



PEACE IN THE NEXUS IN CAMEROON

1. Background

The inclusion of the peace pillar in the nexus results from the recognition that violent conflicts drive a significant share of humanitarian needs, displacement and migration, and represent both an obstacle to sustainable development and a symptom of development failures. During the decade 2010-2020, the number of violent conflicts reached a record high¹. Conflicts also last longer and, for societies that have overcome violent conflict, the rate of relapse is high. Conflicts drive displacement, migration and humanitarian needs, which have also increased in number and duration. While the relationship between poverty and conflict is more complex than cause and effect, 2.3 billion people will live in settings qualified as fragile by 2030², a majority of which experience violent conflict.

At policy level, this recognition has led to the convergence of separate processes around acknowledging the centrality of prevention. The World Humanitarian Summit (2016) introduced a more human-centred approach to humanitarian crisis and consecrated the New Way of Working which provides that “there is [...] a shared moral imperative of preventing crises [...]”. The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, through its Sustainable Development Goal framework and in particular Goal 16, recognizes that peaceful and inclusive societies, founded on accountable and inclusive institutions that guarantee access to justice for all and leave no one behind, are an enabler of sustainable development. Finally, within the peace and security pillar of the United Nations, a series of policy reviews all emphasized that the United Nations should shift its focus towards addressing the root causes of violent conflict³. It promoted the concept of “sustaining peace” to reaffirm that ***peacebuilding encompasses post-conflict interventions and a wider scope of efforts ranging from prevention to longer-term peace consolidation***. The convergence of policy discourses across pillars was best illustrated by the first address of the 9th United Nations Secretary General to the Security Council on 10 January 2017 when he stated that “prevention should permeate everything we do. It should cut across all pillars of the UN’s work, and unite us for more effective delivery”.

Cameroon overarching development policy echoes the global prevention agendas and recognizes the importance of strengthening social cohesion. Reflecting Cameroon’s ambition to reinforce peace,

¹ See Uppsala University. Uppsala Conflict Data Program, <https://ucdp.uu.se/>. For an analysis of trends in conflict using the Uppsala university data, please see Strand, Håvard; Siri Aas Rustad; Håvard Mogleiv Nygård & Håvard Hegre. 2020. Trends in Armed Conflict, 1946–2019, Conflict Trends, 8. Oslo: PRIO.

<https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=2117&type=publicationfile>

² OECD. 2018. Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind. OECD Publishing, Paris. According to the OECD, fragile settings are settings where the coping capacities are not able to effectively mitigate a combination of economic, environmental, political, security and/or societal risks.

³ The High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) released its report in June 2015. The report concluded that the context should guide the shape of United Nations interventions in country and recommended that the conflict prevention of the United Nations country teams be strengthened, including through intensifying the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors. In October 2015, the United Nations-commissioned independent Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 was released and highlighted the limited progress in transforming policy commitment into concrete actions on the ground to ensure the effective protection and participation of women. Finally, the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture released in June 2015 noted that funding has been largely directed towards peacekeeping operations and that the United Nations has tend to deal with the symptoms, not the root causes of conflict. The 2020 peacebuilding architecture introduced “sustaining peace” in the terminology.

liberty, justice, social progress and national solidarity by 2035, Cameroon's National Development Strategy 2020–2030 foresees a range of measures, such as the acceleration of the decentralization process, to address inequalities in terms of access to basic services and economic opportunities that negatively impact social cohesion.

In its progresses towards operationalizing, the Cameroon Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus Task Force emphasizes the need for a people-centred approach that makes a difference in the lives of targeted populations. Previously considered a bastion of stability in the sub-region, Cameroon has seen a tragic deterioration of its security, social and economic context over the last ten years. The evolution of external and internal risk factors and their complex interaction led to the emergence on its territory of three concurrent complex humanitarian crises, including two armed conflicts. Against this backdrop, Cameroon volunteered during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to be one of the countries implementing the HDP Nexus and became a priority country for the UN Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration, and the joint United Nations and World Bank Humanitarian Development Peace Initiative. In May 2019, the Humanitarian Country Team of Cameroon established a Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) Nexus Task Force, composed of government representatives, local/national and international nongovernmental organizations, donor agencies, private sector, and United Nations entities, which contributes to the emergence of a shared understanding of the nexus concept and its operationalization in several geographical zones, known as convergence areas.

This note provides triple nexus actors with policy and programmatic orientations regarding the “peace” pillar of the nexus approach in Cameroon. As in many other contexts, the inclusion of “peace” in the nexus has not been without controversies. Humanitarian and development actors expressed concerns that joining the nexus could result in a politicization of their work. Furthermore, some humanitarian actors feared an erosion of the very principles that make humanitarian action possible, particularly the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. This note aims at clarifying what “peace” aspects will be included under the nexus approach in Cameroon. It was developed by the Cameroon HDP Nexus Task Force.

2. What is peace in the nexus in Cameroon? The emerging consensus at a conceptual level

Peace is more than the absence of direct violence and, as such, peace actions in the nexus promote the attitudes and beliefs, relationships, institutions and structures to sustain peaceful societies. The idea that peace is more than the absence of physical or verbal violence, embodied in the concepts of negative and positive peace, was first theorized by Johan Galtung⁴. Galtung argued that while physical or verbal violence is the most visible type of violence, it is often a symptom of attitudes and beliefs that legitimize violence and structural inequalities, thereby promoting a broad understanding of the concept of peace or positive peace. Galtung's concept echoes the Yamoussoukro Declaration on Peace in the Minds of Men of July 1989 which affirms that: “Peace is more than the end of armed conflict. Peace is a mode of behaviour. Peace is a deep-rooted commitment to the principles of liberty, justice, equality and solidarity among all human beings.” While this paper recognizes that the absence of direct violence (negative peace) can provide an opportunity to transforming attitudes and beliefs, relationships, institutions or structures, in Cameroon, the focus of the peace pillar of the nexus will be on contributing to sustainable positive peace. Interventions fostering social cohesion fall under this definition of peace.

⁴ Galtung, Johan. 1964. An Editorial. *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 1, issue 1.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/002234336400100101>

Responses consisting of, or directedly and expressly linked to, the use of force are not included within the nexus in Cameroon. There are a wide variety of responses to conflict, and the use of force – to fight back or to play a role of interposition between the belligerents – is one of them. In some intervention logics, such as counterinsurgency, the use of force is seen as an essential step towards (re)establishing a wide range of state functions and consolidating the security gains. While recognizing that such responses (fighting back, interposition and interventions based on a counterinsurgency logic) can, under specific circumstances, improve the life of vulnerable people and the environment aid workers are operating in, these responses are not included under the nexus to preserve humanitarian space in respect of the humanitarian principles. It is however critical to cultivate awareness of these responses, including in the way they can influence the way nexus interventions might be perceived.

Peace actions under the nexus can promote the development and progress towards a shared vision of society within the convergence zones. Such peace actions can include (1) the support to processes through which all parts of a society – with specific attention paid to the participation of groups at risk of being left behind – develop a shared vision for peace in their communities; (2) actions that contribute to the emergence of a consensus on the need for a peaceful change; and (3) actions that translate on the ground the shared vision for peace. All these actions have to be conflict sensitive. Because they are specific to the convergence zone, they do not include national-level interventions for instance.

Conflict sensitivity is a minimum standard and a compass that can guide nexus interventions. Conflict sensitivity is the capacity of an organization to understand the context it is part of, and to act upon this understanding to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive ones. When any intervention enters a context, it becomes part of that context and interacts with both factors that connect individuals and groups and those that divide them. It is the responsibility of each actor across the nexus to identify these factors and to regularly analyse all aspects of its presence and interventions to prevent their potential negative impact on the context (whether through deepening existing cleavages or undermining connecting factors and local capacities for peace). Recalling that the contexts where the nexus approach is to be implemented are inherently complex, conflict sensitivity provides nexus actors with a tool to analyse their intervention options and make conscious and informed decisions on moving forward and joining up humanitarian and/or development interventions with peace actions, considering the potential impact on other interventions.

3. Some consideration for the integration of the peace pillar at a programmatic level

A conflict analysis must be conducted, and its findings acted upon, at regular intervals. For interventions to be conflict-sensitive or impact conflict drivers, they need to be informed by a conflict analysis. The level of analysis required depends on the objective of the intervention. If an intervention aims at saving lives or promoting long-term development, then a simple divider-connector analysis will be sufficient. If an intervention aims at transforming the conflict dynamics, then, in addition to a divider-connector analysis, it will be necessary to have an in-depth understanding of the key conflict drivers, peace engines, and their interrelations. Findings of these analyses need to guide strategic programming and operational decisions then.

Interventions must be context-specific. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to peacebuilding. A conflict (and peace actions) is the outcome of a complex interaction of diverse factors. While there might be recognizable patterns, no two conflicts are the same. As such, to be conflict-sensitive and/or impact the conflict, stakeholders must tailor their actions to the context, specifically to each of the convergence zones.

In peacebuilding, the process is as important as the destination. Conflict-prone settings are often characterized by a high degree of polarisation. In such context, getting all population segments to agree on what issue needs addressing and how it needs addressing is critical, if not more critical, than implementing the agreed “solution”. A process of dialogue around a specific aspect of the conflict can contribute to identifying a mutually acceptable way forward, promote the understanding that there is more than one narrative of the conflict, that all sides have experienced violence and suffering; in short, contribute to transforming the relationships which were at the very heart of the conflict. Even a simple participatory conflict analysis through which all stakeholders express and reflect on their experiences of the conflict and understand other points of view can provide a powerful peacebuilding intervention.

Peace is built by local/national stakeholders and as such, all external actions should contribute to strengthening them and their capacities. Most humanitarian, development and peacebuilding practitioners would agree that peace is inherently local/national. External stakeholders are often there for a limited period. While they can bring comparative experiences and expertise, and some argue a degree of objectivity, their ability to understand the local context and build the necessary relationships of trust across conflict divides is limited. Local/national actors – legal and physical persons, state and non-state – are therefore key to the conflict transformation process. External actors must ensure that their action contributes to strengthening the capacity of these actors to play a positive role in the conflict transformation process and reinforcing their legitimacy. This implies the systemic integration of capacity strengthening of local actors as an intervention strategy. It requires that external stakeholders acknowledge that external interventions do not occur in a vacuum and that there are local/national peace capacities that can be strengthened if one only makes an effort to identify them. As mentioned below, the impact and sustainability of peace efforts depend on changes happening at the socio-political level, including changes in policy or their implementation. It is therefore essential to involve national and local authorities to enable the institutionalization of interventions or their outcome within a public sector's policy making, planning and budgeting.

Inclusivity is essential. When working on conflict, there can at times be a tendency to only engage with state and non-state armed actors and their top leaderships. While these actors have immediate influence over the violence, research has shown that for peace to be sustained, the conflict settlement needs to be inclusive. So beyond armed actors, it is necessary to ensure the effective participation of both individuals or groups that play or could play a key role in the conflict and its resolution and the broader population in its diversity. Who is key and who constitutes a population group will depend on the context and needs to be carefully analysed.

While the contribution of individual interventions is difficult to measure and demonstrate, some elements can increase the effectiveness of conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects have uncovered these elements in their Reflecting on Peace Practice Programme that worked since 1999 with hundreds of agencies and conducted 26 peacebuilding case studies throughout the world to identify what works – and what doesn't work – in peacebuilding. According to CDA, five elements increase the impact of conflict prevention and peacebuilding interventions: (1) targeting one or more key conflict drivers (as identified through a conflict analysis highlighting the conflict dynamics); (2) ensuring that the interventions contribute towards one or more of the five “building blocks for peace”⁵ and that efforts towards the building blocks are fast enough, big-enough and sustained, among other; (3) aiming at change at the socio-political level (in addition

⁵ 1. The effort results in the creation or reform of political institutions to handle grievances in situations where such grievances do, genuinely, drive the conflict. 2. The effort contributes to a momentum for peace by causing participants and communities to develop their own peace initiatives in relation to critical elements of context analysis. 3. The effort prompts people increasingly to resist violence and provocations to violence. 4. The effort results in an increase in people's security and in their sense of security. 5. The effort results in meaningful improvement in inter-group relations, reflected in, for example, changes in group attitudes, public opinion, social norms, or public behaviours.

to changes at the individual/personal level)⁶; (4) involving both “more people” (the general population in its diversity) and “key people” (opinion leaders); and (5) formulating a theory of change at both programme level (how do we think that activities will yield the expected results and why) and to explain the contribution of the project to “peace writ large” to ensure that assumptions are expressed and can be verified and adjusted. This latest element emphasizes that peace practices must be reflective, i.e. promote continuous learning.

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding require progress towards gender equality and the participation of young people, and the transformation of other discriminatory norms and structures.

The link between inequality and conflict (and equality and peaceful societies) has been widely documented and acknowledged. UNSC Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 2250 (2015), women and youth have a recognized fundamental role to play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. The need to prevent conflict and promote peaceful societies therefore reinforces the imperative of gender equality, youth participation and the prevention of all forms of discrimination. Conflict, when dealt with through peaceful means, provides a great opportunity to change institutions and structures that are discriminatory. As such, peace actions must be sensitive to gender, age, social status and other relevant identity traits, prevent discrimination and promote equality for all, also implying to work on the perception of actors towards other actors and the mitigation of reductive representations.

⁶ Changes at the socio-political level includes changes in group behaviour/relationships; public opinion; social norms; institutional change; and structural and cultural change.

Annex 1: Useful guidance and tools

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