

# THE HUMANITARIAN-PEACE-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

## Introduction

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Humanitarian action and foreign policy have been closely interlinked with foreign policy agendas such as international law, migration, refugee rights, and the prioritisation of gender equality, including women's participation in international spaces and processes. At the same time, they have often faced contradictions due to a State's national interests not aligning with the [humanitarian principles](#) of impartiality, neutrality, and independence.<sup>1</sup> These aid sector tensions intersect with gender justice, and the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. A state's political position and relationships influence how, what, and where humanitarian response may occur, as foreign policy decisions, including budget allocations and official development assistance (ODA) priorities, directly impact the amount and type of humanitarian assistance a country provides. At times, the effectiveness of humanitarian action has been scrutinised internationally in line with the growing understanding that humanitarian action alone is insufficient to address the complex and protracted nature of crisis – especially with the unprecedented scale of new and rapid onset emergencies, and the increase of protracted crises and the [compounding risks of climate change](#). Humanitarian action is not always gender responsive, and there are active debates in the sector(s) on whether humanitarian aid is capable of being gender transformative and/or feminist. Ongoing humanitarian sector reform still risks falling short of meaningfully engaging with the WPS agenda, including its natural entry point – the relief and recovery pillar.

Moving beyond traditional humanitarian response, the [humanitarian-development-peace nexus](#) (or 'triple nexus') has been coined to describe the interaction between humanitarian assistance, development, and peacebuilding efforts and work to increase [co-ordination and collaboration](#) between actors working in these spaces. Similarly, Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) explores the [intersectional approaches](#) to foreign policy decision-making, including who participates and represents decisions, and the need for more gender-transformative approaches. In this light, the two frameworks meet in the shared commitment of addressing the root causes of crisis and promoting stability through a more integrated response to confront the social, cultural, and economic factors and power relations (hidden and invisible) that that need to occur – both in the humanitarian system and within foreign policy discussions – to [shift power dynamics](#) in favour of those most affected, and to [transform systems and structures](#) which restrict, deny, or violate the rights of women and other excluded groups in times of crisis.

Today we are witnessing deliberate actions (including by states) to restrict civic and humanitarian spaces, the rollback of democratic norms and regression of women's rights, and a resurgence of toxic masculinities worldwide. Domestically, states' restrictions on civic space, such as in the UK and in countries receiving UK ODA, hinder the ability of women leaders and their organisations to claim individual and collective rights more generally and to meaningfully allow for feminist foreign policy actions.

## Global Women Peace and Security frameworks and the triple nexus

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Feminist foreign policy goals reinforce [long-lasting commitments](#) of WPS and gender equality in humanitarian action, through the prioritisation of women's participation, prevention, and empowerment as essential components to international relations. This aligns with the gender mainstreaming efforts within the triple nexus debate, which aim to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated in all stages of programming, in order to address the root causes of crises. Gendered inequalities, along with [colonial](#) and patriarchal norms underpin and affect any humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding work. When these are heightened and not addressed within a crisis, it becomes harder for development and peacebuilding activities to be [meaningful](#). This is aligned across [all WPS pillars](#) that aim to improve strategies to prevent and protect women and girls against gender-based violence and call for the inclusion of women's participation and leadership in decision-making processes.

Global humanitarian frameworks and commitments made through the World Humanitarian Summit, such as [the Grand Bargain](#) and [Agenda for Humanity](#), emphasise gender equality and women's empowerment in humanitarian response; while the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) and [Istanbul Convention](#) recognise the importance of addressing gender-based violence and ensuring women's participation in promoting peace. While these frameworks contribute to the goals and principles of the triple nexus, no framework specifically addresses how to operationalise the triple nexus and its intersections with gender equality. And while the WPS agenda, including Resolution 1325 and its follow-up resolutions, recognise the importance of women's participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, and post-conflict recovery, there is a limited understanding between how WPS commitments link with global humanitarian frameworks and in-country WPS plans. Countries like the UK have directly emphasised the need for gender-sensitive peacebuilding and greater alignment between inclusive development and humanitarian response through their WPS National Action Plans, but limited funding and operational plans have been put in place to drive these plans forward. Better alignment between the UK's commitments on gender equality, such as through the International Development Strategy, Gender Equality Act and Women and Girls Strategy. By adopting an integrated approach across the range of humanitarian, development, and peace (including WPS) commitments, and the actors within them, the UK would be strengthening policies which put the furthest-behind first and challenge social barriers. Such an intersectional approach would be a step toward developing a more fair, equitable, and just UK foreign policy agenda.

## From theory to practice

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In reality, gaps remain in how international actors talk about, versus how they practise, the WPS agenda and its links with humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding work. While FFP documents speak to humanitarian response, the international community still struggles to operationalise and implement the triple nexus, [both globally and domestically](#). In line with many feminist approaches, operationalising the nexus calls for the ['how' being as important as the 'what'](#) – challenging institutions (donors and operational agencies alike) to be more conflict sensitive and adaptive in their approaches and taking meaningful steps towards reshaping power dynamics in a patriarchal humanitarian system. As such, recognising the significant areas of joint commitments between humanitarian, development, and peace actors (as well as their limitations) and the WPS agenda offers a potentially impactful testing ground for nexus approaches and for the implementation of a feminist foreign policy.

Global policy commitments around humanitarian action such as the Grand Bargain remain siloed, with states often failing to adequately provide data on their progress on localisation and transparent funding streams, with an even [worse track-record](#) of gathering data on the type of organisations these funding streams go to with Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) in particular chronically under-resourced. Weak funding mechanisms and the de-prioritisation of peacebuilding and mediation efforts undermine the role, scope, and participation of the women's rights movement, highlighting a [clear missed opportunity](#) for international actors to work in collaboration with WROs and feminist movements as a step in operationalising the nexus, as such movements are key to understanding the context and historical background of a crisis and are best placed to respond in a more holistic approach that considers root causes of change.

Maintaining a division between humanitarian action and the WPS relief and recovery agenda has served to divide funding and political will, as well as hinder coordination support for gender justice in crises, which diminishes efforts mapped out by the theoretical notions a feminist foreign policy. Women's rights and gender justice can find themselves [subsumed](#) under life-saving, humanitarian urgency, obfuscating root causes and drivers of violence. Allocation decisions in foreign policies are now made on the basis of the security and business priorities of donors as we witness states redefining ODA in ways that allow aid to cover more forms of military and defence, and less for peacebuilding efforts, evident by a [\\$300 million decline](#) in UK ODA spending on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution from 2016 to 2021 and increased politicisation of ODA. Conflicting priorities, stringent donor and internal processes that stick to short-term humanitarian activities, and inflexible funding do not allow for long-term interventions that can respond to the intersectional dimensions of climate change, conflict and peace and how these risks increase vulnerabilities and rights of women and girls, which limits the possibility of a truly inclusive and feminist foreign policy.

The WPS agenda provides [an avenue](#) towards feminist foreign policy by encouraging better collaboration of all actors working across the nexus, through the integration of gender-transformative relief and recovery, and that includes long-term gender-transformative programming which moves beyond immediate response and encompasses peace-building and conflict prevention.

Foreign policy commitments and budgets cannot be ring-fenced only on specific indicators and short-lived activities as they will not be able to address the structures that inadvertently perpetuate unequal power dynamics. Instead, they should be used as an opportunity to break down the structures and patriarchal barriers that inadvertently perpetuate unequal international–local power dynamics. Lessons from a feminist triple nexus approach highlight the need to ensure feminist foreign policies build in effective links to the WPS agenda through the inclusion of women’s protection and via dedicated funding to address, respond to, and prevent GBV and support national and local self-defined priorities. When establishing new programmes, international actors need to ask: who has shaped the agenda, and whose priorities are being prioritised? Who is included? Who is excluded? And why?

As both the nexus and FFP talk about [avoiding silos](#), the international community needs to work with civil society to find international development frameworks that reduce and avoid harmful, siloed approaches to foreign policy and aid.

## Key recommendations

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**The development of FFP requires ongoing and meaningful participation with feminist movements, women’s rights organisations and girl-led groups – at home and abroad. Women’s leadership should be promoted and resourced effectively in the consultation processes. This can be done through:**

- The representation of civil society actors within government planning of development, humanitarian, and recovery mechanisms and providing per-diems or financial support for their engagement
- Open dialogue with women’s groups to get advice on how to best remove barriers to women’s meaningful engagement, including travel and security restrictions to decision-making spaces
- Translation and addressing language barriers that current consultations may provide.

**Support national and locally led rooted and owned solutions to humanitarian action, by shifting power, access and resources to civil society as leaders and agents of change in nexus approaches. The UK should carefully consider how alliances with un-like-minded states/donors may impact the operationalisation of feminist development policy and challenging western interventionist mindsets. It should**

- Ensure that information, training and guidance on new humanitarian programmes or funding are accessible and translated
- Increase the representation of national and local WROs, Women-Led Organisations and Youth-Led Organisations within all formal donor dialogues
- Support women-led needs assessments at the centre of short- and long-term global responses to humanitarian and protracted crises.

**Create dedicated, flexible, responsive core funding mechanisms, with systematic gender-responsive reviews of the UK’s civil society funding. This would allow the UK to assess how the parameters and requirements of international funding and partnership approaches may generate benefits and risks for local/national partners or be de facto inaccessible for national civil society movements. This includes:**

- Providing more opportunities for long-term, multiyear and flexible funding (e.g. for both humanitarian and peacebuilding funding) which can be adapted to different contexts in order to avoid siloed funding streams
- Simplifying funding requirements, particularly in the financing of emergency responses, to provide simpler and more accessible application routes and not depend on intermediaries. Shifting power to the Global South through [radical reform](#) of ODA funding mechanisms is critical to the institutional survival of women’s rights movements in many fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Without such support women’s rights movements will struggle to deliver principled humanitarian assistance or hold their national power-holders to account.

**Ensure policy coherence on gender equality across foreign policy and domestic contexts. Ensure that the UK’s domestic and foreign policy is in-line and not working in siloes. This includes working across domestic teams and working on principles of feminist foreign policy addressing the structures and systems of power that (re)produce inequality and violence within and at its own borders.**