

DOING NEXUS DIFFERENTLY – LESSONS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Based on regional learning, CARE International's MENA hub has been advocating for a bottom-up approach to more integration between humanitarian, development and peace activities, where analysis, design and implementation are done in very close relation to its impact groups. This article takes a look at three contexts where CARE has been implementing nexus approaches, namely Jordan, Palestine and Syria.

By Anan Kittaneh and Antoinette Stolk

Since 2015, appeals for crises lasting five years or longer have spiked and now command 80 per cent of the funding received and requested, often in contexts marked by man-made conflicts. Fuelled by this realisation, the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, a global, dual-mandate organisation providing both humanitarian and development assistance world-wide, has been vocal about the opportunities of more complementary approaches. Building on CARE's years-long experience, we argue that humanitarian assistance, development and peace are compatible in many cases. But only because CARE views and implements development and peace as bottom-up processes; they should ultimately be driven and owned by the affected communities, not by external agendas. Advocating for NGO space in the nexus developments, for example, in the discussion of a country strategy among European Union institutions in EU nexus pilots, has been a key point for CARE. As funding mechanisms are changing and major actors are adjusting their ways of working, we continue to call for wider involvement of stakeholders in these processes, especially local NGOs, women's organisations and private sector stakeholders.

CARE is currently working in more than twelve countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Many of these contexts face high levels of fragility and/or conflict, each with its unique dynamic. This article looks at contexts and lessons learnt in Jordan, Palestine and Syria, where CARE has been using the Doing Nexus Differently-approach (see above Box on page 22).

MEETING THE NEEDS OF REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES IN JORDAN

In 1948, CARE Jordan was established with the arrival of Palestinian refugees and significantly transformed its presence during the Syrian crisis starting in 2011. Jordan is one of the countries most affected by this crisis and has



Women are now leading socio-economic initiatives in the Northern West Bank.

Photo: CARE WBG

the second highest share of refugees compared to its population world-wide – around 89 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants. The majority of Syrian refugees in Jordan live in urban areas and in poverty, over 85 per cent of them below the poverty line and around half of them children. CARE Jordan's activities directly reach about 136,000 people and indirectly over 590,000, with a specific focus on women and girls, among Jordanians, Syrian and Iraqi refugees as well as other minority-displaced populations. While considering the specific legal and social situation of each target group and location (urban areas, refugee camps, etc.), CARE Jordan applies a combined, holistic lens of both short- and long-term needs. Key changes enabling this approach are an organisational restructuring process creating shared support systems (combining Monitoring and Evaluation – M&E systems, finance and Human Resources – HR) and secondly, longer-term and more flexible funding, where humanitarian proposals include development budget lines and vice versa and pooling of funding.

CARE Jordan's Humanitarian Response Model uses a combination of social work tools (information provision, case management), cash assistance and livelihood support (e.g. vocational training and psycho-social support activities). However, to avoid long-term dependency, the programme complements Emergency Cash support with Conditional Cash support that links cash to e.g. school enrolment for vulnerable children. Under this Conditional Cash programme, cash is being provided as regular financial support to eligible at-risk households applying negative coping mechanisms such as child labour. Cash distributions are an important component in strengthening the resilience of families through encouraging education and providing protection against risks (early drop-out, child labour, early marriage). This is enabled by connecting cash support with a comprehensive programme in partnership with a local NGO that provides in-school support to vulnerable children and youth. In this way, we give the vulnerable households both the financial incentive (through CARE Jordan) and the prac-

tical support (through the partners running in-school programmes) to keep children on track in their learning, thus making the impact of cash assistance go much further!

Additionally, Community Saving and Loan Associations (CSLAs) have been utilised to economically and socially empower women from different social and cultural backgrounds (Jordanians, Syrians, and Iraqis). CSLAs not only help them access cash (often used in micro-businesses/projects) and receive training and business support but also reduce social tensions and prejudices through enhancing horizontal trust and collective engagement to tackle societal issues for refugees and host populations together.

CONTRIBUTING TO RESILIENT MARKET SYSTEMS IN PALESTINE

In Palestine, political deadlock and on-going occupation keeps the population vulnerable, especially disempowering youth and women, who are unable to exercise their basic economic, social and political rights. CARE West Bank and Gaza (WBG) programmes focus on economic empowerment and women's rights as well as assisting the most vulnerable Palestinians in meeting their basic and long-term needs. In 2018, the programmes reached 138,000 people directly, around 50 per cent of whom are women, and more than 295,000 people indirectly.

Leveraging its long-time presence in the country, CARE WBG made a major shift towards a partnership approach in 2012. This approach takes a participatory way to empowerment by giving meaningful roles and responsibilities to local NGOs, private sector, and localised governmental actors in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects. It also has a complementary view of humanitarian and development activities that will strengthen local partners' capacities (private sector, community-based organisations – CBOs, local government) and local social and economic structures including co-operatives and networks, infrastructure, facilities, and services). In crisis response, emergency actions such as food distributions are only run for a minimum period, and in parallel with rehabilitation of food value chains at household/enterprise and community level and entrepreneurship development to create long-term opportunities (see below Box on the right).

In addition, social economic hubs are set up, mostly through co-operatives or CBOs, to

DOING NEXUS DIFFERENTLY – AN ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING PROCESS AT CARE INTERNATIONAL IN THE MENA REGION AND BEYOND

In co-operation with over 30 global leaders and practitioners, building on evidence coming from research and teams in the field, CARE's Regional Applied Economic Empowerment Hub in the MENA region has presented key insights and recommendations on the current nexus challenges and opportunities. This hub has been hosted by CARE West Bank and Gaza (WBG) since mid-2017, strengthening regional programming through applied innovation, technical assistance and ground-up thought leadership.

Building on organisational-wide learning, the hub has become an advocate for the need to implement the nexus in a much more bottom-up, localised and contextualised way in order to protect and empower the impact groups. Together with CARE's thought leaders, the hub formulated the vision "Doing Nexus Differently". This consists of the following bottom-up guiding principles: localisation, local ownership and participation, evidence-based analysis, politically smart, gender and women's voices, integrated resilience, adaptive management, pilots with cross-sectoral teams and reinvestment in programme quality.

BREAKING CYCLES OF DEPENDENCY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE GAZA STRIP

In the context of re-occurring violence and a broken economy, small-scale producers like Wafaa, a mother of four children in the Gaza Strip, were depending on aid distributions year after year. CARE assisted Wafaa and more than 100 other producers to come together in a social business that produces and markets high-quality dates and date products. This gives these entrepreneurs a steady income while improving food availability in the Gaza Strip and shows the power of tapping into local market potential.



Wafaa (on the left) from the Gaza Strip who became a successful entrepreneur connected to growing markets.

Photo: CARE WBG

KEY LESSONS GATHERED THROUGH REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION AND PILOTING

Context matters: Contributing to resilience can be done in many contexts and ways. So, programmes must be strongly rooted in local contexts, making use of evidence and different types of analysis, e.g. of political economy, power, fragility and conflict, gender dynamics and local market systems.

Gender opportunities: More opportunities for gender-transformative change open up when the nexus lens is applied. In times of fragility, there are extra burdens and vulnerabilities for women and girls, but also openings and fluid social norms. Through sound analysis and locally rooted project design, transformative work can take place.

Partnerships matter: They should be as local as possible, while reaching out to less traditional partners (such as the private sector) as well. This also means searching for complementarity to other (local) actions. A nexus approach does not mean working on every aspect of the human-development-peace spectrum; consortia and innovative partnerships can make a crucial contribution by pooling resources, sharing expertise and combining knowledge/learning production to multiply impact.

Management matters: Implementing successful nexus programming requires our management systems to be much more adaptive, flexible, and open to learning, with a strong commitment of managers to communicate across traditional silos (of humanitarian-development-peace). This approach will also ask more from our support systems, stressing the need for high programme quality (M&E, HR systems). More flexible funding mechanisms are needed to facilitate stronger nexus programming and it is encouraging to see that donors are picking up on this.

serve communities' development needs, but also respond to farmers' urgent needs such as loss of livelihood or income during times of destruction, displacement, droughts or floods. Advocacy at different levels complements this work as a way to continuously address drivers of conflict and root causes of crises. These are organised not only at global level (e.g. through calling for cease-fires) but also in the local ecosystem. For example, CARE WBG and partners lobbied local authorities for the implementation of signed international agreements or for the improvement of services provided by public and private actors to meet the needs of female value chain actors as well.

So far this nexus approach has yielded two main benefits:

- Gender moves more to the centre by looking at gender-specific needs and constraints for both short- and long-term goals, allowing more for working towards gender-transformative change (that aims to change underlying causes of gender inequality) in assessments, activities, partnerships and knowledge production.
- Local, innovative partnerships (locally owned, mutual-beneficial processes that build local capacities) can multiply impact of activities, especially when non-traditional partners, like market system actors, are involved.

REACHING THE MOST VULNERABLE IN SYRIA WHILE REHABILITATING VALUE CHAINS

Reaching between 900,000 and one million people in the last two years, CARE Syria has been making a significant effort to touch the lives of Syrians impacted by the on-going conflict, which has seen more than half of the population displaced. While violence and destruction is still lasting in several provinces of the country, other regions are slowly starting to pick up the pieces of the eight year-long war. CARE ensures to reach at least 50 per cent women and girls with activities that mostly focus on emergency assistance but also include the food and nutrition security sector. The scale and complexity of the Syrian crisis demands a holistic and complementary approach where immediate needs are not separated from existing structures, capacities and available social capital. Different initiatives take place inside Syria by or in partnership with CARE. The CARE Syria programme discussed here, connects emergency assistance with Resilient Market Systems approaches. It aims to reach the most vulnerable while also supporting entrepreneurship and rehabilitating high-potential food value chains such as wheat, livestock, dairy, etc. CARE is capitalising on the nexus opportunities by integrating stronger analysis of gender, social dynamics, conflict sensitivity, local peace-building opportunities and local governance capacities, and by moving beyond a distribution model.

One of the ways to enable this in such a highly fragile situation is by applying different vulnerability scales and accordingly addressing the needs of households. For example, the most vulnerable farmers, namely small livestock holders, receive a more extensive package of inputs and support, while more capable farmers are engaged in rehabilitation of their productive assets (e.g. irrigation systems or vaccination and feeding programmes for livestock) and capacity building activities connecting them more sustainably to the growing markets. These activities take into account conflict sensitivity and (environmental) do-no-harm. Specific target groups have received additional support through emergency cash, winterisation kits or cash-for-work programmes, all in complementarity to and reinforcement of the value chain activities. This is to ensure that Syrians not only meet their immediate needs but also contribute to long-term resilience by supporting market system development.

WHAT NEXT?

While much of this learning is still on-going, a major organisational realisation has been the huge potential in positively connecting humanitarian activities with development and contributions to local peace. Real benefit from the opportunities requires a nexus grounded in local realities and adopting local approaches to local challenges, keeping localisation, local ownership, and local participation as core drivers of nexus programming. Our key lessons in this regard are presented in the Box above. We continue to call for the development of stronger awareness and a more explicit evidence base for the nexus to avoid the dangers or negative consequences around possible instrumentalisation and politicisation of aid, as well as any potential reduction of programming impact or threats to our humanitarian principles. CARE's regional hub in the MENA region invites others in the sector to read the Doing Nexus Differently papers and contribute with their own learning through the public survey.

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