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ARTICLE

Envisioning the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh: Implementation challenges and suggestions for the future

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Abstract

Motivation: Since 2017, more than a million forcibly displaced Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have been heavily reliant on humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. The donors and humanitarian stakeholders involved, often drawing on OECD recommendations, are calling for a triple nexus design linking humanitarian, development, and peace pillars to increase effectiveness.

Purpose: To further understanding of the issues involved and to provide recommendations for the implementation of a triple-nexus programme, the article explores the main challenges relating to triple-nexus implementation in Bangladesh.

Approach and Methods: Thematic analysis is conducted on 25 qualitative key informant interviews with selected government officials and international and national NGOs involved in the Rohingya humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar.

Findings: The study identifies five main challenges to triple-nexus implementation, foregrounding the OECD guiding principles: (1) the "peace" component remains unaddressed and undefined; (2) the capacity of local organizations is undermined in the Rohingya response due to the dominance of international organizations; (3) the shrinkage of overall funding leads to ambiguities in multi-year funding commitments and modalities; (4) there is a co-ordination gap between the three nexus pillars; and (5) the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is reluctant to design long-term refugee policies for Rohingyas.

Policy Implications: The study suggests that adopting the triple nexus in the Rohingya response requires stronger political commitment on the part of the GoB and goal-oriented national policy in accordance with OECD principles. The inclusion of a "peace" element is indispensable to enable the balance between humanitarian and development components, but requires a clearly defined conflict context to be entwined with the nexus programming. The findings also contribute to reappraising the impediments to operationalizing the nexus programme and refurbishing policy discussions in other major cases in forced migration, IDP, or refugee crises globally.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus (also known as the triple nexus) encapsulates a vision of linking humanitarian, development, and peace components to move away from a compartmentalized approach (Howe, 2019). In response to the call for strengthened policy and operational coherence, there has been a greater acceptance of the HDP nexus approach (OECD, 2021) among humanitarian actors and in the international aid system (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). In 2019, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provided a set of 11 guiding principles for the triple nexus to strengthen co-ordination, programming, and financing to address risk and vulnerabilities, strengthen prevention efforts, and enhance complementarity between the nexus pillars (OECD, 2024).[1] However, this is challenging as, ideologically, the needs-based approach of humanitarian action is fundamentally different from the right-based approaches of development (Lie, 2020), and the peace component adds to the complexity. In practice, there is no single method of HDP nexus implementation in humanitarian settings, but it certainly requires a longer timeframe than yearly allocations of humanitarian relief funding (Joireman & Haddad, 2023).

In Bangladesh, the humanitarian-development nexus (double nexus) is not new in terms of climate-related disaster risk management, but little attention has been paid to human-made disaster policies relating to refugees in the country's national plan. Today, over a million Rohingya refugees are living in Bangladesh (Khan, 2023).[2] In August 2017, following a military crackdown in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas were added to the existing mass displacement in Cox's Bazar, the first wave of which had arrived in 1978; since then, critical observers in Bangladesh have framed the presence of Rohingya refugees as a "crisis" (Uddin, 2024). However, after several failed attempts, a repatriation plan for Rohingyas has yet to be devised. Indeed, due to the military coup d'état in February 2021, the situation in Myanmar has become more complex and halted the progress of plans for large-scale repatriation. Hence, the Rohingyas might remain in Bangladesh for the foreseeable future, relying heavily on humanitarian aid. Today, however, new tensions have emerged inside the refugee camps because of the escalation of violence between armed groups like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO), who have firmly established themselves among the refugees (International Crisis Group, 2023). Additionally, antirefugee sentiments are growing in Bangladeshi host communities due to the perceived negative effect of the presence of refugee on local livelihoods, resources, social security, and the environment (Siddiqi, 2022).[3] If peace efforts are not prioritized, and the ongoing tensions between Rohingyas and host communities remain unaddressed, the refugees might face adverse forms of confrontation and hostility from host communities in the near future (Masum, 2021). Therefore, the inclusion of a "peace" element is inevitable in the Rohingya humanitarian response, yet the conceptual scope of the term is contentious, barely addressed and largely undefined due to its multiple interpretations. To avoid the multiple contextualization of peace components (Norman & Mikhael, 2023), this article focuses on conflict sensitivity—or peaceful co-existence between host and refugees (Grossenbacher, 2020)—until a dignified voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar is possible.[4]

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[1]For the DAC recommendation on the humanitarian Development and Peace nexus, see OECD (2024).

[2]In this article, I use the term "refugees" to refer to the Rohingyas even though they are not given refugee status in Bangladesh.

[3]"Host community" in this article refers to the host population in the Cox's Bazar district, not the entire host country.

[4]In the conflict-sensitivity approach, peace per se is not the primary objective (IASC, 2020); rather, it requires that actors do not unintentionally favour one party over another, do no harm, avoid negative impacts, and maximize positive impacts to sustain peace in a conflict context.

This study, therefore, seeks to revisit the triple-nexus framework and its operational challenges, in accordance with the principles of the OECD, to achieve more coherent, efficient, and collective outcomes in the Rohingya humanitarian response, addressing the question: what are the main challenges to triple-nexus implementation in the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh? Drawing from thematic analysis of 25 qualitative key informant interviews, the study identifies the following five challenges: (1) the "peace" component remains unaddressed and largely undefined; (2) the capacity of local organizations is undermined in nexus planning due to the dominance of international organizations; (3) the shrinkage of overall funding has led to ambiguities in multi-year funding commitments and modalities; (4) there is a co-ordination gap between the three nexus pillars; and (5) the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) is reluctant to design long-term refugee policies for the Rohingyas.

2 | FROM DOUBLE NEXUS TO TRIPLE NEXUS: CONNECTING THE DOTS

The humanitarian-development (double) nexus is not a new concept. There has been discussion since the 1980s on how to overcome the silos in output-oriented interventions in nexus programming (Torres et al., 2021). In the early 1990s, efforts to link relief rehabilitation and development (LRRD) focused on improving the transition from humanitarian action to development co-operation, using the concept of "continuum" to bridge the divide; this ultimately transformed into the double nexus that connects humanitarian efforts with early recovery and rehabilitation, thus forming the foundations of development (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023; Lie, 2020). During the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in 2016, two fundamentally different schools of thought emerged on the nexus approach (Poole & Culbert, 2019). The first focuses on the narrower double-nexus interpretation represented by the New Way of Working (NWOW), which calls on humanitarian and development actors to work collaboratively to address the multifaceted challenges in the Grand Bargain[5]; the second articulated the peace component of the humanitarian-development nexus in 2017 when UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres proposed "sustaining peace" resolutions to highlight the importance of working together towards achieving the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, addressing conflict to alleviate human suffering (Barakat & Milton, 2020; Brown et al., 2024).

By and large, the HDP nexus is a whole-of-system approach (IASC, 2020), which forms a triangle of three dual nexuses: humanitarian-development, development-peace and humanitarian-peace. The humanitarian-development nexus comprises the "transition or intersection between the delivery of humanitarian relief and the provision of long-term development assistance to the affected population" (Strand, 2020). The humanitarian-peace nexus refers to delivering lifesaving assistance in promoting a safe and protective environment for affected communities, and the development-peace nexus highlights the link between development efforts in vulnerable communities and preventing conflict in order to sustain peace (Howe, 2019). The shaded areas in the centre of Figure 1 depict the intersection of the three components—humanitarian, development, and peace—that contribute to a complementary co-ordination of the triple nexus for collective outcomes (Howe, 2019). However, the unshaded area among the overlapping circles represents situations where all three components should be nexus sensitive. For example, the development and peace components should be humanitarian sensitive to resist the politicization of humanitarian principles and protect humanitarian space. Likewise, a peace action need not contribute to the outcomes related to the other two components, but it should be both development and humanitarian sensitive in terms of "doing no harm" (Howe, 2019).

The peace component in triple-nexus thinking can be supplied with differing objectives and strategies irrespective of the multiple meanings and multitude of ways of conceptualizing it (Brown et al., 2024; Brown &

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[5]"Grand Bargain" is an agreement between large donors and humanitarian organizations, launched in WHS (2016). See https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2017-02/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf.
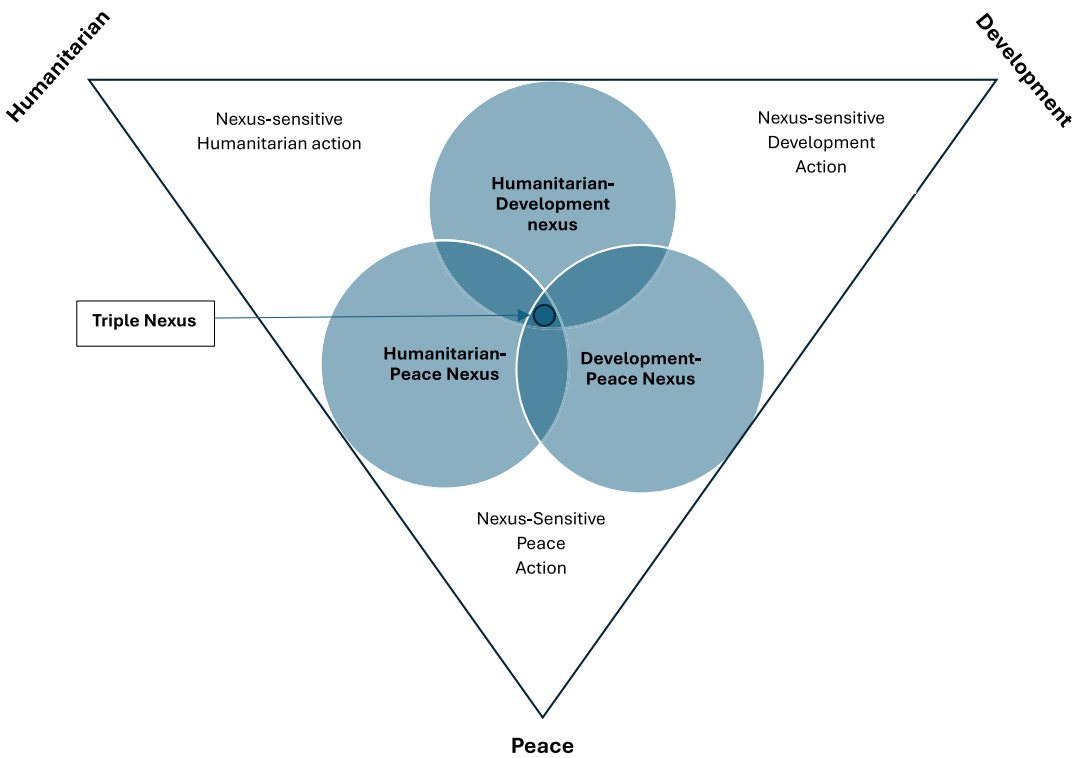
FIGURE 1 Triple-nexus framework adapted and modified from Howe (2019) (reproduced with the publisher's permission).

Mena, 2021); it is, however, one of the most controversial issues in the triple-nexus implementation, often seen as compromising humanitarian principles (Barakat & Milton, 2020). Humanitarian actors are wary of engaging with peace workers, for fear of putting the core humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality at risk. Hence, the inclusion of peace and its links with development and humanitarian sectors should be defined with care and clarity. Brown et al. (2024) identify three main conceptualizations among the many that are associated with the field: *peacemaking* efforts involve an agreement (at any level of formal or informal diplomacy) among political or military elites to establish peace among parties in conflict; *peacekeeping* maintains peace by military force; and *peacebuilding* aims to produce market-oriented democracies governed by the democratic rule of law and protection of human rights. These three distinct areas of peace-oriented international relations are important for policy debates and the broader policy implications of using the triple-nexus approach. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has conceptualized peace by distinguishing between the "big P" and "little p" approaches (IASC, 2020). "Big P" actions can support political solutions and securitize responses to violent conflict at local and national levels, whereas "little p" activity focuses on building the capacity for conflict prevention and management within institutions and society more broadly, which includes building trust and social cohesion (DPC, 2019).

3 | THE HDP NEXUS IN COX'S BAZAR: LOCATING PEACE

Bangladesh has already developed a double-nexus approach to nationally led disaster risk reduction, building resilience to natural disasters and climate change following the devastation caused by Cyclone Bhola in 1970

(Islam, 2019), while the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme is another double-nexus success, begun in 1974 (Anwar & Cho, 2016). Initially a humanitarian aid initiative in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) for the famine-stricken population of Bangladesh, the government has instrumentalized it in several food crises, transforming it from short-term relief to a ladder approach to economic development of people in need, and since 1998 it has been part of Bangladesh's social safety programmes. Recently, a UN-led Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT) with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) set out a humanitarian-development nexus strategy in Bangladesh to improve systemwide coherence in humanitarian pre-paredness in high climate-related risk districts and in the response strategy supporting the National Plan for Disaster Management (NPDM) to complement the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN Bangladesh & Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, 2021).

However, the NPDM barely mentions the Rohingya refugee crisis, which is within the remit of the Joint Response Plan (JRP): a co-ordinated mechanism to address the immediate lifesaving needs of the Rohingya popu-lation and mitigate the refugees' impact on the host communities in Cox's Bazar (ISCG, 2024). The JRP began with the single pillar of humanitarian intervention, but later shifted to the humanitarian-development nexus; the third JRP in 2020 was particularly praised for its application of the latter nexus to meet the needs of both Rohingya refugees and host communities (Masum, 2021). The GoB adopted the UN framework on skills development in 2022 to build capacity for Rohingya refugees commensurate with livelihood opportunities in Myanmar to as-sist a sustainable return and mitigate the impact of Rohingya presence on residents of Cox's Bazar. The District Development and Growth Plan (DDGP) also involves long-standing co-operation between development partners and the local government in the district, a part of the nexus thinking developed by the District Administration of Cox's Bazar with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners. However, there remains a knowledge gap concerning how the nexus pillars can be bridged at the grassroots level. For example, one can categorize road construction between Cox's Bazar and Teknaf for communicating between the Rohingya camps as a humanitarian response as it could both support the safe delivery of lifesaving goods and the long-term development goals of the affected communities (Islam, 2019). So, is this a humanitarian-development nexus? Or is it just a humanitarian action that has long-term implications? Linking the peace component to the humanitarian and development pillars adds further discussion to nexus thinking, as the peace component is the most mallea-ble pillar of the three, with the greatest variation in views of its meanings, functions, and compatibility (Brown et al., 2024). Nexus thinking thus becomes more complicated in the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar due to the absence of clearly defined peace components or specified interlinkages with humanitarian and development el-ements, which reduces the efficiency of the JRP and creates an imbalance in the effectiveness of response plans (Masum, 2021).

Hitherto, Bangladesh was the second largest recipient by volume of official development assistance (ODA) in 2019 (Rieger, 2021), not only for Rohingya refugee problems but also for the development needs of the en-tire district of Cox's Bazar. The humanitarian ODA also significantly addresses the mounting hostility between residents of the district (FAO et al., 2021) because the long-term Rohingya presence has created resource scar-city, loss of livelihood, and social conflict (Habib, 2023). Although Rohingyas are prohibited from engaging in income-generating activities outside the camps, they take on low-salaried work in the local market, curtailing the livelihood of the host people (Ahmed & Naeem, 2020). Moreover, the prolonged presence of the refugees has increased competition for land, while Bangladeshi farmers complain of the unremunerated loss of agricul-tural land due to the construction of refugee camps (Joireman & Haddad, 2023). Despite international efforts to engender countervailing support for host communities and refugees, tensions persist largely because of the competitive economy and perceptions of unequal distribution of aid. Therefore, in this situation, drawing on Galtung (1969), the meaning of "peace" should not only be understood as an absence or termination of acute, open violence (negative peace), but also as a constructive resolution to conflict through the re-establishment of social systems that serve the whole population (positive peace). Thus, in the Rohingya response, the peace component might be understood as comprising more transformative systems and societal changes leading to

social cohesion, trust building, rights, and justice (Brown et al., 2024), thereby preventing conflict from accelerating into violence (Grossenbacher, 2020).

4 | METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The author visited Cox's Bazar for one month of fieldwork in 2022 to gather data on the triple nexus. Nineteen qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted, based on judgemental sampling techniques (Berndt, 2020), whereby the interviewees were selected on their expertise and experience in the Rohingya response. Semi-structured interview guides were used to conduct face-to-face interviews with two officials from the Office of the Refugee, Relief, and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), four officials from the Camp in Charge (CiC) office, one Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) official, five international non-governmental organization (NGO) employees, and seven national NGO practitioners. The interviews were recorded after gaining the interviewees' written consent. The author also conducted six Zoom interviews between April and July 2023, using a snowball sampling method (Given, 2008), as some participants alluded to other professional experts in the development sector who were working in the host communities of the Ukhiya and Teknaf sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. In total, the article draws on 25 interviews discussing the relationship between development and humanitarian assistance in the Rohingya response and, further, the conflict dynamics of the camps and their relationship to peace measures. Overall, the interviews focused on the contextualization of the nexus pillars and challenges to their implementation in the context of the crisis.

Most of the interviews, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, were conducted in Bengali (one in English). After careful transcription and translation of the interviews into English, a thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2012) building on the definition of triple nexus, based on which five main themes concerning the challenges to its implementation were generated.

5 | FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The triple nexus in the Rohingya response might be envisioned from the different perspectives of organizations, various communities, and the Rohingya themselves. This study, however, focuses on two dominant views: those of local and international actors involved in the Rohingya response, along with government views (RRRC officials, DC office, Upazila office in Cox's Bazar), while identifying the triple-nexus implementation challenges in the response. In what follows, the five main barriers to its implementation identified in the interviews are presented and discussed with regard to the OECD recommendations.

5.1 | Peace components are undefined and unaddressed in the Rohingya response plan

The operationalization of the triple nexus relies on how the organizations on the ground understand peace and their connection to peace action (Brown et al., 2024). OECD-DAC Recommendation IV(1) states that prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding should be prioritized, and development investment prioritized whenever possible while ensuring the continuation of immediate humanitarian needs; IV(3) recommends ensuring that activities do no harm and are conflict sensitive to avoid unintended negative consequences and maximize the positive effects across humanitarian, development, and peace actions (OECD, 2021). However, the interviews show that the absence of a definition of the characteristics of the peace component impedes the realization of the HDP nexus in Cox's Bazar. A number of interviewees disagreed with implementation of the HDP nexus, as the peace action has not been treated as a separate domain, but rather tainted by different conceptualizations and meanings when

interconnected with humanitarian and development work by different actors involved in the Rohingya response in Bangladesh. As Participant 25, a development practitioner, pointed out:

> The donors in the Rohingya humanitarian response want a long-term humanitarian-development nexus plan, whereas the GoB wants a humanitarian-peace nexus, meanwhile defining repatriation as peace. So, there is a strategic gap of understanding of the peace component at the macro level of analysis.

The humanitarian actors in the response plan, guided by the donors and multilateral development banks (MDBs), wish to cultivate social cohesion between hosts and refugees to sustain peace, whereas the GoB only focuses on a humanitarian response and immediate voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar as a peace measure. These two different views of refugee treatment have obstructed long-term triple-nexus implementation in the ground. In fact, many interviewees were concerned about whether the inclusion of peace in the humanitarian-development nexus was undermining the core humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality. In a similar vein, Brown et al. (2024) argued that the differing approaches and the multiple meanings of peace adopted by different players do not merely create a conceptual problem in the ground, but also translate into considerable differences in the programming. One of the reasons for this was the "invisibility" of peace-related action, a problem cited during the interview with one of the national NGOs' chief executive body, who asserted:

> Peace components cannot be seen with bare eyes. The donors continue to prioritize the materialistic support and disregard conflict-sensitive approaches such as awareness, advocacy, trust building, psycho-social support, and so on. When you support with natural capital such as the delivery of food/ non-food items, and infrastructure, the project might show progress in the affected areas; but they cannot display any components of peace, since they are not visible.
>
> (Participant 2, national NGO representative)

Although the peace component was hard to define, the participants from the organizations provided highly relevant reflections that resonated with understanding it as conflict sensitivity, prevention, or resolution (Norman & Mikhael, 2023). Based on their comments, the nature of the conflict dynamics in Cox's Bazar can be analysed in three different contexts; the inter-inter conflict (between the host communities), inter-intra conflict (hosts vs. refugees), and intra-intra conflict (between the armed refugee groups). Here, the focus is on friction between hosts and refugees, wherein resource competition was identified as one of the main problems. One of the interviewees shared his experience of working in a project:

> The host population sees what the Rohingya receive in terms of humanitarian support. Even if they do not require so much for a household, every Rohingya receives a five-litre oil bottle, food ration, non-food items, and so on. They don't really need that much, so they sell it in the local markets. The host people had their livelihood in the nearby forest or fishing in the Naf River, but today the Rohingya occupy their land, river, forest, hills. Additionally, many Rohingyas work outside the camps, offer cheap labour, and occupy local markets. As a result, host resentment and animosity increase.
>
> (Participant 1, local NGO)

When resource transfers are not planned in a conflict-sensitive manner, they can contribute to rising tensions over the refugee camps, adversely affecting the affected populations. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the host population around the camps received free medical checks, healthcare, non-food items, counselling and advocacy from various organizations along with the refugees; however, the cessation of such services for the

host community after the end of the pandemic has made the locals envious and resentful of the Rohingyas for whom these continue (Masum, 2021). Consequently, the local host communities feel that they are faced with social, economic, environmental and security challenges due to the Rohingya presence, which triggers anger and frustration. One of the interviewees also raised the issue of local residents suffering due to strains on aquifer levels of groundwater:

> Initially nobody considered the impact of the response on the aquifer level in Cox's Bazar. Thousands of shallow tubewells were sunk as part of several projects, causing the aquifer level to be practically depleted due to excessive extraction of drinking water for the refugees. Today, the residents need deep tubewells to extract water deep under the surface1,000 metres, which is expensive. So, who will pay for this?
>
> (Participant 5, development practitioner)

In order to mitigate the effects of hosting a large number of Rohingyas, the JRP prioritizes the strategic objectives of fostering the well-being of host communities, offering various activities to support the communities across the affected areas. Moreover, the dynamics of peace/conflict differ from one context to another. For example, in the Teknaf upazila (an administrative division of Cox's Bazar), most of the camps are built on private property, whereas in Ukhiya upazila the camps are located on government-owned land. Hence, the intensity of the social conflict between hosts and refugees is based on geographical proximity, as well as an understanding of peace in everyday realities; however, the implementation of peace as a separate silo has not been addressed in the Rohingya response, which hinders the process of updating HDP nexus programming.

5.2 | The dominance of international organizations undermines the capacity of local organizations

Nexus thinking is predominantly a way of approaching aid, whereas the localization agenda is about how it should be delivered (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019). One of the principles of DAC-OECD Recommendation IV(5) on the triple nexus is "strengthening national and local capacities" (OECD, 2021), which should remain a priority even in times of crisis. In particular, IV(5.II) recommends that international actors invest in local capacities to foster self-reliance and resilience in order to end dependence on humanitarian assistance gradually (OECD, 2022). However, according to the interviews, the domination of international organizations in the humanitarian space of the Rohingya response undermines local capacities and restrains local participation. In practice, local knowledge and participation are crucial, as the purpose of the HDP nexus in integrating the silos is not new to the local actors (Agensky, 2019). The interviews emphasized three main factors undermining the capacity of local organizations in the broader HDP nexus design: externally led localization design, a lack of strategic partnership, and the stringent accountability mechanisms applying to local initiatives.

Partnerships with international organizations mostly strengthen local capacity and complementarity (Wake & Bryant, 2018), augmenting the capacity of local organizations to take over the leadership role in the long run, which is also an exit strategy for the international agencies—although defining "local" further blurs the lines between local and international (Roepstorff, 2020). As such, one of the local NGO actors in the Cox's Bazar camps, Participant 22, asserts that, "in the name of localization, we are getting the imposed version of the international doctrine. It is not local engagement, but an international design for counterfeiting localization commitments." Also, there is no local NGO in the localization task force. In this regard, Participant 25 from the development sector sarcastically mentioned that "the localization progress in Bangladesh is like a car with a local body but foreign engine. To actualize the localization, it is necessary to localize the international agencies first." Therefore, as long as the international NGOs (INGOs) hold their dominance, such an externally led localization process might

reproduce current power asymmetries, marginalizing actors at the periphery and becoming another method whereby dominance and control is exercised by international organizations (Roepstorff, 2020).

Moreover, partnerships with locally led organizations are limited to small-scale projects, whereas most of the humanitarian funding to local NGOs is channelled through UN agencies, pooled funds, and international NGOs (FAO et al., 2021). Local NGOs' participation in the large-scale humanitarian response is limited to the role of implementing partner for the INGOs. In fact, there is no consensus on whether "localization" involves the transfer of resources, the transfer of agency, or a focus on local ways of doing things (Baguios et al., 2021). As one of the interviewees from the local NGO in Cox's Bazar postulates:

> As for the Grand Bargain commitments, 25% of funding should be channelled directly to local NGOs. For implementation work, donors and INGOs connect through intermediaries, which may increase administration costs. So, if the local NGOs are trained well with effective partnerships and complementarity with INGOs, it would make funding more cost-effective and enhance localization.
>
> (Participant 5, Bangladeshi NGO)

In Bangladesh, most of the development work is implemented by local and national NGOs, but the humanitarian emergency with the Rohingyas meant that the local actors were involved in the humanitarian response as implementing partners. However, local organizations have limited access to decision-making power. The international organizations dominate the humanitarian aid chain because they have money, power, and capacity, with experienced staff.

Furthermore, the current capacity strengthening of local NGOs is geared towards donor accountability requirements during project implementation, rather than building professional skills to be self-sufficient in delivering the response under local leadership (Insights, 2023). One of the local organization representatives was frustrated about the technical aspect of funding allocation for the local NGOs in the response to the Rohingya, as stated below:

> If any Bangladeshi NGO calculates a high overhead cost in their proposed budget and if there is no budget allocated for host communities, it is not approved by the NGO affairs bureau. Yet…the UN approves four-to-five times higher administrative costs for any project in the Rohingya response by any INGO. However, it is a challenge to convince the donors [to approve] such fund allocation in a proposal since donors focus only on Rohingyas, not the host people in their humanitarian funding.
>
> (Participant 19, local NGO)

Hence, the robust accountability mechanism for local NGOs leads to unequal power relations in the aid chain, prioritizing "trust" (Roepstorff, 2022) and hindering direct funding to local organizations. However, Cochrane and Thornton (2016) claim that the double or triple nexus might have the potential to centralize decision-making away from local actors, because power and control are entirely embedded in the unequal power relations within the technocratic and administrative process. Therefore, to enable the programming of the nexus in Cox's Bazar it is important to ensure local participation and to assign value to local capacities in the decision-making process of long-term nexus planning.

5.3 | Ambiguity of multi-year funding commitments and incompatible funding modalities

Using predictable, flexible, multi-year funding is one of the guiding principles of the triple nexus set by the OECD-DAC Recommendation V(2) (OECD, 2021). Interviewees suggest that the GoB's short-term refugee policy setting discourages donors from offering multi-year funding in the Rohingya response. Although a multi-year

humanitarian and development strategy is required for effective medium-to-longer-term response, the GoB views it as politically sensitive. Due to the strong stance favouring voluntary repatriation of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, the possibility of a multi-year crisis response plan has been opposed (Rieger, 2021), and the GoB policies have also restricted refugee activities leading to self-reliance. However, many respondents from the local organizations consider the implementation of the triple-nexus approach over the medium to long term in Bangladesh to be complementary rather than a hindrance to a dignified, safe and voluntary return of the Rohingyas. In this regard, the interviewees discuss three main issues that hinder multi-year funding and nexus programming on the ground: inflexible funding modalities, politically sensitive refugee-capitalism, and shrinking JRP funding.

The annual JRP for the Rohingya response has always faced an unmet funding gap, which posits multi-year funding as a solution. Moreover, given the accountability mechanisms for UN-funded projects, the UN agencies are not accountable to the GoB and there is no tracking of data for their funding. Yet funding transparency is crucial to convince the government of flexible funding in the Rohingya response. Many of the interviewees (Participants 1, 2, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, and 25 from the local NGOs) framed the issue in similar terms. As one of the participants asserted:

> UN fund tracking is complicated, as data is not available publicly. The DC office requires us to submit our audit report in order to be included in the final enclosure report on our projects, received through the FD6 and FD7 foreign donations form. According to the UN agencies, their headquarters are responsible for their actions. However, they never share or reveal any data, citing the data protection policy. In fact, they refuse to share it with the Camp in Charge, claiming that doing so violates data privacy. Hence, you will never have aid transparency, and that is one of the obstacles to multi-year funding for nexus thinking.
>
> (Participant 18, local NGO)

The effectiveness of the JRP in responding to the Rohingya crisis mostly depends on modifications to finance, such as flexible financing and streamlining of financing channels to seek synergies with humanitarian funding, which is primarily pre-defined according to the annual pattern. Furthermore, having access to flexible and long-term institutional funding could reduce competition among the local NGOs for financial support, rather than forcing them to rely only on project-based funding (Kluczewska & Kreikemeyer, 2022). However, one of the development practitioners during the interview referred to the "disaster-capitalism complex" (Klein, 2007), reflecting that "the triple-nexus concept might be a for-profit business model, as the actors might gain political and economic benefit by deliberately sustaining the patron-client relationship in the Rohingya refugee crisis" (Participant 25, development practitioner).

Hence, funding should be attuned to humanitarian imperatives that consider humanitarian principles and should not be used as a political tool facilitating humanitarian action mission creep; GoB scepticism about such political sensitive refugee-capitalism is inhibiting long-term funding modalities for the Rohingya response, as this could prolong the refugee presence in Bangladesh.

Foreign funding for Bangladesh's refugee crisis response has significantly increased. Before the Rohingya crisis in 2017, ODA support for Bangladesh focused primarily on disaster preparedness; it now provides services, food, and other material support; there was also a noticeable change from grants to concessional loans along with the increase in ODA (Rieger, 2021). Yet some concerns about loans in relation to the multi-year funding structure due to the Rohingya crisis were raised by one of the development NGO practitioners:

> Humanitarian plans take a needs-based approach, while development plans are produced through analytical and contextual analysis. In addition to a few small grants, the WB, ADB, and IMF offer soft loans. During the Rohingya crisis, the World Bank provided USD 700 to 800 million for multi-sectoral emergency assistance, mostly in the form of loans, plus an additional 100 million in grants. Bangladesh is a poor country; do they really think the World Bank will lend them money to feed

the Rohingyas? Could that really happen? At the individual level, let's say someone lost everything in a disaster, you feed him for a few days and then you advise him to take out a loan for all of his rehabilitation and recovery costs. Does it fit with humanitarian principles?

(Participant 25, NGO practitioner)

The prevalence of soft or concessional loans might, in the long run, bring additional complexities to multi-year funding. However, aid has been increasingly underfunded over the past two years; where, in 2022, JRP sought USD 881 million, only 70% of the funding met the projected needs and in 2023 the number dropped to 66% of the co-ordinated plan funding (UN OCHA, n.d.). Food rations from the WFP were cut by a very significant amount. Consequently, multi-year funding for triple-nexus implementation seems a long way off, as the annual response plan has never met its projected budget for the Rohingya response.

5.4 | Co-ordination gap between humanitarian, development and peace components

The deficiencies in humanitarian and development co-ordination are an implementation challenge to the nexus approach in the Rohingya context. OECD-DAC Recommendation III(2) on the triple nexus suggests providing appropriate resources to empower the leadership to provide cost-effective co-ordination across the humanitarian, development and peace architecture (OECD, 2021). Ideologically, some structural constraints to bridging the silos persist due to the separate tools, funding circles, and decision-making processes (Roborgh et al., 2024). In the Rohingya response, the implementation actors are either from the humanitarian or the development fields and are also working on advocacy and social awareness programmes for the host communities, as there are no separate peace actors in the refugee response in Cox's Bazar. It should be noted that the UN and the MDBs are working on peace diplomacy with the GoB to find sustainable solutions for different sector needs, but progress is slow because of the GoB's politically sensitive and repatriation-oriented thinking. However, there is no co-ordination body linking the HDP components in Cox's Bazar and peace actors—who are conspicuously absent from the response plan. To date, actors involved in the response work focusing on peace action have suggested alleviating tensions between host and refugee communities in two ways: by prioritizing social harmony in intercommunal relationships and addressing the unmet needs of host communities to alleviate tensions associated with unfair distribution of resources (Rieger, 2021). Furthermore, there remains a knowledge gap among the stakeholders co-ordinating the HDP nexus.

Although Bangladesh is the recipient of substantial ODA and most donors have long-standing relationships with the government and a strong presence within the nation, it lacks a co-ordinated framework for bringing the funding streams together. The UNDP and the World Bank, along with their technical leadership, have been working with the District Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office to enhance the DDGP and disaster risk reduction (DRR) (Rieger, 2021). However, there is no formal platform that unites national development and humanitarian actors. The co-ordination of the Rohingya response is managed at the local level in Cox's Bazar, but the development partners are mainly based in Dhaka. The humanitarian co-ordination mechanism in Bangladesh has connections with a number of responsible line ministries, and UN agencies are also involved in various crisis responses. It is, therefore, challenging to integrate separate policy and strategy in national development, disaster management, and refugee responses.

The overall Rohingya response is led and co-ordinated by the GoB at two levels (Chowdhury et al., 2022). The National Task Force (NTF) is chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the MoDMR provides oversight and strategic guidance for the overall response. The Strategic Executive Group (SEG) engages with the government at the national level and provides overall guidance for the Rohingya humanitarian response in two locations: the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) is responsible for the Cox's Bazar co-ordination system and the UNHCR is responsible for the Bhasan Char co-ordination system (ISCG et al., 2023). Through communication with the RRRC,

the CiCs and the Senior Co-ordinators of the ISCG Secretariat oversee the entire co-ordination of the Rohingya refugee response. However, many local NGO representatives wanted the Rohingya response to be managed by a single, unified entity. According to one of the interviewees:

> We would like to have a single body where we can report and receive approval; when it comes to refugee administration, there should be no distinction between the RRRC and DC offices. The RRRC handles refugees, the DC office handles the host population, and the ISCG oversees camp management. Additionally, the work done in the camps will be overseen by the Head of Sub Offices (HOSO), who are all representatives of international non-governmental organizations. The Strategic Executive Group from Dhaka also discusses what they need, but there are no government officials in the SEG. There is too much multiplicity.
>
> (Participant 7, national NGO representative)

The co-ordination of the humanitarian and development fields is complex, as both the GoB and the ISCG are involved on the ground. For the host communities, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is the chief executive officer of the sub-district, and the Deputy Commissioner (DC) office is responsible for the host communities, whereas the RRRC office is responsible for the Rohingya refugees. Furthermore, there is also a division of labour in the UN co-ordination of the Rohingya response, as the UNHCR and IOM have split up their tasks in the camps; there has, however, been a lack of information sharing and alignment between the two agencies, which hinders the effectiveness of the response and triggers confusion among the implementing partners (Post et al., 2019). Furthermore, the JRP focuses on humanitarian funding and the DDGP on development funding, although there is still a co-ordination gap when defining the humanitarian or development work. Other government officials explained the co-ordination challenges in terms of needs-based evaluation on the ground,

> Any foreign funding or donations are state resources and it is our responsibility to utilize them properly. When the Rohingyas arrived in Bangladesh, they certainly needed a hygiene kit, toothbrush, sandals, and so on. But the hosts, do they need such support? Also, we observed that undergarments are distributed to the host people. Do you think they need them? Giving them such support means redundancy, overlap, and duplication of resources. The NGOs are instructed to co-ordinate with the DC office or the UNO, but they do not do this. Co-ordination is, indeed, a challenge.
>
> (Participant 8, government official)

This extract clearly highlights the deficiencies in co-ordination between governance and service delivery. Furthermore, while there are several development programmes in Cox's Bazar that seek to improve social cohesion and improve intercommunal peace activities between hosts and refugees, there is no shared platform for measuring success.

5.5 | GoB reluctance to endorse long-term refugee policy settings

OECD-DAC Recommendation III(3) on the triple nexus suggests utilizing political engagement at all levels to prevent crises, resolve conflicts, and build peace, while Recommendation IV(2) suggests putting the people affected at the centre of operations, tackling exclusion, and promoting gender equality (OECD, 2021). However, the Rohingya crisis does not appear in any of the national plans, as the GoB is not interested in recognizing them as part of any national plan, and there is very little reference to Rohingyas in the country's five-year strategy paper on disaster management. The GoB approaches the crisis on an ad hoc basis (Siddiqi, 2022), and has declared unequivocally that it opposes the local integration of Rohingyas, preferring quick, voluntary repatriation. As a result, development plans regarding Rohingyas are extremely sensitive and might not be

viable due to the Bangladeshi refugee management model. Against this backdrop, humanitarian and development actors encounter further difficulties in meeting the long-term requirements of host communities and refugees due to the absence of a multi-year plan, something that might in fact be politically unfeasible due to GoB resistance (FAO et al., 2021). However, through the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank's IDA18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities (RSW) (World Bank, 2020), and its IDA19 counterpart, Bangladesh became eligible for grant support for refugees and host communities (Rieger, 2021). Refugee-relevant national policies in Bangladesh could attract further funding attention from the MDBs or financial institutions, but the government is reluctant. As one of the development practitioners sets out:

> Generally, loans and grants from multilateral agencies and banks are allocated based on the country's plan and policies. Hence, those agencies ask the GoB to include the Rohingya humanitarian issue in its national strategy plan to extend the development funding focusing on the humanitarian-development nexus. However, the government is sceptical as to whether it could bring the political perspective to nexus thinking by including the "peace" component. The GoB wants the international community to play an active role in peace talks and peace diplomacy in negotiating the immediate repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar, along with funding for humanitarian action.
>
> (Participant 25, development practitioner)

From the GoB perspective, the peace component is a political term that marks the repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar, rather than referring to social cohesion between the Rohingyas and the host communities in Cox's Bazar. Another respondent expanded on this issue, saying: "More than half a million Urdu-speaking Biharis who have been living in Bangladesh since its independence are legally entitled to citizenship in Bangladesh. So, the government is reluctant to accept any more local integration of refugees" (Participant 23, NGO advisor). Consequently, the government is afraid to acknowledge any refugee-relevant policy in its long-term disaster risk management (DRM).

Moreover, the nexus action also presents a political aspect, as long-term planning could reduce international backing for the government's repatriation-oriented planning. As one of the NGO employees working in the camps put it: "The government is sceptical about supporting long-term planning as it believes the repatriation plan will then be strategically on the back foot, and the international community will relax, and they will not pressurize Myanmar" (Participant 1, NGO worker).

Another respondent also voiced concern about the future of the nexus approach.

> It is critical to understand the government's goals in creating an inclusive development strategy that addresses the Rohingya crisis. As there are specific needs for the well-being of the host and conflict prevention inside and outside the camps, triple-nexus-oriented initiatives might be inferred on a project by project basis. But at the macro level, the government must agree to bring all the projects based on the triple nexus together. However, given the government's exclusive repatriation plan, it is difficult to bring together a single co-ordination body for the triple nexus.
>
> (Participant 22, development practitioner)

Hence, merging the multiplicity of the institutions into a single co-ordination body is challenging due to the unwillingness of the government to countenance any long-term refugee policy or any means of local integration at the macro level. At the micro- or meso-level of governance, the local government has scant funding and few avenues of involvement to work effectively with the host communities. Thus, local communities have very little opportunity to shape policy agendas, and local government officials are rarely involved in the planning, monitoring, directing or implementation of investment projects funded by the annual development plans (Lemma et al., 2018). Therefore, it is challenging to link the peace pillar to visions of an HDP nexus in the Rohingya response on the ground, largely due

to the GoB's rigid stance on the politically led peace pillar of immediate repatriation of over a million of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

6 | CONCLUSION

Essentially, the HDP nexus revolves around a combined emphasis on all three nexus pillars, with humanitarian, development, and peace work all contributing to the empowerment of the framework. This article has identified five main implementation challenges—based on OECD guiding principles—to the triple nexus in the Rohingya humanitarian response in Cox's Bazar. Given the protracted nature of the crisis, long-term simultaneous engagement to provide relief and promote resilience is key. Although the OECD guiding principles for the triple nexus are the baseline for implementation, my findings suggest that specific conclusions can be drawn and recommendations made for extending the triple nexus approach for each of the three main stakeholders: government, donors and the international humanitarian NGOs involved in the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar.

First, as one of the main challenges is the reluctance of the GoB to commit to a long-term refugee settlement on its territory, it is posited that it should see the nexus approach in the Rohingya context as complementary and not antagonistic. The inclusion of a "peace" component in triple-nexus programming needs to be firmly integrated, as the government's strategy is more aligned to the humanitarian-peace nexus, provided that dignified repatriation is regarded as a peace measure. Therefore, the government should consider establishing a diplomatic forum that includes the representation of donors, MDBs, INGOs, and UN agencies to make a concerted effort to promote peace talks with the Myanmar government and pressure them to create an environment conducive to swift but dignified voluntary repatriation, in line with the government's political priorities and unwillingness to craft a long-term refugee policy. Meanwhile, development-sensitive nexus action in the Rohingya context is aligned with the government's political priorities and unwillingness to countenance long-term refugee policy settings and, therefore, is currently limited due to the lack of a common strategic framework. Hence, a diplomatic policy dialogue between the GoB and the international humanitarian community is required to negotiate how to situate the HDP nexus in the Rohingya response. Also, considering the efficiency and effectiveness of the triple-nexus approach, the Rohingya crisis should be part of Bangladesh's NPDM to provide strong co-ordination and strategic planning for a mid- to long-term nexus plan in Cox's Bazar. Moreover, the locally led localization agenda must be synchronized with the current disaster management governance framework with the complementarity and funding support of donors, MDBs and INGOs. Furthermore, the government must ensure stronger engagement by the ISCG with the DDGP, including the incorporation of peace measures, to build a framework able to maximize positive collective outcomes while supporting systematic co-ordination among HDP sectors.

Second, while the donors' view of triple-nexus implementation is more aligned with the OECD-DAC recommendations, the challenges lie in funding and co-ordination. Hence, donors should ensure multi-year flexible funding and resource mobilization for the triple-nexus including the allocation of funding to educate stakeholders and fill knowledge gaps related to the HDP nexus. Additionally, donor communities and the MDBs should ensure their commitments to flexible funding to support anticipatory action that addresses conflict-sensitive nexus programming along with the Rohingya humanitarian response. Donors should also prioritize initiating peace talks that can lead to the dignified voluntary repatriation of the Rohingyas to Myanmar, and strengthen the capacity of local organizations' in order to improve the exit strategy of international humanitarian actors and give further impetus to a complete HDP nexus design in the Rohingya JRP. Development funding should be focused on long-term, system-oriented approaches, with a focus on collective national priorities and ring-fencing humanitarian support for emergency needs in disaster and refugee response in order to safeguard humanitarian principles. Meanwhile, donors must ensure transparency in the accountability mechanism covering information sharing between humanitarian and development funding and ensure that they complement rather than undermine one another.

Third, international humanitarian NGOs must emphasize a predictable conflict prevention strategy within the humanitarian space in the Rohingya response, and understand the local context of conflict, promoting peace accordingly. The ISCG should negotiate with the government and donors for the inclusion of a peace component to incorporate the core humanitarian principles into the nexus design, and to explicitly define what the peace element embraces in the non-military refugee context in Cox's Bazar. In addition, INGOs should facilitate skills training and capacity building to educate local implementation partners so that they align their work with understandings of transformational means of conflict-sensitive peace action. In this regard, all the actors can understand the nexus implementation in a similar manner using a conflict-sensitive approach to minimize negative impacts (do no harm) while maximizing positive impacts (do more good) with actions associated with promoting social cohesion, conflict prevention, and sustaining peace. In addition, international actors must give greater credit to the local capacity and work together to ensure equal participation of the local organizations. However, INGOs should support the need for national assessment based on shared, risk–informed conflict analysis of sector-based nexus planning, meaning that some of the sector could be prioritized for nexus planning to balance the HDP nexus pillars, as each nexus domain should be equal across all contexts (Howe, 2019). As such, a conflict-sensitive nexus design must focus on strengthening local capacity to prepare local actors to take over large-scale Rohingya response measures in Cox's Bazar.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The interview data are restricted due to the protection of personal data of the recipients but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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