

# LOCALISATION AND THE HDP NEXUS

*Empowering Local Organisations to Support the HDP Nexus Approach*

FINAL REPORT

COLUMBIA | SIPA



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research partnership between Columbia SIPA and the UNDP Nexus Academy, with collaboration from the Network for Empowered Aid Response, addresses a critical knowledge gap in humanitarian, development, and peace programming: how localized organizations understand, operationalize, and experience Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approaches, and what support they need to lead Nexus programming at scale. The core research question asks: How can local-most aid organizations prepare to step up and replace international aid organizations in supporting vulnerable populations through HDP Nexus interventions? This question emerges from a moment of convergence of crises and opportunities, where overlapping and prolonged crises demand integrated responses, resource constraints force efficiency, and growing recognition that local actors possess comparative advantages international organizations cannot replicate: community trust, contextual knowledge, adaptive capacity, cost-effectiveness, and sustained presence before, during, and after disaster.

This report examines five countries purposefully selected to represent diverse combinations of civil society strength and government consolidation (see Figure 1): Türkiye, Colombia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Syria. This typology enables comparative analysis of how different governance arrangements, civic space restrictions, and conflict dynamics affect local organizations' capacity to implement Nexus approaches. Research (November 2025 to April 2026) employed mixed methods including desk research, literature review, stakeholder analysis, interviews with stakeholders across country contexts, and data analysis of funding streams. Key stakeholders engaged included local and national civil society organizations (large national NGOs, refugee-led organizations, community-based groups), international organizations (UN agencies and INGOs), and academic/research institutions.

## Key Findings

- **Understanding:** Local actors demonstrate strong grasp of integrated approaches based on community realities but rarely use “HDP Nexus” terminology. In Türkiye, “social cohesion” serves as the dominant framework integrating humanitarian protection, development (livelihoods), and peace (tension reduction). As one Turkish practitioner explained: “We don't call it the Nexus...For locals, [the Nexus concept] is very core to localization, because that is who we are anyways.” Similar patterns exist across diverse country contexts where local organizations practice integration intuitively because communities experience humanitarian, development, and peace needs concurrently and holistically.
- **Practice:** Consciously and unconsciously, local organizations operationalize Nexus through diverse sectoral combinations: Humanitarian-Development integration linking emergency assistance with livelihoods programming, Development-Peace approaches combining community development with reconciliation, and ultimately full triple Nexus programming. Türkiye’s social cohesion model combines refugee assistance with host community economic integration and inter-community dialogue. Afghan organizations maintain community-based programming addressing chronic needs despite sanctions structurally blocking development funding.
- **Comparative Advantages:** Local organizations possess deep community trust enabling access international actors are not designed to achieve, particularly in hard-to-reach or politically sensitive areas. They demonstrate deep contextual knowledge and cultural competency informing appropriate, and targeted programming design. Their flexibility and adaptive capacity enable rapid response. Sustained presence before, after, and during crises provides continuity when international actors withdraw as funding shifts.
- **Systemic Funding Barriers:** The overwhelming majority of funds flow through international intermediaries rather than directly to local organizations, with short-term cycles (typically 12 months) contradicting multi-year Nexus needs and inadequate overhead preventing organizational development.
- **Coordination:** In larger, wealthier NGOs and Intergovernmental Organizations, local organizations are merely positioned as information recipients, not decision-makers with a role in strategic planning. In partnerships between localized and international organizations, local actors function as subcontractors executing international-designed programs with multi-tiered implementation chains distancing decision-making from communities. Governance constraints, regulatory restrictions and shrinking civic space limit advocacy and programming autonomy.
- **Capacity Needs:** There is a diversity of needs in every context, however there are some common themes. Technical (donor compliance, integrated M&E, financial management), Strategic (organizational development, coordination skills, evidence generation), and Systemic (direct funding access, multi-year grants, adequate overhead, coordination co-leadership, protected civic space).

Many local organizations already practice Nexus integration out of operational necessity, but **concentrated funding, coordination exclusion, and governance constraints** prevent them from leading at scale. While localized organizations take on the risks, the responsibility, and the work involved in responding to overlapping crises, they are not compensated with the financial, capacity, or decision-making power. The future of crisis response and management looks different from the current aid architecture. Localization of the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace Nexus approach requires international actors and donors to rethink and remove systemic barriers and create the conditions and culture for local leadership to flourish and sustain.

## **Core Recommendations**

**For NEAR/National CSOs:** Partner with UNDP Nexus Academy to co-design training modules. Commission research documenting local Nexus comparative advantages. Lead collective advocacy for funding harmonization, multi-year grants, and adequate overhead. Addressing capacity and coordination gaps, develop an online forum for members of localized NGOs to share lessons learned, best practices, and templates for grants and performance reporting (See, Frontline: A Global Commons for Local Crisis Leadership).

**For UNDP Nexus Academy:** Addressing technical needs, strategic needs, and systemic barriers, co-design training specifically for local actors incorporating locally-grounded frameworks (social cohesion, territorial peace, community resilience). Offer training in multiple languages with accessible formats. Create a sustained community of practice connecting training alumni with peer learning. Develop a localization strategy and monitoring and evaluation indicators to track shifts in curriculum, programming, and priorities.

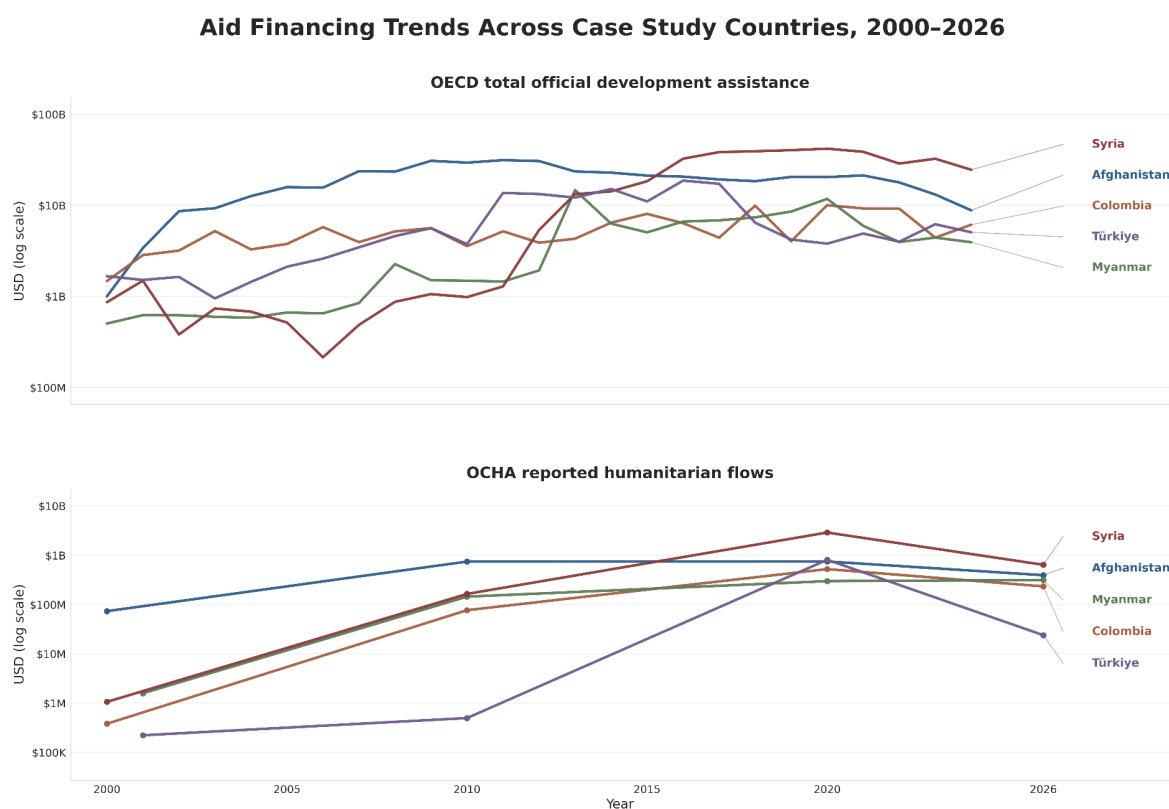
**For National Governments:** Clarify and protect space for advocacy and rights-based work. Streamline regulatory approvals with clear timelines and reduced bureaucracy. Establish government-CSO dialogue mechanisms addressing operational constraints. Simplify registration for refugee-led organizations.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Context: The Convergence of Crises and Opportunity

There are existential considerations facing the global aid sphere today. The global humanitarian landscape stands at a critical inflection point. With 56 active conflict zones (the highest number since World War II) and converging crises driven by climate shocks, pandemics, and economic instability, the international aid system faces unprecedented strain.<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously resources are tightening across major donors, with funding drastically decreasing or being cut altogether. Official Development Assistance (ODA) has decreased overall despite pockets of increased spending, creating widening gaps in funding for essential, often lifesaving programming.<sup>2</sup> The convergence of escalating needs and shrinking resources demands fundamental reconsideration of how humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors operate.

**Figure 1: Aid Financing Trends Across Case Study Countries, 2000-2026**



Source: OECD Table2a data and OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS). OECD values are reported in constant 2023 USD where available. OCHA values reflect reported humanitarian flows and represent partial funding snapshots.

<sup>1</sup> Vision of Humanity, "Highest Number of Countries Engaged in Conflict Since World War II," June 11, 2024, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/highest-number-of-countries-engaged-in-conflict-since-world-war-ii/>.

<sup>2</sup> OECD, *Applying the Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus* (Paris: OECD, 2020).

The figure illustrates how these systemic pressures translate into the structure and evolution of aid financing across contexts. While total Official Development Assistance (ODA) consistently exceeds humanitarian funding, the relationship between the two diverges significantly across countries. In high-intensity conflict settings, humanitarian flows expand rapidly and, in some cases, begin to substitute for development assistance, reflecting a shift toward crisis-driven financing. In contrast, more stable or institutionally robust contexts maintain a development-led structure, with humanitarian aid remaining supplementary. Other cases display delayed or episodic humanitarian responses, indicating reactive rather than anticipatory funding behavior. Taken together, these patterns suggest that the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus does not operate as a coherent or integrated model in practice, but instead manifests as a set of fragmented financing regimes shaped by conflict intensity, institutional capacity, and donor behavior. These divergences underscore deeper structural limitations within the aid architecture, helping to explain why reform efforts have struggled to produce consistent, system-wide change.

This crisis is compounded by what many practitioners term the “humanitarian reset”, a moment of reckoning for the international aid architecture. The Grand Bargain commitments of 2016, which promised transformative change including greater localization and more efficient aid delivery, have yielded uneven progress at best.<sup>3</sup> Nearly a decade later, local and national organizations still receive a fraction of humanitarian funding directly, despite being first responders and staying long after international actors depart.

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, an approach emphasizing coherence, complementarity, and coordination across humanitarian response, development programming, and peacebuilding, is a key conceptual framework in producing sustainable crisis response.<sup>4</sup> Rather than operating in separate silos with different timeframes, mandates, and funding streams, the Nexus approach recognizes that protracted crises require integrated responses addressing immediate needs, structural causes, and pathways to peace simultaneously. Nexus programming is more effective, more efficient, and more sustainable than fragmented sectoral interventions.

Local organizations are uniquely positioned to lead Nexus approaches. They possess deep contextual knowledge, community trust, and long-term presence that international actors cannot replicate. They naturally integrate humanitarian, development, and peace dimensions because communities experience these needs simultaneously.

The principle of “as local as possible, as international as necessary” increasingly defines effective crisis response.<sup>5</sup> True localization means international actors stepping back to supporting roles,

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<sup>3</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need* (May 2016), <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>.

<sup>4</sup> OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), "DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus," OECD Legal Instruments, 2019, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019>.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP, *The HDP Nexus in Practice: Lessons from Local Actors* (New York: UNDP Crisis Bureau, 2022).

providing resources and technical expertise while local organizations lead design, implementation, and coordination. This moment of convergence, protracted crises demanding Nexus approaches, resource constraints forcing efficiency, and growing recognition of local actors' essential role, creates conditions for transformative change in crisis response globally.

## 1.2 Project Purpose and Research Questions

This research partnership between Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), the UNDP Crisis Bureau's Nexus Academy, and the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) addresses a critical knowledge gap: how local-most aid organizations understand, operationalize, and experience HDP Nexus approaches, and what support they need to lead Nexus programming at scale.

Despite growing recognition of local actors' importance, Nexus discourse and training remain dominated by international perspectives. The UNDP Nexus Academy has provided valuable training to practitioners, but this has primarily reached international actors.<sup>6</sup> Global Nexus guidance documents overwhelmingly reflect northern institutional experiences rather than southern realities.<sup>7</sup> If Nexus approaches are to succeed in practice, they must be grounded in the experiences of local actors who will lead implementation, especially given the shifting funding landscape.

NEAR, as a Global South-led network of local and national civil society organizations, advocates for structural reforms elevating local leadership and shifting power in humanitarian systems.<sup>8</sup> NEAR's members across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America must lead Nexus approaches if localization commitments are to become reality. Yet these organizations face systemic barriers: limited direct funding, exclusion from coordination, inadequate overhead, and partnerships positioning them as implementers rather than decision-makers.<sup>9</sup>

This project addresses these challenges through participatory research centering local voices and experiences.

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<sup>6</sup> UNDP, "What We Do – Crisis Bureau," accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.undp.org/crisis/what-we-do>.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, *The HDP Nexus in Practice: Lessons from Local Actors* (New York: UNDP Crisis Bureau, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), "About NEAR," accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.near.ngo>.

<sup>9</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant, *Localisation in Practice: Three Examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's Collective Localisation Efforts* (December 2021), 6-10.

## Core Research Question:

How can local-most aid organizations prepare to step up and replace international aid organizations in supporting vulnerable populations through HDP Nexus interventions?

## Sub-Questions:

1. **Understanding:** How do local actors understand the HDP Nexus? Do they use Nexus terminology, and if not, what frameworks do they use?
2. **Current Practice:** How do local organizations currently operationalize integrated humanitarian-development-peace approaches? What does Nexus look like in their daily work?
3. **Gaps and Challenges:** What barriers do local organizations face in implementing Nexus approaches? How do coordination, coherence, and complementarity challenges manifest in practice?
4. **Capacity and Resources:** What are local organizations' priority capacity needs for Nexus programming? What types of support would be most valuable?
5. **Support Mechanisms:** What can NEAR do to help its members strengthen and scale HDP Nexus capacities? What role can the Nexus Academy play in supporting local actors?
6. **Funding and Power:** How do ODA trends and funding structures affect local organizations' ability to implement Nexus approaches? What changes would enable local leadership?

This research aims to generate actionable insights that enable both NEAR and the Nexus Academy to better support local organizations. For NEAR (and other national CSO consortia), findings will inform strategic priorities, advocacy positions, and member services. For the Nexus Academy, findings will guide training adaptation, resource development, and engagement strategies with local actors. More broadly, this research contributes evidence to shift global Nexus discourse toward genuine localization.

## 1.3 Geographic Focus and Selection Criteria

This research examines HDP Nexus localization across five countries: Myanmar, Türkiye, Syria, Afghanistan, and Colombia. These countries were purposefully selected to represent diverse combinations of civil society strength and government consolidation, providing comparative insights into how different political and operational contexts affect local organizations' capacity to implement Nexus approaches.

**Table 1: Governance and Civil Society Country Matrix**

| <u><b>Strong Governance / Strong Civil Society</b></u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <u><b>Strong Governance / Weak Civil Society</b></u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Türkiye:</b> With over 120,000 registered associations, Türkiye has substantial civil society capacity, though organizations operate within increasingly restrictive regulatory frameworks under consolidated government control. <sup>10</sup>                                                    | <b>Colombia:</b> Colombia's robust civil society emerged from decades of armed conflict, with strong advocacy networks, victim organizations, and community peacebuilding initiatives operating alongside functioning but unevenly present state institutions. <sup>11</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <u><b>Weak Governance / Strong Civil Society</b></u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <u><b>Weak Governance / Weak Civil Society</b></u>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Myanmar:</b> Despite decades of military rule and the 2021 coup, Myanmar maintains a vibrant civil society including ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) providing parallel governance and services, national NGOs, and community-based organizations operating across conflict lines. <sup>12</sup> | <p><b>Syria:</b> After 14 years of conflict, Syrian civil society has demonstrated remarkable resilience, with national NGOs, community organizations, and diaspora networks sustaining services across fragmented territorial control.<sup>13</sup></p> <p><b>Afghanistan:</b> Following the August 2021 Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's civil society operates within severe constraints but retains organizational capacity built over decades, navigating restrictive civic space while maintaining community connections.<sup>14</sup></p> |

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1 The HDP Nexus: From Concept to Practice

Initially articulated at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus is a conceptual framework that critiques the de facto siloing of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities. It places all three sectors in conversation with the ultimate goal of better coordination, coherence, and complementarity. Formalized through the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and subsequent OECD-DAC recommendations, the Nexus emphasizes collective outcomes, comparative advantage, and addressing root causes.<sup>15</sup> The “New

<sup>10</sup> Nefise E. Gokalp-Aras, “Temporality and Stratification of Refugee Governance in Turkey,” *Central & Eastern European Migration Review* 14, no. 2 (2025).

<sup>11</sup> Manuela Nilsson, “Building Peace Amidst Violence: An Analysis of Colombia's Policies to Address Security and Development Challenges,” *Iberoamericana – Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 47, no. 1 (2018): 34-44.

<sup>12</sup> Stella Naw, Maw Naw, and Dustin Barter, *Making Myanmar: Humanitarianism amid Revolutionary State-Building* (London: ODI Global, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: SELA Report 2025* (2025).

<sup>14</sup> International Crisis Group, *After the Aid Axe: Charting a Path to Self-Reliance in Afghanistan*, Asia Report No. 350 (October 2, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), “DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus,” OECD Legal Instruments, 2019, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019>.

Way of Working” presented at the Summit called for humanitarian and development actors to work toward shared outcomes over multi-year timeframes (beyond acute humanitarian response), while the OECD-DAC recommendation provided operational guidance.<sup>16</sup> While the HDP Nexus is widely understood in the United Nations system and International NGOs, implementation and strategy remain disjointed. A 2022 OECD progress review found that while Nexus language is ubiquitous, practice lags behind, with funding streams and coordination mechanisms remain siloed, and humanitarian-development-peace actors struggle to align timelines and mandates.<sup>17</sup> The gap between Nexus aspiration and reality is particularly visible at the country level, where institutional incentives, donor requirements, and operational constraints often reinforce fragmentation despite policy commitments to integration.<sup>18</sup>

## **2.2 Localization: Promise, Reality, and Need**

The Grand Bargain of 2016 committed donors and aid organizations to channel at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding “as directly as possible” to local and national responders by 2020, alongside commitments to multi-year funding, reduced earmarking, and greater local participation in coordination.<sup>19</sup> Nearly a decade later, progress remains disappointingly limited. Global tracking shows direct funding to local actors stalled at approximately 1.2% of international humanitarian assistance in 2021-2022, with most funding flowing through multiple intermediaries.<sup>20</sup> Beyond financing, local organizations are structurally excluded from strategic decision-making around HDP programming, often taking on risk as sub-contractors without support from contracting parties.<sup>21</sup> Yet the case for localization grows stronger as evidence demonstrates local actors’ comparative advantages with contextual expertise, community trust, access to affected populations, cost-effectiveness, and sustained presence after international actors depart.<sup>22</sup> The humanitarian reset driven by reductions in international spending on aid and intersecting crises creates a moment of both urgency and opportunity to shift from localization rhetoric to genuine power transfer and resource reallocation.

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<sup>16</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), “The New Way of Working,” 2016, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/the-new-way-of-working>.

<sup>17</sup> OECD, The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus: Interim Progress Review (Paris: OECD, 2022), [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review\\_2f620ca5-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review_2f620ca5-en.html).

<sup>18</sup> ALNAP, Essential Briefings: The HDP Nexus (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2024), [https://alnnap.org/documents/20651/Explain\\_HDPNexus\\_Briefing\\_052025.pdf](https://alnnap.org/documents/20651/Explain_HDPNexus_Briefing_052025.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need (May 2016), <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>.

<sup>20</sup> Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023 (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2023), <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/>.

<sup>21</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant, Localisation in Practice: Three Examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's Collective Localisation Efforts (December 2021), 6-11.

<sup>22</sup> UNDP, The HDP Nexus in Practice: Lessons from Local Actors (New York: UNDP Crisis Bureau, 2022); Van Brabant, Localisation in Practice, 9-10.

## 2.3 Knowledge Gaps

Since the World Summit (2016) a significant body of literature around the HDP Nexus has developed, however documentation and analysis of local Nexus practice remain relatively unexplored. Most Nexus case studies center on international programming, with local organizations mentioned as implementing partners rather than strategic actors who employ the Nexus approach.<sup>23</sup> The few studies examining local actors focus predominantly on “capacity gaps” rather than comparative advantages, reproducing deficit narratives that justify continued international control.<sup>24</sup> This reflects broader knowledge production inequities: Nexus frameworks, guidance documents, and training curricula overwhelmingly reflect Global North institutional perspectives and priorities, with Southern voices often marginalized from defining what Nexus means and how it should be operationalized.

Existing research lacks context-specific analysis of how government arrangements, civic space restrictions, and conflict dynamics shape local Nexus implementation, guidance assumes stable contexts with functioning coordination and accessible funding, conditions rarely present where Nexus approaches are most needed.<sup>25</sup> A Syrian organization navigating fragmented territorial control faces fundamentally different constraints than a Colombian organization within formal peace frameworks, yet Nexus guidance treats contexts as interchangeable. Critical questions remain unanswered: What cost-effectiveness differentials exist between local and international implementation? What sustainability outcomes result from locally led approaches? Which conditions enable local leadership, and which necessitate international support? Finally, power dynamics receive insufficient attention, discussions of “partnership challenges” obscure fundamental questions about who controls resources, makes decisions, and whose knowledge is valued.<sup>26</sup> The literature treats these as technical problems solvable through capacity building rather than structural inequities requiring power redistribution. These gaps mean current Nexus guidance risks being simultaneously too abstract (disconnected from operational realities) and too prescriptive (imposing external frameworks on local practice), undermining the localization it ostensibly supports.

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<sup>23</sup> ALNAP, *Essential Briefings: The HDP Nexus* (London: ALNAP/ODI, 2024), [https://alnapp.org/documents/20651/Explain\\_HDPNexus\\_Briefing\\_052025.pdf](https://alnapp.org/documents/20651/Explain_HDPNexus_Briefing_052025.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., *'As local as possible, as international as necessary': Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI, 2022), [https://media.odi.org/documents/As\\_local\\_as\\_possible\\_as\\_international\\_as\\_necessary\\_understanding\\_capacity\\_and\\_comp.pdf](https://media.odi.org/documents/As_local_as_possible_as_international_as_necessary_understanding_capacity_and_comp.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *The Nexus in Practice: The Long Journey to Impact* (Oslo: NRC, 2023), <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/the-nexus-in-practice-the-long-journey-to-impact>

<sup>26</sup> Sufyan Barakat and Sarah Milton, "Localisation Across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 15, no. 2 (2020): 147-163, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316620922805>

### 3. FROM CONCEPT TO PRACTICE: THE COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

Across varying configurations of governance capacity and civil society strength, the five countries examined in this report demonstrate diverse understandings and applications of the HDP Nexus. As explored in greater detail in Annex 2 (“Country Findings”), each country’s distinct conflict and crisis dynamics shape the environment in which local actors respond to overlapping humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding needs. The cases illustrate how local organizations navigate different political, institutional, and operational constraints while contributing to Nexus-oriented approaches in practice. The following sections provide brief profiles of the governance context, civil society landscape, and HDP dynamics in Türkiye, Colombia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Syria.

#### 3.1 Türkiye

Türkiye hosts the world’s largest refugee population with approximately 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, a protracted displacement crisis compounded by the February 2023 earthquakes that devastated southern provinces.<sup>27</sup> The country operates within a framework of moderate-to-strong civil society with strong government consolidation, over 120,000 registered associations navigate increasingly restrictive regulatory frameworks requiring government approval for foreign funding while restrictions on advocacy create shrinking civic space.<sup>28</sup> Despite these constraints, the 2019 Gaziantep Declaration marked explicit policy commitment to transitioning “from emergency to resilience,” though this coincides with substantial international aid reductions.<sup>29</sup>

#### 3.2 Colombia

Colombia has endured over sixty years of internal conflict, one of the longest in the world, which has internally displaced some 7 million people as of 2025<sup>30</sup>, with an estimated 450,664 killed between 1985 and 2018 and 121,768 people forcibly disappeared between 1985 and 2016. Taking into account underreporting, these estimates could reach as high as 800,000 and 210,000 victims respectively.<sup>31</sup> Embedded within the state is a strong civil society composed of grassroots-founded

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<sup>27</sup> UNHCR Turkey, “Social Cohesion and Harmonization,” accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/ne-yapiyoruz/social-cohesion-and-harmonization>; European Commission, “ECHO Turkey HIP 2023” (Brussels: European Commission, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Nefise E. Gokalp-Aras, “Temporality and Stratification of Refugee Governance in Turkey,” *Central & Eastern European Migration Review* 14, no. 2 (2025), <https://ceemr.uw.edu.pl/vol-14-no-2-2025/special-section-three/temporality-and-stratification-refugee-governance-turkey>.

<sup>29</sup> UNDP Turkey, “Gaziantep Declaration: Transition from Emergency to Resilience,” press release (2019); OECD, “Development Co-operation Profile: Türkiye” (Paris: OECD, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, “Colombia: Forced Displacement Reaches a 10-Year Peak,” November 3, 2025, [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/colombia-forced-displacement-reaches-10-year-peak\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/colombia-forced-displacement-reaches-10-year-peak_en).

<sup>31</sup> Comisión de la Verdad, “Analítica de datos, información y recursos,” accessed April 14, 2026, <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/analitica-de-datos-informacion-y-recursos#cl>.

advocacy groups, the majority of which are funded by external international organizations and states. Despite this robust network, many smaller organizations operate beyond direct government reach in territories controlled by armed groups with limited infrastructure and resources to sustain themselves. Furthermore, despite the monumental peace accord of 2016 with the guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), the country continues to face increasing levels of violence and displacement.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.3 Afghanistan

Afghanistan presents a structural inversion of the HDP Nexus rather than a failed implementation of it. Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, external budget support has been cut off, roughly seven to ten billion dollars in central bank reserves remain frozen, and sanctions and banking restrictions have made routine transfers into the country difficult; overlapping shocks from drought, the August 2025 earthquake, and the large-scale return of refugees from Pakistan and Iran have pushed humanitarian need to more than 20 million people annually, while annual appeals of three to four billion dollars now function as the country's de facto social protection system. Afghanistan sits in the weak-governance, weak-civil-society quadrant of the report's typology, though this placement understates a real paradox: Afghan NGOs retain deep operational capacity built over decades, yet civic space has collapsed under unclear registration rules, heavy oversight from the de facto authorities, and gender-based work restrictions that have pushed many women leaders into exile. The humanitarian pillar is dominant and overstretched, the development pillar hollow, and the peace pillar politically constrained and largely invisible in formal coordination, a configuration that tests the viability of the HDP framework when its institutional preconditions no longer exist.

### 3.4 Myanmar

Myanmar has experienced protracted armed conflict between the central state and various ethnic armed organizations since independence in 1948, making it one of the world's longest-running civil wars. The situation deteriorated significantly following the 2021 military coup, which triggered renewed nationwide violence, economic decline, and large-scale internal displacement, compounded by the regional effects of the 2017 Rohingya crisis.<sup>33</sup> Humanitarian access remains highly restricted due to insecurity, bureaucratic constraints, and the politicization of aid, while weak governance structures and siloed ministries limit cross-sector coordination despite overlapping humanitarian, development, and peace needs.<sup>34</sup> Despite these constraints, Myanmar

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<sup>32</sup> Roxanna Vigil, *Preventing Renewed Conflict in Colombia* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2026), <https://www.cfr.org/reports/preventing-renewed-conflict-in-colombia>.

<sup>33</sup> Center for Preventive Action, "Civil War in Myanmar," 2026; Vibhu Mishra, "Four Years after the Coup, Myanmar Remains on the Brink," UN News, 2025.

<sup>34</sup> Paul Vrieze, *Myanmar in Crisis: Navigating Humanitarian Aid Challenges*, 2025; Marte Nilsen, "Perceptions of Rights and the Politics of Humanitarian Aid in Myanmar," 2020.

maintains a resilient civil society ecosystem, including national NGOs, community-based organizations, and providers linked to armed groups that deliver services in conflict-affected areas, often through informal or cross-border mechanisms that reflect bottom-up and necessity-driven approaches to integrated HDP-type programming.<sup>35</sup>

### 3.5 Syria

Syria has faced a protracted crisis since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, resulting in one of the world's largest displacement situations. As of 2025, over 7.4 million people are internally displaced and more than 4.4 million refugees remain in neighboring countries, including Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan.<sup>36</sup> Nine out of ten Syrians live below the poverty line, with widespread food insecurity and damaged infrastructure, further strained by the 2023 earthquakes. As a consequence, now 75% of the population depend on some form of humanitarian aid.<sup>37</sup> Governance and civic space, while more open after the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, are highly restricted with fragmented territorial control and tight regulations on civil society. Humanitarian access remains politicized, and international sanctions continue to complicate operations. Despite this, Syrian civil society remains resilient, with local NGOs and community groups delivering essential services through cross-border approaches and collaborative networks. However, governance and funding limitations weaken institutional capacity.

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<sup>35</sup> Anne Décobert et al., "Compliance and Coloniality," *Disasters 2025*; UNDP, *HDP Nexus Compendium Myanmar*, 2026.

<sup>36</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Emergency," (2025) <https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Development Programme. The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: Socio-Economic Impact Assessment. February 24, 2025

## 4. THE ROLE OF NEAR AND LOCAL ORG NETWORKS

### 4.1 Current Value of NEAR

After the Grand Bargain (2016), the discussion around a people-centered and leaner humanitarian response, resulted in the formalization of networks of local NGOs, usually with an emphasis on South-to-South collaboration and impacted communities. The Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), with registered members across the world, provides critical infrastructure for local and national civil society organizations that individual actors cannot replicate. NEAR membership offers significant benefits: legitimacy and visibility in international forums, access to peer learning and South-South exchange, and collective advocacy leverage.<sup>38</sup> In Türkiye, NEAR members including Jasmine, STL, and others reported that network affiliation strengthened their capacity to access grants with international donors and coordination bodies, contextualize at the country level, and shape policy collectively.<sup>39</sup> Other similar groups like ACBAR in Afghanistan and National Reference Groups globally, have provided critical architecture to bolster the capacity, knowledge-sharing, and power of local organizations.<sup>40</sup>

### 4.2 Opportunities for Local NGO Networks in HDP Nexus

Local NGO Networks and the UNDP Nexus Academy represent complementary positions that, when collaboratively aligned, could accelerate local Nexus leadership globally. NEAR brings deep connections to local and national organizations across diverse crisis contexts, legitimacy as the authoritative Global South voice on localization established through its membership structure, and practical knowledge of barriers local actors face in accessing training, funding, and coordination. The Nexus Academy brings Nexus frameworks and training methodologies, established learning infrastructure including online platforms and facilitation expertise, UNDP's convening power with governments and UN agencies, and institutional resources to develop and disseminate learning at scale.<sup>41</sup> Strategic collaboration between these complementary actors (with Local NGO networks' providing grounded knowledge of local needs and mobilizing its member networks while Nexus Academy provides technical training capacity and institutional leverage within UN systems) creates pathways for locally-relevant Nexus capacity development and evidence-based advocacy that neither organization can achieve independently.

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<sup>38</sup> Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), "Our Members," accessed April 14, 2026, <https://near.ngo/our-members/>.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Turkish CSO representatives, Istanbul, January 2026.

<sup>40</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), "National Reference Groups," Grand Bargain Official Website, accessed April 14, 2026, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain-official-website/national-reference-groups>. Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), accessed April 14, 2026, <https://www.acbar.org>

<sup>41</sup> Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR), "Our Members," accessed April 14, 2026, <https://near.ngo/our-members/>; UNDP, "What We Do – Crisis Bureau," accessed April 14, 2026, <https://www.undp.org/crisis/what-we-do>.

## 5. GAPS AND CHALLENGES

**Table 2: Country Analysis of Gaps and Challenges**

| COUNTRY            | Challenge 1                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Challenge 2                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Challenge 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>TÜRKIYE</b>     | Funding architecture concentrates resources and decision-making with international intermediaries, providing local CSOs minimal direct funding, short-term cycles (12 months), and inadequate overhead, preventing organizational development and strategic leadership despite demonstrated capacity. | Government regulatory constraints require approval for foreign funding, restrict advocacy, and create shrinking civic space that forces organizations to carefully navigate what programming and partnerships they can pursue, limiting autonomy and flexibility for Nexus approaches. | Coordination mechanisms exclude local CSOs from strategic decision-making and resource allocation, positioning them as information recipients rather than leaders despite their comparative advantages in community access, contextual knowledge, and sustained presence. |
| <b>COLOMBIA</b>    | Highly centralized, top-down coordination and funding structures marginalize local actors from decision-making and limit the integration of locally grounded knowledge into program design.                                                                                                           | Short-term, restricted, and indirect funding flows undermine organizational stability, disrupt long-term peacebuilding and service delivery, and force local actors into competition rather than collaboration.                                                                        | Persistent fragmentation across humanitarian, development, and peace systems produces siloed implementation, with integration occurring informally out of necessity rather than through coherent system-level design.                                                     |
| <b>AFGHANISTAN</b> | Sanctions, frozen central bank reserves, and donor risk aversion have produced a structurally humanitarian-only funding architecture that locks out development and peace investment regardless of Nexus commitments.                                                                                 | Localization without authority: Afghan NGOs carry the majority of implementation and security risk while remaining excluded from programme design, strategic decision-making, and direct access to funding.                                                                            | Gender apartheid and shrinking civic space structurally disable the peace pillar and compound the exclusion of women-led organizations across all domains of localization.                                                                                                |
| <b>MYANMAR</b>     | There are major coordination constraints. Fragmented governance and security priorities limit strategic HDP planning                                                                                                                                                                                  | There are persistent capacity and funding gaps, as local actors lack sufficient resources and organizational capacity to independently sustain and scale integrated programs.                                                                                                          | A, so called, "Governance Vacuum" exists, namely, the absence of legitimate, inclusive authority results in fragmented parallel systems, making durable peace, development, and                                                                                           |

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | humanitarian integration structurally difficult.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>SYRIA</b> | Short-term, restricted, and insufficient funding streams and facilitated through intermediaries undermine the implementation of HDP Nexus approaches, which require sustained, multi-year investment to effectively address protracted crises and support long-term recovery. | Top-down coordination and decision-making structures led by UN agencies and international actors limit the integration of local knowledge, resulting in misaligned programming that does not fully reflect contextual realities while final authority remains concentrated with large international organizations. | Fragmented territorial control and divided governance structures hinder nationwide coordination and coherence, limiting opportunities for reconciliation and making integrated humanitarian, development, and peace efforts structurally difficult to implement. |

## 6. SYNTHESIS

While unique permutations are country dependent, these challenges resonate along three universal barriers to localized Nexus implementation: **funding concentration, coordination exclusion, and governance constraints.**

Across all contexts, funding remains a critical barrier. Consistent with the global aid economy, resources flow through international intermediaries rather than directly to local organizations. Türkiye's local CSOs operate on 12-month cycles with inadequate investment; Colombia's restricted funding forces competition over collaboration; Afghanistan's sanctions-driven architecture locks out development entirely while Afghan NGOs bear implementation risk without decision-making power; Myanmar's funding gaps prevent scaling despite frontline delivery, Syria's funding architecture remains highly humanitarianized and mediated through international intermediaries, with short-term, restricted funding and sanctions-related constraints limiting long-term recovery and preventing local actors from accessing direct, flexible financing.<sup>42</sup> Inadequate resources prevent organizational development, which donors cite to justify continued international control of resourcing.

Consistent with global power dynamics, coordination systems perpetually exclude local leadership. Despite participation, local organizations are “risk-bearers, not decision-makers.”<sup>43</sup> Colombia's top-down structures marginalize local knowledge; Myanmar's fragmented, and

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Olive Branch Syria April 2026

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Turkish CSO representative, Istanbul, January 2026.

militarized governance constrains strategic planning; Afghanistan’s gender restrictions compound exclusion of women-led organizations.<sup>44</sup> In Syria, parallel coordination systems across government, opposition, and autonomous regions fragment decision-making and reinforce international control, limiting local actors’ influence despite their central role in implementation. While Humanitarian-Development-Peace coordination remains relatively siloed, integration happens informally through local adaptation, not systematically through local networks.

Governance constraints compound these barriers. Türkiye's regulatory approvals and advocacy restrictions limit programming autonomy; Myanmar’s governance vacuum fragments authority; Afghanistan's civic space collapse structurally disables peacebuilding, while Syria’s fragmented territorial control and politically constrained environment limit national-level coordination and restrict progress on reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.<sup>45</sup> Local organizations navigate overlapping restrictions that international actors evade or have the capacity to overcome. To varying degrees of implementation, local organizations practice informal Nexus integration out of necessity, but systemic barriers prevent them from leading at scale or accessing decision-making power.

| 7. RECOMMENDATIONS         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Actor                      | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Türkiye</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>National Government</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish Government-CSO Dialogue Mechanism on Civic Space: Establish quarterly dialogue forum bringing together relevant ministries (Interior, Foreign Affairs, Family and Social Services), Provincial Governorates, and CSO representatives, to address regulatory interpretation disputes, approval process delays, civic space concerns, and coordination on shared priorities. Model this on successful municipal-CSO partnerships in Gaziantep, scaling to national level.</li> <li>2. Reduce Regulatory Barriers While Maintaining Oversight</li> </ol> |
| <b>UNDP Nexus Academy</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Offer Training in Turkish and Arabic</li> <li>2. Create Peer Learning Platform for Refugee-Hosting Contexts</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

<sup>44</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung, "Working Conditions of Local Civil Society in Afghanistan" (2024); stakeholder interviews, 2026.

<sup>45</sup> Gokalp-Aras, "Temporality and Stratification of Refugee Governance in Turkey" (2025)

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Local NGOs</b>          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest in Peer Mentoring</li> <li>2. Leverage Local ngo networks for access to grants, capacity building for monitoring and evaluation, and skill sharing around grant applications, program coordination, and use of AI.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Local NGO Networks</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Build Earthquake-Response Learning Platform: document what integration approaches worked, what barriers you faced, how funding/coordination systems helped or hindered.</li> <li>2. Establish Refugee-Led Organizations Sub-Network: form specific sub-network to share strategies for accessing funding and coordination, coordinate advocacy on refugee-led organization recognition, mentor emerging refugee-led groups, and document your comparative advantages as evidence challenging deficit narratives.</li> </ol> |
| <b>Colombia</b>            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>National Government</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop funding and support mechanisms for advocacy groups.</li> <li>2. Identify sustainable, development-oriented pathways to engage smaller, historically marginalized organizations operating beyond state reach, ensuring efforts prioritize harm reduction and do not compromise their autonomy or safety.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>UNDP Nexus Academy</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide training for advocacy groups on accessing resources, including support for submitting formal proposals and filing official reports to strengthen legitimacy within the HDP Nexus context.</li> <li>2. Develop networking and peer-connection opportunities through the UNDP Nexus Academy to strengthen collaboration and information-sharing among organizations in Colombia.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Local NGOs</b>          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest in peer mentoring initiatives to strengthen knowledge-sharing and capacity among local NGOs in Colombia.</li> <li>2. Leverage local NGO networks to improve access to grants, build capacity in monitoring and evaluation, and support skill-sharing in grant applications, program coordination, and the use of AI.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Local NGO Networks</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create platforms or communication channels to connect with NGOs and facilitate coordination within local networks in Colombia.</li> <li>2. Map smaller NGOs and their geographic distribution, and conduct targeted outreach to strengthen engagement and inclusion within local NGO networks.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

| <b>Afghanistan</b>                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>De Facto Authorities</b>                                 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarify and Formalize NGO Registration and MoU Procedures: Establish written procedures with predictable timelines and a single point of contact through the Ministry of Economy, reducing reliance on informal, province-by-province negotiation that exposes organizations to arbitrary closure.</li> <li>2. Open Technical Dialogue with ACBAR and the Localization Technical Working Group on Principled Access: Treat female staff participation, community health worker networks, and community-based education as continuity-critical service delivery that cannot be restricted without creating protection gaps the de facto authorities cannot themselves fill.</li> </ol>                                                          |
| <b>UNDP Nexus Academy</b>                                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver Training in Dari and Pashto, Co-Designed with ACBAR and National NGOs: Adapt content to a humanitarian-only funding architecture rather than assuming a functioning development or peace pillar; include dedicated modules on operating under sanctions, compliance, and counter-terrorism regimes.</li> <li>2. Establish a Women-Only Learning Track: Deliver remotely with flexible scheduling, in partnership with the Afghan Women's Network and exiled women-led organizations, to reach female staff and women-led NGOs that cannot participate in mixed or in-person settings.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Local NGOs</b>                                           | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Document Nexus Practice Already Happening: Codify community health worker networks, WASH-and-livelihoods programming, and community-based education as Nexus evidence for direct donor engagement rather than leaving it buried in project reports.</li> <li>2. Invest in Shared Compliance and M&amp;E Systems: Strengthen smaller NNGOs so they are not excluded from direct funding through capacity-assessment gatekeeping; retain female staff through flexible arrangements and peer support to slow the erosion of the sector's long-term capacity.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Local NGO Networks (ACBAR, LTWG, women-led networks)</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Produce a Recurring Evidence Base on Localization: Build on the LTWG Baseline Assessment to track Afghan NGO funding access, decision-making influence, and partnership quality on a rolling basis, converting the documented pattern of responsibility without authority into a negotiable baseline for donor engagement.</li> <li>2. <i>Coordinate a Collective Position on Pooled Funds and Direct Funding:</i> Negotiate a binding localization floor rather than leaving individual organizations to engage donors bilaterally; maintain a discreet coordination space for women-led organizations, including those operating from exile, so that peace and gender work can continue as part of the sector's collective memory</li> </ol> |

| <b>Myanmar</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>National Government</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Allow flexible implementation arrangements for locally led projects: where administrative approval is required, introduce simplified or informal coordination channels that reduce delays for humanitarian and development activities delivered through local partners operating in sensitive or hard-to-access areas.</li> <li>2. Maintain technical engagement on basic service delivery and resilience programming: prioritize cooperation in sectors such as livelihoods, disaster preparedness, and community resilience that can remain politically neutral while supporting continuity of HDP Nexus activities.</li> </ol> |
| <b>UNDP Nexus Academy</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide practical training on operating under restricted civic space: support local organizations in managing compliance risks, adapting project design to changing regulatory conditions, and documenting program outcomes in environments with limited formal recognition.</li> <li>2. Facilitate peer exchange among organizations working in fragile governance contexts: enable structured learning between actors in Myanmar and those in similarly constrained environments to share strategies on maintaining partnerships, safeguarding staff, and accessing flexible funding modalities.</li> </ol>                     |
| <b>Local NGOs</b>          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen operational resilience through diversified partnerships: collaborate with community-based organizations and informal networks that maintain local access, particularly in areas where international actors face operational constraints.</li> <li>2. Improve basic monitoring and documentation practices: develop low-cost tools for tracking project implementation challenges, access constraints, and beneficiary needs to support adaptive programming within HDP Nexus frameworks.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Local NGO Networks</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support discreet coordination mechanisms among local actors: maintain low-profile communication channels that allow organizations to share information on access limitations, implementation risks, and funding opportunities without increasing political exposure.</li> <li>2. Map local implementation capacities beyond major urban centers: identify smaller organizations with strong community presence to broaden participation in Nexus programming and reduce concentration of funding among a limited number of actors.</li> </ol>                                                                                     |

| Syria                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>National Government</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish inclusive coordination mechanisms across regions: Develop a unified, cross-regional coordination platform that connects actors operating across northwest, northeast, and formerly government-controlled areas. This should include local CSOs, municipal actors, and international agencies, and aim to reduce fragmentation by aligning priorities and sharing data.</li> <li>2. Stronger governance on international funding: Establish clear and transparent frameworks for managing international funding flows, including standardized procedures for allocation, oversight, and accountability. Improve coordination with donors and implementing partners to ensure funding aligns with national and local priorities, reduces duplication, and supports longer-term HDP programming.</li> </ol> |
| <b>UNDP Nexus Academy</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contextualize HDP Training to Syrian practice: Deliver training that reflects how Nexus approaches are already implemented in Syria through early recovery, livelihoods, and social cohesion programming, rather than relying on abstract HDP terminology.</li> <li>2. Facilitate cross-regional peer learning platforms: Create structured learning spaces for widespread introduction and further connecting organizations across different regions of Syria to exchange strategies on operating under fragmented governance, navigating donor constraints, and embedding peacebuilding within programming.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Local NGOs</b>          | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen integration of livelihoods within Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion Programming: Expand the economic dimension of programs by systematically linking community-building and social cohesion activities with livelihoods and income-generating opportunities. Prioritize approaches that address economic insecurity as a foundation for sustained peace and community resilience.</li> <li>2. Document and formalize Nexus practices already in use: Capture and systematize existing integrated approaches of effective Nexus implementation. Use this documentation to strengthen advocacy toward donors for more flexible and long-term funding.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Local NGO Networks</b>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthen collective advocacy on funding and localization: Develop a coordinated position on direct funding access, multi-year financing, and reduced reliance on intermediaries. Use collective evidence from members to advocate for funding models that better support integrated HDP approaches and long-term programming.</li> <li>2. Expand coordination beyond information-sharing to joint programming: Move from primarily coordination and networking roles toward facilitating joint program design across organizations. This can help overcome fragmentation and improve complementarity across actors.</li> </ol>                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## 7.1 Recommendations for NEAR/Local Networks

- **For NEAR/Local Networks:** Partner with UNDP Nexus Academy to co-design training modules. Commission research documenting local Nexus comparative advantages. Lead collective advocacy for funding harmonization, multi-year grants, and adequate overhead. Develop an online forum for members of localized NGOs to share lessons learned, best practices, and templates for grants and performance reporting.

## 7.2 Recommendations for UNDP Nexus Academy

- **Address the three-tiered capacity framework identified in findings.** For technical needs (donor compliance, integrated M&E, financial management), co-design training modules with NEAR incorporating locally-grounded frameworks (social cohesion, territorial peace, community resilience) and offer accessible multilingual formats.
- **For strategic needs (organizational development, coordination skills, evidence generation),** create sustained peer learning communities connecting training alumni with experienced local practitioners, develop case study methodology training enabling local organizations to document their own practice, and facilitate regional South-South exchange networks.
- **For systemic barriers (funding access, coordination exclusion, civic space restrictions),** develop a localization strategy with M&E indicators tracking not just training participation but whether graduates gain coordination leadership roles and direct funding access, use UNDP's institutional convening power to advocate for local co-chair arrangements within UN coordination systems, and explicitly address power dynamics in training content acknowledging that technical skills alone cannot overcome structural inequities.

## 7.3 Frontline: A Global Commons for Local Crisis Leadership

Across the five country contexts, local organizations carry the sector's operational weight yet remain locked out of the knowledge infrastructure that shapes it. What they learn stays trapped inside individual organizations, buried in closed project reports, and rarely reaches the coordination spaces or donor tables where strategic decisions are made. Each new crisis or partnership cycle forces local actors to re-negotiate compliance, reporting templates, and risk-sharing terms that others have already worked out. This is not a capacity problem. It is an infrastructure problem, and the infrastructure currently serving the sector was built for and by international actors.

This report therefore proposes the establishment of **Frontline: The Commons for Local Crisis Leadership**, a global, member-governed platform for local and national NGOs working across humanitarian, development, and peace mandates. Frontline is grounded in the principle that localization has meant responsibility without authority, and that the next generation of Nexus

tooling should shift knowledge, templates, and convening power into local hands rather than deliver them as top-down capacity building. It is designed for implementation in partnership with NEAR as its Global South anchor or as a direct initiative of the Nexus Academy under its Learning, Community, and Action pillars. Its ten sections span Peer Exchange, a Knowledge Commons surfacing locally-authored evidence first, an Advisory Bench, Templates and Tools, co-designed Learning Pathways, Regional Training Hubs, a Funding layer tracing the journey of a humanitarian dollar, a Donor–Member Dialogue that puts draft program concepts before country circles on the record, and member-elected Governance with a data-sovereignty protocol. The platform would launch multilingual, tiered for high-risk contexts, and integrated with existing infrastructure rather than competing with it.

Frontline is the operational translation of this report's core argument. It does not dismantle structural constraints, but it offers local organizations the collective infrastructure to engage them from a stronger position and provides the Nexus Academy a concrete instrument through which to advance its mandate.

#### **8.4 Loose Questions for Further Research**

1. How should Nexus “success” implementation be defined and measured from local community and organizational perspectives versus international donor frameworks? What indicators meaningfully capture locally-led Nexus outcomes?
2. What sustained outcomes (5-10 years) result from locally-led Nexus approaches compared to internationally-implemented programs? How do community ownership, sustainability, and resilience differ?
3. What would a UNDP Nexus Academy localization strategy look like?
4. Do current Nexus training approaches change organizational practice for local actors, or do they primarily provide language to articulate existing work? What learning modalities (formal training, peer exchange, mentoring, South-South collaboration) produce measurable improvements in local Nexus implementation?

## 8. CONCLUSION

This report set out to examine how local and national organizations understand, operationalize, and experience the HDP Nexus across diverse crisis contexts, and what conditions are required for them to lead Nexus approaches at scale. Across Türkiye, Colombia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Syria, a clear and consistent finding emerges: local actors are already seeing the importance or even practicing the Nexus often more effectively than formal systems but are systematically constrained from leading it. Rather than conceptual or capacity gaps, the primary barriers are structural. Local organizations demonstrate strong contextual knowledge, community trust, and adaptive capacity, enabling them to respond holistically to overlapping humanitarian, development, and peace needs. In practice, they integrate sectors organically because communities experience crises as interconnected realities, not as siloed domains. However, this bottom-up integration remains largely informal and unsupported by the broader aid architecture.

Three systemic constraints recur across all contexts. First, funding structures remain misaligned with Nexus principles, characterized by short-term cycles, heavy earmarking, and reliance on international intermediaries, limiting both flexibility and long-term impact. Second, coordination systems continue to exclude local actors from decision-making, positioning them as implementers rather than strategic leaders despite their central role in delivery. Third, governance and regulatory environments restrict civic space, further constraining autonomy, advocacy, and the ability to scale integrated approaches. At the same time, the findings highlight a critical opportunity. As global crises intensify and international funding declines, the sustainability of the current aid system is increasingly in question. Local organizations are not only essential to maintaining service delivery, but also uniquely positioned to drive more effective, efficient, and contextually grounded Nexus approaches. The shift toward localization is therefore not simply normative, it is operationally necessary.

Realizing this shift requires moving beyond rhetoric toward structural transformation. This includes rethinking funding models to enable multi-year, flexible support; redistributing decision-making power within coordination systems; and strengthening enabling environments for civil society. It also requires reframing local actors not as beneficiaries of capacity-building, but as leaders of integrated responses whose existing practices should shape the future of the Nexus. Ultimately, the HDP Nexus will not be realized through frameworks alone, but through who leads, how systems are structured, and whose knowledge is prioritized. This research demonstrates that local organizations already embody the principles of the Nexus in practice. The challenge and opportunity lies in aligning the global aid architecture to support, rather than constrain, that leadership.

## 10. ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining literature review, semi-structured interviews, and stakeholder analysis to generate both breadth of understanding and depth of insight into local organizations' experiences with HDP Nexus approaches.

The research was explicitly participatory, centering local voices and experiences as primary sources of knowledge rather than secondary data points illustrating externally derived frameworks. This methodological choice reflects both ethical commitments to equitable knowledge production and pragmatic recognition that local actors possess expertise that international researchers lack. As UNDP's own Nexus guidance acknowledges, "Local actors are not beneficiaries of Nexus approaches; they are leaders of Nexus approaches who require enabling conditions."<sup>46</sup>

#### Research Timeline: October 2025 – May 2026

##### Research Phases:

1. **Desk Research and Literature Review** (October-March 2025): Comprehensive review of academic and gray literature, policy documents, and practitioner resources
2. **Stakeholder Mapping** (January 2026-February 2026): Identification and documentation of key actors across five countries
3. **Field Research** (January 2026, March 2026): In-person interviews and observation in Türkiye and Colombia.
4. **Remote Interviews** (January-April 2026): Virtual interviews with stakeholders across all five countries
5. **Analysis and Synthesis** (March-April 2026): Thematic analysis, comparative analysis, and triangulation
6. **Report Development** (April-May 2026): Drafting, review, and finalization

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<sup>46</sup> UNDP, *HDP Nexus Reflections: Lessons from Country Experiences* (2025), [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/hdp\\_nexus-en.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/hdp_nexus-en.pdf).

## 2.2 Data Collection

### Literature Review

#### *Scope and Sources:*

The literature review covered academic journals, gray literature from multilateral institutions and international NGOs, policy documents from donors and governments, and critically, Southern knowledge products including documentation from local organizations, regional networks, and Global South researchers.

**Geographic Focus:** While the review examined global Nexus literature to establish conceptual foundations, country-specific literature focused on the five case study countries. For each country, the review analyzed:

- Crisis context and aid architecture (humanitarian actors, development programs, peace processes)
- HDP Nexus discourse and practice (how Nexus is framed, what integration occurs)
- Local organizational landscape (types of organizations, capacities, constraints)
- Localization dynamics (funding flows, partnership models, coordination mechanisms)

#### *Key Literature Gaps Identified:*

The review revealed systematic gaps in existing knowledge:

- Limited documentation of local Nexus practice: Most Nexus case studies center international programming, mentioning local partners only as implementers
- Absence of Southern voices: Nexus frameworks and guidance overwhelmingly reflect northern institutional perspectives
- Insufficient attention to power dynamics: Literature discusses "partnership challenges" without interrogating fundamental power imbalances
- Lack of context-specific analysis: Generic Nexus guidance fails to account for how governance arrangements, civic space restrictions, and conflict dynamics affect implementation

## **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews served as the primary qualitative data source, providing depth and nuance that literature could not capture. The research team conducted approximately 20 interviews across five countries with diverse stakeholder types. Interview distribution aimed for balance between local actors (primary focus), international actors (comparative perspective), and other stakeholders (contextual insight).

Due to time, political, or local capacity constraints in-person and virtual interviews were conducted only in Colombia, Turkey and Syria, while Myanmar had email interviews, and Afghanistan relied on desk research.

### ***Module Structure:***

1. Understanding of HDP Nexus (terminology, conceptualization, framing)
2. Current Programming (sectors, integration types, examples)
3. Coordination and Partnerships (mechanisms, participation, power dynamics)
4. Capacity (strengths, gaps, support needs)
5. Funding (sources, restrictions, adequacy)
6. Localization (direct funding, decision-making, recognition)
7. Policy Environment (government positioning, civic space, regulations)
8. Recommendations (priorities for NEAR, Nexus Academy, others)

### ***Stakeholder Analysis***

For each country, the research team conducted systematic stakeholder mapping and analysis identifying key actors, their roles, capacities, and HDP Nexus engagement.

Stakeholder Tracker Components:

- Organization profile: Type, scope, sectors
- HDP Nexus engagement: Explicit vs. implicit, which pillars
- Key programs: Integration examples
- Partnerships: Local-local, local-international linkages
- Coordination roles: Participation, leadership
- Relevance: Significance for local Nexus leadership

Stakeholder analysis drew on organizational websites, program documents, coordination meeting records, and interview data. For each country, detailed write-ups synthesized patterns across organizations, revealing how sector dynamics shape individual organizations' positioning and opportunities.

## 2.3 Analysis

### *Thematic Analysis*

Interview transcripts and field notes underwent thematic coding identifying patterns, tensions, and insights across data sources. The analytical approach was both deductive (applying categories from literature and conceptual frameworks) and inductive (identifying themes emerging from data itself).

### *Primary Analytical Dimensions:*

- Understanding: How actors conceptualize integration (terminology, frameworks, drivers)
- Practice: How Nexus manifests operationally (sectors, integration types, approaches)
- Strengths: Comparative advantages local actors bring to Nexus work
- Challenges: Barriers across coordination, coherence, complementarity, funding
- Support Needs: Capacity priorities, resource requirements, enabling conditions

Analysis remained attentive to power dynamics: whose voices dominated coordination spaces, who controlled resources, whose knowledge was valued. Rather than treating "challenges" as neutral technical problems, analysis interrogated how systemic inequities create barriers for local actors.

## 2.4 Limitations

This research faced several limitations affecting scope, depth, and generalizability:

### *Access Constraints*

**Security and Political Restrictions:** In Myanmar, Afghanistan, and parts of Syria, insecurity and government controls limited access to certain geographic areas and stakeholder types. Government officials were difficult or impossible to interview safely in some contexts.

**Remote Engagement:** With the exception of Türkiye and Colombia field visit, all interviews were conducted remotely. While efficient, remote methods preclude observation of day-to-day operations and informal interactions that reveal organizational realities beyond what's reported in formal interviews.

**Partner Dependence:** Access to local organizations relied partially on NEAR membership and existing relationships, potentially creating selection bias toward groups that have capacity for NEAR membership.

### *Time and Resource Constraints*

**Limited Interview Sample:** With approximately 20 interviews across five countries, the sample provides insights but cannot claim comprehensive representation of diverse actors within each context. Smaller organizations, community-based groups, and diaspora networks may be under-represented. Many of the interview subjects were members of NEAR.

**Compressed Timeline:** Seven-month research period (October 2025–May 2026) limited depth of engagement possible. Longitudinal research tracking organizations over time would yield richer insights into capacity development trajectories and programming evolution.

**Language Coverage:** Some interviews required interpretation and nuance may have been lost. Additional languages (Burmese, Arabic) would have enabled broader engagement.

### *Mitigation Strategies*

The research employed several strategies to mitigate limitations:

- **Triangulation:** Cross-checking interview data with literature and stakeholder analysis
- **Transparency:** Open acknowledgment of limitations rather than overclaiming certainty
- **Contextual Framing:** Presenting findings as context-specific insights rather than universal prescriptions

## **ANNEX 2: COUNTRY FINDINGS**

### **TÜRKİYE**

#### **1. Understanding of the HDP Nexus**

In Türkiye, the term “HDP Nexus” is rarely used by local actors, instead, “social cohesion” has emerged as the dominant operational language through which Turkish and refugee-led civil society organizations integrate humanitarian, development, and peace objectives.<sup>47</sup>

This understanding is deeply practical rather than formal. Local organizations describe social cohesion programming as naturally addressing immediate protection needs (humanitarian), supporting economic integration and skills development (development), and reducing inter-community tensions through dialogue and joint activities (peace). As one interview participant explained, “We don’t call it the Nexus...For locals, [the Nexus concept] is very core to localization, because that is who we are anyways.”<sup>48</sup> Organizations like Support to Life, ASAM, and Maya Foundation practice this integration daily without adopting international technical

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<sup>47</sup> UNHCR and İnsani Gelişme Vakfı, “Social Cohesion in Türkiye: Programming Model and Guide” (UNHCR, 2022), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94759>.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Turkish CSO representative, Istanbul, January 2026.

terminology. The February 2023 earthquakes intensified this implicit Nexus practice. Organizations integrated disaster response with ongoing refugee support, ensuring both populations received assistance while promoting social cohesion through joint recovery activities.<sup>49</sup> This demonstrates how context – in this case, overlapping crises of protracted displacement and acute disaster – shapes understanding toward practical integration driven by community realities rather than donor frameworks.

Government positioning reflects a similar pattern. The 2019 Gaziantep Declaration explicitly calls for transitioning “from emergency to resilience,” emphasizing local governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration, core Nexus principles without using the codified specific language.<sup>50</sup> This suggests that Nexus thinking exists in Turkish policy discourse but is framed through concepts like resilience, integration, and social cohesion that resonate more deeply in the national context.

## **2. Current Practice: What Nexus Looks Like**

Nexus approaches in Türkiye manifest primarily through humanitarian-development (H-D) integration, with peace dimensions embedded through social cohesion work. Social cohesion programming dominates across nearly all major organizations, creating a practical framework for triple Nexus implementation even when not explicitly named as such.

Support to Life (STL) exemplifies this integration by combining emergency cash assistance with vocational training and employment support while facilitating workplace interactions between Syrian and Turkish workers – simultaneously addressing immediate economic needs, building long-term self-reliance, and reducing social tensions. ASAM operates over 60 community centers nationwide providing protection services, language training, psychosocial counseling, and social cohesion activities in single integrated spaces. Maya Foundation demonstrates H-D-P integration through trauma-informed mental health programming that addresses immediate psychological needs while building community resilience and social support systems.<sup>51</sup>

Refugee-led organizations show similar patterns. Jasmine Syria Organization integrates women's protection, economic empowerment, and community dialogue. Basmeh & Zeitooneh combines youth education with skills development and peacebuilding activities. These approaches emerge organically from community needs rather than donor requirements. These local organizations naturally integrate pillars because communities experience humanitarian, development, and peace

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<sup>49</sup> IFRC and UNHCR, “Social Cohesion between Refugee Communities and Their Hosts,” assessment report (2022), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/93929>.

<sup>50</sup> UNDP Turkey, “Gaziantep Declaration: Transition from Emergency to Resilience,” press release (2019), <https://www.undp.org/turkiye/press-releases/gaziantep-declaration-calls-transition-emergency-resilience-approach-migration-and-displacement-responses>.

<sup>51</sup> Support to Life, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.supporttolife.org>; SGDD-ASAM, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://sgdd.org.tr>; Maya Foundation, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://mayavakfi.org/en/>.

needs simultaneously.<sup>52</sup> The post-earthquake context created a natural experiment in Nexus integration. Organizations like ASAM and Hayata Destek seamlessly integrated earthquake disaster response with ongoing refugee programming, ensuring both Turkish and Syrian populations received assistance while using joint recovery activities to strengthen social cohesion. This demonstrates local organizations' adaptive capacity to operationalize integrated responses when crisis demands it.<sup>53</sup>

Sectoral patterns reveal livelihoods, protection, and social cohesion as the dominant Nexus entry points. Health and psychosocial support (Maya Foundation), education (Hope Revival, Basmeh & Zeitooneh), and municipal service delivery (through Gaziantep Municipality partnerships) provide additional integration pathways. Notably absent are explicit “peacebuilding” programs – the peace dimension manifests indirectly through social cohesion rather than formal conflict resolution.<sup>54</sup>

### **3. Strengths and Comparative Advantages**

Local Turkish and refugee-led organizations demonstrate substantial comparative advantages for Nexus implementation. Deep community trust, legitimacy, and access to provide direct service emerge as their primary strength. Organizations like ASAM, STL, and refugee-led groups maintain long-standing relationships with both refugee and host communities, enabling access to populations that international actors struggle to reach and facilitating interventions that require sensitive, context-dependent community navigation.

Contextual knowledge and cultural competency allow local actors to design programming responsive to actual community dynamics rather than external assumptions. Refugee-led organizations bring particular assets, Syrian organizations understand displacement experiences, speak the language, and navigate cultural norms in ways international actors cannot replicate. Interview participants emphasized that “For locals, [broad mandates] is very core to localization, because that is who we are anyways ”<sup>55</sup>

Flexibility and adaptive capacity distinguish local actors from larger international organizations. The earthquake response demonstrated this clearly – local organizations rapidly adjusted programming, reallocated resources, and integrated new needs without requiring extensive bureaucratic approvals. Where international actors needed weeks to pivot, local organizations responded within days. Especially in the context of the Earthquake, it took OCHA weeks to get approval to enter and engage in Türkiye due to the strict government policies on intervention.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Jasmine Syria Organization, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://jasmine.ngo>; Basmeh & Zeitooneh, accessed March 4, 2026, <https://www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org>.

<sup>53</sup> IFRC and UNHCR, “Social Cohesion between Refugee Communities and Their Hosts.”

<sup>54</sup> Stakeholder analysis, January-March 2026.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with refugee-led organization, Istanbul, January 2026.

<sup>56</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Istanbul, January 2026.

Cost-effectiveness provides another advantage, though this is rarely quantified in available data. Local organizations operate with lower overhead structures, pay local salary scales, and leverage community volunteers, enabling them to deliver more services per dollar invested than international alternatives.<sup>57</sup>

Long-term presence and commitment matter profoundly for Nexus approaches requiring sustained engagement. Unlike international actors who may withdraw when funding shifts or political winds change, local organizations remain embedded in communities. As one participant noted, local organizations are there “pre and post crisis...it is a continuum”<sup>58</sup> While local organizations are still ongoing post-crisis, participants noted that funding “post-crisis” lessened dramatically, and that this impacted recovering and more development oriented programs.<sup>59</sup>

Compared to international actors, local organizations excel at community mobilization, navigating local political dynamics, and maintaining programming continuity through transitions. However, they face disadvantages in accessing funding, meeting complex compliance requirements, and participating in high-level policy forums, often due to lack of capacity and structural barriers in the aid architecture.

## **4. Key Challenges and Gaps**

### **4.1 Coordination**

Local CSOs participate in coordination mechanisms – clusters, working groups, sector platforms – but rarely in leadership roles. International actors chair these spaces and control agenda-setting, resource allocation, and strategic planning. Local organizations report attending meetings “to receive information, not to make decisions.”<sup>60</sup> This exclusion extends beyond formal meetings; strategic planning and resource allocation decisions occur in international-only spaces, with local input sought only after key decisions are made.

Coordination systems remain siloed between humanitarian and development streams despite both targeting the same populations in the same locations. Separate cluster systems, working groups, and donor reporting requirements create artificial divisions that contradict the integrated programming local organizations practice on the ground. Language barriers compound these challenges – most coordination happens in English, while many Turkish and refugee-led organizations operate primarily in Turkish or Arabic.

### **4.2 Coherence**

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<sup>57</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant, *Localisation in Practice: Three Examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's Collective Localisation Efforts* (December 2021), 15; stakeholder interviews, Türkiye, January-March 2026.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Turkish CSO representative, Istanbul, January 2026.

<sup>59</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Istanbul, January 2026.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Turkish CSO, Istanbul, January 2026.

Short-term humanitarian funding cycles (typically 12 months) contradict the multi-year commitments required for resilience programming and social cohesion work. Organizations receive one-year grants for activities requiring three to five years to show impact, forcing them into artificial project thinking despite long-term community needs.<sup>61</sup>

Separate humanitarian and development funding streams reinforce programmatic silos despite policy rhetoric about integration. ECHO (humanitarian) and FRiT (development) funding come with different eligibility criteria, timeframes, reporting requirements, and strategic frameworks. An organization might receive humanitarian funding for refugee assistance and development funding for host community support – yet these streams prohibit integrated programming serving both populations jointly, exactly what social cohesion requires.<sup>62</sup>

Organizations struggle to work across sectors within their own structures due to donor restrictions. Humanitarian funding rarely covers development activities like skills training, while development funding prohibits emergency response – yet communities need both simultaneously. This forces organizations to maintain artificial internal divisions contradicting their operational reality.

### 4.3 Complementarity

Partnership models reveal fundamental power imbalances. Most local organizations function as **implementing partners or sub-contractors** rather than strategic co-designers. Even capable national organizations like STL and ASAM primarily execute programs designed by international actors, with limited influence over strategic priorities or resource allocation.<sup>63</sup>

**Multi-tiered implementation** concentrates decision-making with intermediaries. Funding flows: bilateral donor to UN/EU to large national NGO to smaller local organization.<sup>64</sup> Each layer takes overhead and imposes requirements, reducing resources reaching communities while distancing decision-making from implementation. STL exemplifies this, while itself an implementing partner for Government agencies, it functions as grantmaking intermediary channeling resources to smaller organizations, creating a funding chain where strategic control remains upstream.<sup>65</sup>

**Refugee-led organizations face particular marginalization.** Despite bringing critical assets – community trust, cultural-linguistic competencies, deep understanding of refugee capacities –

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<sup>61</sup> *Three Examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's Collective Localisation Efforts* (December 2021), 7-8; OECD, *The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus: Interim Progress Review* (Paris: OECD, 2022), [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review\\_2f620ca5-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/the-humanitarian-development-peace-nexus-interim-progress-review_2f620ca5-en.html).

<sup>62</sup> European Commission, “ECHO Turkey HIP 2023” (Brussels: European Commission, 2023), [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo\\_tur\\_bud\\_2023\\_91000\\_v2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/hip2023/echo_tur_bud_2023_91000_v2.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Türkiye, January–March 2026; Koenraad Van Brabant, *Localisation in Practice: Three Examples of the Dutch Relief Alliance's Collective Localisation Efforts* (December 2021), 6-7.

<sup>64</sup> Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., ‘As local as possible, as international as necessary’: *Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action* (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI, 2022), 15-18

<sup>65</sup> Support to Life, <https://www.supporttolife.org>.

organizations like Hope Revival, Jasmine Syria, Basmeh & Zeitooneh, and Olive Branch struggle to access funding and formal coordination. They are positioned as “community engagement” or “outreach” partners for specific activities rather than strategic program designers. International actors extract their community access while maintaining decision-making control.<sup>66</sup>

Competition rather than complementarity characterizes relationships among organizations. With limited funding and unclear delineation of roles, organizations compete for the same resources rather than coordinating based on comparative advantage. International actors maintain parallel implementation systems rather than supporting local capacity, justified by risk aversion and compliance requirements.

#### **4.4 Funding**

Funding architecture remains fundamentally misaligned with localization commitments. Despite rhetoric, resources and decision-making concentrate with international actors. Local CSOs receive minimal direct funding. The overwhelming majority of funding flows through international intermediaries (UNHCR, IOM, UNDP, INGOs) rather than directly to local organizations.

Short-term cycles contradict resilience and Nexus needs. Typical grants last 12 months despite programming requiring multi-year commitments. Organizations cannot plan strategically, retain staff long-term, or invest in institutional development when operating on annual renewal cycles. This forces reactive rather than proactive programming and prevents the sustained engagement Nexus approaches require.

Inadequate overhead coverage often prevents organizational development. When overhead doesn't cover actual costs, organizations cannot invest in financial systems, compliance capacity, strategic planning, or staff development – precisely the institutional strengthening needed for Nexus leadership. This creates a vicious cycle: inadequate overhead prevents capacity development, then organizations are judged lacking capacity to receive direct funding.

Separate humanitarian and development streams reinforce silos despite integrated programming needs. Even when an organization receives both types of funding, restrictions prevent truly integrated implementation. Humanitarian funds cannot support development activities; development funds cannot address emergency needs. Yet social cohesion programming requires both, emergency support for crisis-affected populations alongside long-term integration and community dialogue.

Recent international aid reductions have intensified these challenges. While exact figures vary by donor, overall humanitarian funding to Türkiye has declined since 2021 peaks, even as needs

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<sup>66</sup> Stakeholder interviews with refugee-led organizations, Türkiye, January 2026. UNHCR and İnsani Gelişme Vakfı, “Social Cohesion in Türkiye: Programming Model and Guide” (UNHCR, 2022), <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/94759>

remain high. This creates increased competition among organizations for shrinking resources, pushing international actors to tighten rather than loosen control over funding flows.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4.5 Additional Constraints

Government regulatory restrictions significantly constrain CSO autonomy. Requirements for government approval of foreign funding create delays and uncertainty. Complex compliance demands disproportionately burden smaller organizations. Restrictions on advocacy limit CSO ability to address systemic barriers. Shrinking civic space creates a risk-averse environment where organizations carefully navigate what programming, partnerships, and language they can safely employ.<sup>68</sup>

Capacity gaps exist but are perpetuated by structural constraints rather than inherent incapacity. Organizations face challenges with complex donor compliance (especially EU), proposal writing for integrated programming, M&E frameworks measuring Nexus outcomes, and organizational development, yet these gaps result from inadequate overhead funding and short-term partnerships that prevent institutional investment, not lack of organizational capability.

### COLOMBIA

#### 1. Understanding

Across interviews and supporting materials, there is a clear distinction between conceptual understanding of the Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus and its use as an operational framework. While nearly all local Colombian actors who were interviewed demonstrate familiarity with the integrated logic underlying the Nexus, its terminology is applied unevenly across organizational types. Literature generally indicates that international organizations, particularly those embedded in formal coordination and funding structures, are more likely to explicitly employ HDP language, where it functions as a structuring device for program design, reporting, and evaluation.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, local and nationally embedded actors generally do not employ the term, despite working across substantively similar domains.<sup>70</sup> They instead frame their activities through human rights, governance, and civil society lenses, a divergence which reflects key differences between institutional positioning and operational context.<sup>71</sup> Local actors, especially those working in areas with limited state presence, operate under significant

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<sup>67</sup> *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023* (Bristol: Development Initiatives, 2023).

<sup>68</sup> Nefise E. Gokalp-Aras, "Temporality and Stratification of Refugee Governance in Turkey," *Central & Eastern European Migration Review* 14, no. 2 (2025), <https://ceemr.uw.edu.pl/vol-14-no-2-2025/special-section-three/temporality-and-stratification-refugee-governance-turkey>.

<sup>69</sup> European Commission (DG ECHO). "Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP): Latin America and the Caribbean." Year 2026, Version 1. Brussels: DG ECHO, 2025.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Instituto Internacional de Responsabilidad Social y Derechos Humanos representative, Colombia, March 2026.

resource, security, and infrastructural constraints, leading them to adopt adaptive, practice-based approaches rather than formalized frameworks.<sup>7273</sup> Even more formalized local organizations tend to selectively adapt HDP-related concepts to align with locally grounded understandings, producing hybridized approaches.<sup>74</sup> International organizations, in contrast, rely on standardized frameworks to coordinate programming and allocate resources across contexts, positioning the HDP Nexus primarily as an administrative and strategic tool. As a result, while the HDP Nexus is widely understood in principle, it is not the dominant framework through which local actors organize their work, with its practical relevance shaped by institutional role, degree of local embeddedness, and operational constraints.

## 2. Practice

In practice, Nexus implementation is largely informal and driven by operational necessity rather than deliberate design. The most common form of integration is Humanitarian–Development (H–D), as actors simultaneously respond to immediate needs, such as displacement, protection, and basic services, while supporting longer-term livelihoods and community stabilization<sup>7576</sup>. Development–Peace (D–P) linkages are present but less consistent, typically emerging in areas related to reintegration, local governance, and community-level peacebuilding<sup>77</sup>. Fully integrated Humanitarian–Development–Peace (H–D–P) approaches remain rare, as activities are not structured within a unified Nexus framework but instead overlap pragmatically due to on-the-ground constraints.<sup>78</sup> Sectorally, protection and human rights function as the primary anchor, particularly through legal accompaniment, psychosocial support, and victim-centered interventions<sup>7980</sup>. Governance is present at a localized level, focused on justice access, civil society engagement, and transitional processes, rather than formal state-building. Livelihoods are central but often shaped by reliance on illicit economies, including coca cultivation and illegal mining, which structure survival strategies in areas with limited state presence<sup>81</sup>. Armed actors play a

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<sup>72</sup> Neira, Diego & Cala Vitery, Favio & Aguja, Fernando. (2025). Rural Education in Colombia: Adapting Quality Policies to Local Realities. *Societies*. 15. 159. 10.3390/soc15060159.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>75</sup> Nilsson, Manuela. "Building Peace Amidst Violence: An Analysis of Colombia's Policies to Address Security and Development Challenges." *Iberoamericana – Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 47, no. 1 (2018): 34–44. <https://doi.org/10.16993/iberoamericana.411>.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Instituto Internacional de Responsabilidad Social y Derechos Humanos representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Universidad de los Andes representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>79</sup> Nilsson, Manuela, and Laura K. Taylor. "Applying the Security-Development Nexus on the Ground: Land Restitution in Colombia." *Conflict, Security & Development* 17, no. 1 (2017): 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2016.1231844>.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Instituto Internacional de Responsabilidad Social y Derechos Humanos representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>81</sup> Alther, Gretchen. "Colombian Peace Communities: The Role of NGOs in Supporting Resistance to Violence and Oppression." *Development in Practice* 16, no. 3-4 (2006): 278–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614520600694828>.

critical role in shaping territorial dynamics, access to resources, and patterns of insecurity, while gender and social inclusion operate as cross-cutting priorities embedded within both protection and governance efforts.

### 3. Strengths

Local organizations in Colombia demonstrate clear comparative advantages in access, trust-building, and sustained engagement in hard-to-reach or low-legitimacy environments. They consistently operate in areas where the state has limited presence—such as remote regions, conflict-affected territories, and communities influenced by armed groups—and are able to engage populations that are often inaccessible to external actors<sup>82,83</sup>. This extends beyond physical access to include social and relational access, enabling them to work effectively with communities that may distrust government institutions or international organizations. In practice, local actors are also highly effective at contextual interpretation and adaptive implementation, tailoring interventions to shifting local dynamics, informal economies, and evolving security conditions<sup>84</sup>. Their work frequently cuts across sectors, protection, livelihoods, and governance, allowing for more integrated and responsive approaches to complex needs<sup>85</sup>.

These strengths are rooted in structural and contextual factors. Local organizations benefit from long-term presence and embeddedness, which fosters trust and provides granular knowledge of community dynamics, informal power structures, and the behavior of armed actors. This enables more precise targeting and responsiveness in programming<sup>86</sup>. Their operational flexibility allows them to adapt quickly to funding gaps, security shifts, and emerging needs, often prioritizing practical solutions over adherence to rigid frameworks<sup>87</sup>. In contrast, international actors bring financial resources, technical expertise, and coordination capacity, but tend to operate within more bureaucratic and standardized systems that can limit responsiveness and local legitimacy<sup>88</sup>. As a result, while international organizations play a central role in funding and strategic design, they often depend on local actors for effective implementation, even as power asymmetries and top-down funding structures constrain local autonomy and long-term sustainability.

### 4. Challenges

**Coordination.** Local actors are present within coordination systems but remain peripheral to decision-making. Engagement is typically limited to implementation roles, with international

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>83</sup> InterAction (2024) Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response, Case Study: Colombia.

<sup>84</sup> International Crisis Group, Protecting Colombia's Most Vulnerable on the Road to "Total Peace", Report No. 98 (Bogotá/Brussels/Washington, February 24, 2023).

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>87</sup> Helen Guyatt, "Unpacking the Value of Locally Led Humanitarian Action," Humanitarian Practice Network, August 15, 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with The Open Society Foundation representative, Colombia, March 2026.

actors and government institutions retaining control over agenda-setting and resource allocation<sup>89</sup>. Stakeholder evidence points to fragmented coordination across humanitarian, development, and peace sectors, with weak information-sharing and duplication of efforts across actors. While Colombia's policy architecture formally promotes cross-sector coordination, implementation remains siloed, and local expertise is inconsistently integrated into outcomes.<sup>90</sup> Local organizations also report limited recognition by government actors and insufficient inclusion in structured coordination spaces, reinforcing their position as participants rather than drivers of coordination processes<sup>91</sup>.

**Coherence.** Coherence challenges are primarily driven by structural mismatches between funding models, policy frameworks, and operational realities. Short-term, uncertain funding cycles are misaligned with the long-term nature of peacebuilding, governance, and community recovery, creating interruptions in programming and undermining sustained engagement<sup>92</sup>. At the same time, there is a disconnect between national-level peace and development frameworks and on-the-ground conditions, with formal processes failing to translate into improved local outcomes<sup>93</sup>. As a result, while local actors work across humanitarian, development, and peace domains in practice, they do so adaptively rather than within systems designed to support integrated, long-term approaches.

**Complementarity.** Partnerships between local and international actors are functional but structurally unequal. Local organizations provide access, legitimacy, and implementation capacity, while international actors retain control over funding, program design, and strategic direction<sup>94</sup>. This division of labor reinforces hierarchical relationships, limiting local autonomy and shaping programming around donor priorities rather than locally defined needs<sup>95</sup>. Stakeholder evidence indicates that local actors are rarely involved meaningfully in program design or strategic decision-making, and that competition for limited resources further undermines collaboration, increasing duplication and reducing complementarity<sup>96</sup>.

**Funding.** Funding structures represent the most significant systemic constraint. Local actors rarely receive direct, flexible funding, with resources typically channeled through intermediaries such as government entities or UN agencies<sup>97</sup>. These arrangements are bureaucratic, compliance-heavy, and predominantly short-term, limiting organizational stability and long-term planning.

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>91</sup> Nilsson, Manuela. 2025. "International Actor Coordination in Peacebuilding in Colombia: Pitfalls and Potential." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 19 (5): 677–96. doi:10.1080/17502977.2025.2489906.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>93</sup> International Crisis Group, "Colombia: From 'Total Peace' to Local Peace," commentary, January 30, 2025.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Corporación Amigos UNESCO representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>95</sup> Véronique Barbelet, *Rethinking Capacity and Complementarity for a More Local Humanitarian Action* (London: Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group, October 2019).

<sup>96</sup> GISF (2024). *Neutrality, Access and Making Localisation Work*. Global Interagency Security Forum (GISF).

<sup>97</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

Stakeholders report that funding often fails to cover operational costs, while delays and uncertainty disrupt program continuity and erode community trust<sup>98</sup>. Broader reductions in official development assistance have intensified these challenges, increasing competition among local actors and further weakening sustainability. As a result, the core issue is not only the volume of funding, but its structure; indirect, short-term, and externally controlled<sup>99</sup>.

## AFGHANISTAN

### 1. Understanding

Afghan local actors rarely use the term “HDP Nexus.” This is not because they lack an understanding of integration. The concept as a formal framework arrived late to a context where local organizations had already spent decades doing integrated work out of necessity. When there is no functioning state to deliver health services, no development programming to build on, and no peace process to engage with, the organizations still delivering aid do not need a policy label to recognize that humanitarian, development, and peace concerns are connected. They live that reality everyday.<sup>100</sup> ACAPS confirmed this in a 2024 thematic report: across sectors, there is no commonly shared definition among Afghan actors of how these domains should relate, and localization itself remains contested.<sup>101</sup> An earlier scoping survey by ACSM and ACBAR found that respondents understood localization in terms of funding, capacity strengthening, and locally led decision-making, with no reference to Nexus frameworks.<sup>102</sup>

What exists instead is a practical understanding rooted in decades of crisis. Afghan organizations talk about community resilience, service continuity, community-driven development. The ACBAR Baseline Assessment’s regional workshops in late 2025 consistently surfaced these terms rather than formal framework language.<sup>103</sup> Research on Afghan conceptions of peace reinforces this: Afghan communities prioritize everyday safety, fairness, and stability within family and community networks, not externally defined political settlements.<sup>104</sup> The Localization Factsheet puts it simply: for many Afghan organizations, integrated practice is embedded in everyday work, which is partly why the formal vocabulary feels redundant.<sup>105</sup> The de facto authorities reinforce this configuration. The Taliban’s line ministries engage with international actors on sectoral issues only, with nothing resembling a cross-cutting framework. The NRC has characterized Afghanistan

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Colombia, March 2026.

<sup>99</sup> Abby Stoddard, Lydia Poole, Glyn Taylor, and Barnaby Willitts-King, *Efficiency and Inefficiency in Humanitarian Financing* (Humanitarian Outcomes, December 2017).

<sup>100</sup> ACBAR LTWG, *Localization Factsheet: Advancing Locally Led Humanitarian Action in Afghanistan* (2025), 2–4.

<sup>101</sup> ACAPS, *Afghanistan: Different Understandings of Localization in Humanitarian Action, Development, and Peacebuilding*, Thematic Report (August 2024), 1–4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, citing ACSM/ACBAR localization scoping survey (2023).

<sup>103</sup> ACBAR LTWG, *Localization Baseline Assessment: Final Report* (January 2026), 4–5.

<sup>104</sup> Shrestha, S. et al., “Conceptualizing Peace: A Qualitative Study Among Afghan Adolescents Living in Intractable Conflict,” *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 16 (2023).

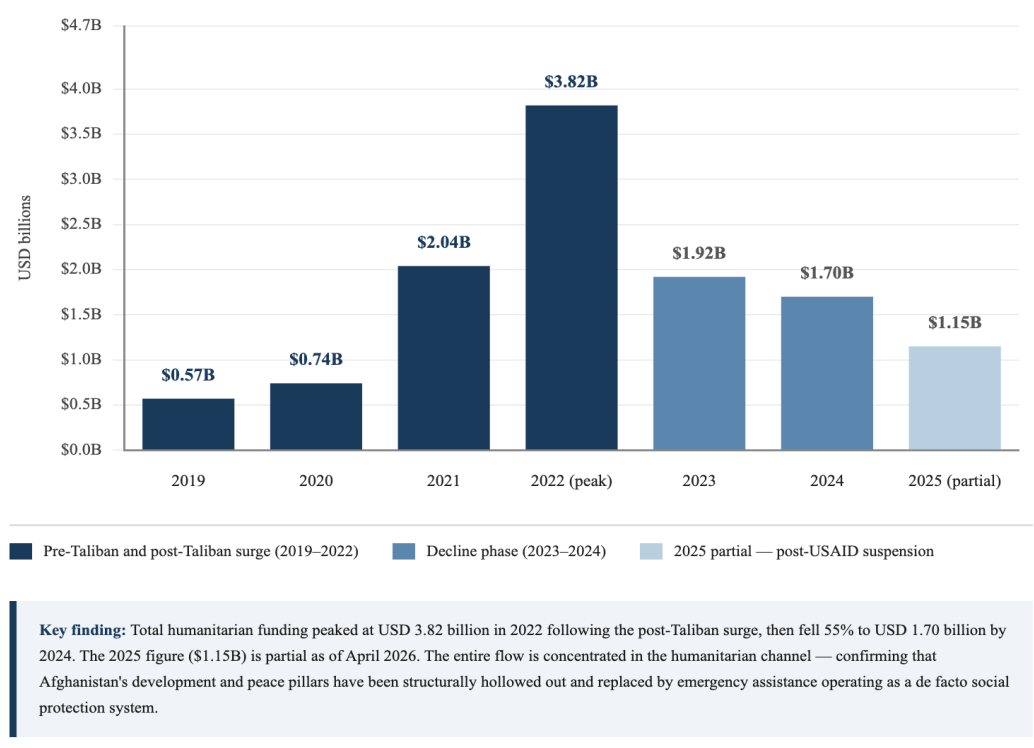
<sup>105</sup> ACBAR LTWG, *Localization Factsheet*, 4.

as a “reversed Nexus,” where the political and compliance environment confines organizations to humanitarian delivery regardless of intent.<sup>106</sup>

2. Practice

The dominant integration in Afghanistan is humanitarian-development, concentrated in health, WASH and livelihoods, and education. This is not designed. It is structural. After the suspension of development financing in 2021, humanitarian actors absorbed functions that state institutions had previously performed, and the distinction between relief and longer-term service provision collapsed.<sup>107</sup> The NRC confirms that there are effectively no formal Nexus or development interventions in the country; the distinction between humanitarian and development actors has become arbitrary because both implement similar short-term activities under similar funding constraints.<sup>108</sup>

Figure 2: Total reported humanitarian funding to Afghanistan, 2019-2025



Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service, *Trends in Reported Funding — Afghanistan*, extracted 3 April 2026. Exact figures (USD billions): 2019: \$0.57; 2020: \$0.74; 2021: \$2.04; 2022: \$3.82; 2023: \$1.92; 2024: \$1.70; 2025: \$1.15 (partial year). Note: 2025 data partial as of extraction date.

<sup>106</sup> NRC, *The Nexus in Practice: The Long Journey to Impact* (2023), Afghanistan chapter.  
<sup>107</sup> International Crisis Group, *After the Aid Axe: Charting a Path to Self-Reliance in Afghanistan*, Asia Report No. 350 (October 2025), 2.  
<sup>108</sup> NRC, *The Nexus in Practice*, Afghanistan chapter.

Three patterns illustrate what this looks like. Community health worker networks maintained by national NGOs provide primary care in provinces where the public system no longer functions. Organizations like DACAAR combine relief-oriented water provision with rural infrastructure and income generation that extends well beyond emergency mandates. In education, community-based education programs operate outside Taliban-controlled school systems, simultaneously protecting girls, building human capital, and generating community solidarity through collective negotiation with elders and local authorities. The ACBAR Baseline documents that sustained local advocacy helped institutionalize CBE within provincial and national education strategies.<sup>109</sup>

Development-peace integration is far weaker. Shura-level dispute resolution and community-mediated negotiation with local power holders are routine, but they receive almost no recognition in formal coordination or funding systems. The peace pillar remains the most politically constrained of the three, and its absence from programme design reflects political conditions, not a lack of local capacity.

### 3. Strengths

Afghan local organizations bring comparative advantages that the aid architecture relies upon but does not adequately resource. National NGOs and community structures have operated across Afghanistan's provinces for decades, maintaining trusted relationships through conflict, political transition, and institutional collapse.<sup>110</sup> Afghan NGOs handle most frontline delivery, particularly in remote and insecure areas where international organizations cannot maintain a consistent presence. In WASH, livelihoods, and community health, local organizations blend relief with longer-term support as a matter of routine, drawing on contextual knowledge that international actors cannot replicate.

The Baseline Assessment confirms strong implementation capacity and community trust among national NGOs, even as institutional systems remain under-resourced.<sup>111</sup> The Localization Factsheet identifies strengths that formal assessments frequently overlook: home-based education, mobile health outreach, and community-managed dispute resolution, all developed as low-cost adaptations to restrictive environments.<sup>112</sup> The shrinking international footprint has also prompted skilled Afghan professionals previously employed by INGOs and UN agencies to return to national organizations. Coordination infrastructure is emerging. The LTWG provides a platform for collective strategy, the Afghanistan Localization Lab represents a locally initiated effort to center

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<sup>109</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Baseline Assessment, 32 (Pillar VI: Policy Influence); ACBAR LTWG, Localization Factsheet, 6.

<sup>110</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Working Conditions of Local Civil Society in Afghanistan: Realities, Opportunities, and Challenges (2024), 12–18.

<sup>111</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Baseline Assessment, 27 (Pillar V: Capacity Strengthening).

<sup>112</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Factsheet, 6–7.

Afghan actors in aid governance, and ACBAR’s advocacy at the European Humanitarian Forum and the Senior Officials Meeting in Brussels has raised the visibility of Afghan civil society in global policy spaces.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4. Challenges

**Coordination.** Local actors participate in Afghanistan’s cluster system and ACBAR-facilitated forums, but engagement remains irregular and influence limited. The Baseline Assessment found that the majority of national NGOs engage in country-level strategic decision-making only “sometimes” or “rarely.”<sup>114</sup> More critically, the majority of NNGO respondents reported that local expertise is “minimally acknowledged and rarely integrated” into coordination outcomes.<sup>115</sup> The humanitarian cluster architecture is the only functioning coordination mechanism. There is no parallel development or peace coordination structure, and English-language dominance in meetings compounds the exclusion of national actors.<sup>116</sup>

**Figure 3: Perceived Integration of local knowledge in coordination and decision-making**

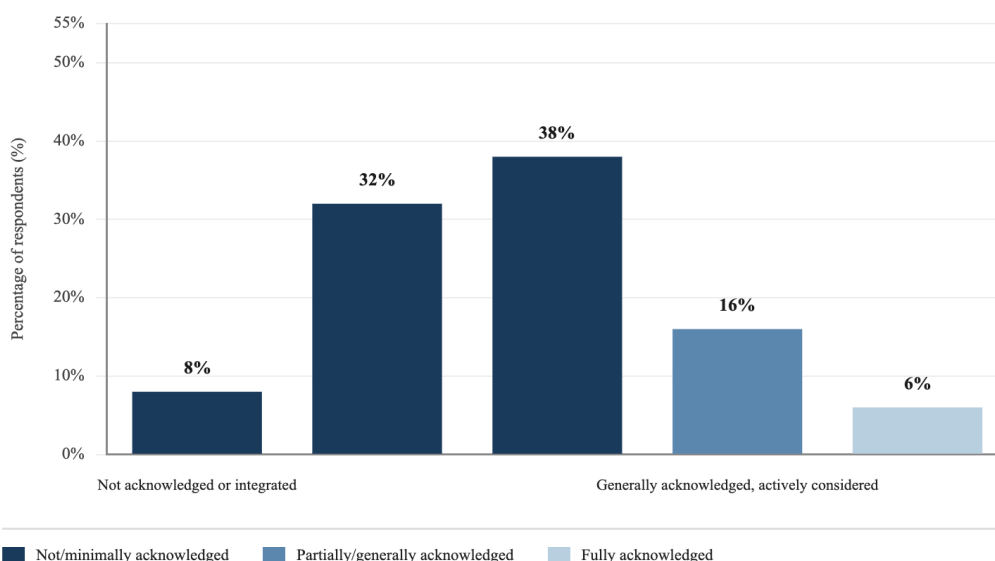
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<sup>113</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Overview of 2025, 1–2; ACBAR LTWG, Localization Factsheet, 5.

<sup>114</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Baseline Assessment, 20–21 (Pillar III: Coordination).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 21 (Figure 7).

<sup>116</sup> ACAPS, Different Understandings of Localization, 4.



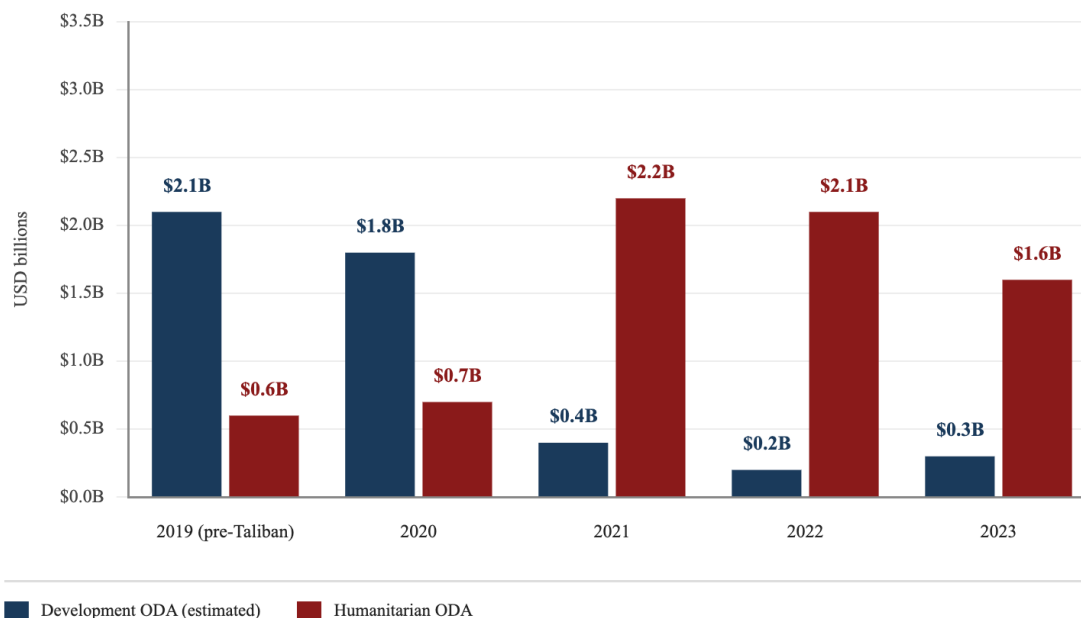
**Key finding:** Over 70% of NGOs report that local knowledge and expertise is minimally or only partially acknowledged in country-level coordination forums. Described by the ACBAR Baseline Assessment as among its most confronting findings, this pattern confirms that coordination mechanisms extract information from local actors without granting them corresponding authority over how that information shapes programming priorities.

**Source:** ACBAR Localisation Technical Working Group, *Localization Baseline Assessment: Final Report* (Kabul: ACBAR, January 2026), Figure 7. Pillar III: Coordination and Complementarity. Survey of 143 organisations, September–November 2025.

**Coherence.** The coherence challenge in Afghanistan is structural. Each pillar operates under a different political logic and these logics constrain each other. Humanitarian work is tolerated by the de facto authorities because it delivers visible services. Development work is blocked by sanctions, frozen reserves, and donor refusal to provide budget support to a non-recognized government. Peace work is politically unacceptable to both sides. Short-term humanitarian funding dominates not because donors prefer it, but because the sanctions architecture and political conditions leave no viable alternative.<sup>117</sup>

**Figure 4: ODA Composition shift: development collapse and humanitarian substitutions, 2019-2023**

<sup>117</sup> NRC, *The Nexus in Practice*, Afghanistan chapter; UNDP, *HDP Nexus Reflections* (2025), 8–12.



**Key finding:** In 2019, Afghanistan received \$4.3 billion in total ODA, the majority development-focused as international budget support underpinned the republic government. Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, donors suspended development ODA to avoid resourcing the de facto authorities. Humanitarian ODA surged to fill the gap, producing the H-heavy D-hollow P-absent configuration that defines Afghanistan's anti-nexus — a structural condition, not an operational failure.

**Source:** OECD DAC / World Bank, net ODA received (2019–2023); OCHA FTS humanitarian ODA component; *Défis Humanitaires*, DAC humanitarian aid analysis (January 2024). **Note:** Development ODA estimated as total net ODA received minus reported humanitarian ODA. Humanitarian ODA (DAC): 2021 \$2.2B; 2022 \$2.1B. World Bank reports total net ODA received in 2023 at \$3.06B.

**Complementarity.** Partnerships are functional but structurally asymmetrical. The Baseline Assessment reports that nearly half of NNGO respondents described their involvement in programme design as minimal or non-existent, with international actors retaining control over design, budgeting, and strategic direction.<sup>118</sup> Risk and compliance responsibilities transfer downward without corresponding authority. The ACAPS analysis of power in humanitarian partnerships documents this imbalance across six dimensions, concluding that national NGOs are disadvantaged in structure, strategic influence, decision-making, visibility, risk-sharing, and resourcing.<sup>119</sup>

**Funding.** Access to direct donor funding remains the most binding constraint. Only 10 per cent of NNGO respondents reported full and consistent access.<sup>120</sup> Funding peaked at \$3.8 billion in 2022 but fell by more than 58 per cent by 2024, a decline that accelerated with the suspension of U.S.

<sup>118</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Baseline Assessment, 11 (Figure 2).

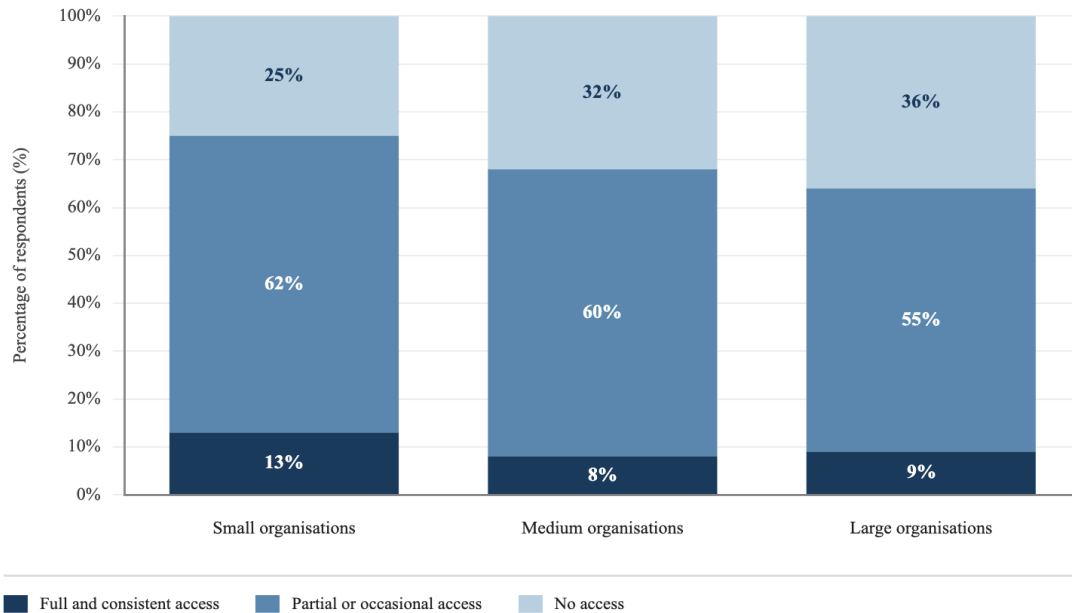
<sup>119</sup> ACAPS, Localization and Power in Humanitarian Partnerships: Afghanistan (September 2025).

<sup>120</sup> ACBAR LTWG, Localization Baseline Assessment, 15 (Figure 3).

aid programs in early 2025.<sup>121</sup> The Baseline documents a self-reinforcing cycle: funding arrangements inadequately cover overhead costs, reinforcing institutional capacity gaps that donors subsequently cite as barriers to direct funding. Four of nine donors reported providing “limited” or “very limited” flexible funding for institutional strengthening; six of nine then identified “capacity gaps” as a primary barrier to direct access.<sup>122</sup>

**Figure 5: NGO access to direct funding by organization size**

Afghanistan, September–November 2025 | n=96 national NGO respondents | percentage of respondents within each size category



**Key finding:** Direct funding exclusion is structurally uniform across all organisation sizes. Only 10% of NGOs report full and consistent access to donor funding regardless of organisational scale, refuting assumptions that larger organisations are better positioned. The overwhelming majority operate within short-term, intermediary-dependent arrangements that prevent institutional investment and sustainable programming.

**Source:** ACBAR Localisation Technical Working Group, *Localization Baseline Assessment: Final Report* (Kabul: ACBAR, January 2026), Figure 3. Structured survey of 143 organisations administered September–November 2025. Percentages refer to the share of respondents within each organisational size category.

## MYANMAR

### 1. Understanding of the HDP Nexus

Myanmar has experienced prolonged armed conflict between the central state and various Ethnic Armed Organizations since its independence in 1948<sup>123</sup>. This makes it one of the world’s longest-running civil wars. The situation deteriorated further in 2021, when the military seized power in a coup, triggering renewed nationwide violence, widespread human rights abuses, and large-scale

<sup>121</sup> Crisis Group, *After the Aid Axe*, 2.

<sup>122</sup> ACBAR LTWG, *Localization Baseline Assessment*, 17, 29.

<sup>123</sup> Center for Preventive Action, “Civil War in Myanmar,” January 29, 2026, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar>.

internal displacement. Additionally, since 2017, the mass displacement of Rohingya communities to Bangladesh, known as the “Rohingya crisis”, has added a regional humanitarian dimension, placing further strain on resources and cross-border relations.

As a result, Myanmar faces overlapping crises that include ongoing armed conflict, political instability, a deteriorating economy, and a deepening humanitarian emergency. Humanitarian access is heavily restricted, with bureaucratic obstacles, security risks, and politicization of aid affecting both domestic and international actors.<sup>124</sup> The country has experienced a severe economic decline since 2021, leading to rising poverty and further vulnerability among affected populations.<sup>125</sup> The crisis in Myanmar is cyclical and layered rather than linear. There has been no consolidated peace settlement, and ceasefires have repeatedly proven fragile or collapsed altogether. As a consequence, humanitarian, development, and peace needs to happen simultaneously rather than as a sequence. This makes Myanmar very complex in regard to the HDP Nexus approaches, as immediate emergency response, long-term development concerns, and fragile peace processes have to be addressed at the same time rather than in clearly separated phases.

## **2. Current Practice: What Nexus Looks Like**

The government has not taken an official policy position regarding the HDP Nexus. However, there is some implicit engagement through sectoral mandates and terminology such as “development” and “humanitarian assistance”.<sup>126</sup> The term “HDP Nexus” is not widely used among actors operating in Myanmar. Among local civil society organizations and NGOS, Nexus-like thinking exists but is rarely framed in those terms. As noted by Maureen Aung-Thwin [Open Society], many local organizations operate from a value base rooted in Buddhist principles of holistic community care, which naturally incorporates what the Nexus framework describes, without reference to it. In this sense, understanding of the Nexus among local actors is practical and experience-based rather than formal or policy-driven. International actors, such as UN agencies and INGOs, do employ Nexus terminology and show strong conceptual alignment with the framework. Context shapes understanding significantly: decades of conflict, a post-coup operating environment, restricted access, and deep institutional distrust have made adaptive informal integration a survival strategy rather than a designed approach. Key actors include the State Administration Council (SAC), which holds central authority controlling security, administration, and access, as well as a range of ministries such as the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education. The system is

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<sup>124</sup> Paul Vrieze, "Myanmar in Crisis: Navigating Humanitarian Aid Challenges," Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2025, [https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2025/final-ui-report-no.-6-2025\\_pv.pdf](https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2025/final-ui-report-no.-6-2025_pv.pdf).

<sup>125</sup> Vibhu Mishra, "Four Years after the Coup, Myanmar Remains on the Brink," *UN News*, January 29, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159561>.

<sup>126</sup> UNDP, "UNDP HDP Nexus Compendium Myanmar," 2026, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2026-03/undp-hdp-nexus-compendium-myanmar.pdf>.

highly centralized but weak in practice. Due to siloed ministries, there is only limited cross-sector coordination. A security-first approach dominates, resulting in weak or absent humanitarian-development-peace coordination platforms.<sup>127</sup> Coordination is therefore highly ad hoc and access-driven, rather than strategic.

### 3. Strengths

Despite these constraints, local actors play a critical role in delivering integrated HDP programming. Civil society organizations are the primary drivers of Nexus-like approaches in practice, especially in conflict-affected and EAO-controlled areas.<sup>128</sup> There are local and ethnic networks, such as the Karen Peace Support Network, whose role is advocacy and monitoring development impacts.<sup>129</sup> They are particularly strong in linking development and conflict sensitivity. Service delivery actors, such as the Back Pack Health Worker Team, provide health services in accessible areas and operate across the humanitarian-development divide. Hybrid INGOs that are locally embedded, such as the Asia Foundation and International Alert, play roles in knowledge generation, implementation, and policy influence. They can act as bridging actors, linking governance, peacebuilding, and development, generating evidence-based knowledge, and influencing policy. These local actors have deep community trust and access to conflict-affected areas, as well as experience in integrated service delivery, conflict-sensitive programming, and strong flexibility and adaptability. They are de facto Nexus implementers.

### 4. Key Challenges and Gaps

While formal structures still exist, such as ministries and township-level administration, there are major constraints: restricted humanitarian access, bureaucratic approval processes, political interference, militarization of aid, and a legitimacy crisis due to many actors (donors and CSOs) avoiding formal engagement.<sup>130</sup> The government acts more as a gatekeeper than a facilitator. The military regime prioritizes control and stability (through a security lens), meaning development is seen as secondary to regime survival.

Peacebuilding is also politicized and militarized. There is significant distrust between the government and most other actors.<sup>131</sup> Engagement with international actors is limited, with some

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<sup>127</sup> Marte Nilsen, "Perceptions of Rights and the Politics of Humanitarian Aid in Myanmar," *European Journal of Development Research* 32 (2020): 338–358, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00265-0>.

<sup>128</sup> Anne Décobert, Pyae Phyo Maung, Alec Scott, and Tamas Wells, "Compliance and Coloniality: Aid Bureaucracy and the Failures of 'Localisation' in Myanmar's Complex Emergency," *Disasters* 49, no. 4 (2025): e70002, <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.70002>.

<sup>129</sup> KPSN, "About Us," n.d., <https://www.karenpeace.org/about-us/>.

<sup>130</sup> Tingyu Hou, "Humanitarian Aid Practices on the Thai-Myanmar Border after the Coup: Beyond Depoliticization and Inequality," *International Journal of Humanitarian Action* 9, no. 16 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-024-00159-4>.

<sup>131</sup> Chiraag Roy, Anthony Ware, and Costas Laoutides, "Middle Powers as 'Peacemaking Entrepreneurs' in Myanmar's Peace Process 2011–2021," *The Pacific Review* 37, no. 5 (2024): 884–912, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2023.2264520>.

selective partnerships, such as with UN agencies and neighboring states. The relationship between local CSOs and the government is restrictive and marked by suspicion, with many CSOs operating informally or through cross-border mechanisms.<sup>132</sup> However, they face legal risks, funding instability, and operate at a limited scale.<sup>133</sup>

International actors, such as the European Union and INGOs, show strong conceptual alignment with the HDP Nexus.<sup>134</sup> Post-coup, they have reduced engagement with the government and increased reliance on local CSOs, and emphasize conflict sensitivity and localization. However, they face access limitations, political sensitivities, and strict risk management requirements. There are clear opportunities for localized Nexus approaches, as this is already happening organically through CSOs and EAO service systems. There is strong local knowledge and legitimacy. Existing enablers include CSO networks and hybrid INGOs acting as bridging actors. Donor shifts toward localization, combined with experience in conflict-sensitive programming, further support this. Scalable models include cross-border aid delivery, community-based service systems, and conflict-sensitive development programming.

## 5. Complementarity

The HDP Nexus in Myanmar operates largely through bottom-up integration, driven by necessity rather than state-led design. Local actors and EAOs have long established parallel governance systems and service delivery networks that inherently combine humanitarian, development, and peace objectives. Existing complementary mechanisms include CSO networks that link actors across sectors and regions, hybrid INGOs bridging local and international systems, community-based service systems that integrate development and humanitarian response and, finally, cross-border aid delivery enabling continuity in areas with restricted access. These approaches demonstrate the potential for localized, organic Nexus programming that can be both responsive and adaptive, leveraging local knowledge and legitimacy to overcome structural and political barriers.

## 6. Funding

Funding remains a critical constraint. Local CSOs rely heavily on donor support, which is volatile and often tied to short-term projects. This limits their capacity to sustain integrated HDP programming independently or to scale effective models. Financing gaps are compounded by the broader economic collapse since 2021, which has eroded local resource mobilization, weakened financial systems, and reduced the fiscal capacity of any parallel governance structures to self-

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<sup>132</sup> Anne Décobert, "'The Struggle Isn't Over': Shifting Aid Paradigms and Redefining 'Development' in Eastern Myanmar," *World Development* 127 (2020): 104768, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104768>.

<sup>133</sup> Anne Décobert, "'The Struggle Isn't Over': Shifting Aid Paradigms and Redefining 'Development' in Eastern Myanmar," *World Development* 127 (2020): 104768, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104768>.

<sup>134</sup> UNDP, "UNDP HDP Nexus Compendium Myanmar," 2026, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke3226/files/2026-03/undp-hdp-nexus-compendium-myanmar.pdf>.

fund service delivery. Currency instability and banking restrictions imposed by the junta further constrain the flow of funds to civil society actors, particularly those operating cross-border or informally.

Still, donor shifts toward localization, conflict-sensitive programming, and flexible multi-year funding present opportunities to strengthen local HDP approaches. Innovative financing mechanisms, such as pooled humanitarian funds, diaspora remittance channels, and cross-border transfer systems, have emerged as workarounds where formal banking infrastructure is inaccessible or politically compromised. When combined with local actors' knowledge and legitimacy, more flexible and risk-tolerant financing arrangements can create more durable and scalable Nexus solutions, provided funding mechanisms adapt to the unique challenges of the Myanmar context.

The Nexus can exist without state leadership, as localization of parallel governance systems and long-standing non-state service delivery. Myanmar represents a “bottom-up Nexus model”, where integration is driven by necessity at the local level rather than by national policy or coordination.

## SYRIA

### 1. Understanding of the HDP Nexus

In Syria, the term “HDP Nexus” is not the primary language through which local actors conceptualize or describe their work. Evidence from interviews indicates that Syrian organizations more commonly frame their activities in terms of early recovery, livelihoods, resilience, localization, civic peace, and social cohesion, with the underlying logic of integration understood as a practical necessity rather than a formalized framework particularly in policy and donor discourse. While the importance of integrated approaches is broadly acknowledged, the concept itself and particularly its terminology remains relatively inaccessible to many local organizations.<sup>135</sup> This is partly due to the absence of a structured or locally grounded introduction to the framework, resulting in perceptions of the Nexus as a top-down construct driven by international actors and further constrained by significant structural barriers, including funding restrictions, limited institutional capacity, and fragmented governance systems.

International actors, particularly UN agencies, INGO's and major donors are more likely to employ HDP Nexus terminology explicitly. Yet, in practice, funding and programming often remain siloed, with a predominant emphasis on humanitarian response and early recovery, while longer-term development interventions remain comparatively underprioritized.<sup>136</sup> This imbalance has

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<sup>135</sup> Marc DuBois, *The Triple Nexus – Threat or Opportunity for the Humanitarian Principles?* Berlin: Centre for Humanitarian Action, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Syrian Arab Republic: Humanitarian Response Priorities, January–December 2025*. July 24, 2025. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-humanitarian-response-priorities-january-december-2025>

significant implications as development programming, particularly in livelihoods and economic stabilization, is widely recognized in the literature as foundational for sustainable peace and social cohesion, as it enables communities to rebuild stable and dignified lives.<sup>137</sup> Even where Nexus-oriented approaches are adopted, they are frequently operationalized through “early recovery” frameworks rather than comprehensive HDP integration.

Prior to recent political shifts, the operating environment for civil society in Syria was highly constrained. Under the Assad regime, CSOs operated under strict state control, with limited autonomy and heavy regulation of funding, programming, and partnerships. At the same time, the country was effectively fragmented into three primary areas of influence (northwest, northeast, and government-controlled territories) each associated with separate UN coordination hubs that operated with limited cross-regional integration.<sup>138</sup> This fragmentation significantly constrained coherent, nationwide approaches and reinforced siloed HDP interventions. These dynamics continue to shape the current landscape. Syria remains one of the largest displacement crises globally, with approximately 7.4 million internally displaced persons, over 4.4 million refugees and asylum-seekers, and around 75 percent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance in 2025.<sup>139 140</sup> As the country gradually transitions out of acute crisis conditions, there is growing recognition of the need to move toward more integrated HDP approaches that address overlapping needs simultaneously. Interviews further suggest that recent political developments since late 2024 have created a tentative opening for shifting beyond a purely humanitarian focus. Nevertheless, civic space remains constrained, and trust in international systems particularly among local civil society actors remains limited. Consequently, the HDP Nexus in Syria is best understood as a practical and widely recognized necessity that has yet to be fully formalized within policy frameworks or coordination mechanisms, reflecting both the realities of the operating environment and the structural limitations of the current aid architecture.

## 2. Current Practice: What Nexus Looks Like

In practice, Nexus approaches in Syria are shaped primarily by humanitarian response, early recovery, and peace-related activities, with development remaining the least systematically integrated pillar. Early recovery functions as the primary operational bridge, linking immediate

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<sup>137</sup> Podder, Sukanya. "Thinking about the Legacy of Peacebuilding Programs." *Peace Review* 33, no. 1 (2021): 106-114.

<sup>138</sup> Meininghaus, Esther. "Humanitarianism in Intra-State Conflict: Aid Inequality and Local Governance in Government-and Opposition-Controlled Areas in the Syrian War." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 8 (2016): 1454-82.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2016.1159509>

<sup>139</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Syria Emergency," (2025)

<https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/syria/>

<sup>140</sup> United Nations Development Programme. *The Impact of the Conflict in Syria: Socio-Economic Impact Assessment*. February 24, 2025

assistance with short-term stabilization efforts such as livelihoods support, service restoration, and small-scale infrastructure rehabilitation. However, these interventions are typically designed within short funding cycles and are therefore limited in their ability to support sustained economic recovery or long-term development outcomes.<sup>141</sup> Interview evidence consistently highlights that most programmes remain short-term and project-based, which constrains the development of durable partnerships and undermines the continuity required for effective HDP implementation.

These patterns are closely linked to the broader structural environment. The legacy of the Assad regime marked by tight control over civil society and fragmented governance combined with the division of the response into three operational hubs, has limited coordination and reinforced siloed approaches. While recent developments have created greater space for collaboration, coordination remains uneven and often fragmented across regions and systems. Emerging collaboration platforms, including civil society networks like Madaniya and the Syrian NGO Forum, have strengthened horizontal coordination among local actors, but these mechanisms remain limited in their ability to influence system-wide integration or donor-driven priorities.<sup>142</sup>

Sectorally, Nexus-related programming in Syria is concentrated in livelihoods, education, protection, psychosocial support, and basic service delivery, but these are typically implemented as short-term, layered interventions rather than as part of sustained, integrated strategies. In practice, organizations combine immediate assistance with elements of stabilization, for example by linking education programmes with psychosocial support and community engagement activities aimed at rebuilding trust and social cohesion. Olive Branch exemplifies this approach, integrating youth education, psychosocial support, and community dialogue to address both immediate needs and longer-term social fragmentation.<sup>143</sup> However, its experience also highlights a key structural limitation: without sustained development interventions particularly those supporting livelihoods and economic stability such community-building efforts remain difficult to maintain over time.

The peace pillar is both prominent in focus and constrained in implementation. Across interviews, organizations emphasize the importance of civic peace, social cohesion, and community dialogue. These activities include facilitating interaction between previously divided communities, integrating reconciliation narratives into psychosocial support, and promoting local dialogue processes. However, peacebuilding continues to often be rather implemented through early recovery than long-term programs. The International Crisis Group further noted that while there is increasing recognition particularly following recent political shifts that peacebuilding must be expanded, funding and operational priorities continue to favor humanitarian response and early recovery over more comprehensive peace strategies.<sup>144</sup> Development remains the least operationalized pillar, despite being widely recognized by all interviewed actors as essential for

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<sup>141</sup> United Nations Development Programme, “Participatory Local Recovery Planning in Syria,” 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Madaniya representative, Syria, April 2026.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Olive Branch representative, Syria, April 2026.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with International Crisis Group representative, Syria, April 2026.

sustainable peace. Organizations repeatedly stressed that economic stability and livelihoods are foundational conditions for both individual well-being and community cohesion. Without these, efforts to promote social cohesion or reconciliation risk remaining superficial. However, development programming is constrained by donor restrictions, sanctions-related challenges, and the lack of long-term, flexible funding. Acted, for example, highlighted a clear mismatch between needs on the ground and the type of programming funded, with development interventions insufficiently supported despite their central role in enabling long-term recovery.<sup>145</sup>

Structural factors further reinforce these dynamics. Localization remains limited, largely due to persistent trust deficits between international actors and Syrian organizations. As highlighted by SARD and Acted, funding is often channeled through international intermediaries, which retain control over programme design and priorities, thereby shaping the balance of nexus implementation.<sup>146</sup> This intermediary model, combined with short-term funding cycles and compliance-heavy requirements, restricts local actors' ability to plan strategically or invest in long-term programming. Madaniya further emphasized that limited trust in international systems, combined with insufficient contextual understanding, continues to constrain meaningful collaboration.<sup>147</sup>

### **3. Strengths**

Local Syrian organizations demonstrate strong comparative advantages in access, contextual knowledge, and adaptive implementation, which position them as central actors in any effective Nexus approach. Across interviews, local actors consistently emphasized their ability to operate in complex, fragmented environments where international actors face access, information, trust, or legitimacy constraints. Their long-term presence within communities allows them to navigate social dynamics, which is particularly important in a post-crisis and multi-ethnic setting like Syria, local power structures, and conflict sensitivities in ways that externally driven programmes often cannot replicate. A key strength lies in their ability to integrate sectors organically. Rather than treating humanitarian, development, and peace as separate domains, Syrian organizations tend to design programmes that reflect the reality that communities experience these needs simultaneously, like Olive Branch puts in their approach. This reflects a form of practice-based Nexus implementation, where integration is driven by lived needs rather than formal frameworks. Local actors also demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness, particularly in crisis situations. Interview evidence highlights that Syrian organizations are able to adapt programming quickly, adjust priorities, and respond to emerging needs without the bureaucratic delays often associated with international systems. This was particularly evident in responses to shocks such as displacement waves and the 2023 earthquakes, where local actors were often first responders, with the UN taking more than 2 weeks. While international actors bring financial resources and

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Acted representative, Syria, April 2026.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with SARD & Acted representative, Syria, April 2026.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Madaniya representative, Syria, April 2026.

technical capacity, they frequently depend on local partners for implementation, highlighting a structural reliance on local actors that is not always matched by corresponding decision-making power.

#### **4. Key challenges and gaps**

Despite the presence of Nexus-type practices, the operationalization of integrated approaches in Syria remains significantly constrained by structural, financial, and political factors. One of the most persistent challenges is the fragmentation of the response system, which continues to reflect the legacy of conflict and territorial division. The existence of multiple operational hubs has resulted in parallel coordination systems with limited cross-regional integration. Although there have been recent improvements in collaboration, particularly among local organizations and civil society networks, coordination remains uneven and often confined within specific geographic or institutional silos. Local actors participate in these systems but have limited influence over strategic decision-making, which continues to be largely driven by international agencies and donors.

A central constraint lies in the misalignment between programming structures and the nature of needs on the ground. The Syrian context is characterized by overlapping humanitarian, economic, and social challenges, yet interventions remain largely short-term and sector-specific. Interview evidence consistently highlights that organizations are required to operate within narrow funding mandates, which often prioritize emergency response or specific thematic areas while excluding others. This is particularly evident in the limited support for long-term development programming. While early recovery initiatives attempt to bridge this gap, they are typically designed as transitional measures rather than sustained pathways to economic stability. As a result, integration across humanitarian, development, and peace dimensions remains partial and constrained, preventing the emergence of comprehensive, long-term approaches. The imbalance across pillars further reinforces these limitations. Peace-related activities are increasingly emphasized, particularly through social cohesion and community-level initiatives, yet they are often implemented in isolation or embedded within other sectors rather than as part of a coherent strategy. At the same time, development remains the least operationalized pillar, despite being widely recognized by local actors as essential for sustainable recovery and social stability. Interviews repeatedly stressed that economic insecurity and lack of livelihoods undermine both individual well-being and community cohesion, limiting the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts.

These challenges are compounded by the structure of funding mechanisms, which remain largely short-term, inflexible, and mediated through international actors. Local organizations have limited access to direct funding, with resources typically channeled through intermediaries that retain control over programme design, priorities, and compliance requirements. This not only reinforces power imbalances but also constrains the ability of local actors to design contextually appropriate and integrated programmes. In addition, short funding cycles limit organizations' ability to plan

strategically, invest in long-term partnerships, or build sustained programming. This is particularly problematic for Nexus approaches, which require multi-year engagement and continuity to be effective. Underlying these dynamics is a broader issue of trust and system design. Donor risk aversion and compliance requirements continue to restrict direct engagement with local actors, leading to reliance on international intermediaries. Interview findings highlight a persistent lack of trust between international systems and Syrian civil society, which affects both funding flows and the extent of local participation in decision-making processes. At the same time, sanctions and regulatory constraints further complicate funding and programming, particularly for development-oriented activities. These factors collectively limit the scope for integrated approaches and reinforce a system that prioritizes short-term outputs over long-term impact.

## **5. Complementarity**

Partnerships between local and international actors are functional but structurally unequal. Local organizations provide access, contextual understanding, and implementation capacity, while international actors retain control over funding, programme design, and strategic direction. This creates a division of roles in which local actors are primarily implementers rather than co-designers of interventions. Interview findings indicate that this imbalance limits complementarity. Local knowledge is often underutilized in programme design, and decisions are frequently made top down without sufficient input from those implementing programmes on the ground. At the same time, competition for limited funding reduces collaboration among organizations, further weakening complementarity and leading to duplication of efforts.

## **6. Funding**

Funding represents one of the most significant systemic constraints. Local Syrian organizations have limited access to direct funding, with resources typically channeled through international intermediaries. These intermediaries retain control over programme design, priorities, and compliance requirements, reinforcing existing power imbalances within the aid system. Funding is also predominantly short-term and inflexible, which constrains organizations' ability to plan strategically or invest in long-term programming.<sup>148</sup> Interviews consistently emphasized that most projects operate on short funding cycles, making it difficult to build sustained partnerships or achieve durable outcomes. This is particularly problematic for Nexus approaches, which require multi-year engagement to be effective. In addition, trust deficits between donors and local organizations further limit direct funding opportunities. Donors often require international intermediaries due to perceived risks, which adds additional layers of bureaucracy and reduces the resources reaching local actors. Sanctions and regulatory constraints further complicate funding flows, particularly for development-oriented activities. Overall, the funding architecture remains

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<sup>148</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Financing Fragility: Delivering on the Nexus* (Paris: OECD, 2020), [https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/Financing\\_Fragility\\_2020.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/Financing_Fragility_2020.pdf)

misaligned with the requirements of HDP approaches, prioritizing short-term outputs over long-term impact.

## **ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW FRAMEWORK**

### **CORE QUESTION MODULES**

#### **MODULE 1: Understanding of HDP Nexus (15 minutes)**

##### **Opening/Rapport Building:**

1. Can you tell me about your organization and the communities you serve?
2. What are the primary challenges facing the communities you work with currently?

##### **Conceptual Understanding:**

- Are you familiar with the term "HDP Nexus (Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus)"

If yes: What does it mean to you and your organization?

- If no: [Provide brief explanation] Does your organization do work that connects humanitarian relief, longer-term development, and peacebuilding?
- In your own words, how would you describe the relationship between humanitarian assistance, development programming, and peace efforts in [country context]?
- Does your organization use different terminology to describe integrated approaches to crisis response? What terms do you use?

##### **Country-Specific Probes:**

- **Colombia:** How does your work address the needs of Venezuelan migrants/refugees alongside conflict-affected Colombian communities?
- **Syria:** How do you balance immediate survival needs with longer-term recovery in areas with varying levels of stability?
- **Afghanistan:** Since August 2021, how has your approach to supporting communities evolved?
- **Myanmar:** How do you navigate working in areas controlled by different actors (military, ethnic armed organizations, resistance groups)?
- **Türkiye:** Post-earthquake (2023), how has your organization integrated disaster response with ongoing refugee support?

#### **MODULE 2: Current Programming and Operationalization (20 minutes)**

##### **Program Description:**

- Can you describe a specific program or project that connects humanitarian relief with development and/or peacebuilding objectives?
  - What are the specific activities?

- Who are the beneficiaries?
- What timeframe does it operate on?
- How do you determine whether to implement humanitarian versus development activities in a given area or for a given community?

#### **Integration Practices:**

- How does your organization coordinate across different types of programming (emergency relief, livelihood support, social cohesion, etc.)?
- Can you share an example of how you've successfully integrated humanitarian and development work? What made it successful?
- What about an example where integration was challenging or didn't work as planned? What were the barriers?

#### **Contextual Adaptation:**

- How does the political/security context in [country] shape your ability to implement integrated programming?

#### **Country-Specific Probes:**

- **Colombia:** How do you work with both host communities and Venezuelan populations in the same programming?
- **Syria:** How do you maintain programming continuity across different areas of control?
- **Afghanistan:** How have restrictions on women's participation affected your Nexus programming?
- **Myanmar:** How do you ensure your programs support peace without becoming politicized?
- **Türkiye:** How do you integrate earthquake recovery with ongoing support for Syrian refugees?

### **MODULE 3: Funding & Coordination, Coherence, and Complementarity (15 minutes)**

#### **Coordination Mechanisms:**

- What coordination mechanisms or platforms does your organization participate in (clusters, working groups, networks)?
- How effective are these mechanisms in promoting integrated approaches across humanitarian, development, and peace actors?
- Do you coordinate directly with development actors when implementing humanitarian programs? With humanitarian actors when doing development work? How does this work?

#### **Coherence Challenges:**

- What are the main obstacles to aligning humanitarian and development approaches in your context?
- Funding constraints and donor requirements?
- Different organizational mandates and timelines?
- Access or security issues?

- Government regulations or restrictions?

16. How do different donor requirements affect your ability to implement integrated programming?

**Complementarity:** 17. How does your organization ensure its work complements rather than duplicates other actors' efforts?

18. Are there specific organizations (international or local) that you work well with on integrated programming? What makes that partnership effective?

#### MODULE 4: Capacity and Resource Needs (15 minutes)

##### **Current Capacities:**

- What specific skills, knowledge, or capacities does your organization have that enable Nexus approaches?
- What training or capacity building has your staff received related to:
- Conflict sensitivity
- Do No Harm principles
- Needs assessment across humanitarian/development spectrum
- Multi-year programming and planning
- Working with diverse stakeholder groups

##### **Gaps and Needs:**

- What types of training or technical support would be most valuable for your organization?
  - Strategic planning for integrated programming
  - Advocacy and policy influence
  - Partnership development and management
  - Fundraising and proposal writing for Nexus programming
  - Monitoring and evaluation of integrated outcomes
  - Staff security and risk management
- Beyond training, what other resources would help strengthen your Nexus work?
  - Flexible funding
  - Longer-term funding commitments
  - Networking opportunities
  - Technical advisors
  - Access to evidence and best practices

#### MODULE 5: Funding and Sustainability (10 minutes)

##### **Funding Landscape:**

- What are your organization's primary sources of funding currently?
- How has the funding landscape changed in recent years?
  - Post-COVID
  - With recent ODA cuts
  - With the "humanitarian reset"

- Multi-year programs?
- Do you receive funding for:
  - Core organizational costs?
  - Programming that explicitly integrates humanitarian, development, and peace objectives?
  - Gender-specific programming

#### **Access to Funding:**

- What barriers does your organization face in accessing international funding for Nexus programming?
  - Requirements for prior experience
  - Reporting requirements
  - Language barriers
  - Compliance and due diligence demands
  - Lack of direct access (funding through intermediaries)
- What proportion of funding comes directly to your organization versus through international intermediaries?

#### **Sustainability:**

- How sustainable is your current funding model? What would make it more sustainable?

### **MODULE 6: Localization and Partnerships (10 minutes)**

#### **Current Partnership Dynamics:**

- How would you characterize your organization's partnerships with international organizations (UN agencies, INGOs)?
  - Equal partnership?
  - Implementer of their programs?
  - Sub-contractor?
  - Technical partner?
  - Constraints?
- What decisions does your organization control in these partnerships? What decisions do international partners control?
- In your experience, are international actors genuinely committed to localization, or is it more rhetorical?

#### **Power and Decision-Making:**

- How involved is your organization in:
  - Needs assessment and program design
  - Budget allocation decisions
  - Monitoring and evaluation framework design
  - Policy and advocacy at national/international level
- What would genuine localization look like for your organization?

**Networks and Coalitions:** 35. Are you familiar with/a member of NEAR (Network for Empowered Aid Response)?

- If yes: How has NEAR membership benefited your organization?
- If no: [Provide brief description] Would this type of network be valuable?
- What role could a network like NEAR play in strengthening local organizations' Nexus capacities?

#### **MODULE 7: Policy and Advocacy (5 minutes)**

- Does your organization engage in policy advocacy related to crisis response? At what levels (local, national, international)?
- What policy changes would most improve your organization's ability to serve communities in crisis?
- How can international actors better support local organizations' policy and advocacy work?

#### **MODULE 8: Recommendations and Looking Forward (5 minutes)**

**NEAR:** What are the top 3 things NEAR should prioritize to help local organizations strengthen their Nexus capacities?

**Nexus Academy:** 41. If the Nexus Academy were to develop training specifically for local organizations, what should it include?

- Content topics
- Format and delivery modality
- Language
- Duration
- What would make Nexus training most relevant and applicable to your work?

**Vision:** Looking ahead 3-5 years, what role do you see local organizations playing in crisis response in [country]?

- What would enable local organizations to fully replace or lead crisis response efforts currently led by international actors?

### **ANNEX 4: DISCLOSURE OF AI TOOL USE**

In accordance with Section E of the *Capstone Workshop in Sustainable Development Practice 2025–26 Student Guide* ("Academic Integrity Statement and AI Policy"), this annex discloses the use of generative AI tools in the preparation of this report.

#### **Tools used**

Anthropic Claude (Opus 4.6) and OpenAI ChatGPT, accessed via their respective web platforms.

## **Purpose of use**

AI tools were used in a proofreading and editing capacity, consistent with the uses permitted under the Workshop Guide. The team used these tools for the following functions:

- Copy-editing and proofreading of team-drafted text, including grammar, punctuation, sentence-level clarity, and consistency of terminology across country chapters.
- Tightening of team-drafted paragraphs to meet word limits.
- Formatting and consistency checks for Chicago-style footnotes and bibliographic entries.
- Structural review and feedback on team-drafted sections, including suggestions on paragraph sequencing and transitions.
- Document design and formatting of the final report file, including typography, layout, headers and footers, table of contents, and figure placement.
- Technical assistance in producing data visualisations from team-verified source data, drawing on OCHA Financial Tracking Service data, OECD DAC and World Bank statistics, and the ACBAR LTWG Localization Baseline Assessment (January 2026).

## **Representative prompts**

The following are representative of the prompts submitted to the AI tools:

- "Proofread the following paragraph for grammar and clarity. Do not change the argument or substitute synonyms for technical terms."
- "This paragraph is 240 words. Tighten to 180 without losing the citations or the analytical claim."
- "Check the footnote formatting in this section against Chicago Manual of Style 17th edition."
- "Suggest a clearer transition between these two paragraphs."
- "Format this set of figures consistently with institutional document standards (UN Blue accent, Georgia body text)."

## **Content authorship**

All substantive content in this report, including analytical framings, country findings, recommendations, and conclusions, was researched, written, and authored by the capstone team. AI tools were not used to generate research findings, analytical claims, or recommendations. Source identification, evidence synthesis, and argumentation are the work of the team.

## **Limitations and verification**

The team is aware that AI-generated suggestions can be inaccurate, incomplete, or biased. All AI-assisted edits were reviewed by the responsible team member before being incorporated. All citations, statistics, and factual claims in the report were verified against original sources by the

team.

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