Applying the HDP nexus approach to better respond to forced displacement

Lessons and experiences from the partnership between the German Development Cooperation and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive Summary

Since 2018, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have worked together to implement the Global Programme Support to UNHCR in Facilitating the Operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (SUN Global Programme or SUN-GP). SUN-GP is a collaborative GIZ-UNHCR initiative, leveraging each agency's complementary strengths to implement HDP nexus approaches and operationalise the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). Additionally, SUN-GP served as a platform for capacity building, knowledge sharing, and lesson learning. It enabled partners to refine HDP nexus approaches and promoted sustainable solutions for displaced populations and host communities.

Purpose and scope of this study

This joint study was conducted between February 2022 and March 2025 by IOD PARC in partnership with the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi). It focuses on UNHCR-GIZ cooperation within SUN-GP to answer: 'How can HDP nexus approaches be used to better respond to forced displacement and put into practice the objectives of the GCR?' It documents lessons learnt, achievements, and areas requiring improvement in future collaborations. The study is primarily aimed at supporting learning for UNHCR and GIZ, but also by other humanitarian and development actors seeking to engage in HDP partnerships.

The study has the following main focuses:
› **UNHCR-GIZ partnership focus:** i) comparative advantages of UNHCR and German Development Cooperation; ii) SUN-GP implementation models; and iii) contextual and partnership enabling and constraining factors; and,
› **HDP approaches focus:** i) setting of collective outcomes for GCR implementation; ii) contributions to collective outcomes; and iii) Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and conflict sensitivity as cross-cutting issues.

The joint study builds on findings from an iterative process of extensive document reviews, in-country and desk-based data collection, and stakeholder consultations. Field missions and follow-ups were conducted in Mexico, Mauritania, and Mozambique. Desk-based research covered Niger, Ethiopia, and Uganda.

Key findings

SUN-GP has supported host governments in integrating refugee support into national development frameworks by providing funding and technical expertise and fostering long-term planning aimed at the inclusion of refugees in national systems and economies. The collaboration between GIZ and UNHCR has strengthened in-country stakeholder engagement, leveraged past learnings, and refined implementation models – each with its own strengths and limitations. However, some challenges remain. These include misaligned implementation timelines, gaps in monitoring progress, and the need for stronger coordination structures to align humanitarian and development responses with government priorities. Balancing the needs of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities also remains a key challenge, particularly in environments where financial resources are scarce.

Ensuring sustainable refugee integration requires early government engagement, locally led approaches, and a stronger emphasis on peacebuilding. Enhancing AAP, integrating conflict sensitivity more effectively, and addressing environmental considerations could improve future responses to forced displacement.

Interest area 1: Lessons learnt, gaps, and opportunities in partnership set-up and project design

Leveraging and capitalising on the comparative advantage of partners

BMZ/GIZ provided critical funding and technical expertise to complement UNHCR's efforts under SUN-GP to support the inclusion of refugees in national planning for increased self-reliance and resilience. Both organisations brought high levels of trust and close government relationships to the partnership, enabling effective coordination with ministries and development partners, and alignment with broader national planning and budgeting frameworks. There are examples from various country contexts of GIZ and UNHCR effectively leveraging their respective technical expertise, presence, resources, and networks to implement nexus approaches. For example, in Uganda GIZ supports the strengthening of authorities' local district planning by contributing to medium-term (five-year) planning processes. In Mauritania, UNHCR's preparedness expertise supports the authorities in adopting a comprehensive approach that combines development initiatives with emergency response, which is especially critical for addressing surges in new refugee arrivals.

The partnership provided both GIZ and UNHCR with opportunities to learn how to refine roles and improve communication by building on mechanisms that worked. These opportunities were facilitated by information-sharing meetings, technical exchanges, and informal communication that supported real-time problem-solving. In Mexico, a coordination agreement clarified cooperation terms and improved workflow, while in Mauritania, efficiencies were achieved by hiring dedicated project managers.

Reflection on different implementation models

This study identifies the strengths and weaknesses of SUN-GP's different implementation modalities: transactional, non-transactional, and joint implementation.[1] All modalities can be effective in achieving a balanced, multi-faceted response to displacement. A few factors are important across all three modalities for enabling effective partnerships: the alignment of implementation timeframes, the establishment of effective coordination and communication mechanisms from the outset (project inception), dedicated expectation management, trust-building, and alignment of interventions with the partners' respective technical expertise and networks. While the joint implementation modality has the potential to offer deeper partnership integration – for example when organisations work together on a day-to-day basis, sharing the same project geographies, offices, and staff – it does not inherently lead to greater success than other modalities. In addition, the benefits of this modality are more likely to be seen in the medium- to long-term as they relate to the sustainability of impact and capacity built within local ecosystems; it may not be realistic to expect immediate cost savings or efficiencies.

In terms of additional opportunities, this joint study's findings suggest that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within programmes using HDP nexus approaches should be strengthened – this is true across all of the implementation modalities covered in this study. GIZ and UNHCR acknowledge the importance of measuring impacts on resilience and socio-economic inclusion of affected populations through the application of HDP nexus approaches. However, monitoring systems do not currently capture direct benefits for targeted populations, and measuring the impact on affected populations remained outside the scope of the joint study.

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1 Non-transactional implementation – GIZ and UNHCR work in partnership leveraging complementary expertise, but no financial resources are exchanged; UNHCR-led transactional implementation – UNHCR leads implementation of SUN-GP activities supported by BMZ funding; Joint Implementation – GIZ and UNHCR jointly implement SUN-GP activities, supported by BMZ funding to both organisations.

Interest area 2: Lessons learnt, gaps, and opportunities on HDP approaches for GCR implementation

Contributing to collective outcomes

Ideally, government-led planning frameworks for inclusion and solutions to displacement should reflect collective outcomes for different actors to align their interventions. SUN-GP demonstrated strong alignment with national planning frameworks, ensuring that interventions contributed to broader government-led strategies. Across the case study countries, interventions were designed to support national resilience-building efforts, infrastructure rehabilitation, and refugee inclusion in national services and economies. Early government engagement by humanitarian and development partners and joint strategy development at both national and local levels enhanced political ownership and contributed to the strong alignment between partners. In Ethiopia, by involving local actors and placing staff in key regions, GIZ and UNHCR were able to adapt projects and tailor solutions to resonate with specific community dynamics. In Uganda, SUN-GP supported National Development Plans and sector response plans that capitalised on the host government's administrative structures and policy-making capabilities for refugee inclusion.

Other success factors for operationalising the HDP nexus included clear national-level coordination structures, locally led coordination and the application of bottom-up approaches.

› **National coordination structures:** This joint study identified good practices for whole-of-government approaches to the refugee response, which include using cross-sectoral coordination and leveraging existing structures such as the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). Examples of these good practices were seen in Uganda and Ethiopia. SUN-GP supported this approach with GCR Advisors. Challenges in other case study countries included insufficient political buy-in for national planning frameworks and weak mandates of lead agencies within national coordination structures.

› **Locally led coordination and bottom-up approaches:** To implement bottom-up approaches, humanitarian and development actors need to achieve a common understanding with local actors, secure political buy-in, foster a sense of ownership at the local level, and strengthen participation within communities. Capacity-strengthening efforts with local governments in Uganda, income creation for municipalities through land development in Niger, and joint implementation of gender-based violence (GBV) services with local governments in Mozambique all serve as positive examples of this. However, the partnership faced challenges in fully engaging local actors in some contexts such as in Ethiopia. This was due, in part, to centralised decision-making structures, a lack of implementation mechanisms, and limited funding at the district level.

To fully operationalise HDP nexus approaches, contributions to peace outcomes require greater attention and investment. While "small p" contributions, such as conflict-sensitive programming and capacity-building, were evident in some contexts, peace outcomes were not consistently prioritised. Differences in organisational mandates and language around peace-related work contributed to a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities.

Further opportunities to contribute to the operationalisation of the GCR

Designing a partnership to complement other actors' efforts was a key success factor for HDP interventions to advance GCR objectives. In both Mauritania and Niger, cooperation between GIZ and UNHCR complemented major investments by the World Bank in national development planning. Conversely, in other contexts, SUN-GP missed opportunities to leverage synergies between HDP interventions with other actors.

Cross-cutting environmental issues offer an opportunity for bringing humanitarian, development and peace actors together to achieve GCR objectives. While environmental issues were part of SUN-GP in some settings (Energy Solutions in Displacement Settings – ESDS), there is potential to more systematically address environmental issues, including climate resilience.

Integration of AAP and conflict sensitivity as cross-cutting issues

The partnership has produced good practice on conflict sensitivity and social cohesion, but there are additional opportunities for strengthening AAP and making these areas more systematic.

› **Accountability to Affected People:** UNHCR and GIZ employed basic AAP tools and supported the strengthening of local actors' capacity in this respect. Areas requiring attention include: i) moving beyond one-way feedback by communicating whether and how feedback is taken onboard; ii) checking for the inclusion of a broad range of perspectives; and iii) developing a clear approach for collecting, analysing, and using information on community participation and AAP across partner agencies.

› **Conflict-sensitivity:** The study also identified promising practices used in SUN-GP for applying conflict-sensitive approaches. Ethiopia's community-based conflict management is a positive example of the application of conflict-sensitive approaches under SUN-GP. Similarly, Mauritania's ProNexus project balanced immediate humanitarian needs with sustainable strategies while addressing communal conflicts through awareness-raising and social inclusion efforts. Moving forward, greater collaboration will be needed to ensure partner agencies integrate conflict-sensitive programming effectively, including aligning reporting on conflict-sensitive indicators.

› **Social cohesion:** Well-implemented, culturally aware interventions can positively impact social cohesion when aligned with community needs. Positive examples emerged across different contexts, including the integration of women into brickyard workforce initiatives, which led to reduced GBV reports in Niger, Peace Circles that fostered social cohesion and trust among communities in Mexico, and One Stop Shops that centralised protection services for both refugees and host populations in various countries. However, resource scarcity often created competing priorities, requiring careful negotiation to prevent tensions between displaced populations and host communities. Funding constraints sometimes led to perceived inequities in aid distribution, undermining social cohesion. Furthermore, government-led integration efforts sometimes overlooked grassroots discrimination issues.

Recommendations

The joint study offers eleven recommendations that distinguish between strategic and operational levels. Four main stakeholder groups were identified as key actors for the uptake and implementation of these recommendations: UNHCR and GIZ (and humanitarian and development actors more broadly), host governments and donors.

Recommendations tailored to relevant stakeholders

Rationale	Recommendation
Partnerships design, set-up and management	
Recommendation 1 Build in flexibility to support partnering processes and dynamics The identification and regular assessment of partners' comparative advantages and disadvantages in sectors of intervention and contexts of focus are necessary to support the achievement of results.	**Operational – UNHCR and BMZ/GIZ** Provide greater organisational flexibility once partnership has been agreed to integrate necessary adjustments during project implementation, e.g., on the focus of interventions or contributions of partners. Incorporate deliberate reflection points for open and honest communication between partner organisations about comparative advantages for the achievement of results and challenges that may require adaptation or discontinuation of interventions. **Operational – donors** Allow implementing agencies flexibility to manage and adapt partnerships to capitalize on comparative advantages for the achievement of results.
Recommendation 2 Set up light structures to support partnering and implementation of joint initiatives Working in partnership across the HDP nexus requires dedicated structures to support relevant processes, particularly given differences in organizational tools and working cultures and potential needs for adaptation over the course of implementation.	**Operational – UNHCR and BMZ/GIZ** › Ring-fence dedicated attention and time of staff during appraisal and inception phases of partnership projects to familiarise each other on organizational processes and set expectations on their potential impact on implementation. › Put in place mechanisms to review and manage the potential impact of organisational processes and culture on implementation based on previous good practice, e.g., joint planning and reviews, agreed decision-making processes for considering/introducing project adaptations, and specific working arrangements for more effective/efficient implementation, e.g. co-location. › Ensure the inclusion of HQ and country-level colleagues in discussions during appraisal/inception phases and ongoing review to support dialogue between agencies and adaptation to challenges at all levels impacting implementation. › Include local level in project countries in appraisal missions, in addition to country level, including consideration of the feasibility of decentralising authority to lowest practical level where strongest opportunities for collaboration are identified.

Recommendation 3
Share learning to support effective partnering efforts
 	
Thanks to their collaboration on SUN-GP, UNHCR and GIZ have both undergone learning processes that will likely be useful for both organisations in future partnerships with one another as well as with other stakeholders. Learnings should be captured in documentation such as SOPs, recommendations compendiums and/or a collection of good practices and reflections.
	Operational – UNHCR and BMZ/GIZ
	› Drawing on the experience of partnering for SUN-GP, develop guidance internal to each organisation on:
	  › Process-oriented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for joint projects.
	  › Recommendations on partnering, e.g., length of programming, managing adaptations following re-appraisal, options for increased efficiency.
	  › Collection of good practices and reflections on division of tasks and responsibilities between HQ and country/local levels.
	  › Maintain learning processes and reflection loops to accompany the partnership.

Rationale	Recommendation
Recommendation 4 Improve the process and utility of joint pro–ject monitoring and learning cycles To address the persistence of differences in assessing what constitutes progress on the application of HDP nexus approaches, a more coherent understanding of how to measure the effectiveness of HDP interventions in displacement settings is needed to support inclusion and long-term outcomes.	**Strategic – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** › Identify priority results areas where joint efforts will be invested and measured to monitor results and progress, ensuring these priority areas are kept to a minimum to limit burden on staff and appropriate quality of monitoring data. › Build in reflection and learning loops that draw on monitoring results to ensure the project remains relevant, flexible and adaptable. **Operational – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** › Identify relevant indicators to operationalise priority results areas during the project appraisal/design stage taking into account practical operating realities of partners (e.g., staffing and likely workload involved in collecting monitoring data). › Assess whether and how existing monitoring structures can be capitalised on for the collection of data for joint indicators, building on existing tools where possible. › Classify indicators between those that will be joint indicators focused on synergies, and indicators that are specific to each partner and collected separately. › Engage staff at all levels when developing the monitoring and learning cycle from the outset to draw on their operational knowledge and foster ownership and buy-in. › Establish appropriate learning loops and analysis sessions around monitoring processes with clear mechanisms to use the evidence gathered through monitoring.
	HDP approaches for GCR implementation
Recommendation 5 Foster a whole-of-government approach to ensure alignment and sustainability A unified, whole-of-government approach aligned with international partners is key to the sustainability of solutions in forced displacement contexts.	**Strategic – organisations engaging in HDP-focused partnerships** › Support host governments in taking the lead on driving socio-economic inclusion of displaced populations in contexts of forced displacement through dialogue between all partners to design collective outcomes, and ongoing engagement to support their achievement. › Identify and collectively address barriers to host governments taking the lead role as appropriate. **Operational – host governments** › Identify the line ministry/agency responsible for facilitating HDP approaches in displacement contexts, in collaboration with other relevant sectoral ministries/agencies. › Ensure that the identified line ministry/agency and supporting sectoral ministries/agencies are appropriately resourced (financial and staffing) to effectively exercise their responsibilities. › Formulate, in cooperation between line and sectoral ministries/agencies, an operational plan for a whole-of-government approach for the inclusion of displaced populations in national systems and economies. **Operational – development actors** › Working with humanitarian partners, map relevant line/sectoral ministries and agencies within them to identify different needs for capacity strengthening and political dialogue on inclusion of displaced populations and host communities. › Identify any challenges and barriers to the host government driving the HDP approach that can be addressed through political engagement, technical assistance and/or financial support. › Align development partnerships and programmes to government priorities and coordination structures for the inclusion of refugees in relevant policies and strategies across sectors, e.g., economic, health, education, and energy policies. **Operational – humanitarian actors** › Work with development actors to advocate for and support governments to lead on HDP planning, prioritisation and coordination from the outset of an emergency, in line with the principles of sustainable responses. › Engage with development actors to ensure support provided to government authorities accounts for the inclusion of refugees in national priorities and sectoral plans. **Operational – donors (multilateral and bilateral)** › Support national strategies to focus on the inclusion of refugees in national systems and economies when providing funding and insist that development and humanitarian actors operate within coordinated, unified frameworks towards that goal. › Where possible and appropriate, support political engagement to address barriers within host governments to lead on HDP approaches.

Rationale	Recommendation
Recommendation 6 Ensure vision and operational planning support implementation of inclusion efforts The achievement of concrete lasting outcomes for populations affected by displacement must include efforts to support the inclusion of displaced populations in national services and improve their livelihood opportunities. This will help facilitate the transition to self-reliance and limit aid dependency.	**Strategic + operational – host governments** Develop a guiding vision for the inclusion of displaced populations in national systems and economies and an operational plan to support its implementation, including the following: › Ensure that displaced populations are integrated and costed into existing and new national development strategies and plans. › Within existing and new national development strategies and plans, identify sectors and cross-cutting areas where inclusion of displaced populations can support national development outcomes. › Capitalise on established coordination structures to advance the inclusion of refugees in national systems aligned with the whole-of-government approach. Identify line ministries with clear responsibility for the inclusion of displaced populations, going beyond line ministries with a mandate for migration and forced displacement and encompassing line ministries of national services such as health, economy, education and social protection.
Recommendation 7 Capitalise on partners' comparative advantages through systems-based context analyses The identification of priority sectors where humanitarian and development actors can support the inclusion of displaced populations should be based on a detailed context analysis that allows them to strategically formulate their offer and identify areas that may require adaptations, including in addressing issues such as lack of political will, lack of access, or limited influence to effect change..	**Strategic – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** Jointly undertake a systems-based context analysis to identify international, national and local actors within the system for collaboration on application of the HDP nexus and the inclusion of displaced populations, clearly identifying the lead in each context for this joint analysis exercise. › Identify enabling and constraining factors, including lack of political will and structural barriers that may pose challenges or require adaptations for interventions. › Define which humanitarian and development actors are best placed to collaborate with identified counterparts and to address constraining factors in the partnership.
Recommendation 8 Build and strengthen capacity on sectoral and cross-cutting issues The positioning of humanitarian and development actors supporting HDP nexus approaches in displacement settings must be based on an assessment of national capacity and sectoral entry points to support national ownership and transition planning.	**Operational – host governments** › Identify sectors (e.g., employment, education, health) and cross-cutting issues (e.g., digital identity for accessing services) where financial, technical, capacity and/or systems strengthening support for inclusion of displaced populations will be required from humanitarian and development actors. › Ensure agreement on transition planning and clear understanding of responsibilities and timelines for transitioning. › Ensure line ministries have the resources, political support and capacity, including coordination with international and national partners. **Strategic + operational – development partners (including GIZ)** › Support the government in identifying sectors and cross-cutting issues in which financial, technical, capacity and/or systems strengthening support will be required for the inclusion of displaced populations. › Coordinate with humanitarian actors on planning and actioning handover pathways to development partners and government leadership/national stakeholders. **Strategic + operational – humanitarian partners (including UNHCR)** › Support the government in strengthening capacity for the inclusion of displaced populations in national systems and economies in identified sectors/on cross-cutting issues. › Draw clear handover pathways in coordination with development partners and government leadership/national stakeholders on sectoral plans and on cross-cutting issues. **Strategic + operational – donors** › Target funding to support national capacity strengthening and inter-sectoral coordination in the context of forced displacement, creating enabling conditions for partnership at national and international level and joint programming.

Rationale	Recommendation
Recommendation 9 Support bottom-up responses and engage with local actors In line with localisation/locally led development commitments and fostering of bottom-up responses to displacement, the engagement of local actors should be prioritised and financial, technical and capacity support provided to them for sustainability and effectiveness..	**Operational – host governments** › Nominate district- and local-level counterparts (if applicable to country context) to lead work with humanitarian and development actors on relevant sectors of intervention for the inclusion of displaced populations. › Ensure dedicated funding is redistributed to district and local levels to support efforts for the inclusion of displaced populations. **Strategic + operational – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** › As part of project planning and appraisal stages, ensure complementarity with interventions for the inclusion of displaced populations at district and local level, and identify technical, financial, and capacity needs that can be supported through HDP approaches. **Strategic + operational – humanitarian partners (including UNHCR)** › As part of project planning, ensure complementarity with interventions of authorities and other actors for the inclusion of displaced populations at district and local level. › Support authorities in conducting analyses of expected costs of transitioning from humanitarian to national quality standards and engage with development partners and governments to define financing options. **Operational – development partners (including GIZ)** › As part of project planning and appraisal stages, identify technical, capacity and financing needs that can be supported through development approaches at district and local levels. › Support district and local level stakeholders to analyse costs and draw a financing plan for the inclusion of displaced populations in relevant sectors and services and to draw a financing plan. **Operational – donors** › Require that budgeting for interventions on inclusion of displaced populations integrate allocations at district and local levels, as appropriate. › Require consideration in funding requests for examination of whether and how interventions in refugee-hosting areas can be linked to national and sub-national development plans (e.g., in infrastructure)..
Recommendation 10 Systematically collect and use beneficiary perspectives Meaningful engagement with the programme beneficiaries promotes interventions that are more relevant to their needs and project designs, delivery, and adaptations that more effectively integrate their perspectives and views.	**Operational – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** › Capitalising on established methods and mechanisms, incorporate monitoring tools for engagement with affected populations on relevant indicators/results areas to support systematic collection, analysis and use of beneficiary data. › Incorporate consideration of beneficiary feedback into learning loops, decision-making and analysis sessions, and adapt interventions accordingly, if needed.
Recommendation 11 Systematically collect and use data on interventions' impact on social cohesion The concept of social cohesion in HDP nexus programming should be further developed. Given both uncertainty around putting the "peace" element of the nexus into practice and the narrow understanding of social cohesion (which is limited to including both refugees and host community members in HDP interventions), HDP partners should further develop their definition of social cohesion entails and use that to inform more appropriate guidance.	**Operational – humanitarian partners and development partners (including UNHCR and GIZ)** › In jointly implemented projects on HDP nexus, develop joint understanding and, capitalising on existing mechanisms, incorporate monitoring tools for measuring contributions to social cohesion in identified priority result areas to support systematic data collection, analysis and adaptation. › Incorporate consideration of social cohesion dynamics into learning loops and analysis sessions, and adapt interventions as needed to mitigate arising tensions. **Operational – development actors** › Drawing on monitoring data, communicate at district, national and international level how joint interventions are benefitting host communities and integrating displaced populations.