

# Linking humanitarian, development and peace-building policies and programmes to improve nutrition in Afghanistan

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## Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous country in south-central Asia with a population of 32 million. Four decades of conflict have made Afghanistan a context of multiple and protracted crises. Around 11.3 million people (37% of the total population) are estimated to likely experience severe acute food insecurity, of which an estimated 8.6 million people will likely be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and nearly 2.7 million people will likely be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4)<sup>1</sup>. Prevalence of stunting in children under five years old (CU5) is 41%, while the CU5 wasting prevalence is 9%<sup>2</sup>.

## The Triple Nexus Approach

The Government's development agenda calls for an increased focus on linking humanitarian, development and peace-building policies and programmes. This 'Triple Nexus Approach' has brought increased coherence and linkages to delivery of actions for improved nutrition and food security, particularly reflected in the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A) Strategic Plan (see below). The approach is also intended to encourage donors to invest

further as they see tangible outcomes of funding interventions from greater efficiency and impact. The Triple Nexus Approach links three key plans: the Humanitarian Response Plan, the One UN Plan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) peace mandate (see Figure 1).

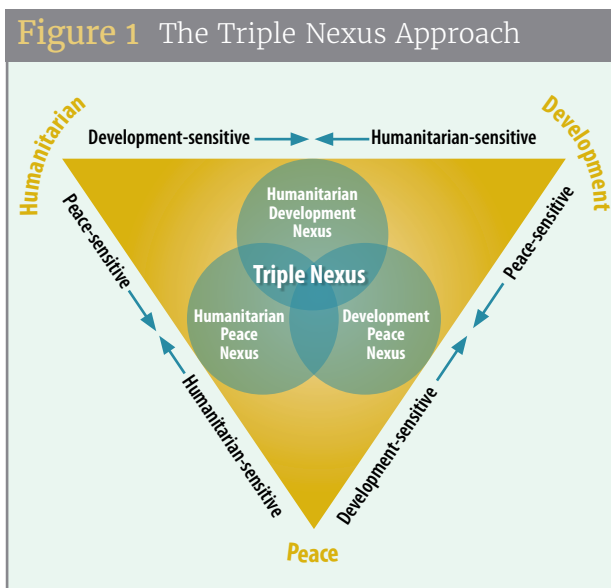
The uniqueness of this approach is that the triple nexus reflects the reality and needs of the current context in Afghanistan. The country is fragile and affected by conflict and violence, a context that requires short, medium and long-term humanitarian, development and peace-sensitive actions to address immediate needs and also build resilience and sustainable development.

## The Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda

Delivering a multi-sector response through the Triple Nexus Approach has also become possible following the launch of the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A) in 2017. The AFSeN-A Strategic Plan (2019-2023) reflects both humanitarian and development multi-sector responses and actions. Implementation via strong institutional leadership and community engagement aims to improve the situation of the population and facilitate peace building.

Under AFSeN-A, the Triple Nexus Approach aims to improve the nutrition situation at two levels, policy and programming. At policy level, the approach includes humanitarian, development and peace stakeholders in food security and nutrition policy-making discussions in support of policy coherence. The AFSeN-A Secretariat has also taken the initiative to bring in the humanitarian-focused cluster coordinators to participate in Executive Committee meetings, bringing more efficient exchange, awareness and space for improved linkages between platforms.

At programme level, the approach provides a coordination and tracking framework. This has strengthened joint analysis, planning and programming between humanitarian, development and peace actors to design interventions with



Source: P. Howe (2019) The triple nexus: A potential approach to supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals? World Development 124

<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan IPC projection (November 2019-March 2020)

<sup>2</sup> <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/southern-asia/afghanistan/#profile>

both short and long-term goals, which also feed into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The current AFSeN-A Strategic Plan identifies priority actions from various sectors that will contribute to the common goals of achieving food and nutrition security, and interventions that contribute to outcomes in two or more nexus areas (see Table 1).

### Working together

AFSeN-A coordination meetings involve food security, nutrition, public awareness and advocacy working groups; SUN Movement networks (UN, development partners, civil society and business networks); and decision-making platforms (executive and high-level steering committees). These groups and forums bring together development, humanitarian, civil society organisations, the private sector, academia and government decision-makers to discuss short, medium and long-term interventions around food security and nutrition, including defining priorities and identifying fundraising mechanisms. Much of the ‘peace building’ is through dialogue-based development work that focuses on community-owned initiatives.

While several nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions are being implemented at national scale, translation of the AFSeN-A strategic plan is an opportunity to strengthen linkages and coherence of the multi-sector response by mapping what is already being done and advocating to fill gaps on what is missing; for example, strengthening joint efforts in line with operationalising the Maternal and Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) strategy so as to accelerate progress on the prevention of malnutrition (wasting, stunting and micronutrient deficiencies). Increased awareness and understanding of all three elements of the Triple Nexus through concrete examples is key to promoting the approach.

### Addressing challenges

The AFSeN-A has introduced the triple-nexus concept via orientation trainings, but it will take more momentum to move forward. The integration of humanitarian, development and peace initiatives in a context of protracted civil strife requires a transition phase. This is needed for transferring responsibilities to governments and ensuring mainstream budgetary allocations and structural adjustments, as well as long-term planning and financing by both government and donors, with a critical component of capacity strengthening. For example, donors have plans to pilot a long-term financing project on ‘Early Financing, Early Action’, which explores shock-responsive, immediate safety-net actions linked to longer-term social-protection schemes.



A mother feeds her underweight baby at a hospital in Kishim district, northern Afghanistan

WFP/Jacob Maentz

Funding for nutrition through national budget remains insufficient to meet needs due to competing national priorities. However, through the AFSeN-A, provincial coordination committee advocacy is focused on increasing prioritisation of nutrition with an increase in national budget allocation and there are budgetary allocations for nutrition-sensitive actions at provincial level.

Afghanistan has been delivering services through the humanitarian-development nexus through several initiatives. There is a need to identify and document these, as well as to analyse how the peace component fits and can be further elaborated. These are beginning stages that reflect the progress achieved through the framework of the triple nexus, with many existing examples to build on (especially ones linked to humanitarian and development linkages).

### Next steps

Next steps include wider dissemination and orientation on the triple nexus from the AFSeN-A perspective, so that stakeholders understand the rationale and importance of the approach. The concept should be internalised and examples discussed in various platforms of the AFSeN-A. Moreover, newly developed policies and strategies need to be reviewed in light of the approach. A small team composed of government, UN, development partners, private sector and civil society will be formed to facilitate this process and report regularly to the AFSeN-A Executive Committee.

A better understanding is still needed, however, on how country efforts are sequenced to operationalise the peace and development initiatives while simultaneously mainstreaming humanitarian actions. This link can be further strengthened in supporting responses and service delivery in order to prevent people from falling back into crisis as their resilience increases.

**Table 1** Examples of Triple Nexus Approach interventions

| Type of intervention   | Humanitarian   | Development  | Peace   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <i>Treatment of acute malnutrition</i>                               | • Delivery of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) treatment programmes through mobile teams in camps and hard-to-reach areas | • Decentralisation of treatment to lower health facility levels nearer to villages of origin                   | • Opportunities for less movement through improved availability of services   |
| <i>Asset creation</i>  | • Fortified wheat flour  | • Economic stimulus<br>• Community assets  | • Opportunities for work, less migration, reduced tensions  |
| <i>Shock-responsive safety net</i>                                   | • Protective safety net  | • Productive safety net  | • Greater trust in and legitimacy of government   |
| <i>School feeding, deworming and iron folic acid supplementation</i> |  | • Improved access to education<br>• Reduced stunting and prevention of anaemia<br>• Improved learning outcomes | • Normalisation and stability<br>• Peaceful coexistence   |
| <i>Community-based nutrition interventions</i>                       | • Engagement of community health workers for detection and referral, and awareness-raising   | • Triggering and ownership by communities to improve the nutrition situation<br>• Reduction in stunting        | • Improved wellbeing of household via improved nutrition status<br>• Increased cognitive and productivity potential |