GENEVA GRADUATE INSTITUTE

NORRAG GLOBAL EDUCATION CENTRE

POLICY INSIGHTS

EDUCATION AND THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS AT 10

ABOUT THE PROJECT

NORRAG's work on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus provides a platform for a range of perspectives on the reality – and ongoing challenges – of implementing a nexus approach in education, 10 years since the term entered the policy discourse. The HDP – or triple – Nexus emphasises the interconnections between humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding efforts in order to better serve affected communities; more effectively addressing and anticipating crises while also promoting sustainable development and peace. This project asks: To what extent is global action keeping up with and supporting local leadership, solutions and effectiveness, and what are ways forward in a context of increasing levels of crisis globally, and sharply reduced international funding flows?

This Policy Insights collection examines how the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus can inform – and has informed – education programming in diverse geographies, offering rich illustrations of the reality of implementing a nexus approach. Bringing together over 40 contributions from more than 100 authors from diverse geographies, half of whom are from the Global South, the publication sheds light on successes and ongoing challenges in practice and policy.

More information: www.norrageducation.org/education-and-the-humanitarian-development-peace-hdp-nexus

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

To advance both understanding and practice of the HDP Nexus through education, NORRAG convened over 80 authors from 4 continents, half of whom are from the Global South. Their contributions examine initiatives in 34 countries and provide global overviews. Contributors include teachers, young people, education authorities, practitioners (both local to the interventions and international), United Nations organisations, coordination bodies, education networks, donors and researchers. A full list of the authors who contributed to this publication, including their biographies, can be found at the end of the publication. The publication is edited by Alison Joyner, Education in Emergencies specialist at NORRAG, and Moira V. Faul, NORRAG's Executive Director. They also introduce the publication. A foreword to the publication is provided by Laura Frigenti, Chief Executive Officer for the Global Partnership for Education.

ABOUT NORRAG

NORRAG is the Global Education Centre of the Geneva Graduate Institute and is a global membership-based network of international policies and cooperation in education and training. NORRAG's core mandate is to co-produce, disseminate and broker critical knowledge and to strengthen capacity for and with academia, governments, NGOs, international organizations, foundations and the private sector who inform and shape education policies and practice, at national and international levels. Through our work, NORRAG contributes to creating the conditions for more participatory, evidence-informed decisions that improve equal access to and quality of education and training.

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FOREWORD

Laura Frigenti
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When the Humanitarian-Development–Peace Nexus was conceived a decade ago, it was both ambitious and intuitive. Crises, once thought of as short and exceptional, had become protracted and recurrent. Millions of people trapped in cycles of fragility and crisis were falling through the cracks between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance. In these contexts, aid helped people survive but often fell short of enabling them to thrive or build long-term self-reliance.

The nexus offered a new way of working: one that saves lives while simultaneously working to reduce need and support local and national systems in conflict-sensitive ways. Few sectors make this imperative – and opportunity – clearer than education. It is one of the rare investments that simultaneously protects children during a crisis, accelerates recovery, strengthens resilience and lays the foundations for peace and prosperity in the long term.

This collection of Policy Insights shares valuable insights on how translating the nexus from principle into practice strengthens education systems to withstand conflict, climate shocks, and displacement while keeping equity and learning at the center. The articles bring together diverse voices from countries, civil society, and development partners, offering practical strategies from a range of contexts. They offer valuable insights on putting people first; investing in teachers and communities; empowering local leadership and building national capacities that endure long after crises subside. Taken together, they provide a strong evidence base for what works, where resources have the greatest impact, and how to scale solutions sustainably.

Across the collection, one message stands out: lasting change must be grounded in national and local leadership and supported by flexible, sustainable financing. This lesson resonates deeply with the Global Partnership for Education. As a partnership built on the principles of country leadership and collective responsibility, we are working with governments and partners in many of these contexts to build resilient education systems – systems that can withstand shocks, recover faster, and continue delivering learning and stability for every child.

The examples in this volume show what is possible. But we must urgently accelerate progress. The world faces the highest number

of conflicts since World War II, and the learning of over 234 million children and adolescents is affected by displacement, climate change, and conflict. At the same time, financial headwinds are intensifying. Government spending is constrained by rising debt and fiscal pressures; meanwhile projections point to a 9-17% fall in net ODA in 2025, with the steepest impacts on the poorest countries. Aid to education could see the sharpest decline in decades, with total support projected to fall by more than a quarter by 2027.

Yet for every child, education remains the strongest route to a better future. Almost every desirable life outcome improves when a child learns – infant mortality drops, child marriage declines, lifetime earnings rise – and multiplied across millions, these gains transform societies, anchoring prosperity, peace, and resilience.

Looking ahead, the task is no longer how to redefine the nexus, but how to realize it. We must redouble our efforts to build strong, resilient education systems that can withstand shocks and contribute to peace, even as we grapple with resource constraints and overlapping crises.

One thing is clear: keeping learning going in crises will require a renewed collective effort. Let us ensure the next ten years deliver real progress for children.

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INTRODUCTION: DELIVERING ON THE PROMISE OF THE TRIPLE NEXUS THROUGH EDUCATION

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A decade has passed since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit proposed the Humanitarian-Development Nexus to the international community, which was then extended in 2017 by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres to also include peace. The Nexus is not an entirely new concept, as it builds on several decades of efforts to better connect its different elements, such as Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development in the 1980s and 1990s. This Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus (or Triple Nexus) framework emerged as a necessary shift away from Global North framings of crisis management as separate from development and peace-building towards coherent, context-sensitive approaches that mirror the activities undertaken in affected contexts. The Nexus emphasises the interconnections between humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding efforts to better serve affected communities, to more effectively address and anticipate crises while also promoting sustainable development and peace.

Naming the HDP Nexus in global policy did not breathe it into being; global action is lagging behind these global promises. Furthermore, education actors at the chalkface work through Nexus approaches simply because this complexity is intrinsic to their efforts to provide quality education; global action needs to support their efforts.

Our contributors show that communities, teachers and learners prioritise nexus working, even if they have never heard of the term "Nexus." By taking a nexus approach, we can

- provide learning spaces that are safe and that support learner and teacher well-being from the onset and through protracted crises, wherever possible within national education systems, benefitting displaced and host communities alike;
- support teachers in taking care of their own well-being while sensitively addressing the underlying causes of conflict and community tension in their classrooms;
- prepare systems before disaster strikes by building education into emergency response plans, and emergency preparedness into education sector plans and curricula.

In reality, however, despite numerous initiatives and policy reforms, the practical implementation of the Nexus has encountered significant challenges. Progress is impeded by pervasive structural fragmentation and persistent financial silos that prevent the genuine integration of humanitarian, development and peace efforts. The fragmentation between global short-term, reactive humanitarian financing and longer-term development funding manifests as incompatible funding streams, misaligned planning cycles, alongside divergent and duplicative accountability frameworks. This lack of joined-up, sustained and flexible financing limits coordinated action and results in disconnected, short-term service delivery.

The deep-seated divide between the structuring of global support and local solutions is the primary constraint. The gaps that remain leave affected populations underserved, and make the financing itself unsustainable and ineffective.

Operationally, localization efforts frequently fail due to centralised or global decision-making, which disregards teacher, community and government perspectives. Compliance bottlenecks exclude smaller local organisations from directly receiving the flexible funding they need despite their lived reality as de facto first and continuous responders. This exclusion is compounded by fragmented data systems and the sidelining of local knowledge, impeding

coherent, context-responsive programming. While funding silos persist, competition and duplication between actors is often rife, and coordination among diverse actors can be difficult.

The HDP Nexus prioritises collaborative cross-sectoral approaches that foreground local leadership supported by global assistance. Taking a Nexus approach requires fostering integrated and collaborative action among humanitarian, development and peace-building efforts – and the funding for these tasks – in order to achieve collective outcomes effectively and sustainably. Nexus approaches provide the most effective way to facilitate the continuity of quality education for all in all contexts.

This collection shows that a decade after the formulation of global pledges to nexus working, the richness of practice, policy and knowledge in low-income countries and contexts of emergency and protracted crisis is not supported by the policy promises and funding opportunities generally afforded by actors in Global North. Furthermore, the peace pillar is often vaguely defined or conflated with state-centric security or counter-extremism agendas when it should instead focus on the transformative possibility of quality education to promote equity, reconciliation, and community and social resilience. Global actors, including funders and technical and normative agencies, need to better understand, respond to and meet the demand for quality education that can work across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, anticipating and responding to the intensification and proliferation of crises and their increased complexity and duration.

These profound and longstanding power differences threaten the promise of the Nexus. The contributors to this Policy Insights collection show critical paths forward. Considering the impact of dramatic funding cuts in international aid during 2025, these contributors provide key takeaways for decision makers, educators and students on the main challenges concerning Nexus implementation in education. They foreground the necessity of putting local leadership and equity at the heart of HDP Nexus-informed decision-making and deployment as the only effective, cost-efficient and sustainable route forward.

The authors provide their insights in the following five sections: **Taking Stock** assesses the current status and relevance of the Nexus framework in education and aid and examines coherence, financing models and lessons learned from Nexus engagement in crisis contexts. **Centring Humanity** focuses on reimagining education centred on human well-being, with examples from how psychosocial support, social and emotional learning (SEL) and localised systems can build community and social resilience using a Triple Nexus approach. **Teaching at the Heart of the Nexus** explores the crucial role of teachers as frontline agents in operationalising the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus. It emphasises the centrality of their professional development, agency, well-being and critical function in building just peace. **Leading locally** examines the necessity of prioritising local leadership and ownership in Nexus implementation, focusing on empowering community actors, integrating community-based and national systems and addressing structural barriers in funding and coordination. **Making the Connections** emphasises the importance of strengthening the coherence and coordination of relevant actors across the Nexus. It details lessons from coordinating bodies, focusing on the integration of child protection with education and the importance of connecting evidence systems and advancing anticipatory action.

Learning from fragmented, short-term approaches, this collection demands a structural and principled realignment of global assistance behind local leadership. It is time to deliver on education's potential to contribute to meaningful Nexus implementation, recognising the importance of community and social resilience. In line with new directions set by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) as it marks its 25th anniversary, this collection's authors demand that global structures provide coordinated systems and flexible, long-term financing that prioritises local actors, recognising and amplifying the work of those on the frontlines, especially teachers, women-led organisations and young people. Forging education systems that better serve all learners, teachers, families and societies while providing the foundation for just and peaceful futures depends on their calls being answered.

1 TAKING STOCK

Taking Stock assesses the current status and relevance of the Nexus framework in education and aid, examining coherence, financing models, and lessons learned.

Tesfaye and Stoff argue that the Triple Nexus may be increasingly pertinent within the current pressured and fragmented aid architecture, which potentially deprives the most vulnerable children of learning opportunities. **Tammi and Keis** review GPE's engagement in fragile contexts and find more systematic coordination between humanitarian and development actors (including local actors) has led to collective prioritisation and the use of innovative financing to support crisis-affected children. To achieve coherence in education responses, **Smiley, Viko, Winters, Falk, Pacifico, Deitz and Kwok** foreground donor flexibility, sustained long-term financing—frequently through crisis modifiers—and continued investment in trust-building with national stakeholders. **Hervey, Hure and Sellami** posit that addressing the issue of invisible Out-of-School Children arguably requires HDP Nexus actors to pursue more integrated planning, promote policy alignment around inclusive documentation and enrolment, and secure flexible, multiyear funding arrangements.

Telford and Taylor argue that the inclusion of refugees within national education systems is often an effective and sustainable pathway for advancing Triple Nexus objectives; however, the authors note that implementation may be constrained by a persistent catch-22 in which host governments seek assured financing prior to full policy commitment. **Pinna and Stoff** draw on a joint analysis by ECW and UNESCO's GEM Team to explore how fragmented reporting systems across humanitarian and development aid make it difficult for strategic, technical and financing actors to ensure that investments break silos and remain responsive to context. **Volkdal** maintains that education holds the potential to reconceptualise the Triple Nexus from a linear framework into a more dynamic, adaptive and multidirectional system—one that emphasises structural inclusion and places local actors at its centre.

IS THE NEXUS STILL RELEVANT? RETHINKING COHERENCE IN EDUCATION AID

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Key takeaways:

- Centre communities to enhance resilience and social cohesion: Strengthen local ownership by channelling more funding and leadership to local actors while mitigating the risks they face in conflict settings. Inclusive, conflict-sensitive, community-based education responses can also foster social cohesion and peace.
- Make the nexus more practical: Simplify the language and concepts around the nexus and develop clear measurement tools that connect ideas to practice and demonstrate tangible outcomes.
- Strengthen coordinated financing for EiEPC: Sustain joint donor approaches such as pooled funding while recognising the complementary roles of different actors. ECW highlights the urgent needs of crisis-affected learners and lays the groundwork for development efforts, while partners such as GPE and the World Bank scale efforts through long-term investments in national education systems (Education Cannot Wait and Global Partnership for Education, 2023).

Aid cuts have forced a reckoning in global education as it seeks to determine how to respond to the learning crisis with fewer resources. Some have called for tighter mandates among a smaller set of global actors (Burnett, 2025), while "hyper-prioritization" in appeals has narrowed what counts as a humanitarian need, reducing emergency education funding requirements by 33% in 2025 (Education Cannot Wait and UNESCO GEM Report, 2025).

Yet, these distinctions are constructed, rather than real. The line between humanitarian and development needs is blurred, with the World Bank projecting that by 2030, 60% of people in extreme poverty will be in fragile, conflict-affected countries —the very contexts at the center of humanitarian crises (World Bank, 2024).

For two decades, the concept of the nexus (and more recently the triple nexus) has shaped discourse on aid effectiveness. Recent funding shifts and wider trends have now raised the question of how the nexus can adapt– and remain relevant – in a changing aid landscape.

Putting the Nexus to Work in Fragile Contexts

Most education in emergencies and protracted crisis (EiEPC) needs arise in fragile, conflict-affected settings in which humanitarian and development challenges intersect.[1] Development institutions such as the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) have increasingly expanded their investments to strengthen education systems in these contexts.

Development actors, however, face serious obstacles carrying out their objectives when governments lack legitimacy. In 2022, nearly half of people living in World Bank–designated fragile states were in countries where donor–government relations were "politically estranged" (Cliffe, S., Dwan, R., Wainaina, B., & Zamore, L., 2023). Meeting education needs in these cases requires alternative channels, as donors often suspend direct engagement with governments.

By contrast, humanitarian actors such as ECW have the mandate and flexibility to respond quickly in politically fluid contexts, delivering education through local and international partners. Laying the groundwork for sustainable

responses remains essential even in crises. Where collaboration with national partners is possible, humanitarians integrate crisis needs into national strategies; where direct engagement with a government would conflict with humanitarian principles (as in Afghanistan), humanitarians work with partners and communities to provide harmonized, alternative education support that can eventually transition into sustainable development efforts.

Lessons from the Field

At ECW, we recognise that working in protracted crises requires both immediate responses to prevent education disruption and continued support embedded in local systems and communities to secure continued access and learning for crisis-affected children. For us, the nexus is simply a modus operandi to deliver quality and sustainable programming. Examples from our programmes demonstrate that bridging the nexus can deliver more coherent and sustainable results.

Amid conflict in Sudan, our Multi-Year Resilience Programme (MYRP) partnered with humanitarian and development actors to integrate data on emergency education needs from crisis-affected areas into the Transitional Education Plan. Its structured non-formal education model– later adopted by partners funded by GPE and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA) of the European Union – was scaled across crisis-affected states, promoting coherence through harmonised approaches. In Myanmar, following the 2021 military coup that disrupted the education system, the MYRP became the primary platform for aligning education funding among partners in conflict-affected areas. Linked to the Education Cluster Strategy, the MYRP aligns with GPE's Education Sector Programme Implementation Grant, ensuring coherence through joint results measurement and a shared steering committee. Similarly, in South Sudan, the MYRP collaborated with the Ministry of General Education to develop a costed Education Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, helping to institutionalise emergency needs and crisis response within government planning.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. First, ECW's experience underscores the persistent gap between global discourse and practice, as practitioners are often constrained by the complex language and concepts surrounding the nexus. To address this, we have sought to simplify and operationalise the approach through a practical guide and new efforts to measure nexus-related outcomes (Education Cannot Wait, 2025). Another challenge lies in the peace gap: while peace is a core pillar of the nexus, many humanitarian efforts – limited by political sensitivities and gaps in understanding peacebuilding – do not fully leverage education's role in fostering peace. This represents a missed opportunity to align education with broader peace outcomes. Finally, donor politics continue to shape education funding decisions, often skewing resources toward strategic partners such as Ukraine while leaving politically isolated countries like Mali behind. Meeting global education needs, however, requires engagement in all crisis-affected contexts, which can be achieved by channelling support through needs-based multilateral mechanisms.

Conclusion

Is the nexus still relevant in EiEPC? In today's pressured aid architecture, we find that it is more relevant than ever. Humanitarian interventions that provide one-off support without linking to education systems risk fragmentation, while development investments that fail to address crisis-related gaps leave the most vulnerable children without learning opportunities. Rather than reverting to compartmentalising, the global education architecture must build on recent lessons and continue to strengthen linkages between humanitarian, development and peace efforts.

Footnote

1. See definition of "Fragility": What Does State Fragility Mean? | Fragile States Index

SYSTEM CHANGE THROUGH INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE, COLLECTIVE PRIORITISATION AND COORDINATED FINANCING: A REVIEW OF THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION'S ENGAGEMENT IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

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Key takeaways:

- Coordinate through country-led structures: Humanitarian coordination platforms are temporary in nature and should support national coordination structures, including the local education group, to integrate core functions performed by humanitarian coordination platforms in the long term.
- Provide sustainable financing across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus: Combining and sequencing public and private finance that aligns with national priorities and strengthens education systems will be essential at a time in which global education aid is shrinking.
- Create multi-sector partnerships for change: Humanitarian actors have ample experience in multisector coordination, which can inform how governments, civil society and international partners better coordinate and mobilise resources to achieve outcomes for children across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) supports country-led, inclusive reforms that are underpinned by strong education systems, strategic partnerships and sustainable financing. Functioning as both a fund and a partnership, GPE provides grants to lower income countries and brings together governments, civil societies, multilateral organisations, teachers, the private sector and philanthropy to build equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century. We at GPE focus on countries with the greatest need and children who are most at risk of being left behind. As of 2025, 40 of our partner and eligible countries—out of a total of 96—are fragile and conflict-affected (GPE, 2025). Strengthening systems to withstand the impacts of fragility, conflict and climate change, and mitigating the systemic impacts of these crises on children, continue to be critical to GPE's mission. In most cases, this implies working with national governments; however, in cases where this is not feasible, GPE supports service delivery and prevents system collapse.

In this contribution, we review GPE's support for inclusive dialogue, collective prioritisation and coordinated financing across the humanitarian–development–peace-nexus.

Through the partnership compact process, partner countries articulate—in a strategic document known as a partnership compact—how they intend to work with others around a priority reform that has the potential to catalyse system-wide change. This includes identifying and addressing system inequities and gender inequality (GPE, 2024). By June 2025, 34 partner countries affected by fragility and conflict had developed partnership compacts, articulating the roadmap for each country's prioritised education system reforms (GPE, 2025). Evaluation evidence indicates that GPE"s model is improving inclusive dialogue by identifying and prioritising the conditions that impede the achievement of better education outcomes in partner countries (Triple Line, 2024). An independent review also suggests that the model has led to better evidence use, deeper policy dialogue, and improved integration of gender

equality, including in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict (Kellum and Tsolakis, 2025).

Evidence indicates that education coordination in crisis contexts drives coherent planning and timeliness of responses, leading to better education continuity and coverage of crisis-affected children (INEE, 2021; ODI, 2020). GPE's partnership compact process is an opportunity for ministries of education and their partners to critically examine sector coordination practices to understand how mechanisms can best support and accelerate change in a priority reform area. In 2024 and 2025, nine of the 17 partner countries affected by fragility and conflict that reported progress to improve sector coordination were on track, and five had made progress in spite of some delays that are likely to be resolved (GPE, 2025). For example, the Central African Republic has made progress in holding regular local education group meetings with the participation of the Education Cluster co-lead. It has also organised both a national joint sector review and regional (sub-national) sector reviews in 20 regions for the first time.

We are seeing progress in inclusive dialogue mirrored in the composition of local education groups, which bring together education actors at the national level. Since 2020, 27 partner countries or federal states affected by fragility and conflict have added representatives from civil society, teacher associations, or both, to their local education groups. As of 2025, 25 partner countries or federal states affected by fragility and conflict have both types of representatives in the local education group, while 14 have one of the two types. Evaluation evidence underscores the fundamental role of civil society in establishing inclusive, quality education systems and confirms the role of Education Out Loud (EOL), the GPE fund for civil society advocacy and social accountability, in supporting effective engagement and influence of CSOs (INTRAC, 2025). For example, EOL-supported civil society grantees contributed to the partnership compact process in Burkina Faso. They also monitored the implementation of education plans, which served as an advocacy tool to influence decision-makers to ensure educational continuity for marginalised children in conflict-affected areas of the country (Oxfam Denmark, 2024). GPE 2030, the partnership's new strategic plan, will deepen this support, strengthening the role of teachers in reform and ensuring that children, students and youth are more systematically included in national decision-making and accountability processes.

The GPE fund mobilises financing from diverse sources to support and sustain education reforms. It unlocks and aligns external sources of financing tailored to each country"s ambitions and contexts. Since 2021, nearly US$1.2 billion has been mobilised in co-financing for partner countries affected by fragility and conflict, representing nearly a third of all co-financing mobilised by GPE during this period. In Ukraine, a combination of financial support from GPE, implementation support from UNICEF and financial and in-kind support from Microsoft and Google allowed the country to open digital learning centres equipped with computers and an internet connection in places where schools cannot reopen (GPE, 2025). Meanwhile, in South Sudan, where floods damaged nearly 900 schools in a single season (2021–2022), GPE and the Green Climate Fund have combined their financial resources to support the adoption of a national climate-education policy, revise school construction standards to integrate hazard-resistant and gender-sensitive designs, and pilot 75 green schools—models that combine safe infrastructure, sustainable water and energy use, and environmental clubs to promote climate awareness in the community—in flood- and drought-prone areas.

GPE's operational framework for effective support in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, adopted in 2013, outlines that, in situations such as coups d'état, armed conflicts, or human rights abuse, GPE can continue to engage with education actors without direct government intervention to protect children's best interests and the elements of the education system closest to communities. The framework allows for accelerated support so that partners can respond to urgent crisis-related education needs while continuing to support system strengthening, and also ensures that GPE takes a coordinated and complementary approach with humanitarian actors, including Education Cannot Wait, the global fund dedicated to education in emergencies. Following a coup d'etat in Myanmar in 2021, GPE's coordinating agencies played a critical role in aligning humanitarian and development partners under a national strategic joint response framework (GPE, 2025).

The start of GPE's new strategic period—and GPE 2030 strategy—coincides with multiple overlapping crises spanning conflict, climate change, debt distress and demographic pressures—the impact of which is felt hardest in partner countries affected by fragility and conflict. Paradoxically, even though equitable education is critical to unlocking social, economic and peace dividends that drive stability and resilience, deep cuts are being made to external aid to education.

At the core of strong education systems is the fact that they deliver for all. Coordination across the nexus, equitable financing, and multisector partnerships are among the factors that support realizing that ambition of leaving no one behind. In crisis contexts, systematic coordination between humanitarian and development actors is critical to reinforce equity, efficiency and resilience. Meanwhile, all education finance, including domestic financing, needs to be allocated equitably and tracked so that resources are used to improve outcomes for the most marginalised girls and boys. Finally, partnerships allow us create solutions that address the reality of the learning crisis being deeply connected with forces outside the education sector, including climate change, malnutrition and violence.

FLEXIBLE FINANCING ACROSS THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS: A CASE STUDY OF PLAYMATTERS

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Key takeaways:

- Commit to flexible funding in countries prone to insecurity by embedding mechanisms for flexibility, such as crisis modification preparedness plans, anticipatory action plans and ongoing/open dialogue with implementing partners.
- Commit to long-term investment for education interventions using a nexus approach by prioritising multi-year projects, providing opportunities to extend post-project funding with bridging or add-on grants and/or building upon projects that demonstrate evidence of quality and impact.
- Commit to investing in relationships with national stakeholders that enable education interventions to align with national priorities, expand reach and enhance sustainability.
- Commit to embedding research and learning in programme design in partnership with national universities and government stakeholders to develop trust in intervention approaches and their associated evidence.

Bridging the structural divide between humanitarian financing, which is shorter term, reactive and channelled through non-state actors, and development financing, which is longer term and aligned with national systems, has long presented challenges in achieving coherence across the humanitarian-development nexus. Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions with 92 practitioners, donors and national stakeholders, this article presents learnings from PlayMatters, an education initiative by the LEGO Foundation, the International Rescue Committee and partners in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda. PlayMatters supports national systems in integrating learning through play as an active teaching method to improve children's holistic learning and well-being across acute crises and development contexts. PlayMatters defines education coherence as the alignment of systems, actors and contexts across humanitarian and development sectors to meet urgent educational needs and support long-term education sector change to positively impact refugee and host communities.

First, education coherence requires flexible funding aligned with longer-term outcomes, while enabling responsiveness to immediate needs and emerging crises. Donor flexibility facilitated PlayMatters' response to emerging issues while pursuing long-term education objectives. At the country-level, the LEGO Foundation allowed PlayMatters to redirect substantial funds to activate an emergency response mechanism in Ethiopia – a one-year, multi-sectoral supplemental intervention designed to support crisis-affected children in 2022. Learning from this emergency response mechanism, the LEGO Foundation now includes crisis modifiers – a pre-agreed mechanism between the foundation and partners that allows for the rapid reallocation of resources and the adaptation of activities in response to acute crises – in new awards. Crisis modifiers enable long-term, system-strengthening projects to respond to acute emergencies, minimising the negative effects a crisis can have on system-strengthening objectives.

In protracted refugee contexts, donor flexibility enabled PlayMatters to address critical education school-level needs for refugee and host communities (such as school renovation, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, menstrual hygiene management

and pre-primary caregiver stipends) that are foundational for meeting the goals of the project. One PlayMatters staff member shared that these shifts were possible through "dialogue and advocacy with the donor," whose openness to learning and adapting contributed to more effective programming.

Despite this financial and programmatic flexibility, many basic needs remained unmet in both host and protracted refugee communities, impeding efforts to support education through a nexus approach. For example, one field staff member lamented that "in that one week, over 50 children had collapsed because of hunger," underscoring the challenge of implementing pedagogical reforms, such as learning through play, when learners are struggling to meet their basic needs. This is the reality in many crisis-affected contexts, pointing to the value of multi-sectoral programming such as the emergency response mechanism, which holistically supports both children and teachers and provides flexible funding in response to immediate needs while pursuing long-term education objectives.

Second, education coherence requires sustained financing to strengthen systems. The five year duration of the PlayMatters programme provided a strategic advantage in pursuit of longer-term objectives beyond traditional short-term humanitarian funding cycles. Despite this, many PlayMatters staff members felt that substantive policy change still requires more time. One explained that even with the positive response from national stakeholders, they did not think that "the government machinery would have picked the new [learning through play] practices and adopted them fully… [because] investing in the system is not something that you do it, and then you believe that it 's going to work within five years."

Achieving lasting change in refugee and host community education requires long-term investment from donors; it involves moving beyond fragmented, short-term funding to strengthen systems and sustain impact across humanitarian and development sectors. The LEGO Foundation moved in this direction and recently awarded PlayMatters a bridging grant along with a new funding opportunity to scale learning through play across project countries by strengthening systems at the local, sub-national and national levels. This reflects a rare commitment to additional funding beyond the original five-year project timeline, strengthening education coherence across the nexus.

Third, education coherence requires building trust through sustained relationships with national stakeholders, not working around them, and demonstrating evidence of impact. PlayMatters has invested in relationships with national stakeholders from the outset of the project, through the project launch, co-creation of content, memorandums of understanding and ongoing policy alignment and systems strengthening activities. Nurturing these relationships has enabled PlayMatters to: (1) align the project with national policy priorities, (2) expand the project's reach by leveraging existing education infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms, (3) promote sustainability by strengthening the institutional capacity to deliver learning through play and (4) influence policy by using evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of learning through play.

Two strategies were consistently cited by participants as central for strengthening these relationships: (1) seconding project staff to ministries of education; and (2) establishing a community of practice for learning through play that brought together ministries of education, humanitarian and development actors. These strategies require sustained investment in staffing and financing for continuous coordination and engagement.

PlayMatters also built trust with governments by investing in research and collaborating with senior researchers from national universities, which enhanced its credibility and helped legitimise its recommendations to ministries of education. This was made possible through the LEGO Foundation's commitment to prioritising learning within projects. Generating and utilising evidence, particularly at the impact level, takes time, again highlighting the need for longer-term funding commitments.

ACHIEVING SDG 4 BY MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THE PROMISE OF THE TRIPLE NEXUS

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Key takeaways:

- Humanitarian and development actors must coordinate and adopt integrated approaches as well as work with national governments and local stakeholders to strengthen education planning.
- Disaggregated data on OOSC is needed to inform effective planning, coordination and service delivery that maximises opportunities for these children to benefit from inclusive quality education.
- National identity systems and school admission processes should be aligned to enable flexible and inclusive enrolment policies, particularly for displaced and undocumented children.
- Multi-year, pooled funding is essential across humanitarian and development budgets to support the education needs of marginalised children.
- Diversification of the education offer is necessary to make systems more inclusive and accessible for learners, especially the most marginalised.

Approximately 272 million children and youth are out of school globally, up from 244 million in 2020. Of these children, 78 million were at the primary level (UNESCO, 2025). Despite significant policy efforts and programmatic investments, progress has stalled or reversed in many fragile, conflict-affected and displaced settings (Education Above All Foundation, 2023). For children who are displaced, undocumented and living in extreme poverty, often, education is not merely delayed – it is denied.

The systemic failure to link humanitarian urgency, development planning and peacebuilding efforts is at the heart of this crisis. Many emergencies today are protracted, blurring the lines between humanitarian response and development. The humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus was introduced to address this fragmentation. However, there remains an urgent need for a stronger, more deliberate centring of education at the onset of emergency and in planning and response, thereby ensuring the continuity of learning and building resilience. The nexus can – and must – serve as the bridge to bring about better linkages between humanitarian response and development planning.

Out-of-School Children as a Nexus Indicator

EAA's 2023 report argues that out-of-school children (OOSC) remain "invisible" to many systems. These children are excluded from educational statistics, policy frameworks and learning itself (EAA, 2023). Yet, the number and percentage of OOSC serve as important indicators for whether systems are functioning inclusively across the HDP nexus. Their exclusion is not accidental; it is the result of interlinked failures in education, documentation, protection and governance. For example, stateless and undocumented children – such as the Rohingya in Bangladesh or displaced youth in the Sahel – are frequently denied access to school due to identity requirements (UNHCR, 2023; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). Such barriers are rarely addressed within education ministries alone. Moreover, EAA (2023) highlights that, barriers to education often lie outside the education system: legal status, geographic isolation, poor infrastructure and conflict-induced trauma all inhibit access.

EAA's EAC programme and partners have reached over 14.5 million OOSC in 57 countries

through integrated approaches. EAC's focus on primary education is strategic. It is at this level that children gain the foundational skills – literacy, numeracy, socio-emotional development – that are essential for further learning and development. Prioritising the most marginalised children at this stage helps prevent educational exclusion and supports the transition to post-primary education, thereby advancing progress towards SDG 4.

Operationalising the Nexus for Out-of-School Children: What Works?

1. Integrated planning, not parallel tracks: Humanitarian and development education actors continue to operate on separate timelines, mandates and metrics. For OOSC, particularly displaced and other mobile populations, this results in fragmented service delivery. To close these gaps, it is essential to have nexus-informed needs assessments, aligned indicators and integrated programme cycles. EAC works with partners to address these needs. For example, EAC's partner project in Djibouti established a government-managed information system to count and track every child, including refugees. In Iran, EAC's partner project worked with the country's ministry of education to waive school fees for Afghan refugees. EAC's projects have also partnered with governments and organisations in Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda to integrate refugees into national education systems.

2. Inclusion through documentation and policy reform: Undocumented children, especially refugees and migrant populations, are often ineligible for enrolment. Nexus actors must work together to enable access to registration, legal identity documentation and education, including support for education policy reform. In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, EAC's partner project supported local policy changes to facilitate birth registration that allows school enrolment for undocumented children.

3. Sustained and flexible financing: Traditional education financing remains inflexible and focused on the short term. In contrast, success in protracted crisis settings was most evident in areas where funding supported multi-year planning and included core support to local actors, especially community-based organisations and frontline education providers. EAC's multi-year funding approach, combined with its co-funding model, ensures sustained financing aligned with key stakeholders, such as national governments, funders and international and local organisations.

4. Education for peacebuilding: Inclusive and conflict-sensitive education is vital to supporting the peace-building element of the nexus approach. Nexus-informed programming recognises education as a protective intervention and platform for social cohesion. In addition, EAC has leveraged catch-up, bridging, remedial and accelerated learning programmes as flexible and alternative learning options. These programmes have played a key role in expanding access and fostering understanding, inclusion and stability among displaced populations in countries such as Kenya, Pakistan, Sudan, and Syria.

MIND THE GAP: FINANCING FOR REFUGEE EDUCATION

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Key takeaways:

- Including refugees into national education systems works across the triple nexus in terms of both coordination and long-term impact.
- Including refugees into national education systems is the most effective and sustainable strategy: It provides refugees with certified qualifications that facilitate education and livelihoods pathways and with opportunities to strengthen host country's education system for all children. This fosters social cohesion and economic benefits for the long term.
- Significant funding challenges create a deadlock: While bridges between humanitarian and development finance and a long-term vision to economic growth are available, host governments are reluctant to fully include refugees without secured funding, while development funding is often tied to supporting national systems.
- While change is possible, shared responsibility across the triple nexus is essential to moving forward: Overcoming constraints requires international partners to fulfil their financial commitments, responding to and incentivizing policy changes from host governments. Granting refugees the right to work is crucial, as it allows them to contribute to household education costs and the host country's tax base, thus expanding the domestic resources available to everyone.

Including refugee children and youth into national education systems is the most efficient, effective and sustainable approach to ensuring predictability, pathways to certification and more robust quality assurance. The protracted nature of displacement means that refugees will be outside of their country for 13 years on average, long enough to complete significant parts of their education pathway. Refugees are often hosted by communities with the lowest education and economic outcomes in a particular country, thus. Strengthening national education systems to support refugees contributes to the triple nexus not only by increasing coordination between the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors but by creating education pathways for citizens, thereby contributing to local economies and fostering social cohesion.

Throughout history, refugees have been welcomed and integrated by host communities. However, global forced displacement has more than doubled since 2020, resulting in an increase in the number of camps or settlements offering parallel education services managed and funded by the international community. Education opportunities in these settings are often based on projects offered by non-state partners, without guaranteed certification and transition pathways. The lack of consistent regulation found in national education systems and challenges related to leveraging economies of scale can mean this is an expensive approach with limited impact.

The formal adoption of the inclusion approach was inscribed in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR, 2018), a United Nations (UN) framework that promotes international cooperation and responsibility-sharing in addressing refugee situations. The framework aims to ease pressures on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third-country solutions and support refugees' safe return to countries of origin. It acts as the cornerstone of negotiation between host governments, the international community and refugee and host populations. Aligning funds and funding approaches, with the aim of improving services for both refugees and host countries, was a key focus of the Global Refugee Forums in 2019 and 2023 (GRF, 2023). There have been strong examples of success such as Kenya's Shirika Plan and the establishment of the INSPIRE technical assistance facility with the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Foreign Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO).

However continued reductions in international and domestic education finance along with increasing needs mean that the education of almost 15 million refugee children and the opportunity to improve services and access for – often marginalised – host community children around the world, remain at risk.

What Does Refugee Education Cost?

The World Bank and UNHCR estimate that the annual cost of educating the nearly 15 million refugee children worldwide in host-country public schools is US$9.3 billion annually. Conversely, the total cost of educating all refugee children in Low Income Countries (LICs) –nearly 2.4 million students –is only US$309 million. These calculations are premised on refugees receiving the same education opportunities as host-country children, delivered and managed through the same channels. Additionally, national systems should not be negatively impacted by receiving refugees (e.g. overcrowded classrooms). The World Bank-UNHCR costing methodology used to develop the costing includes a coefficient that recognizes that refugees also have unique and specific needs, such as language support. This coefficient is in addition to the per capita cost applied for nationals.

The global government spend across basic education per child is $130 in low-income countries and $659 in lower-middle-income (LMIC) countries. It is important to note the significant cost of secondary-level education compared to primary-level education: in LMICs, the annual cost per child at primary level is $483 compared to $817 at secondary level. While the expenditure covered by these funds in each country will differ, core expenses include teacher remuneration, school infrastructure, classroom resources and the costs of conducting examinations.

What Funding is Available?

There is a significant data gap regarding financing for refugee education. While impressive efforts such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s 2023 survey have enabled the first large-scale, sector-specific estimates of Official Development Assistance (ODA), substantial information gaps persist. Data on domestic government and philanthropic expenditure are seldom disaggregated by refugee status. However, an analysis of the OECD data reveals that education is the third-largest sector for refugee funding, receiving approximately US$2.3 billion per year. This analysis reveals that financial support is not distributed equitably; 75% of funding for refugee education is concentrated in just four countries that host 25% of all refugees.

Unlike other sectors, a striking 89% of education funding for refugees comes from development finance rather than humanitarian aid. This represents an opportunity to accelerate refugee inclusion in national education systems in line with nexus approaches, including refugee education in development partnerships that are more likely to take place over multiple years and be embedded in sector management. Education for citizens remains largely funded by domestic finance. However, the necessary focus on domestic populations who may already struggle to access education, along with the systems and processes governing financial flows, have left refugee schools and learners without support to cover critical costs that are usually funded by the state, such as teacher payments and operational expenses.

What Needs to Be Done?

Host governments have made significant progress on legislation and policy for refugee inclusion in national systems. The successful implementation of these policies depends on whether the parties to the Global Compact on Refugees fulfil their commitments to share the costs of implementation.

The decision to fully include refugees into national systems can be a catch-22: without funding, many governments are reluctant to commit; without this commitment, however, refugee schools remain parallel and receive limited benefit from development financing that aims to support national schools.

In addition, future work must consider that while government expenditures account for approximately three-quarters of global education financing, a significant portion of the remaining funds comes from household contributions. Providing support to refugee households unable to work should be seen as part of their transition costs. Parties to the Global Compact on Refugees must enhance their efforts to ensure that refugees are able to work. This will create opportunities for individual and household economic independence and social agency and allow refugees to formally contribute to the host country's tax base. In turn, this will expand domestic financing available for everyone in the country and promote overall economic growth. This is in line with nexus approaches that shift from humanitarian support to foster long-term stability, reduce vulnerability and achieve collective outcomes.

EDUCATION FINANCING IN CRISIS: THE ROLE OF DATA IN BREAKING SILOS

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Key takeaways:
For all these reasons and to support limited funding effectively going where it is needed most, ECW calls for the following actions:

- Break financing and information silos: Promote interoperability across humanitarian and development data systems (FTS, IATI, CRS) to enable a comprehensive and shared understanding of education financing in crisis-affected contexts.
- Improve data quality and transparency: Standardise definitions, ensure consistent sector tagging, and incentivise timely, disaggregated and accessible publication of education disbursements to strengthen accountability and planning.
- Foster coherence across funding streams: Ensure that humanitarian, development and other financing (e.g. climate, philanthropic and blended) are strategically aligned at the global and country levels to maximise impact and sustain education outcomes in crises.
- Invest in evidence for decision-making: Support initiatives that build integrated, transparent and accessible financing analyses to inform more predictable, complementary and context-responsive education investments.

In 2025, global aid to education fell sharply, and it is projected to decline by 25% in 2027 — the steepest drop since the 1990s (UNESCO GEM, 2025). Cuts to humanitarian education funding are projected to be even more severe: by mid-2025, the sector had received less than a third of the total humanitarian education funding mobilised in 2024 (USD 1.17 billion) (GGHEiE, 2025).

In response, humanitarian education funding requirements were hyper-prioritised in each country with an OCHA Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan and were reduced by 33% overall, resulting in the exclusion of more than 33 million learners from planned aid (GEC, 2025). This contraction comes amid escalating and prolonged crises — with one in six children globally living in or fleeing conflict (UNICEF, 2024) and 83% of people in need residing in countries facing protracted and complex crises (ECHO, 2023) characterised by recurrent conflict, displacement and chronic vulnerability.

Ensuring that every dollar achieves the greatest possible impact is critical in these circumstances of shrinking aid and rising needs. This context calls for coherence across humanitarian and development financing so that short-term interventions contribute to long-term outcomes. Achieving such coherence requires clear, comprehensive financing data that reveal how funds flow, where they overlap and how different streams interact in crisis contexts. Only by seeing the entire picture can education actors make informed, strategic and sustainable decisions.

Fragmented Financing and the Challenge of Coherence

Education in crisis settings often sits at the intersection of emergency response and long-term system strengthening. While the humanitarian–development–peace nexus has gained policy traction over the past decade, financing practices still lag behind in operationalising it. Most aid systems continue to sharply distinguish between humanitarian and development budgets, even though realities on the ground defy such separation.

In recent years, pooled funding mechanisms such as Education Cannot Wait (ECW) have helped bridge this divide by aligning humanitarian and development resources while promoting multi-year, collaborative planning. Coordination among actors is improving at the

country level reflecting the need for flexible approaches that address both immediate learning continuity and systemic recovery. However, progress towards coherence is often constrained by data and reporting systems that remain fragmented, making it difficult to capture, analyse and optimise the full spectrum of education financing in crisis contexts.

Fragmented Visibility: A Partial Picture

Existing reporting systems provide valuable but incomplete insights into education financing. Humanitarian funding is tracked through OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS). The OECD's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) captures development and humanitarian flows from DAC donors but lacks timely, sector-specific detail, while the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) offers project-level data, although its humanitarian tag is inconsistently applied. Each system sheds light on part of the landscape —yet none offers a full view (GGHEiE, 2022).

To address this, ECW and UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report teams have assessed and consolidated the data from these sources (2021–2024) (ECW and UNESCO GEM, 2025) to build a more comprehensive picture of education financing across humanitarian and development streams globally and in 11 protracted crisis contexts: Afghanistan, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Haiti, Nigeria, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Ukraine.

The analysis found limited duplication across systems and thus confirmed that a reliance on a single reporting stream—particularly one focused on humanitarian aid—can obscure significant volumes of education funding, even in the most severe and protracted crises. In the 11 countries analysed by ECW, only 28% of total education funding was reported in OCHA's FTS, while 17% of EiE-tagged funds were found exclusively in the IATI.

Inconsistent reporting and incomplete sector tagging further revealed important visibility gaps: After applying thematic keyword filters, over half of "humanitarian response" and 57% of "displacement-related " transactions in the IATI were missing from the FTS.

At the global level, UNESCO GEM's analysis of data from the OECD's CRS and IATI showed that the share of education in emergencies and protracted crises financing channelled through humanitarian systems declined from 30% in 2017 to just 8% in 2023. While absolute figures may vary with different filters, the trend is clear: Most education support in protracted crises now flows through non humanitarian channels, and the humanitarian share continues to shrink. In addition, we were not able to quantify the major gaps in data related to domestic and private financing.

These analyses and missing data jointly underscore the importance of developing a more integrated and transparent picture of funding flows to strengthen complementarity across the humanitarian–development nexus at both the global and country levels.

Towards a More Coherent Financing Picture

Improving the visibility and interoperability of financing data is a foundational step towards greater coherence. This includes strengthening common definitions, ensuring consistent sector tagging and promoting the systematic publication of and access to timely, disaggregated disbursement data. The goal is not to merge systems but to connect them, thereby enabling a fuller, shared understanding of the financing landscape that improves better decision-making and accountability.

Initiatives such as ECW's collaboration with UNESCO's GEM team on joint analysis and data transparency illustrate how this can work in practice. By bridging information across humanitarian and development data sources, such efforts help reveal the true scale and diversity of education investments in crisis-affected contexts as well as identify opportunities for greater alignment.

Conclusion

In a time of declining aid and expanding crises, making the most of every dollar destined to the education sector in contexts of emergencies and protracted crises requires breaking down both financial and informational silos. Dedicated humanitarian funding will always be essential for rapid response; however, separating it too rigidly from development financing risks inefficiency and missed opportunities for sustained impact.

Momentum towards building synergies beyond the humanitarian–development divide is growing—linking sectors and financing streams such as climate finance, philanthropic capital, and innovative tools like blended and results-based financing. Strengthening the visibility and alignment of education financing can help ensure that investments are complementary, predictable and responsive to context. Ultimately, seeing the whole picture is not about merging systems or mandates but about connecting information to enable smarter, more coherent action for crisis-affected learners.

REIMAGINING THE TRIPLE NEXUS THROUGH EDUCATION: OPERATIONALIZING COHERENCE AMID COMPLEXITY

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Key takeaways:

- Design education responses in crises using the triple nexus as an adaptive, multidirectional strategy that allows for movement between emergency, development and peacebuilding pathways as local needs change.
- Strengthen support for local education actors (including teachers) as knowledge-holders and decision-makers, and not simply as implementers, through core funding, technical training and meaningful inclusion in coordination platforms.
- Develop and apply context-responsive evaluation frameworks for Nexus education programs that look beyond short-term outputs to capture intersectoral synergies and long-term learning outcomes.

While the triple nexus – which integrates humanitarian, development and peacebuilding responses – has emerged in response to the shift from fragmented crisis management to coherent, context-sensitive approaches, the education sector remains promising but undertheorized. Education is essential for restoring hope, resilience and crisis prevention, but is often treated as either short-term aid or long-term development. This contribution argues that education reframes the triple nexus not as a linear sequence but as a dynamic, adaptive (Coetzee et al., 2016; de Coning, 2020) and multidirectional system (Jackson, 2001; Meadows, 2008; Stroh, 2015) that strengthens institutional practice (Hawkins, 2024).

Communities in crisis frequently request education first (INEE et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2025), yet systems require sustained investment, multisectoral coordination and inclusive governance. This duality illustrates the broader nexus tension of aligning short-term responsiveness with long-term transformation Evidence shows education systems often traverse the nexus more organically than other sectors (ECW, 2025b; UNICEF, 2021, 2024), with education actors increasingly coordinating crisis response, systemic strengthening and peacebuilding (ECW, 2025a, 2025b).

Like the disaster management cycle (Bali, 2024; Coetzee, 2010; Tay et al., 2022), nexus dimensions are not linear but cyclical and multidirectional (Mena et al., 2022). While this fluidity remains underexplored, it is critical for nexus-aligned programming.

Persistent structural bottlenecks – misaligned planning cycles, incompatible funding streams and divergent accountability frameworks– impede education's role within the nexus (UNICEF, 2025). Without predictable financing, adaptive metrics and genuine local agency, education risks remaining rhetorical. Avoiding the use of the nexus as a buzzword (Cornwall, 2007) requires actionable strategies that prioritise equity, local epistemologies and institutional agility alongside reforms in coordination, financing and accountability.

A systems thinking (Meadows, 2008; Sterman, 2000) perspective helps reveal these constraints while offering tools to navigate them. Education systems function as complex adaptive systems that are marked by interdependence, feedback loops and path dependency. Within nexus implementations, this complexity often gives rise to tensions between sectoral mandates, such as between the immediate protective needs of children in crisis settings and the longer-term goals of systemic curriculum reform. These are not necessarily incompatible, but they may compete for limited resources, operate on different timelines, or reflect divergent institutional priorities. Similar tensions exist between donor-driven programming and locally defined needs, as well as between short-term service delivery and long-term inclusion. Education thus serves not only as a delivery mechanism but also as a structural entry point for promoting coherence, with teacher deployment, language policy and psychosocial support shaping perceptions of equity, legitimacy and state responsiveness – critical dimensions of peacebuilding.

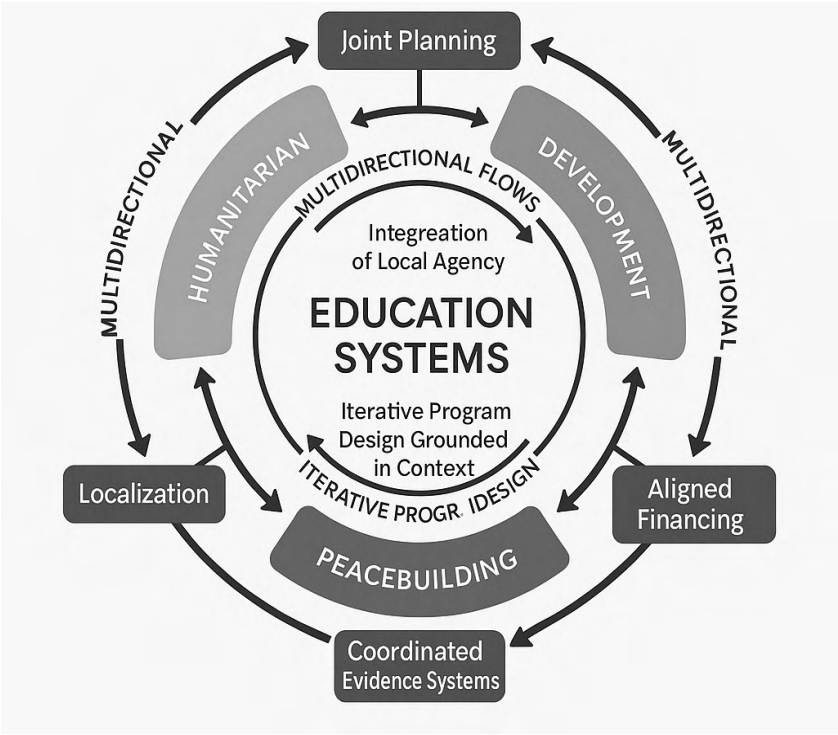
Moreover, the recognition that nexus implementation in education is shaped by political economies of aid and knowledge production is equally as important. Despite calls for localisation, the nexus remains heavily framed through Global North institutions and metrics, often sidelining local knowledge

systems and priorities (Mosse, 2005; Santos, 2007). Local education actors – teachers, school management committees, or ministries – do not merely implement nexus directives; they reinterpret, resist and reshape them. Evidence from decentralised education systems and cross-border refugee education coordination demonstrates that local actors can drive adaptive, integrated responses long before nexus terminology is introduced (A'yunina, 2024; ECW, 2025a).

The sector must move beyond rhetorical commitments to "leave no one behind " and engage in institutional realignment that supports structural inclusion and contextual legitimacy. Teacher support and professional development are crucial here: teachers are frontline nexus actors. Their voice, well-being and agency are vital to sustaining classroom continuity across humanitarian and development contexts.

Yet teacher training and support remains inconsistently funded and policy frameworks often fail to recognize the psychosocial burden and pedagogical challenges faced by educators in conflict-affected settings (A'yunina, 2024; Foreign Ministry of Denmark, 2023; Mendenhall, 2019). This contribution argues that education provides a compelling lens for reframing the nexus as a dynamic and multidirectional system rather than a linear process. Centring education in Nexus implementation can move efforts beyond rhetoric toward meaningful structural integration, thereby promoting equity, sustainability and resilience rooted in local realities.

Figure 1
Operationalising the Triple Nexus in Education: A Multidirectional System of Localized, Adaptive Practice



Source: Author

2 CENTRING HUMANITY

Centring Humanity focuses on reimagining education centred on human well-being, with examples from psychosocial support, social and emotional learning, and community and social resilience.

Mbau asserts that INEE's Beyond Aid initiative requires that the HDP Nexus prioritises well-being as a cross-sectoral outcome, shifting power and resources to local actors and embedding psychosocial support and social and emotional learning (PSS-SEL) within resilient, adaptable education systems. **Dalrymple** argues that to fulfil its peacebuilding potential, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) must move beyond individualised, Minority World models towards contextually grounded, collective approaches that engage with historical and structural injustices extending beyond the classroom. **Akhi and Khan** suggest that the *Pashe Achhi* model illustrates how a scalable, low-tech and telecommunication-based system can bridge humanitarian support, child welfare and peace by integrating caregiver mental health and child development in climate-prone and crisis-affected communities.

Komaragiri maintains that for the peace pillar to effectively strengthen the Triple Nexus, education must evolve beyond conflict sensitivity and so-called "big P" security paradigms to embrace its transformative potential for advancing locally defined, justice-oriented forms of "little p" peace. **Kapur** argues that early childhood education (ECE) represents an especially effective and strategic entry point for implementing the HDP Nexus, as evidenced by the case of Ahlan Simsim, which combines play-based learning, SEL, predictable multi-year financing and co-design with national systems.

Hedges, Ebubedike, Zwier, Chidiac and Okada argue for the operationalisation of the HDP Nexus through protective, community-led learning spaces that integrate foundational skills and social-emotional learning, supporting adaptive, localised models as vital for system resilience and recovery in diverse fragile contexts. **Kester** contends that a postcritical approach to Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and peacebuilding may be essential for embedding education within the HDP Nexus by centring local epistemologies, affective pedagogies and pluralistic conceptions of peace in curricula across conflict-affected settings. **Moser-Mercer, Mbonihankuye, Muvunyi and Arakaza** contend that the African Higher Education in Emergencies Network (AHEEN) SEL Skills for Peace project demonstrates the importance of engaging forcibly displaced youth in developing comprehensive life skills through culturally relevant, curriculum-integrated activities as a means of fostering peaceful coexistence in displacement settings.

REIMAGINING EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES AT THE HUMANITARIAN–DEVELOPMENT–PEACE TRIPLE NEXUS: A PSYCHOSOCIAL AND SYSTEMS LENS FROM INEE'S 'BEYOND AID' INITIATIVE

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Key takeaways:
As we reflect on the past decade of nexus policy and practice, three principles stand out for their relevance to the future of Education in Emergencies:

- **Prioritise well-being as a cross-sectoral outcome.** Mental health and psychosocial support must not be siloed. Embedding SEL and well-being into the core of education planning builds individual and community resilience and contributes to long-term peace.
- **Shift power to local actors.** Nexus approaches must be anchored in localisation. This involves not only funding local NGOs but also integrating local knowledge into program design, decision-making and evaluation frameworks. In some countries in Africa, local organisations have co-led the contextualisation of PSS-SEL tools by adapting language, stories and activities to reflect community values and realities. This has not only made the content more relevant and impactful but also empowered local actors to lead psychosocial support efforts in schools and learning spaces.
- **Invest in systems that can be flexible across crisis cycles.** Rather than planning separately for emergency and development phases, governments and partners should co-design education systems that are adaptable, resilient and inclusive, capable of withstanding shocks while promoting equity and learning continuity. In some settings, the PSS-SEL Toolbox has been integrated into teacher training and classroom practice, enabling education systems to support well-being during crises and beyond. By embedding PSS-SEL into national plans, governments build resilience into their educational systems, ensuring continuity and care across all phases of crisis.

As we mark ten years since the World Humanitarian Summit elevated the Humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) Nexus, the Education in Emergencies (EiE) sector stands at a pivotal juncture. Global geopolitical shifts, entrenched crises and the declining trajectory of humanitarian aid are reinforcing the need for the nexus as we consider the future of education for crisis-affected populations.

As emergencies evolve into long-term displacements or conflict-affected environments, the lines between humanitarian and development phases have begun to blur. This requires shifting away from short-term, reactive programming toward integrated, sustained support that builds resilience.

For the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), this moment offers a unique opportunity to reflect on how nexus thinking can help reimagine not only how we deliver EiE but also how we centre well-being, sustainability and local agency at the heart of this delivery.

Localizing the Nexus: Learning from the Beyond Aid Initiative

Despite the nexus' promise, operationalizing it in EiE contexts remains fraught with challenges. Competing mandates, short funding cycles and siloed bureaucracies continue to limit coordinated action across sectors. Moreover, while the development–peace link is well-articulated in policy, the humanitarian dimension is often diluted, leaving urgent needs unmet.

INEE's Beyond Aid initiative is rethinking how education in emergencies (EiE) can be financed and sustained beyond traditional donor dependencies. It explores alternative, locally driven approaches that prioritize localisation, equity, and sustainability, questioning what it would mean to resource and deliver EiE without relying solely on conventional humanitarian aid pipelines. In doing so, Beyond Aid aligns closely with broader efforts across the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus to localize decision-making, strengthen resilience, and build more sustainable education systems in crisis-affected contexts (INEE, 2025).

Through consultations with education actors from crisis-affected contexts, one resounding message emerges: while local actors are ready to lead, they continue to lack consistent support and recognition. We must go beyond institutional coordination to confront questions of who holds power, whose knowledge counts, and how long-term systems change is resourced. When applied meaningfully, Nexus thinking can help centre local expertise, shift resources closer to affected communities, and inform more sustainable investments in the capacity and wellbeing of those delivering education on the frontlines.

Nexus thinking is an approach for examining the connections between different sectors like humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding and encourages coordinated, integrated solutions rather than working in isolation. It helps ensure that short-term emergency responses also support long-term stability and growth.

In several consultation meetings, local education actors emphasised the need for psychosocial support and the effectiveness of community-led healing circles, peer support groups and school-based mental health initiatives, which are often rooted in local cultural practices. These locally driven interventions not only fulfilled the immediate emotional needs of learners and teachers but also built trust, restored social cohesion and strengthened community ownership of education programs. This highlights how integrating mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) through localised approaches can operationalise nexus thinking by addressing both urgent well-being and long-term resilience.

From Response to Resilience: The Role of Psychosocial Support and Social Emotional Learning (PSS-SEL) in Advancing the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus

Quality education cannot exist without addressing the psychosocial needs of learners and educators. Managing the psychosocial needs of teachers and learners is essential because emotional well-being directly influences the teachers' ability to teach, learn and engage meaningfully in the classroom. Education offers a powerful and structured space to promote healing, build resilience and foster a sense of normalcy and belonging, especially in crisis-affected settings where such support systems may be otherwise unavailable.

By supporting the mental health and well-being of both teachers and learners, we strengthen social cohesion and lay the groundwork for peacebuilding, demonstrating the power of the triple nexus in action. Psychosocial support promotes safety and stability during humanitarian response, helping learners recover and re-engage with education. At the same time, it contributes to longer-term development by building emotional resilience, supporting learning outcomes and reinforcing inclusive, supportive education systems.

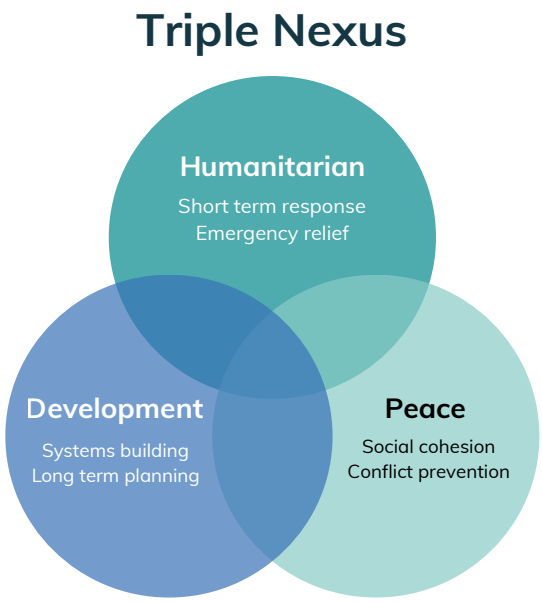
INEE has witnessed firsthand the strain placed on teachers and learners when funding gaps interrupt PSS-SEL psychosocial programming or when rigid development indicators fail to capture the complexity of education in conflict zones. Without flexible, multi-year financing and coordination across sectors, including funding for mental health, protection and livelihoods, the nexus remains a theory more than a tool for transformation.

The Psycho-social Support and Social and Emotional Learning (PSS-SEL) Toolbox, a resource developed by INEE and Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning (EASEL) Laboratory, Harvard provides educators, communities and policymakers with practical, evidence-informed tools to embed PSS-SEL into everyday teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The 10th anniversary of the triple nexus is not just an opportunity to take stock but a call to action. It is a reminder that EiE concerns not only classrooms in crisis – it involves reimagining education as a source of healing, dignity and peace. By centring psychosocial support, local leadership and system resilience, we can ensure that education in emergencies does not only respond to today's crises but shapes a more just and sustainable future.

Figure 2
The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Triple Nexus Illustrating Links Between Crisis Response, Recovery and Resilience



Source: Author

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: RETHINKING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING ACROSS THE TRIPLE NEXUS

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Key takeaways:

- Move beyond individualised models of SEL toward approaches that centre collective wellbeing, historical memory and social justice.
- Engage local educators, families and communities not as implementers of predesigned content but as co-creators of contextually relevant, culturally rooted SEL strategies that build upon and enhance existing SEL practices and concepts amongst communities.
- Conduct research that traces not just whether SEL works in improving psychosocial outcomes, but how it may shape social relations, trust and belonging beyond the classroom.

Over the past decade, social and emotional learning (SEL) – a pedagogical approach to fostering competencies such as self-management, emotional regulation and positive decision-making (CASEL, 2025) – has become central to global education policy and practice in crisis and displacement contexts. Positioned as a tool for supporting academic achievement, psychosocial wellbeing, inclusion and resilience (INEE, 2016, 2018; UNESCO, 2019), SEL has increasingly been promoted by donors and international agencies as a bridge across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (Sinclair, 2020). Yet, while global rhetoric has cast SEL as a pathway toward conflict prevention and sustainable peace, a significant disconnect between these high-level aspirations and the realities of program implementation on the ground exists (Dalrymple, 2024b).

This tension reflects deeper questions about what we ask education – and educators – to do in crisis contexts. The triple nexus demands that education simultaneously address immediate needs (humanitarian), support systemic rebuilding (development) and contribute to durable peace (peacebuilding). Given its emphasis on emotional regulation, empathy and relationship-building, SEL appears well suited to this task. However, most evidence of SEL's effectiveness remains confined to classroom settings. While some teachers in crisis contexts are indeed creating safe, inclusive and culturally affirming learning environments (Boukhari, 2025; Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Kirk & Winthrop, 2007), we know far less about how SEL can foster broader social cohesion in communities experiencing displacement, marginalisation, or intergroup tensions.

SEL's global diffusion has been shaped by frameworks developed in the Minority World that often emphasise individual behaviour change and self-regulation (Bryan, 2022; Durlak et al., 2011). When transferred to crisis contexts, these frameworks risk reproducing colonial and racialised logics of control – refugee and crisis-affected learners are taught to manage their emotions within systems that deny them their full humanity and ignore the historical and structural factors that contribute to their crisis and displacement in the first place (Dalrymple, 2024a; Shah & Dalrymple, 2025). Meanwhile, collective, relational and culturally grounded ways of expressing emotion and care in many communities are sidelined or rendered invisible.

In parallel with these critiques, the everyday work of teachers and education actors in crisis and displacement contexts points to important possibilities. Across refugee-hosting settings, educators have adapted external – often Minority World, white-dominant – education approaches to align with local values. They have also incorporated concepts such as traditional storytelling and community dialogue and have drawn on indigenous and religious frameworks for healing and relational wellbeing (Burde et al., 2017; LWF, 2024; MHPSS Collaborative et al., 2024; Shah, 2017). These innovations reveal the potential of SEL to not only support individual learners but also to mend social ruptures and rebuild trust across groups.

Despite these innovations, research on SEL's contributions to peacebuilding and social cohesion at the community level remains limited. In multicultural refugee settings, where learners from different national, religious, or ethnic backgrounds share space, SEL could theoretically serve as a platform for building mutual understanding and solidarity.

Similarly, in contexts marked by tension between refugees and host communities, SEL programmes might foster intergroup empathy and reduce perceptions of threat. But such outcomes are largely assumed rather than substantiated.

Indeed, SEL programmes are rarely designed with intergroup dynamics in mind. Most programmes target school environments without considering broader social structures, power relations, or historical grievances. This limits SEL's transformative potential and may even entrench inequities if certain groups' social and emotional expressions or worldviews are privileged over others (Hoffman, 2009; Jagers et al., 2019).

Thus, SEL must be reimagined to fulfil its potential across the triple nexus. This reimagining requires research that traces not just whether SEL works in improving psychosocial outcomes, but how it may shape social relations, trust and belonging beyond the classroom. This research must explore what SEL practices and concepts exist within crisis-affected communities and examine how SEL practices influence peer, family and community dynamics in crisis-affected settings. We must also observe what adaptations educators in crisis contexts have made to embed external SEL practices within local cultural, spiritual or relational traditions. It will also be important to examine under what conditions SEL contributes to social cohesion, and when it might it exacerbate tensions and/or exclusions, as well as to explore how power, race, gender, displacement status and other identity markers shape whose behaviours, emotions and expressions are legitimised or suppressed within SEL frameworks.

While the triple nexus offers an opportunity to integrate education more meaningfully into strategies for peace and resilience, doing so requires more than rhetorical alignment. It demands that we critically interrogate the theories of change and pedagogies underlying SEL, invest in longitudinal and participatory research and prioritise the voices of those most affected by conflict and displacement. Only then can SEL truly support not just schooling and psychosocial wellbeing but solidarity and systemic change.

PASHE ACHHI: A NEXUS MODEL FOR RESILIENT CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CAREGIVER WELLBEING IN CLIMATE-PRONE AND CRISIS-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

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Key takeaways:

- Focus on parents and caregivers through community-based platforms.
- Integrate remote Early Childhood Development (ECD) and psychosocial tools like Pashe Achhi in disaster preparedness plans.
- Expand social protection to include maternal health with screening and phone-based counselling.
- Promote fathers' involvement in their children's lives via dual-parent participation in parenting programmes.
- Ensure sustainable funding through multisectoral mechanisms across education, health and disaster response.
- Align ECD and caregiver wellness with peace-building and social cohesion efforts, such as providing child-friendly spaces and peer counselling during the post-disaster recovery process.

Context and Rationale

Bangladesh is situated in the vast and densely populated Bengal Delta (or the Ganges–Brahmaputra Delta), which faces repeated seasonal flooding. This has worsened into frequent climate-driven crises that demand a nexus approach linking humanitarian response during emergencies, peacebuilding through community resilience and long-term social development.

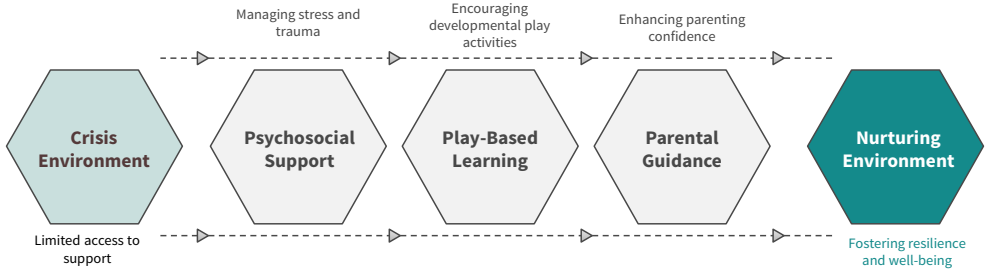
Pashe Achhi means "Beside You" in Bangali. It represents a telecommunication-based early childhood development (ECD) model developed by BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED), offering psychosocial support to caregivers and learning-through-play support to children affected by crisis. Its design and evaluation across four phases (2021–2023) offer critical lessons for building adaptive, scalable low-cost and contextually relevant resilient systems for emergency response and social development.

Strategic Objectives

The *Pashe Achhi* model demonstrates how a simple mobile-phone based system can improve child development, support parental mental health and reduce family-level conflict, even in disaster-hit, low-resource settings. The model's objectives are as follows:

- support parental mental health, especially where services are inaccessible or interrupted due to poverty, disaster or displacement;
- improve children's socio-emotional learning and holistic development in low-resource disrupted environments;
- strengthen family interactions and social cohesion, key to post-emergency peacebuilding; and
- develop a scalable, low-tech model suitable for humanitarian settings and long-term social service delivery.

Figure 3
Pashe Achhi Model Design and Structure for Accessible Support to Early Childhood Development



Source: Authors

Nexus in Action: Operational Strengths for Crisis Contexts

Pashe Achhi's primary mode of delivery involves 20-minute phone calls per week. The model is designed to be simple, effective and adapted to reflect the linguistic, cultural and logistical realities of the local population. Mothers and fathers of children aged 0–5 years who receive the intervention through weekly 20-minutes structured phone calls engage with trained professionals,

namely *Pashe Achhi* facilitators (PAF), even without advanced technology or internet access. The phone calls are divided into two segments of tele-counselling and tele-learning components. The first 10 minutes, which cover tele-counselling, focus on the psycho-social first aid and emotional wellbeing of the parent, deriving from the logic that if a parent is happy and stable, then a child is more likely to grow up in a positive and supportive environment (Davids et all. 2017, Yap et al., 2014). In the subsequent 10 minutes of the call, which cover tele-learning, PAFs guide mothers through age appropriate, play-centred learning activities for their children. For fathers, a greater emphasis is placed on positive father–child interaction.

Key Finding Across the Nexus

Pashe Achhi is not just a model; it is a nexus solution that bridges humanitarian support, long term-child welfare and the foundations of social peace and cohesion. It demonstrates that by investing in families' emotional health and resilience, communities' ability to withstand future shocks can be strengthened.

1. Humanitarian–ECD linkage

   - In disaster-affected areas, such as flash flood–affected areas in North Bengal (June 2022) and regions affected by heavy rainfall and landslides in Cox's Bazar (July 2021), mobile-based interventions sustained early learning stimulation despite physical service disruption.
   - Children randomly assigned to the mother and father-engagement group consistently outperformed the children in the mother-only group in cognitive and socio-emotional metrics within low-resource and crisis settings.

2. Development outcomes (psychosocial support and parenting guidance)

   - Maternal depression, particularly in its moderate and severe forms, decreased among participants following the intervention. Self-esteem improved over time, especially with longer program exposure (Khan et al., 2024).
   - After the programme, mothers better understood their children's needs, improved their parenting skills and insisted that support for their child's growth and mental well-being remain available. Fathers became more involved in caregiving, promoting balanced parenting roles.

3. Peace-building contributions

   - Along with improved mental health and self-esteem status among parents, the evaluations also revealed a decline in intimate partner violence and improved intra-household communication in intervention groups, which contribute to household stability and lay the foundations for social cohesion and community peace in post-crisis recovery.
   - By recruiting local young women as facilitators and para-councillors within the community, providing them with rigorous training in digital literacy and psychosocial support and engaging them as frontliners, *Pashe Achhi* fostered women's empowerment and leadership development, ensured economic participation and voice and reduced the prevailing digital divide in the community.

Conclusion

As climate shocks increase, resilience building must start in the family. The well-being of children and parents are fundamental to achieving sustainable peace. Moreover, the integration of caregiver wellbeing and child development within a scalable, low-tech model demonstrates how humanitarian efforts, development and peace-building goals can be achieved simultaneously. In this era of climate uncertainty and repeated displacement, investing families' emotional and developmental resilience is not optional – it is foundational for peaceful and sustainable societies.

Table 1
Why the Pashe Achhi Model Works

FEATURE	IMPACT
Low-tech, high impact phone-based model	Functions remotely; works in remote areas during mobility restrictions, infrastructure breakdowns or crisis moments (e.g. floods or lockdowns)
Cultural contextualisation	Culturally adapted parenting tips (provided through voice messages or taking account of local customs); increased message retention and behavioural uptake as it reflects local customs, habits and communication styles
Psychosocial support integration	Addresses caregiver trauma and strengthens emotional capacity
Capacity building of local population	Recruits frontliners from the locality for better penetration and sustainability; empowers local young women through digital literacy that reduces digital divide
Scalability	Adaptable to fragile and disaster/climate-prone settings; easily integrated into existing health and education infrastructure.
Peace-building potential	Exhibits peacebuilding potential through emotional healing, family resilience and community empowerment

Source: Authors

DEFINING PEACE IN EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES (EIE): STRENGTHENING THE TRIPLE NEXUS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

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Key takeaways:

- Centre local conflict analysis: Locally led conflict analyses must guide EiE programme design and delivery and prioritise community peacebuilding goals over donor-driven agendas.
- Decolonise the education agenda: To truly enable the peace pillar, the education sector must interrogate and address colonial legacies across all three pillars (humanitarian, development, and peace).
- Prioritise local action and agency: Communities do not think in nexus silos – listening to and investing in local efforts demonstrates how education can most effectively operate using a nexus approach.
- Invest in teachers: Teachers are central to the success of education as a peacebuilding tool. Supporting teachers' own mental health, safety and agency is important; they must be recognised as critical actors in both crisis response and long-term peacebuilding.
- Build nexus literacy: The education sector has access to best practices and evidence on dual-hatted approaches (humanitarian and development); however, case studies and evidence on triple-hatted approaches must be developed.
- Hold donors accountable: Ensure that education donors define and implement peace in ways that are rooted in local, inclusive peacebuilding and backed by clear accountability mechanisms.

As the triple nexus, which links humanitarian, development and peace efforts, enters its second decade, its application in the education sector has reflected both progress and persistent tensions. While strides in aligning humanitarian and development responses have been made, these efforts often reinforce existing international power structures rather than transform how education systems engage with crisis and conflict. The peace dimension remains particularly underdeveloped and inconsistently applied, and it risks being coopted by security agendas that diminish education's broader peacebuilding potential. This contribution argues that the triple nexus must evolve beyond a tool for technical coordination to instead embrace education's transformative potential– demonstrated most profoundly in the daily practices of teachers – to support locally defined, socially just and sustainable peace.

The Evolution of the Triple Nexus

Emerging in the 1980s with the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD), the humanitarian-development nexus evolved from a linear continuum to parallel activities in the 1990s, alongside the rise of "human security" which linked security and development (Tronc et al., 2019; Ramet, 2012; Morinière & Morrison-Métois, 2023; Dalrymple, 2019; Hövelmann, 2020). This trajectory laid the foundation for the humanitarian–development–peace nexus or the "triple nexus."

In the education sector, the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards (2000) and the Global Education Cluster (GEC) (2007) structurally embedded education as part of a humanitarian response. In 2016, at the World Humanitarian Summit, a call for "collective outcomes" and a " new way of working" (Tronc et al., 2019; Morinière & Morrison-Métois, 2023) was made, and Education Cannot Wait (ECW), which positions itself as a nexus organisation through its complementary funding windows, was established. Spurred by these developments, from 2017 onward, actors such as ECW, INEE, GEC and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) have adapted their frameworks, funding modalities and coordination roles to better align humanitarian, development and – to a lesser degree – peace goals.

The Missing "Peace" in Education

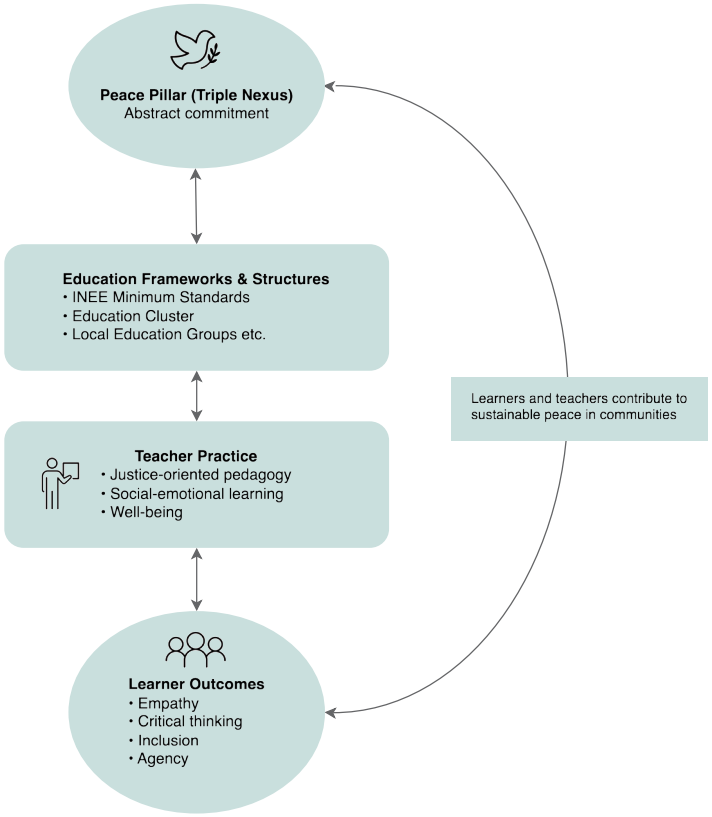
The "peace" pillar remains the least conceptually and institutionally developed pillar within the triple nexus. Scholars distinguish between "big-P" peace, which is centred on political stability and

security, and "little-p" peace, which is focused on community-level transformation and reconciliation (Morinière & Morrison-Métois, 2023). Donor preferences for the former often introduces tensions with core humanitarian principles such as neutrality and impartiality (Tronc et al., 2019), particularly in education, which can be co-opted by state-building or security agendas.

In the absence of a robust peace lens, education risks being instrumentalised, causing a shift from learner-centered objectives to narrow, securitised goals, such as governments and donor placing a narrow focus on education's role in countering violent extremism (CVE) or deradicalisation. The 2024 INEE Minimum Standards rightly place conflict sensitivity at the foundation of education programming to ensure education does not exacerbate existing tensions. However, if peace is to be more than the absence of violence – what Galtung (1967) termed "positive peace"– education must also confront historical, structural and epistemic injustices. Education nexus approaches –as they are currently framed – often fall short of this ambition. Moreover, the short project life cycles of EiE work and peace efforts, which are long-term and relational processes are often in tension (see Novelli et al., 2017 for the 4Rs analytical framework – sustainable peacebuilding in education includes redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation). However, incremental integration is possible and necessary.

Coordination gaps structurally reinforce this disconnect. Humanitarian actors typically engage through clusters and emergency coordination bodies, while development actors work with education ministries and sector working groups. In addition, the architecture to embed peacebuilding within education strategies at either the country or global level is limited, as local actors continue to be critical in shaping how triple nexus principles are realised (Aloyo, 2013; Barnett & Finnemore, 1999; Barakat & Milton, 2020). In the education sphere, local teachers, civil society groups and community leaders translate abstract notions of peace into meaningful practices and skills for learners to engage with (see Figure 4).

Figure 4
Abstract Peace to Classroom Practice



Source: Author

Equipping Teachers for Peace: The Role of SEL in Peace Education

Operationalising peace within EiE demands a sustained investment in the people who animate those systems. Teachers are not only frontline responders in crisis-affected settings but also critical peacebuilders. Supporting their capacity and well-being is central to building safe, inclusive and healing learning environments. This involves moving beyond conflict-sensitive pedagogy and requires that teachers be equipped to navigate the legacies of violence and exclusion, to have a sense of agency and to cultivate justice-oriented pedagogies. This dual role – mitigating harm for learners while advancing justice – is at the heart of education's peacebuilding potential.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) could offer a practical and widely recognised entry point for EiE actors, educators and learners. SEL can strengthen foundational competencies such as empathy, perspective-taking, critical thinking and self-awareness – skills that are closely aligned with peace education frameworks (e.g. UNESCO, 2024). While SEL builds essential interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities, peace education extends this even further, engaging with structural drivers of conflict, such as inequality, exclusion and historical injustice. However, to meaningfully confront historical, structural and epistemic injustices, the EiE sector must walk the talk – critically examining whose values and worldviews are embedded in the SEL competencies it promotes (Dalrymple, 2023).

Conclusion

By articulating a shared vision of education's contribution to peace, the education sector can move beyond abstract commitments towards locally informed investments in teachers and other community actors and the cultivation of social-emotional competencies that can sustain peace over time.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: OPERATIONALIZING THE TRIPLE NEXUS THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

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Key takeaways:

- **Embed ECE in crisis and development frameworks.** Treat early childhood education as foundational to humanitarian and development planning. Integrate ECE into national crisis response, recovery, and education policies through coordinated action across the health, protection, and education sectors.
- **Ensure predictable financing and local ownership.** Establish multiyear, cross-sectoral financing models to enable sustainable and scalable ECE programming. Promote shared governance by co-designing programmes with ministries, local NGOs, and community actors, thereby fulfilling Grand Bargain commitments to localisation.
- **Leverage SEL as a peacebuilding strategy.** Recognise social-emotional learning (SEL) as a vital component of psychosocial support and a cornerstone of conflict-sensitive education. Embed SEL in curricula, teacher training, and parenting resources to foster social cohesion, resilience, and healing in crisis-affected communities.

Reframing the Triple Nexus Through the Lens of Early Childhood Education (ECE)

The humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus emerged as a response to chronic inefficiencies in siloed crisis responses. The nexus promotes integrated collaboration, local ownership, flexible financing, and collective outcomes. Early childhood education (ECE) is frequently excluded from both the operationalisation of the HDP Nexus and traditional humanitarian responses, and it is often seen as peripheral to core emergency objectives. This is a critical oversight. Evidence shows that high-quality ECE can improve mental health, mitigate the long-term effects of trauma, and enhance social cohesion in conflict-affected environments (OECD & UNHCR, 2024). Despite these synergies, ECE receives only 2% of all funding for humanitarian aid (Moving Minds Alliance, 2021).

This underinvestment reflects a deeper issue: the fragmentation of ECE programming across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding domains. Humanitarian actors may prioritise psychosocial support and safe spaces, development actors focus on system reform, and peacebuilding efforts rarely engage with early learning at all (Dryden-Peterson, 2022), resulting in a patchwork of small-scale, short-term interventions that are disconnected from national systems and unsustainable beyond project cycles.

Systems Thinking as a Nexus-Enabling Framework

Systems thinking — an approach that conceptualises child development as part of an inherently dynamic, ecological, and intersectoral system — emphasises the need to move beyond "business as usual" interventions toward more systemic and coordinated approaches that strengthen weak and fragmented systems. By focusing on the interactions among health, education, child protection, and family well-being, it highlights how multiple sectors jointly influence developmental outcomes and must therefore be addressed collectively (Milner et al., 2023). Building on this foundation, systems thinking can serve as a useful lens for advancing the goals of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus by promoting coherence, adaptability, and cross-sector collaboration in early childhood development.

Systems thinking enables stakeholders to recognise how health, education, child protection, and family well-being jointly influence child development outcomes, making explicit the interactions, dependencies, and synergies among these domains (Ndaruhutse, Jones, & Riggall, 2019).

First, systems thinking encourages actors to map and respond to complexity. For example, when a caregiver's mental health is disrupted by conflict or displacement, reduced engagement in early learning can exacerbate developmental delays. By identifying such feedback loops, systems thinking supports more targeted and coordinated cross-sectoral interventions.

Second, systems thinking fosters adaptive governance by emphasising iterative learning, multi-level accountability, and distributed leadership. It provides a governance model aligned with local ownership and collaborative planning—principles central to the HDP Nexus but often absent in humanitarian education programmes.

Finally, systems thinking reorients service delivery around the child. Rather than conforming to institutional silos, it prioritises child-centred outcomes that integrate protection, education, and peacebuilding goals.

Ahlan Simsim: Operationalising the Triple Nexus Through ECE

Ahlan Simsim demonstrates how early childhood education (ECE) can serve as an effective entry point for implementing the HDP Nexus. Operating across Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, Ahlan Simsim integrates play-based learning, social-emotional learning (SEL), and caregiver support into both emergency response and national systems strengthening (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2024).

In Jordan, for example, play-based ECE activities have been embedded into a variety of delivery platforms—including health clinics, classrooms, and community centres—signalling a shift from short-term programming to institutionalised service delivery (IRC, 2024; Sesame Workshop, 2023). Independent evaluations highlight that SEL interventions—including media, parenting resources, and classroom-based approaches—have led to measurable gains in emotional awareness, regulation, and peer relationships among children exposed to conflict (Global TIES for Children, 2023).

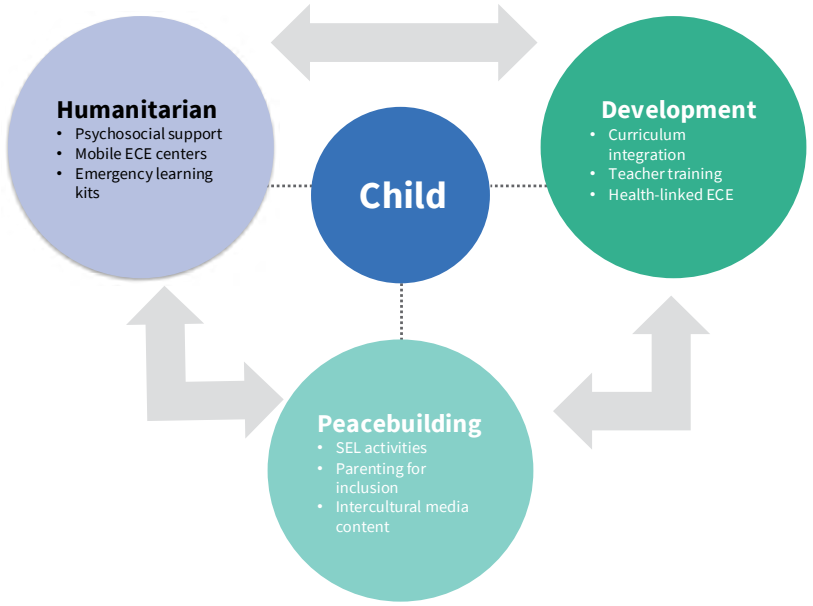
Ahlan Simsim's peacebuilding dimension is further supported by culturally resonant content such as Basma and Jad, a locally produced children's television series that promotes empathy, emotional literacy, and conflict-resolution skills linked to social cohesion (Sesame Workshop, 2023). These outcomes have been supported by predictable, multiyear funding—including financial support from the MacArthur Foundation—which has enabled cross-sector planning, scaling, and integration across humanitarian and development systems (IRC, 2024; MacArthur Foundation, 2023).

The programme also exemplifies locally led governance. Co-designed with national ministries and local NGOs, Ahlan Simsim—a regional early childhood development initiative led by Sesame Workshop and the IRC—has advanced policy reform and system ownership in Lebanon and Iraq (IRC, 2024). This co-development has contributed to sustained uptake and alignment with global commitments to localisation, including the Grand Bargain, a 2016 agreement that calls for more effective humanitarian action through greater local leadership and accountability (MacArthur Foundation, 2023).

Conclusion

While systems thinking and integrated approaches to early childhood education (ECE) in crisis contexts are not new, they remain underutilised by policymakers, donors, and implementing agencies across humanitarian and development settings. Initiatives such as Ahlan Simsim demonstrate how aligning ECE with the HDP Nexus can translate long-standing theory into scalable, coordinated action. By embedding ECE into national systems, fostering local co-ownership, and prioritising social-emotional learning, stakeholders can design interventions that are not only integrated and sustainable but also transformative.

Figure 5
Child-Centered Triple Nexus Systems Map. An integrated systems-thinking approach to operationalising the HDP Nexus through ECE



Source: Author

MESSY, HARD, REWARDING! FIGURING OUT TOGETHER CATCH-UP LEARNING ACROSS THE HUMANITARIAN–DEVELOPMENT–PEACE NEXUS

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Key takeaways:

- Affirm learning as a life-saving priority. Providing safe spaces with shelter, food and water is not enough. It is crucial to recognise the cognitive and emotional urgency of learning during displacement or in contexts of fragility. Denying this recognition increases children's vulnerability and protection risks, while providing it can address wide-ranging needs in a structured way, thereby connecting flexibly with other interventions.
- Integrate social-emotional learning within pedagogy and learning environments. Investment in social-emotional learning is a critical enabler of inclusion, learning and wellbeing through dedicated learning sessions, embedding it into pedagogy and integrating it into the learning environment.
- Invest in community-led capacity for system resilience. CUP is a vehicle for a nexus approach that leverages community facilitators closest to children, rather than relying solely on schools, which may be closed or overstretched. These localised practices, such as community-run clubs, adapted tools, and informal leadership structures, can facilitate small but significant systems shifts.

World Vision's Catch-Up Programme (CUP) is a flexible, community-led initiative that employs an Accelerated Education approach that supports foundational literacy and numeracy for children affected by crisis and fragility. CUP works within education in emergencies (EiE) to address urgent learning needs while also promoting psychosocial well-being, community resilience, and links to longer-term systems strengthening. Operating through the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus, CUP exemplifies how localised, non-formal learning models can serve both immediate and structural goals. CUP''s flexibility enables it to be applied and adapted for accelerated, bridging, catch-up, and remediation learning.

This contribution draws on systematic multi-methods research led by The Open University (Okada et al, 2025), including case studies from Ethiopia (conflict), Chile (displacement), and Zimbabwe (climate shocks), alongside current implementation by World Vision in Iraq, Lebanon, and Ukraine. It examines how CUP is being adapted in diverse fragile contexts and offers applied insights into localising EiE and operationalising the Nexus through education.

In Chile, a pilot implementation reached over 400 migrant children in temporary learning spaces and schools. These children often live in risky, informal encampments. Local facilitators adapt play-based catch-up activities to Spanish and embed culturally sensitive stories, resources and approaches in these activities. One facilitator explained:

"We try to show why children need to play – that the children have had a different experience and need a way to express themselves."

This approach focuses on fostering resilience, confidence, and providing children with an interactive and enjoyable way to learn – over 7 in 10 children showed learning improvements - while addressing deeper emotional needs.

In Ethiopia, a community-based "try and learn" implementation reached over 300 vulnerable children in and out-of-school in conflict-affected areas in North Gondar. Local facilitators draw on adapted learning activities in Amharic, aligning with local cultures and available resources. When schools closed due to conflict, local facilitators kept the clubs running, and children continued to come. A CUP Community Management Committee member, who

coordinates and connects local stakeholders, including parents, leaders, facilitators and other services, said:

"Our role is to ensure the programme aligns with the community's priorities."

The play-based activities included storytelling, drama, and peer collaboration. One learner shared:

"Before, I was afraid of making mistakes, but now I like reading in front of my friends."

Again, over 7 in 10 children showed learning improvements.

Our reflections highlight the following pathways to operationalise the HDP nexus:

- CUP as a protective learning space: CUP is increasingly conceptualised by local stakeholders not as a one-off or one-size-fits-all intervention but as a protected, emotionally supportive time and space. It meets learners where they are educationally, emotionally and contextually, and learning recovery is co-constructed over time. It therefore allows learners, teachers, and communities to re-engage in education during and after crises, aligning with Nexus principles of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding.
- Design rooted in local experience: Children's and communities' lived experiences shape the design and delivery of catch-up activities, and communities are elevated as partners in learning. While grounded in World Vision's global guidance, tools and methods are adapted or co-created locally to explore possibilities for learning and to reflect diverse learning realities and capacities, which can expand both who leads learning and how it happens.
- Harnessing complementary strengths of local authorities, systems and actors: Context-specific approaches can bring about small shifts in local systems that are both important and often hard won. They can catalyse change for people and processes at the intersections of child protection, learning and emergency support at the local levels, thereby offering a blueprint for more systemic policy change.

When supported through flexible funding and connected to national education and protection strategies, such initiatives can leverage trust, community ownership and adaptable tools. They reinforce nexus goals that transform longer-term, integrated system responses in fragile settings.

Figure 6
Catch-Up Learning Design Principles

Source: Authors

GLOBAL AGENDAS, LOCAL REALITIES: TOWARD A POSTCRITICAL APPROACH TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND PEACEBUILDING EDUCATION IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SETTINGS

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Key takeaways:
Educators should:

- Centre local epistemologies and design curricula and teaching practices that move beyond Western-centric frameworks to incorporate local knowledges, languages and cultural traditions, thereby ensuring that education reflects and respects diverse ways of knowing and explains phenomena in ways that makes sense both globally and locally.
- Embrace relational and affective pedagogies and foster learning environments that are built on care, compassion and collaboration, considering relationships and emotional connections as being essential to meaningful education, especially in contexts of cultural and social divisions. This emphasises diverse ways of being.
- Promote pluralistic perspectives on peace and Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and create learning environments that embrace diverse cultural, historical and philosophical perspectives, thereby ensuring that peace and GCE are recognised as multifaceted concepts rather than as singular narratives. This encourages learners to question dominant assumptions and to consider alternative viewpoints leading to pluralistic visions of peace.

Education systems in contexts shaped by structural inequities, conflict legacies and global interdependencies must balance the competing imperatives of inclusion, development and peacebuilding. This policy insight draws from curriculum research in Punjab, Pakistan, and fieldwork in Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, South Korea and Somalia/Somaliland to explore how schools and universities can foster global citizenship and peace learning through context-specific and conflict-sensitive curricula (Kester, 2021; Kester et al., 2025; see also Brandt et al., this issue; Hervey et al., this issue). This research advocates for a postcritical[1] approach to global citizenship education (GCE) and peacebuilding aligned with the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus, emphasising curricula that are locally grounded, conflict aware and relationally oriented (Kester & Misiaszek, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, traditional liberal models of GCE and peacebuilding education tend to individualise peace and isolate the citizen as the primary site of intervention, often neglecting community-based and systemic dimensions (Higgins & Novelli, 2020; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013). Furthermore, more critical models of GCE, though powerful, risk alienating learners from their own contexts by reinforcing epistemological hierarchies that privilege abstract, universalist ideologies over situated, contextual knowledge (Andreotti, 2015) or by failing to sufficiently delink from hegemonic forms of GCE despite employing critical discourse (Pais & Da Costa, 2020). In contrast, postcritical GCE and peacebuilding education foregrounds humility, embodied learning and ethical coexistence, making space for localised and relational understandings of citizenship, peace and justice (Kester, 2023; Pashby et al., 2020; Stein & Andreotti, 2021).

Embedding Postcritical Global Citizenship and Peace in the Curriculum

These insights are based on data collected between 2020 and 2025 from 30 curriculum specialists and 52 university educators across Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, Pakistan, South Korea and Somalia/Somaliland, as mentioned above. Curriculum developers in Punjab, Pakistan, offered insights into primary

school English, general knowledge and social studies curricula, particularly regarding the inclusion of GCE and peace themes into syllabi and textbooks. Educators in the other settings discussed the role of higher education in peacebuilding under conditions of conflict or contested sovereignty (Kester, 2025).

This research shows that in Pakistan, textbooks in the Single National Curriculum (SNC) increasingly reflect peace-oriented themes – such as empathy, environmental awareness and inclusion. Lessons such as "Together We Live" (Grade 5 English) and "Working Out Disagreements" (Grade 3 General Knowledge) encourage reflection on conflict resolution and ethical relationships. On the other hand, struggles to foster a unified national identity in Pakistan's SNC often conflict with commitments to global citizenship (Kester et al., 2025; Pasha, 2024).

Educators across Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, South Korea and Somalia/Somaliland also emphasised the importance of questioning universalised models of education in favour of locally situated practices (Abdi, 2015; Brandt et al., this issue; Kim et al., 2023). For instance, in Afghanistan, several key shifts in university teaching were observed: Educators moved towards embracing local inspiration for curricula, contesting externally imposed values and creating education spaces grounded in context-specific and conflict-sensitive approaches (Kester, 2021; Higgins & Novelli, 2020). These practices highlight the value of postcritical GCE and peacebuilding education that is rooted, reflexive and reciprocally oriented.

Connections to the HDP Nexus

Education in these settings operates at the convergence of HDP imperatives. Schools and universities are not only centres of learning but also frontline institutions that respond to crises. Students and educators in these contexts may face existential threats – ranging from ethnic or religious exclusions in Afghanistan and Pakistan to war-related stress on the Korean peninsula and diplomatic isolation in Somaliland and Taiwan. Consequently, in these contexts, the role of education must extend beyond knowledge transmission to include care, community cohesion, and the promotion of critical dialogue both within and outside educational institutions (Esquith, 2019).

On the developmental front, education is often framed by politicians, policymakers, and pedagogues as a pathway to state-building and societal repair. For instance, the research shows that in Pakistan and Somaliland, education is explicitly linked to restoring the social contract and promoting equity, while in China and Somalia, the discourse is more focused on modernisation and national development (Kester, 2025). In each case, education institutions may or may not play a role in fostering personal, social and national development, critical thinking, ethical citizenship and locally resonant forms of engagement.

The peacebuilding dimension is most visible in efforts to reshape civic identities and open spaces for dialogue. In this regard, education is potentially a platform to interrogate and reframe dominant narratives of citizenship, peace, identity and conflict. In these contexts, training in peaceful and conflict-sensitive facilitation techniques is crucial to ensure that educators foster open, respectful, dialogical learning communities (Komaragiri, this issue; Sayed & Beiruti, this issue). Through relational peacebuilding pedagogies, educators and universities can promote peacebuilding and ethical engagement in societies struggling with deep-seated divisions (Millican et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This work proposes a holistic model of education across the HDP nexus that focuses on immediate protection and care within learning spaces (the humanitarian dimension); structural transformation through equitable, inclusive and participatory education (the development dimension); and affective, dialogical and relational shifts in conflict narratives and civic identities (the peacebuilding dimension). The incorporation of postcritical GCE and peacebuilding education across the conflict-affected settings of Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, South Korea, Pakistan and Somalia/Somaliland illustrates how education can serve all HDP functions simultaneously.

In conclusion, adopting postcritical perspectives on GCE and peacebuilding can foster deeper critical reflection among educators and students while grounding learning in lived experiences and mutual understanding. This approach enables students to engage with global and local issues through relational and transformative lenses, allowing them to move beyond abstract, universalist frameworks to better connect global agendas with local realities.

Footnote

1. A postcritical lens moves beyond conventional critical pedagogy that often diagnoses ignorance or deviance as root causes of conflict to foreground relationality, affect and the co-construction of knowledge. First, the lens embraces the embodied and emotional dimensions of learning, recognising how war and division shape educators' experiences. Second, its emphasis on a hermeneutics of faith rejects a top-down knowledge imposition, affirming learners' and communities' wisdom in addressing their own conflicts. Third, it embraces plural criticalities, insisting there is no single correct critical stance; instead, multiple ways of knowing and engaging peace are possible (Kester, 2025).

BUILDING RESILIENCE AND PEACE LOCALLY: THE ROLE OF LIFE SKILLS, PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT, AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN DISPLACEMENT

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Key takeaways:

- Life skills are crucial for forcibly displaced youth, helping them navigate challenges and build peaceful lives.
- These skills are most effectively developed through meaningful, culturally relevant activities integrated into school and community life and engaging the whole brain.
- Youth benefit from context-specific, future-oriented activities that foster social-emotional learning (SEL), rather than focusing solely on past trauma.
- Each displaced community holds its own concept of peace, so conflict resolution must draw from local knowledge and traditions.
- Teacher professional development for EiE should adopt a comprehensive SEL approach that embeds life skills into everyday teaching and uses local resources to enhance student and community engagement.

Introduction

Youth in many African countries have been forcibly displaced due to conflict and crises (African Center for Strategic Studies 2024). These young people take these experiences into the communities they settle into in the countries that host them. Having had their lives impacted by conflicts that failed to be resolved peacefully, many youth have been unable to acquire the skills and competencies they need to ensure peaceful coexistence in their new communities. The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace project demonstrates that when forcibly displaced young people are engaged in developing comprehensive life skills through their regular education curricula, they will apply these skills to further their own advancement as well as that of the communities they have joined.

The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace project departs from traditional peace education approaches in that displaced youth first identify the skills and competencies required of every individual for peaceful coexistence. Then, AHEEN designs curricula and activities for learners to successfully acquire them. The model, which uses a bottom-up approach that focuses on understanding what peace means to displaced youth, can be readily transferred to other cultural contexts and to the different phases of the humanitarian development (HDP) nexus – from crisis intervention through to recovery. It can be successfully adapted to different age groups both in and out of school or university as well as to community groups. The model therefore addresses the needs in humanitarian contexts, provides avenues to support development and strengthens peaceful coexistence. Refugee researchers at the local level drive the contextual adaptation to ensure relevance, inclusion, community support and sustainability.

The Problem We Wanted to Solve

The AHEEN SEL Skills for Peace model is designed to address the development of specific life skills that support peaceful coexistence in fragile contexts through an improved understanding of

- Why is it important to solve the peace building skills gap, and who will benefit from a model that can be contextualised to

different humanitarian and development contexts and bridges the nexus?

- Why is it important to solve this problem now?
- What are the causes of the problem and what are its effects on displaced youth and their communities?
- How can we create positive experiences for displaced youth around peaceful coexistence?
- How does this problem affect displaced communities?
- What skills do displaced youth need to acquire in order to be well equipped for driving peaceful coexistence in their communities?

Summary of the Research

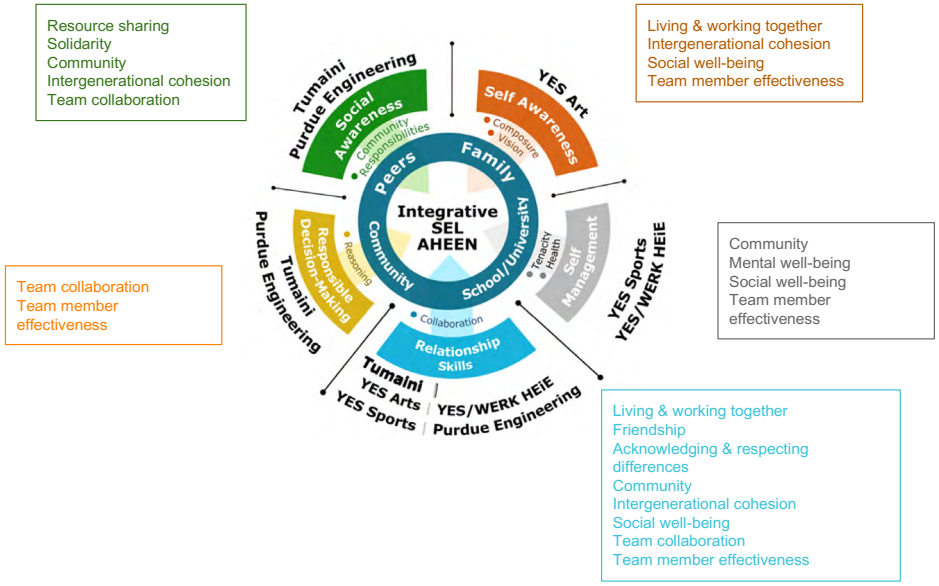
The applied research project was implemented in two large refugee camps in Kenya: Kakuma/Kalobeyei and Dadaab. It aimed to develop a proof of concept for a novel approach for strengthening peaceful coexistence in fragile contexts. Using a participatory action research approach the project ensured that conceptual input was authentic and produced by the very groups who needed to acquire relevant skills. The participants were AHEEN higher education students in Kakuma/Kalobeyei and Dadaab as well as refugee-led organisations that are members of AHEEN.

What Did We Do?

Refugee researchers first explored the concept/construct of peace and what it meant in their context. The project used the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL 2025) approach to SEL, which addresses the five interrelated competencies that are fundamental for social-emotional well-being: self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision making and social awareness). Project collaborators are identified on the outermost circle of the wheel and include RLO Youth Education & Sports (Kakuma/Kalobeyei) with their sports and arts programs, Women Educational Researchers of Kenya and Tumaini Innovation Center Eldoret in partnership with Purdue University. Together, these three program components, sports, applied arts and localised engineering, engage different parts of the brain in complementary ways and build physical literacy, creativity and problem solving skills. The different sub-skills identified by researchers through participatory research among refugee students for each of the five competencies are listed in the colour-coded boxes linked to each of the five competencies.

The results were then verified through program implementation among refugee students in higher education in emergencies in the two camps. Implementation was accompanied by monitoring and evaluation. The research team then conducted a large-scale survey among the program participants at the end of the implementation period for the three program components.

Figure 7
The AHEEN Integrative SEL Wheel



Source: Authors

What Did We Learn?

The skill sets and competencies identified in the AHEEN Integrative SEL model and allocated to the three components – sports, applied arts, localised engineering – were assessed through a final survey that combined both cross sectional and retrospective approaches, as we had not administered a baseline survey. The retrospective approach had respondents compare their past behaviour and experiences (prior to the start of the programme) their behaviour at present (at the end of the programme) and their anticipated future behaviour. This cross-sectional approach yielded endline data for the different skills program participants had developed, while the retrospective approach invited them to compare their new skills and skill levels to those prior to their joining the program.

The return rate was 80% (sample size: 29) in the anonymous online survey. 30% also submitted a sample media file, such as a poem, a visual or a video testimonial with their reflections on peace. We found largely significant changes in behaviour on all the skill sets and competencies, indicating increased expertise on the part of respondents in terms of their skills and competencies that promote peaceful coexistence.

A qualitative analysis of free responses also revealed respondents' regular use of terms such as "team collaboration," "togetherness," "joint decision-making," "helping others," "being motivated to do the best they can," and "eagerness to learn more."

3 TEACHING AT THE HEART OF THE NEXUS

Teaching at the Heart of the Nexus explores the crucial role of teachers, emphasising their professional development, agency, well-being and central function in building a just peace.

Sayed and Beiruti argue that to advance the HDP Nexus, it is necessary to confront its problematic (that is, Global North) linear assumptions and instead centre a notion of just peace that is grounded in rights and justice and recognises teachers as crucial, value-driven political actors who should show solidarity with the oppressed. **Gichuhi** maintains that effectively integrating teacher professional development (TPD) into the HDP Nexus entails a shift away from top-down, short-term and project-based approaches toward teacher-centred, sustainable systems that harmonise certification processes and prioritise educators' well-being and agency. **Beruin** argues that institutionalising self-reflective practice is vital for teacher development in crisis contexts, as such practices humanise educators, enable them to recognise emotional strain, establish boundaries in caregiving roles and sustain their sense of professional identity as community anchors without succumbing to isolation or burnout. **Obwoya** highlights that despite Uganda's long-standing commitment to an inclusive refugee policy, recent donor funding cuts have significantly jeopardised teacher retention and professional development, thereby undermining the sustainability of the system integration envisaged in the government's transition roadmap. **Yeo** suggests that the liminal experiences of Karen refugee teachers reveal inherent paradoxes in self-reliance narratives within the Nexus, thereby underscoring the need for formal accreditation, direct and flexible funding for refugee-led initiatives and psychosocial support to mitigate the psychological toll of instability.

Barnes contends that investing in the inclusion, agency and well-being of refugee teachers—by engaging them as co-researchers exploring paths to formal integration into national education systems—represents a particularly strategic, sustainable and dignified means of activating the HDP Nexus and dismantling entrenched "us versus them" narratives that can deteriorate into social unrest.

Innes suggests that a pilot study in Pakistan provides evidence that TPD that centres a pedagogy of care can foster social cohesion among refugee and host-country teachers while equipping them with actionable strategies to support student well-being amid upheaval. **Thorpe and Magrath** argue that empowering teacher-led innovation and local ownership can be enabled through human-centred design and contextually grounded holistic assessment, as illustrated by the Schools2030 model in crisis-affected settings. The need for donor investment in systemic teacher preparation rather than short-term, project-based training is also highlighted by **Brandt, Marchais, Maisha and Matabishi**, who describe the ongoing development of a scalable pre-service teacher training module in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that integrates peace education (positive peace), contextualised education in emergencies (EiE) and trauma-sensitive pedagogy. **Jocson** suggests that engaging with contexts characterised as fragile, abstruse, confusing and erratic (FACE) may necessitate context-specific interventions and enhanced coordination, achieved through the empowerment and financing of local HDP Nexus organisations and the incorporation of EiE competencies into teacher education. **Ansari and Ahmad** maintain that addressing Pakistan's intensifying learning crisis requires Teacher Education Programmes that embed mandatory modules on emergency pedagogy, trauma-informed psychosocial support and inclusive teaching strategies within national policy frameworks, thereby positioning teachers as pivotal agents of resilience and recovery.

PLACING TEACHERS AT THE CORE OF A JUST PEACE SOLUTION TO CRISES AND CONFLICTS

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Key takeaways:

- The three components of the HDP nexus should be seen as integrated rather than linear, with a focus on just peace.
- Teaching is value-driven, and teachers cannot be neutral in contexts of injustice.
- Investing in teachers as agents of change and empowering them to develop students' capacities to understand and challenge oppressive systems is vital to achieving a just peace.
- Teachers are key actors in the promotion of just peace and should be centred in conversations around the HDP nexus.
- Peacebuilding efforts must centre justice rather than simply the absence of conflict; just peace is a precondition for stabilisation and development, not just an outcome.

To us, the Peace is the Justice.

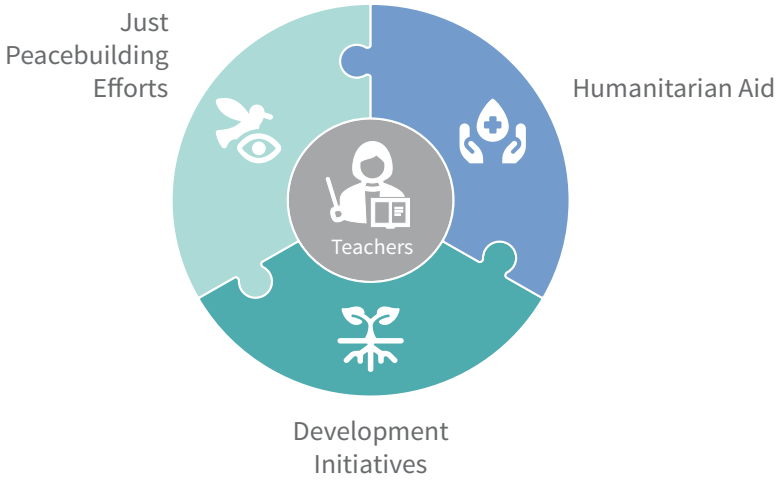
– Ghassan Kanafani, Palestinian novelist, journalist, scholar and activist

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 emphasised the importance of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, also known as the Triple Nexus or the HDP Nexus, for achieving outcomes across the three sectors and successfully alleviating crises. The nexus has since evolved into a key framework for guiding work in crisis or conflict settings, ultimately promoting collaboration among actors from the three sectors. The nexus focuses on three interrelated elements for crisis contexts: meeting immediate needs, rebuilding systems and ensuring peace for long-term stability. Recognising the complex interplay between the three elements, the nexus has been critiqued for assuming a linear logic in which stabilisation precedes rebuilding, followed by peacebuilding. This linearity is problematic because it suggests that peace follows stabilisation and rebuilding, whereas in reality, as in many conflict contexts (e.g. Palestine and Sudan), the lack of a peace built on justice –which we call a just peace– is a driver of conflict that precludes progress in the humanitarian and development spaces.

Rebuilding education systems also implies rebuilding the conditions for just peace. Crucially, the HDP Nexus lacks attention to teachers as key actors in promoting just peace. In this contribution, we spell out in greater detail what a just peace would entail and pay particular attention to the central role of teachers in promoting just peace, as highlighted in the figure below, which is often taken for granted in discussions of the HDP Nexus.

While recognising the ideas of negative and positive peace, much of the debate about peace falls into what Mohammed El Kurd, in his new book *Perfect Victims*, calls "the politics of appeal" in which discussions of peace do not talk about rights and social justice, but only discuss the

Figure 8
Centring Teachers in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus



Source: Image generated by authors using Napkin.AI and edited

absence of war and conflict, stripping the oppressed of their fundamental human rights to achieve the oppressors' peace of mind. Peace without justice risks "aidwashing" or shifting the focus from accountability to the provision of humanitarian aid – often seen as charitable contributions without political accountability. This idea of just peace is powerfully captured in the following poem by Basman Derawi:

> *Do you think a child who walks in the street, while a drone carrying rockets hovers over her head,*
>
> *wants or even needs handouts of food and clothing,*
>
> *what you call humanitarian aid?*
>
> *What they want, what they need, is true for us all:*
>
> *Dignity, Independence, Freedom.*

If just peace is a condition of stabilisation and system rebuilding, then teachers' work and teachers themselves are crucial. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* powerfully convincingly argues the idea that a teacher can be an oppressor or a liberator, advocating for teachers who not only empower children to understand the world but give them the skills and competencies to change it. Such a teacher is not a neutral or a technical agent but one who stands on the side of the oppressed and marginalised. In his book, *The Politics of Education*, Freire admonishes the act of "washing one's hands" of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral" (p. 122, 1985).

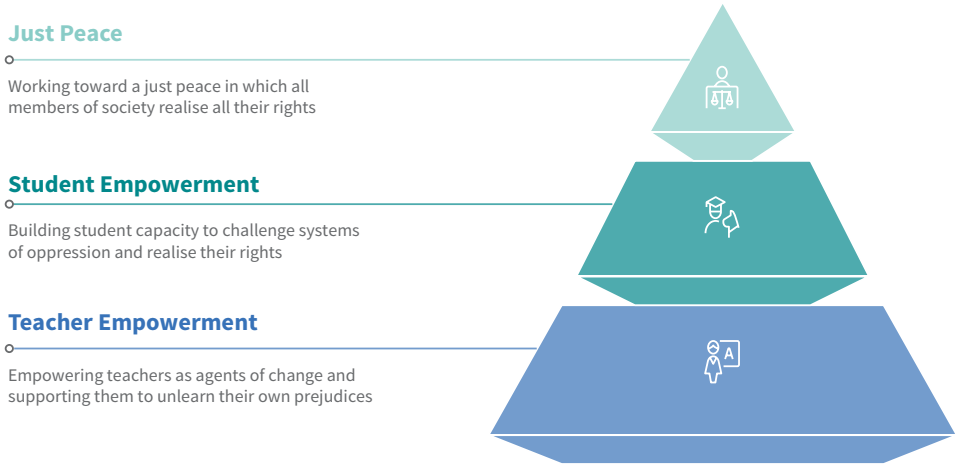
Teachers have historically held major roles in contexts of crisis and injustice. Sister Helene Nayituriki is the epitome of teachers playing an essential protective role during a crisis. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Sister Helene Nayituriki, then the head teacher at Lycée Notre Dame de Cîteaux in Kigali, took a courageous stand against prejudice, telling students, "We don't have ethnic groups at school, we have students; discrimination cannot be tolerated at all." She went on to help 150 people escape death. Moreover, survivors of the Srebrenica genocide recount stories of writing in UNHCR notebooks in improvised classrooms as they started school in Srebrenica under siege. Teachers and other school staff, they recollected, had to "improvise new ways of teaching" to try to maintain life.

Whilst teachers are key agents of positive change, we recognise that not all teachers stand for justice or are free of bias and prejudice – some align themselves with those in power, reinforcing systems of oppression. One example of this comes from the apartheid era in South Africa, where some teachers sought to indoctrinate youth through curricula that endorsed racist ideologies (see the collection of articles in a book edited by Kallaway). Another example can be found in the history of the United States of America. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) discusses how her [white] teachers immediately post-integration reinforced racist stereotypes through their lessons (p. 3), which stood in stark contrast to her experience with Black teachers who "enact[ed] a revolutionary pedagogy of resistance that was profoundly anticolonial", empowering their students (p. 2).

These examples tellingly illustrate the dual roles of teachers in contexts of injustice. Teachers also play key roles in such contexts in all areas of the HDP Nexus. A report on attacks on Palestinian education exemplifies how teachers work simultaneously as agents for just peace across the humanitarian, development and peace spaces. The report points to how teachers, despite suffering family losses, displacement, injuries and hunger, provide humanitarian support to their learners, act as distributors of food, support traumatised and vulnerable children and continue providing education. In this report, teachers demonstrate the idea of steadfastness (*ṣumūd* in Arabic) as key in acting as transformative agents of change and creating the conditions for just peace. At the same time, the following quote (University of Cambridge, Centre for Lebanese Studies & UNRWA, 2024) illustrates the critique of stabilisation and rebuilding for peace without justice:

> *The children have seen that the international community will sit idly by as they're killed for being Gazan or Palestinian for nearly a year and this has left them with questions about the values that schools hope to instil around humanitarian principles that teachers will have to navigate. (p. 30)*

Figure 9
Teacher Empowerment Laying the Foundation for Just Peace



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This report and the other examples mentioned illustrate that just peace is not a result of humanitarian aid and system stabilisation; rather, it is a key condition for these goals. Furthermore, the report illustrates the important roles of teachers in supporting learners across all three elements of the HDP Nexus.

When thinking about the way forward for the role of teachers in building just peace, it is crucial to recognise that teaching and therefore the actions of teachers, are value-driven. Teachers in any context and particularly in conflict contexts, make choices as they teach. As argued here, these choices should favour those who are marginalised and oppressed. Neutrality is not an option – particularly for teachers. Additionally, the act of teaching and the work of teachers is more than simply a narrow focus on a limited range of learning outcomes; it concerns teachers supporting the values and goals of justice in their teaching. This notion of teacher agency and identity understands teaching as actions of disruption and transgression that work against school systems and societal structures. This recognition of agency informs an understanding of teachers as political actors working within social formations that can produce and reproduce inequities and that need to be confronted and challenged. Teacher agency is thus a value-laden, political commitment and teaching is a value-laden, ethical activity.

Education programming in settings of crisis and injustice should embed values of commitment to students and justice throughout the roles of teachers. This approach moves beyond Freire's criticism of the "banking method", toward empowering teachers to build students' capacities and help them fully realise their rights and challenge the systems that oppress them, as summarised in Figure 9. When teaching peace and peace-building within programmes based on the HDP Triple Nexus, teachers should emphasise that peace must be founded on justice and not merely a call for the oppressed to endure silent oppression. Without investing in teachers – empowering them as agents of change and supporting them – it is impossible to achieve the justice-centred peace that the HDP Nexus envisions.

CAN THE TEACHER'S VOICE IN CRISIS CONTEXTS COUNT? THE UNHEARD VOICES IN THE HUMANITARIAN DEVELOPMENT AND PEACEBUILDING NEXUS

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Key takeaways:

To integrate teacher training in crisis contexts with the HDP Nexus framework, TPD programmes must transition from top-down, short-term approaches to teacher-centred, sustainable systems. This means:

- **Working collaboratively with teachers** to create TPD through participatory needs assessments that guarantee relevance, tackling issues such as multilingual and trauma-informed curricula while promoting local autonomy.
- **Boosting teacher empowerment in crisis contexts by harmonising** certification and establishing realistic and desirable minimum standards that can be globally accepted. The UNESCO Qualification Passport could serve as a basis for this by facilitating the portability of qualifications and improving employability, especially for refugee teachers.
- **Integrating conflict-sensitive curricula** in which teachers cocreate contextually relevant, conflict-sensitive curricula and support them in modelling nonviolent and cohesive behaviours.
- **Prioritising teachers' well-being** by providing them with psychosocial support and peer networks, which can mitigate burnout and promote resilience.
- **Appropriate and contextualised uses of educational technology**, including mobile learning platforms, can offer alternative, cost-effective approaches to ongoing professional growth in volatile environments.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus is a framework that aims to integrate humanitarian aid, development efforts and peacebuilding to address crises holistically, thereby fostering resilience and stability. It focuses on coordinated, long-term solutions that address immediate needs while sharing capacity. In practice, various challenges emerge that undermine this promise.

Ignoring Teachers' Perspectives in Professional Development

Teachers, especially those working in crisis contexts, serve as the fulcrum of education, providing not only teaching but also a sense of normalcy, hope and a safe environment for children amid uncertainties. However, educators' perspectives are frequently disregarded during the formulation of teaching and learning programmes and teacher professional development (TPD) programmes in crisis contexts. Humanitarian teacher training programmes, provided by various stakeholders and sometimes referred to as "parallel education systems", are characterised by a hierarchical curriculum, fragmented implementation and unrecognised credentials that fail to empower teachers or consider their expertise. The curricula developed by various stakeholders, including specific short-term programmes, do not account for contextual factors such as linguistic differences and cultural nuances as well as the unique traumas experienced by both educators and students during crises.

Lack of Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Development

This situation has immediate and long-term implications for education. Similar to other traditional scenarios, the development of teacher preparation programmes in crisis contexts is frequently carried out by individuals unfamiliar with the specific environments, resulting in a gap between theoretical and practical curriculum approaches. The function of teachers as curriculum implementers and co-creators are, in general, often overlooked in global curriculum design and development processes. Circumstances are considerably more challenging in emergency settings, where the curriculum content, context and language of instruction complicate implementation.

Insufficient coordination among training providers intensifies these difficulties. Moreover, despite the existence of coordination structures, competition is more common than collaboration in addressing teachers' TPD needs. Government departments, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operate in silos to execute TPD initiatives that overlap only occasionally due to incongruent objectives and content.

Reliance on Short-Term Project-Based Education Programmes

When crises are classified as 'humanitarian', short-term, donor-funded educational initiatives that emphasise immediate results in teacher training programmes tend to be implemented. Such arrangements have ramifications for the HDP Nexus, since long-term professional development and sustainability, which are essential principles of disaster preparedness, teacher professional development and building comprehensive crisis responses, are disregarded. In addition, project- and donor-based TPD programmes encourage dependency, depriving teachers of skills enhancement after funding ceases. When teachers are passive consumers, their agency is undermined, negatively impacting both their well-being and the development of social-emotional learning in their students. The absence of recognition eventually weakens the peacebuilding process.

Lack of Recognised Certification

Unrecognised and unaccredited certificates earned by teachers in crisis contexts limit their career mobility and professional development, consigning them to unstable, low-wage jobs. This lack of recognition contributes to teacher burnout and undermines educational systems, depriving students of quality learning. In prolonged crises, this failure weakens resilience and peacebuilding efforts within the HDP Nexus. Furthermore, an over-reliance on uncoordinated donor-funded programmes keeps both teachers and actors constantly on the move, raising concerns about the potential withdrawal of programme initiatives by the donor. This disconnection makes it difficult for humanitarian education programmes to work together with development goals, such as providing lasting education, teacher professional development programmes and peace initiatives that help communities become stronger. To align with the HDP Nexus, it is essential to implement ongoing budgeting and financing initiatives that include long-term strategies, teacher-participatory professional development and integrated approaches that strengthen education systems while promoting government ownership and sustainability.

PROMOTING SELF-REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

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Key takeaways:

- Teachers must be given a space to reflect, heal and grow to better equip them to serve their students and communities, especially in times of need. These are not meant to be feel-good practices to comfort oneself; they are essential elements of a sustainable human-centered approach to education in crisis-affected contexts (Henriksen et al., 2022; Hopman & Clark, 2023; Tangco-Siason & Siason Jr., 2024).
- We need to consider teacher well-being and self-reflective practice as central pillars of humanitarian, development, and community-building strategies. This can primarily be achieved by institutionalising self-reflection in teacher training and allocating time for socio-emotional processing of their personal and professional situation within the academic calendar.
- Embed teacher psychosocial support into education policies as a permanent feature of the Philippine teacher development system, not only during crises. At their core, improved teacher development programs can further strengthen teacher agency, well-being and resilience.

Over the past decade, particularly after the armed conflicts in the southern region of the Philippines, a series of extreme weather disturbances and natural disasters, and post-pandemic realities, teachers' inner lives and reflective practices have not received sufficient emphasis in policy and program design in institutions across the country. Reflective teaching practices are generally geared towards curricular improvements for learner and teacher experience. However, crisis-affected contexts have revealed how teachers are more than educators. The additional community roles they play exemplify the nexus approach to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work. At their core, teachers simultaneously deliver educational services, provide immediate support during crises, and contribute to social cohesion and reconciliation efforts, embodying the interconnected nature of these traditionally separate sectors in community preservation.

There remains a need to institutionalise self-reflective practice as a key component of teacher development and lifelong learning, particularly for teachers working in crisis-affected environments. Specific institutions have ongoing initiatives to address these challenges, such as the Katig Transformative Teacher Training series spearheaded by Teach for the Philippines (TFP), which focuses on professional development through mental health, motivation and self-care reflective learnings. Self-reflection proposed by the Teacher Education Council of the Department of Education. As reflective practice is key to improving teacher identity and professional quality (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021), it is important to highlight the role of self-reflection as a vital but often overlooked strategy for supporting teachers working in the most challenging situations.

In these situations, teachers are not only knowledge facilitators; but role models, caregivers, mentors, and community pillars (as shown in Fig. 1 above). These expectations arise especially in geographically isolated and depressed areas in which poverty-stricken families endure harsh conditions across many facets of community life (Lariosa et al., 2022). To sustain these roles, educators need more than just technical and soft skills training. We require a space and support to critically reflect on our values, mental capacities, individual capabilities, and the challenges we undergo. Doing so will draw attention to the following questions faced by teachers in crisis contexts:

How Can We Maintain the Mindset of Being Role Models Despite Facing Personal Hardships?

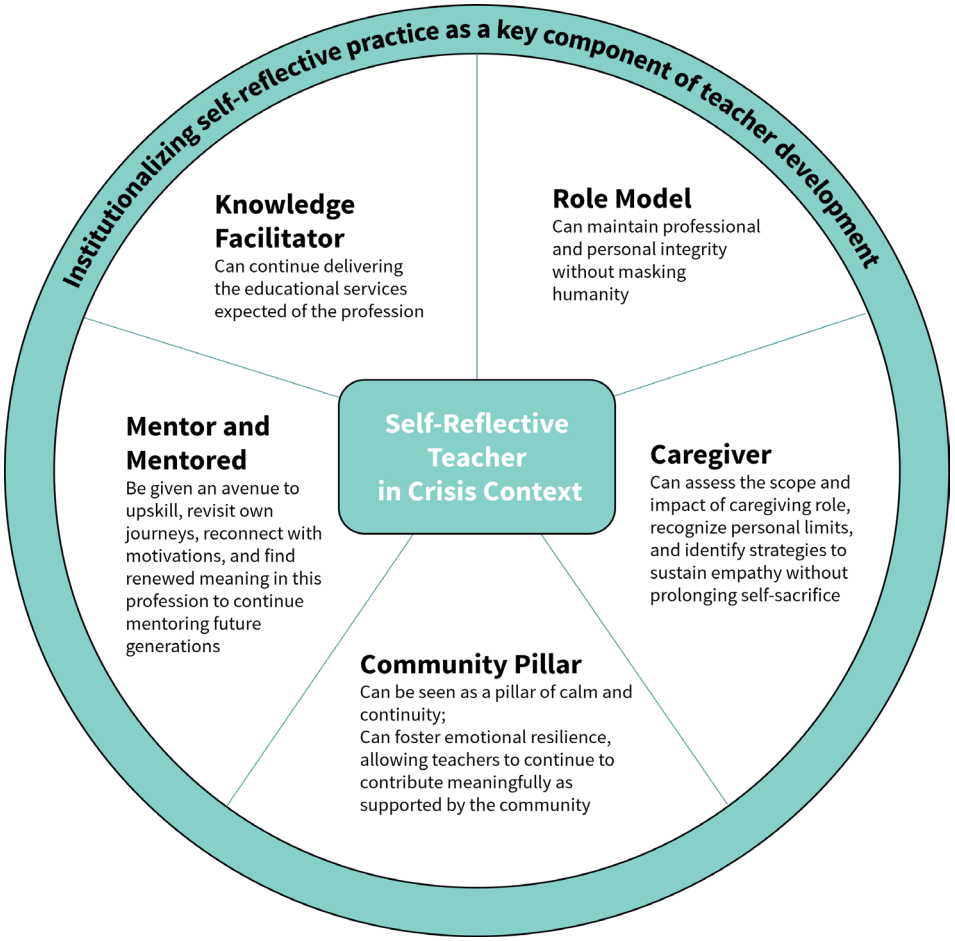
We, as teachers, are expected to model strength, integrity and optimism regardless of our present situations. Despite this, we are still human and we are physically and psychologically afflicted by the realities of pandemics, disasters, and ongoing conflicts, which makes sustaining this "identity as a role model" increasingly difficult.

Institutionalizing self-reflective practices can offer a vital space for us teachers to acknowledge emotional strain, recalibrate our mindset and realign with core professional values. The opportunity for formalized self-reflective practices that go beyond improving teacher-learner practices can help teachers maintain professional and personal integrity without masking our humanity.

What Are the Boundaries and Burdens of Caregiving When We Ourselves Are Financially or Emotionally Drained?

Crisis scenarios often stretch the role of teachers beyond instruction, requiring us to act as caregivers. In addition to delivering lessons, we willingly provide emotional support, encouragement, and, at times, even cover

Figure 10
Role of the Self-Reflective Teacher in Crisis Contexts



Source: Author

students' material needs out of pocket to ensure their continued learning. But we must realize that such willingness, amid the uncertain economic conditions, also places significant emotional and financial demands on teachers. Promoting self-reflective spaces within teacher development allows us to assess the scope and impact of their caregiving roles, recognize our personal limits, and identify strategies to sustain empathy without prolonging self-sacrifice.

How Can We Continue Mentoring Others when Our Access to Upskilling Opportunities is Limited and We Are No Longer Committed to Pursuing Meaningful Professional Development?

Mentorship requires more than experience; it needs inspiration, up-to-date knowledge and a sense of growth. However, limited access to professional development opportunities, especially meaningful, context-sensitive and empowering opportunities, can leave teachers stagnant and demotivated. Embedding reflective practice into mentoring frameworks can revitalize peer support networks even in resource-constrained situations (Pottinger et al., 2019). It should be emphasized that growth is not limited to professional upskilling. Humanizing teachers entails recognizing the need for socio-emotional growth and its integral role in professional development. Through self-reflection, we are given an avenue to revisit our own journeys, reconnect with our motivations, and find renewed meaning in this profession.

How Do We Remain as "Pillars of the Community" When Our Own Safety and Stability are Under Threat?

In times of social unrest, teachers serve as frontliners and are seen as possible pillars of calm and continuity (Hopman & Clark, 2023). But when our own homes, health or livelihoods are compromised, it becomes increasingly difficult to carry such a responsibility. When supported at the institutional level, self-reflection enhances educators' emotional resilience and allows us to continue contributing meaningfully. We are pillars, but we must not feel isolated and left alone to ourselves. Supporting teachers to remain grounded requires systems that protect our well-being and recognise that we cannot anchor others if we, too, are adrift.

These points attempt to paint a clear reflection of the lived experiences of countless teachers in the Philippines. Whereas financial benefits and additional resource funding are imperative, recognising and humanizing expectations toward teachers who are often underappreciated can also be seen as a form of empowerment.

UGANDA'S REFUGEE EDUCATION RESPONSE: CHALLENGES, INNOVATIONS AND THE CENTRAL ROLE OF TEACHERS

Martin Obwoya
Technical Advisor Education,
Plan International Uganda, Uganda

Key takeaways:

- Prioritise sustained investment in teachers' recruitment, professional development and well-being to prevent shortages and ensure quality education in crisis contexts.
- Integrate refugee education into national systems to strengthen sustainability and move beyond short-term humanitarian responses.
- Safeguard education funding to protect learning continuity, foster resilience and support peaceful coexistence in displacement-affected communities.

Uganda is known for having one of the most favourable policies for refugees and asylum seekers in the world. Its open-door policies give opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers to enter and escape from insecurity in their countries of origin. As of July 2025, a total of 1,936,934 refugees and asylum seekers resided in Uganda. Women and children constitute 78% of the refugee population, while those under 18 years of age account for 52%. To address the education challenges among the refugee and host community children, the Uganda Education Response Plan II recommends the recruitment of 13,203 teachers each year to support 709,460 learners by 2025.

Plan International Uganda (PIU) is implementing education in emergencies (EiE) projects in the Adjumani and Yumbe refugee hosting districts. These projects prioritised capacity development for teachers among other interventions with the view to provide quality education to the refugee and host community children. Due to the context and based on assessments, teachers' capacity was found to be very critical and several training sessions were implemented in the past three years to address the capacity gaps among teachers. The training focussed on gender responsive pedagogy, targeted instruction, psychosocial support counselling, disability inclusion, child protection, school hygiene and health, language bridging and mentorship programmes.

Plan International Uganda is a member of the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) consortium that implements the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) approach in the Bidi-Bidi refugee settlement. TaRL targets the root of the learning crisis by transforming the structures that lead to it. At the classroom level, TaRL employs a teaching approach that uses a simple testing tool to assess and then group children according to their learning level rather than their age or grade. TaRL seeks to ensure that all children learn and its goal is to ensure basic foundational skills for all, including clearly articulated objectives for basic reading and mathematics. In 2024, PIU trained teachers on TaRL and other gender- responsive pedagogies. After the three months of participation in the TaRL programme, 25% of learners attained the required literacy competencies, while 36% of learners attained numeracy competencies required for the level they were enrolled in.

To remain active and motivated to perform their job, PIU engaged technical staff from the district education department and teacher educators to develop a school-based mentorship programme. Teacher Learning Circle (TLC) models developed by the Uganda Education Consortium led by Save the Children International were adopted and implemented. A peer-to-peer approach was used for the peer coaching activities including Teacher Learning Circles (TLCs), classroom observations and classroom visitations that encourage shared learning and teaching among teachers. The approach contributes to the nexus by engaging local actors to participate and promote sustainable development hence, improved services to the communities.

In 2025, donor cuts and withdrawal of funding from the education sector have had far-reaching negative impacts across all levels of education including early childhood development (ECD), primary, secondary and the vocational education. By mid-2025, the number of teaching staff has been substantially reduced: 205 ECD caregivers out of 1003, 419 primary teachers out of 4,625 and 123 secondary teachers out of 1,233 have been laid off, leading to worrying

increases in pupil-teacher ratios (PTR) in refugee schools. Settlements with the worst PTR in ECD include Bidibidi at 1:129 and Palabek at 1:199. Settlements with the worst PTR at primary school level include Imvepi at 1:133, Rhino Camp at 1:121 and Kyangwali at 1:117.

These funding cuts have affected the ability of partners to effectively implement a nexus approach through teacher training and ongoing support, voice, agency, well-being and retention in crisis-affected contexts. The Uganda Education Response Plan II attributed the low motivation of teachers to inadequate teacher living accommodations. There is an average of four teachers per unit – a house – at the primary level, while at the secondary level the figure is 7:1, both above the recommended 1:1 ratio. Other challenges teachers in an emergency context face include teaching children with diverse cultures and language.

Uganda's commitment to a nexus approach is, however, reflected in the Uganda education sector's draft transition plan and roadmap, which emphasises the transfer of education services in refugee settlements from humanitarian to government planning and management with partner support. This also demonstrates the Government of Uganda's commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). UNHCR continues to advocate for the coding of community schools by the government: their recognition and integration into the national education system, which is more sustainable than relying on donor funding. Once coded, the government can allocate budget and resources to these schools.

The Uganda's open-door refugee policy remains a global model for inclusivity, but without consistent support for education, the country risks undermining its own humanitarian achievements. Teachers are at the heart of the education response; their well-being, recognition and professional development must be prioritised. Sustaining investment in teachers is not only about improving classroom learning; it is about securing the future of more than one million refugee and host-community children who rely on Uganda's education system for hope, skills and resilience. Continued cuts to education support reduce the ability of refugees to sustain livelihoods, and put peaceful co-existence at risk.

BEYOND SELF-RELIANCE: REFUGEE EDUCATORS NAVIGATING LIMINALITY WITHIN THE HDP NEXUS

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Key takeaways:
A more inclusive Nexus requires the following:

- **Reframing refugee teachers as policy actors, not just service providers or beneficiaries.** Their lived expertise in curriculum, cultural preservation, and community leadership is vital for building context-responsive systems.
- **Integrating equity into Nexus thinking.** Without confronting power asymmetries and the limits of "self-reliance" discourse, the Nexus risks perpetuating marginalisation under the guise of localisation and resilience.
- **Ensuring that cross-sectoral coordination addresses – rather than obscures – systemic exclusion is essential.** A more inclusive Nexus must redistribute authority and accountability by centering the agency of displaced communities, including refugee teachers, in both planning and policy. Only then can the HDP Nexus meaningfully bridge humanitarian aid, development, and peace in ways that uphold dignity, equity, and sustainability.
- **Developing formal accreditation systems** to integrate non-formal education into national frameworks.
- **Prioritising direct funding for refugee-led educational initiatives** within flexible multiyear Nexus financing.
- **Integrating psychosocial support into teachers' professional development** to address the impacts of temporal and spatial liminality.

A decade after the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus was proposed to bridge humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding, refugee education continues to reveal both its potential and limitations. Drawing on research with Karen (members of the Karen community from Myanmar) refugee teachers on the Thailand-Myanmar border, this contribution explores how the nexus manifests in refugee education and what can be learned from teachers' lived experiences.

Refugee Teachers as Liminal Actors Within the Nexus

The HDP Nexus emphasises localisation, integrated collaboration, and collective outcomes. Yet in practice, Karen refugee teachers on the Thai–Myanmar border are caught in spatial and temporal liminality – a condition of living "betwixt and between" systems with no clear path towards recognition or stability. These teachers operate in schools unrecognised by either host or origin governments, with qualifications valid only within camp boundaries. This structural exclusion reflects the insufficient attention paid to formal integration mechanisms in a Nexus approach, despite its rhetoric of localisation and sustainability.

Karen refugee teachers play multiple roles as educators, cultural custodians, community organisers and income generators. They integrate cultural identity into curricula to preserve Karen heritage, organise informal recognition systems to sustain morale, and initiate income-generating activities (e.g. running canteens) to fund school operations amidst dwindling external support. While their efforts demonstrate entrepreneurial resilience, they also highlight the HDP Nexus' unintended consequences: shifting responsibilities from states and international actors onto marginalised communities without addressing underlying inequities.

The Paradox of Self-Reliance within the Nexus

The Nexus promotes self-reliance and resilience as part of a development-oriented shift away from protracted humanitarian aid. However, refugee teachers' experiences reveal that self-reliance becomes paradoxical when systemic barriers remain unaddressed. Teachers described their deep frustration: their labour

is celebrated within camp communities but invisible beyond them, as their qualifications lack state accreditation. This dual recognition gap constrains their mobility, professional development and economic security – core promises of HDP integration.

Implications for Education in Emergencies (EiE)

1. Localisation must go beyond participation to formal recognition. Refugee teachers are the backbone of education in emergencies, but ''localisation'' as currently interpreted in a Nexus approach risks instrumentalising their labour without structural inclusion. Formal accreditation pathways co-designed with refugee educators are critical for sustainable, equitable education systems.

2. Flexible funding must include direct support to refugee-led initiatives. Teachers' income-generating activities fill essential gaps but should not be a substitute for adequate institutional funding. A Nexus approach should ensure flexible, multi-year financing mechanisms that prioritise refugee-led programmes while building links to national systems.

3. Conflict sensitivity requires the psychological impacts of liminality to be addressed. Teachers' indefinite waiting and lack of recognition create psychological distress and demotivation, undermining peacebuilding goals. Policies should integrate psychosocial support and professional development to sustain educators' well-being and agency.

Towards a More Inclusive Nexus

The experiences of refugee teachers illustrate the risks of de-siloing without de-colonising. When self-reliance narratives obscure systemic exclusion, the Nexus fails to achieve equitable collective outcomes.

THE TEACHER AS THE NEXUS: ENHANCING AGENCY AND WELL-BEING IN THE NATIONAL INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE EDUCATORS

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Key takeaways:

- Teachers are a critical group that can unite the different aspects of the nexus approach in a way that is genuinely localised and bottom-up. In this age of fiscal austerity, we cannot afford the inefficiency of failed, top-down projects.
- Investing in the enhanced inclusion, agency and well-being of refugee teachers is not an added cost but the most strategic, dignified and sustainable pathway to a nexus that delivers lasting results for all, including enhanced learning outcomes for learners, a reduction in social friction and the promotion of peace.
- There is great potential to build a robust evidence base on refugee teacher inclusion, well-being and agency by working directly with teachers to generate evidence.

In an era of unprecedented global displacement, the humanitarian sector faces a crippling funding crisis (Mishra, 2025), creating a dangerous paradox. Governments are simultaneously reducing education spending (Bennell, 2024) and deprioritising refugee support (ISS, 2025) in the face of competing priorities. Against this backdrop, refugee teachers are excluded from host country education systems, face financial instability and struggle with inevitable damage to their sense of well-being and agency.

This contribution describes the conceptual underpinnings of a current study seeking to build an evidence base for improving refugee teacher inclusion pathways in ways that enhance their well-being and agency. Operating in Chad, Uganda and Zambia, the study works on the premise that refugee teachers' formal inclusion into national education systems is a powerful, cost-effective catalyst for activating the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus.

Funded by the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) and led by Jigsaw in partnership with UNHCR and Refugee Education UK (REUK) as part of the Global Evidence for Refugee Education (GERE) initiative, the project explores and seeks to strengthen pathways for the national integration of refugee teachers. This work's central research approach involves training refugee teachers as co-researchers – from critiquing research questions to analysing data and formulating policy recommendations – as their lived experiences constitute the driving force of the study. This approach positions the refugee teacher as a living embodiment of the triple nexus: a single human point in which the three pillars (humanitarian, development and peace) converge.

From a humanitarian perspective, our work recognises the crucial role that education plays in emergency contexts: a role in which teachers are the primary actors (INEE, 2022). If we are to ask these teachers to play this role while they themselves are dealing with displacement, we must at the very least ensure that they are provided with the tools, recognition and support required. Recent research suggests that the appropriate support for these teachers is typically not in place (Save The Children, 2025). As such, we are concerned with fostering a dignified, rights-based humanitarianism that invests first and foremost in human capital.

From a development perspective, the research team views the integration of refugee teachers as a direct engine for the strengthening of the national system. It is a strategic alternative to creating costly, aid-dependent parallel education systems. By investing in the national system to recognise and absorb these educators, host countries can address their own teacher shortages, enrich classrooms with linguistic diversity and gain a cohort of motivated professionals (Bengtsson et al., 2023). This transition from aid recipient to salaried taxpayer represents the pinnacle of sustainable development, fostering self-reliance and reducing long-term financial burdens on the state and the international community.

The peace-building implications of this approach are profound and practical. When a refugee teacher serves as a state-certified professional and community leader, a powerful dismantling of the "us versus them" narratives that fuel social friction can occur. This formal inclusion by the state is a powerful act of peace-building that demonstrates a commitment to a pluralistic society and building the mutual trust that underpins stability (Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.).

PEDAGOGY OF CARE: TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN REFUGEE VILLAGES IN PAKISTAN

Sacha Innes
Right to Learn Afghanistan, Canada

Key takeaways:

- UNHCR Pakistan should consider adapting this programme and scaling out efforts to ensure social cohesion established among these teachers is sustained, and that teachers in other Pakistani refugee villages gain similar learning experiences.
- As Afghan refugee students integrate into Pakistani Government schools, stakeholders should consider adapting the pedagogy of care TPD to promote social cohesion among Pakistani and Afghan teachers and learners.

Introduction and Context

UNHCR Pakistan runs 153 schools and other alternative learning programmes (UNHCR 2025), providing 57,000 Afghan refugee children with primary education. Considering the 2012 Global Refugee Education Strategy, in 2018, UNHCR schools shifted to the Pakistani Single National Curriculum, taught in Urdu. With increasing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, in 2023 the Pakistani government began the forced repatriation of Afghans including children, even those born in Pakistan (Save the Children, 2023). It is within this complex context that Right to Learn Afghanistan (RTLA), a Canadian charity, is studying teacher professional development (TPD) and introducing teachers to the "pedagogy of care".

A Pedagogy of Care Teacher Training Programme

RTLA piloted a hybrid TPD programme designed to promote quality, efficiency and equity. It included an online course on the "pedagogy of care" and monthly meetings known as "networked improvement communities (NICs)" facilitated by four university professors working as education facilitators (EFs).

A prior situational analysis (Dinakhel & Ghali, 2024) found that teachers were concerned about teaching the Pakistani curriculum and using Urdu as the language of instruction. Afghan teachers shared a sense of depletion and alienation. As one Afghan teacher said, "I tell you honestly, my heart is very exhausted from teaching"; another said, "our book does not include any content related to Afghanistan and I have not been allowed to discuss Afghan topics".

Designers structured the course curriculum to reflect the experiences of Afghan refugees during this period of upheaval and displacement. Content was guided by the work of Gilligan (1993) and Tronto (1993) on the "ethics of care" and empathy and compassion. The pedagogy of care modules introduced teachers to care concepts through practical strategies designed to help them care for themselves, their colleagues, and their refugee students. The modules were reviewed for contextualisation by UNHCR technical experts and implementing partners, and the course was launched on the RTLA Moodle platform, as a free, open product.

The programme targeted primary school teachers funded by UNHCR, balanced by gender and ethnicity (50% Afghan). Fifty teachers participated in the programme from August 2024 to April 2025.

Research Findings

Preliminary findings from a mixed-methods research study indicate that teachers participating in the programme were able to use an evidence-based action learning cycle (Plan, Do, Study, Act) to identify and support refugee students. One group, for example, noticed that "slow learners benefitted from individual attention; attention should be paid to [students] by giving them extra or after class-time". For withdrawn students, teachers experimented with assertiveness-focused role playing exercises. Teachers intervened with students with letter reversal issues, comprehension challenges and significant learning lags by experimenting with adjusting lesson delivery, changing seating arrangements and creating peer learning opportunities.

These micro-challenges and experimental solutions illustrate that teachers in low-resource refugee learning environments, who may themselves be experiencing dislocation, can provide care and support refugee students in need.

Crucially, the TPD programme appeared to impact how (Pakistani) EFs understood care, and observed Afghan refugee teachers. One EF shared that "[Afghans] were actually helping us to understand their culture. To open our hearts and minds about them". Another EF explained that "previously I would consider [Afghan teachers as] just teachers like any other government schools, but after interacting with them, I came to realise they have [a] different set of problems."

Conclusion and Recommendations

These preliminary observations suggest that TPD can break down barriers and promote social cohesion among refugees/displaced teachers and host country educators. Teachers can employ actionable strategies to support refugee students to gain a sense of belonging, even during acute situational upheaval. Education facilitators play an essential role in facilitating trust among refugee and host country teachers. These facilitators themselves may experience a sense of "care transformation" which can impact their understanding of refugee educators and students.

Acknowledgment and Disclaimer

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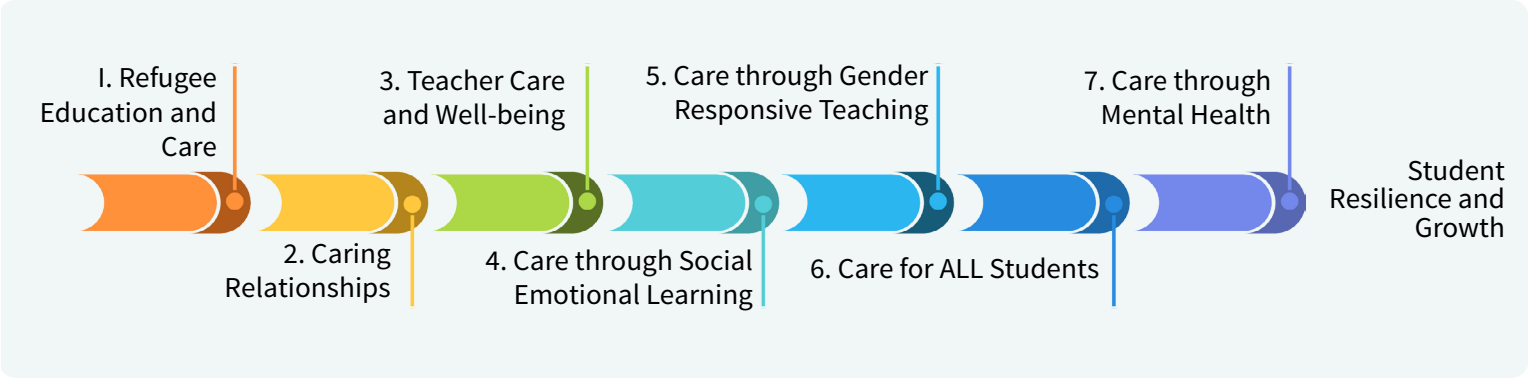
Figure 11
Pedagogy of Care Course Overview



Source: Right to Learn Afghanistan

LEVERAGING TEACHER-LED INNOVATION TO LOCALIZE THE TRIPLE NEXUS: LESSONS FROM SCHOOLS2030 IN CRISIS-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

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Key takeaways:

- Governments and education partners should formally recognize and embed teacher-led innovation models, such as those used in Schools2030, into national teacher professional development frameworks to ensure that grassroots innovations inform system-wide practices.
- Education systems should integrate holistic learning and associated assessment tools, to address both the academic and emotional needs of crisis-affected learners.
- Policy frameworks should allow for greater decentralisation of education programming, empowering local NGOs and education authorities so that educational continuity can be safeguarded when international operations are restricted.

Nearly a decade since the introduction of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, the global education sector continues to grapple with operationalizing the model, particularly in the contexts of emergencies and protracted crises The Schools2030 Programme, implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and supported by a consortium of donors, operates in 10 countries worldwide, including crisis-affected countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uganda. It offers a compelling example of how localised, teacher-driven innovation can bridge the three pillars of the Nexus: addressing immediate educational needs while promoting long-term development and contributing to social cohesion.

The cornerstone of Schools2030's contribution to the Nexus is its three-step model, which is grounded in human-centred design (HCD), innovation and holistic learning. Through this model, Schools2030 supports teachers in assessing student learning using contextualised holistic assessment tools that were co-designed with teachers, validated through their use with learners and are responsive to local needs, including for crisis-affected learners. Based on the assessment evidence, teachers then design contextually relevant innovations to improve quality, equitable learning through HCD. These new innovations are tested and iterated at classroom level, with the most impactful showcased in local, national and global events and media to connect school-level innovation to system-level change. For instance, Uganda's National Institute of Teacher Education (NITE) cited the Schools2030 model as a basis for its rethinking of teacher education, while in Pakistan, provincial education officials publicly committed to broader collaboration with Schools2030 partners. Such engagements ensure that the results of the three-step process have the potential for wider systemic impact.

One of the persistent critiques of Nexus implementation concerns its lack of genuine local ownership (IASC, 2024). Schools2030 counters this by empowering teachers to lead classroom-based innovations and by integrating their voices into national education dialogues. It has shown an adaptability that facilitates alignment between humanitarian and long-term education development goals. In Afghanistan, where political restrictions have led to an increased reliance on local NGOs, this model has also proven resilient, allowing local partners to continue supporting schools.

Its responsiveness is further enabled by a commitment to iterative learning with feedback loops through the assessment of learning outcomes and the quality of learning environment, thereby ensuring that educational strategies remain aligned with evolving needs. As several institutional reviews note, context-specific, adaptive programming is essential for operationalising the HDP nexus in volatile and systemically fragile environments (UNICEF, 2021). The Schools2030 movement has significantly enhanced teacher agency in the crisis-affected contexts such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uganda by positioning educators as central actors in educational innovation and improvement. These opportunities have elevated the voices of teachers within policy and education circles and increased their motivation, confidence and ownership over professional development.

Schools2030 prioritises evidence generation as part of a wider effort to identify, support and scale education innovations that show impact on quality teaching and learning and

that align to contextual needs and priorities. The programme works with teachers and school leaders co-design and test education innovations and gather evidence of impact - to date, Schools2030 has worked in partnership with over 50,000 teachers in 1000 schools across 10 countries, including in crisis- affected contexts. The programme also works in partnership with Ministries of Education, local education authorities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders to amplify teacher-led innovation and evidence and to ensure policy alignment and relevance. This approach reflects a shift from fragmented, short-term interventions towards a collective, long-term vision for educational transformation (Wyss et al., 2023). By building a robust ecosystem for peer learning, policy engagement and digital access to open-source tools, Schools2030 is laying the groundwork for the systemic uptake and sustainability of its teachers' innovations, ultimately bridging the gap between school-level experimentation and nationwide educational reform.

Schools2030 offers a powerful example of how the HDP Nexus can be brought to life at scale through localised, teacher-led solutions that position educators as central to crisis response and recovery. We echo Henderson's (2023) warning that "the absence of teachers' voices from global policy and guidance means that we have an inadequate understanding of teachers' agency and fail to recognize their potential to realize, reimagine and rework global recommendations at a local level." By centring teacher-led assessment, teacher agency and local ownership, Schools2030 offers a replicable and sustainable model for education in crisis-affected contexts – one that keeps teachers' responses to real-world challenges at the core of system transformation.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES: A SCALABLE APPROACH FROM EASTERN CONGO

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Key takeaways:

- **Embed EiE and peace education within national teacher training curricula.** Relying on short, project-based training is insufficient. Governments and donors should co-fund the integration of comprehensive modules into formal education and teacher training systems.
- **Center teacher well-being in all nexus interventions.** Teacher professional development must include both psychosocial support for students and reflective tools for educators, who often operate under extraordinary stress.
- **Support scaling models that are locally led and adaptable.** Top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches rarely work in crises. By investing in locally co-developed content and iterative feedback systems, education systems can better serve teachers and learners alike.

If education systems are to support peace and resilience in conflict-affected contexts, they must prepare teachers to respond to violence with care, to teach amid crises with purpose and to rebuild trust in fractured communities. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a team led by professor Samuel Matabishi at the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu is developing a new competence-based teacher training module to achieve just that. The module integrates peace education, education in emergencies (EiE) and trauma-sensitive pedagogy into pre-service training for secondary teachers. This initiative is an urgent and practical response to the call for a stronger Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in education.

A Nexus-Based Pedagogy for Future Teachers

Teachers in eastern DRC face extreme challenges: displacement, exposure to violence by armed actors, psychological stress and teaching in dilapidated classrooms with little pay and resources. Yet, as countless studies have affirmed, they remain one of the most critical actors in sustaining the right to education during a crisis and in shaping the future of peace (Mendenhall et al. 2024).

Through a partnership between the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu (ISP Bukavu) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), our team, which is based at these institutions, is co-developing a structured module that draws directly from the lived realities of Congolese teachers. This initiative builds on over five years of collaborative research and is now supported through the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX). The module is being designed for scale and institutional uptake across the country's teacher training institutes.

What sets this module apart is not only its contextual relevance but its integrated, competence-based design that is tailored to the DRC's teacher training curriculum. It weaves peace education, emergency response and trauma-responsive approaches into the foundational skillset of future teachers.

Three Pillars of the Module

1. Peace Education as Foundation, Not an Add-On

Teachers are introduced to the concept of *positive peace* (Galtung, 1969), which focuses on justice, inclusion and relational healing – not just the absence of violence. The module trains teachers to facilitate critical conversations around conflict, identity, reconciliation and coexistence in the classroom. Activities, which range from storytelling and case analysis to conflict mapping, are all tied to the broader goal of building peaceful school communities.

2. Contextualised Education in Emergencies

The module is rooted in a deep understanding of the DRC's protracted conflict dynamics. It helps future teachers understand how schools are embedded in wider political economies of violence, from armed group interference to structural inequalities. Learners engage with the architecture of EiE, child protection frameworks and strategies for maintaining learning in the face of crisis. This equips teachers to respond both pedagogically and pragmatically when emergencies unfold.

3. Trauma-Sensitive and Relational Pedagogy

Many children – and teachers themselves – are navigating grief, fear and loss. The module foregrounds psychosocial support, introducing practical strategies for creating safe, inclusive and emotionally responsive classrooms. This approach is informed by deep, locally grounded expertise on trauma and healing in conflict-affected communities. It also invites a critical reflection on teacher well-being, helping future educators to recognise their own emotional needs, develop resilience strategies and avoid burnout. These efforts align with growing global evidence showing that teacher well-being is essential for student learning, particularly in emergencies (Falk et al., 2019).

A Locally Led, Globally Relevant Approach

While grounded in eastern DRC, the module can be adapted to fit other conflict-affected contexts. It draws, for example, from INEE's *Teachers in Crisis Contexts* framework and builds on prior work under the EU- funded Building Resilience in Conflict through Education (BRiCE) programme. Importantly, the module is being shaped by Congolese teacher educators and practitioners, ensuring socio-cultural relevance and local ownership. The GPE KIX-supported scaling process aims to test and refine the module in different provinces with a feedback loop built into its implementation.

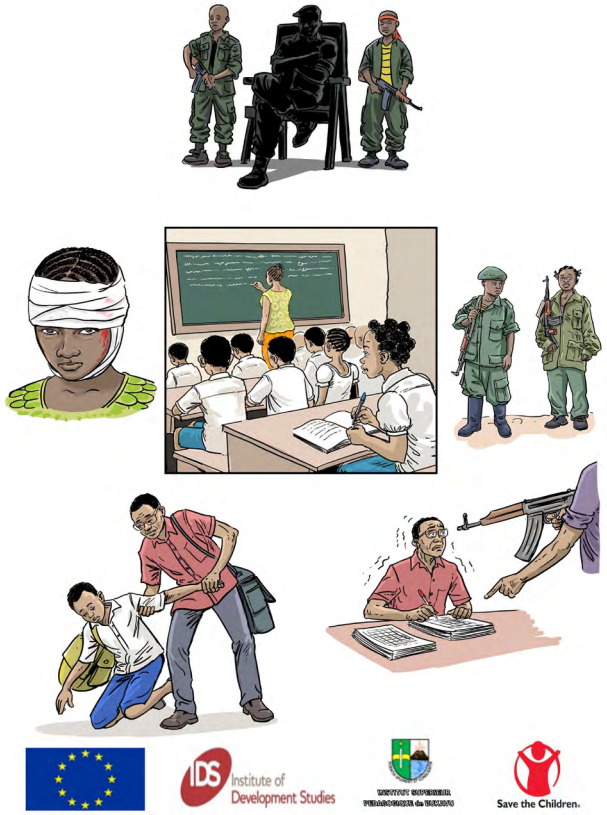
What the Triple Nexus Looks Like in Practice

This module exemplifies the HDP Nexus in action:

1. **Humanitarian:** It addresses immediate needs for safer learning spaces and psychosocial support in crisis settings.
2. **Development:** It strengthens national teacher training systems and embeds new competencies at scale into pre-service training curricula.
3. **Peace:** It prepares teachers to become facilitators of healing, dialogue and social cohesion in divided communities.

In this sense, the project challenges donors and policymakers to move beyond short-term trainings and invest in systemic, locally led teacher preparation that addresses the complexities of conflict-affected education.

Figure 12
Teaching in Conflict-Affected Contexts



Source: Image produced by Congolese artist Séraphin Kajibwami.

Acknowledgment

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REFORGING LINKS; RESHAPING VISIONS: A REVIEW OF THE HDP NEXUS FOR BETTER TEACHER SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Key takeaways:

- Include EiE in teacher-education and teacher-preparation training schemes.
- Enhance coordination between local, national and international initiatives by empowering and financing local HDP organisations and initiatives.
- Develop dedicated and localised funding mechanisms to ensure that local agencies are supplied with the resources that they need to respond to contextual issues.
- Recognise how progress leads to social divides and disenfranchisement if systemic issues are not addressed.

The humanitarian–development–peace nexus (HDP) is an approach aimed at unifying three fields and utilising collaborative efforts to help people meet their needs, address vulnerabilities and risks and work towards building and sustaining peace (Nguya & Siddiqui, 2021). It purports that national and international organisations, policymakers and donors must embrace this brand of action, labelled a "new way of working" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2016).

While the nexus was designed to be collaborative and generalisable, recent reports show that this design inhibits deeper contextualisation and limits the integration of nuances needed at the grassroots. For instance, Olelke and Scherer (2022) as well as Puglisi et al. (2025) discussed how the broad, generalised strategies as well as significant structural inequalities and the lack of a shared understanding of the nexus have inhibited its intended purpose.

Supporting Teachers in the Nexus

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) describes the requirements for providing "quality, safe, and relevant education for all persons affected by emergencies" (INEE, 2025). Members of the network, supported by its secretariat, have been actively working to address issues in education in emergencies (EiE) globally. However, the nature of and response to emergencies require immediate attention. Local and national organisations/agencies should be empowered and financed to fully serve as a first-responder arm, making coordination towards addressing emerging needs easier and quicker.

INEE has focused on work to support the professional development and well-being of teachers. However, teacher-education programmes are often designed to equip future educators with the most basic knowledge and technical know-how on the teaching profession, and they are only trained in areas specific to EiE when crises arise. This reactive manner of training, upskilling and deploying teachers who have no prior experience with EiE should be changed. For instance, the teacher-education curriculum in the Philippines was designed to be industry responsive; however, after the siege of Marawi in 2017, educators in the area had to face anxiety-riddled children and deal with significant difficulties resulting from the conflict that occurred in the area (Sultan, 2018). Many of them are unprepared to do so. On a similar note, the decades-long conflict and insurgency in Mindanao revealed how schools can reinforce radicalism, violence and similar ideologies as well as how the combination of conflict and the promotion of a single religion can inhibit inclusion and discourage diversity (Floresta, 2022). These are realities that teachers are simply ill-equipped to respond to, particularly at micro and macro levels, where peacebuilding and inclusivity should be present.

Proactively equipping future educators with EiE competencies would enable them to respond to emergencies quickly and with properly contextualised solutions. This initiative will necessitate the enrichment of existing teaching curricula, training structures and skill development schemes in local settings. It will entail integrating and combining humanitarian, development and peace concepts into teachable units and competencies for teacher-education institutions. These competencies include, but are not limited to:

- Conflict prevention/resolution
- Social and emotional learning and psychosocial support
- Peace education
- Human rights education
- Inclusive education
- Social, cultural and economic diversity

Contextual Factors that Affect Teachers

Teachers and teaching are affected by the educational, economic, social, and political inequalities that become apparent at the grassroots during crises and are directly experienced by the concerned populations. Local agencies and organisations are rendered ineffective due to heavily bureaucratised policies and procedures, which often delay or hamper resource allocation and teaching and learning activities. Having a dedicated and easily accessible funding mechanism would help empower local agencies and ensure the timely dissemination of aid when it is necessary.

The ways in which the current realities inevitably define future social divides should also be a point of emphasis. The sharp rise in technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence, is an example of this. Relatively richer countries are capable of immediately absorbing and integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their economic, social, and educational systems, and are advancing at a faster rate. Meanwhile, poorer countries struggle economically, socially, and educationally, and are left behind further due to their failure to adapt. Children in conflict-ridden areas and children of families living below the poverty line are doubly disadvantaged because their situation renders them unaware of what mainstream society currently enjoys as part of their daily lives.

The global inability to address poverty and conflict before it occurs leads to social divides. Efforts to curb these situations should include finding equitable solutions that consider both the rich and the poor as well as those who living in conflict-afflicted areas. The same effort should be directed at providing additional support for teachers and the learners in these circumstances.

INTEGRATING EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS INTO TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN PAKISTAN: A NEXUS APPROACH

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Key takeaways:

- Incorporate mandatory modules on emergency pedagogy, climate adaptation and remote instruction into curricula.
- Equip teachers with the skills to offer trauma-informed and socially inclusive instruction.
- Embed the reform of teacher education within national policy and planning frameworks.

The Urgency of Teacher Preparedness in Emergencies

The increasing frequency of natural disasters (e.g. floods, climate-related disruptions and pandemics) and man-made crises (e.g. the war on terror, security threats and socio-economic disparities in schooling) in Pakistan has intensified the country's learning crisis and further deteriorated its quality of education (UNESCO, 2024; World Bank, 2022). According to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan ranks among the top ten countries most vulnerable to climate change (Eckstein et al., 2021). The devastating 2022 floods disrupted education for over 3.5 million children (UNESCO, 2024), while the COVID-19 pandemic exposed systemic gaps in preparedness for remote instruction (Bond, 2021).

Climate change continues to trigger increasingly severe weather events and school closure, and at the same time, terrorism, internal conflicts and widespread criminal activities compromise school safety. Persistent socio-economic inequalities, especially between well-resourced private schools and underfunded public schools, exacerbate the impact of these crises on marginalised learners. The cumulative effects of these shocks create long-term learning losses and deepen inequity.

Teachers, as frontline actors in the education system, are pivotal to sustaining learning and safeguarding student well-being during such emergencies. However, most teachers are ill-equipped to manage disruptions, support learners in distress or adapt pedagogy for crisis contexts (Ahmad et al., 2025; Chidambaram & Khalid, 2024). This limited capacity not only delays educational recovery but also widens existing learning gaps. It is therefore imperative to reimagine Pakistan's teacher education through a triple nexus lens by linking education, emergency response and sustainable development, to prepare teachers for the complex realities they face.

Emergency Contexts Confronting Teachers in Pakistan

Despite the recurring nature of climate-, conflict- and health-related emergencies in Pakistan, TEPs have failed to systematically address preparedness for such events. Empirical evidence indicates that disaster-risk-reduction training is rare among Pakistani teachers (Hyder et al., 2020). Few pre-service or in-service curricula include content on emergency teaching strategies, climate-adaptive instruction or digital pedagogies for remote learning (Sujaya et al., 2023; Shah et al., 2019).

Teachers working in areas affected by terrorism and internal conflict often face prolonged school closures, infrastructure damage and psychological trauma among students (Ali et al., 2024). Many are unprepared to manage such environments, let alone support children's recovery or facilitate learning under duress. The socio-economic divide in access to education further complicates matters, with marginalised learners being disproportionately affected by disruptions.

Moreover, research has highlighted a widespread lack of training in conflict-sensitive education and trauma-informed teaching (Durrani et al., 2017). In contrast, global evidence from low- and middle-income as well as conflict-affected settings suggests that equipping teachers with psychosocial support skills can significantly improve student retention, well-being, and learning outcomes in crisis contexts (Arega, 2023; Cahill et al., 2020; Falk et al., 2019). These gaps

expose a missed opportunity to utilise teachers as active agents of resilience and recovery.

Policy Recommendations: Embedding a Nexus Approach into Teacher Education

To address these gaps, Pakistan's Teacher Education Programmes, both pre- and in-service and offered by specialised institutions, must embed emergency preparedness across three interconnected domains: curricula, psychosocial support and inclusive pedagogies and alignment with national frameworks. These reforms should be implemented with a nexus approach that connects humanitarian needs, long-term development goals and education system strengthening. Importantly, achieving this vision requires synergy across public systems as well as humanitarian, development, national and international stakeholders to ensure teacher preparedness and responsiveness in emergency situations.

Disaster Risk Reduction in Curricula

The curricula of Pakistan's TEPs should incorporate mandatory modules on emergency pedagogy, climate adaptation and remote instruction. These should be co-developed with national institutions such as the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and include simulation-based training, scenario planning and toolkits for school-level emergency responses.

These reforms would ensure that teachers are not merely passive responders but proactive facilitators of educational continuity and student safety during crises. As noted by Sujaya et al. (2023), curriculum innovation is a critical step in aligning education systems with the realities of an increasingly volatile world.

Psychosocial Support and Inclusive Teaching Strategies

The second priority is equipping teachers with the skills necessary to offer trauma-informed and socially inclusive instruction, particularly in conflict-affected or displaced communities. These skills should include basic training in recognising signs of trauma, providing psychosocial first aid and applying differentiated teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners, including those from marginalised and underserved backgrounds (Durrani et al., 2017; Siddiqui, 2017).

Low-intensity psychosocial support initiatives can significantly enhance children's well-being and engagement in post-crisis settings (Cahill et al., 2020). Embedding such training in TEPs will not only enhance emergency response but also contribute to broader development goals, such as equity, social cohesion and inclusive learning.

Integration with National Frameworks and Monitoring Systems

Finally, teacher education reform must be embedded within national policy and planning frameworks. The proposed upgrades to TEPs should align with Pakistan's National Education Policy Framework (2024) and contribute directly to the achievement of global commitments such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Peace and Justice).

The National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) in Pakistan needs to extend its role to assess teacher preparedness and responsiveness in emergencies using indicators such as training coverage, application of inclusive practices and student engagement during crises. Multilevel collaboration between public institutions, humanitarian agencies, teacher education providers and international partners is essential to ensuring that reforms are implemented at scale and sustained over time.

Conclusion

The triple nexus of humanitarian response, development and peace underscores the central role of education and teachers in crisis contexts. Within this framing, teachers are not merely curriculum deliverers but critical agents of resilience, recovery and social cohesion. To address the worsening learning crisis in Pakistan, teacher education must evolve to embed crisis preparedness, equipping teachers to sustain learning amid disruption while also contributing to longer-term development and peacebuilding. Empowering teachers in this way can reduce educational inequalities and strengthen a more resilient, responsive and equitable education system for all.

4 LEADING LOCALLY

Leading Locally examines the necessity of shifting power to local leadership and solutions, focusing on empowering community actors, integrating community and national systems, and addressing structural barriers to funding and coordination.

Shetty and Hassan maintain that the global aid system requires a structural reform addressing compliance bottlenecks and performance metrics if it is to genuinely support local actors, such as those running emergency response rooms in Sudan, who are already enacting Nexus principles but remain marginalised by centralised control and inflexible global funding mechanisms. **D'Angelo** contends that moving beyond fragmented data systems and siloed decision-making necessitates a unified, demand-driven approach to evidence generation—one that systematically incorporates local expertise and knowledge to inform integrated HDP responses, as exemplified by the Locally Inclusive Framework for Transforming Education Decision-Making (LIFTED) framework. **Kochenburger** argues that the inter-governmental Safe Schools Declaration (SSD) and its state-led implementation network embody the spirit of the Nexus by fostering state-led, localised, peer-to-peer collaboration aimed at protecting education in conflict zones and promoting national policy reform.

Mokolé suggests that the Kündükwa initiative in the Central African Republic (CAR) illustrates the transformative potential of local leadership and community dialogue platforms by sustainably improving education through strengthened community ownership, enhanced teacher motivation and the better monitoring of access to education—particularly for girls. **Samuel** maintains that realising the full potential of the HDP Nexus requires a fundamental reorientation that prioritises direct, multi-year and flexible funding as well as co-design with and leadership from local women-led organisations whose holistic approaches to conflict, education and social cohesion closely align with Nexus principles. **Postemska** argues that Ukraine's recovery experience indicates that leveraging grants for budget support, fostering local ownership and community participation and aligning reconstruction with ongoing reform agendas under the Build Forward framework are critical for strategic, sustainable and hopeful recovery. **Bhatt and Radford** argue that Ukraine's crisis response demonstrates how the government-led deployment of edtech initiatives, such as AUSO, can function as a systems innovation lever for the Triple Nexus when underpinned by robust digital frameworks, coordinated governance and a strategic alignment between humanitarian and development actors.

Sheshadri contends that foundational Arabic literacy reforms in Jordan, such as the RAMP initiative, advance the HDP Nexus by reinforcing national education systems through evidence-based pedagogical practices and integrating transformative components that cultivate learners' agency, empathy and social cohesion. **Sindhvad** suggests that the education response for Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar reveals how the evolution of humanitarian aid towards rights-based, long-term development is deeply contingent upon the host government's political will and its commitment to peacebuilding efforts that affirm children's identity and culture. **Skeie and Dalrymple** argue that the Tanzanian government's abrupt withdrawal from the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) exemplifies the fragility of global compacts when confronted with domestic political pressures, reinforcing a siloed approach to refugee education that undermines inclusion and long-term Nexus objectives.

Alone and Laeke provide a case study of how codes of contact are contextualised while integrating safeguarding policy into local authority systems in the challenging context of refugee camps in Gambella, Ethiopia. **Rehman** argues that the Punjab Human Capital Investment Project operationalises the HDP Nexus in early childhood care and education (ECCE) by leveraging multi-year World Bank financing, fostering local ownership through school councils and promoting integrated development centred on play-based and socio-emotional learning in underserved communities. Lastly, **Latafat** maintains that Nexus implementation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces persistent obstacles due to the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the notions of peace, limited local ownership and donor fragmentation, suggesting that education should be more explicitly positioned as a cross-cutting instrument to promote resilience and peacebuilding within national strategies.

WHOSE NEXUS? WHEN THE SYSTEM LAGS BEHIND FRONTLINE ACTORS

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Key takeaways:

- **Reform compliance to enable local leadership.** Simplify and scale compliance requirements to size and risk using shared accreditation to open funding access for smaller local actors.
- **Embed power sharing into performance metrics and budgets.** Redesign KPIs and funding structures to prioritise community decision-making, capacity exchange and adaptive programme delivery.
- **Shift coordination from badging to building.** Implement resource coordination mechanisms, share leadership with local actors and ensure a fair distribution of pooled funds.
- **Ensure that flexible funding reaches the frontline.** Maintain flexibility through all funding layers, build shared risk buffers and transparently track funding flows to local partners.

The conflict in Sudan uprooted over 11 million people and pushed a serious hunger crisis to the brink. Emergency response rooms (ERR) emerged as lifelines in the besieged Khartoum state. Run entirely by volunteers, these neighbourhood-based networks create safe spaces for children to learn and play, provide meals to prevent malnutrition and keep services like water and electricity running. However, the scale of need far exceeds their means. While their work runs on small donations from local and diaspora benefactors, many international agencies remain hesitant to fund community groups and choose to operate in areas with "supposedly less fighting". Essentially, these ERR volunteers shoulder the responsibilities that the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (Triple) Nexus was designed to support, stepping in when international and state systems fall short.

Promises

In 2016, the UN's World Humanitarian Summit coined a new way of working. This idea, now known as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (Triple) Nexus, was simple enough. It meant collective action for collective outcomes over multiple years so that efforts reinforce one another rather than compete. A twin reform, the Grand Bargain, pledged more local leadership, more multi-year flexible funding and slashed red tape so that frontline actors could actually deliver impact where it is needed most.

Yet, nine years after these global pledges, the ERR's daily juggle of delivering life-saving aid, long-term learning and community healing is, ironically, exactly what the Triple Nexus was supposed to enable. These ERRs, like countless local actors across the world, are already "doing the nexus." The question is whether the global system can catch up and whether it can learn to genuinely support local leadership, solutions and actors. This mismatch is the starting point and the warning shot for this article.

Fractures

Several conferences, policy briefs, webinars and glossy toolkits echo the same chorus: localise more, coordinate better and fund flexibly. This mantra is usually delivered by those who already hold the purse strings and the podium. We have heard the critique many times before, but today, these are no longer abstract; they show up in very specific pressure points that stall progress everywhere, from donor capital flow to the classroom.

Compliance Bottlenecks Shut Out Local Organisations

"Listen to local voices" sounds hollow when those voices are shut out long before the conversation begins. This is evidenced by the fact that direct funding to local and national actors rose to just 4.5 percent in 2023, a sliver of the Grand Bargain's 25 percent pledge. Eligibility thresholds and exhaustive compliance requirements keep many community organisations from even stepping onto the playing field, let alone shaping strategy.

In practice, the door closes before local actors have a chance to speak, so the collective action the Nexus promises is forged without those it claims to centre. Whose Nexus is it, really?

The problem is structural. The humanitarian system was not built to share power; rather, it was built to manage and control risk. Changing this will require political will and a full structural redesign. However, the most immediate and practical lever is compliance itself. Donors can't relax compliance. Taxpayers and boards expect robust safeguards and rightly so; however, they can design it to manage risk without blocking local leadership.

Begin with tiered due diligence: Require lighter, proportional checks for community-based organisations (e.g., verified bank account and reference letters) and reserve full audits for high-value, high-risk grants. Maybe it is time to establish a single passport accreditation valid for three years and recognised by all major donors so that local partners stop drowning in duplicate audits. It is also critical to scale requirements to size and risk: A community-based organisation should have to clear a lighter checklist than a multinational NGO instead of being shut out altogether. True localisation cannot occur until compliance becomes enabling rather than extractive.

Local Leadership Is Undone by Control and KPIs

For all the Nexus commitments to shift power to local organisations, most localisation efforts still look like theatre rather than transfer. The mechanics of decision-making remains centralised, budgets are approved far from the crisis, priority themes are set before consultations and local actors are framed as downstream implementers, not leaders. Ground Truth Solutions' (2025) multi-country survey backs this up: Crisis-affected communities continue to report low levels of trust in aid actors and do not feel more heard or involved.

Why has the power not shifted? Part of the answer to this question lies in how the system judges performance. What gets measured is what gets funded: textbooks distributed, children enrolled and hours of training delivered. The metrics may be tidy, but what actually drives long-term impact in crisis education is far messier: how lessons were co-designed with communities, how teachers mentored each other, how trust was built with local leaders and how programs were re-designed through feedback from the ground. This kind of relational and adaptive work, the core of genuine localisation and capacity exchange (not one-way capacity building), is what underpins resilient education systems.

The sector is full of talk about local participation, so we all agree that it matters. Why, then, is it still underfunded as an afterthought? Rigid logframes and donor-driven KPIs leave little room (or budget) for participation. True participation, after all, takes time and money. It requires dialogue, iteration and long-term relationships. These are rarely considered efficient in a system that rewards quick results on limited budgets and limited time.

Key performance indicators (KPIs), which flood proposals and agreements, are not villains; they simply reflect what we choose to value. We can make KPIs work for participation rather than against it. It is time we consider matching each output metric (what was done) with a simple power metric (who decided), recording the percentage of key decisions that were co-signed by community representatives. Second, each grant should ring-fence roughly ten percent specifically for capacity exchange so that relational costs are no longer treated as optional overheads. Third, funders should build in a no-penalty mid-course review that allows targets to be revised once frontline actors have listened and learned, rewarding adaptation instead of punishing it. Fourth, meaningful community participation must be incentivised, possibly through a modest bonus or a renewal preference. These tweaks retain the discipline of metrics while making space and budget for relational work.

Until our definitions of success value who shapes decisions and how knowledge is exchanged, we will continue to prioritise what is countable over what truly counts.

Coordination that Badges Rather than Builds

Countless alliances, coalitions and partner portals have popped up across the humanitarian landscape, each sporting its own logo and launch webinar. No one doubts that coordination can work. In Cox's Bazar, the Education Cluster's joint needs assessment and planning process aligned over 30 partners, reduced duplicative efforts and bridged humanitarian and development actors within months, despite the sticky challenges talked about below.

The broader picture is bleak. Jan Egeland, Grand Bargain Eminent Person, accurately points out that humanitarian reform is now "more cumbersome" because "many more actors demand much more consultation and every change requires lengthy negotiations" (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2023, p. 4). In other words, coordination has become a branding exercise with plenty of meetings and little momentum.

The latest independent review of the Grand Bargain also notes "no broader coordination effort… discernible among donors or between donors and aid-organisation signatories" (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2023, p. 20).

The money trail clearly exposes the problem as it continues to remain wildly uneven. In 2022, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Haiti flash appeal was 10 percent funded, while Ukraine's flash appeal hit 88 percent, underscoring how collective mechanisms have not corrected basic allocation inequities. Coordination forums may market solidarity, but money still follows the political spotlight in the Global North.

Coordination mechanisms were largely designed around and by international actors for international actors. This dynamic is particularly exclusionary for local and national actors, despite the fact that these organisations often lead the most integrated responses on the ground. To move from badging to building, we propose three shifts. First, recognise that dedicated coordination takes dedicated time and effort. Apply a small, compulsory, coordination service fee to pooled funds that covers a full-time facilitator, joint needs-assessment teams and a shared monitoring platform. Second, hard-wire local leadership by requiring every education cluster (or equivalent) to have national and local co-chairs with equal veto power. Third, automatically trigger top-ups from pooled funds when any appeal falls drastically short of the global average. These shifts could resource the glue work of keeping

potentially competing actors on a shared track, distribute leadership and keep money flowing where need is greatest

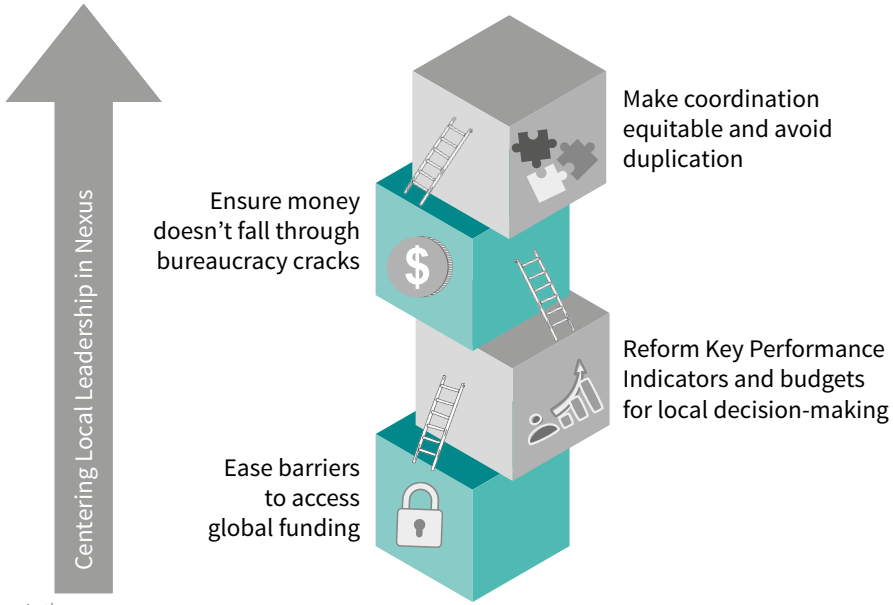
Flexible Money that Stops at the Gate

Flexible funding from the donor to the ground is a leaking pipe that is not accidental but is engineered into the system. Yes, donors report larger multiyear envelopes and flexible funding over the years; however, independent reviewers find that "most of the funding that is passed down does not have the same multi-year and/or flexible quality with which it is received" (Metcalfe-Hough et al., p. 48). A related analysis of localisation finance cites inconsistent and incomplete reporting, vetting rules, banking hurdles and risk-transfer cultures as pressing reasons (Viswanathan, 2023). After going through multiple layers of administrative, overhead and bureaucratic costs, what reaches community schools is typically a six-month, output-heavy micro grant that is too small and focused on the short term to really deliver a sustainable, impactful programme.

Fixing this pipe requires making three hard moves. First, donors should include clear rules in contracts to ensure that flexible funding keeps its flexibility all the way down the chain. At least 60% of grant funding should be passed to partners on the same terms. Second, a small portion of each grant (2% to 3%) could go into a shared risk fund. This would act as an insurance buffer so that agencies do not feel the need to tighten funding rules just to protect themselves. Third, all major organisations should report where the money goes, how long it lasts and how restricted it is using simple, public dashboards. If a flexible grant becomes rigid along the way, it should be flagged. These are just starting points to ensure that flexible finance survives the journey from headquarters to the classroom, where it belongs.

These recommendations are neither silver bullets nor radical demands. These are practical corrections that should be explored to protect the promise made by the Triple Nexus and the Grand Bargain so that it does not collapse under the weight of its own bureaucracy. Local actors, such as the ERR volunteers in Sudan, are not waiting. They are already doing the work. The question is not whether change is possible; it is whether the rest of the system, if donors and international agencies, are willing to follow their lead.

Figure 13
Where Local Leadership Gets Blocked, Systemic Shifts Are Needed



Source: Authors

BEYOND COORDINATION: WHY BRIDGING EVIDENCE SYSTEMS IS THE TRIPLE NEXUS FRONTIER TO PRIORITISE

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Key takeaways:

- Systematise the role of community actors as knowledge partners, ensuring they are meaningfully engaged in defining research priorities, sourcing and identifying relevant knowledge, and shaping evidence use.
- Adopt a shared framework for evidence generation and use, such as LIFTED, to align HDP Nexus actors around collective outcomes, local relevance and actionable insights that can guide integrated responses and reduce fragmentation.
- Invest in national and local knowledge capacity and infrastructure across the nexus by supporting interoperable data systems, digital tools and institutional leadership to generate and share timely, context-relevant evidence.

In 2010, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, prompting one of the largest humanitarian responses in history. Billions of dollars in aid were pledged, and hundreds of agencies were mobilised. Despite this, the effort is widely seen as a failure not due to funding shortfalls but, among other factors, a lack of coherent information systems. Local actors and insights were sidelined, data were fragmented or inaccessible, and decisions were based on outdated or unreliable information (Altay & Labonte, 2014). The lesson then was clear: Even well-funded responses fail without shared knowledge systems. Fifteen years later, today's triple nexus inspires us to greater coherence, yet despite joint plans and pooled funding, one critical gap remains: a unified approach to evidence.

What's the Challenge

Despite operating in the same contexts, humanitarian, development and peacekeeping (HDP) actors rarely share a common approach to evidence. Data systems remain fragmented and unequal and divided by mandates, timelines and epistemologies, reinforcing power imbalances. What counts as evidence is shaped by political and epistemic hierarchies (Woendsdregt, 2025). While humanitarian actors focus on rapid needs assessments (ALNAP, 2018), development actors favour peer-reviewed research (World Bank, 2021). Yet both are often dominated by Global North authors (Amarante & Zurbrigg, 2022; Brun et al., 2024). Information sharing is constrained by data protection, lack of trust and weak interoperability (CIC, 2019; Ludin, 2022; Owino, 2020). Despite a growing focus on localisation – and some progress in the area – efforts often fail to disrupt existing power dynamics (IASC, 2023; Foroughi & Kelly, 2024), and affected communities report minimal involvement in decisions that impact them (Barbelet et al., 2021). The meaningful engagement of local actors has not been systemised.

Why It Matters

These misalignments carry real costs. Effective disaster response depends on timely and cost-efficient data (World Bank, 2021). Fragmented systems increase duplication and obstruct cross-sector learning (Owino, 2020) , while decision-making is often shaped by information that confirms previously held beliefs or supports existing operational plans (von Billerbeck et al., 2024). Local knowledge is rarely sought, shared across silos of the HDP nexus or embedded in development, humanitarian and peace-building strategies (von Billerbeck et al., 2024). Research framed by short-term emergencies can overlook key sociopolitical dynamics (Brun et al., 2024), while short-term solutions erode trust within affected communities (Bell et al., 2018). Without a shared understanding of and appreciation for what counts as credible evidence to local actors, decision-making remains fragmented and blind to what communities already know. Indigenous knowledge and community-generated data are too often dismissed as anecdotal. Yet local actors, including CSOs, women 's groups and cultural leaders, can rapidly mobilise information grounded in context and community trust (de Wolf & Wilkinson, 2019; Hoffman, 2021; Close & Darwish, 2025). This can unveil key drivers of social and behaviour change, which are critical to HDP nexus response and resilience (Ludin, 2022; Hoffman, 2021).

How a Common Framework Can Help Build an Evidence Bridge

To move beyond fragmented data and siloed decision-making, HDP actors need more than better evidence – they need a shared, demand-

driven approach to how evidence is generated, interpreted and applied. The three-step framework below, inspired by Education.org 's Locally Inclusive Framework for Transforming Education Decision-Making (LIFTED) model, offers a practical approach to bridging knowledge systems across the HDP nexus. While designed for education, LIFTED 's principles are applicable across sectors, as they centre community needs, local knowledge and experts and system-wide change.

Step 1: Define Collective Outcomes to Guide a Demand-Driven Research Agenda

Coherent responses begin with an agreement on what success looks like. Coordination is strongest when actors align around shared outcomes that reflect the priorities of affected communities (Austin & Barca, 2021). Too often, collective outcomes are vague or high level, with no clear indicators to drive action (ALNAP, 2022). This step calls for iteratively defining outcomes based on local conceptions of needs, the inclusion of marginalised groups – including those facing intersecting vulnerabilities – and language that resonates across cultural contexts.

Step 2: Leverage Local Knowledge and Experts to Identify Relevant, High-Quality Evidence

Local actors – including researchers, community leaders and practitioners – hold vital contextual knowledge but are often excluded from defining what counts as credible evidence. Their engagement can enhance sourcing contextually relevant evidence and data from subnational data systems to crowdsourced inputs. Local leadership strengthens trust, contextual relevance and legitimacy, making communities indispensable partners in designing evidence-informed responses in fragile and complex settings (Morales et al., 2025). Organisations positioned at the regional level with credibility across countries can also play a key intermediary role in this process, bridging between North-South partnerships and national actors (Cameron et al., 2025), particularly in cross-border crises.

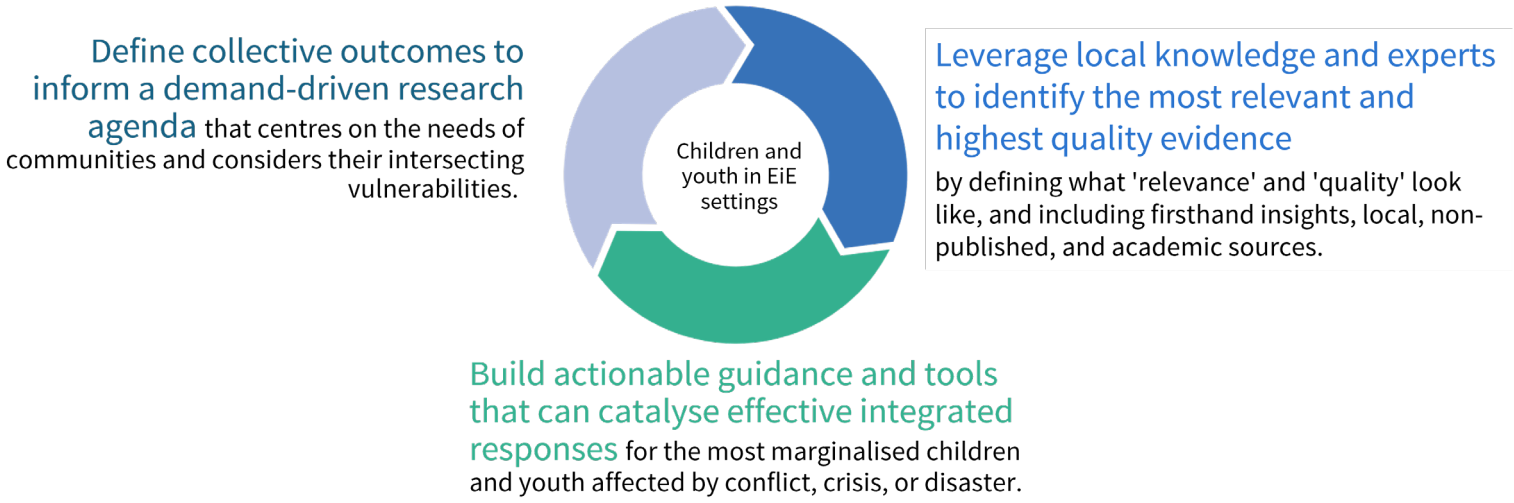
Step 3: Build Actionable Guidance and Tools that Catalyse Integrated Action

Robust research is only useful if it is accessible and actionable. The growing field of knowledge brokering recognises that evidence must be co-created, adapted and embedded throughout systems (Baek & Steiner-Khamsi, 2024). Tools should support implementation and learning, not just reporting. In complex crises, co designed, context-aware resources can help accelerate cross-sector responses (ALNAP, 2022).

What It Takes to Make the HDP Evidence Bridge Work

Bridging evidence systems across the HDP nexus demands investment in capacity, infrastructure and funding. Researchers and intermediaries often lack training in translating evidence for decision-makers (OECD, 2025). Digital infrastructure and interoperable systems are essential for scaling local insights into cross-sector action (World Bank, 2021); however, tight budgets and shrinking aid threaten to deprioritise evidence entirely (ALNAP, 2022). Without targeted support, even valuable frameworks fail to gain traction. This results in decisions shaped by partial truths, blind spots and entrenched inequalities, which risks a repeat of the same failures in the post-earthquake response in Haiti.

Figure 14
An Inclusive Framework for Bridging Knowledge Systems Across the HDP Nexus



Source: Created by the author based on Education.org 's LIFTED approach to evidence.

TEN YEARS OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS DECLARATION: LESSONS FOR THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS

Alexander Kochenburger
Coordinator, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, United States

Key takeaways:

- **Support for victims:** As the SSD marks ten years and the Implementation Network celebrates its fourth anniversary, GCPEA recommends a renewed focus on two often-overlooked SSD commitments: providing assistance to victims of attacks and ensuring children can safely resume learning after these attacks. Additional attention and funding are needed to translate these commitments into meaningful support.
- **Impact evaluation:** A comprehensive, multi-level evaluation of SSD implementation is also overdue. To build on lessons learned, stakeholders must move beyond counting activities and outputs to assess the long-term policy, practice and behavioural changes this programming enables.

To understand more about the threats that attacks on education pose in armed conflict and how the Implementation Network pushes for collective and local action through a Nexus-informed approach, GCPEA invites readers to consult the following resources:

- **Education under Attack 2024** - GCPEA recommends readers consult the latest edition of the Coalition's flagship report to understand more about the threats attacks on education pose in armed conflict. The report found that more than 6,000 attacks on education occurred in armed conflict over the period of 2022-2023. Education under Attack 2026 will be published in Q2 2026.
- **Practical Impact of the Safe Schools Declaration Fact Sheet, Second Edition**- GCPEA also recommends readers consult this fact sheet to better understand how the Implementation Network pushes for collective and local action through a Nexus-informed approach. The second edition of the fact sheet demonstrates progress made at the national, regional and international levels on implementing the SSD.

One year before the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus was articulated at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (Agenda for Humanity, n.d.), the international community – led by the Governments of Norway and Argentina– launched a new framework to protect students and educators from the worst effects of armed conflict. The result was the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD), an intergovernmental political agreement that embodies the Nexus spirit and aims to build safe, resilient and conflict-sensitive education systems (GCPEA, n.d.).

As the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) reviews 10 years of SSD implementation, the opportunity allows for critical insights into what works and what remains to be done when it comes to advancing a Nexus approach. The Declaration's evolution underscores the power of collective action and localised efforts to shift global norms and deliver concrete policy change across sectors.

A State-Led Implementation Network

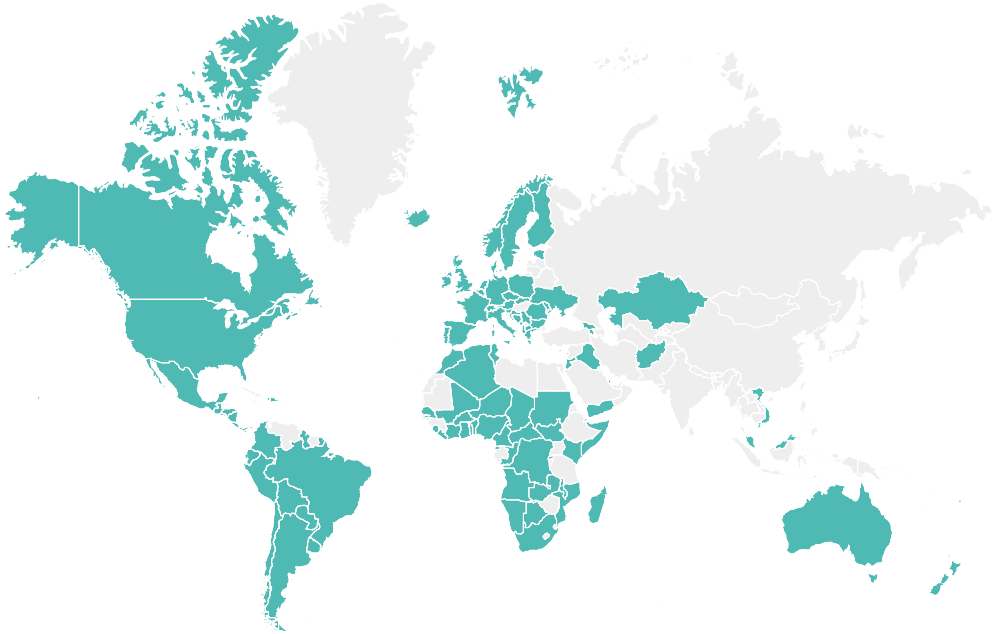
The SSD functions as both a normative framework and an action-oriented roadmap. Its political, financial and programmatic commitments bring cohesion to efforts to protect education in conflict zones – turning promises into practice. The commitments require action across the Nexus, such as strengthening military doctrine and training with regard to the necessity of protecting education and respecting its civilian status in armed conflict (development and humanitarian), bolstering peacebuilding through conflict-sensitive education and justice for victims (peacebuilding) and ensuring the protection of schools and continuity of learning during times of crisis (humanitarian).

The SSD's dynamic and responsive character is perhaps best reflected in the State-Led Implementation Network, launched by Norway in 2021 at the Fourth International Conference on the Safe Schools Declaration (GCPEA, 2023). With 121 endorsing states as of June 2025 (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), the Network is founded on peer-to-peer learning and fosters cooperation through policy dialogue, training and advancing accountability tools. The Network includes myriad states, from those experiencing conflict to those contributing troops to peacekeeping missions. The Network also actively involves actors across ministries and sectors, for example, bringing together

military stakeholders with education authorities or child protection experts to exchange with representatives from judiciary bodies.

Most important however, is the state-led essence of the model, which has centred the experience and expertise of engaged states, de-centring the Global North and organically strengthening regional hubs. States can learn from other continents and countries, but continue to prioritise regional members who share geo-political contexts, language and sometimes borders – making cooperation all the more localised and sustainable.

Figure 15
121 States that have Endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, June 2025



Source: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack

Local Exchanges, Real Impact

Under the Network's umbrella, States have engaged in webinars, regional workshops and bilateral exchanges that have embedded Nexus programming at the local level. One standout example: A delegation from Burkina Faso's SSD committee travelled to Mali in July 2024 for a formal exchange (GCPEA, 2024). Both countries face persistent attacks on education, especially in the Sahel region, making their collaboration especially urgent and relevant.

The two delegations exchanged best practices on SSD implementation, including how national action plans operate, the role of technical committees, the importance of robust data collection and effective community engagement strategies, including local sub-national SSD committees. The delegations also visited Segou, a region heavily impacted by attacks on education, to understand how these sub-national regional SSD committees navigate local challenges.

The exchange produced rapid policy momentum. Soon afterwards, Mali began drafting a new national law on protecting schools and universities during armed conflict, while Burkina Faso incorporated the SSD into its national education in emergencies action plan – a powerful example of how localised cooperation can drive national policy reform.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP: COMMUNITIES' CONTRIBUTION TO TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR ACCESSIBLE, QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

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Key takeaways:

- Ensure that a concrete strategy and policy for community engagement and leadership are included in the plans of the education sector and all partners.
- Develop an action plan to implement the steps of community engagement and develop context-specific tools to be used in community dialogues to strengthen consultation capacities, community self-diagnosis and leadership and community action plans.
- Identify the main responsibilities of national and provincial ministries in supporting community engagement as well as the main capacities and responsibilities of communities in supporting education.
- Integrate modules on mindset change and local leadership for the transformation of the education system into teacher training content.
- Content relating to the development and sharing of the capabilities of the Kündükwa platforms and communities may incorporate other aspects, such as agriculture and health, in order to ensure well-being and resilience through the development of practical skills.

The education system in the Central African Republic has for years been severely affected by a succession of crises that have made access to education difficult. In these circumstances and contexts, the importance of localisation and community empowerment has emerged as the key to sustainability and growth. Such initiatives enable to take greater account of the long term and the capacity of communities to find local solutions.

Faced with significant educational challenges in the Central African Republic, where more than 60% of teachers are provided by the community, an innovative community dialogue and engagement initiative called Kündükwa has been put in place since 2022 to strengthen community ownership of educational needs. Developed by the Ahdieh Foundation, a national NGO, in conjunction with the Ministry of National Education, the approach is based on the creation of community dialogue platforms called Kündükwa ("let's work together" or "working group" in the Sango language), enabling villages to collectively reflect on educational issues and design action plans adapted to their local realities. It should be noted that this initiative is in line with the declaration made by the Central African Republic authorities at the 2023 World Education Summit in New York and the country's education sector plan (ESP).

The Kündükwa are made up of members elected without nomination and act as community platforms dedicated to dialogue about schools and education in general. Kündükwa members are trained and guided by the Ahdieh Foundation (FoNaHA) on approaches to social and behavioural change. These approaches are based on FoNaHA's extensive experience of working in various Central African communities and its collaboration with other actors in the education sector, such as UNICEF.

Quarterly dialogue sessions within the village help identify and understand challenges such as teacher motivation, pupil retention, particularly of girls and learning monitoring. They also highlight the strengths and resources available within the community itself. Local solutions are then identified by the community and incorporated into simple action plans designed by community members.

In the village of Ngaidoua, for example, such dialogues enabled the village to realise that only four girls were enrolled in Year 5 of primary school and no girls were enrolled in Year 6. The whole village then decided to monitor the learning of these four girls to help them complete primary school and then secondary school. This realisation strengthened the village's commitment to monitoring girls' school attendance and to engaging in conversations with teachers. This marked a significant transformation in attitudes and behaviors, one that is likely to be sustained since it originates from within the community and is becoming deeply rooted in the collective consciousness.

These platforms have thus contributed to the smooth running of the Parents' Association and other structures that support the school.

Since their launch, Kündükwas have had a significant impact on:

1. Improved school attendance rates, particularly among girls.
2. Increased motivation among teachers thanks to innovative solutions. For example, community contributions to support teachers are collected in churches.
3. Construction and creation of schools adapted to children's needs. Communities decide for themselves the geographical location of schools in order to shorten the journey in consideration of the children's safety.

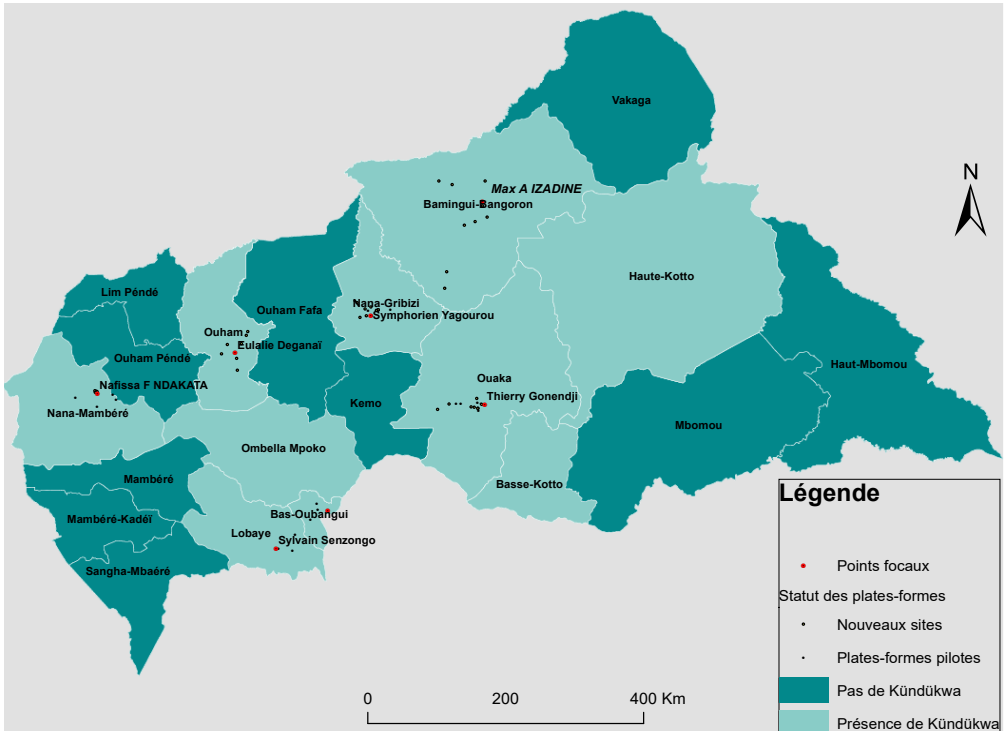
A training manual for Kündükwa platforms has been approved by the Ministry of National Education. The programme has been extended in 2023 to cover 150 new villages in partnership with 11 NGOs and local school authorities. More than 190 Kündükwa platforms are currently active in the country.

The lessons learned from Kündükwa have also been used to strengthen inclusive education in regions such as Bambari, in collaboration with Handicap International. These successes led to a recommendation during the Education Sector Review to extend the approach to other regions of the country to transform education nationwide with a localised approach and the engagement of entire communities.

The Kündükwa approach illustrates how the community becomes a framework in which powers are multiplied in unified action, in which individual and collective will volition are blended and in which the entrepreneurial spirit is strengthened by an awareness of the need for concerted action and commitment to the common good.

The Kündükwa approach shows that collective and structured efforts can contribute to sustainably improving access to quality education by placing communities at the heart of the educational process, where a growing number of people take charge of their social and intellectual development. The result is that these people see themselves as active agents of their own progress and that of their community. Ultimately, this approach shows the way to resilience and localisation.

Figure 16
Regions Where Kundukwas are Present in Central African Republic



Source: FoNaHA Oct. 2024, © GROCAMEC

A FUNDAMENTAL REORIENTATION OF THE TRIPLE NEXUS FRAMEWORK, PRIORITISING LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

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Women for Change (WFC), South Sudan
Moro Stephen Brown Juma
Women for Change (WFC), South Sudan

Key takeaways:
The following recommendations serve as a blueprint for genuinely making the triple nexus a reality by shifting power, resources and decision-making ability to those who are best positioned to effect lasting change:

- Fund local first: Donors must invest a significant portion of their humanitarian, development and peacebuilding funds to local and national organisations. This funding should take the form of flexible multiyear grants that allow for adaptive programming.
- Decolonise programme design: International organisations must move away from a partnership model in which local groups are merely implementers. A truly collaborative approach requires local actors to codesign and co lead nexus programmes from the outset, ensuring they are contextually relevant and culturally sensitive.
- Invest in gender-specific capacity: Funding for the nexus must include dedicated resources for building the institutional and technical capacity of women-led organisations to empower them to take on leadership roles in programme management, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation.
- Provide meaningful, long-term funding to Women-led organizations: Meaningful funding must include multiyear commitments of at least 3–5 year. This provides financial stability and the ability to plan for sustainable, long-term impact rather than being confined to short-term, project-based cycles. It also involves providing funding for overhead and core operational costs, recognising that strong institutions are essential for effective programming.

The humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus, or triple nexus, was conceptualised a decade ago with the aim of fostering integrated and collaborative action between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. While this framework holds immense potential, its implementation has often been hindered by a top-down, internationally driven approach that marginalises local actors. For the triple nexus to achieve its true potential, all actors involved must fundamentally reorient their work to prioritise local ownership and, specifically, the leadership of women-led organisations. These groups are not merely beneficiaries or subcontractors but primary drivers of sustainable change. They possess deep-seated community roots, an unparallelled understanding of local cultures and the agility to navigate the intertwined challenges of conflict, poverty and gender inequality. They are uniquely positioned to build lasting solutions to the above-mentioned challenges.

Conflict and protracted crises disproportionately affect girls' education, leading to increased vulnerability to early marriage, gender-based violence and recruitment into armed groups. In South Sudan, women-led organisations such as Women for Change (WFC) have demonstrated that they can address these complex issues more effectively than siloed, internationally driven interventions. Their approach embodies the triple nexus because they provide immediate humanitarian relief (safe, inclusive learning environments) while also fostering long-term development (economic empowerment through skills training) and contributing to peace (community dialogues and conflict resolution).

WFC's Empowerment Program, combines basic literacy and numeracy with life skills (e.g. tailoring and soap making) with conflict resolution and human rights education, thereby empowering women and girls with both knowledge and practical skills. WFC supports participants within target location(s) such as Juba and Yei River Counties of Central Equatoria state, and Gogrial West County of Warrap state, based on participants' areas of interest. For example, Our recently concluded project "Women's Voice and Leadership" (WVL), funded by Global Affairs Canada through CARE International, not only helped participants secure livelihoods but also enabled them to become agents of change in enabling a peaceful coexistence within their families and

communities. For instance, in Luri Payam of Juba County, central Equatoria state, trained women leveraged their newfound financial independence and human rights knowledge to successfully mediate three family land disputes, thus preventing the disagreements from escalating into broader community conflicts. Such holistic, community-led programmes are far more effective and sustainable than siloed interventions, as they simultaneously build economic resilience and social capital, which are mutually reinforcing foundations for lasting peace and development.

Women-led organisations are uniquely positioned to address the complex challenges in conflict and post-conflict environments because they possess direct lived experience and grassroots knowledge relevant to addressing the interlinked challenges of conflict, poverty and gender inequality. Women and girls disproportionately endure the brutalities of conflict, facing higher rates of gender-based violence, early marriage and the loss of educational opportunities. According to UN News: Global perspective Human stories, the percentage of women killed in war doubled in 2023 stating the proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled compared to 2022, accounting for 40 per cent of all deaths in war. UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence increased by 50 per cent in the same period.

This firsthand reality means that women-led, community-based groups have an intimate understanding of their communities' most urgent needs, enabling them to build trust among the community and develop solutions that are more effective than top-down, external interventions.

Furthermore, these organisations typically adopt community-centric and holistic approaches that embody the triple nexus. Research shows that women in leadership roles are likelier to prioritise investing in critical community resources like education, healthcare and sanitation (United Nations, 2020). The work of women instinctively links humanitarian relief (immediate safety), development (long-term empowerment) and peacebuilding (conflict resolution), as they recognise that a child's education is inseparable from their safety and their family's well-being. WFC's Community-Led Innovation Program (CLIP) in Warrap State illustrates the positive impact that results from communities being given the power to identify and generate solutions to their challenges.

Finally, the inclusion of women in peace processes leads to more durable and inclusive peace agreements. A women leading peace report found that when women's groups are involved in conflict resolution and negotiations, peace agreements are 64% less likely to fail (UN Women Report 2015). This is because women are likelier to build coalitions across ethnic and political divides and to focus on shared human rights and social cohesion rather than on narrow political gains. Their emphasis on transitional justice and a holistic view of community needs is critical for preventing relapses into conflict and fostering lasting stability.

The core barrier to nexus work, however, is the lack of flexible and accessible funding for local actors, especially women-led organisations, who are often relegated to a subcontractor role. To make the nexus a reality, international partners must dismantle these barriers and genuinely invest in the capacities of local organisations. Together, we can achieve more.

THE RECIPE FOR UKRAINE'S RESILIENCE: LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND FUTURE-ORIENTED RECOVERY

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Key takeaways:

- Grants for budget support and community engagement empower local authorities, while building ownership, promoting accountability and local contributions.
- The triple nexus is not another buzzword but a logical systemic response to complex crises, requiring deep, long-term contextual understanding.
- Ukraine's education reforms make recovery strategic; reconstruction must align with ongoing reforms and the analysis of future demographic needs.
- Involving students in school design fosters democracy, trust and transparency while limiting corruption through robust public oversight.
- Recovery must inspire hope; modern, student-centred schools are essential for safety, healing, and peace.

Since 2022, Ukraine's education sector has suffered severe disruption due to the destruction of education infrastructure, a massive displacement of children (more than half of the country's estimated 7.5 million child population) and substantial learning losses caused by multiyear online learning and the constant stress of air attacks. At the same time, it is exactly the recovery of the education sector that in many cases has brought people back to their communities, once security conditions had become more or less tolerable.

Despite its massive humanitarian needs, Ukraine has never been a purely humanitarian context. From the very early days of the crisis, the Ukrainian government and local authorities consistently urged the international community to have a stronger focus on long-term development beyond immediate humanitarian response, which is a clear call for a triple nexus approach. Switzerland, a long-standing partner of Ukraine, already in the first weeks of the crisis reoriented its ongoing development interventions to allow for the provision of emergency support to partner communities. Immediately after the de-occupation of regions in the north-east of Ukraine, Swiss aid reoriented its on-going Decentralisation for Improved Democratic Education (DECIDE) Project, which was originally focused on decentralisation reforms in education governance and citizenship education, to focus on the recovery of the education sector.

Locally Driven Recovery Requires Trustful Partnership and the Highly Contextualised Design of Interventions

Many international partners supported the recovery of schools and bomb shelters, much needed to bring children back to offline schooling. However, fewer managed to fully tailor their approaches to the Ukrainian context, where most communities had functioning local governments, but needed resources and technical support.

Instead of managing the recovery of schools and bomb shelters on behalf of local authorities, DECIDE provided grants to local budgets, supplementing the entire process of technical design documentation, budgeting, procurement and construction works with expert technical advice. The trust given by the donor to local authorities allowed them to take full ownership of the recovery process, with additional contributions made to the projects from local budgets.

The design of the intervention also included a strong engagement of schoolchildren in planning and co-creating some spaces in the recovered school shelters. It promoted democratic decision-making involving all students and their parents, and joint development of community and school strategies.

This high degree of engagement of the local community – and in particular of the youth – into the recovery created strong public oversight over the construction works, an area marked by potential corruption risks. Additionally, all the relevant project documentation was transparently published on the national recovery portal, allowing local civil society organisations to monitor the whole process in real time.

This intervention design effectively embodies a triple nexus approach integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts to achieve sustainable recovery and lasting community resilience.

Recovery is Powered by Reforms; Reforms Make Recovery Fit for Purpose

In Ukraine, where an ambitious reform agenda has been underway since 2014, stopping it during wartime was not an option. On the contrary, continuing the reforms while adjusting them to new security realities and war challenges (such as massive displacement and depopulation of certain areas) has been essential for meaningful and sustainable recovery.

Thus, extending existing development interventions to include a recovery component has proven both effective and time efficient. This ensured that only schools with a viable future were prioritised for reconstruction, and that recovery and rebuilding efforts already considered their intended function: either a gymnasium (up to Grade 9) or a lyceum (up to Grade 12). For this, the government and the expert community (with support of DECIDE) made significant efforts in developing a mid-to long-term demographic analysis and modelling the future school network.

It Is High Time to Embrace a "Build Forward" Approach to Recovery

In the context of ongoing insecurity and daily air alerts, returning to one's home community is not always a purely rational choice. It is a deep emotional bond to your home, your community, and hope for a better future for your children that outweigh the existing risk factors.

Recovery, particularly in the education sector, cannot be a mechanical reconstruction of what was lost or damaged; it should convey a strong message of modernisation, progress, dignity and youth agency. A common question such as, *"Should we prioritise basic recovery and reach more communities instead of investing in fancy education spaces in shelters?"* gives a clear answer: modern learning environments co-designed with students are not a luxury, but a highly important psycho-social pillar of recovery. They strengthen children's sense of safety, belonging to their community and hope for a better future, ensuring sustainable recovery and peace.

EDTECH AS SYSTEMS INNOVATION IN CRISIS: UKRAINE'S DIGITAL EDUCATION RESPONSE AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS

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EdTech Hub, United Kingdom
Kate Radford
EdTech Hub, United Kingdom

Key takeaways:

- **Anchor EdTech in government-led frameworks:** Humanitarian and development actors should align with national digital strategies and platforms to ensure local leadership, system coherence and sustainability.
- **Invest in governance systems before crisis hits:** Ministries should develop infrastructure, coordination units and strategies in advance, as they lay the foundation for crisis agility and donor confidence.
- **Create flexible financing and coordination mechanisms:** Donors should allow accelerated disbursement and accountability protocols that empower national systems while upholding transparency.

When Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, more than 5.7 million learners risked losing access to education (UNICEF, 2023). In response, the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) led a government-driven digital pivot that positioned education technology (EdTech) not just as a stopgap solution but as a system-wide strategy. Ukraine's experience offers insight into how national leadership, emerging from broader decentralisation reforms, can align actors across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding domains to operationalise the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in practice.

MoES's deployment of EdTech by working with development and humanitarian partners was not simply a tool for instruction but a way to reassert continuity, system reform and national authority amid disruption. Technology was embedded within a broader institutional effort to align emergency action with long-term reform. Building on prior initiatives such as the New Ukrainian School and its 2021–2027 Strategic Action Plan (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2023), the Ministry scaled platforms such as All Ukrainian School Online (AUSO) to reach millions. Key partnerships were actively coordinated: Google.com's donation of 50,000 Chromebooks and the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) use of its multiplier mechanism, which mobilised $10 million in matched funding, were channelled through government systems. At the same time, MoES led coordination, subnational authorities managed distribution logistics and partners like UNESCO supported procurement and training. Risk assessments addressed digital exclusion and child protection, pairing device delivery with teacher training on hybrid instruction and online safety.

Efforts like the Device Coalition, digital learning centres and public–private training partnerships with Ukrainian universities exemplified how EdTech functioned as a convening force across humanitarian and development actors. However, implementation was not without challenges. Concerns emerged around the quality of pedagogical support, uneven access to psychosocial services and the difficulty of maintaining learning engagement, particularly for younger children or those with additional learning needs. These gaps underscored the need for wraparound support to accompany digital delivery.

MoES's leadership was central to de-siloing efforts across the Nexus. Rather than relegating crisis response to short-term humanitarian solutions, MoES leveraged a suite of tools developed or adapted during the emergency, including real-time dashboards, the integration of humanitarian data into the national education management information system (EMIS) and flexible blended learning modalities that combined online and offline instruction. For example, partner data on school functionality and displacement patterns helped guide resource allocation. Blended approaches, such as AUSO with printed materials, community hubs or digital learning centres, supported continuity in low-connectivity areas. This work was implemented by decentralising structures that empowered local authorities, school networks and frontline educators to deliver services under rapidly shifting conditions.

Donors responded to the education crisis accordingly: GPE and Education Cannot Wait adjusted funding timelines and conditionalities to meet Ukraine's pace and priorities, while humanitarian actors gradually shifted from parallel delivery models. Joint planning with the Transition Ministry (the process of moving from emergency response to longer-term education recovery and system strengthening) was integrated into national coordination processes, with the Ministry and Education Cluster partners

working closely together towards handover (Education Cluster, 2025).

Tensions within this Nexus approach were nevertheless visible. The ongoing conflict necessitated rapid pivots as children moved from in-person to online learning, often in quick succession, leaving little room to establish teaching practices or instructional norms. While overall coordination was strong, the pace and volatility of the crisis strained the ability of humanitarian and development actors to fully align themselves with each other. Digital access remained uneven, particularly for children with disabilities, those in frontline areas or learners navigating dual schooling abroad (UNESCO, 2025; UNICEF, 2025). Teacher training and protection services were fragmented, limiting quality and reach. In many cases, online learning also limited peer interaction and meaningful teacher-student engagement, posing risks to learners' motivation, emotional well-being and social development. These challenges were especially acute in contexts in which caregivers or local educators were unavailable to facilitate learning.

Ukraine's ability to lead its education response was technically and politically shaped by factors not easily replicated elsewhere. These included its European orientation, digital governance infrastructure and the extent to which international donors were willing to align with its reform agenda and crisis framing. These enabling conditions raise questions about how transferable such a model is to contexts with less institutional capacity or without the political positioning and perceived legitimacy that helped Ukraine secure high-trust donor partnerships. These partnerships, underscoring the need for differentiated models of Nexus coordination, tailored to the political economy and institutional realities of each context.

From a systems innovation perspective, Ukraine's case invites a reflection on the role of EdTech as both a technical and an institutional lever. Technology itself did not act as a substitute for in-person learning, nor did it inherently promote peace or equity. But when embedded within a broader reform agenda led by a ministry with strategic vision and coordination authority, it created literal and figurative platforms supporting collective action in a Nexus approach.

The policy implications are clear: Ministries must invest early in digital transformation and governance systems and lead not only in setting the terms of engagement with donors and private actors, but also in defining the pedagogical vision, equity goals and implementation strategies that guide EdTech use. Humanitarian and development agencies must recalibrate their approaches toward supporting government ownership under crisis conditions. Ukraine's experience demonstrates that Nexus integration is not merely a matter of aligning funding or timelines; it requires a rebalancing of power with government ownership at the centre.

Figure 17
Triple Nexus in Ukraine EiE Response

Source: Authors

BUILDING LITERACY, BRIDGING SILOS: INSIGHTS FROM ARABIC LITERACY REFORM IN JORDAN THROUGH A TRIPLE NEXUS LENS

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Key takeaways:

- **Support teacher agency.** Ensure sustained investment in teacher professional development programs that centre transformative, Nexus-aligned pedagogies. Teacher agency must be supported through collaborative learning opportunities, leadership roles and autonomy in pedagogical decision-making (UNESCO IICBA, 2017).
- **Strengthen intersectoral coordination.** Facilitate coordination among humanitarian, development, state and peacebuilding actors by leveraging education cluster groups, national education sector plans and inter-agency platforms. Strategic collaboration can help integrate literacy goals with peace education objectives.
- **Institutionalise a nexus-aligned textbook strategy.** Embed transformative and inclusive pedagogies within national textbook development mechanisms. Learning materials should reflect the cultural, linguistic and emotional realities of both host and displaced learners to support long-term social cohesion.

At the intersection of protracted displacement, strained public systems and global literacy crises, Jordan's education sector offers a compelling illustration of how development-led interventions can align with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Drawing on the USAID-funded Reading and Math Program (RAMP) implemented by RTI International in partnership with Jordan's Ministry of Education, this article explores how early-grade literacy reform represents a promising but underutilised model for alignment across the Nexus. This contribution examines how the Ministry of Education's new National Arabic Literacy Strategy aligns with Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) priorities through evidence-based pedagogy, learning material development, and teacher professional development. It discusses ways these efforts can be strengthened to better serve both, host and refugee learners.

A major achievement of the RAMP was its reformation of how children learn to read Arabic in the early grades. The program introduced a more structured way of teaching reading in which children first learn letter sounds and then practice with simple storybooks – called "decodable readers " – that use only the letters and words they have already been taught. This aligns with research on how children learn to read in languages like Arabic, where the spelling system is highly consistent and each letter typically corresponds to the same sound, making it easier for early readers to sound out words. This alignment is commonly referred to as shallow orthographies (Thomure & Speaker, 2018). These pedagogical approaches are now reflected in the Government of Jordan's 2023–2028 National Arabic Literacy Strategy, which emphasises learner engagement and curriculum alignment through technical support from RAMP specialists (Ministry of Education, 2023).

This pedagogical shift was not without its challenges. Many teachers were accustomed to rote memorisation methods and lacked exposure to evidence-based reading instruction (Thomure & Speaker, 2018). RAMP addressed this gap through teacher coaching, in-service training and providing classroom learning materials (RTI International, 2020; 2022). Ensuring continuity beyond donor cycles remained a concern, raising the importance of institutionalisation within national policy frameworks. The example of Jordan highlights the multiple ways in which such literacy reforms can be institutionalised within humanitarian and crisis-affected education programming to align more closely with learning from global evidence and sector-wide reform agendas at the national level.

As global actors advocate integrated education approaches in crisis contexts (INEE, 2021; Novelli, 2019), Jordan's experience illustrates how foundational literacy programs can also be shaped to address the complex and overlapping needs of displaced and host learners.

Development-led literacy reforms such as RAMP and Literacy Boost by Save the Children forward their advanced humanitarian aims and peacebuilding goals in many ways within the Jordanian contexts. One such approach includes equipping teachers with inclusive pedagogy, expanding access to Arabic literacy materials for vulnerable learners and strengthening national systems to deliver equitable, state-led education during times of protracted crisis. These reforms reflect the Humanitarian-Development-Peace principles of inclusivity, sustainability and system strengthening (United Nations & World Bank, 2018).

While such programs have established foundational structures for implementing reading programs at scale in Jordan and beyond, these efforts must be aligned more intentionally with the goals of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Bridging this gap requires an understanding that literacy instruction must support not only academic development, but also learners' emotional and social well-being, especially in contexts affected by conflict, displacement or crisis. In this light, transformative pedagogies (approaches that foster critical thinking, civic engagement and intrinsic motivation) and thoughtfully designed learning materials are critical tools that can help nurture learners' agency, empathy and collaboration, preparing children not only to read but also to engage in rebuilding their communities (Smart & Sinclair, 2019). Several examples from Jordan show promise in this regard:

1. ***We Love Reading* initiative:** Founded by Dajani (2017), *We Love Reading* is a community-based initiative in Jordan that trains local adults to conduct Arabic read-aloud sessions in informal settings such as mosques, homes and community centres. By creating emotionally safe and inclusive spaces, the programme fosters in children a love for reading, intrinsic motivation and social connectedness. *We Love Reading* emphasises storytelling and learner agency, aligning with peacebuilding goals by nurturing empathy and resilience among children in marginalized and conflict-affected communities (Dajani, 2017). Certain elements from this initiative, such as structured daily read-aloud time, have been adopted as part of the new national Arabic literacy strategy.

2. **UNESCO IICBA 's Transformative Pedagogy for Peacebuilding Framework:** This framework has influenced regional education programming in MENA, including in Jordan's refugee education and teacher professional development contexts. It emphasises teaching practices that promote critical thinking, empathy and peaceful coexistence. Grounded in dialogic learning, learner-centredness, and conflict-sensitive education, this approach encourages students to analyse their lived realities, engage in respectful dialogue and become active participants in their communities. If pedagogies such as storytelling circles for language development in Arabic and conflict mapping through writing were to be integrated into foundational literacy programs and materials, they could deepen students' engagement while nurturing holistic language development. This alignment would help move literacy efforts beyond reading skills towards nurturing learners' holistic development and their capacity to contribute to more peaceful societies (UNESCO IICBA, 2017, pp. 15–17).

Such examples are particularly powerful in classrooms that serve both host and refugee children, many of whom have experienced trauma and instability. Literacy instruction designed for social cohesion not only supports academic outcomes and skill development, but nurtures students' agency and well-being.

Figure 18
Materials Developed for the We Love Reading Program in Jordan by Taghyeer

Source: Ideo.Org

TRIPLE NEXUS REVIEW OF THE EDUCATION RESPONSE FOR ROHINGYA REFUGEE CHILDREN IN COX'S BAZAR

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Key takeaways:
The Rohingya refugee experience informs the Triple Nexus in the following ways:

- The extent to which needs-based, short-term humanitarian aid can evolve into rights-based, long-term development efforts depends on governmental political will, together with the host community's socioeconomic conditions.
- The continuous role of international and local actors is critical in advocating for and negotiating with the government to uphold the right to education during emergencies and transition phases.
- Peacebuilding needs to be intentional in education, starting with acknowledgement of children's identity, culture and language.

Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District is host to one million Rohingya refugees, including approximately 481,000 school-age children, who have fled Myanmar due to deep-rooted discrimination and violence (Haque et al., 2024). The Bangladeshi government intends to repatriate the Rohingya (Joint Response Plan, 2025–26); therefore, it has not granted them legal status or opportunities for basic inclusion, including education. As a result, Rohingya children remain excluded from the national education system and are restricted to informal education programmes. Following international pressure in 2021, the government agreed to allow Rohingya children to study the Myanmar Curriculum (MC) to support repatriation (Saha et al., 2024; Alam, 2020). This contribution reviews education for Rohingya children through the lens of the Triple Nexus.

Humanitarian

At the onset of the Rohingya influx, the government limited access to education to the early primary school level, mainly offering playtime (Ahmed, 2020). Two and a half years after the 2017 wave of Rohingya displacement, the Bangladeshi government lifted restrictions in response to pressure from international actors (UN agencies, NGOs and rights groups), who argued that the denial of access to education violated the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Human Rights Watch, 2019). UNICEF and its implementing partners – local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – worked alongside the government to establish learning centres that offered informal education to children aged 4–14 years. These organisations used an ability-based accelerated learning (ABAL) approach, which grouped children in centres according to their age (Shohel et al., 2023). Learning programmes promoted the study of Burmese, English, mathematics, general science, Islamic studies, drawing and storytelling.

Initially, Bengali was included as a subject. However, in 2018, it was banned to align with the repatriation agenda (Lewis et al, 2019). The government's National Task Force on Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals produced guidelines for providing Rohingya children with informal learning opportunities in either Burmese or English. In coordination, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) introduced the Guideline for Informal Education Programme to ensure a sustainable form of education meeting the needs for engaging Rohingya children in learning activities while still aligning with a repatriation orientation (MoPME, 2019).

Development

In 2018, UNICEF and its implementing partners carried out the learning competency framework approach (LCFA), which grouped children attending learning centres according to their abilities in the competencies (Shohel et al., 2023). While implemented under the MoPME guidelines, the LCFA marked a major shift from the initial ABAL approach. The LCFA addressed literacy gaps and behavioural development of Rohingya children through an emphasis on pedagogy, life skills and community engagement (UNICEF, 2018). Despite its weaknesses, such as its limited focus on post-traumatic well-being, child abuse, trafficking and technology, the LCFA approach offered a structured pathway for basic education (Shohel et al., 2023).

In 2020, the Bangladesh government authorised humanitarian partners to pilot the Myanmar Curriculum (MC) (Saha et al., 2024). The MC is meant to provide Rohingya children with learning opportunities aligned with the curriculum of their native country and delivered

in the Burmese language. The government considered this effort a temporary solution until repatriation. Nevertheless, led by UNICEF, international actors continue to promote the MC as part of a longer-term educational solution. However, government emphasis on repatriation restricts sustained investment in the further development and implementation of the delivery of the MC. For instance, the education delivered under the MC in refugee camps is not accredited by education authorities in either Bangladesh or Myanmar. While the initial objective for introducing the MC was to support repatriation, the lack of recognition translates to limited future opportunities.

Peace

The influx of Rohingya refugees into Cox's Bazar is considered a crisis within a crisis, as it is one of the country's most deprived districts (Khan, 2024a). Access to education has been problematic within the host community itself, and the presence of the Rohingya fuels resentment among locals, who perceive the refugees as encroaching on already limited resources. Peacebuilding interventions are essential to alleviating mistrust among these groups (Khan, 2024a and 2024b).

In its response to pressure from international actors, the Bangladeshi government adopted a needs-based rather than rights-based approach. Its repatriation policy limits investment in education, leaving refugees reliant on international aid and informal learning (Afrin, 2025). By focusing on short-term humanitarian response to education without further integrating development or peacebuilding, existing vulnerabilities are further entrenched (Khan, 2024a and 2024b).

FROM COMMITMENTS TO CONSTRAINTS: TANZANIA'S RETREAT FROM REFUGEE EDUCATION INCLUSION AND THE TRIPLE NEXUS DILEMMA

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Key takeaways:

- Strengthen the role of national education authorities in refugee response and planning.
- Strengthen collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Education Working Group and development-oriented education coordination mechanisms.
- Expand non-formal education alternatives with pathways toward continued learning to address diverse needs, including those of overaged and out-of-school children and youth.
- Revisit restrictive infrastructure policies (e.g. prohibitions on semipermanent school structures).
- Invest in teacher training, equitable incentives and certification recognition.

Introduction

In 2017, Tanzania was lauded as a pilot country for the UN's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), signalling a commitment to integrate refugees into national systems and align with global norms promoting inclusion, self-reliance and durable solutions to forced displacement (Fellesson, 2019). At the time, Tanzania was host to more than 360,000 refugees mainly from neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo living in three camps in the Kigoma region (UNHCR, 2018).

Refugee education in Tanzania is governed by a parallel system based on the curriculum of refugees' countries of origin rather than integration into Tanzania's national education framework (Dalrymple & Skeie, 2018). With endorsement of the CRRF, the local Education Working Group, responsible for refugee education coordination and guidance as part of the Refugee Coordination Model, carried out a Joint Education Needs Assessment with an objective to inform its roll out (EWG, 2018). However, within a year, Tanzania abruptly withdrew from the CRRF without explanation, casting uncertainty over the future of refugee education and revealing the limits of global policy in shaping national action (UNHCR, 2018; Milner, 2013).

A Siloed Approach

This withdrawal had stark implications for the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus. The CRRF offers an integrated vision that encourages host countries to include refugees in national education systems. An important feature of the CRRF is its "whole of society" approach, which involves convening a range of actors to respond to the needs of refugees and their host communities (Thomas, 2017). Investment of development funding in refugee hosting communities was one way in which the CRRF was put into practice, with the already existing Kigoma Joint Programme as one relevant approach (Fellesson, 2019). However, with Tanzania's withdrawal from the CRRF, the divide between humanitarian and development efforts remained a barrier to delivering education across the triple nexus.

While, globally, the policy discourse has shifted towards inclusion of refugee learners into national education systems – recognising education as a right and a tool for long-term stability – Tanzania's model reinforces segregation and uncertainty about the future. This approach reflects the longstanding Tanzanian policy of encampment and temporary protection underpinned by the 1998 Refugee Act and the 2003 National Refugee Policy (Ruzibiza & Turner, 2023).

The consequences of this decision are multifaceted: poor educational outcomes, limited recognition of certificates and minimal transition to higher education or employment (Dalrymple & Irankunda, 2024). Moreover, the country-of-origin curriculum is increasingly misaligned with student needs and realities, especially for youth who have never lived in their "home" countries (Dalrymple, 2024). Since 2018, nearly half of all school-aged refugee children in Tanzania's Kigoma region camps have been out of school, many of whom are overaged. Few non-formal education alternatives are provided for those unable to attend regular schools in the camps (EWG, 2018). Those who do attend learn in overcrowded and under-resourced classrooms with few qualified teachers (Dalrymple, 2018; ECW, 2025).

These effects ripple across the triple nexus. Humanitarian actors are stretched thin, providing temporary services in protracted

settings. Development actors hesitate to invest in systems perceived as outside of national planning. Peacebuilding efforts suffer from a lack of continuity and legitimacy, as education fails to offer a viable pathway to integration or self-reliance. This siloed structure has been acknowledged within Tanzanian refugee education coordination architecture, where linkages between non-formal and formal education remain weak and national ministries have limited engagement (EWG, 2018).

Tanzania's withdrawal from the CRRF also complicates regional momentum. The 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education, endorsed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development member states, emphasised the right of refugees to access quality education within national systems (IGAD, 2021). While countries such as Ethiopia and Uganda have enacted policies to make this a reality (Dryden-Peterson, 2022), Tanzania's retreat signals a divergence from regional cooperation.

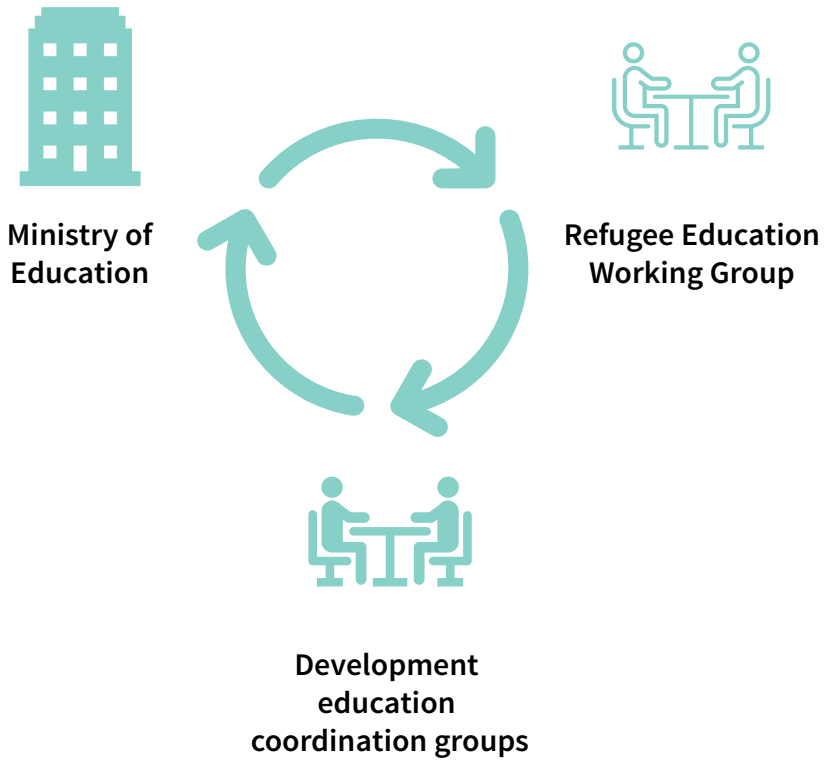
Local Ownership and Global Aspirations

Tanzania's reversal underscores the deep tension between global aspirations and national sovereignty. Tanzania's case demonstrates how refugee-hosting countries are not simply passive recipients of international norms or suggested best practice; they negotiate, resist and/or selectively adopt such standards based on domestic political calculations.

A reimagining of the triple nexus – one that centres host country realities, historical legacies and political economy constraints – is necessary to move beyond rhetorical commitment. In Tanzania, past experiences with large-scale naturalisation efforts and perceived donor disengagement have fostered scepticism toward long-term refugee integration (Milner, 2013). Triple nexus actors must acknowledge these dynamics and work collaboratively to rebuild trust, codesign context-appropriate policies and ensure sustainable financing.

Tanzania's example is not an aberration but a cautionary tale. It illustrates the fragility of global compacts when confronted with domestic politics and the inadequacy of nexus thinking that assumes alignment without sustained engagement. A truly integrated approach must go beyond frameworks and funding streams to grapple with the sovereignty, capacity and trust issues at play in these complex situations.

Figure 19
Better Collaboration Between Key Stakeholders in Education is Key for Realising the Triple Nexus



Source: Authors

BEYOND ACCESS: RETHINKING EDUCATION IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS THROUGH THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS IN ETHIOPIA

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Key takeaways:

- **Move beyond access to quality:** Shift funding and programming priorities from temporary education access towards long-term investments in safe, inclusive and quality learning national education systems.
- **Contextualise and integrate school safeguarding systems:** Make contextualised, school-wide safeguarding policies a mandatory component of all education programmes in conflict-affected contexts.
- **Apply the HDPN in education in conflict-affected contexts:** Align education interventions in conflict-affected and protracted displacement contexts with the Humanitarian-Peace-Development nexus. Use adaptive, context-sensitive and multidisciplinary approaches to strengthen holistic and resilient education systems rooted in local realities and integrated within national frameworks.

Operationalising the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Education: From "Any Education" to Quality and Safe Education

Over the past twenty years since the establishment of the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the provision of education in emergency (EiE) (Kagawa, 2005) has been instrumental in getting children back into learning spaces during conflict and natural crises. However, in regions in which conflict has become a generational condition, such as in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Syria — where displacement, instability and collective trauma are the norm rather than the exception — the temporary nature of EiE approaches and the structure of the EiE sector, have proven to be necessary but insufficient (Novelli & Kutan, 2023; Brun & Shuayb, 2023).

A shift in attention is needed to move from temporary measures to structural and integrated systems. Until 2015, with the adoption of the concept of "quality education" in the Sustainable Development Goal 4, the focus of education programmes during emergencies has been on access to education, building temporary schools and providing different kinds of temporary, alternative and accelerated learning programs. In conflict-affected contexts and protracted displacement situations, this approach was justified by the assumption that schools located in communities torn apart by violence and displacement can provide protection for children. However, in many protracted crises, simply being enrolled in school does not guarantee safety, learning or emotional well-being (Shuayb, 2019). Quality education, especially in the contexts of chronic instability, requires schools to be physically, emotionally and socially safe environments. As indicated in SDG 4 (Target 4a), a safe learning environment is not secondary but a foundational pillar of quality education.

A Systemic Approach: From Codes of Conduct to School Safeguarding System

In many areas such as Gambella Region, Ethiopia, which since 2014 has hosted almost 400,000 South Sudanese refugees, refugee and host community schools do not have a comprehensive safeguarding framework. Managers and teachers in these contexts are mostly undertrained in child protection, and formal mechanisms to report abuse or exploitation are exceedingly rare. These gaps represent direct threats to the children that schools are supposed to help, and undermine the humanitarian principle of "do no harm".

To change this reality in Gambella, the programme Building Resilience: Education Opportunities in Fragile and Crisis-Affected Environments (BRiCE) (2018–2022) supported the community and the regional authorities to develop the first School Safeguarding Policy of the Region. This experience showed that a comprehensive school safeguarding approach should be central to education programmes and built as a contextualised and localised system of care that entire communities can support. In practical terms, this means engaging communities and families in shaping what safeguarding means in their context — since imported standards have little effect if they are not localized and shared — and developing rules for the entire school community (i.e., managers, teachers, administrative staff and learners) that reflect local cultural realities. Doing so requires strong coordination among all the actors involved in protection and education policies, including humanitarian, development and peacebuilding stakeholders.

Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, Contextualisation and Multidisciplinary Approaches

In a complex and challenging context such as Gambella, the BRiCE programme adopted different tools taken from humanitarian, development and peacebuilding programming using a HDP nexus approach. For instance, although the importance of "education in conflict" (Novelli & Lopes Cardozo, 2008), and of the interplay between protection and peace in conflict-affected contexts are well recognised, limited attention has been paid to the importance of school safeguarding policies and their contextualisation conflict-affected contexts and protracted displacement situations. An in-depth understanding of the context is crucial in protracted crises; this becomes evident when using the categories of "contextuality", which are frequently used in social work (Fook, 2015), and Urie Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (SEM) (Kilanowski, 2017). In Gambella, contextuality and SEM show that children's safety and development are influenced by multiple and interconnected social layers. Applying these analyses to inform education policies in similar contexts helps us move away from isolated interventions and towards systems thinking.

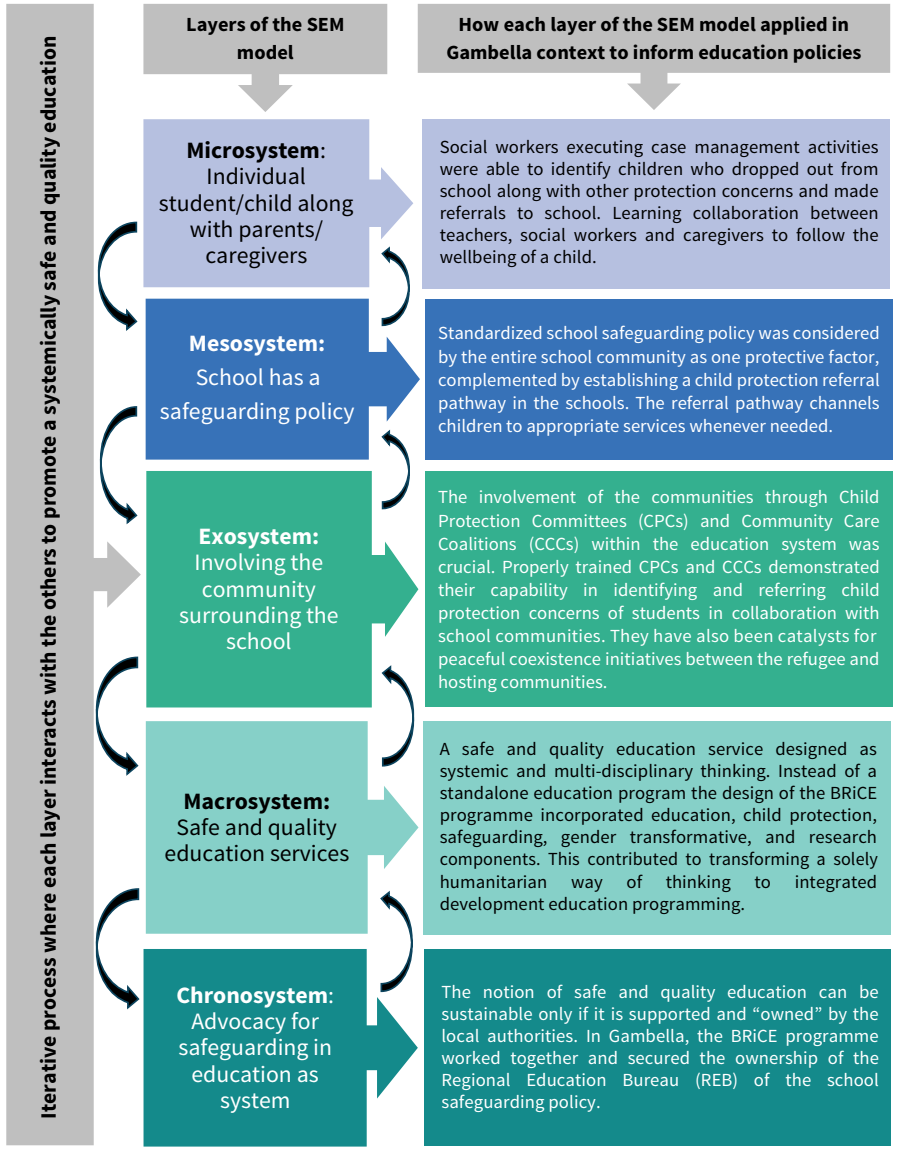
While these tools are not new to the humanitarian sector, they are scarcely applied because of the short-term interventions proposed by EiE. The four-year BRiCE programme implemented a contextualised combination of existing recommendations from the Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action (CPMS) (Standard 14: Applying a socio-ecological approach to child protection programming) and the INEE Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (Standard 9: Protection and well-being). Both publications suggest the use of the SEM model to guide the development of the school safeguarding policy, rooted in the knowledge acquired in years of presence in the region. Details are shown in Figure 20.

Towards a Safe and Quality Future

The language we use is important to frame our ideas and practice. When we speak of access to education, we risk obscuring the deeper needs of children trapped in the limbo of long-term crises (Shohel, 2023). When we treat education as an emergency service rather than as a foundation for peace and recovery, we fail to meet the moment and change the paradigm (Versmesse et al., 2017).

As war and instability become increasingly prevalent, leading to an increased number of refugees and more protracted and long-lasting conflicts, policy changes are required. We need to speak about a quality education that is grounded in context, centred on protection and aimed at long-term societal change. Safe schools in which children are not only taught but protected, heard and empowered, are not a luxury — they are the minimum standard for doing education right in conflict-affected contexts and protracted displaced situations.

Figure 20
How the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) Applied in Gambella Context



Source: Authors

FROM FORGOTTEN CORNERS TO NEXUS-CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY OF LOCALISED TRIPLE NEXUS IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH PUNJAB HUMAN CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROJECT PAKISTAN

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Key takeaways:
Building on the lessons from Punjab Human Capital Investment Project's nexus implementation and localisation, the following actions are recommended:

- Embed local leadership in the design, delivery and monitoring of EiE programs, ensuring resource delegation, decision-making authority, empowering structures and accountability mechanisms at the local level.
- Adopt cascade training models with continuous mentoring, coaching, emotional support and clear professional growth pathways to sustain teacher agency and long-term improvement beyond donor cycles.
- Ensure that multi-year planning is paired with flexible funding to respond rapidly to emerging classroom-level needs, including those arising from emergencies and unexpected disruptions.
- Promote ECCE as a peacebuilding tool, particularly in fragile and underserved contexts in which early learning can lay the foundation for inclusion, empathy and social cohesion.
- Strengthen coordination between education, health and social protection systems to address children's nutrition, readiness and holistic well-being.

Punjab, Pakistan, particularly its southern regions, regularly experiences floods and natural hazards that disrupt education and exacerbate existing inequalities in early childhood development. Although not classified as a conflict zone, these communities often face systemic inequities and widespread poverty, and they score low on several human development indicators.

A Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach is vital for bridging emergency response, long-term development and peacebuilding in this context. In 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit introduced the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus as a guiding framework to bridge emergency response, development planning and peacebuilding. The Punjab Human Capital Investment Project (PHCIP), funded by the World Bank under the School Education Department of the Government of Punjab, Pakistan, was launched in 2020. The PHCIP is a powerful case study of how the Nexus can be operationalised in early childhood education through locally led, integrated approaches.

Localisation as a Nexus Enabler

PHCIP was designed to address critical early learning deficits in underserved communities across 11 districts of Punjab. In many remote villages of Punjab, government school classrooms before the PHCIP intervention faced several challenges in supporting early childhood education. Dedicated spaces for young learners were limited, and access to age-appropriate learning materials and structured environments was often constrained. Teaching practices tended to follow traditional teacher-led methods that focused on repetition and memorisation. While many teachers made commendable efforts within these limitations, opportunities for play-based, child-centred learning were generally limited. These conditions highlighted the need for more supportive, developmentally appropriate approaches to early education in underserved areas. The PHCIP, implemented by Program Monitoring Implementation Unit – Punjab Education Sector Reforms Program (PMIU-PESRP), reversed this trajectory by actively engaging district education authorities, teachers and community voices in the reform process.

Rather than imposing a centralised ECCE model, the PHCIP prioritised context-specific design and local ownership through school councils. Schools were supported in creating low-cost, age-appropriate furniture, including learning and reading corner shelves, using locally available materials. Teachers, previously working without guidance or resources, were not only trained using a cascade model but were also empowered to observe and adapt lessons based on children's evolving needs. Learning materials for teachers, such as lesson plans, flashcards, assessment structures through children portfolio management, caregiver manuals, learning kit manuals and parent guides were provided to enrich the learning environment. Teachers' voices shaped content, classroom design and feedback mechanisms, an approach rarely seen in conventional development programming.

Integrated, Multi-Year Collaboration in Practice

The PHCIP's model of change reflected integrated collaboration at all levels. It trained 338 master trainers who cascaded knowledge to over 30,260 teachers, caregivers and school leaders. Parents from the community were also engaged through social mobilisation, broad-based community sessions and corner meetings. Through ongoing classroom mentoring and structured child portfolios, learning became individualised and interactive. Classrooms were enriched with skill-based learning corners, building blocks, picture books, storytelling tools and an 84-item ECCE learning kit aligned with the curriculum, collectively supporting children's literacy, cognitive growth and socio-emotional development through play-based, experiential learning.

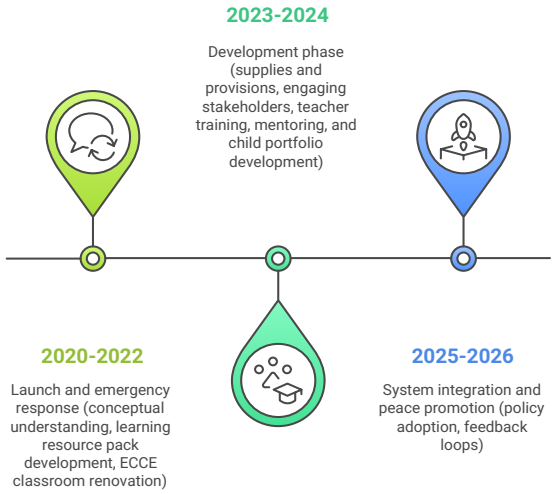
This was not a one-off intervention. Over five years, the PHCIP established ECCE standards, renovated ECCE classrooms, provided teaching learning resources, built feedback systems, conducted pre- and post-training assessments and developed mechanisms for continuous adaptation. This multi-year commitment was aligned with the Nexus principle of collective outcomes, moving beyond emergency fixes to long-term system strengthening.

The Role of Local Actors in Peace-Promoting Environments

By centring play, empathy, inclusion and trust-building in the early years, PHCIP's locally led ECCE classrooms nurtured resilience, equity and future-oriented mindsets among children and teachers alike.

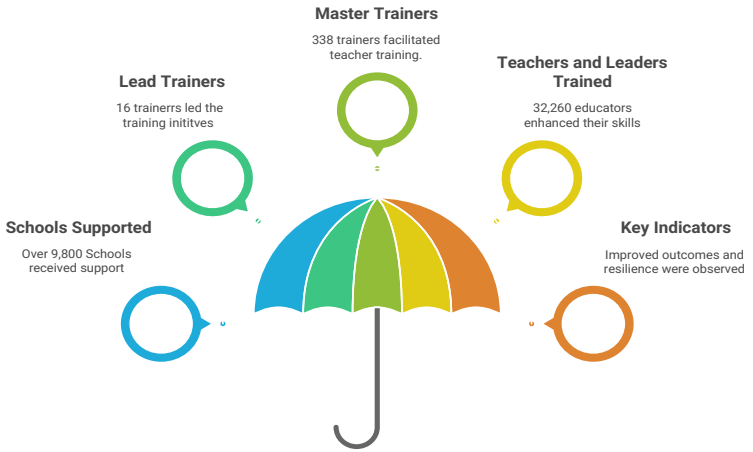
Teachers became change agents in their own right. Their professional identities shifted from passive implementers to active contributors, supporting not just cognitive but also emotional well-being. This is essential in communities in which exclusion, gender inequality and limited opportunity can breed tension. The shift also underscores how, if local actors are empowered, peacebuilding is possible even in non-violent, structurally marginalised settings.

Figure 21
ECCE Programme Development and Integration Timeline



Source: PMIU–PESRP. (2025). Progress report under the Punjab Human Capital Investment Project (PHCIP). School Education Department, Government of Punjab.

Figure 22
Overview of Punjab Human Capital Investment Project's Educational Development Achievements



Source: PMIU–PESRP. (2025). Progress report under the Punjab Human Capital Investment Project (PHCIP). School Education Department, Government of Punjab.

NAVIGATING THE TRIPLE NEXUS IN PAKISTAN: LESSONS FROM KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA AND PATHWAYS FOR INTEGRATED HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE RESPONSES

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Key takeaways:

- **Highlight education as a nexus enabler.** Education should be considered both a right and a resilience-building sector. Nexus planning must consist of conflict-sensitive teacher training, learner protection planning and flexible funding for enhanced learning in affected areas. Actions must be focused on strengthening inclusive school settings, facilitating female teachers and incorporating psychosocial support into curricula.
- **Institutionalises peace-sensitive programming frameworks.** Develop a collective, context-specific framework to differentiate peace building from stabilisation. This should be based on conflict sensitivity and ethical humanitarian engagement, allowing actors to deal with political pressures while safeguarding neutrality.
- **Strengthen local ownership and accountability.** Empower community-based groups through direct, flexible funding and require shared planning as a condition for Nexus programming. Platforms such as district-level "peace and improvement forums" could monitor this funding locally.
- **Establish a national nexus coordination mechanism.** A formal inter-ministerial and multistakeholder platform possibly led by the Planning Commission or National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) could reassure alignment of national development urgencies with humanitarian and peace-building activities. This would also support donor constancy and localisation. Specifically, education must be accepted not only as a sector affected by the crisis but also as a strategic instrument for peacebuilding, inclusion and long-term development, especially in regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Introduction

The Triple Nexus, the union of humanitarian, development and peace efforts, has seen increased and renewed importance since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. For Pakistan, a country dealing with prolonged displacement, fragile border zones and tenacious development disparities, operationalising the Nexus is both a necessity and a challenge. This article critically reflects on Nexus-aligned programming in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), underlining empirical lessons, policy tensions and opportunities for reform.

Reflections on Practice in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In 2018, Pakistan was one of the first countries selected as a pilot for integrated Nexus programming under UN leadership. In KP, international actors introduced collaborative planning frameworks envisioned to bridge emergency responses with sustainable development and peace building. However, findings from Hövelmann (2020) point to a worrying trend: Instead of nurturing an independent humanitarian space, aid delivery is often aligned with state-centric stabilisation descriptions. Civil society voices were marginalised and humanitarian values of neutrality and independence became unclear in implementation.

Brown, Mena and Brown (2024) further highlight that "peace " within Pakistan's Nexus narrative remains ambiguously defined and often conflated with security or counter-extremism rather than inclusive social cohesion or community-led reunion. Donor-driven programming suffered from short-term funding cycles and preventive transformative peace building outcomes. The UN-led management mechanisms initially offered promise but were not sufficiently attached to provincial governance or grassroots structures.

Education within the Triple Nexus Framework

The application of the Triple Nexus remains both critical and unknown in the context of Pakistan's education sector, specifically in crisis-affected areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Most of the time, schools in conflict-sensitive

areas serve as more than learning places. They deliver physical safety, psychosocial care and a sense of routine for children and adolescents experiencing displacement, trauma and instability (UNICEF, 2024). Despite this, educational programming remains fragmented: humanitarian actors in Pakistan generally focus on ensuring immediate access to learning after emergencies by establishing temporary learning spaces and distributing basic learning kits, while development agencies highlight infrastructure, and reform and peace building efforts are mainly absent (INEE & UNESCO, 2023)

Initial steps, such as the Girls' Right to Education Programme in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa implemented by the KP Education Department with support from UNICEF and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) focused on gender-sensitive school infrastructure, female teacher training, and community engagement. However, these initiatives, along with similar programs supported by the UNESCO Office in Islamabad, lacked a holistic Triple Nexus integration, often overlooking the peace building dimension of education, such as civic learning, social cohesion, and counter-radicalisation.

Accelerated learning programs for out-of-school children in complex districts similarly merged emergency response with development aims but remained short-lived and disengaged from broader education sector planning (UNICEF, 2024). In addition, teachers in vulnerable contexts remain under-supported. Many lack training in conflict-sensitive or trauma-informed pedagogies, despite their frontline role in stabilisation and reconstruction (Baron et al., 2024). Concurrently, learners, particularly girls, displaced youth and marginalised groups, face persistent barriers to entry that are not systematically addressed through integrated Nexus planning (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Department, 2022).

Thus, the current Nexus discourse in Pakistan has not sufficiently incorporated education as a cross-cutting tool for retrieval, resilience and peace. Moving forward, it is important to embed education mainly within Nexus frameworks to ensure that schools, teachers and learners are not only beneficiaries but active agents of sustainable peace and development.

Challenges and Gaps in Triple Nexus Implementation

Several basic and conceptual issues have inhibited coherent Nexus implementation in Pakistan:

1. **Conceptual ambiguity.** The lack of a shared definition of "peace" among government agencies, international donors, and civil society organizations has resulted in fragmented interpretations, undermining programmatic coherence (Brown et al., 2024). Despite its integrative ambition, the Triple Nexus approach in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has encountered several structural and operational challenges. The vagueness of the "peace" component, which is often combined with state-led stabilisation or counterinsurgency initiatives, results in declining bottom-up peace-developing efforts (Hövelmann, 2020; Brown et al., 2024).
2. **Limited local ownership.** Local NGOs and marginalised communities have had limited voices in programme design or priority planning.
3. **Civil-military coordination mechanisms.** Although effective in swift responses, these mechanisms have constrained humanitarian neutrality and limited the strategic impact of civil society actors.
4. **Misalignment of timeframes.** Long-term iterative engagement is required while dealing with peace initiatives; humanitarian responses tend to be reactive and limited to the short term in this context.
5. **Donor fragmentation:** Nexus efforts have remained compartmentalised without coherent funding streams and clear accountability plans.

These challenges illustrate the requirement for adaptive, context-sensitive frameworks that prioritises local agency, clarify peace-building initiatives, and nurture fair partnerships across sectors. These structural issues have had transparent implications for the education sector. For example, donor fragmentation has led to intersecting but uncoordinated education interventions in post-crisis areas of KP, whereas short-term humanitarian funding seldom allows for sustained teacher training, school rehabilitation or system-wide learning recovery planning. Limited local ownership constrains school communities and teachers from playing an important role in decision-making processes.

Conclusion

Ten years into the Nexus dialogue, Pakistan's experience shows an instructive story and an invitation to revise existing Nexus approaches. Bridging humanitarian relief, development and peace is not simply a structural or funding matter; it requires a principled, inclusive and locally knitted approach. As Pakistan prepares for future emergencies, climatic, political or security issues, the country's capabilities to leverage the Triple Nexus efficiently will be determined by the resilience of its governance and people alike.

5 MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Making the Connections focuses on examining lessons from coordinating bodies, integrating child protection with education, bridging evidence systems, and advancing anticipatory action.

The **Global Education Cluster** maintains that joined-up coordination initiatives such as the Initiative for Strengthening Education in Emergencies Coordination (ISEEC) in Ethiopia and Sudan are instrumental in aligning humanitarian, refugee and development responses through shared planning processes—such as Transitional Education Plans—alongside formalised agreements and mutual learning to support the creation of more resilient education systems. **Diallo, Ouedraogo, Monserez and Hodgkin** contend that Anticipatory Action (AA) represents a powerful yet underutilised mechanism for proactively safeguarding education systems across the Triple Nexus, through the use of crisis modifiers in development programs and joint planning to mitigate the foreseeable impacts of climate- and conflict-related shocks.

Chapple and McKinney argue that integrated programming across Child Protection and Education in Emergencies, as promoted by the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance), is essential for holistically addressing children's needs, mitigating protection risks and advancing cost-effective, sustainable and locally grounded solutions within the Nexus framework. Finally, **Ronca and Lyon** suggest that the Irish Aid Civil Society Partnership for a Better World (ICSP) funding model exemplifies an effective Nexus approach by offering flexible and complementary funding streams that span development and chronic humanitarian contexts and that collectively enhance preparedness, resilience and accelerated education progress across humanitarian and development objectives.

NEXUS APPROACHES IN EDUCATION COORDINATION: LESSONS FROM ETHIOPIA AND SUDAN

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Key takeaways:

- Build alliances and intentional joined-up coordination across relevant bodies to ensure a coherent responses across all stages of planning, implementation, monitoring and advocacy
- Promote pooled and flexible funding to support joint sector and response planning, such as national and transitional education sector plans, that include stakeholders across humanitarian, development and peace-building fields.
- Institutionalise joined-up coordination (through formalised agreements) to ensure continuity staff turnover and changing circumstances.

In crises where education systems teeter between emergency and recovery, effective coordination can mean the difference between continuity and collapse. As part of its mandate to support education clusters in predictable, effective and accountable responses, the Global Education Cluster (GEC) works to strengthen coordination across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. In many contexts shaped by conflict, displacement, and fragile institutions, education actors have often operated in silos – humanitarian, development, and refugee responses have frequently been planned and implemented separately. Recognising this gap, recent years have seen growing efforts to better align these responses. One such effort is the Initiative for Strengthening Education in Emergencies Coordination (ISEEC), a partnership between the GEC, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR), Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), supported by Education Cannot Wait. The partnership has set out to improve joined-up coordination between refugee responses, humanitarian responses and longer-term development programming in protracted crises.

Faced with the tremendous upheavals and funding cuts reshaping the humanitarian sector in 2025, the Humanitarian Reset (IASC, 2025), which aims to transform and streamline global humanitarian response presents both an opportunity and an imperative to foster more coherent coordination and stronger transition between humanitarian and development actors. Achieving this requires sustained partnerships and commitment at both country and global levels. The GEC's experience in nexus and transition support, together with lessons from ISEEC, provide valuable insights into what works.

In Ethiopia, coordinated action between the Education Cluster, the Education Technical Working Group (ETWG), and the Refugee Education Working Group (REWG) has been instrumental in aligning emergency and development responses. This collaboration has fostered a shared understanding of the situation on the ground and more coherent response planning. The integration of refugee education into broader national frameworks has led to a more comprehensive understanding of the needs of all learners: refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities alike. Improved data sharing and coordination have strengthened monitoring and targeting efforts, while joint advocacy has enhanced donor engagement and resource mobilisation. This process has enabled cross-representation in meetings, joint donor mapping and collaborative planning under the Multi-Year Resilience Program of Education Cannot Wait (ECW) (Education Cannot Wait, 2024). In regions such as Jijiga and Amhara, sub-national coordination efforts brought together actors from REWG and the Education Cluster, fostering localised solutions and reducing duplication across education programmes. These efforts have not only expanded access to education but have also promoted the inclusion of displaced learners in national systems, contributing to more durable and equitable outcomes. (ISEEC, 2025a).

However, several challenges remain. Regional coordination structures require further strengthening, particularly in Ethiopia's federal system, where decentralisation complicates policy alignment. Local NGOs often lack formal representation, and data interoperability continues to hinder joint analysis. Despite these challenges, the Ethiopian experience offers valuable insights into how coordinated leadership, dedicated capacity, global support

and formalised arrangements – such as terms of reference and memoranda of understanding between education actors – can support effective joined-up coordination between humanitarian and development responses. (ibid.)

Sudan constitutes a different – yet equally compelling – case. Since April 2023, the war in Sudan has resulted in one of the most severe education crises in the world. In this context, the development of Sudan's multi-year Transitional Education Plan (TEP)[1] for 2025–2027 emerged as a critical opportunity to align humanitarian, development and refugee responses (Global Partnership for Education, 2025). Through close collaboration between the Sudan Education Cluster, the Local Education Group (LEG), UNESCO and UNHCR, the TEP development process became a platform for shared planning and visioning (ISEEC, 2025b).

Participation in humanitarian and development planning forums – especially the LEG and TEP workshops – allowed humanitarian actors in Sudan to influence long-term strategies. Emergency education needs were incorporated into each pillar of the medium-term TEP, ensuring that the children most affected by the conflict were not left behind. A shared monitoring and evaluation framework was developed to harmonise data across sectors, while scenario planning helped define the responsibilities of different actors according to various possible contingencies (Global Partnership for Education, 2025). Cluster partners contributed real-time emergency data and led on technical areas such as non-formal education, teacher professional development and support for national examinations (ISEEC, 2025b).

This joined-up approach in Sudan also fostered trust among stakeholders and encouraged a shift from reactive to forward-looking planning. Humanitarian actors did not only inform longer-term responses but also adapted their own strategies – such as the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) – to align with national goals. In turn, development actors recognised the value of humanitarian insight and operational reach in conflict-affected areas. This mutual learning and shared ownership have made joint advocacy more coherent and effective, especially in calling for school reopening and increased investment in education. (ISEEC, 2025b).

Nexus Coordination is Strategic for Humanitarian and Development Concerns

The examples of Ethiopia and Sudan demonstrate that nexus coordination is more than an operational tool – it is a strategic commitment to coherence, equity and resilience. Success depends on several enablers: inclusive and proactive leadership, formalised coordination mechanisms, harmonised data systems and sustained donor engagement. Crucially, the involvement of diverse actors must move beyond consultation towards genuine collaboration, where roles are clearly defined and responsibilities are shared (ISEEC, 2025b).

As education crises grow more complex and intertwined with broader development and displacement dynamics, adopting nexus approaches becomes even more urgent. Learning from these experiences, education stakeholders in other contexts can move beyond fragmentation, towards coordinated systems that deliver sustainable solutions for all learners.

Footnote

1. A National Education Sector Plan (NESP) is government-led, while a Transitional Education Plan (TEP) is developed by development partners (in this case with the support of humanitarian partners and the Education Cluster) to bridge a gap in Ministry of Education capacity, or sometimes a lack of government legitimacy.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION: ADVANCING THE TRIPLE NEXUS THROUGH COORDINATED APPROACHES TO ANTICIPATORY ACTION

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Key takeaways:
To realise the potential of anticipatory action, the education sector must:

- **Engage children and community members** in identifying and monitoring risks and work through schools as community hubs for anticipatory action;
- **Integrate education into coordinated inter-sector anticipatory frameworks** under the leadership of the Education Cluster and other key stakeholders;
- **Build anticipatory action into development education** programming, policies and plans through crisis modifiers;
- **Invest ahead of crises** to save lives and resources and protect the education and futures of millions of children and youth

(Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2025).

Anticipatory action is a powerful means of reducing the impact of climate- and conflict-related shocks by using risk forecasts to trigger timely pre-crisis interventions. This approach can leverage action across the triple nexus and is especially valuable in the education sector, where disruptions severely affect children's short and long-term learning, protection and wellbeing. Anticipatory action can align humanitarian, development and peace actors to prevent disruptions to education and keep children safe. As needs rise and resources shrink, stronger coordination across sectors and systems is essential.

What is Anticipatory Action?

Anticipatory action involves acting ahead of predictable hazards to prevent or mitigate their impact (Global Education Cluster, 2024). This works best when activities and triggers (pre-agreed thresholds for action) are built into frameworks to ensure the rapid release of pre-arranged funding (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2024).

Anticipatory action is widely acknowledged as "a powerful tool for delivering both humanitarian and development benefits - making humanitarian response, faster, more efficient and more dignified, while also safeguarding development gains" (Anticipation Hub, 2021). According to a 2025 evidence synthesis, anticipatory action can reduce humanitarian costs by up to 50% compared to traditional reactive responses. Including education in coordinated anticipatory approaches can safeguard learning, protect hard-won progress towards development goals and promote peaceful, inclusive education. While anticipatory action in education is necessary to contribute to education-focused outcomes, schools can also serve as important community hubs for early action, engaging children in addressing broader climate and conflict impacts.

Shifting to anticipatory approaches requires collaboration and coordination: "Humanitarian actors, development actors, climate actors, governments, civil society, private sector… have different entry points but share a common goal: protecting vulnerable people against shocks is a collective undertaking" (Anticipation Hub, 2021). Through the Education Cluster and other coordination platforms, the education sector can accelerate anticipatory approaches by convening these diverse partners – including local actors

who are first to respond – to support joint planning, data sharing and aligned frameworks and funding.

How can Anticipatory Action Support Humanitarian, Development and Peace Outcomes through the Triple Nexus?

Anticipatory action in development programmes is enabled through crisis modifiers – a flexibility mechanism built into longer-term programs that allows for rapid reallocation of resources to respond to emerging crises. Save the Children used scenario-based planning in a five-year USAID-supported education project in Burkina Faso to enable local partners, parent teacher associations, school management committees, provincial and regional education authorities to adapt to conflict and climate risks. Three scenarios – catastrophic, stable and optimistic – were developed with corresponding activities and budgets. In the catastrophic scenario, once the humanitarian situation in a region has deteriorated to a certain threshold, the crisis modifier and associated anticipatory action activities are triggered. This approach shows how development programming that is sensitive to humanitarian needs can use anticipatory action to support longer-term objectives. However, aid cuts halted the project before activation, resulting in the loss of a key chance to test anticipatory action and share lessons with the sector. As budgets tighten, it is vital not to miss opportunities to work across the humanitarian–development nexus.

While anticipatory action is increasingly built into humanitarian coordination and funding frameworks, education is often excluded. In Niger, a multi-sector *Anticipatory Action Framework for Floods* included early actions in food, health, water, shelter and protection (OCHA, 2024). Education actions were not included, despite lessons from the 2024–2025 monsoon season, when 10 million children were out of school due to flooding and over 5,500 classrooms were damaged (UNICEF, 2024). The Niger Education Cluster is currently advocating for the inclusion of education in the 2025 Framework, emphasising the need for pre-agreed actions to protect children and their learning. As a result of strong advocacy, Education Clusters are increasingly integrating anticipatory action into multi-sector Frameworks and Education Cannot Wait, an education donor working across the nexus, is investing in anticipatory action pilots in Somalia and Pakistan.

Anticipatory action is not yet widely used for conflict-induced shocks, which are harder to predict than climate risks, making triggers hard to define and activate. However, anticipatory action can support education's peacebuilding potential by protecting learning continuity and reducing the risk that crises will disrupt fragile social contracts by fostering inclusion, social cohesion and resilience of communities. Furthermore, where education is under attack, such as in Nigeria, Education Clusters are coordinating efforts by partners to monitor early warning signs of attacks on schools (GCPEA, 2023) and take action to prevent harm.

Greater investment, evidence and cross-sector collaboration are needed to unlock the peacebuilding potential of anticipatory action and make education a meaningful tool in conflict prevention and response.

What Comes Next?

As crises grow more complex, Anticipatory Action offers an innovative approach to proactively protect education systems, uphold children's right to learn and strengthen the contribution of education to peace and resilience.

> *"Crises may be unavoidable, but their worst impacts are not"*
>
> (Geneva Global Hub for Education in Emergencies, 2025).

With the right investments, coordination and political will, we can move from reacting to crises to preventing the worst impacts, thereby ensuring that education not only endures but actively contributes to building a more peaceful and resilient future.

CHILD PROTECTION AND EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES: INTEGRATION ACROSS THE NEXUS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

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Key takeaways:

- Governments, donors and organisations should collaborate across child protection and education to strengthen systems and support local actors in delivering integrated programmes that centre children across the nexus.
- This not only improves children's protection, learning and well-being; it is cost effective and sustainable, thus maximising the impact of investment.

In this time of great uncertainty across the humanitarian sector, children and young people affected by crises and conflicts still need education and protection regardless of what global structures and funding are in place. It is essential that Child Protection and Education in Emergencies actors work together through joint and integrated programmes to holistically address needs before, during and after crises. The advantages of such collaboration extend beyond improving learning and well-being outcomes for children; they also contribute to more streamlined and cost-effective ways of working.

The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (The Alliance) have found that joint and integrated programming can transform humanitarian delivery, drive nexus approaches and support the localisation agenda, supporting stronger systems and communities in crises. Such programming can also:

- Improve child well-being and healthy development.
- Improve learning outcomes through holistic support to well-being.
- Prevent and mitigate certain protection risks while improving access, retention, and success in learning.
- Prevent children "slipping through cracks" between sectors by centering the child in multi-sectoral, integrated programming.
- Contribute to efforts to transform humanitarian delivery, support the localisation agenda, and maximise the impact and cost-effectiveness of multiple-sector interventions for stronger systems and communities in crises.

INEE and the Alliance committed to a formal collaboration in 2020 and established the Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPHA)-Education in Emergencies (EiE) joint initiative. The joint initiative aims to strengthen collaboration between child protection and education sectors responding to the needs of children, communities and systems experiencing crises. This, in turn, facilitates a Nexus approach. While we recognised excellent work was already taking place to address the needs of children and young people in crises around the world, our networks had identified the need for greater clarity and technical guidance on how and why cross-sectoral collaboration is critical to meet the needs of children and young people.

To better establish a shared understanding, we produced joint foundational publications during the first phase. These publications included a position paper setting out the rationale for collaboration and a research paper on the impact of Covid-related school closures on education and child protection outcomes. With the support of a multiagency advisory group, the Guidance Note: Supporting Integrated Child Protection and Education Programming in Humanitarian Action was co-created and launched, giving practitioners a set of guidelines and resources to support shared planning and implementation in responses. Throughout the first phase, as partners with the IASC Cluster system, we ensured alignment and complementarity with the Education in Emergencies-Child Protection Collaboration Framework developed by the Global Education Cluster (GEC) and the Child Protection Area of Responsibility (CPAoR).

In June 2025, our members fed into a process to ensure our next phase was shaped by current realities and experiences of practitioners.

First, we facilitated a workshop. This was then followed by a widely distributed survey. Both endeavours reviewed how members engaged in integrated and joint programming, what tools were being used to support coordination, advocacy and implementation as well as additional resources required to better support this work. Engagement from both sectors was impressive, with 26 people attending the half-day workshop and over 360 practitioners, mostly from national-level organisations, responding to the survey. This not only indicates commitment to joint work, but the enthusiasm and comments we received reiterated the initiative's importance and timeliness.

Guided by this outreach, we have begun to organise a wealth of existing resources from members and the two networks in a shared Child Protection in Humanitarian Action and Education in Emergencies web-portal. Rather than developing new guidance, we are focusing on user-focused guidelines on how and when existing materials can be used. We will continue to support advocacy efforts through continued compilation of evidence of what works, drafting related speaking points and compiling country-based case studies and tools developed by partner organisations.

We recognise that working across the nexus is more critical now than it has ever been before. The work produced during this phase of the joint initiative focuses on supporting the national systems and organisations that serve children and youth across the nexus. Many of these actors already work in a multisectoral way, recognising that they are most effective when they respond to specific needs of children and youth. For example, they may set up temporary classrooms that are used for teaching and learning and provide a safe, protective space and access to other related services, including psychosocial support. Local organisations are best placed to ensure that responses are context-specific, culturally relevant and equitable – from anticipatory action and preparedness through to response and recovery.

The needs of children and young people affected by conflict and crises will not change regardless of decisions made during the current reorganisation of the global humanitarian architecture. Supporting children and youth holistically requires ways of working in which global structures do not dictate the design of programmes, in which cross-sectoral working is the norm and in which local actors are given the power and resources to work together to improve outcomes for the children they serve.

Joint and integrated child-centred programming across the nexus and at local levels is key to ensuring children are better protected, develop cognitively, socially and emotionally, and can contribute to peace and stability in their communities as they grow up. As we face increasing financial and capacity constraints, it is more important than ever that we work across silos (both the Humanitarian Response Plan and Humanitarian-Development-Peace), focus our attention on supporting and empowering local and national actors and place children at the centre of our responses.

NEXUS IS THE ONLY WAY TO SUSTAINABLY ACHIEVE SDG 4

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Key takeaways:

- Adaptable funding mechanisms that support long-term planning and that can adjust to evolving circumstances are necessary to facilitate sustained engagement across the nexus.
- An evaluation of the Irish Aid funding scheme as an enabling model for the achievement of collective education outcomes across the nexus should be conducted.
- Strengthen coordination and dialogue between development and humanitarian donors, including governments, INGOs, local partners and communities to explore opportunities of nexus modalities.

Introduction

With the sectors current funding crisis, many governments are shifting their priorities and reducing national government allocations towards aid. These reflections are based on Plan Ireland's work in Western Africa, which nurtured internal discussions about the current education programming and nexus. The Irish Government's funding stream model represents a good example of Nexus that can inform future education in emergencies (EiE) programming.

The Irish Aid Ireland's Civil Society Partnership for a Better World (ICSP) brings previously siloed funding mechanisms together under one scheme. Under ICSP, are four distinct but complementary funding streams for development, chronic humanitarian crises, acute humanitarian crises and global citizenship education (Government of Ireland, 2021). Irish Aid encourages flexible use of funds, allowing reallocations of up to 20% within country budgets without prior approval as long as modified or newly defined activities remain aligned with objectives. Reallocations across streams or countries are accepted when justified by changing needs, contexts or shared outcomes, with approval determined on a case-to-case basis.

Plan Ireland´s perspective is that, because humanitarian funding does not keep pace with rising needs, humanitarian aid must be more efficient, effective and responsive. This occurs only when preparedness is ensured, which can happen only when there is no crisis. The Irish Aid funding model facilitates the building of systems such that they are better prepared and more resilient, thus paving the way for quality responses.

The Safe, Quality, Resilient, Inclusion-Based Education (SQRIBE) Programme

Collective Outcomes in a Flexible and Multi-Year Funding Scheme.
The Irish Aid-funded SQRIBE programme is funded by ICSP development and chronic humanitarian streams and focuses on achieving a common goal and objectives over a 5-year period. The 7 SQRIBE project results frameworks have the same skeleton for outcome areas, which broadly focus on the following:

1. Access to retention in and progress in education
2. The delivery of quality, safe and inclusive education
3. Stakeholder engagement, partnership and localisation
4. Policy, advocacy and systems strengthening

These outcomes are operationalised in seven specific contexts across six countries. In Mali, for example, the project is unique in that it is funded via both ICSP development and chronic humanitarian crisis streams. The other SQRIBE projects are either development or humanitarian funded. As such, the Nexus project in Mali typically integrates humanitarian and development indicators under a unified results framework. This dual focus allows Plan Mali's project to respond to immediate needs while strengthening long-term education systems in the Timbuktu region.

SQRIBE's fourth overarching outcome is related to policy, advocacy and systems strengthening. When it comes to the implementation of this outcome in the context of the project in Mali, a combination of education indicators ensures that education actors are equipped with the ability to respond effectively to the most urgent educational needs in fragile and crisis-affected contexts (humanitarian) and to build the foundations for inclusive, evidence-based education planning and policy (development).

Table 2
Sample indicators of Mali's achievement of Outcome area 4

HUMANITARIAN INDICATORS	DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS
Percentage of Accelerated Education (AE) teachers demonstrating improvement in AE pedagogy	Availability of reliable education data in targeted districts
Percentage of education actors reporting implementation of crisis-sensitive and gender-responsive education planning guidelines	The extent to which gender equality and inclusion are integrated and supported in national education policies, curricula, teacher training and student assessment

Source: Authors

Together, these indicators show how Mali's nexus approach involves not just a combination of funding streams, but also the merging of methods, tools and priorities from both humanitarian and development domains to achieve more coherent, sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

When it comes to defining which activities to put in place to operationalise outcomes at the country level, individual projects in each country have the flexibility to define which approaches and activities best suit the achievement of collective educational outcomes. Contextualised and appropriate responses, where possible, should also try to meet long-term sustainable impact goals. While humanitarian-only projects focus on activities that facilitate immediate access, safety and accelerated learning often far removed from national systems or long-term pathways, development projects aim to reform existing systems, influence inclusive policies and attain sustainable change; however, they often lack flexibility or responsiveness to acute crises. The following two examples illustrate how flexible funding enables an approach that allows for interventions adapted to the specific crisis context: accelerated education and flexible hardware provision.

Plan International's Accelerated Education Strategy Contextualised in Development and Emergency Programming

One of the core components of SQRIBE is accelerated education (AE), which has proven to be effective across the nexus. Education continuity and quality education are guaranteed by adapting a strategic approach specific to the context. The AE programme in Guinea-Bissau, for example, enables out-of-school and over-age children to catch up on missed learning by accelerating six years of learning into three. The Nafa Centres in Guinea offer an AE programme of 3 years of education in one year and the opportunity for over-age children who will never be integrated into primary school to attend vocational training.

This allows them to acquire the professional skills they need to carry out income generating activities in the future. In Central African Republic and Cameroon, the AE curriculum allows conflict affected children to catch up with missed learning and depending on exam results, re-integrate into the formal system or progress onto the next level of AE. The Irish Aid funding model allows for this kind of flexibility, enabling education objectives to be contextualised and adapted to achieve collective educational outcomes.

Why a Flexible Funding Model in Education Allows More Suited Responses to Predictable Crisis

In an effort to make our education interventions more flexible and responsive to sudden crises, our technicians and programmes often develop strategies such as prepositioning learning materials, school kits or temporary structures to enable rapid deployment. Our thoughts on these strategies are as follows:

1. Preparedness in the form of prepositioning, despite challenges, is crucial to ensure education continuity in case of crisis.

2. Donors can be resistant. However, risks can be mitigated and not necessarily avoided. Small-scale pilots (Trócaire, 2023) or project-level prepositioning can still significantly reduce response times while limiting financial and compliance risks.

3. This approach can be particularly relevant in recurring crises, such as climate-driven ones. In these contexts, prepositioning forms part of a risk-informed preparedness strategy that can help maintain students access to education, even in the face of repeated shocks.

Crisis-affected children who drop out of school risk never returning. They are exposed to protection risks that will dramatically impact their lives, such as violence, abuse, trafficking, child marriage and recruitment into armed groups. A nexus approach requires these risks to be managed more intelligently, adapted to the specific nature of the crisis. Flexible donor funding allows this to happen.

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