Policy Brief

Applying the HDP Nexus in Education: promoting sustained and equitable access in fragile and crisis contexts

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The HDP Nexus in Education: Promoting Sustained and Equitable Access in Fragile and Crisis Contexts

In fragile contexts or contexts of protracted crisis and violence, such as Burkina Faso and Mozambique, applying the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in education is not only relevant - it is essential.

By integrating humanitarian response, development planning, and peacebuilding efforts into education programs, HDP Nexus approaches can help to bring about structural transformations that address the key drivers of vulnerability and conflict, help to empower communities by reducing their exclusion and marginalization, and equip future generations to build more just, peaceful, and resilient societies.

Aligning with the standards and guidelines developed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), the Grand Bargain and the Core Humanitarian Standards, educational initiatives in fragile and crisis-affected contexts

can ensure that access to education and learning remains a priority during emergencies and beyond, and that education continues to serve as a cross-cutting pillar offering a strategic entry-point to promote lasting social cohesion, social justice and accountability for vulnerable populations.

Drawing on the experiences of Educo and WeWorld in Burkina Faso and Mozambique and based upon a joint study[1] conducted by the Institute of Studies on Conflict and Humanitarian Action (IECAH) under the joint initiative of the ChildFund Alliance[2], this policy brief explores how the Nexus is being applied in education programming in fragile and crisis contexts. It identifies persistent barriers, promising practices, and key recommendations that can inform context-sensitive, integrated education responses in other crisis-affected settings.

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[1] "HDP Nexus in Education Sector: Key Lessons to Move Forward – March 2025"

[2] ChildFund Alliance is a network of eleven child-focused development and humanitarian agencies, including EDUCO and WeWorld.

Operationalizing the HDP Nexus in Education: Key Challenges identified from the field

Lack of a shared, operational understanding of the HDP Nexus

Despite the extensive narrative available on the HDP Nexus, there remains confusion around what the HDP Nexus entails in practice. Rather than a linear model treating humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding as a sequence of disconnected pillars, the Nexus should be understood as an integrated, cross-cutting approach to be applied flexibly and contextually. However, it is still often perceived as a top-down or externally imposed agenda. This hinders coherent planning and risks fragmenting efforts across actors.

Structural inequalities

Many educational interventions fail to address the root causes of exclusion and conflict, such as historical injustices and systemic inequalities. In some cases, education programs are shaped more by external policy agendas – such as those focused on migration control or counter-terrorism — than by the educational needs identified through comprehensive, conflict-sensitive local analyses. This risks misalignment with community priorities and may perpetuate existing inequalities and injustices.

Education's overlooked potential in fostering peace

Although education is widely recognized as a potential driver of peace, concrete evidence of its effective integration into peacebuilding remains limited. Too often, peacebuilding is addressed separately rather than as an integral part of education systems. To operate effectively within the Triple Nexus, education must be critically examined both for its role in exacerbating conflict and its potential to foster sustainable peace.

Limited local ownership and leadership

Despite commitments to the Localization Agenda, international organizations often retain dominant roles in project implementation. Decision-making power remains concentrated among international actors, and local organizations often face barriers to accessing funding or

influencing programming. This reinforces dependency, limits the scope of locally-led solutions, and overlooks indigenous community-based expertise in peacebuilding and education. Limited understanding of local power dynamics and historical grievances further undermines program relevance and impact.

Disconnect between local realities and global frameworks

Ensuring that education initiatives align with global frameworks and standards — such as the INEE standards or the Global Education Cluster — while maintaining local legitimacy, remains a persistent challenge. Although such alignment can improve program quality, it may also exclude grassroots organizations that lack formal recognition, despite being trusted by communities. Tensions also arise when international actors systematically play a leading role in coordination mechanisms, sidelining local knowledge and reinforcing power imbalances.

Key Recommendations for Donors and Policymakers: Supporting HDP Nexus-Aligned Education

To enable education systems to fulfil their transformative potential in fragile and crisis-affected settings, donors must prioritize flexible, inclusive, and peace-oriented approaches across funding mechanisms and policy frameworks. The following recommendations aim to strengthen the application of the HDP Nexus in education through donor engagement:

1. Unlock Flexible, Long-Term, and Nexus-Aligned Education Financing

- Provide predictable, multi-year and unearmarked funding that supports adaptive education programming across the humanitarian-development-peace spectrum → Education systems in crisis-affected areas often reflect and reinforce structural and historical inequalities. Rigid and short-term funding cycles prevent actors from adapting and responding to evolving needs and vulnerabilities in real time and limits education's transformative potential.

- Enable a flexible and more balanced reallocation of funds across the three pillars of the HDP Nexus to address evolving needs and to support equity, inclusion, and social cohesion considerations through learning.

- Fund integrated, multi-sectoral programs that connect the right to education with protection, child well-being, disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding goals.

- Fund both transformative, long-term programs and short-term interventions that integrate HDP Nexus components, including training, research, and knowledge exchange. → Supporting the creation of transformative education systems in crisis-affected settings requires funding that supports both long-term planning and immediate implementation. However, donors often prioritize short-term outputs over systemic change. This limits the potential of education to drive inclusive, lasting peace and to foster social cohesion.

2. Earmark dedicated funds for peace-oriented education programming

- Allocate dedicated funds for education programs that promote non-violence, reconciliation, and social cohesion and enhance education's role in sustainable peacebuilding across the HDP Nexus spectrum — including peer mediation, restorative practices, and community-led peace initiatives in schools. → Education in crisis settings often lacks dedicated funding to address the root causes of conflict and promote reconciliation. Most donor support overlooks the potential role of schools as spaces for dialogue, healing, and peacebuilding.

- Invest in long-term support for all education personnel, including provision of learning resources, teacher training and curriculum development, to enable the delivery of inclusive, conflict-sensitive and peace-oriented education, tailored to local realities and needs.

3. Foster local leadership and enhance stakeholder coordination in Education

- Channel funding directly to community-based educational initiatives and local organizations, prioritizing those that promote inclusive, rights-based approaches and building local ownership over education in fragile settings. → Local education actors often face funding, capacity and compliance barriers to lead responses in crisis-affected areas. Without direct support, community-led education and peacebuilding efforts remain under-resourced and marginalized, despite their central role in building resilience and social cohesion.

- Prioritize funding for locally embedded organizations that demonstrate strong partnerships across the humanitarian, development, and peace

sectors, close alignment with national education plans and conflict-sensitive strategies, and a credible track record in delivering inclusive, conflict-sensitive education across the HDP Nexus. → Fragmented efforts in educational response reduce impact and sustainability. Effective coordination between humanitarian, development, and peace actors, especially those rooted in local educational systems, is often under-valued in donor frameworks.

- Support donor and stakeholder coordination frameworks and mechanisms that promote joint action on peace-oriented education across the HDP Nexus, engaging international, national, and local actors.

Applying the HDP Nexus in Education Programming: Recommendations for Education Practitioners and Good Practices from the field

To operationalize the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus in education, especially in fragile and crisis-affected contexts like Burkina Faso and Mozambique, actors across all levels — international, national, and local — must adopt holistic, inclusive, and context-appropriate approaches. The following integrated guidance offers practical recommendations, reinforced by field-tested programmatic examples.

1. Systematically integrate the peace pillar into education programming

- Incorporate peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity as an integral part of education programming and systems strengthening, ensuring equal strategic weight is given to the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars. A thorough understanding of the local education sector, the local conflict and social dynamics, and the key drivers of conflict is essential. The use of rights-based and critical peace education approaches, and participatory tools like SPICED indicators[3] can help ensure that national curricula, teacher training models, and extracurricular activities are designed to be inclusive and context-appropriate and that due emphasis is given to the integration of reconciliation processes.

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[3] **The SPICED criteria** allow for the development of indicators *with* stakeholders. The idea is that stakeholders can define indicators themselves and therefore use these indicators for themselves to hold the project to account, interpret progress and learn about the changes that the project is delivering.

> *Good Practices*
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> **Adoption of a conflict-sensitive approach:** In Mozambique, a <u>Conflict Sensitivity Toolkit</u> has been successfully tried and tested, giving good results in supporting local youth and communities in conducting participatory conflict analysis and social cohesion building exercises. This methodology is currently being piloted at the school level to better understand potential conflict dynamics and implement tailored initiatives to promote a culture of peace and conflict transformation.
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> **Integration of the peace dimension:** In Burkina Faso, programs integrate peacebuilding into education by promoting inclusive and conflict-sensitive practices that foster social cohesion in both formal and non-formal settings. Initiatives such as vocational training programs for girls and women combined with peace education aim to strengthen community resilience and reduce drivers of conflict. Other projects use participatory methods and non-violent communication to build trust, address discrimination, and improve social cohesion between displaced and host communities.

2. Address structural inequalities through inclusive and transformative education

- Use multi-level analysis frameworks and participatory approaches to support the development of contextually relevant, child-centered, gender-sensitive education policies and strategies that explicitly aim to reduce structural inequalities and promote the use of education as a tool to build/restore sustained social cohesion and peace, at school and community level.

- Promote inclusive and rights-based educational initiatives that link top-down structural reforms with locally grounded solutions. These initiatives should be adapted to different educational levels and contexts, and developed in collaboration with grassroots actors to enhance equity, ensure community ownership, and address historic and systemic inequalities through innovative and culturally relevant pedagogy.

> *Good Practices*
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> **Inclusive and contextualized educational opportunities:** A training package for teachers was developed in Mozambique, using local literature and music as teaching tools. The program features traditional Macua stories from Cabo Delgado and involves local youth artists to support creative activities, promoting ancestral knowledge and cultural appreciation and improving the understanding of local social dynamics.
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> **Transformative and rights-based education approaches:** In Burkina Faso a rights-based approach in crisis-affected contexts has been applied by integrating life skills, peace education, and financial literacy into programs. These initiatives empower children - especially girls - by linking education with social cohesion, agency, and long-term gender equality. Local actors, adolescents, youth, and families actively shape the learning process, ensuring cultural relevance and community ownership.

3. Empower Local Actors and Promote Locally Led Solutions

- Promote inclusive, community-led education initiatives by positioning local actors—including children and marginalized groups — as co-leaders in the design, coordination, and governance of Nexus-aligned interventions, ensuring their voices, knowledge, and leadership shape all project phases and long-term strategies in crisis-affected contexts. → Local education actors are critical for ensuring the relevance, continuity, and legitimacy of interventions across the HDP Nexus, particularly in fragile or contested areas. Their leadership should extend beyond implementation to include strategic planning and decision-making processes. Ensuring the meaningful and sustained participation of communities, including children, is vital in hard-to-reach and non-traditional settings where formal education structures may be absent or fragile.

- Recognize and integrate local knowledge systems and perspectives on peace and conflict into each education intervention, starting with a preliminary context analysis. This analysis should involve local civil society organizations, especially those advocating accountability, and include the voices of marginalized groups, with a strong emphasis on child-centered perspectives.

- Invest in strengthening the financial, management and programmatic skills and capacities of local education organizations -especially in fragile and crisis contexts - to lead interventions that integrate peacebuilding, conflict mitigation, and rights-based approaches.

Good Practices

Strengthened community engagement and leadership: In Mozambique, the collaboration between schools, families and communities was strengthened to reduce school drop-outs, promote gender equality, and ensures access to education, especially in conflict-affected areas. Networks of local activists are trained to facilitate school and community-level activities, ensuring the sustainability of interventions. Similarly, in conflict-affected regions of Burkina Faso, where schools are often closed due to insecurity, community leadership on education is strengthened by engaging local education committees, parents' associations, and children and adolescent clubs in the design, implementation, and monitoring of learning spaces. This helps to reinforce community ownership and social cohesion and enhances the capacities of local actors to deliver inclusive, context-sensitive education.

Community-led disaster risk reduction (DRR) initiatives in schools: In Mozambique, local educational communities have been supported in implementing the PEBE (School-Based Emergency Plan). Students, education personnel and parents are actively involved in DRR school committees. As part of these committees, they receive training and participate in child-inclusive risk mapping, as well as in the development and implementation of contingency plans that integrate conflict-related risks. These contextualized DRR initiatives in schools, combined with similar DRR initiatives at community level, empower communities and ensure sustainable, contextualized and locally-led disaster preparedness.

4. Bridge global coordination mechanisms with local realities

- Strengthen the periodic mapping of education actors and capacities in a given context to avoid duplication and to foster complementarity across humanitarian, development, and peace interventions. This process should prioritize the promotion of opportunities for dialogue between local and international actors over more explicitly donor-driven processes, enabling the identification of synergies and more effective resource management → Maximizing the effectiveness of education initiatives and ensuring their alignment along the HDP Nexus can be achieved by strengthening coordination mechanisms, developing a shared understanding of the HDP

Nexus and its pillars, and reinforcing adherence to shared frameworks that remain adaptable to local realities.

- Facilitate the inclusion of local education and peace actors in global platforms such as the Education Cluster and INEE, establishing a balance between adhering to global standards and ensuring local ownership. → The Education Cluster is an example of a network that should be more representative and involve a variety of organizations and institutions. There needs to be greater recognition of inherent structural and historical inequalities in these fora, and of the need to redress them. It is also essential to foster the participation and collaboration of formal and informal authorities, public and private institutions, as well as rights holders, including children and students, in order to generate ownership and participation in the decision-making process.

Good Practices

Coordinating and aligning education interventions in Burkina Faso. In Burkina Faso, efforts were made to ensure effective coordination between local education authorities, community representatives, and international partners. Thanks to a regular collaboration with local education inspectors and government officials, education interventions were aligned with the national Education in Emergencies (EiE) strategy. This approach fosters a unified response, preventing duplication of efforts and enabling a more efficient use of resources. Coordination meetings with local stakeholders enabled an evaluation of the overall state of education in the country and for strategies to be refined, ensuring that all interventions were complementary and addressed both immediate and long-term needs.

Replication of best practices from crisis to development contexts: A dialogue between international education partners and the provincial Directorate of Education was facilitated in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique to address the risks posed by inconsistent Non-Formal Education (NFE) practices. This collaboration has led to the establishment of a technical working group that now oversees the development of standardized NFE programs, ensuring they meet both humanitarian and long-term educational needs in the region. This initiative demonstrates how integrating humanitarian approaches into national education policies can address both crisis-related and long-term development needs. The Ministry of Education is now considering scaling up these programs to reach out-of-school children.

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ChildFund Alliance

ChildFund Alliance is a global network of 11 child-focused development and humanitarian organizations reaching nearly 30 million children and family members in more than 70 countries. Members work to end violence and exploitation against children; provide expertise in emergencies and disasters to ease the harmful impact on children and their communities; and engage children, families and communities to create lasting change.

Educo

We are Educo, an NGO and member of ChildFund Alliance that has a presence in more than 18 countries and has been working for more than 30 years for the wellbeing and rights of children, especially the right to receive a quality education. With more than 200 development, social and humanitarian aid projects, we support almost 1 million children, especially those living in situations of vulnerability, poverty, or lack of opportunities. Whatever happens, nothing can stop us: in any crisis, armed conflict or emergency, education cannot stop. Because education is urgent: it heals, empowers, and protects.

WeWorld

WeWorld is an independent Italian organization, member of ChildFund Alliance, engaged in development cooperation and humanitarian aid projects over the last 50 years, operating today in more than 20 countries. Over the last year, WeWorld has carried out over 160 projects, reaching over 5.6 million people. Children, women, and young people, agents of change in every community, are at the centre of WeWorld's projects and campaigns in the following areas of intervention: access to water hygiene, and sanitation; education; food security, livelihoods and local development; gender and protection; environment and climate.

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The Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action emerged in the year 2000, as the new millennium appeared, with the purpose of bringing a new perspective to the debates related to the humanitarian and peacebuilding world, in a context of change influenced by the globalization and its many faces. The Institute aims to contribute to the consolidation of the response to situations of crisis, emergencies, and violent conflicts through the analysis of these realities and the responses given to them.