



AID IN THE TIME OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC: CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES OF FRAGILITY, POVERTY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Reality of Aid International Coordinating Committee^a

1. INTRODUCTION

A triple crisis of poverty, inequality, and a climate emergency, compounded by a global pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed disturbing limits in global solidarity, particularly on the part of the international donor community. In a matter of months, the pandemic has exposed long-standing structural inequalities both within and between countries. Despite some progress, COVID has increased vulnerabilities for millions of people, pushing many into poverty, in the context of the ever-more-present impacts from climate change.

Faced with these compounding global challenges, there is an unparalleled and urgent need to maximize development finance, while focusing on the rapidly worsening conditions for poor and vulnerable people. Yet the evidence in this Report, and several parallel

^a This chapter conveys the views of the International Coordinating Committee in their individual capacities and do not necessarily represent views of their affiliated organizations. It was authored on their behalf by Brian Tomlinson, the content editor for this Report.

civil society commentaries, point to largely stagnant aid flows, an aid system with systemic ineffectiveness highly resistant to change, and a growing pre-eminence of donor economic and political interests in aid priorities.¹

The recently published UN *2021 Financing for Sustainable Development Report* warns that the pandemic could lead to a lost decade for development, noting that there is a sharply diverging and unequal world emerging from the lack of access to resources by poor countries and people to combat the crisis. Their report cites growing global systemic risks arising from inter-linkages between economic, social (e.g. health, inequality), and environmental (e.g. climate) conditions.²

World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Director, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus³ fears that the world is on the cusp of a “catastrophic moral failure.” Multilateral collaboration is limited, at best, in the wake of “vaccine apartheid” and the “me-first” northern allocations of vaccines. Heightened nationalism in several donor countries, as well as rising levels of systemic racism, are very worrying trends against the vision and commitments to a Decade of Action for Agenda 2030.

The immediate pandemic-induced crisis is deep and profound. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has predicted the deepest global recession since World War II for 2020, estimating a contraction of 3.5% in global GDP. Prospects for global recovery are highly uneven and dependent in part upon equitable access to effective vaccines.⁴ Inequalities between countries are deepening. According to estimates, the real GDP for Sub-Saharan Africa fell by 2.6% in 2020, its first continental recession in 25 years. In April 2021, the DAC reported that aid from DAC donors to this region fell by 1% in 2020.⁵ By the end of 2021 this region's GDP is expected to drop to levels not seen since 2008. It is estimated that it may take over a decade for a full recovery.⁶

The modest progress in reducing global poverty since 2015 has proven to be highly vulnerable to the impacts of the pandemic shocks. It is estimated that there was an additional 34 million people living in extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2020. This is on top of a pre-pandemic total of 433 million people already deprived of the basics to support life. Together these numbers represent almost 44% of the people of the sub-continent by 2021.⁷

The expected deepening of poverty is not limited to Sub-Saharan Africa – it will be experienced across all regions of the world. Two-thirds of the 225 million **additional** people predicted to be pushed into poverty (the \$3.20 poverty line) are living in South Asia. More than 200 million additional people are likely to be reduced to poverty (the \$5.50 poverty line) in East Asia. Considering the likelihood of greater inequality and uncertain growth prospects throughout the Global South, the World Bank analysts predict that these trends will continue in 2021 and perhaps 2022. In their words, “the only certainty in this crisis is that it is truly unprecedented in modern history.”⁸

The theme of this Report focuses on the inter-connections between expanding conditions of “fragility” affecting millions of people living in poverty, the immediate and long term impacts of climate change, now compounded by a global pandemic.

Many of those most severely affected by the pandemic in the Global South were already living in fragile contexts and the “furthest behind”. This fragility has had several inter-related characteristics: 1) high levels of poverty and inequality; 2) the breakdown of key institutions; 3) systemic discrimination of ethnic and racial minorities; 4) high levels of violence against women and girls; and 5) political volatility accompanied by repression and narrow authoritarian regimes.⁹ These conditions are often further worsened by violence and conflict, as governments are either unwilling or unable to protect the rights of their citizens. Growing impacts from climate

change are increasingly being felt in these same country contexts. Combined these factors paint a dire picture for millions of affected people across the globe.

The number of protracted humanitarian crises (lasting more than five years) has more than doubled in the last 15 years, from 13 to 31. Over one billion people are living in countries affected by these long-term emergencies.¹⁰ The aid trends chapter in this Report examines aid trends for 30 of the most highly fragile and conflict affected countries where 38% of the population live in extreme poverty [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].^b

As the pandemic unfolds, time is also running out in tackling the climate emergency. The climate and environmental crises are continuing to disrupt basic conditions of life on earth. Despite the commitments of the 2015 Paris Agreement, carbon emissions are projected to continue to increase. With the accumulated effect of each year of inaction, scientists are predicting that the 1.5°C Paris Agreement limit will be breached in less than a decade, and a catastrophic 3°C heating by the end of the century.¹¹ Emissions dropped by 7% during the “great pause” of 2020, but to keep global warming to 1.5°C, these emissions need to fall by 14% **each year** up to 2040.¹² The medium and long-term consequences of inaction are critical for the entire world, but particularly for poor and vulnerable people. These impacts will be much deeper and more generalized than even the pandemic, which may be seen as a dress rehearsal for the potential for human rights violations unleashed by worsening global warming in the later years of this century.¹³

Vigorous social and political movements pushing for strong coordinated government action are more important than ever in meeting these intertwined crises. In recent months, international social movements and coalitions of youth, Indigenous Peoples,

environmentalists, human rights activists and scientists are calling for a major paradigm shift. These shifts are needed to build back a more just and equitable post-pandemic world. The political stakes are high and challenging.

Shifting economies and livelihoods towards a zero-carbon world is daunting, especially with the continued resistance by powerful corporate and private interests and their commitment to a carbon dependent global capitalism. The responses by several governments to the pandemic in the Global North have demonstrated that major shifts are possible. Notions of “affordability,” and what might be considered “normal,” are as much a political constraint as a financial one.

The costs for climate inaction are already being paid in the lives of many of poor and vulnerable people across the Global South. They are manifest in extreme weather conditions destroying their homes and productive infrastructure, in reduced availability of scarce water resources, crop vulnerability for millions involved in small-scale agriculture, and in the inundation of their communities from storm surges as sea levels rise.

According to the World Bank, impacts from climate change are life-changing for those living in fragile and conflict affected settings. Its analysis identifies the prospect of an additional 132 million people living in extreme poverty by 2030 due to irreversible climate change.¹⁴ By 2050 up to 140 million people could be forced to move within their own countries due to climate-induced disruptions to their livelihoods. In 2019 over 70% of the internally displaced persons population was the result of extreme weather events and natural disasters, more than three times the displacements caused by conflict and violence in that year.¹⁵

In this *Reality of Aid Report 2020/2021* the civil society contributors examine the place of aid in responding to these global crises. How donors

^b References in square brackets are to chapters in this Report.

respond will shape development opportunities for the remaining years in the decade. How will donors address the widening and persistent state fragility and conflict in the lives of people living in poverty? What role will a deepening climate and environmental emergency play in these responses? How will current patterns of cooperation in the face of the global health pandemic affect development cooperation going forward in the next five years, and perhaps for the rest of the decade?

The 2020/2021 *Report* provides new evidence from CSOs, both in the South and the North. They are writing on the role of aid in the convergence of fragile contexts, escalating impacts of the climate crisis and a global pandemic. Chapters critically examine the reform of aid in these fragile country contexts. How are donors approaching the Triple Nexus, which calls for greater coordination amongst humanitarian support, development, and peace actions? In seeking a more holistic approach, the Triple Nexus has gained increased attention since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the 2019 agreement by all donors at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on a DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.¹⁶ Experience and issues in its implementation are elaborated through country case studies and thematic perspectives on peace and security, social protection and violence against women and girls.

As the climate emergency increasingly shapes humanitarian and development futures, several chapters look more closely at the priorities in international climate finance and their potential impacts on development prospects for vulnerable populations and communities.

Altogether this body of evidence accentuates the urgent call by the Reality of Aid Network for systemic aid reform. Can the pandemic be a moment of opportunity? Might the dramatic spread of COVID-19 change the future of aid? Could it bring the needed transformations in development and humanitarian aid delivery that have eluded those seeking reform for the past ten years? The Report puts forward a number of recommendations for moving along these directions.

2. REFORMING THE AID SYSTEM

An aid system that is stagnant and resistant to change

The current aid system is ill equipped to meet the challenges of this coming decade. Over the past twenty years the Reality of Aid Network have been consistent in calling for donors to meet the UN target of 0.7% of donors' Gross National Income (GNI) for Official Development Assistance (ODA). Despite these calls for greater justice in resources for development, Real ODA has languished at about \$132 billion and 0.26% of DAC donors' GNI in 2019, largely unchanged since to 2017.^c [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*]

Preliminary ODA figures for 2020 from the OECD DAC put Real Aid at \$142 billion, an increase largely reflecting modest donor support for pandemic measures in 2020. Given that aid budgets were already established prior to the pandemic, there is no certainty that this increase will hold in future years.¹⁷

Substantially increased aid is recognized as a key and strategic resource for development and achievement of Agenda 2030 and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a public resource shaped by governments, aid has a unique focus on measures that tackle all

^c Real ODA is ODA reported to the DAC less in-donor refugee and student costs, debt cancellation and interest received for ODA loans.

forms of poverty and inequalities and targets those that are furthest behind.

To do so, CSOs have argued that donors must be guided by three main orientations: 1) development effectiveness principles (country ownership, inclusive partnerships, focused on results, accountability and transparency), which donors agreed in Busan in 2011; 2) a focus on women's empowerment through feminist principles and practices; and 3) the implementation of human rights-based approaches.¹⁸

This *Report* reveals that there has been marginal growth in ODA over the past decade as a critical public resource to tackle poverty, inequality, women's empowerment and climate justice. Most donors are fixated on the mobilization of the private sector through deploying scarce aid money to these actors, rather than significantly increasing their budgets for ODA, moving to reach the UN target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI), and allocating it to urgent public supports for people and communities [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

In its 2018 *Report* the Reality of Aid Network highlighted that ODA is a deeply compromised resource, one that is trapped in donors' own political and institutional interests, which have been largely resisted change.

Chapters in this current *Report* explore some of these challenges and emerging trends. They examine the priorities and policies of several key donors, including the European Union, Japan, Sweden, Belgium, Canada and the United Kingdom. An overview of the directions shaping South-South Development Cooperation (SSDC) provides a perspective on possibilities for the evolution of a more equitable and relevant modality for development cooperation [Morales, *Construction of South South Cooperation*].

Despite a modest increase in 2020, the outlook for aid for 2021 is still fraught with

uncertainty. The UK has made major cuts in its aid [Baldoumas and Rumford, UK]. France's and Japan's increase in its aid budget is accompanied by a problematic use of ODA loans [Jandaeux, France; Takayanagi, Japan]. Other donors, such as Canada and Sweden, have promoted a feminist and human rights approach in aid delivery. However, Canada has failed to match these commitments with significantly increased aid dollars [Thomasson, Sweden; Novovic, Canada].

The Report also notes and analyzes the high concentration of aid among a few donors. Among the 30 DAC donors, the top five donors – the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Japan, and France – provided more than two thirds (67%) of aid in 2019. The next five donors ranked by quantity (Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Canada and Italy) provided another 17% of aid in that year. Advocates for aid reform need to take account that these donors, and particularly the top five, have a major impact on the quantity of aid and the quality of development cooperation.

The significant difference among donors is also important to note. The ODA/GNI performance for the top five in 2019 was 0.26% of their collective GNI, compared to 0.39% for the next five donors. The gap widened with the preliminary 2020 figures – 0.31% compared to 0.47%. On a sector proxy indicator for the degree to which donors have oriented their aid towards poverty reduction, the top five donors have shown little improvement since 2014 (about 37% of their aid allocated to small/medium enterprise development, basic education, health, human rights and agriculture sectors). However, all other donors (representing a much smaller share of total aid) have an improved performance on this proxy indicator with 44% of sector allocated aid in 2019 [see Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

This *Report's* chapters on current donor directions and practices document a weakened resource that is ill-equipped to respond to the urgent responses to the pandemic and the

Box 1: A Reality of Aid Action Agenda: Transforming Development Cooperation

A Ten-Point Action Agenda to retool ODA as a resource that is relevant to reducing poverty and inequalities in the 21st Century must include:

1. **Achieving the 0.7% Target** – DAC providers that have not achieved the 0.7% of GNI UN target for ODA must set out a plan to do so without further delay.
2. **Addressing the needs of the least developed, low income, fragile and conflict-affected countries** – As DAC donors move towards the 0.7% target, they must also meet the long-standing commitment to allocate up to 0.2% of their GNI to Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
3. **Establishing a rights-based framework** – The allocation of all forms of development finance, but particularly ODA and including South South Cooperation (SSC), must be designed and measured against the four development effectiveness principles (country ownership, focus on results, inclusive partnerships and transparency and accountability) and human rights standards.
4. **Mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment** – Providers of ODA and other forms of concessional development finance (e.g. SSC) must **demonstrably** mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment in all dimensions of development cooperation projects, programs and policies.
5. **Addressing other identity-based inequalities** – Providers of ODA must develop strategies to guide increased efforts to tackle all forms of inequalities, such as those based on economic marginalization, disabilities, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or age.
6. **Reversing the shrinking and closing space for CSOs as development actors** – All actors for development – governments, provider agencies, parliamentarians, INGOs – must proactively challenge the increasing regulatory, policy and physical attacks on civil society organizations, human rights defenders, indigenous groups, women and environmental activists.
7. **Implementing clear policies for ODA to improve its quality as a development resource** - Development effectiveness principles require practical reforms to strengthen partner ownership to guide the priorities of ODA, including reversing trend in increased loans, demand-led technical assistance, formal and informal aid untying, and reducing donor-led special multilateral funds.
8. **Assessing the deployment of ODA in support of private sector instruments and private sector partners** – ODA should only be deployed for provider Private Sector Instruments (PSIs) in projects/activities that can be directly related to building capacities of developing country private sector actors, that respect development effectiveness principles and human rights, and that demonstrably improve the situations of people living in poverty.
9. **Rejecting the militarization and securitization of aid** – In responding to humanitarian situations and the development needs of countries with high levels of poverty, conflict and fragility, providers should avoid shaping their strategies and aid initiatives according to their own foreign policy, geo-political and security interests (e.g. migration and counterterrorism).
10. **Responding to the acute and growing challenges from climate change** – All governments should reach agreement on a post-2020 climate-financing framework for developing countries, which is new and additional to ODA commitments, and which meets the growing challenges they face in adaptation, mitigation as well as climate-related loss and damage.

International Coordinating Committee, *The Reality of Aid 2018: The Changing Faces of Development Aid and Cooperation*, accessible at <https://realityofaid.org/global-reports/>.

needs of this Decade for Action for achieving the SDGs. Long-standing tensions and challenges continue to beset the aid system, problems which are now further compounded by the demands of the pandemic. Some of the persistent challenges include:¹⁹

1. Although the need for country ownership for inclusive national development is well recognized, aid conditionality and many forms of aid tying are making a comeback.

For over a decade, donors have made commitments to respect and strengthen democratic country ownership in determining aid priorities and delivery. Despite this rhetoric, development banks, the European Union, and several bilateral donors, have increasingly been imposing policy conditions on their aid. These relate, among others, to partner country measures to control migration to Europe or the United States, to austerity measures limiting government spending, or to the advancement of donor resource extraction interests. These measures focus on the least developed and weakened middle-income countries, those that are least able to resist [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*; Roba, *European Union*].

The money coursed through IMF in the form of loans are a critical lifeline for more than 80 countries facing the economic fallout from the pandemic. But these loans are inherently and structurally flawed as it forces developing economies further into debt at a time when concessional ODA funds are most needed. Yet, as Oxfam has calculated, 76 out of 91 IMF loan agreements negotiated between March and September 2020 (at the height of the pandemic), require public expenditure cuts that could undermine public health care systems as well as other crucial social safety nets.²⁰

2. Trust in multilateralism is eroding at a time of urgently needed cooperation is

needed to address global crises such as the pandemic and climate change.

With the UN seeming to be overwhelmed by rigid geo-political positioning by global powers and country blocs, there is diminishing political relevance and an eroded trust in multilateralism. Donor aid priorities and their delivery are increasingly shaped by self-protection instincts by governments and citizens, which are accentuated by a go-it-alone nationalism.²¹

3. While there is important donor recognition of CSO as essential development actors, there is often a failure in implementing donor measures to promote CSOs as actors in their own right and to protect civil society under attack.

The donor community has strengthened its policies for civil society, including consideration in 2021 of a possible DAC Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society.²² However, the current development and humanitarian system has few incentives to strengthen independent local civil society actors for peoples' participation in their own development. Civic spaces, including for human rights defenders, is increasingly under attack and surveillance in many political contexts in both the Global South and North [Lahoy and Canape, *Philippines*].

4. More attention to climate finance is eroding limited ODA for other purposes.

This *Report* recognizes and documents donors' increasing attention to climate change as a major development and humanitarian threat. Unfortunately, climate finance to address these issues is being drawn predominantly from existing limited ODA, thus reducing resources available for other aid priorities. There is no consideration of donors' prior political commitment to additional resources for climate finance for partner countries affected by the climate emergency. These are the countries that

Box 2: Defining Fragility

The OECD DAC defines fragility as “the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks. Fragility can lead to negative outcomes including violence, poverty, inequality, displacement, and environmental and political degradation. Fragility is measured on a spectrum of intensity and expressed in different ways across the economic, environmental, political, security and societal dimensions, with a sixth dimension (human capital) forthcoming in States of Fragility, 2022.”

OECD, *State of Fragility 2020*, page 17

Large donor institutions (government, multilateral development banks, and INGOs), control and direct programs for most aid funding solely in relation to donor and institutional interests. As institutions they are slow and frequently resistant to change. Instead, they appear to be rigidly locked into centralized (political) structures of accountability for priorities and practices which are largely set in the major donor countries.

Reforming aid is a critical and urgent necessity. This Report’s conclusions and recommendations for reform build upon Reality of Aid’s *Ten Point Action Agenda for the Transformation of Development Cooperation* (Box 1). This Ten Point Agenda was elaborated in detail in the 2018 Reality of Aid Report. It continues to be very relevant to the effective implementation of the Triple Nexus for humanitarian, development, peace action, the delivery of climate finance, and aid responses to the pandemic. The *Report’s* findings for these areas are set out in the following sections.

bear historic responsibility for climate change [*Sward, The World Bank Climate Finance; Deze, Belgium*].

5. A broad recognition of the need for reform is stymied by rigid institutions that are largely resistant to change.

3. THE TRIPLE NEXUS: A TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENT FOR AID REFORM?

Increasing situations of conflict, violence and fragility

This *Report* highlights the growth of humanitarian emergencies and assistance over the past decade, often closely related to development failure and socio-political fragility. ODA support to alleviate the needs resulting from various humanitarian emergencies has more than doubled over the past decade, from \$12 billion in 2010 to \$25 billion in 2019. Its share of Real ODA has risen from 10% to 19% [*Tomlinson, Global Aid Trends*].

This growth is not surprising, given the substantial increase in state-based and non-state conflicts over the past decade. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, state-

based conflicts rose from 37 in 2010 to 64 in 2019 and non-state violence increased from 42 to 67 conflicts over the same period.²³ These conflicts are creating extreme vulnerability and insecurity and dramatically undermining the prospects for development for many populations in the Global South.

Conflict is major characteristic of state “fragility”. Persistent conflict disrupts and reverses years of development efforts. But fragile contexts also arise where social, economic and political conditions are highly unequal, discriminatory and polarized. The result is often political estrangement and violence with the state’s roles and capacities weakening and citizens being unable to organize, initiate and manage development

processes. (See **Box 2**) This places a huge burden in ways that profoundly shapes and adds great vulnerabilities on the lives of those who are already “the furthest behind”.

These conditions of fragility have become more prominent in the past decade and are increasingly a priority and focus for donors. The OECD DAC identifies 57 fragile states in its latest *State of Fragility Report 2020*, up from 48 in 2012.²⁴ Among 178 countries measured for conditions of fragility by the Fund for Peace’s Fragile States Index, only 22 countries improved their scores between 2019 and 2020. These situations are often highly intractable. Among the most fragile states in 2010, 23 remained in the top 30 in the 2020 Index.²⁵

The *Report’s* aid trends chapter examines 30 of the most fragile country contexts, home to approximately 1.1 billion people, of which 38% are living in poverty. There is a high coincidence with other measures of global poverty and inequality. Of the 30 countries, the vast majority (22) were Least Developed or Low-Income Countries. Twenty-one were located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Seventeen were experiencing high or medium levels of conflict. These 30 countries received a three-year average (2016 to 2018) of \$47 billion in aid or almost a third of Real ODA (32%) and 57% of total humanitarian assistance in that period [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

Creating resilience: Can donors transform the humanitarian landscape?

In the face of mounting humanitarian suffering and endemic conflicts, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon convened the international community for the 2016 Istanbul World Humanitarian Summit. The Summit was to be a call to action to deliver aid more effectively for millions of people caught in humanitarian crises as well as to strengthen their resiliency to shocks.²⁶

The transformation of the humanitarian landscape is recognized as an essential driver

in achieving Agenda 2030. The Summit’s *Agenda for Humanity* sets forth an international consensus that humanitarian assistance, development and peace and human security are intertwined and interdependent.

The Summit notes that people living in conflict and fragile situations do not experience their reality in humanitarian-development-peace silos. It launched commitments towards greater coherence in the ways that the international community can work effectively in fragile contexts and humanitarian crises. These measures aim to reduce risks, lessen vulnerability to shocks and reform the delivery of humanitarian finance.²⁷ Several important initiatives for reform followed the Summit in rethinking ways of working, financing mechanisms, promoting localization and rethinking the expertise needed.

Immediately following the Summit, UN organizations and the World Bank launched a *New Way of Working* initiative. It focuses on reforming on-the-ground practices for greater synergies across the humanitarian and development spectrum. This initiative is part of the ongoing UN reform process for UN agencies as well as the building of coherence in country / situation strategies with government, agencies and donors working towards an agreed upon country “Collective Outcome.”²⁸

A Collective Outcome is defined as “a concrete and measurable result that humanitarian, development and other relevant actors want to achieve jointly over a period of 3-5 years to reduce people’s needs, risks and vulnerabilities and increase their resilience.”²⁹ This *New Way of Working* emphasizes the need for greater and more systematic attention to joint analysis and the determining of context specific collective outcomes. It calls for joint planning, programming and financing among UN agencies. The *New Way of Working* has the endorsement of the World Bank and the International Organization for Migration.

The New Way of Working agenda concentrates on overcoming long-standing operational and institutional barriers in addressing the humanitarian/development divide (double nexus) in specific country contexts. In December 2016, the new Secretary General, António Guterres, welcomed this effort for institutional humanitarian reform. But he also called for “sustaining peace” to be considered “the third leg of the triangle,” giving birth to the humanitarian-development-peace Triple Nexus.

The Triple Nexus acknowledges that the international community is working in countries that face the triple challenges of poverty/inequality, conflict/fragility and humanitarian need. While recognizing the uniqueness of every situation, it seeks dialogue, relationships and programmatic connections between humanitarian, development and peace actors. The assumption is that greater coordination will ultimately improve community resilience through reducing and mitigating the risk of conflict, addressing conditions of poverty and vulnerability, and integrating long-term development goals [*Reality of Aid Asia/Pacific, A Region Embattled*].

The Triple Nexus was clearly articulated by DAC donors in a 2019 *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*. The Recommendation provides DAC members and other stakeholders in the international community “a comprehensive framework that can incentivise and implement more collaborative and complementary humanitarian, development and peace actions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected situations.”³⁰ It sets out 11 principles by which these actors can more effectively coordinate, program and finance the needs of fragile and conflict-affected situations (see **Annex One** for an elaboration of these principles).

The Nexus Recommendation establishes goals for a transformative context-specific approach to working in fragile contexts. The *New Way of Working* is essentially an elaboration of the

approaches to achieve these goals. The latter details ways to strengthen collaboration, coherence and complementarity between humanitarian, development and peace actors, who often work in silos in the same country context. While respecting the distinct mandates for each of these three pillars of operation, the *New Way of Working* explores ways to create practical synergies to begin to address the root causes of conflict, vulnerability and fragility.³¹

Complementing and accelerating these UN/DAC-driven initiatives is the *Grand Bargain*. Also launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, the *Grand Bargain* is an agreement to implement 51 commitments by 63 multi-stakeholder signatories, including some of the largest donors and humanitarian organizations (25 Member States, 22 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations). To facilitate progress on its commitments the *Grand Bargain* has been organized into eight work streams with progress being assessed in an annual independent report.³²

The *Grand Bargain's* fundamental commitment is to deliver more resources and capacity for recovery and resilience directly into the hands of people in need. The signatories aim to do this through: 1) more support and funding tools for local and national responders; 2) increased cash-based programming; 3) greater inclusion of people receiving aid in decisions affecting their lives; 4) better coordinated management and harmonization of assistance; and 5) improved transparency. It complements and overlaps with the *New Way of Working* by engagement with a wider set of humanitarian and development actors.

Importantly, the *Grand Bargain* has a key commitment to the localization of humanitarian finance with an “aggregated target [by 2020] of at least 25 per cent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs.”³³

Ongoing advocacy by Southern CSOs prior and subsequent to the Humanitarian Summit called for major reforms in the international humanitarian system. These efforts have been a major driver for localization of humanitarian finance and delivery of programs.³⁴ These organizations have drawn attention to the important knowledge and sustained presence of local government, civil society and Southern NGOs. They are the first on the ground in the wake of humanitarian crises and are there long after the international community departs. Despite their skills, commitment and knowledge these organizations have largely been sidelined. Their potential to undertake humanitarian roles as actors in their own right has been routinely dismissed by the humanitarian system.³⁵

Since the Summit, the localization agenda has attracted considerable attention.³⁶ Advocacy by Southern local and national CSOs through networks such as NEAR (the Network for Empowered Aid Response) has demanded changes to reshape the top-down humanitarian and development aid system to one that is locally driven and owned.³⁷ Their efforts are complemented by the Charter4Change initiative on the part of 38 major International NGOs (INGOs) that are deeply involved in delivering humanitarian assistance. These organizations have committed themselves to realize the goals of the *Charter for Change* through major reforms in their own ways of working so that southern-based national actors play an increased and more prominent role in humanitarian response.³⁸ The *Charter* has been endorsed by more than 400 Southern-based national and local organizations working in the humanitarian sector.

Assessing the Triple Nexus: The challenges in transforming humanitarian aid practices

The commitments coming out of the World Humanitarian Summit promised significant changes, ones that are conceptual (*Triple Nexus*), institutional (*Grand Bargain*) and programmatic (*New Way of Working*). They set in motion expectations as to how aid should be

planned and implemented in humanitarian and fragile country contexts. They promised new initiatives to break the cycles of vulnerability and to support paths out of fragility towards sustainable development. These commitments call for improved coordination at all levels, less fragmentation, and conflict-sensitive programming, with improved accountability to local leadership and country ownership.

These reforms are a tall order for a system that has been locked in its ways of working for many decades. However, there are hopeful signs. Since 2016, the Triple Nexus has been the subject of much constructive discussion at both international and countries levels. There have been independent assessments of progress and case studies which have explored challenges and lessons for donor agencies, humanitarian institutions, and local country actors for peace and development.³⁹ The country and regional case studies in this *Report* are a contribution to these reflections. They delve into both positive examples [Atakpu, Lake Chad Region; Agirregomezkorta, Engendering the Nexus] as well as challenges in addressing specific fragile country contexts [*Reality of Aid Asia-Pacific, A Region Embattled; Lahoy and Canape, Philippines; Van Houte, Fragility*].

This experience highlights four lessons that can inform policy recommendations to move towards more coherence, and build better approaches, programming and partnerships.

Lesson One: Humanitarian actors are cautious. Protecting humanitarian principles will be challenging in the implementation of the Triple Nexus in many countries experiencing conflict and political ruptures.

The four humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity and independence have been the bedrock in guiding the delivery of humanitarian assistance.⁴⁰ Effective support for affected populations requires humanitarian action to address need wherever it is found. Humanitarian actors must not take sides in conflicts and/or align with political, religious

or ideological affiliation. They need to work independent of governments to preserve this neutrality.

Peace and development actors are likely to have distinct and different relationships with both local people and the government in a conflict country situation. Conflicts are infused with complex dynamics of power at all levels of society. Interventions for peace seek to establish political processes for conflict resolution and to promote social cohesion and political accommodation. These actors engage with state and non-state parties who may be provoking conflict, while also working directly to strengthen political agreements with government, regardless of its roles in the conflict.

Donors as development actors are operating under a different mandate, one geared to support sustainable development. They often try to align their work with a government's priorities and development frameworks. Sites for development work can often include areas that are less affected by conflict. This can include specific issues and sectors, such as work to strengthen the position of women and girls or radicalised minorities, which may be politically contested in other parts of the country that are engulfed in armed conflict. Neutrality is not a high priority for development actors as it is for humanitarian workers.

Consequently, humanitarian actors have to perform a challenging juggling act. On the one hand they need to maintain a neutral and independent profile while also seeking greater coordination with legitimate efforts of peace and development actors. Conceptually the Triple Nexus may be sound, but it requires careful humanitarian calibration in each country context.

Improved dialogue and understanding between those working through the three pillars in the nexus is important. Examples from this *Report* point to situations where humanitarian actors have reason to be cautious [Reality

of Aid Asia Pacific, A Region Embattled]. In Cameroon, for example, humanitarian actors have guarded humanitarian space in the North of the country by carefully maintaining their independence from various political agendas. This has affected development and peace efforts in other parts of the country [Atakpu, Lake Chad Region]. Mali is another case of evidence of security actors' involvement in assessing humanitarian needs and protecting humanitarian actors, which has politicized and undermined relief efforts.⁴¹

Lesson Two: An emphasis on private sector extractive resource development by different donors and governments, alongside different security-oriented approaches to constructing peace, affects the ways that the Triple Nexus approach rolls out in conflict and fragility contexts. The results can have very serious consequences for the human security of people on the ground.

There is no consensus on the meaning of how peace operations can be integrated within the Triple Nexus. Donors' foreign policy interests often frame peace in terms of improved security and stabilization for top-down government control or the operations of an extractive private sector.

Other groups, including civil society, challenge this approach. They understand peace as a community-based peacebuilding approach that addresses the root causes of a conflict. This is consistent with principles set out in the DAC Recommendation on the Triple Nexus. The Recommendation calls for putting people at the center and ensuring that all peacebuilding measures assess impact on "political and conflict economies, conflict dynamics, social cohesion, exclusion, resilience, services and markets, and local accountability chains, with a view to reducing negative unintended consequences of external intervention."⁴²

But actual donor development priorities and international security agendas can be critical factors. They can be at odds with people-

centered approaches to peacebuilding. The Philippines case study demonstrates how security initiatives in that context often drive humanitarian and development efforts, severely compromising peacebuilding efforts, conflict reduction and the rights of affected populations [*Lahoy and Canape, Philippines*].

Major private sector infrastructure and resource extractive projects, supported by USAID and other donors, in partnership with the Philippines government, have directly challenged the rights of indigenous populations in the northern Cordillera region. Militarization to guarantee security for investments against those who resist has perpetuated conflict through the loss of ancestral indigenous domains, community resources, and traditional livelihoods.

The authors of the Philippines case study also point to an experience in Mindanao where international donor aid has been integrated with militarized security interventions, operations which they argue have contributed to the conflict. Interpreting peace as security and stabilization has encouraged the Philippine government to criminalize civil society actors who are accompanying and defending the rights of marginalized populations. They conclude that these donor and government priorities have created a situation that is “a long way from the vision of the Triple Nexus” [*Lahoy and Canape, Philippines*].

Several contributions identify heightened security and private sector agendas by key donors such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, which undermine the potential for a people-centered approach to peace operations [Reality of Aid Asia Pacific, A Region Embattled; Baldoumas and Rumford, United Kingdom]. The Lake Chad regional case study describes the Nigerian government’s civil-military coordination of security mechanisms in northern Nigeria, which has critically affected and reduced support for humanitarian–development and peace

operations on the ground [*Atakpu, Lake Chad Region*].

Transforming development cooperation in conflict and fragile contexts through a fully integrated conflict-sensitive approach to people-oriented peacebuilding, focusing on the root causes of conflict and fragility, requires concerted attention to the drivers of foreign and economic policies of key donors.

Lesson Three: The commitment to localization is largely unfulfilled and civil society is under attack in many countries. But at the same time, the key dimensions of the Triple Nexus require a strongly engaged civil society.

By putting people at the center and emphasizing importance of local contexts, knowledge and capacities, the Triple Nexus is closely aligned with the Grand Bargain’s commitment to localization. In every emergency, the first responders are always local people supported in different ways by local organizations. Yet donors’ institutional incentives are overwhelming to work in conflict-affected and fragile contexts through the large intermediary international organizations, be they multilateral or INGOs. Donors continue their rhetoric to enhance the representation, participation and power of local actors, but the reality on the ground confirms little change in the marginalization of these actors.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of humanitarian assistance was provided through multilateral organizations, up from 52% in 2010. In part this increase is the result of earmarking by bilateral donors for multilateral special appeals. Only 14% of donor humanitarian money to UN agencies was not earmarked in 2019. Civil society organizations, mainly International NGOs (INGOs), have been responsible for the delivery of 30% of donor annual humanitarian resources over the past decade. The largest INGOs frequently combine donor funds with money raised from the public in their home countries [*Tomlinson, Global Aid Trends*].

While some INGOs may partner with local, Southern CSOs, donor fiduciary requirements (and some INGO policies) usually insist that the former maintain control over the allocation of these funds. INGOs do bring substantial resources into local situations they can disempower local organizations by offering higher salaries for the best-trained and effective local staff.⁴³ In the words of a CSO activist from Mindanao, Philippines:

"If we talk about localization, this should not be separated from the issue of injustice, inequality, and imbalance of power. Localization, therefore, is about transforming the current power dynamic in the humanitarian system."⁴⁴

Is there any evidence that the situation is changing, that humanitarian work is moving towards greater involvement of local actors? The answer is, not really. Despite the Grand Bargain's commitment to 25% localization, Development Initiatives' analysis actually points to a decline in direct humanitarian funding to local actors. According to its research, direct funding to local humanitarian organizations in the Global South decreased from 3.5% in 2018 to 2.1% in 2019 - a far cry from 25%.⁴⁵

This trend is not surprising. At the macro level, INGOs are playing an increasing role in the aid system. They have increased their share of ODA channelled through CSOs from 17% in 2010 to 27% in 2018, while Developing Country Based CSOs saw their share increase imperceptibly from 6% to 7%. The increased share through INGOs has been at the expense of Donor Country based CSOs, whose share declined from 77% in 2010 to 66% in 2018. Support for CSOs, whether as humanitarian or development actors, remains highly skewed towards donor country and international CSO intermediaries.

Without major shifts in the modalities for channelling humanitarian and development resources to the local level, localization of

humanitarian support is an empty promise. Given legal constraints and home-country pressures, bilateral donors claim to have little institutional space to make these shifts. Instead, they continue to rely on intermediary organizations (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and INGOs) to deliver humanitarian aid, who in turn have strong pressures to grow and monopolize humanitarian and development finance.

Finance is not the only issue affecting local CSO capacities in situations of conflict and fragility. In many of these country contexts civic space has disappeared or is limited; conditions for CSOs are very poor, and human rights defenders are vulnerable to severe repression. Among the 30 highly fragile country contexts analyzed in the *Report's* global aid trends chapter, civic space in 24 countries is either entirely closed or severely restricted. Active individuals and civil society members who criticize power brokers risk surveillance, harassment, intimidation, imprisonment, injury and death, often with impunity.⁴⁶ According to Frontline Defenders more than 50 human rights defenders were killed in these same 30 countries in 2019 and 2020, with many more subject to forms of harassment [See also Lahoy and Canape, Philippines].⁴⁷

Attacks on women human rights defenders and wide-spread sexual violence are endemic in situations of conflict and countries experiencing conditions of fragility. In Mali for example,

"Violence and instability have had a high impact on the lives and security of women and girls, especially in the three northern regions. Armed actors use various forms of sexual violence, particularly against minors. Rape and collective marriages and other forms of sexual slavery are carried out in a context of impunity. At the same time increasing poverty has reduced women's livelihood opportunities, forcing them to beg or prostitute themselves as a family survival strategy [Agirregomezkorta, Engendering the Nexus]."

The realization of *Triple Nexus/Grand Bargain* commitments to engage local leadership, national CSOs and local government requires innovative financing arrangements under the direction of local actors. But just as important are policy measures to ensure that local civil society can contribute to humanitarian, development and peace processes. With more than 80% of armed conflicts taking place in gender-discriminatory contexts, combatting gender inequality and empowering the participation of women and girls, and their organizations, must be a central element of the Triple Nexus approach [Agirregomezkorta, *Engendering the Nexus*].

Lesson Four: While a few donors have been able to apply Triple Nexus practices, most face significant institutional barriers in their implementation of the Triple Nexus.

Implementing the Triple Nexus requires structural shifts in the operational status quo of the aid system, which has long operated in humanitarian and development silos. Bringing in peace operations, peacebuilding and conflict sensitive programming adds further complications and challenges. The Triple Nexus potentially affects the ways in which donors determine priorities, manage country programs, and allocate resources. It brings new actors, views and skills to project design, implementation, and monitoring outcomes. The ambition is substantial. In the Nexus vision, donors work towards collective decisions on overall outcomes rather than focusing on accomplishment of their specific project activities. It also requires humanitarian organizations to regularly adapt their approach to suit the specific and changing needs and risks of each country context.

While the benefits of this vision might seem obvious, its realization remains far from the reality of current donor practices. Many are still at a preliminary stage where they are experimenting with complementarity, improving cross departmental capabilities and learning. They are increasing dialogue

and coordination on layering different programming in some specific geographic areas and exploring appropriate financing mechanisms. A common first goal is developing a shared institutional understanding of new approaches and ways to reduce risk and vulnerability across the nexus.

Atakpu's chapter describes the Resilience for Sustainable Development in the Lake Chad Basin Nexus program. It is a UNDP and OCHA initiative to address both the underlying systemic causes of conflict in the region (high levels of poverty and inequality, historic marginalization, climatic change and land degradation), while also responding to immediate needs and security interventions. He identifies some of the practical difficulties the program has confronted in coming to a consensus on collective outcomes in different multi-country realities, in adapting to the challenges of an ever-changing political and security environment on the ground, and in the lack of data to inform, draw lessons and tracking changes for conflict affected populations.

The broader literature (see endnote 39) examines the experience of several donors and country situations in the implementation of Triple Nexus approaches. These case studies identify issues in 1) coordination and planning; 2) programming; 3) requirements for new skills; 4) operationalizing local partnerships; and 5) establishing different and appropriate modalities for financing:

1. **Coordination and planning.**

While donors and partner country governments often elaborate formal and informal mechanisms for coordination, these are usually specific to separate humanitarian, development, peace or security concerns. Efforts for joint planning, needs assessments and stakeholder engagement across these silos remain weak. Donors are moving cautiously. Canada's Global Affairs Department, for example, has set out a multi-year strategy to define

the practical ways to bring its development, humanitarian and peace operations in line with the Triple Nexus. At this point it is only in Phase 1 of better understanding and enhancing institutional capacities.⁴⁸ Case study research suggests that knowledge of nexus approaches is not clear among those staff implementing development and humanitarian programs at the country level.⁴⁹

The literature points to the enhanced engagement of development and peace/security actors. But, as noted above, the approach to security and the implications for humanitarian action are still controversial. Progress is context specific. Successful cases confirm that adaptive program management skills are essential, with significantly decentralized donor decision making, based on regular on-the-ground assessments and continuous learning with affected stakeholders. Several donors, such as Sweden and the UK, already have a high degree of decentralized decision-making, while others continue to be centralized and depend upon headquarters and field visits for decisions.

In many conflict contexts there are significant restrictions on donor travel. Situation reports and needs assessments, differentiated for gender and other vulnerable groups, thus need to rely on local communities with capacities to assess and report on their situations. However, this approach is not common donor practice.

The Triple Nexus requires increased 'whole-of-donors' coordination. But as one analyst points out, there are major disincentives for development actors to coordinate:

"Coordination on the whole is not funded and significant antipathy was expressed toward the added burden of coordinating, and skepticism was expressed about the return on investment. National authorities

tend to lead the coordination of development work, which means that if governance is weak [in conflict and fragile contexts] so is coordination."⁵⁰

2. **Programming.** Development programming concentrates on changing longer term structural and social issues underlying conditions of poverty, vulnerability and conflict. In fragile contexts there are opportunities for synergies with humanitarian concerns, particularly in measures for disaster risk reduction, adaptation to climate change or displacement.

There is more attention by donors to disaster risk reduction, but it is not clear how much these efforts are at the country/community level. Total ODA directed to post-disaster reconstruction and to disaster preparedness doubled between 2010 and 2018. But as a share of humanitarian assistance, it increased only marginally, from 13.6% to 14.3%. There is significant scope for greater investment and coherence in these areas. Investing in ways that strengthen community resilience will help reduce the vicious cycle of fragility as well as the need to respond to immediate crises [*Van Haute, Fragility*].

There are examples of successful sectoral or area-based nexus programming. But understanding how a nexus approach can be rolled out to broad national programs for health, nutrition or food security programming, in collaboration with partner country government, remains unclear for both donor headquarters and country programmers.

As noted above, the impacts of conflict and fragility on women and girls are profound with high levels of sexual violence and forms of trafficking and exploitation being common. Despite this, the need for gender equality and women's empowerment is not well supported, or even acknowledged in humanitarian assistance.

In 2019 over 82% of humanitarian assistance had no objectives relating to gender equality, according to data in the DAC Creditor Reporting System. Of the 30 highly fragile countries analyzed in this Report, approximately half (52%) of their bilateral aid did not contain any objectives on gender equality. But gender sensitivity in aid for these fragile contexts compares somewhat favorably to total DAC bilateral aid where approximately 60% had no gender equality objectives. Women's organizations that promote and protect the rights of women and girls received less than 1% of total bilateral aid in 2018 [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

Significant programmatic attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in fragile contexts is a critical condition for peacebuilding and community resilience, where the transformation of social norms and power relations is often essential.

3. New skills to work across the nexus

The literature describes a range of skills and capacities that may need enhancement to work effectively across the nexus. Some examples include:⁵¹

- Skills and tools/approaches in holistic context analysis, including gender analysis, political economy/power analysis, systemic causes analysis;
- Conflict sensitive analysis and programming;
- Adaptive management skills, taking account of the critical need for flexibility/responsiveness in fragile contexts and institutional imperatives for fiduciary accountability;
- Working with, strengthening capacities, and sharing direction with local leadership and partnerships; and

- Humility, mutual respect, commitment to dialogue and compromise are essential to recognizing the value/constraints of each nexus pillar.

Analysts point to the importance of collaborations and partnerships that can facilitate access to a different range of skills and knowledge in any given context.

4. **Operationalizing localization.** A people-centered and community-led approach to resilience, requires both practical modalities to provide resources and capacities to local organizations (see above), as well as deliberate measures to improve trust in local organizations and communities. In fragile contexts, these measures are crucial. Donors must respect and support autonomous local efforts to identify needs and to structure the right ways to strengthen their communities. In principle, INGOs, in contrast to official donors, have greater flexibility to partner with local organizations in ways that enable them to take greater leadership in local responses.

But there is also skepticism about the readiness for the changes that are required. According to a Southern CSO observer, "... flexibility to adapt is really critical and I question to what extent a lot of responders are capable of doing that – all the way up from the donors, all the way down to the local organizations."

Analysts point to the importance of donors working with local governments at the district level and to strengthen their capacities to deliver services to all residents, rather than directly targeting specific vulnerable populations or refugees. This has been the approach in Bangladesh, where donors have responded to the economic and development needs of the district where the main Rohingya refugee camps are situated. This localized approach ameliorates, to some degree, potential hostilities between host and displaced populations.⁵³

Nevertheless, Development Initiatives study of three country case studies concluded that:

“Despite efforts such as these to work with local authorities, there is a perception that development actors over-emphasise top-down policy and institutional reforms and partnerships with central government, with crisis-affected regions neglected or overlooked because power is highly centralized (e.g. in Cameroon and Bangladesh) or authority and reach is weak (in Somalia).”⁵⁴

5. Establishing appropriate financing modalities. Over the past decade donors have increased financing that targets fragile and humanitarian situations, mainly through multilateral and INGO channels. But most analysts maintain that the Triple Nexus requires new incentives and modalities for donor finance, ones that are better suited to a nexus coordinated approach and sensitive to local environments at the sub-national level.⁵⁵

While donors are channeling less funding via national governments in fragile contexts, they are sometimes reluctant to support a collectively agreed upon plan that is not also endorsed by the national government. Finance is usually governed by distinct

rules for humanitarian or development channels set and implemented at donors’ headquarters. Approaches that target building community resilience in crises situations or proactive efforts for policy coherence at the country level often fall between the cracks of different financing channels.

In recent years major donors have rolled out new financing instruments. This includes the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the EU’s Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, and the UK’s Conflict, Stability and Security Fund. These funds are structured to respond to the security-development nexus in fragile contexts. But they are controversial because of their potential to politicize humanitarian assistance and in their seeming prioritization of donor security interests over good development practice [Thomasson, Sweden].⁵⁶

Local and national CSOs have been advocating for UN or country-managed pooled funds that channel international resources to local actors. Local CSOs see this approach as a way to level the playing field for all local organizations. They are also challenging international CSOs who respond to the *Grand Bargain* by establishing national branches to implement donor finance.⁵⁷

4. A CLIMATE EMERGENCY IS UNFOLDING: IS THE HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT SECTOR READY?

The climate crisis is now, not the future. It is about changing environmental conditions, compounded by frequent and extreme weather events, in which many people are conducting their daily lives. Millions of the world’s poorest people, especially those in the poorest countries or the most fragile situations, are highly dependent upon a changing natural environment for their subsistence and livelihoods.

The climate crisis is also a growing humanitarian emergency. In 2018 more than 100 million people required humanitarian assistance as a result of storms, floods, droughts and wildfires. This number is expected to grow to over 200 million each year by 2050.⁵⁸ The International Federation of the Red Cross estimates that the costs for climate related humanitarian needs will be approximately \$20 billion by 2030, which

is almost the current level for the entire humanitarian sector.⁵⁹

Climate and environmental degradation are now among the root causes of food insecurity, displacement and poverty. The climate emergency and biodiversity loss, entrenched poverty, and increased humanitarian needs are clearly converging. They are intensifying peoples' risks and vulnerability in fragile country contexts. Without concerted action, the World Bank predicts that more than 130 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty by 2030 and these worsening levels of poverty will continue to escalate in the next decade.⁶⁰ All but one of the 30 most fragile country contexts analyzed in this Report [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*] are considered to be highly vulnerable to irreversible climate change impacts and are the least ready to deal with these impacts.⁶¹

With so little time to prepare and act, how should humanitarian and development finance donors respond to the climate emergency? Several chapters in this Report assess current directions in donor and multilateral climate finance. They argue, alongside many academic analysts and civil society colleagues, that progress is not only affected by the limited scale of resources provided to date, but also by false donor solutions for poor and vulnerable countries and people.

Inadequate climate finance

The international community has established a \$100 billion annual target for all forms of concessional and non-concessional climate finance by 2020. This is to be new and additional finance to existing ODA commitments. Donors are still far from achieving this goal. The global aid trends chapter points to research by Oxfam that demonstrates that developing countries have seen only \$19 billion to \$22 billion in total concessional climate finance (multilateral and bilateral) to date. Climate finance from bilateral donors (\$11.6 billion in 2018) actually fell by \$2.9 billion from the previous year. This amount

is far from the \$37.3 billion bilateral target within the \$100 billion commitment. Almost all official climate finance for most donors is included in their ODA despite promises of additionality [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

The Triple Nexus, humanitarian assistance and the climate crisis

While there is no definitive evidence that links environmental degradation to the escalation of violent conflict, there is no doubt that it is causing increased displacement, poverty and deprivation.⁶² These impacts require a holistic response to meet immediate needs and to support community resilience in the face of sudden disasters. Research reports confirm that "there is a need to integrate stabilization and peacebuilding principles with climate-resilient development interventions at local and sub-regional levels."⁶³ The lessons from donor measures to implement the Triple Nexus are clearly applicable to climate related finance, particularly for adaptation and for addressing loss and damage from climate change.

To date, humanitarian assistance, including disaster preparedness and reconstruction, continues to have little sensitivity to climate change objectives. In 2019 only 7% of DAC bilateral humanitarian assistance had a climate adaptation or mitigation marker (meaning that there was at least one climate objective for these projects). For donor disbursements focused on disaster preparedness and reconstruction this share with climate markers rose to about 29% of project disbursements.⁶⁴

But there is some positive evidence that some donors are considering strategic approaches to the dynamics of climate trends, risk reduction and development support. They have been developing project management frameworks for improving the climate screening of their projects, including assessments for medium-term climate-related risks. Several donors have created special funding mechanisms for climate-related development spending (the UK, Norway, Germany and Denmark). Against

these positive developments is the fact that research also shows that the rigor in applying these guidelines is mixed, transparency is weak, and special funds are often stand-alone mechanisms uncoordinated with the donor's development initiatives at the country level.⁶⁵

Responding to climate change in conflict and fragile contexts should explicitly integrate *Triple Nexus* and *New Way of Working* approaches, particularly where preparation for climate impacts is weak. Donor implementation of the *Triple Nexus* can be enhanced with greater conflict sensitivity to climate impacts in country programs. Assessments of humanitarian needs in protracted crises should take into account climate related vulnerabilities over the medium term. There also needs to be better integration of local climate adaptation measures for improved community resilience as part of a more coordinated approach to fragile situations.

Bringing urgent attention to addressing loss and damage

There is little doubt that the impacts of extreme weather are falling disproportionately on low and lower middle-income countries. In 2019 eight of ten countries most affected by extreme weather events fell into this category although they bear no responsibility for the climate emergency. These developing countries are seeking sustained international finance to cover their "loss and damage" – a term which refers to unavoidable adverse impacts arising from climate change and weather events.⁶⁶

An adequate response to climate induced loss and damage requires immediate relief and reconstruction as well as longer-term, country specific disaster risk reduction strategies. This issue has been sidelined by donors for more than two decades.

In the UN global climate negotiations finance for loss and damage continues to be highly controversial. Finally, as part of the 2015 Paris Agreement donors recognized that

loss and damage might result from human-induced climate change. But to date they strongly resist binding financing arrangements for compensation beyond their voluntary contributions for humanitarian assistance and adaptation.⁶⁷ And each year donors fail to meet UN established targets for global appeals for disaster relief and recovery. In one estimate, by 2030 loss and damage in developing countries, caused by climate change, will grow to between \$290 billion and \$580 billion.⁶⁸

More attention to the quality of climate finance

The degree to which climate projects are meeting their goals is coming under greater scrutiny. A CARE Norway and CARE Netherlands study recently concluded that adaptation finance has been dramatically over-stated. The projects that were examined included large infrastructure projects that had little to do with adaptation.⁶⁹ Other research on adaptation projects points to negative impacts, what the authors' term 'maladaptation'. This work reveals that some adaptation projects have made people more, not less, vulnerable to climate change.⁷⁰

These analysts highlight the critical importance of understanding the processes that lead to maladaptation. Their findings suggest a failure to take into account systemic inequalities and a lack of sensitivity to socio-political dynamics that made people vulnerable in the first place. There can be a failure to identify potential unintended consequences for poor people living in adjacent areas of a project in sustaining their access to essential livelihood resources.

The authors concluded that maladaptation often occurs when there is little or no participation by marginalized groups in the design and implementation of projects. They warn against the quick retrofitting of existing development agendas with adaptation objectives that are not fully considered in a holistic and integrated manner. Despite women's critical roles in key sectors, such as

agriculture and food security which are highly affected by climate change, women-led climate change responses tend to be largely excluded from global climate finance flows.⁷¹

In a contribution to this Reality of Aid Report, the Bretton Woods Project raises similar questions with regard to the seeming increase of World Bank “climate related” projects. They question the inclusion of thermal power plants using natural gas. These projects are clearly not aligned with the intent and goals of the Paris Agreement. The Bank has a heavy reliance on loans as the main modality for its climate finance, furthering the debt burden of countries that bear no responsibility for the climate conditions affecting them [Sward, *The World Bank Climate Finance*; Craviotto, *Debt Relief and ODA*].

Like many donors, the World Bank seeks to crowd in private financing for its climate portfolio. Sward refers to the “Wall Street Climate Consensus” amongst its donors. The promise is to deliver a low-carbon transition with the private sector. But this is to be accomplished without major political or institutional changes that might begin to address the overlap between powerful corporate interests in carbon and the climate and inequality crises [Sward, *The World Bank Climate Finance*].

Yumnam’s contribution highlights a case study from Northeast India that documents persistent donor support for coal fired power plants in the region, as well as the aggressive pursuit of large-scale power dams as renewable energy sources. Civil society organizations in the region reject large dam energy infrastructure as sustainable energy sources. They are “false solutions” to the climate emergency with their continued major emissions of GHGs and their very significant socio-economic impacts on local communities [Yumnam, *Climate Change in South Asia*].⁷²

A contribution from Latin America highlights the Escazú Agreement for Latin America and the Caribbean. This important South-South Cooperation breakthrough in addressing climate issues and environmental degradation is now ratified by 24 countries in the region. The Agreement establishes urgent priorities for environmental management and protection at the country level; regulates rights to access information and to public participation; and advocates for justice in the sustainable use of natural resources. Muñoz argues that the Agreement sends a strong message to the national and international community about the region’s commitment to human rights and environmental justice. At least 264 human rights defenders were killed in the Americas in 2020, with 40% of violations from the land, Indigenous Peoples and environmental rights sector [Muñoz, *The Escazú Agreement*].⁷³

Localization is a key factor for the effective implementation of initiatives to address climate change impacts, as it is in the application of the Triple Nexus in conflict and fragile contexts. Support for local initiatives from donors and national governments for disaster risk reduction in relation to expected climate change impacts are essential. However, this support is currently very modest or absent.

Research in Bangladesh has established that poor households, many headed by women, are the largest source of finance for adapting to climate-induced changes or for community disaster risk reduction.⁷⁴ But according to the IIED, a UK-based research and policy NGO, only 10% of US\$17.4 billion of global climate funds between 2003 and 2017 could be traced to the local level.⁷⁵ As discussed above, it is critical for donor intermediaries to deliver more funding to households, cooperatives, CSO federations, social movements and local governments to support changes that strengthen local resilience and biologically diverse ecosystems.

5. RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC: CAN THE TRIPLE NEXUS RISE TO THE OCCASION?

The COVID-19 pandemic has definitely exacerbated conditions of fragility, amplified humanitarian needs, and made development progress much more complex. As noted in the Introduction, the economic and political demands of the pandemic are unprecedented in their global scope and scale. With one in thirty-three people needing humanitarian assistance in 2021, humanitarian aid for those affected by the pandemic will require more than \$35 billion.⁷⁶ In July 2020 the UN announced that the projected cost (from all sources) of assisting the world's most vulnerable 10% in recovering from both the primary and secondary socio-economic repercussions of the pandemic at \$90 billion.⁷⁷ In truth, the scale of investments needed is still largely unknown.

The global shock is profound; with close to three million deaths worldwide from COVID related causes by early 2021. The pandemic endangers everyone, but very unequally. Those who have limited options – the poor, women isolated at home, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities, the elderly, those who belong to racial, sexual or ethnic minorities – face heightened risks of infection and death. Already living on the margins of extreme poverty, they are least able to manage the sharp economic and social shocks that have been part of this pandemic. They are confronted by losses of informal or subsistence livelihoods in country lockdowns, limited access to urgently needed health care, and increasing food insecurity as internal markets are disrupted.

The world was not prepared for this systemic crisis. It has exposed long-standing problems of inadequate public health systems and a patchwork of weak social safety nets for hundreds of millions of people living in the Global South.⁷⁸ As many have noted, a public health crisis experienced by many countries in early 2020 became “an economic and social crisis and a protection and human rights crisis rolled into one.”⁷⁹

The traditional donor systems and aid architecture are proving woefully inadequate. Countries in the North have quickly devoted trillions of dollars to protect their economies and provide health and livelihoods assistance for their citizens. However, in mid-2020 donors claimed that they are only able to protect, at best, the current and woefully inadequate levels of ODA [Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*]. In April 2021, with the release of preliminary aid figures, the DAC celebrated a small increase of 3.5%. In light of the magnitude of the pandemic and development crises the world faces today, such a performance is woefully underwhelming and inadequate.⁸⁰

“Vaccine nationalism” has meant that the vast majority of vaccines approved and produced in early 2021 have been commandeered by developed countries for their own populations. This exercise of economic power has deeply undermined a global and equitable approach to vaccinating the most vulnerable everywhere they may live. It poses deeply ethical questions. UN Secretary General Guterres has described this failure to ensure equity in vaccination efforts as “the latest moral outrage” to come out of the pandemic.⁸¹

Limited results to date for developing countries, despite multilateral initiatives such as COVAX, reflect both the long-standing shortcomings in global health governance as well as the Northern governments’ rigid defense of vaccine patents by the highly concentrated pharmaceutical sector.⁸² Perpetuating these huge disparities in levels of support ignores a critical fact: the pandemic cannot be stopped until its impact has been overcome throughout the world [See Tomlinson, *Global Aid Trends*].

Country ownership of pandemic responses is vital. As a Gates official commented, the global response “is still too fragmented, and that we need to join up global efforts to provide supply and financing more with the integrated program efforts at country level.” He noted

that there were missing pieces “between global and country-led efforts to secure supplies and ensure they work within countries’ health systems.”⁸³

Can the aid system help in fragile country contexts?

In fragile and conflict-affected settings, the pandemic could present an opportunity for building donors’ coherence across the Triple Nexus. As described above, many donors are still exploring ways in which they can deliver a nexus approach in specific country situations. Populations affected by conflict and fragility live with unstable economic and social conditions, weak governance and a high mistrust of government. These countries’ immediate responses to the pandemic and medium-term recovery plans will interact and be limited by these conditions of fragility. Government is a critical actor in an effective pandemic response. Can the implementation of nexus principles and approaches enhance sensitivity to conflict, address systemic discrimination and the importance of community engagement? How can donor support for pandemic measures in fragile contexts also contribute to rebuilding trust in government?⁸⁴

A review of lessons from the recent Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo unfortunately point to the failure of donors to learn lessons from past pandemics. The report is highly critical in “its assessment of the multiple failures to engage with communities, resulting in distrust, resentment, and even violence against the Ebola response; and resulting in the devastating prolongation of the outbreak.”⁸⁵

At the same time, local actions by CSOs and Community-Based Organizations have provided communities a critical lifeline. They alone are positioned to meet basic needs for those left isolated and vulnerable by lockdowns and other disruptions. One review of 200 CSO case studies concluded that:

“the physical proximity of locally-based communities helped them overcome problems faced by larger organisations, such as physical distance and dependence on the Internet. These networks and communities were also able to develop new strategies for service delivery thanks to their knowledge of local communities – for example mapping vulnerability in an Indian village in order to make sure government budgets provided medicines and food to the needy; awareness raising in the Brazilian favelas; and many other forms of mutual aid.”⁸⁶

Unfortunately, the pandemic has also accentuated the rise of authoritarianism with attacks on journalists and human rights defenders. There has been an increase in surveillance and restrictions on CSOs’ freedom to operate in many countries. At the opening of the 2021 session of the Human Rights Council UN Secretary General Guterres noted:

“The danger of ... hate-driven movements is growing by the day. ... [W]hite supremacy and neo-Nazi movements are ... becoming a transnational threat. ... These and other groups have exploited the pandemic to boost their ranks through social polarisation and political and cultural manipulation.”⁸⁷

According to Human Rights Watch, regimes in 84 countries have used the pandemic to seriously limit freedom of speech.⁸⁸ The pandemic has unleashed a crisis for civic space with the abuse of emergency laws and restrictions that have made it harder for civil society to aid those impacted by the pandemic.⁸⁹

Humanitarian actors are deeply concerned about the implications for future crises and potential pandemics arising from climate change and the encroachment of human economic activity and the natural forests. According to a report in July 2020 by the Norwegian Refugee Council,

“The pandemic demonstrates that the international response system needs to be prepared for a new order of crises, for an era in which large-scale systemic shocks may overlay and aggravate existing risk and significant long-standing humanitarian needs. Incremental reforms will not deliver a system fit to respond effectively....

“While the crisis remains high on the global agenda, there is opportunity to advocate for a significant shift in development investments towards public service provision, risk surveillance and preparedness, including financial preparedness against risks and shocks.”⁹⁰

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REFORMING AID ARCHITECTURE

The contributions to this *Report* reaffirm the urgent call for fundamental reforms in policies and practices of the humanitarian and development finance system. There is little doubt that the pandemic creates high levels of uncertainty, with immeasurable impacts on people, livelihoods and countries across the world. The challenges facing the systems for humanitarian and development finance have never been greater.

In exposing deep social, economic and political inequalities, the pandemic may also be an opportunity to drive the necessary policy reforms for radical change in development cooperation. We must not lose sight of the transformative Agenda 2030 and the substantial efforts needed to deliver the SDGs by 2030.

Can donors and international financial institutions finally begin to tackle long-standing barriers that limit international cooperation as an effective resource? How can they put peoples’ interests and their human rights at the center of these reforms? What measures might work to strengthen capacities for the poorest countries and people to manage the many repercussions from the pandemic? How can donors provide support to strengthen community resilience and peoples’ human rights over the longer term?

The inter-connected crises of a global pandemic, the persistence of vulnerability, poverty and inequality in fragile country contexts, and the unfolding of a climate emergency, together suggest some directions for transformative change. The following recommendations are made with these dynamics in mind:

1. **Donors must rapidly scale up ODA to match a unique set of global challenges.** Where donors have not already achieved the commitment to spend a minimum of 0.7% of their GNI on ODA, each donor must set out a specific plan to do so without delay. Allocation of expanded donor aid resources should be consistent with their historic responsibilities, their international human rights obligations and development effectiveness principles. *Reality of Aid’s Ten-Point Action Agenda to Transform Development Cooperation (Box One)* is a framework to retool ODA as a relevant resource to reduce poverty and inequalities in the 21st Century.

In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- a. **Increased ODA should provide the resources required to ensure the availability, accessibility and quality of health care as a human right to all without discrimination.** This implies giving priority to 1) strengthening health

systems, 2) providing equitable access to vaccine supplies and 3) suspending the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement to increase affordable and necessary supplies of COVID-19 vaccines, drugs, tests and equipment.

- b. **Provide ODA resources as grants not loans**, ensuring sustainable financing in the face of urgent needs arising from the pandemic and its recovery.
- c. **Implement debt cancellation.** All external debt payments due in 2020 and 2021 should be permanently suspended. Donors, international financial institutions and other providers should implement measures for a comprehensive system to cancel developing country external debt to a level consistent with sustainable development and the goals of Agenda 2030, across private, multilateral and bilateral creditors.
- d. **Increased ODA should target social security and national and local recovery plans targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized.** ODA should align with expressed developing country needs for recovery. But donors should also give priority to recovery measures that recognize those groups that have been disproportionately affected: those living in poverty, those depending on informal markets and labour, women and children, persons with disabilities, sexual minorities and racial minorities, and Indigenous Peoples, among others.
- e. **Civic space for local development actors must be protected and promoted as a critical support for isolated communities and people left with no social protection in economic lockdown and other pandemic measures.** It will be critically

important for donors to continue to adjust their support for civil society to allow greater access to resources and flexibility in responding to the pandemic. To the extent possible, donors should engage partner governments to promote emergency measures that are proportionate to scientific advice to protect the health of all citizens. They should challenge measures that are used to silence human rights defenders and oversight by journalists, as well as the daily operations of civil society organizations. These actions should be part of a recognition that civil society is a key interlocutor for reaching people in communities with both services and reliable accurate information on the pandemic.

- 2. **Donors must tackle the current incoherence in their policies and practices in conflict-affected and fragile contexts by fully implementing the principles and directions set out in the DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian - Development - Peace Nexus.** Improving development cooperation in conflict and fragile contexts, and addressing the root causes, are both complex and situation specific. Nevertheless, contributions to this *Report* and the DAC Recommendation suggest some essential measures to guide its effective implementation:
 - a. **"Accountability to people, ... strengthened transparency, voice and participation ... are a critical element of improving Collective Outcomes"** in fragile and conflict affected country settings [DAC Recommendation].
 - b. **Designing tools to actively support the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,**⁹¹ taking into account the importance of implementing Early Warning Systems

on Violence against Women and Girls in Conflict Contexts, particularly through local actors, will be essential in implementing the Recommendation.

- c. **Supporting conflict sensitive, people-centred approaches to peacebuilding**, essential for the implementation of the DAC Recommendation, requires donor/ government policy coherence. This nexus approach should be pursued by resolving tensions with major donors' geopolitical and economic security interests, particularly in fragile and conflict situations. It is also important to use a range of approaches to peacebuilding, responding to the needs of specific situations., with attention to the inclusion of women peace negotiators, community processes for reconciliation, and non-formal Track II diplomacy by non-aligned non-state actors.
- d. **A clear understanding of the scope and the implications of nexus measures in donor operations and financing, consistent with development effectiveness principles, is essential:**
 - i. **Overcoming donor silos.** Nexus measures have major implications for donor human resource skills, approaches to planning and country assessment strategies, technical support, ongoing collaboration across the nexus pillars, and adaptive management of projects. These must be implemented, assessed through continuous learning, and fully resourced.
 - ii. **Improved coordination among donors** in implementing a nexus approach requires greater donor support for partner government(s) to set up or strengthen country-based development coordination mechanisms to build country ownership, accountability, and trust.
 - iii. **Implementing the nexus must be accompanied by practical ideas and resources for economic transformation** that take into account the needs of diverse groups such as youth, refugees and internally displaced, women and girls as well as regional concerns, among others, and the implementing of inclusive partnerships. Increasing donor resources and national resource mobilization for cash transfers and/ or universal social protection, which maximize effects on poverty and inequality reduction, is an important part of economic plans for "leaving no one behind" in fragile contexts.
 - iv. **Working in all areas, not only those affected by conflict**, is important to build trust across political/social/ regional divides, while also ensuring full humanitarian access to those affected by conflict in accord with humanitarian principles.
 - v. **Processes to develop shared Common Outcome goals** (*New Way of Working*) must be inclusive and accompanied by the necessary resources to implement actions towards these goals and to bring all relevant stakeholders on board.
 - vi. **Financing mechanisms for conflict affected and fragile contexts** should incentivize nexus participation and planning across the nexus pillars, while respecting distinct mandates. These mechanisms might include dedicated budgets for joint programming in areas where collaboration is feasible. Given the importance of conflict sensitivity and adaptive management, financing mechanisms relevant to fragile settings require flexible risk management tools which are not risk averse. Donors should consider the importance of greater preparedness measures

through quick-access funds that are available at local, national and regional levels.

On the development side, donors need to consider the extent to which support for central government programs might exclude marginalized populations in a contested fragile setting. Careful consideration should be given to using/reforming donor centralized funds whose purposes are mainly oriented towards maximizing donor security and geo-political foreign policy interests.

requires direct engagement with local actors from affected communities, which may be closed to donors themselves. Each situation will require donors to calibrate their relationships with local civil society.⁹² Relying on local civil society for conflict-sensitive information-gathering, for example, may jeopardize their security in highly contested environments. It is often better to support coalitions of local actors to avoid specific targeting by authorities. It may be best to work through small-scale initiatives with civil society as large-scale, donor-branded projects may be more visible and therefore more vulnerable.

3. Effective implementation of the Triple

Nexus approach requires a close understanding of the priorities of local populations and the inclusion of diverse actors from civil society and marginalized communities.

a. **Donors, including INGOs, must consider changes in their funding frameworks that allow for more resources to be accessed at the local level, consistent with the *Grand Bargain* commitment.** These can include collaborative financial instruments managed at the country level; changes to donor risk management assessments for local partnerships, and increased direct funding of Southern CSOs across all of their mechanisms, which recognize CSOs as important development actors.

b. **Donors must address the closed civic space in fragile and conflict affected situations**, through their diplomatic engagements with relevant parties, ongoing situation assessments of conditions for civil society actors (with CSOs where possible), and flexible financing and other measures of protection for local CSOs and human rights defenders at risk.

c. **Understanding the priorities of local populations in settings of conflict**

4. Implement donor climate finance (\$100 billion annually) in ways that fulfill the commitments and intent of the 2015 Paris Agreement, that respect development effectiveness principles, and take account Triple Nexus approaches.

a. **At a minimum all donors must meet their fair-share of the current commitment to \$100 billion in annual climate finance with public resources that are new and additional.** In doing so, donors acknowledge that this \$100 billion is a negotiated commitment and does not represent the real finance required for climate adaptation and mitigation. Climate finance should be provided as grants, not loans, fulfilling donors' historical and differential responsibility for the climate emergency.

b. **As part of the UN climate negotiations donors must agree to robust financial mechanisms to cover substantial loss and damage in developing countries, resulting from climate change for which they bear no responsibility.** Loss and damage finance must be additional to the current \$100 billion commitment for climate adaptation and mitigation. Practical measures for supporting loss and damage should learn from current donor/partner country experiences in

Annex One
DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus
Key Principles to Direct Action

Coordination

1. Undertake joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience and the identification of collective outcomes incorporating humanitarian, development and peace actions.
2. Provide appropriate resourcing to empower leadership for cost-effective coordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture.
3. Utilise political engagement and other tools, instruments and approaches at all levels to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace.

Programming

4. Prioritise prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met.
5. Put people at the centre, tackling exclusion and promoting gender equality.
6. Ensure that activities do no harm, are conflict sensitive to avoid unintended negative consequences and maximise positive effects across humanitarian, development and peace actions.
7. Align joined-up programming with the risk environment.
8. Strengthen national and local capacities.
9. Invest in learning and evidence across humanitarian, development and peace actions.

Financing

10. Develop evidence-based humanitarian, development and peace financing strategies at global, regional, national and local levels, with effective layering and sequencing of the most appropriate financing flows.
11. Use predictable, flexible, multi-year financing wherever possible.

Extracted from *DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*, 2019 accessed at <http://legalinstruments.oecd.org>.

disaster risk reduction and post-disaster reconstruction. Loss and damage initiatives should work closely with partner governments and local actors, including civil society, in developing mechanisms, implementing responses and strengthening resilience. These measures should strengthen local ownership and inclusive partnerships, based on country risk reduction strategies, as agreed in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.⁹³

c. Donors should reconsider and end finance for large-scale hydropower

dam projects as inconsistent with the Paris Agreement and climate mitigation measures. Massive dams and hydro projects are likely to cause significant destruction of biodiversity and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples without their consent. Sustainable adaptation and mitigation projects should be designed to respect community rights and their full participation. Phasing out fossil fuels cannot be at the expense of poor communities without access to appropriate sources of energy, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and ecological integrity.

ENDNOTES

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