to mitigating the risk for humanitarian actors originating from the HDP Nexus approach if it is not adequately interpreted and implemented.

Complexity and coordination of the HDP Nexus

A variety of literature evolves around the complexity of the HDP Nexus and questions regarding efficiency and **coordination**. Baroncelli (Baroncelli, 2024) provides an interesting

⁷ MINUSMA was the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. Operation Barkhane was the follow-up French military mission in Mali to Operation Serval in 2013. Mali has since asked both MINUSMA as well as Barkhane to withdraw, neither is any more operational in Mali.

contribution to this topic. She analyses the HDP Nexus from a perspective of global governance and regime complexity and presents it as an “innovative attempt at global experimentalist governance (GXG)” and compares the performance of the UN, the EU and the World Bank Group (WBG) with regards to their Nexus achievements in three case studies (Cameroon, Eastern DRC and Myanmar).

Baroncelli points in her conclusions to a major unresolved issue, which she sees as “the persistent tension between the neutral, people-centred humanitarian approaches on the one side, and the overtly political, state- or system-centred methods possessed by peacebuilding and, at times, by development support, on the other”.

She claims that whereas the humanitarian-development Nexus and the peace-development Nexus have longer histories of genesis, the peace element is the most challenging addition to the Nexus policy concept. This thought corresponds to other scholars portraying the P “leg” as having been added somewhat abruptly first by the UN Secretary General (Antonio Guterre) and then by the OECD DAC (Emmanuel et al., 2019).

She argues that the ‘small p’ part of the peace engagement was easier to integrate, partly because “the potential of the Nexus concept lies in no small part in its experimental, participatory and bottom-up components”. She however maintains that “a meaningful inclusion of the peace dimension must however necessarily integrate the top-down, or ‘big P’⁸ dimension as well” (Baroncelli, 2024).

Baroncelli quotes the chair of the OECD DAC during the launch of the UNDP Nexus academy in 2022, pointing towards including not only peace but also politics into the Nexus. “(We have to) redouble our efforts on the P of the HDP Nexus ... (which is) the peace but also the politics. There is a real role for diplomats in this [...] so maybe we need to become not trilingual but quadrilingual to include them too”. It is of note that this same idea has also been mentioned in interviews: “It is of Swiss interest to use all instruments,...I like to talk about “multiple” nexus, consisting of H, D, P and diplomacy. It is the chief of mission who holds all together, he or she can also use diplomacy”.

While Baroncelli enumerates various shortcomings and issues of the HDP Nexus, her final overall resume encourages further efforts towards the concept. “The Triple Nexus remains to date the most ambitious multilateral endeavour to advance a rights-based, collaborative

8 According to Baroncelli, ‘Big P’ refers to country- or regional-level stabilization efforts, either military or diplomatic, often aimed at restoring the legitimacy of country authorities. ‘Small p’ indicates peacebuilding efforts to improve inter-communal dialogue and social cohesion at community level.

governance effort to preserve the integrity of human lives... As such, it merits perhaps more attention than it has received so far” (Baroncelli, 2024).

Financial challenges of the HDP Nexus

Lastly, the following study adds to an understanding of the **financial challenges** of the HDP Nexus approach. Yabe et al. (Yabe et al., 2024) have analyzed if and how fragility influences donor aid allocations across the three pillars of the HDP Nexus. They base their results on a quantitative analysis of ODA allocations from 23 donors during the period from 2009 to 2019, separately per each of the three pillars H, D and P. Apart from fragility they use self-interest, recipients’ needs and merit as variables in their association to ODA. Fragility is presented in two ways: state of fragility (binary yes/no) and degree of fragility. They find that for overall DAC ODA allocations, humanitarian aid increases significantly with fragility, while development and peace allocations have no strong association with fragility, hence prevention is not being increased in situations of fragility. The situation presents itself different for single donor’s ODA allocations. Here, the association of aid with fragility highly differs across donor countries and pillars. Yabe et al. argue that “when aid flows across the Nexus are inconsistent among donors, it will not give the right incentives for implementing partners to operate consistently”. They suggest that donors should enhance coordination and give a coherent message for ODA to “deliver not only funding but also incentives to work together”.⁹

⁹ Switzerland increases humanitarian aid according to state and degree of fragility, while it decreases ODA for the peace pillar. This result might be related to the influence of the three other variables of self-interest, recipients’ needs and merit.

IV. Methodological approach

The process of data collection was two-fold and entailed (i) an analysis of the theoretical / conceptual basis (reference documents, studies, research, opinion pieces), concerning the HDP Nexus approach, and (ii) a collection of primary data based on semi-structured interviews with individuals working in the fields of humanitarian, development and peace.

The “population sample” or selection of “interviewees” focused on Swiss institutions and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) working in the fields of humanitarian, development and peace. While the majority of interviewees came from Swiss actor groups, some non-Swiss actors were included because they work in countries or programs where Switzerland is engaged in the HDP Nexus.

Due to the research topic (“personal” attitudes), it was important to conduct interviews in an environment perceived by interviewees as a “space allowing them to speak freely” about personal opinions, removed from the necessities of a more institutional positioning. In order to guarantee anonymity for interviewees, interviewee lists will not be provided. Interviewees are described along four specified characteristics: (i) fields (H, D or P), (ii) actor groups (Swiss government, foreign governments, UN, NGOs, think tanks & universities), (iii) countries of engagement and (iv) years of engagement.

Interviews were based on an interview guide for semi-structured interviews. Interviews were not recorded. The author took hand-written notes and transcribed them into summaries of interviews per person.

Based on transcripts, interview results were transferred to an excel database. The transfer process allowed the creation of certain categories to describe answers. This allowed the extraction of all remarks of interviewees that had referred to this category and the processing of this data into a comprehensive description along categories.

The following chapters will summarize findings and interpret, discuss and link them with results from the analysis of the theoretical / conceptual basis.

V. Data Collection and Findings

Population sample (individuals interviewed)

Interviews were conducted with 38 individuals, or 58% of a total of 66 invited. For reasons of confidentiality, the interview list will not be made available. The four characteristics (i) field, (ii) actor group, (iii) years of engagement, and (iv) areas of engagement were established to describe the population sample.

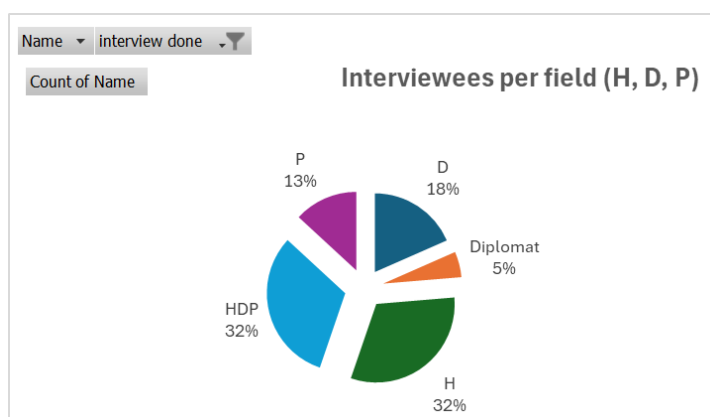


Figure 1 Interviewees per field (H, D, P)

The overall distribution of individuals interviewed according to **fields** is 32% Humanitarian, 18% Development, 13 % Peace, 5% Diplomats, and 32% HDP advisors and managers. A particular cohort carries “HDP” as field name. These are “HDP Advisor and HDP Manager”, positions, which have been defined in the SDC expert pool of the Swiss

Humanitarian Aid unit, in the PHRD expert pool for civilian peace promotion and in SDC (HDP Manager). This cohort provided very interesting insights into how they define and implement the HDP Nexus in practice as HDP Nexus representatives of the FDFA in their specific contexts.

It is a limitation of the thesis that the distribution of individuals per field is not even and has a bias towards humanitarians. On the positive side, this bias gave an opportunity to shed light on issues perceived to be specifically problematic for the field of humanitarian work.

Regarding **actor groups**, 74% of individuals interviewed work for the Swiss Government (FDFA), 5% in Think Tanks and Universities, 8% for the UN, 2% for Foreign Governments, 3% for NGOs, and 8% for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The average **years of engagement** in one of the three fields of H, D or P was 20 years, offering a high level of seniority, adequate for the complex HDP approach.

Interviewees have most, but not all, of their **areas of engagement** in Africa (e.g. Sahel, Horn of Africa, South Sudan, Nigeria), MENA (e.g. Syrian, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Libya), Eastern Europe (e.g. Ukraine, Balkans), Asia (e.g. Myanmar, Afghanistan), and Latin America (e.g. Haiti, Venezuela). While it was not possible to correlate findings to this characteristic, it can be said that interviewees have most of their experience in situations of fragile or conflict affected states or protracted crisis.

29% of interviewees were female and 71% were male.

In general, it can be noted that respondents to the interview request had genuine interest in the HDP Nexus and were open to speak about their attitudes. Comments were thoughtful, the population sample contained highly skilled and experienced individuals. The concept of the HDP Nexus seems to be perceived as **relevant and important** by senior management.

Questions around the definition and understanding of the HDP Nexus

Before approaching the issue of personal attitudes towards the HDP Nexus, the interview process started with preliminary “setting the scene” questions, such as how interviewees defined the HDP Nexus, what was its goal, and why it was necessary.

The HDP Nexus is most often described as a mechanism or a way of working. The term most used was “instruments”, other expressions brought into play were “working in a triangle”, “joint working processes”, “building bridges” or “breaking silos”. This understanding appears rather void of an inspiring “positively formulate goal”, compare to below quote:

It is an empty shell from a normative sense, it makes no sense by itself. It is a mechanic, as a mechanic it is neutral. It needs a compass, a goal; without goal and compass, it can be at best neutral and at worst it can be dangerous. With sustainable development goals, it is clear what should be achieved, with HDP Nexus it is not.

Individuals were therefore asked what they thought was the ultimate goal of the HDP Nexus. Their answers revealed amongst others peace (11 times), development (6 times), sustainability (6 times), or (respect of) human rights (5 times) as goals of the HDP Nexus. 14 answers describe this in relation to the wellbeing of the people, the population or the societies that the HDP Nexus is trying to serve. Some conclude that the goal is “to make ourselves redundant in the countries we work”; to “run ourselves out of the job”; the “end of international cooperation”

A sizeable share of answers (34% or 13 of 38 answers) show mindsets, whereby the individuals interviewed focus on the perspective of the foreign country they are employed to, expressing that the HDP Nexus responds to the complexity of the reality.

HDP Nexus is approaching realities in their complexities, you can't approach one without the others, if you don't work like that you are out of reality

A total 17 respondents gave reasons as to why the HDP Nexus is necessary: these include that goals and objectives “can only be achieved tother” (10), that we “cannot continue as we have been doing” (3), that contexts of current crisis are not only more violent or fragile but also technically more demanding (urban environments) (2), that the HDP Nexus responds

to the hopes and needs of the population (2), that the Swiss constitution demands to achieve objectives corresponding to all three fields (1) and that we have to save money (1).

We cannot continue as we have been doing so far. We also have in the face of so many conflicts, work on prevention. We cannot remain being the fire brigade.

12 interviewees (32%) underline that the HDP Nexus approach is nothing new and remind of its genesis starting with notions of continuum, contiguum, and Linking Relief with Recovery and Development (LRRD).

During the interview, individuals often referred in their answers to the Double Nexus of humanitarian and development and less so to the HDP Triple Nexus. The interviewer therefore specifically asked how they understood and defined this third “P” element. As a first reaction, interviewees often apologized, saying that they know least about the “P”, usually translating it as “peace building”. When defining peace building, 15 answers described this as “do no harm, conflict sensitivity, and social cohesion”.

Another group of 5 answers referred to the notions of positive-negative peace, direct-cultural-structural peace or conflict transformation and political transformation. 5 answers use the terms “small p and big P”, or “track 1,2,3”.

7 answers used the term “political”: “Peace work is political work & uses political instruments, with a political agenda”. 2 interviewees looked at it from the perspective of the concerned society or community: “The peace element is the most difficult one, for communities it is a sense of stability”.

The P element was mostly understood as peacebuilding. There was no reference to security or military aspects or references to peace-making, peace-keeping and peace-building.

The author noted that respondents rarely gave practical examples of peace building activities or mentioned different types of peace building instruments. This may have different reasons; interviewee may not have regarded it as vital to the discussion about attitudes towards HDP Nexus. It may also point to a lack of knowledge about what peace building entails on a day-to-day basis. As the majority of interviewees did not come from the field of peace building, it is likely that the latter is the case (lack of knowledge what peace building entails or can entail).

Some interviewees also expressed their regret that the focus on human rights seems to have shifted towards peace: “The human rights side of it has lost visibility, all now has to become peace”.

Personal attitudes towards the HDP Nexus

Overall, the attitude of interviewed individuals was on the positive side. Answers were grouped along an axis of very positive (13), positive (8), cautiously positive (7), sceptical (3), obedient/pragmatic/fatalistic (3) and openly critical or negative (3).

Very positive answers often cite intrinsic motivations and that interviewees' perception is that they have been thinking and living HDP Nexus long before it emerged as a concept: "For me, the HDP Nexus is very natural and very logical, maybe it was my own development, and I came into the context exactly when this concept came up. I'm convinced about the concept, but there is also a lot of frustration".

8 interviewees are positive about the HDP Nexus and say that it mirrors the complexity of the context: "The Nexus is a reality". "I cannot see a different way to do it, we have to, despite all challenges".

Cautiously positive answers take the following form: "I am cautiously optimistic; I see the value of the HDP Nexus approach". 3 answers show a more pragmatic / fatalistic / obedient attitude: "It is the fatalistic understanding that we have to deal with the dilemmas emerging when H, D and P work occur at the same time in the same country". "I am constructive, I take what is useful".

In 3 instances, answers are openly critical: "Peace is yet another separate funding stream, we are already not managing to put H&D together, to add peace would be a whole different ball game".

The interviewer then offered a probing question, asking interviewees to choose one of three "packages" and detail their attitudes around (i) positively connotated attitudes: hopes, needs, motivations, (ii) negatively connotated attitudes: doubts, fears, risks, concerns and (iii) more neutral/inquisitive attitudes. Note that the interviewer did not ask if an individual had a more positive or more negative or more neutral attitude. Hence, while for a person positive feelings may outweigh negative feelings, he/she may still have decided to talk about concerns, doubts, risks, or fears.

25 of 38 interviewees referred to **hopes, needs and motivations**. While it was not possible to deduct correlations between positive feelings and interviewee characteristics, the author's impression was that the turn towards positive reactions is personality-related and exists across fields, ages and actor groups: "My motivation is to be open and to embrace new concepts and approaches, but change is always difficult, my motivation comes out of these challenges". While the majority says they "belong to the hopeful category", a considerably longer amount of the interview time was spent on discussing problematic issues.

Identified doubts, concerns, risks, fears

9 categories of identified doubts, concerns, risks and fears were identified.



Figure 2 categories of doubts, fears, risks and concerns

Most answers (23 of 38 interviewees) mentioned concerns regarding the **broader context**. This included remarks that the success of the HDP Nexus depended on political interests, internal and external pressure, political will and commitment: “In an ideal world, we would do ABC, but there is “realpolitik”, politics, and what we “can” do, given the constellation of political interests”.

Others stated their unease with the changing world order. “The world has turned upside down”. “If I look at the political level, at the US, what will happen in future? With an attitude of “America First” or “Switzerland first”, the HDP Nexus will not work.” Note that the bulk of the interviews were conducted from October to December 2024, before President Trump took office in the US.

Some respondents referred to contexts where they argue that there is “no (political) willingness to make peace” or they question the future of the system of international cooperation as a whole: “The risk of this new concept is that it does not really address the fundamental problem of the “sector”.

A substantial group of individuals (14 of 38) underline that “we are not enough seeing the **perspective of the countries concerned**, their reality, we are stuck in our own Western perspective”. Similar to the first group of concerns (broader context), this concern contains

a feeling of “unease”, which seems to go beyond calls for localization and questions the foundations of international cooperation and foreign policy: “Are we working in the right setup? Us, the “providing” end, is only one set of actors, but there are other people on the “receiving” end, authorities, communities, is it not more important?”

An important concern evolves around the question of **feasibility** (mentioned 22 times). Some remarks state that while in theory accepted, the HDP Nexus is not done in practice. Some continue this line of thought and deduct that while it could theoretically be implemented, the effort of making it happen might not be worth it, thereby raising the question of efficiency: “The question is efficiency, there is a huge need for internal coordination. We always have to balance things, does the result justify the effort?” It is also argued that the lack of efficiency leads to risks such as overloading stakeholders, delaying action and leading to a “loss of focus, in particular if humanitarian emergency response is required”. A large proportion of interviewees voice annoyance about the pressure to have to refer to the concept in all contexts: “Nowadays, Nexus is added to everything like putting ketchup all over your plate and anti-attitudes are existent”.

Equally prominent are concerns referring to **institutional challenges** (mentioned 22 times). Mentioned are the resistances due to different cultures, thoughts and attitudes of the H, D and P fields. “We are not the same people; we have different cultures and different ways of thinking”. 22 of 28 interviewees from the actor group of the Swiss Government (FDFA), mention concerns that the HDP Nexus may lead to institutional changes regarding the set-up of SDC-humanitarian, SDC-development and PHRD-state secretariat. 7 comments describe that the HDP Nexus is personality-driven dynamic: “It is a question of people; it is crazy how people can change the approach. ”

Interviews showed **conceptual challenges** with regards to the HDP Nexus concept (mentioned 20 times). The HDP Nexus is often described as vague, abstract, complex, conceptually too difficult, not clear, incoherent, not fertile or not effective. One interviewee said that “it (had) lost momentum”, others describe agency or country contexts where the term is not used anymore or even abandoned: “In OCHA, there is resistance against using the term HDP Nexus, this terminology is not used anymore, instead we talk about humanitarian-development collaboration”. “In South Sudan, we are not talking about HDP Nexus anymore, now we talk about transition”.

The following outside view of a Chinese interlocutor puts the finger on the fact that the question of struggle over concept seems to be happening mostly within the arena of Western traditional donors and governments. Neither receiving countries nor Global South actors see this discussion as particularly relevant: “We launched the “Joining Forces to Combat

Protracted Crises” report (WorldBankGroup, 2021) on many panels, the most interesting experience was in China. One Chinese person stood up and said: “This presentation is super interesting, because, you know, this is a typical Western problem that you have created for yourself, you draw these artificial boundaries and now you are having great trouble to overcome them”.

17 respondents describe **dilemmas**, where different **principles, mandates and mechanisms** contradict each other or seem to contradict each other.

Etymologically, the term dilemma describes “a form of argument in which it is shown that whoever maintains a certain proposition must accept one or other of two alternative conclusions, and that each of these involves the denial of the proposition in question”¹⁰

The argument maintains that there are situations where the fields cannot and should not work with each other or even alongside each other, not out of reasons of efficiency but because it would cause harm to one or both to do so. Throughout interviews, 8 different axis or scales emerged, where humanitarian, development and peacebuilding differ. These include principles, mandates, values, time horizons, dialogue form (open- silent), targets, and interlocutors.

Most pertinent is the question of neutrality and independence of humanitarian work and how humanitarian work can co-exist and cooperate with development and peace engagement, which both have political dimensions: “Dilemmas come from actor groups working on different sides of a scale, these scales are for example different time horizons, different interlocutors, different roles, different understanding of their mandates”. “Humanitarians work according to humanitarian principles; these humanitarian principles have been defined in order to give guidance to humanitarian workers. This is different from the political work of conflict resolution”.

Research participants also offer examples that give rise to concerns or where risks occur. One prominently featuring example concerns Durable Solutions programs during the transition phase from humanitarian to development, when “protection”-related issues should be handed over to governments. Both in Iraq as well as in Mali it was for example regarded as very concerning or not acceptable to hand over what had been protection related tasks to Iraqi or Mali institutions, who were both seen as not respecting human rights or respecting minorities, some even accused of committing human rights violations.

Another formulated risk concerned situations of open conflict, where security actors were present at the same time than humanitarian actors. An often-cited example here is Mali,

¹⁰ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=dilemma>

where the question arose if MINUSMA should provide armed escort to humanitarian convoys: “I met with so many commandos, explaining to them that humanitarians needed distance, trying to mitigate the risk to humanitarians”.

Respondents often offered their opinion on how they would like to see the three different H, D and P fields working together, showing concern that they might be “mingled” (17 from 38 interviewees mentioned this): “To start mingling the three instruments would be fundamentally wrong. Instead, it needs leveraging what of the available instruments helps best in the respective context in a concerted way to get to the best outcome”. A majority of respondents would like to set clear boundaries: “We always have to think all three areas together but that does not mean that we act in all three areas, there are situations when we should not”.

It came as a surprise to the author that there were not more concerns regarding **financing systems** (14 times mentioned). Interviewees did point to the difference between the financial resources for the three fields H, D and P, with P lagging behind and the problem of separated funding streams, however, the remark did not occur as often as might have been expected, given the fact that most reports and research literature underline this specific issue as one of the biggest problems for the implementation of the HDP Nexus. As with other types of answers, finance was often linked to the broader political context: “The current state of the world with its new priorities and the financial situation of less willingness to provide resources is concerning and we should ask what impact this has on the HDP Nexus idea”. It might be the case that the chances for HDP Nexus implementation seem so unrealistic at this point in time that “it is not yet worth to think about operational aspects such as financing systems”.

Respondents acknowledged the importance of **leadership and coordination** and gave examples of countries where work on the HDP Nexus broke apart after HDP Nexus champions left (e.g. South Sudan or Burkina Faso), voicing disappointment about the lack of clarity and decision on this issue. With regards to national level coordination in intervention countries, there is vast consensus that this is the role of the Humanitarian / Residence Coordinator(s) while others suggest that “it is based on people; those who will coordinate are the ones who want to do it”.

Many answers maintain that the Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) suffer from a lack of authority and financial resources: “The UN reform was meant to empower the resident coordinator RC, but the problem is that the RC does not have funding. The creation of the RC office left the RC to be an “empty drummer” with no power”.

The role of **Implementing Agencies**, in particular the UN, is often seen as problematic (10 times mentioned). Instead of joint planning and implementation, agencies often compete and rather try to implement all three elements H, D, and P within their own system: “On the side of the implementing agencies, it seems like a nightmare to work in synergies, so they just integrate all three elements within their own program.” Several interviewees describe that there can be “lucky” constellations of donors or UN personnel, often from HC or RC or a big UN agency (personality driven) where adherence to the HDP Nexus is demanded. This triggers sometimes the creation of specific positions of HDP Nexus advisors, mostly to RCO but sometimes also to other organizations, including OCHA.

Examples and practical experiences

Several interviewees provided good-practice examples from a variety of countries: Burkina Faso (1), Burundi (1), DRC (1), Iraq (2), Libya 1), Liberia (1), Mali (1), Myanmar (1), Israel-oPT-Palestine (2), South Sudan (6), Ukraine (1), and Venezuela (2). Respondents often stated that it would be helpful to have such a menu of good practice examples, to explain the concept and provide practical suggestions to implementers.

One group of examples concerns joint policy and planning documents, workshops and trainings: “Ukraine: The HC/RC made the two documents UN Country Framework (CF) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) talk to each other; the HRP of the Year 2020/21 included multi-year goals and objectives, the country framework and the HRP were aligned.

The second group concerns situations, where all three fields were required or where they cross-nurtured each other: “Libya: We intervened in a location addressing three population groups, each one with a different need in a different field: (i) Migrants needed humanitarian assistance, (ii) Libyan residents had structural needs and (iii) a group of Tuareg needed access to human rights, dialogue and exchange with the resident population.”

There are also context needs, which intrinsically necessitate the use of instruments of all three fields, for example Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, the reintegration of child soldiers, or situations of scarcity of resources such as land or water and the risk of conflict over access to these resources: “When I worked there in Eastern DRC, we had a project that included reintegration of child soldiers: we talked to Armed Groups in order to have child soldiers freed, to get them out of the system. We provided humanitarian emergency assistance and had a part which had a longer-term outlook of reintegration in society, comprehensive school programs, accelerated learning programs.”

A variety of research shows the interdependency of natural resources and conflict, presenting scope for coordinated action. Morales et al. (Morales-Muñoz et al., 2022) have

analysed causal loops between environmental degradation, natural resources competition, sustainable livelihoods and violent conflict and describe entry points for peacebuilding, sustainable livelihoods development, climate action and natural resources management that have the potential to generate co-benefits, such as increased social cohesion and livelihood creation.

Durable Solutions programs are sometimes seen as HDP Nexus programs although their focus often lies more on the transition from humanitarian to development.

A last group of examples concerns implementation and funding mechanisms, such as core contributions to NGOs, pool funding (trust funds or peace building fund) or consortium mechanisms. The Reconstruction, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund (RSRTF) in South Sudan was regarded by several as a successful example: “I think it had very good area-based project design. It was an interesting tool, at least conceptually, it produced very good projects....when we developed a national development strategy and discussed objectives, at that moment the local actors also became more important, and the discussion became more balanced”.

HDP Nexus recommendations from interviewed individuals

Although not part of the interview guide, interviewees provided recommendations for the improvement of the HDP Nexus concept / approach.

(1) Recommendations underlined that the HDP Nexus needed **political will** and an institutional strategy: “It needs strategic political decisions and political will”. “It should be the senior management of the FDFA to define the HDP Nexus relationship between PHRD and SDC institutionally”.

(2) Recommendations stated that the HDP Nexus should as an overarching imperative respect and consider the **people** and countries it should serve: “If you put the community at the forefront, then you don't need the HDP Nexus, you can just follow their needs and the HDP Nexus is what comes out of it”. “I think it is very important to put localization at the centre, all of this only makes sense, if we work through local actors, if local actors define their future. We cannot do it for them, we can only support them”.

(3) Recommendations suggested that the HDP Nexus approach should be used only if the situation and context demanded it, that **dilemmas** should be acknowledged and solutions developed of how to overcome them, and that instruments should not be mingled but used according to their comparative advantages.

(4) Recommendations asserted that there is **conceptual work to be done** to further develop the HDP Nexus, to agree on and provide a policy document, including a step-by-step guide

containing examples and case studies, to conduct the necessary training, to conduct further research, and to engage in internal and external advocacy.

(5) Recommendations suggested that **coordination and leadership** should be clarified in a matrix of inter and intra-agency coordination versus global, national and local levels.

(6) Recommendations demanded the creation and handling of **financing systems** that allow implementation of the HDP Nexus: “We should have one budget line for international corporation, not divided between humanitarian and development”

South Sudan as a case study

The author was employed by SDC as program manager in South Sudan from 2021 to 2022, during a time when the HDP Nexus was very pronounced. At the time, the HDP Nexus concept was strongly promoted by the UN system as well as diplomats and donors. The HC/RC at the time also held a title of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) of the UN mission UNMISS. This provided her - together with the support from the Secretary General’s office - an opportunity to set in motion an HDP architecture including a specific HDP Nexus coordinator position.

The author had hoped that South Sudan could provide a case study on the development of an operationalized HDP Nexus. 16 people were invited, of whom only 5 individuals accepted to be interviewed. Interviews revealed that the HDP Nexus momentum had ended abruptly and that the term “HDP Nexus” was not any more in use in South Sudan, having been replaced by the term “transition”. On the surface, the reason given for why the attempt failed was that the DSRSG/HC/RC left, and the position was not filled for some time.

Interviewees were not forthcoming with details of what had happened. It seemed to involve issues relating to behaviour and capacity of individuals. The impression left was that firstly, success and failure of HDP Nexus implementation seems to be highly personality dependent and that secondly, the creation of high expectations, which an ambitious approach such as the HDP Nexus can raise, may quickly turn into disappointment and rejection if not persistently followed through.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

The following paragraphs describe which conclusions can be drawn from the research in relation to research questions. The first research question asked, what type of personal attitudes towards the HDP Nexus existed in the humanitarian, development and peace fields. The vast majority of the population sample at hand expressed a **positive attitude**. Some explain this in practical terms: “With the HDP Nexus and since the “Fit for Purpose” exercise, I feel that I have more freedom to operate from within SDC and use the funding to have more holistic programmatic approaches... (and) to have a longer-term time horizon”. At the same time, the majority of interviewees maintained that the HDP Nexus was not implemented in practice, voiced doubts and described problems of the approach.

The second research question asked, what “hopes, doubts, needs, motivations, fears, concerns, thoughts and questions” existed, leading to more positive, more negative or more neutral attitudes and how these could be categorized. Chapter V identified 9 such categories, presented according to frequency of occurrence: broader context (23), feasibility ((22), institutional challenges (22), conceptual challenges (20), dilemmas (17), perspective of the receiving end (15), finance (14), coordination (10), implementing partners (10).

There were no significant correlations between interview results and interviewee categories. While there were slight variations, the number of interviews was too small to be conclusive and the qualitative nature of the data collection only allowed calculations based on “occurrence of type of concerns” or “attitudes as perceived by the interviewer”. For the sake of the thesis, it can be stated that these were spread out across all four chosen categories of “fields, actor groups, years of engagement and countries of engagement”.

The last research question asked if there were issues emerging from the research that - if addressed - could have a significant positive impact on the course of action for the future of the HDP Nexus. In response to this question, above-mentioned 9 categories have been grouped into (A) issues that are important but not specific to the HDP Nexus, (B) issues that should be addressed, seem fundamental to the HDP Nexus approach, and could have significant positive impact and (C) operational issues that should be addressed and depend on / are linked to the successful handling of group B issues.

A Issues that are important but not specific to the HDP Nexus (broader context, perspective of the receiving end, feasibility)

The category mentioned most often concerned the **broader context**, political interests, and general doubts about foreign policy and international cooperation. While these doubts emerged during interviews, they are not specific to the HDP Nexus approach and could have

been mentioned in relation to other concepts. Remarks such as “we omit to integrate into our strategies the **perspective of the actors on the ground**” may go beyond calls for localization and locally led responses and could be a further symptom of a fundamental doubt in the current system of international cooperation.

It should be noted that interviews were held between September 2024 and February 2025, with the bulk of the interviews conducted before or during the US election and before the commencement of the new US administration. In March 2025, at the time of finalizing this dissertation, doubts about the broader context would arguably have increased, with the suspension of US funding, dismantling of USAID and general change of US foreign policy adding to a fundamental feeling of unease.

The complexity and vagueness of the HDP Nexus and its ambitious nature may add to concerns regarding **feasibility**: “While in theory the concept is accepted, it is not often implemented”. Concerns might be mitigated by any type of known simplification measure, such as restricting the HDP Nexus to certain contexts or “phasing” HDP Nexus implementation, starting for example with a limited number of countries for the approach to be piloted.

B Issues that should be addressed, seem fundamental to the HDP Nexus approach, and could have significant positive impact (conceptual challenges, dilemmas, institutional challenges)

Conceptual challenges and dilemmas

The thesis recommends to carefully re-work the **conceptual bearings of the HDP Nexus**. This should include an analysis-based justification for the addition of the P element to the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. It should be defined what the P element entails, including the question if it also involves hard security elements.

The argument presented for the HDP Nexus may - crudely- be described as: “Humanitarian needs for fragile and conflict affected countries in protracted crisis are continuously increasing, which leads to more money spent on humanitarian aid, instead of development, which leads to the inability to achieve sustainable development goals. Therefore, conflicts need to be prevented; and we achieve conflict prevention by adding peace building to the HD Nexus for a HDP Nexus”. This logic presents inconsistencies.

Firstly, documents such as the OECD DAC recommendation refer to **fragile and conflict affected countries or protracted crisis**, but they do not define the HDP Nexus as a tool to be used explicitly in these contexts. The same can be said for interviewees; they do not link the HDP Nexus to a specific set of contexts although some used the term “HDP Nexus

countries”, which however did not seem to be institutionally defined. This thesis suggests that the issue deserves attention. The addition of peace as a third element may be more readily understood, if the HDP Nexus approach were applied to contexts where conflict is perceived as the main cause for humanitarian needs and lack of development.

Secondly, if we were to define “for arguments sake” conflict-affected countries as “HDP countries”, one of the main problems arising from fragility and conflict is that development actors cease presence and programming. The **D element**, which entails long-term programming and a substantial part of conflict prevention and peace building, goes missing, leaving the field for humanitarian and peace actors. It seems to the author that conflict prevention in fragile countries needs long-term planning and substantial financial investment in addressing root causes of the conflict, something that neither peace actors nor humanitarian actors can easily do.

This thesis argues that one of the main problems in fragile countries is the absence of long-term planning and programming and that it seems questionable if the joining of three fields - of which one is not present - can address this issue. An alternative might be an **instrument for fragility response**, allowing long-term engagement.

Conceptual work on the HDP Nexus should also include an identification and acknowledgement of **dilemmas** arising from different mandates, and solutions of how to overcome them.

Institutional challenges

It should be noted that the HDP Nexus makes most sense for actors overseeing all three mandates of humanitarian, development and peace engagement, for example the head of a government department or the Secretary General of the UN. Most actors however have only mandates for one or at most two of the three fields of H-D-P. The responsibility to deal with institutional challenges therefore often lies with those overseeing all three mandates.

Complex governance regimes such as the HDP Nexus can create tensions if they open discussions around institutional restructuring. Such challenges should be avoided through clear communication from the heads of institutions.

Some issues are better left untouched such as cultural differences between “fields”. They naturally exist and while they can add to the human tendency to resist change, the type of resistance is often non-defined, vague and therefore difficult to address. It can disappear over time or when positive results create a momentum for a new concept.

C Operational issues that should be addressed and are linked to group B issues (finance, coordination, implementing agencies)

The last group of categories concern more practical matters of **operationalizing** the HDP Nexus: leadership and coordination, implementation modalities for implementing agencies and financing systems. These areas should be addressed and further clarified.

Due to the complexity of the HDP Nexus - compare to Baroncelli describing the HDP Nexus as an “innovative attempt at global experimentalist governance (GXG)” - coordination needs to be defined in relation to administrative levels and system boundaries. Swithern and Schreiber have worked extensively on the topic of coordination and suggest differentiating between inter-organisational level (between organisations / institutions) and intra-organisational level (within organizations / institutions) on three levels: operational, strategic and normative. They further differentiate between coordination mechanisms at global, regional, national and local levels. (Schreiber and Swithern, 2023). Of particular importance for the Swiss HDP Nexus response would be a clarification for coordination within the FDFA system and for the coordination in the country of intervention (on national, sub-national and local level), led by the UN and in particular by the Resident Coordinators Office (RCO). In response to requests from RCOs, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) took the initiative to fund and train a pool of deployable HDP Nexus advisers; several of these advisors were interviewed in the study (compare to the description of the population sample for interviews). Schreiber and Swithern explicitly mention this Swiss initiative as a positive contribution to HDP Nexus coordination efforts.

A further conclusion from interviews concerns the challenge that implementing agencies face when implementing HDP Nexus programs. It has been argued that implementing agencies (IA) attempt to implement the HDP Nexus within their own organizations. In fairness it must be said that they may also lack adequate implementation modalities and financing systems that would allow them to independently suggest and implement HDP Nexus programs. Examples that were described as successful HDP Nexus programs usually emerged from modalities where the overall goal and geographical location had already been defined, so that implementing agencies could submit proposals and form consortiums. This was for example the case for trust funds supported by donors (such as for the RSRTF in South Sudan), or when the RCO supported the formation of consortium structures. Several HDP advisors seconded by SDC described in interviews that part of their work consisted in bringing such consortium structures together.

The author suggests that the development of adequate financing systems, and the difficult task of garnering political support may need to follow after addressing mentioned challenges.

VII. Structured presentation of recommendations

This research presents a general outline of individual attitudes and critical aspects of the HDP Nexus. Recommendations remain on general level, not directed towards a specific actor; however, due to the nature of the HDP Nexus, responsibility for their implementation rather lies on senior level. The reader is advised to consider recommendations as mentioned by interviewees (see pages 26,27). The results of the thesis could serve as a steppingstone to further studies if a specific actor had an interest in one of the aspects mentioned.

1. Reconsider Switzerland's HDP Nexus approach in light of the substantial loss of funding available on global level due to the freezing of USAID funding and the US foreign policy change in general.
2. Carefully re-work the conceptual bearings of the HDP Nexus. This should include an analysis-based justification for the addition of the P element to the Humanitarian-Development Nexus and an explanation of what the P element should entail.
3. Define Switzerland's prioritized response modality in conflict-affected and fragile states in protracted crisis (FCS); clarify if the HDP Nexus is regarded as the chosen approach to this context; potentially suggest / develop an alternative "instrument for fragility" which allows long-term planning in the absence of development actors.
4. Identify and acknowledge dilemmas arising from different mandates and give guidance on how to overcome them (see annex 2).
5. Agree on and provide a policy document outlining Switzerland's HDP Nexus approach, including a step-by-step guide with examples and case studies, conduct training, research, and engage in internal and external advocacy.
6. Minimize institutional challenges through clear communication to avoid unnecessary tension, clarify if restructuring of units is envisioned - or not. Make use of resources (e.g. HDP Advisors and HDP managers as a resource group in the FDFA).
7. Clarify coordination and leadership in a matrix of inter and intra-agency coordination versus global, national and local levels.
8. Support implementing agencies such as the UN and NGOs in interagency coordination, offer modalities such as trust funds and consortium arrangements that allow them to coordinate towards a defined goal based on a certain assurance of funding.
9. Develop and offer financing systems that allow implementation across all fields of the HDP Nexus, based on the above defined solutions and modalities.

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IX. Annexes

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews

1. Introduction and explanations

The time of the interview will be 45 minutes and can be extended to 60 minutes. Due to confidentiality, interview lists will not be published, the thesis will be shared with all individuals interviewed.

2. Categories to describe population sample

Due to confidentiality rules, four categories were created to describe interviewees

- a. To which field (H, D, P) would you assign yourself?
- b. To which of the following actor groups do you belong: Foreign Government, NGO, Swiss Government, Think Tank or University, UN, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement?
- c. How many years of engagement do you have in either of the three fields (H, D, P)?
- d. Which countries / regions / thematic areas were important for your general understanding and for your understanding of the HDP Nexus in particular?

3. What do you understand by the term “HDP Nexus”?

- a. What is the ultimate goal of the HDP Nexus?
- b. Why is the HDP Nexus necessary?
- c. What in your view constitutes the P element in the HDP Nexus?

4. What are your personal attitudes with regards to the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus)

5. Could you further detail your attitude?

I will now send you in the chat three packages of feelings which represent more positive, more negative and more neutral / inquisitive connotations. Which one do you feel most attracted to? Use any of the words mentioned to describe your feelings towards the HDP Nexus more in detail:

Hopes, Needs, Motivations	Doubts, Fears, Risks, Concerns	Thoughts, Questions
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6. Snowballing: Who else would you like to recommend being interviewed?

Axis of H-D-P divergences - dilemmas

The below table is intended to give an indication of what is meant by “axis of divergence”. It is based on interviews but for practical use would need to be developed by institutions and organizations according to their needs.

	Axis	humanitarian	development	peace
1	principles	neutrality, independence, humanity, a-political	has a political dimension	peace work is political work & uses political instruments
2	mandates	save lives & relieve suffering it has no end, in the extreme case, we have to do it forever Focuses on symptoms	achieve SDGs, decrease poverty	
3	values	value-based, according to principles	human rights based approach	“Realpolitik”
4	time horizon	short-term	long-term, usually 3-5 years	short-, mid- and long-term
5	type of dialogue	often open	often open	often silent
6	target	people-centred	system based	depending on context
7	interlocutors	the population and whoever needed to get access to the population, does not usually work with the government	work with governments	work with parties to the conflict
8	implementation modality	direct	indirect, includes bigger infrastructure programs, builds institutions	direct

List of Abbreviations

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance
CCA	Common Country Analysis
D	Development
DCO	Development Coordination Office
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DDPS	Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DPG	Department of Peace Operations
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General
FDFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
FCS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected States
F4P	Fit for Purpose
GB	Grand Bargain
GXG	Global experimentalist governance
H	Humanitarian
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HDP Triple Nexus	Humanitarian, Development & Peace Nexus
HNP/HRP	Humanitarian Needs and Priorities / Humanitarian Response
IA	Implementing Agency
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INCAF	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LRRD	Linking Relief with Recovery and Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWoW	New Way of Working
MINUSMA	Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
P	Peace
PGE	Peace, Governance and Equality
PHRD	Peace and Human Rights Division
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODA	Official Development Assistance
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RSRTF	Reconstruction, Stabilization and Resilience Trust Fund
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
SG	Secretary General
UN	United Nations
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan.
UNSC	UN Security Council
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework ()
US(A)	United States (of America)
USAID	US Agency for International Development
WBG	World Bank Group
WOGA	Whole of Government Approach
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

X. Statement of Authorship

I hereby declare that I have written this assignment without any help from others and without the use of documents and aids other than those stated above. I have mentioned all used sources and cited them correctly according to established academic citation rules. I am aware that otherwise the University of Basel and swisspeace are entitled to revoke the certificate/degree awarded on the basis of this assignment.

20.03.2025, Rehetobel

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Muenchenbach', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marina Muenchenbach