

THE TRIPLE NEXUS

DANISH RED CROSS POSITION PAPER



**DANISH
RED
CROSS**

ABOUT THE DANISH RED CROSS

Danish Red Cross was established in 1876 and is part of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, which is present in more than 190 countries and engages more than 11 million volunteers. It is a member of the Governing Board of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and has a strategic partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross. Danish Red Cross is the largest voluntary humanitarian organisation in Denmark with 34,000 volunteers and 42,000 members organised in more than 200 local branches, Faroese Island Red Cross, Greenland Red Cross, and Danish Red Cross Youth. Danish Red Cross responds to national and international humanitarian needs through national and is involved in advocacy on behalf of people in vulnerable situations.

Danish Red Cross has successfully pushed a number of international policy agendas, including the adoption of a resolution on “*Addressing mental health and psychosocial needs of people affected by armed conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies*” at the 2019 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent also attended by all state parties to the Geneva Conventions.

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“ Per humanitatem ad pacem ”

— With humanity towards peace —

This is the motto of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement¹ and it has guided our work for more than six decades. These words remain of central relevance in addressing the humanitarian, development and peace nexus, also known as the ‘triple nexus’. The paper details the Danish Red Cross position on a triple nexus approach, which considers the overall interlocking systems and mechanisms of peace, development and humanitarian interventions. It focuses on **eight key positions** taken by Danish Red Cross in how our actions interact with the triple nexus:

- 1 Our engagement with the triple nexus approach is rooted in principled humanitarian action. People and communities must remain the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- 2 We contribute to overall nexus goals through ‘peace-enabling’ actions with a focus on conflict-sensitive local engagement, underpinned by a ‘do no harm’ commitment.
- 3 We seek to leverage our Fundamental Principles and mandate (including the promotion of international humanitarian law compliance) in relation to conflict mitigation and confidence-building, both among parties to conflict and other relevant stakeholders.
- 4 We will limit our operations to humanitarian activities when our conflict analysis flags significant risks related to working across the triple nexus.
- 5 We will not support a triple nexus approach as a crisis management instrument, as this risks prioritizing political objectives above the needs of the most vulnerable.
- 6 We support a triple nexus approach that is based on the recognition and safeguarding of the specific roles and mandates of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other civil society actors.
- 7 We support programming and funding mechanisms across the triple nexus that are designed to enable the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other civil society actors to meaningfully fulfil their respective mandates and roles.
- 8 We will encourage a context sensitive approach in promoting triple nexus engagement and collective outcome rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

WHERE DOES THE TRIPLE NEXUS COME FROM?

The concept of the 'triple nexus' developed in response to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, when discussion focused on the limitations of the conceptualisation of the 'double nexus' of humanitarian and development work. Peace (or peace-building) was introduced as a third essential dimension in response to situations of conflict and fragility, leading to a shift in conceptual frameworks, policies and new funding approaches in response to crisis situations and disasters. The United Nations (UN) 'New Way of Working' and UN Reform and the involvement of the World Bank in the development and peace-building areas were all influential in promoting this broader approach which became known as the 'triple nexus'.² This was in large part driven by an increase in protracted crises and conflict-related displacement and associated humanitarian needs and the fact that 90% of humanitarian aid is now going to protracted crisis situations.

Some State donors, such as Denmark, have consequently increased their focus on stabilisation efforts in fragile and conflict-affected contexts adopting a comprehensive approach. This integrates a wide range of national instruments including diplomacy, development assistance, defence and/or security force capacity building. The most recent Danish strategy for development and humanitarian assistance, adopted in 2016,³ brings all three dimensions of the triple nexus into play. This is referred to as 'strategic integration and policy coherence' between development, stabilisation, humanitarian action, and other policy areas (such as climate, trade, etc.). It is based on Denmark's promotion of an integrated approach to peace and stabilisation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the UN, the European Union (EU) and its contribution to EU Trust Funds.

WHAT IS A TRIPLE NEXUS APPROACH?

THE TRIPLE NEXUS ITSELF IS THE LINKAGES BETWEEN INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT:

- humanitarian action: to protect life and health, alleviate suffering and ensure respect for the human being in fragile contexts and crisis situations
- development: to support community development, institutional development, resilience and capacity-building
- peace-building: to address the drivers of conflict.

While the term 'triple nexus' is still not clearly defined and has not been fully operationalised,⁴ the broad goal of a triple nexus approach is to reduce needs by addressing root causes of conflict, thereby promoting peaceful contexts for sustainable development. It represents a broad palette of potential actions that can range from traditional, life-saving humanitarian activities to stabilisation efforts incorporating civil and military assistance in support of one party to a conflict. The three dimensions of the nexus are undeniably interrelated and affect each other. However, what is at stake is how these interrelationships are addressed by relevant actors.

² Several key international policy processes and documents articulate these policy priorities, including the World Humanitarian Summit, the Grand Bargain, the two Global Compacts on Refugees and on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, the OECD's Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus; and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Initiative (HDPI), a joint effort by the United Nations and the World Bank Group.

³ <https://um.dk/da/danida/strategi%20og%20prioriteter/#:~:text=Samlet%20strategi%20for%20udvikling%20og,indsatser%20og%20det%20langsigtede%20udviklingsamarbejde>.

⁴ The OECD DAC Recommendations refer to the aim of strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity across the nexus towards collective outcomes, while the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) emphasizes planning, implementation and financing.

The triple nexus approach takes a bird's eye view of the systems and mechanisms of peace, development and humanitarian interventions. It recognizes the sensitivities of conflict and fragile settings. Circumstances on the ground then dictate the degree to which linkages should be promoted in a context-specific manner.

The inclusion of the peace-building dimension in humanitarian response poses a new set of challenges for organisations like Danish Red Cross. Donors increasingly tie this aspect to funding opportunities. It adds to the complexity of our actions and involves an increased risk of politicisation or perception of politicisation of humanitarian and development work. This underlines the critical importance of an in-depth analysis, assessment and understanding of the context.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRIPLE NEXUS?

A number of significant risks are associated with the triple nexus. There is an inherent tension to an approach that according to the OECD “*strives to ensure that diplomatic, stabilisation and civilian security interventions are joined-up and coherent with humanitarian, development and peace outcomes, while respecting humanitarian principles [impartiality, neutrality and independence] and ensuring humanitarian access to people in need is protected*”⁵. It is critical to consider how activities that have traditionally been separated precisely to preserve humanitarian space will continue to do so when ‘joined-up and coherent’.

The peace dimension, the newest addition to the nexus, carries the greatest potential risk to principled humanitarian action and development work, particularly in fragile contexts where state authority is contested. This is partly because ‘peace’ means different things to different actors. For some, it involves military support and/or imposition of political solutions in favour of certain parties to a conflict. For humanitarian and development actors, it is essential to mitigate risks associated with these interventions and to clarify the scope of the peace dimension relative to their own work. These actors must ensure that there is a clear demarcation from ‘peace-building’ activities that may otherwise be seen as partisan or biased.

Within development activities, strengthening and capacity-building of state institutions and of civil society plays a key role. However, in protracted, conflict-driven crises and disasters where state authority is contested, state-focused development activities may be perceived as partisan or instrumentalised by specific groups or interests. In Danish Red Cross’ work across the triple nexus, **local people and communities must remain the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries**. It is vital therefore that development programmes are not used or seen as being used as instruments of particular political interests.

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Even when humanitarian principles are respected, the triple nexus approach runs the risk of creating the perception of instrumentalisation of humanitarian and development actions. In fragile settings in particular, perceptions can be as important as reality in terms of access to people in need. Consequently, an understanding and analysis of perceptions must be part of a wider assessment to determine if, how and to what extent a relief organisation such as Danish Red Cross can operate within the nexus in a given context.

In line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid,⁶ **we will not support a triple nexus approach as a crisis management instrument, as this risks prioritizing political objectives above the needs of the most vulnerable.** This is particularly important in fragile contexts where state authority is contested, or where state structures and services do not reach the most vulnerable segments of society. A one-sided focus on strengthening of state authority will work against the wider localisation agenda and risks leaving vulnerable people unable to access assistance. For this reason, Danish Red Cross **supports a triple nexus approach that is based on the recognition and safeguarding of the specific roles and mandates of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other civil society actors.**⁷ This ensures collaboration, coherence, and complementarity in the overall triple nexus approach.

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WHAT DOES THE TRIPLE NEXUS APPROACH MEAN FOR DANISH RED CROSS?

As a National Society of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, Danish Red Cross is mandated by State Parties to the Geneva Conventions to act at all times in accordance with humanitarian principles,⁸ even though our work is not limited to humanitarian and emergency actions. Danish Red Cross, along with our local partners, is very much engaged in development programmes and activities, such as resilience building, disaster preparedness, and risk reduction.

Our engagement with the Triple Nexus approach is rooted in principled humanitarian action. This improves our ability to undertake humanitarian and development action while at the same time contributing to the peace dimension. Based on our mandate, Danish Red Cross promotes a collective engagement across the triple nexus focused on the needs of the most vulnerable people to achieve sustainable development and lasting peace.

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⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/european-consensus_en

⁷ This is in line with the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on humanitarian assistance and IHL adopted by the Council at its 3732nd meeting held on 25 November 2019 (14487/19)

⁸ Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 2006, article 3.1 (<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/statutes-movement-220506.htm>)

Danish Red Cross recognises that in some contexts engagement in peace-building or development actions could be perceived to promote a particular set of interests. This may potentially put humanitarian actors or civil society organisations and their beneficiaries in harm's way in terms of compromising their neutrality and impartiality.

At the same time, however, we emphasize that principled humanitarian and development action are key contributions to peace-building and conflict prevention through conflict mitigation and confidence-building measures. For example, the promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL) compliance may mitigate the effects of armed conflict and reduce barriers for post-conflict reconciliation. Humanitarian agreements between conflicting parties can build relationships and establish confidence that can be called upon when resolution efforts take place. Community-based resilience work, such as provision of basic healthcare services or disaster preparedness, often involves inclusive approaches that contribute to managing and dissipating local tensions. These contributions may all be accounted for in a triple nexus approach.

3

For this reason, Danish Red Cross seeks to **leverage our Fundamental Principles and mandate (including the promotion of IHL compliance) in relation to conflict mitigation and confidence-building, both among parties to conflict and other relevant stakeholders.**

If situations where Danish Red Cross works become fragile or unstable, there is an open question as to how Danish Red Cross may be perceived as it shifts its operations from those that extend across the humanitarian-development nexus to those that are strictly humanitarian. Danish Red Cross quite frequently works within the double nexus approach (humanitarian-development) and occasionally we engage in a triple nexus approach. This occurs, for example, in long-term engagements with public authorities in traditionally more stable contexts, where we fill a strategic gap linking communities to existing health systems and services. We build capacities, strengthen, and work closely with public health authorities. In cases when state authority become contested, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is called upon to perform its core humanitarian mandate, such as emergency healthcare and ambulance services available to all parties to the conflict. This may give rise for humanitarian agencies to be seen, by both the government and opposition, as providing support to opposing sides, which may potentially hinder humanitarian activities.

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It may be impossible to always be perceived by all parties and stakeholders as neutral by the very nature of providing assistance based on needs. However, **the extent to which Danish Red Cross can operate, act coherently with or provide complementarity to a triple nexus approach will depend on each situation and requires continuous context and conflict sensitive analyses prior to and during engagement.**

HOW DOES DANISH RED CROSS ENGAGE IN THE TRIPLE NEXUS?

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is well set up for working across the triple nexus, being made up of National Societies permanently on the ground, independent of project cycles. The fact that the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is bottom-up, volunteer-led translates into greater community access and local reach with communities and local actors, providing contextually based knowledge and a better understanding of the local drivers of conflict and its dynamics.

In our international operations, Danish Red Cross prioritizes working in fragile contexts and countries with highly vulnerable populations, where the impact can be most beneficial. Operationally, Danish Red Cross interventions are generally implemented with and through our Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement partners. In our work, there are many areas of overlap and complementarity between development activities, designed to address longer-term needs, and humanitarian relief and assistance, addressing short-term needs.

Both the nature of our work and our local partnerships directly affect our approach to the triple nexus. This has led to an internal analysis of the peace-building dimension in terms of how we define it, how it affects our work, and where we position ourselves. Danish Red Cross implements in partnership with the National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any context we engage in and we must be conscious of their structural and operational reality. Each National Society is obliged by its own statutes and must navigate its domestic environment, including its auxiliary role vis-a-vis the authorities. These factors must be included in the analysis of our engagement across the three dimensions.

Diagram 1 illustrates the result of our analysis. On one end of the spectrum is indirect, non-coercive engagement, which is based on conflict-sensitive analyses and includes a 'Do No Harm' approach. This approach is bottom-up working with community members and is geared towards conflict mitigation, confidence-building measures and promotion of social cohesion. It is neutral in nature. At the other end of the spectrum are direct, coercive peace-building actions by means of peace-making or peace-enforcing missions, counter-terrorism activities or other military means. It is inherently politicised, or non-neutral, and usually involves a top-down approach implemented from the nation-state or international level to local or community level.

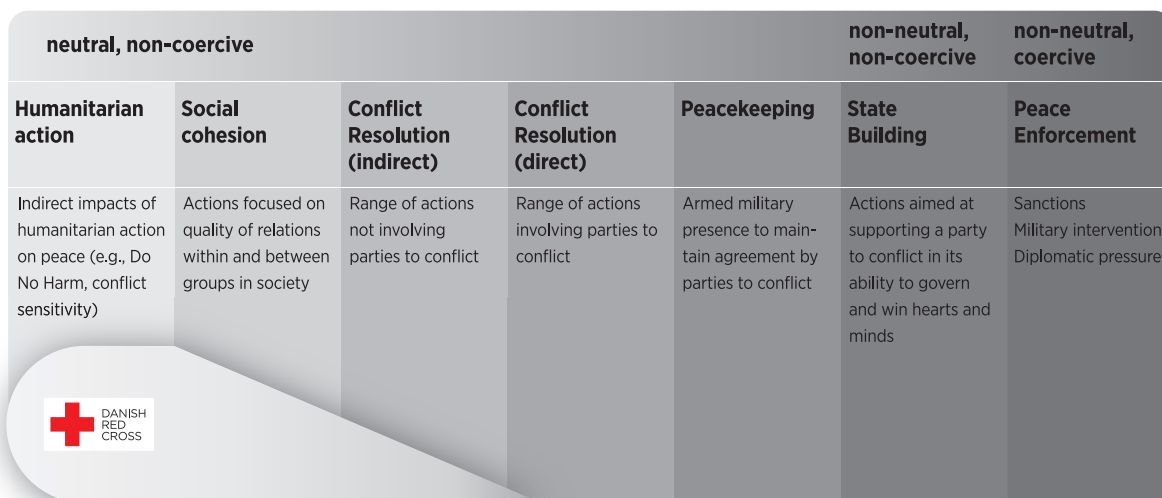


Diagram 1: Positioning Danish Red Cross on the 'peace-building continuum'

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The diagram above reflects the general orientation of Danish Red Cross in relation to the peace-building dimension, which may vary depending on the context and conflict dynamics. It is an indirect peace-enabling approach focused on local engagement and conflict mitigation. It is informed by conflict-sensitive analyses and underpinned by the principle of 'do no harm'. It may also contribute to confidence-building measures that promote social cohesion.

WHEN DOES DANISH RED CROSS OPERATE ACROSS THE TRIPLE NEXUS?

Danish Red Cross operates across the triple nexus when two conditions are met. The first condition is when analysis indicates that engaging in peace-enabling activities does not compromise our mandated role or limit our ability to provide principled humanitarian assistance. The second condition is when such an engagement is expected to have a positive impact on a bottom-up, community-level approach that enables a more peaceful trajectory for communities.

Context analysis is critical, not only in defining the activities that will be included in Danish Red Cross' interventions, but also to assess whether or not to operate within the triple nexus and if so how to engage. We draw from our partners' local knowledge of the context and their understanding of both the drivers of peace and conflict for our analysis. At this stage, we look at our possible contribution and at potential risks ingrained in operating within the triple nexus. We measure these risks with respect to the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement's Fundamental Principles, compliance with IHL, access, and security of staff, volunteers and people in need.

To illustrate the importance of context, **diagram 2** uses the example of access to water to show various intervention scenarios along a peace-conflict dimension. The diagram illustrates how the same type of activity can mean - or can be perceived to mean - different things depending on the context and consequently whether Danish Red Cross can engage in it or not. Importantly, the context is not limited to the particular situation in the target area but can include funding modalities, goals, and conditions, as well as wider geopolitical and security objectives.

HUMANITARIAN NEED

Access to water

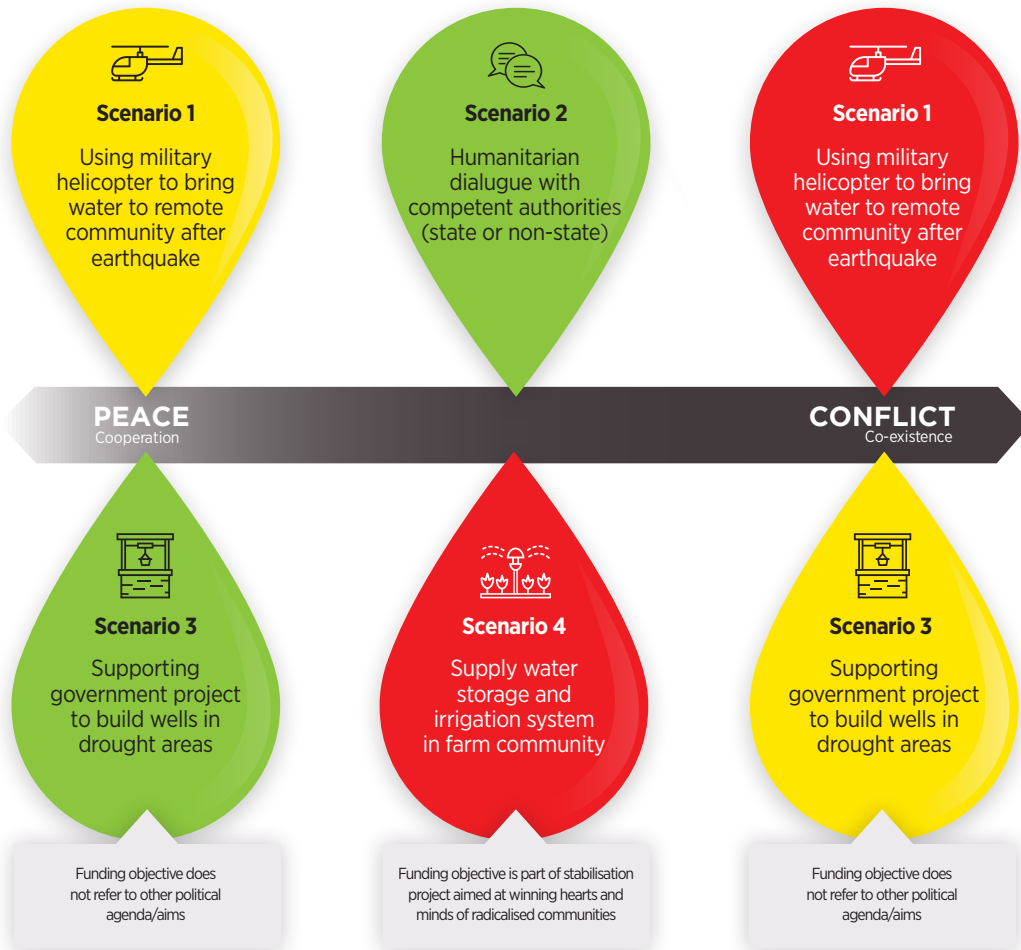


Diagram 2: Intervention scenarios

Please note: Red means no – the intervention is not possible. Yellow means proceed with caution – the intervention may be possible. Green means go – the intervention can go ahead.

During the operational stage, our focus is on how our engagement may save lives and alleviate suffering, promote resilience, strengthen local institutions and civil society, and address the drivers of conflict. It is crucial that engagement and actions are conflict-sensitive and context-sensitive in order not to exacerbate conflict dynamics or cause unintentional harm to any groups of the population. The South Sudan case described in **box 1** is an example of how these different elements are brought together in a triple nexus engagement that is effective in addressing people’s needs, while supporting local initiatives for resilience and peace.

BOX 1: South Sudan

Danish Red Cross (DRC) is supporting South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) in implementing an 'Integrated Community Resilience' project in Bor, South Sudan. The project is designed to strengthen six local communities' resilience towards recurring natural and local conflict-related threats. The project applies an integrated and holistic approach to resilience strengthening across disaster risk reduction, basic community health and hygiene promotion, and psychosocial and protection related activities. It has introduced a 'crisis modifier approach' which allows for timely and effective response should the context suddenly change. This switches the focus of the project from longer-term objectives and planned results to immediate response-focused outputs and associated activities, when relevant and for as long as needed.

In 2019, protection vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCA) were conducted in line with the expansion of the project to two new communities. The protection VCAs provided a platform for different demographic groups to analyse and present their own solutions to the threats they face. However, some of the solutions suggested could not be supported by SSRC, based on their mandate and respect for their impartiality, neutrality and independence. These included lobbying the government to deploy security forces in the areas of frequent attack from neighbouring ethnic groups, encouraging the disarmament of civilians, and mediating peace between conflicting communities. As an alternative, the SSRC decided with communities to facilitate conflict management training for chiefs from all six communities. This has resulted in local village chiefs mediating conflicts in their own communities and calling upon each other for support if they have a conflict of interest.

A review of the project in 2020 confirmed the positive impact of the bottom-up approach on conflict mitigation and support to strengthen social cohesion within the communities. The review also reported that the inter-communal conflict and protection concerns relating to the wider armed conflict cannot be addressed solely by Red Cross actors. Where appropriate, SSRC and DRC will refer these concerns to other triple nexus actors with relevant mandates.

WHEN DOES DANISH RED CROSS NOT OPERATE ACROSS THE TRIPLE NEXUS?

Danish Red Cross draws red lines with regards to triple nexus engagement when principled humanitarian action is at risk. There are a number of different scenarios that may result in humanitarian principles being compromised, particularly in fragile contexts or conflict. State-driven agendas in these situations will often come into conflict with principled humanitarian actions, due to the risk of politicization of both humanitarian and development interventions.

Humanitarian actors should always be able to maintain independence to ensure that they can uphold the principles of impartiality and neutrality and provide services to communities and populations solely based on their needs.

Consequently, Danish Red Cross will intentionally limit its operations to humanitarian actions when:

- a) our triple nexus conflict analysis flags significant risk to humanitarian actions.
- b) engaging may potentially hinder or impede access by first responders to emergency contexts.
- c) engaging in longer-term objectives, whether they relate to building community resilience or social cohesion, may exacerbate conflict at regional or national level.

4

Danish Red Cross will not engage in humanitarian or development actions if the funding is conditioned on engaging in peace-building, stabilisation or 'preventing and countering violent extremism'⁹ activities that may compromise our Fundamental Principles – including neutrality and impartiality – and potentially endanger our staff, volunteers or beneficiaries. The situation in Mali described in **box 2** below provides an example of these concerns.

BOX 2: Mali

Danish Red Cross has worked in partnership with Mali Red Cross since 2007 in projects ranging from addressing basic needs of vulnerable populations to working with communities on early recovery and longer-term development initiatives. The current focus is on humanitarian assistance with much of the country in a protracted crisis resulting from on-going armed conflicts.

There are a number of on-going military operations in Mali: the United National Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the French regional counter-terrorism force Operation Barkhane; the G5 Sahel multinational counter-terrorism military force (comprised of forces from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad); the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM) and Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP), recently also mandated to include training for the G5 Sahel Force – all of them in support of the government and its armed forces and against identified armed groups.

Several armed groups are fighting against these operations. In this increasingly militarized environment, often contributing to shrinkage of the humanitarian space, attacks increase the risks for field staff operating in close proximity to military forces. There have been several security incidents with attacks, kidnappings and killings of humanitarian workers. The consequence is that humanitarian assistance programmes may have to be reduced or suspended when military operations begin.

Security actors, like MINUSMA, often struggle to gain and maintain trust among communities and make use of 'Quick Impact Projects' to build community support, which contributes to blurring the lines between the international stabilisation operations and humanitarian actions. At the same time, the use of armed escorts by humanitarian workers and the use of civilian vehicles by the military for distribution of aid are both common practices in Mali.

In this situation, inclusion of peace-building or stabilisation in programming is extremely sensitive. For humanitarian actors there is a high risk of being perceived as associated with parties to conflict, which may ultimately limit access to affected communities. It can present serious immediate and future risks to humanitarian actors operating in the country, not least the frontline responders, such as the staff and volunteers of the Mali Red Cross.

In early 2019, the EU Trust Fund for Africa invited civil society organisations to submit proposals for transborder programmes (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso) to address the immediate needs of the communities, to contribute to the stabilisation of the area and to 'facilitate the return of the state' in the target areas.¹⁰ Our context analysis based on the concerns outlined here prompted Danish Red Cross to decline this funding opportunity.

The challenge to operating within the triple nexus in a context such as Mali is that the same group of state donors is involved in stabilisation efforts in support of the national government, while simultaneously being the funding sources for humanitarian and development interventions. From a civil society perspective, this situation constitutes a potentially problematic mixing of roles and interests. A basic premise of humanitarian action is that it is carried out impartially and independently from state authority. An important element of development action is to strengthen public institutions through civil society organisations. When these same civil society organisations are requested by institutional donors to align to collective outcomes with the aim of extending the legitimacy of the state, it may become unclear what the role of civil society is and whose interests it serves.

For Danish Red Cross, it is important to safeguard the status and contributions of civil society actors in delivering humanitarian assistance, whilst ensuring sustainable development and promoting conflict mitigation. Consequently, **we support programming and funding mechanisms under the triple nexus that are designed in such a way that the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and other civil society actors can meaningfully fulfil their respective mandates and roles**, which differ from state actors. 7

No two contexts are the same, and every context will change over time. While general approaches and tools can be used, **Danish Red Cross will not support a 'one size fits all' approach in promoting triple nexus engagement and collective outcomes. We advocate for a flexible, case by case, triple nexus approach.** Such an approach also allows for a separation of the three dimensions of the triple nexus when circumstances indicate that this is the best way to guarantee respect for the mandates and role of each stakeholder and maximizes the positive impact for the people we aspire to support. 8

