Whose Knowledge Counts?

Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy

Formative Research

OXFAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Oxfam Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030) was developed through an 18-month global process committed to strengthening feminist leadership and surfacing voices across countries and regions. The framework articulates a vision for increased relevance, resilience, and impact, addressing inequality and highlights six approaches that distinguish Oxfam and its impact:

1. A Feminist Approach: Being feminist in action and interaction.
2. People Power: Amplifying the voices and actions of people who experience poverty and injustice; working with those who fight for these causes.
3. Thinking and Acting Locally and Globally: Building coalitions within and between regions and from the local to the global
4. Enhanced Humanitarian Action: Working with people and communities at risk of conflict and disaster before, during, and after crises.
5. Digital Rights and Space: Engaging with and leveraging the power and influence of digital technology.
6. Systemic Change: Mobilising to transform the systems that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

A core collective area articulated in the Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030) is the application of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus or Triple Nexus. Operationalisation of the Triple Nexus is detailed in the Horizon Plan, which aims to facilitate greater alignment and understanding around programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts.

RIGHTS, RESILIENCE, AND RESPONSE

To better enable and support Country Programmes and partners to tackle extreme vulnerability in fragile contexts, Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam GB) is adapting its internal ways of working. Anchored to the Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030), Oxfam GB aims to shift its approach to Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts, transforming into an **Enabler, Partner and Platform** for Country Offices and partners by 2030.

The Rights, Resilience, and Response Team at Oxfam GB commissioned this formative research to advance its transformation to Enabler, Partner, and Platform. This research aims to:

- Establish what information is required to inform Oxfam GB's ongoing Rights, Resilience, and Response work.
- Establish an evidence base for both programming and influencing in conflict and fragile contexts.
- Define opportunities and challenges for aid system change.

Anchored to the theme: **Evidence and learning – Whose knowledge counts?** this research clarifies what information and analysis Oxfam needs and why; to aid their understanding of the role knowledge, evidence, and information plays internally and within the sector. In addition, this research demonstrates intentional consideration of where and what knowledge Oxfam GB chooses to collect, has access to, and uses.

The following research questions were explored:

What is Oxfam saying they are doing, and what is being done? What is/is not working?

Oxfam prioritises conflict and fragility and a Triple Nexus approach with a foundational emphasis on conflict sensitivity; this is clear in the available strategic documents and interviews with staff.

However, internal processes, partnership models, risk appetite, and internal challenges in realising the strategic ambition dominated interviews. As a benchmark, Oxfam GB appears to find itself at the nexus between ambition and control. The ambition to be an enabler, partner and platform for country offices and partners with the need to control and understand how that works in practice. Additional learning points include:

- The risk appetite required to operate in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts does not yet match the ambition.
- The Triple Nexus approach is viewed positively by many staff, but clarity around the administrative detail of operationalising the approach is needed.
- The peace pillar of the Triple Nexus approach requires further refinement to manage the complexity of neutrality and working with non-traditional State and non-State actors.
- The Durable Peace Programme and feminist peace approach present opportunities for Oxfam GB to demonstrate how peace can be incorporated into the Triple Nexus. Furthermore, by prioritising partnering with women's rights and feminist peace networks, Oxfam GB has the opportunity to elevate their approaches and ways of working into current and future Triple Nexus conversations in the global north.

What are the gaps, challenges, and contradictions across the sector in the theory of Rights, Resilience, and Response and the implementation?

Oxfam appears to be further ahead in the sector when documenting the contradictions inherent in programming and influencing in complex environments and adopting Triple Nexus approaches. Further gaps, challenges, and contradictions include:

- Theories of Change do not always consider the complexity of working with other power holders, for example, informal institutions and non-traditional, non-state actors.
- The Triple Nexus approach is moving towards the *how* with the materialisation of knowledge-sharing platforms, while challenges remain in the practical deployment of Triple Nexus.
- Nexus programming responds to short-term shocks, which may require rapid capacity and transfer. Tensions remain between short-term response with long-term thinking and where partners and local capacities are equipped to respond in this manner.[1]

Oxfam GB and the Rights, Resilience and Response team needs to live the rhetoric of being courageous in challenging the nexus knowledge sharing spaces that are appearing to ensure the same top-down inequalities are not being resown. Oxfam has an opportunity to fill this evidence gap with how nexus is operating organically across multi-sectoral programming and applying a decolonised lens to the Triple Nexus programming.

What has the sector learnt concerning working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts? What is different about the approach in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts? What are the ingredients for success? What have changes led to? Who benefits or loses from the changes?

The approach to working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts is unique to each context, with learning and knowledge dispersed across countries, communities, and intervention types.

- The sector is learning to manage ambitions related to change, outcomes, and impact in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts[2] where policy changes or relationships built over a long period can be quickly dismantled.

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[1] Barakat, S., and Milton, S, "Localisation Across the Humanitarian Development-Peace Nexus". *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development,* 15, no. 2 (2020)

[2] Barbour, B. and Cliffe. S, "Learning the Lessons of Fragility, Conflict and Violence" accessed April 2nd, 2022, https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/podcast/learning-lessons-fragility-conflict-and-violence

- Operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts requires agility, flexibility, and responsiveness by organisations. The sector is theoretically ready but not yet operationally ready. Pivots to Triple Nexus approaches require an emphasis on internal systems and structures to ensure operational readiness in complex environments.

Furthermore, trends and themes around the evolution of fragility, Triple Nexus, conflict sensitivity and working with governments and State institutions are underpinned by a universal need to revisit definitions and approaches against the backdrop of shifting power, creating space to continually test assumptions and ultimately ask '*who defined, labelled, or created new emerging approaches or definitions and what barriers still remain for civil society-led approaches?'*

What networks and influencing platforms are relevant for Oxfam and partners on aid systems change? Where are distinct specialist actors available in the space of RRR, and who should Oxfam partner with instead of developing in-house expertise?

Triple Nexus approaches are complemented by establishing and engaging with networks and platforms. For example, Oxfam's support and successful participation in the growth of a Conflict Sensitivity platform in West Africa. Localisation platforms and networks have materialised that cover knowledge sharing and movement building. A diagram can be found in the networks and platforms section.[3] Furthermore, platforms such as the RINGO project [4]or Re-imagining the international Non-Governmental Organisation project are leading the way in uncovering what keeps the aid sector stuck and unable to shift power. Oxfam may want to engage with this platform and network further by adding concrete examples of how Oxfam is approaching aid systems change.

What power dynamics inform what and how knowledge, evidence, and information are gathered, processed, and why?

Oxfam needs to get comfortable with decentring itself as a knowledge, evidence and information producer in favour of rebalancing toward other sources of knowledge. Power dynamics that may shape this include:

- Systems created by Oxfam GB are not shared widely with partners or local actors.
- The reliance on the English language at Oxfam GB means most products are produced in the English language. Some resources on Oxfam's online repository are available in French, Spanish, and Arabic.
- Donor requests for reports, evidence and information in English tend to dominate the sector and influence Oxfam GB's prioritisation about how to produce, process and disseminate knowledge, evidence and information. Research Participants noted the importance of tacit knowledge, but at this stage, the dynamic of donors requiring reporting in English appears to take priority.
- Partners are often required to adapt to Oxfam's ways of working, systems, and processes.

What is Oxfam's comparative advantage, and what should the offer be?

Oxfam already believes internally that localisation, decolonisation, and Triple Nexus approaches are worthwhile ambitions, but practically, organisational structures are limiting the ability to realise these ambitions. Therefore, at this stage, Oxfam's role may not be to lead in making a case for localisation, decolonisation, and Triple Nexus in the absence of strong examples where it is realising these values and delivering these approaches internally. Through modelling how internal ways of working match these values, for example, by modelling decolonisation approaches, Oxfam

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[3] Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R, "Are we there yet? Localisations as the journey towards locally led practice - initiatives promoting localisation and locally led practice: a multitude of existing efforts" accessed April 5th, 2022 https://odi.org/en/publications/are-we-there-yet-localisation-as-the-journey-towards-locally-led-practice/

[4] Rights CoLab - https://rightscolab.org/ringo/

GB may have more influence across the aid sector that is also struggling to define and understand how to realise these values and commitments.

Despite this, across the sector and internally, Oxfam GB is still considered to have the scale and reach to elevate lesser-heard voices into decision making spaces. More than ever, this advantage should be used to challenge elitist groups that set agendas, definitions, frameworks, policies, and principles that continue to shape the sector.

Oxfam appears to be further ahead in its thinking on peace and dilemmas of how to carry out Triple Nexus approaches. Therefore, Oxfam GB also has the comparative advantage of creating platforms to elevate feminist peace approaches and associated women's networks and feminist organisations from the global South into decision making spaces on the Triple Nexus and aid systems change.

In complement, Oxfam GB may also want to consider taking the lead in acknowledging the harm Oxfam GB has caused when approaching partners, platforms, and networks. Starting from a point of humble acknowledgement could lead to more meaningful reparative partnerships.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Oxfam Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030) was developed through an 18-month global process committed to strengthening feminist leadership and surfacing voices across countries and regions. The framework articulates a vision for increased relevance, resilience, and impact, addressing inequality and highlights six approaches that distinguish Oxfam and its impact:

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To better enable and support Country Programmes and partners to tackle extreme vulnerability in fragile contexts, Oxfam Great Britain (Oxfam GB) is adapting its internal ways of working. Anchored to the Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030), Oxfam GB aims to shift its approach to Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts, transforming into an **Enabler, Partner and Platform** for Country Offices and partners by 2030.

Enabler	
Turning our values into practice	Embedding complementary strategies and cross-cutting concepts such as decolonisation, racism, and feminist principles to move from rhetoric to practice. Focus on unpacking what these concepts mean in practice and contributing to the organisation's understanding, particularly in fragile contexts.
Shifting resources to the South	Increased unrestricted technical support, operational capacity, and resources to support Southern-led strategic processes and priorities.
Fundraising	Deepening relationships with UK-based institutional and philanthropic donors to raise funds and influence their approach to fragile contexts; based on content and evidence co-created with Oxfam GB Rights, Resilience, and Response priority countries.

Partner	

Policies and systems	Updating policies and processes to reflect the global commitment to transformational partnerships; enabling colleagues to invest in long-term, equitable partnerships with a diverse range of formal and informal partners, share power, build local and national leadership and humanitarian practice, and respond and adapt to contextual changes.
Risk and safety	Transitioning to proactive, joint risk management, centred around the safety of partners and staff, based on responsibility-sharing. Bearing the risk, when needed, to fulfil commitments to shift power and decolonise.
Decolonisation of aid	Modelling decolonised practice by shifting power and decision-making over the distribution and use of resources. Resourcing the mainstream awareness of 'Whiteness' as a political and social construct as it manifests within the Rights, Resilience, and Response team's programmatic and operational functions.

Platform	
Aid System Change	Continuing to work with countries, partners, and allies to push for changes in the aid sector's understanding of conflict and fragility, the politicisation of aid, and regulations that restrict effective programmes and partnerships in fragile contexts. Influencing the sector on the importance of Triple Nexus and context-specific, locally-led solutions to address the root causes and drivers of conflict and fragility.
Speaking Out	Working with the confederation, partners, and allies to take a courageous stance and call out the injustices perpetuating conflict and fragility; supporting the access of Southern and/or feminist voices to influencing and decision-making forums on conflict-related issues, peace, rights, and resilience.
Standing in solidarity	Adopting new forms of solidarity and allyship, providing cover, where requested, for those speaking out about injustice. Ensuring not to take their voice, speaking out on issues when others don't feel able to do so. Working within the confederation to develop appropriate decision-making processes for speaking out.
Innovative campaigning	Investing in influencing capacities, support, and innovative campaigns that put partners and activists at the centre, including through non-branded initiatives to elevate others' voices and work.

In applying a coherent and coordinated response through the strategic application of technical competencies, business support, operational behaviours, funding, and partnerships, Oxfam GB seeks to address the drivers of fragility, enabling communities and organisations to claim and secure their rights, driving long-term sustainable change. Working intersectionally, Oxfam GB aims to further its commitments to ensuring its actions and interactions are feminist, anti-racist, safe, and partnership led.

FORMATIVE RESEARCH

To advance its transformation to **Enabler, Partner, and Platform**, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Team at Oxfam GB commissioned this formative research. The purpose of this research was to:

- Establish what information is required to inform Oxfam GB's ongoing Rights, Resilience, and Response work.
- Establish an evidence base for both programming and influencing in conflict and fragile contexts.
- Define opportunities and challenges for aid system change.

Anchored to the theme: **Evidence and learning – Whose knowledge counts?** this research clarifies what information and analysis Oxfam needs and why; to aid their understanding of the role knowledge, evidence, and information plays internally and within the sector. In addition, this research demonstrates intentional consideration of where and what knowledge Oxfam GB chooses to collect, has access to, and uses.

This formative research was guided by the following questions:

1. What is Oxfam saying they are doing, and what is being done? What is/is not working?
2. What evidence is needed to provide a strong business case for the changes in the aid sector that Oxfam is calling for (localisation, decolonisation, Triple Nexus)?
3. What are the gaps, challenges and contradictions across the sector in the theory of rights, resilience and response (including, fragility, conflict, peace, nexus programming and systems strengthening) and implementation?
4. What has the sector learnt concerning working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected contexts?
5. What is different about the approach in Fragile and Conflict-Affected contexts, and what are the ingredients for success? What have changes led to? Who benefits or loses from the changes?
6. What networks and influencing platforms are relevant for Oxfam and partners on aid systems change? What are the knowledge and learning gaps?
7. What power dynamics inform what and how knowledge, evidence and information are gathered, processed, and why?
8. What is the evidence base for nexus approaches and systems strengthening?
9. What is Oxfam's comparative advantage and what should the offer be?
10. What trends and learning questions relating to FCAC does Oxfam need to be ready for?
11. Where are distinct specialist actors available in the space of RRR, and who should Oxfam partner with instead of developing in-house expertise?

This formative research was anchored to the following principles:

- **Active Participation:** Adopting principles and approaches that leverage participatory and inclusive methodologies to reduce and remove barriers to participation.
- **Power and Positionality:** Reflecting on placement and positionality and the impact of power. Committing to better understanding complex power and gender relations that consider the intersection between race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and history.
- **Culturally Responsive and Inclusive:** Privileging lived experience, especially communities and populations of colour.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers conducted internal and external literature reviews and interviews.

Desk Research

Internal resources: Approximately 17 internal documents and videos were provided by Oxfam GB to review. These included strategies, research papers, case studies and learning papers.

External resources: Approximately 43 external sources were referenced. These included journal articles, research, learning, evidence papers and blogs.

The researchers prioritised diversity of sources with consideration for authors, location, type of source (for example website or journal article) and breadth across the research questions.

Content analysis and thematic coding was used to analyse data, and assess gaps, contradictions, trends, emerging learning, and catalysts to aid systems change. The Research Team utilised a computer-assisted qualitative analysis application that mined data specified through a comprehensive coding system.

Key Informant Interviews

The formative research included 26 interview participants: 20 Oxfam staff, and 6 external representatives.[5]
Key Informants were selected based on the following criteria:

- Diversity across roles
- Proximity to the themes: fragility, conflict, peace, and Triple Nexus
- Demographic diversity
- Organisational diversity

Geographic distribution of Research Participants

Across the distribution of participants 11 identified using she/her pronouns and 14 identified using he/him pronouns.

CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The following considerations and limitations articulate how this research embodies some of the contradictions that exist regarding the theme: **Evidence and learning – Whose knowledge counts?**

- The Research Team included a White, cisgender woman and an Asian and Black, cisgender lesbian. Both researchers reside in the United Kingdom and are nationals of the United Kingdom and the United States of America, respectively. The research here is therefore viewed through the lens of privilege.
- English was the only language spoken throughout the research, including with Research Participants. The secondary sources provided by Oxfam and those sourced by the Research Team were written in English. The dominance of English throughout this research is problematic, and the Research Team acknowledges their role in reinforcing inequality.
- The Research Team have attempted to write this report using plain language and without jargon. Acronyms and initialisms have not been used, mindful of the additional cognitive burden these can create for some individuals, particularly non-native English speakers, and those less familiar with the topics.
- Comparatively little internal documentation and evidence was made available to the researchers which may have skewed some analysis within this report. Conflicting priorities and a low level of socialisation of the research across Oxfam GB, including with strategic priority countries may have contributed to the significant gaps.
- The researchers intended to prioritise interviews with country teams and sense-making sessions with partners. Unfortunately, partners, including Women's Rights Organisations, were not included. Additionally, only three Research Participants from Country Programmes were interviewed. This may have been due to time constraints and competing priorities. This is likely to have reinforced inequalities by prioritising evidence available in English and accessible online over the voices of country teams, partners and women's rights organisations.
- The researchers had initially proposed using evidence gap maps to look at evidence across themes such as nexus programming. However, the utility of this was found to be limited against the overarching theme of whose knowledge counts. Especially as the researcher's

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[5] World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, civil society networks and other peace related non-governmental organisations.

own bias and privileged lens may have skewed what evidence was assumed to be available when tacit knowledge and knowledge from country programmes and partners was limited.

- This research paper is 35 pages long, taking a proficient English reader approximately 58 minutes to read which may be practically inaccessible. It is unknown whether it will be available in other languages or in more accessible formats, which may reinforce unequal access to its contents.

2 OPERATIONAL READINESS AND RISK APPETITE

In an attempt to understand what Oxfam is doing, what is working and what is not working around the themes of Rights, Resilience and Response, findings on operational readiness and risk appetite emerged. More specifically, the themes of Oxfam GB to efficiently deploy, operate and maintain the systems and processes needed to effectuate its Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy. The Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy is situated within an organisational structure that influences Oxfam GB's readiness to operate in complex environments that require agility, flexibility, and responsiveness. Oxfam GB's systems and processes and its organisational structure are two notable areas identified in this research.

This section details the findings associated with operational readiness and risk appetite: the activities required to roll out, operationalise, and maintain interventions and the level of risk Oxfam GB is prepared to accept in pursuit of its ambitions.

SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

Well-defined systems and processes improve efficiency and decision-making and influence the overall impact any organisation is seeking to achieve. Research Participants expressed that Oxfam's systems and processes were overly complicated, which may challenge operations in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts that require leaner, more agile processes.

> **"What doesn't work is the whole system we're in and the processes that we have. The way that we're structured does not enable us to achieve our vision. When we say we wanted to work with agility, flexibility, with informal movements, local community-based organisations, change-makers, individuals – our processes and the way we're structured, the requirements that we have, from donors, the aid system, the Charity Commission, regulatory frameworks, local laws, doesn't allow us to do that." - Research Participant**

Furthermore, there may be a perception or expectation that partners are required to adapt to Oxfam's ways of working. These systems and processes may not be fit for purpose for all partners, in all contexts. Therefore, an adaptive and flexible operational approach which includes co-designing and active participation may be more appropriate.

As a **Partner**, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy commits to *updating policies and processes to reflect the global commitment to transformational partnerships; enabling colleagues to invest in long-term, equitable partnerships with a diverse range of formal and informal partners, share power, build local and national leadership and humanitarian practice, and respond and adapt to contextual changes.*

By updating its policies and processes, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Team is positioned to address constraints related to systems and processes in their work. However, the team will need to resolve how to achieve these commitments and operate within Affiliate- and Confederate-wide structures and processes without broader institutional reform.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

> **"There's a fundamental question about how complex we have created our internal apparatus to help and support others." - Research Participant**

Organisational structure describes how activities and initiatives are managed and coordinated. An enabling organisational structure is critical for operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. Oxfam's structure, across the Confederation and within Oxfam GB, was frequently cited as a disabling factor, hindering the organisational competency or capability to operate in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts.

Recruitment and technical capacity, coordinated within the organisational structure, also surfaced as a necessary component of operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts.

As an **Enabler**, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy commits to increasing *unrestricted technical support, operational capacity, and resources to support Southern-led strategic processes and priorities.*

Advancing the ambition of working for greater impact in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts will require Oxfam GB and the Confederation to ensure it has the necessary resources and processes. Foundational skills around Triple Nexus, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability,

> **"Our Confederation is overly complex. Nobody understands it, how it works. Even at the highest level, things are not clear; so, things don't move despite the best intentions." - Research Participant**

and Learning, global and national influencing, partnerships and private sector engagement, accountability and safe programming have been identified as growth areas to deliver programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts.[6] Consideration for how skills, technical support and operational capacity interact with a Confederation-wide restructure is needed. Additionally, consideration for how these skills and capacities are situated in the context of the decolonisation agenda is essential.

> **"Across the Confederation, Oxfam is restructuring, and there seems to be a gap between the ambitions in the horizon plan and the ongoing restructuring. For example, regional offices that have to cut technical capacities and support."**
>
> **- Research Participant**

RISK APPETITE

Operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts requires greater risk-taking. It involves a higher level of operational, programmatic, and ethical risk due to the higher levels of violence, insecurity, and instability experienced by the population. Due to the complexity of the operating environment, the need for a higher risk appetite is articulated within the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy. Triple Nexus approaches focus on assessing risk as a fundamental reality through the integration of preparedness, risk reduction, and mitigation strategies into policy, programmes, and

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[6] Oxfam GB Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy

institutional capacity.[7] However, there was a general perception that Oxfam GB has not yet resolved the tensions between its ambition and the level of risk it is willing to accept.

Risk appetite in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts requires an iterative and power-sensitive assessment of how Oxfam's positionality and the potential for harm to, and because of interactions with, partners in complex environments. Working with or alongside dynamic, evolving, and unconventional State and Non-State Actors may be necessary.

> "When we talk about risk-shifting, what comes to my mind is whose fault is it when it fails? With that question, you start getting the sense of where failure is more apportioned as opposed to if it succeeded." - *Research Participant*

Actors with power and influence may be armed actors; repressive governments may be gatekeepers of certain territories, requiring Oxfam to collaborate on specific issues. *The choice of partners and approach Oxfam takes to working with these actors will be crucial – and must be sensitively made with full awareness, management, and documentation of the purpose of the work and the risks involved.*[8]

Sector actors confront similar challenges with regards to managing risk in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts: *Engaging de facto governments during political transitions has posed risks to the World Bank's reputation.*[9]

> "Oxfam is shifting power to local partners. It is accepted as a positive. In the meantime, when we shift our power to local organisations, we also shift risks. That's a concern because partners are becoming visible." - *Research Participant*

Additionally, the decolonisation agenda, discussed in greater detail in the section *Decolonising Knowledge*, must consider how Oxfam and partners jointly manage risk through all stages of the partnership.

As a **Partner**, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy commits to *transitioning to proactive, joint risk management, centred around the safety of partners and staff, based on responsibility-sharing. Bearing the risk, when needed, to fulfil commitments to shift power and decolonise.*

The commitment to joint risk management necessarily requires an active, power-sensitive dialogue with partners.

> "...sitting down with core partners and saying: What is the transfer of risk? What is your appetite to risk? How can we work on mitigation methodologies or mitigations that will enable us to support you on the level of risk you are willing to take?" - *Research Participant*

SUMMARY

When considering what Oxfam says it is doing and what is being done (*Research Question one*), internal processes, partnership models, risk appetite and internal challenges in realising the strategic ambition dominated interview discussions. As a benchmark, Oxfam GB appears to find itself at the nexus between ambition and control. The ambition to be an enabler, partner and

[7] Wyld, E, "Value for money of social assistance in crisis settings: considerations, evidence, and research priorities" - accessed April 8th 2022, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/17205/BASIC_Working_Paper_9.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[8] "Oxfam GB", Power and Fragility: Governance programming in Fragile contexts, accessed 27th March, 2022, https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/253944/power-fragility-fragile-context-291112-en.pdf?sequence=1

[9] World Bank,. "World Bank Engagement in Situations of Conflict: An Evaluation of FY10–20 Experience", accessed on 5th April 2022 https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36493

platform for country offices and partners with the need to control and understand how that works in practice.

To provide a strong business case for changes in the sector (*Research Question two)* Oxfam GB may need to first address these internal challenges before commencing into an enabler or partner role. It may be that addressing internal processes and their utility is dominating internal conversations to the point that this is limiting the capacity to look towards opportunity, innovation, and influence on the wider aid sector.

Necessary to advancing the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy is a comprehensive examination of these tensions between the ambition of operating in complex environments and Oxfam GB's organisational structure and a risk architecture designed to safeguard Oxfam, a complex international brand. Programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts with the ambition articulated by Oxfam GB will require a shift in organisational mindset that is authentically and intentionally led by partners. Oxfam GB's structures will need to be responsive to the timelines, informalities, and differing needs of partners operating in these contexts.

Potential Approaches

Research Participants proposed potential ways of working that could mitigate challenges relating to operational readiness and risk appetite:

- Embedding trusted technical advisors in partner offices as a way of supporting partners' ways of working; adopting a long-term accompaniment approach.[10]
- Inviting partners and Civil Society Organisations into global policy spaces.

Furthermore, examples from the book "What Transformation Takes" demonstrate successful phase-out plans of international leadership roles and gradual transition models that enable the successful transfer of power and decision-making to partners.

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[10] Peace Direct, *What Transformation Takes,* (London, 2020).

3 PROGRAMMING & INFLUENCING IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

This section discusses themes relevant to Oxfam GB's programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. The researchers have attempted to address questions regarding, gaps, challenges, contradictions, lessons and different approaches in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (*Research Questions three, four, five and eight).* It is worth noting that evidence available on Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts is not often written as lessons or analysis of working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts as a whole. The evidence available tends to be more specific, for example on cash-based programming, value for money or women and girls; often, context-specific. To look at lessons more broadly in Fragile and Conflict-Affected contexts risks missing the in-depth contextual nuances across literature and within the tacit knowledge of Research Participants

(RE)CONCEPTUALISING FRAGILITY

Through the lens of whose knowledge counts, there is a need to revisit definitions, frameworks, and criteria to determine who is setting agendas across the sector and whose voices may be excluded. Definitions of fragility and indicators to measure levels of fragility are primarily led by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Fragility is characterised as the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, systems and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks.

The World Bank

Fragile countries are defined as:

(i) those with one or more of the following: (a) the weakest institutional and policy environment, based on a revised, harmonized Country Policy and Institutional Assessment) score for International Development Association countries (for which Country Policy and Institutional Assessment) scores are disclosed) that is below 3.0; or (b) the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping operation because this reflects a decision by the international community that a significant investment is needed to maintain peace and stability there; or (c) flight across borders of 2,000 or 100,000 population, who are internationally regarded as refugees in need of international protection, as this signals a major political or security crisis; and

(ii) those that are not in medium- or high-intensity conflict, as such countries have gone beyond fragility.

Oxfam uses the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development definition as a starting point but recognises the value-misalignment, for example, neither definition expands into who is

made vulnerable and marginalised by fragility.[11] Pre- 2015, fragility was linked to the concept of failed States, situated alongside narratives of vulnerability and marginalisation. In 2020, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development began to shift narratives around fragility to describe States as 'global and dynamic'[12], broadening definitions of fragility.

With the onset of COVID-19, climate change-related conflict, and the sector's drive to shift power to the global South - reframing the concept of fragility is critical.

"...global emergencies such as COVID-19 can expose the fault lines that feed assumptions about what fragility is, which states are fragile, and what resilience looks like in the face of crises"[13]

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the fragility of wealthier countries and those not designated as conflict-affected.[14] However, across developing countries, one large shock can de-stabilise a nation back into cycles of fragility or conflict.[15]

Designating countries as fragile makes assumptions as to the 'state' of a country, which risks ignoring remaining areas of instability and community level conflicts; specific geographic areas may remain vulnerable to fragility. The Overseas Development Institute argues that *"…an Egyptian health sector worker today — where the World Bank estimates that 60% of the population are poor or vulnerable and poverty levels in some villages are as high as 81.7% — would be really surprised to know that his country is no longer considered fragile."* Despite increased funding to programming in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States, questions remain about what that has meant for national partners, Rights-Holders and intersecting political interests.[16]

> ## Oxfam on Fragility
>
> Things are fragile when order and stability are not maintained, key actors or institutions do not have legitimacy, societal expectations, and capacity to meet them are not in balance, and the effects of external and internal shocks on people make survival or improvements in wellbeing difficult. The language of fragility is often used with reference to fragile states, but often fragility might apply to a specific geographic area within a State and might be used as much in relation to markets or civil society as the State.

For Oxfam and other Non-Governmental Organisations, opportunities exist to challenge classification; drawing attention to whose voices are absent and ignored in these processes and diversifying the narrative away from only fragility and conflict; *"Going forward, development actors should place a much stronger emphasis on opportunity and not just fragility."[17]*

The sector has moved towards 'resilience' programming, including Oxfam, which could be considered a move away from negative discussions on fragility and conflict. However, large influential organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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[11] Oxfam GB Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy, p5

[12] "El Taraboulsi – McCarthy, S., Menocal, A. and Nwajiaku-Dahou, K," Fragility: Time for a rethink, accessed 5th April, 2022, https://odi.org/en/insights/fragility-time-for-a-rethink/#:~:text=Originally%20intended%20to%20help%20mobilise,the%20outset%20were%20arguably%20laudable.

[13] [12] "The New Humanitarian," The 2021 Fragile 15: Upheavals in a time of COVID, accessed 4th April, 2022., https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2021/5/27/2021-fragile-states-index-upheavals-in-a-time-of-covid

[14] "El Taraboulsi – McCarthy, S., Menocal, A. and Nwajiaku-Dahou, K," Fragility: Time for a rethink. / "Ajayi, T," The Changing Dynamics of 'fragility', accessed 5th April, 2022, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2021/5/28/the-changing-dynamics-of-fragility

[15] "Ajayi, T," The Changing Dynamics of 'fragility',

[16] "El Taraboulsi – McCarthy, S., Menocal, A. and Nwajiaku-Dahou, K," Fragility: Time for a rethink.

[17] "El Taraboulsi – McCarthy, S., Menocal, A. and Nwajiaku-Dahou, K," Fragility: Time for a rethink.

and the World Bank still set parameters and frameworks around how we view the countries we support. The same can be said for the Development Assistance Committee Evaluation criteria.

In a similar vein, many international treaties and agreements are set by the United Nations and the humanitarian principles for example, by the International Red Cross and Red Cross Movement. The RINGO (Reimagining the INGO) project states that these treaties, agreements, and frameworks are often assumed to have equal benefit for everyone:

"*We continue to believe that international treaties and agreements are in the best interest of everyone, but do not take into account vested interest of those holding more power*".[18]

Through the lens of who labels fragility and beyond, the sector and Oxfam need to start asking 'who' is setting the agenda and how this power dynamic may have embedded itself across the layers of aid delivery.

TRIPLE NEXUS

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (Triple Nexus) is the emerging and dominant framework applied by sector actors operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. The aim of Triple Nexus is to strengthen and reinforce collaboration, coherence, and complementarity across the pillars of humanitarian, development, and peace. A Triple Nexus approach:

"*Seeks to capitalise on the comparative advantages of each pillar – to the extent of their relevance in the specific context – in order to reduce overall vulnerability and the number of unmet needs, strengthen risk management capacities and address root causes of conflict*".[19]

Triple Nexus, however, is not new and builds upon well-established concepts and approaches within the humanitarian and development fields. Unique to the Triple Nexus, perhaps, is the refocusing of efforts on addressing root causes of conflict and

> *"The Nexus is not a new approach, it's just the restoration of how we should be delivering humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding in a coherent way."* - *Research Participant*

increasing resilience in affected populations; better-addressing cycles of crisis that reinforce the need for prolonged humanitarian and development interventions or actions. General sentiments about Oxfam GB's Triple Nexus approach were surfaced through the research.

> *"…it's a continual call to address the failures that are evident and sooner or later we're going to get it right."* - *Research Participant*

Across the sector, Triple Nexus approaches are now evolving from the theoretical *what* to discussions of *how* through the appearance of network groups: The Knowledge Sharing Series towards Humanitarian, Development and Peace Coherence by the United States Agency for International Development[20], the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-led Nexus Academy[21], and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Results Group Four.[22] There is a risk that emerging groups create exclusivity by professionalising the Triple Nexus, and knowledge is ring-fenced in the same

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[18] "Rights CoLab" accessed 3rd May, 2022", https://rightscolab.org/inquiry-process-synthesis-report/

[19] "OECD", DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development--Peace Nexus, OECD/LEGAL/5019, accessed 30th March, 2022, https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf

[20] "Food Security Network"- Knowledge Sharing Series, accessed 5th May, 2022, https://es.fsnnetwork.org/KSS-Humanitarian-Development-Peace-Coherence

[21] "Inter-Agency Standing Committee", The Nexus Academy, accessed May 2022, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2022-01/Nexus%20Academy%20Explainer%20Jan%202022.pdf

[22] "Inter-Agency Standing Committee", Results Group Four, accessed 5th April, 2022, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/results-group-4-humanitarian-development-collaboration

sector-wide circles; demonstrated in instances where Nexus Academy participants should be *'experienced with multi-agency capacities.'*[23]

Furthermore, tensions remain regarding the balance between short term response and long-term transformative approaches. Nexus programming responds to short-term shocks which may require rapid capacity and transfer. It is unclear how partners and local capacities are equipped to respond in the short-term with long-term thinking approaches expected from the Triple Nexus.[24]

> **"It's probably not the final iteration of how we should be doing it. But it's definitely a system or an approach that would enable us to shift our programming in a way that will enable us or allow us at least to be able to deliver with our partners." - *Research Participant***

Administrative Challenges

Challenges remain on how to administratively approach the Triple Nexus in terms of coherence, joint planning, and bringing the right people to the right conversations. As the sector moves from *what* to *how* more attention is required to the administrative tasks necessary for joining up departments or teams that have not worked together before.[25]

> **"Where we are weaker compared to other organisations is on the internal operations, the processes, the unsexy things." - *Research Participant***

Research Participants referred to limited time and capacity available to implement nexus approaches against immediate humanitarian needs; a sentiment shared in a 2022 evaluation of *Danish Support to Civil Society*:

"Nexus approaches are difficult when humanitarian needs are overwhelming and recurring, and only humanitarian organisations may have access in certain crisis situations."[26]

Peace Programming

Integration of the peace pillar in the Triple Nexus has proved a consistent challenge for Oxfam and across the sector. This has included for example understanding how humanitarian principles and peace programming work together, what is the role of security actors and how non-profit organisations manage the risk of working with a range of non-state actors with unclear agendas. The Peace Spectrum Model, developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee working group articulates how peace may be understood within Triple Nexus.

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[23] "Inter-Agency Standing Committee", The Nexus Academy

[24] Barakat, S., and Milton, S, "Localisation Across the Humanitarian Development-Peace Nexus". *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development,* 15, no. 2 (2020)

[25] "Damian Lily", Preventing the nexus becoming the next fad requires transformational change in the aid system, accessed 6th April, 2022, https://odihpn.org/publication/preventing-the-nexus-becoming-the-next-fad-requires-transformational-change-in-the-aid-system/

[26] "INTRAC and The Nordic Consulting Group" Evaluation of the Support to Danish Civil Society, accessed 7th May, 2022, https://um.dk/en/danida/results/eval/eval_reports/danish-support-to-civil-society-22
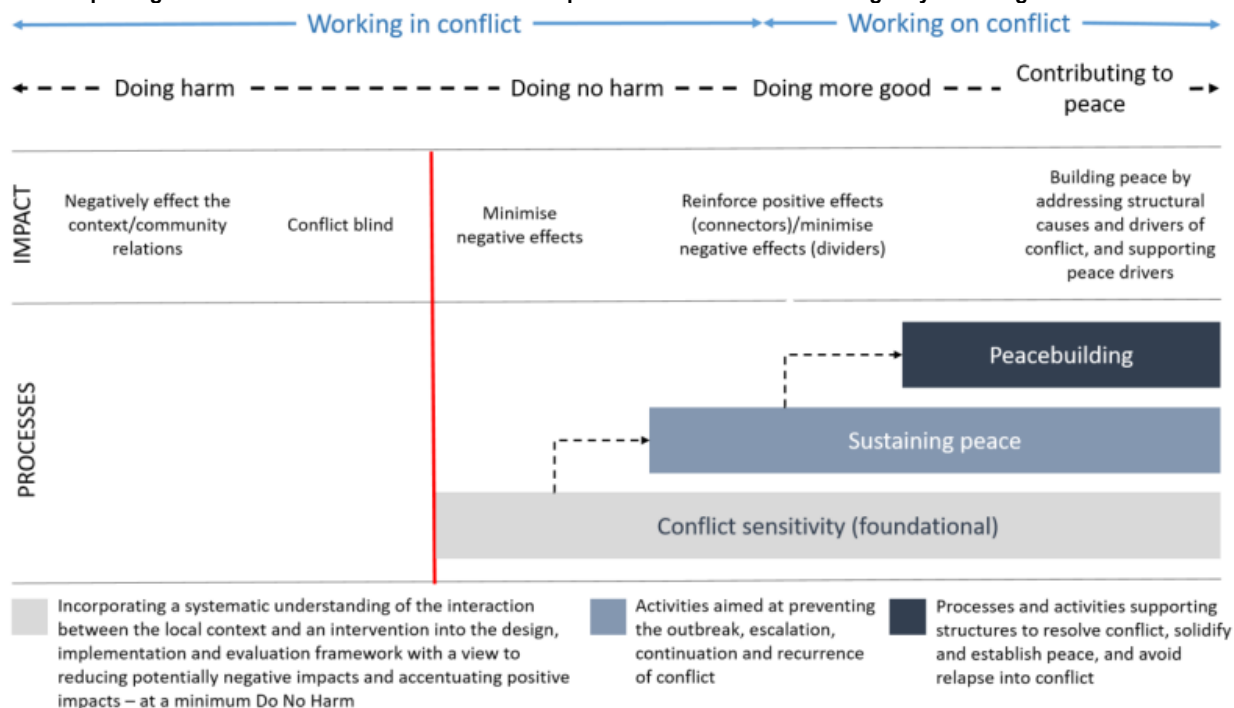
The Durable Peace Programme and Oxfam's global approach to feminist peace are good examples of how Oxfam GB is learning and defining what peace looks like within a Triple Nexus approach. A wealth of women's networks and organisations document approaches to feminist peace for example the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Women's International Peace Centre. Oxfam GB has an opportunity to elevate the voices and networks promoting feminist peace approaches within other nexus platforms, for example, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee nexus groups and where the approach is notably absent within peace models (as shown above).

Durable Peace Programme

The Durable Peace Programme has been operating in Kachin and Northern Shan states of Myanmar for over seven years with the long-term goal to contribute to lasting peace. The Programme adopted activities across humanitarian, development and peace buildings implemented by a large consortium and civil society leading the change. Against a dynamic and complex context, the programme is responsive to the needs of internally displaced persons, women, and other marginalised groups through the differing expertise of civil society organisations.

Feminist Peace

Oxfam's global commitment to adopting a feminist lens in its action and interaction predates its codification in the Global Strategic Framework (2020 - 2030). Through alliances that advance feminist peace, Oxfam is contributing to a vision of peace that addresses the structural inequality and gendered social norms that contribute to violence. Oxfam has been on a self-reflective journey to define its influencing and programming approach to feminist peace through partnerships with feminist networks and alliances for example, the #IMatter Campaign, a worldwide campaign that connects women, girls, LGBTQI+ people, and gender non-conforming people who are living through and after a crisis.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

Conflict sensitivity refocuses organisational efforts on minimising harm supported by an analysis of the drivers and root causes of conflict. Oxfam, and others in the sector, have adopted 'good enough approaches' to conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity against the dynamic and iterative nature of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. External Research Participants reinforced the need for conflict sensitivity tools that are simple and accessible. Although the question of 'good enough for who?' does not yet appear to be concretely answered in external literature; emerging from this research, however, a good enough approach could be described as: *"when you, partners and communities feel you know enough about the dynamics in this context to proceed with some confidence – Research Participant."*

Conflict Sensitivity: Bridging the Pillars

Research Participants reported the biggest shift in Oxfam's approach to conflict sensitivity as an indicator of intentionality across Triple Nexus. Oxfam's adoption of conflict sensitivity and promoting joined up programming through partnerships, has seen success in Somalia. Nine Somali organisations were brought together as part of a Triple Nexus approach and to challenge the differentiated approaches of the distinct humanitarian, development, and peace pillars as a Western construct. By establishing collective outcomes, a feature of Triple Nexus, the alliance highlighted and advanced a Somali-led thought leadership. the differing expertise of civil society organisations.

> **"In terms of power analysis, we're not very good at that.... we have to do continuous power analysis and see the power - those areas that need change in terms of shifting power." - Research Participant**

An essential component of embedding conflict-sensitive approaches is to develop an understanding of the power and influence operating within Fragile and Conflict-Affected States. Power analysis investigates the nuances of where power is situated and analyses power across stakeholders intersecting with conflict dynamics. While Oxfam has a Power Analysis Guide, there may be a need to revisit how comprehensively and consistently this is undertaken with particular regard to knowledge. For example, analysing the role of indigenous communications and intuitive learning and how these are included or excluded as a form of power.

INSTITUTIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

Recognition of the tension between citizens and the State is not a new consideration for working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts but is being discussed across the sector as Triple Nexus approaches are adopted. With consideration for how Triple Nexus approaches may impact where accountability is situated.

"There is a risk that nexus approaches… are likely to increase emphasis on state perspectives. While states are responsible for accountably and inclusively meeting the needs of all their populations, not all states are willing or able to do this."[27]

"Theories of change often assume the existence of 'accountable and responsive institutions', towards which voice may be directed, but in Fragile, Conflict, Violence-Affected States, we need

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[27] Fanning, E., and Fullwood, J. "The Humanitarian, Development, Peace Nexus - What does it mean for multi-mandated organisations?"

to re-understand the nature of authority and question our assumptions of who is to be held to account, and by whom."[28]

Critically, the complex relationship between States and the population must be contextualised and understood before undertaking programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States.

In *Transforming the systems that contribute to fragility and humanitarian crisis*, Oxfam commits to *"Reinforce rather than replace existing capacities in national and local systems to support effective and accountable institutions that respond to communities' needs";* this may be reinforcing an assumption that institutions want to be responsive and held to account. How power manifests in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States may be less well presented in Theories of Change, particularly where States, national and local institutions share power in hybrid arrangements with customary authorities and non-state armed groups in more opaque and fluid ways. Research Participants called for narratives and Theories of Change to move away from a focus on State, civil society and private sector actors toward other stakeholders who may hold power in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. Research Participants also reported a colonial mindset around viewing civil society as a monolith where in one case a participant cited a Civil Society Organisation having more funds than an Oxfam Country Programme in one context. Such assumptions about power holders and relationships may need to be more explicitly narrated and unpacked.

Adopting an indirect and incremental approach to working with governments and institutions (whether formal or customary) in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts is a practical entry point for many organisations.

"...focus on achieving a fairly narrow set of practical results from institutions, and then repeat that process over and over again, rather than what we often see in conflict-affected countries, which is grand plans to reform every part of their institutions all at once".[29]

"Indirect approaches may be more effective in fragile contexts. Governance work can be approached directly through programmes overtly designed to influence governance structures, or indirectly by incorporating governance into other programming, including work on livelihoods, infrastructure, or humanitarian aid".[30]

The World Bank's World Development Report identified success factors when countries transitioned out of fragility. This included *"focusing on just a few results, not trying to achieve 80 or 90 results….building confidence in the delivery, the accountability and the inclusiveness of national institutions"[31]*. Furthermore, the report estimates approximately 30 - 40 years for a country to make this transition (i.e. from Haiti to Ghana)[32]. We cannot assume that all transitions will take this long or short a time, but it may allow organisations like Oxfam to reassess what is achievable within strategic windows.

Assumptions about complex conflict dynamics between actors should be regularly tested with a view to understanding how these relations practically manifest within programming and influencing activities.

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[28] Gaventa, J. and Oswald, K. "*Empowerment and Accountability in Difficult Settings: What Are We Learning? Key Messages Emerging from the Action for Empowerment and Accountability Programme*"

[29] Barbou, B. and Cliffe. S, "Learning the Lessons of Fragility, Conflict and Violence"

[30] "Oxfam GB", Power and Fragility: Governance programming in Fragile contexts.

[31] Barbou, B. and Cliffe. S, "Learning the Lessons of Fragility, Conflict and Violence"

[32] Ibid

EVIDENCE GAPS

<u>Measuring the nexus and results:</u> There is emerging evidence on how to measure Triple Nexus using the 'collective outcomes' approach. A 2022 evaluation of *Danish Support to Civil Society* found:

"Some organisations now include a nexus dimension into their results frameworks, a nexus marker is one way to determine which projects in a portfolio and narrative approaches are also seen as valuable to show the additionality of a nexus approach. The results achieved by the organisations at this point in time is, by and large, outputs and outcomes achieved by tested approaches of projects in crisis contexts - without necessarily showing a nexus dimension".[33]

Evidence of positive, negative, or unintended outcomes from adopting a Triple Nexus approach were less visible, however, examples may be situated outside of the global North, the English language, or be commonly shared orally or informally. Oxfam GB and partners may find it useful to continue to gather case studies which relate to outcomes of Triple Nexus to reinforce the utility of adopting complementary approaches across the pillars. Further, practicing a deeper understanding of whose knowledge counts by presenting these in informal, anecdotal, or oral ways.

<u>Organic nexus approaches:</u> There is an emergence of literature on civil society and local approaches to the Triple Nexus[34], but there are still evidence gaps about how a top-down nexus approach may hinder or enable local actors to operate. Oxfam GB is committed to elevating the voices of Civil Society Organisations and has the capacity and size to counter top-down nexus approaches through evidence and research papers. It is worth noting that civil society in some papers and research often includes international Non-Governmental Organisations and thus the message of whose voices are really being surfaced is hidden behind who is defined as civil society.

SUMMARY

Trends and themes around the evolution of fragility, Triple Nexus, conflict sensitivity and working with governments and State institutions are underpinned by a universal need to revisit definitions and approaches against the backdrop of shifting power, creating space to continually test assumptions and ultimately ask '*who defined, labelled, or created new emerging approaches or definitions and what barriers still remain for civil society-led approaches?'*

Oxfam GB and the Rights, Resilience and Response team needs to live the rhetoric of being courageous in challenging the nexus knowledge sharing spaces that are appearing to ensure the same top-down inequalities are not being resown. There is an opportunity for Oxfam to fill this evidence gap with how nexus is operating organically across multi-sectoral programming and applying a decolonised lens to the Triple Nexus programming.

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[33] "INTRAC and The Nordic Consulting Group" Evaluation of the Support to Danish Civil Society

[34] " CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness ", Localising the Triple Nexus: Civil Society Organisations launch case studies on the Triple Nexus approach, accessed April 5th, 2022, https://realityofaid.org/nexus-launch/
"DAC CSO Reference Group", Feet on the Ground – CSOs weigh in on the challenges of the Triple Nexus approach, accessed 7th April, 2022, https://www.dac-csoreferencegroup.com/post/feet-on-the-ground-csos-weigh-in-the-challenges-of-the-triple-nexus-approach

4 DECOLONISING KNOWLEDGE

This section attempts to answer research questions six and seven on the power dynamics that inform knowledge, evidence, and information. Alongside decolonisation, this presented itself as a significant topic both within Oxfam and across the sector. As an **Enabler**, the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy commits to *turning values into practice: Moving from rhetoric to practice by embedding complementary strategies and key cross-cutting concepts such as decolonisation, racism, and feminist principles. Focus on unpacking what they mean in practice, relating specifically to Rights, Resilience, and Response contexts and contributing to the organisation's understanding."[35]*

Decolonisation refers to efforts made to reposition power, decision-making, and knowledge within the control and influence of individuals and communities directly impacted by aid and development programmes.[36] The decolonisation agenda emerges at a time where deep divides exist between Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, and Rights-Holders because of compounding Eurocentrism.[37] For Oxfam, this means an intentional dismantling of the concentration of power in the global North.

> **"The underlying presumption that Western/European modes of thought, knowledge, methods, and institutions are superior, and that they are the idea to which non-European countries and cultures should strive to catch up with."** *- Beraia, A., Yauvus, H., and Dilanyan Sona (2019)*

While this research explores programming and influencing in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts, Oxfam's added value in these environments, and entry-points for operationalisation of the Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy, this formative research is anchored to a values-led investigation of whose knowledge counts.

> **"In the world of institutionalized peacebuilding, everyone, including war veterans and Internally Displaced People are capable of coming up with a risk assessment and mitigation strategy in a foreign language. This is an example of the kind of highly technical bureaucratic skills required to participate in building peace, which has been rendered into a professional activity dominated by technocracy. In fact, Non-Governmental Organisations in Armenia have become so versed in the technical language of peacebuilding and project proposals, that many have been carrying out activities while holding non-constructive, xenophobic, or racist ideological beliefs about the conflict."** *- Beraia, A., Yauvus, H., and Dilanyan Sona (2019)*

[38]There is a general sentiment that the sector has largely ignored other types of knowledge and that available knowledge and learning spaces are made without consideration for partners and Rights-Holders' added value and preferred ways of contributing.[39] The sector has largely requested Rights-Holders, partners, and other stakeholders to adapt to Western, global North ways of working.

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[35] Oxfam GB Rights, Resilience and Response Strategy

[36] "Byatul, Amruta", Deep dive: Decolonizing aid — from rhetoric to action, accessed 6th April, 2022, https://www.devex.com/news/deep-dive-decolonizing-aid-from-rhetoric-to-action-100646

[37] "Beraia, A., Yauvus, H., and Dilanyan Sona", Beyond NGOs: Decolonising Peacebuilding and Human Rights,

[38] "Beraia, A., Yauvus, H., and Dilanyan Sona", Beyond NGOs: Decolonising Peacebuilding and Human Rights,

[39] Paige S, *"Time to Decolonise Aid by Peace Direct",* (London: Peace Direct, 2020)
Research Participants

[40]Practice in the sector may have influenced the adoption of technical skills with limited relevance to national, local or community values and ways of working. As referenced in the quote above, professionalised Non-Governmental Organisations may have learned to mask the reality of complex and harmful beliefs held.

> **"Structural racism benefits organisations in the Global North and also those from the Global South who know how to 'play' the system." – *Paige (2020)***

A further challenge to this way of thinking in the sector is International Non-Governmental Organisations tend to carry out data collection with civil society, partners or rights holders that confirm their own biases and shape narratives through a Western lens:

> **"There is an assumption that our values of gender justice, decolonisation etc are shared by people in the countries where we work, but the contradiction is that male elites may be even more invested in maintaining their power and so our work poses a potentially dangerous/subversive risk in already fragile contexts, which could actually aggravate conflict/social unrest." – *Rejali (2022)***

[41]Even through evaluations, the sector is still struggling to document and project the voices that really matter. A recent analysis of 42 cash-based and livelihoods programmes in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts retrieved only 25 evaluations for these programmes, primarily made up of Non-Governmental Organisations or implementing organisations' perspectives.[42] A significant number of evaluations did not include the voices of partners or rightsholders.

The sector has normalised the extraction of evidence, information and knowledge from partners and Rights-Holders into branded reports, primarily in the English language.

> **"…in humanitarian reporting, when we read entire reports or articles about specific humanitarian actions or initiatives, but the only voice carried through is that of the humanitarian 'reporter' or organization, perhaps with one or two de-contextualized, short pull quotes from affected people themselves, often focusing on their victimization and/or their gratitude for the provided support. As such, the humanitarian report is not reflecting what an affected person said; it is what the humanitarian(s) took away from the interaction. The initial voice is muted, and the humanitarian speaks for the affected person." – *Rejali (2022)***

"*Programme and research design are rooted in Western values and knowledge systems meaning that many programmes inadvertently create a standard based on the West that communities in the Global South are required to meet. Local knowledge is, by default, devalued*".[43]

Signs of challenging this were evident from Research Participants who demonstrated increased awareness of the importance of tacit knowledge in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts, where the risk of sharing or writing down information is high for stakeholders.

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[40] Paige S,"*Time to Decolonise Aid by Peace Direct",* (London: Peace Direct, 2020)

[41] "Rejali, S", Race, equity and neo-colonial legacies: identifying paths forward for principled humanitarian action. International Committee for the Red Cross, accessed 9th April, 2022, https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2020/07/16/race-equity-neo-colonial-legacies-humanitarian/

[42] Lind, J.; Sabates-Wheeler, R. and Szyp, C, *Cash and Livelihoods in Contexts of Conflict and Fragility: Implications for Social Assistance Programming*, BASIC Research Working Paper 8, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

[43] Paige S,"*Time to Decolonise Aid by Peace Direct",* (London: Peace Direct, 2020)

> **"When we were talking about tacit versus written, written is often hugely risky or can be hugely risky, depending on what you're talking about, especially anything to do with peace or social cohesion." – *Research Participant***
>
> **"I think part of the problem with evidence is the people. Again, we don't inform the people that are learning what's working and what's not. Why would they necessarily need to write it up? If that's been shared within their team, say it's an Oxfam team in the country programme, and they're learning something about what's working in terms of social cohesion, for example, as long as that's a conversation with partners and within the team." – *Research Participant***

Research Participants reported good practice in bringing staff from Somalia and partners to speaking events with the Chief Executive Officer of Oxfam GB and reminding teams to bring partners into the conversation. These are positive signs of considering the spaces in which other kinds of knowledge and partners can be prioritised in decision-making spaces. However, the research did not uncover how this awareness of other kinds of knowledge translates into diversified knowledge products for example songs, animations, or verbal recordings. A review of Oxfam's Policy and Practice website shows that knowledge, evidence, and research is still dominated by long-form reports, primarily in English (though some in French and Spanish). One Research Participant reported that Oxfam has a commitment to track the percentage of publications authored by Country Offices or co-authored by someone from the global South.

As a more explicit practice and awareness of race, power and privilege, some secondary sources included in this research acknowledged the author's power and positionality[44]:

> **"We want to acknowledge the tension that exists in Peace Direct, an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) based in the Global North, taking the lead on a report on decolonising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. During the research process, we were repeatedly confronted by the reality that the majority of research examining race, discrimination and decolonisation within these sectors is written by White Westerners. During the writing of the report, we attempted to centre the perspectives and experiences of consultation practitioners and of non-White academics engaging with this issue. Moreover, we made conscious attempts to avoid centring Whiteness, and encourage readers to look to our cited sources if they wish to delve further into the topic of structural racism and decolonising the aid system." – *Paige (2020)***

However, after the acknowledgement, the articles, research, or papers tended to fall short on how they would create space for researchers from the global South. The same tensions exist in this research.[45]

The availability of literature by researchers, policymakers and practitioners from Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts was limited despite a growing number of researchers in the global South - such as The Bridge Network,[46] made up of seven South Sudanese researchers carrying out research understanding complex conflict dynamics in South Sudan. Oxfam GB and the Rights, Resilience and Response team may want to consider working with pools of national researchers from Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts. To do this, further consideration is needed for the trauma experienced by those living in conflict when working with and advocating for researchers',

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[44] Paige S,"*Time to Decolonise Aid by Peace Direct",* (London: Peace Direct, 2020)

[45] Please refer to the considerations section for how the researchers here would propose changing this next time.

[46] Awany, J. (2021) Researching in Conflict: Interviews from the Bridget Network Archive.

> **"For all the lofty words about 'shifting the power,' many INGO staff and board members still seem unable to let go of a model that values technocrats over movement builders, and which places a higher value on their own Northern white role. I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked by a Northern NGO or funder to put forward a bid to do monitoring and evaluation of a Southern organisation's programme, something I've always turned down because the whole premise makes me uncomfortable." – *Doane (2019)*

policy makers' and practitioners' evidence and knowledge from Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts.

Despite this wider acknowledgement that something needs to change, there is an echoing sentiment that northern organisations are not giving up control.

This quote (left) echoes very few Research Participants who gave examples of giving up control more tangibly e.g., not applying for a grant because a national partner is better suited. It is these more concrete examples of giving up space that appear to be the hardest action to take without a supportive organisational culture. This is reinforced by the World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations who often lead on frameworks, coordination and driving forward new agendas (such as nexus programming).

One reason for the lack of tangible 'shifts' in power could be the sector's focus on neutrality. The humanitarian principles have remained steadfast in guiding how humanitarian organisations operate. Against the lens of shifting power, however, neutrality is coming into question as a barrier to decolonising aid.

> **"Neutrality is used to further the "white saviour" mentality and further the idea of being special, that is why it is linked to white supremacy…because of the exclusionary effect neutrality has, it takes away humanity, the ability to be human and serve all sides of the community." – *Adeso (2020)*
>
> **"Neutrality is not an option because academic 'business as usual' will contribute to knowledge among the powerful, but not the powerless, and, in the process, will increase the gap – no matter what the researcher's intention." - *Knight (2019)*

Oxfam, and the sector, should revisit how much neutrality hides the biases, assumptions and power that have enabled structural colonial systems to exist.

Research Participants also shared further examples of where Oxfam GB is falling short of decolonising knowledge, for example:
● Setting parameters around what evidence and information is required e.g., a need for certain kinds of case studies for public or donor audiences.
● Not using evaluations or evidence that is already in existence.
● Difficulties for country teams to work with long and technically written knowledge and learning products.
● Working to others' timelines outside of projects and contractual deadlines - Oxfam GB would need to shift away from project- and contract-centred relationships.

SHIFTING POWER

Oxfam and many International Non-Governmental Organisations are attempting to 'shift power' to Southern-based organisations:

> **"This campaign [#shiftthepower by the Global Fund for Community Foundations in 2016] …coupled with recent high-profile scandals and the limitations of the localisation agenda, has pushed many large International Non-Governmental Organisations to reflect on their practices and make practical changes." - *Paige (2020)***

[47]

What that means in practice is less clear. Across Research Participants, 'shifting power' was generally interpreted as:

- Shifting power from a power holder to someone with less power, for example from Oxfam to a partner.
- Shifting power to communities or partners and allowing them to make decisions and criticise programmes or projects.
- Acknowledging that knowledge is not exclusive to a particular group of people.
- Giving up control.

In the Rights, Resilience and Response strategy, 'shifting power' is defined as:

> **"rebalancing of power by moving more money, decision-making, and influence to local communities and organisations around the world who are driving change."**

Some Research Participants felt the phrase was problematic because *"it assumes that you have the power and right to choose who to give it to and place it on another."* There is also the risk that power is only talked about as power over someone else rather than a complex understanding of 'power under, power to, and power within'.[48] External literature cautions that the sector often *"jumps into fads and fashions without being aware that each of them has a history and provenance."*[49] Research Participants further cautioned that shifting power can often mean shifting responsibility and risk described in the section *Operational Readiness and Risk Appetite*.

The localisation agenda[50] intersects with decolonisation and shifting power by virtue of removing blockages to support and fund local partners. Terms such as 'global North' and 'global South' have become more mainstreamed, alongside this, the term 'local' remains problematic as who is using the term can change who is defined as local.[51] Who is labelled as local matters, especially when who is defined as local can translate into prioritisation for projects, prioritisation for a group of people to work in partnership with or prioritisation for donor funding. Melis & Aporthorpe (2020) introduce the concept of *'multi-local'*, providing an intersectional and hyper-contextual lens to localisation and acknowledging power relationships across the local space.[52]

[47] Paige S,*"Time to Decolonise Aid by Peace Direct",* (London: Peace Direct, 2020)

[48] Oxfam's Quick Guide to Power Analysis

[49] Knight, B, *Systems to Shift the Power,* (The Global Fund for Community, 2020)

[50] "Grand Bargain", Localisation workstream 2, accessed on 5th May, 2022, https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/grand-bargain-localisation-workstream-2/

[51] Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R, "Are we there yet? Localisations as the journey towards locally led practice - initiatives promoting localisation and locally led practice: a multitude of existing efforts"

[52] Apthorpe, R., and Melsi, S. "The Politics of Multi-local in disaster governance," The Politics of Disaster Governance 8, no. 4 (2020)

[53] Overall, there has been less focus on the *how* of localisation; often resulting in diminished results:

> **"For instance, it is possible for localisation efforts to be top-down and take little account of the views and values of the Global South. That is why many efforts to localise in the past have fallen short of their ambitions. In localisation, the means matter just as much as the end."**
>
> **"If we decouple being locally led (the destination) from localisation (the journey), then it follows that localisation might not necessarily arrive at being locally led. Indeed, it may merely 'localise the sector' without embodying the ideals of being locally led."** *Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R (2021)*

Some Research Participants voiced that Oxfam GB had not yet met commitments to give a percentage of humanitarian funding to 'national and local responders' as per the Grand Bargain commitments.[54] However, one Research Participant reported ambitions to "*reduce Oxfam GBs power over funds via changes to the discretionary funding model*".

Overlapping concepts such as localisation, shifting power and decolonisation require Oxfam to unpack the historical and colonial structures that have blocked previous advances and re-shape a narrative that still centres the role of organisations in the global North as the ones who can shift, and enable decolonisation and localisation.
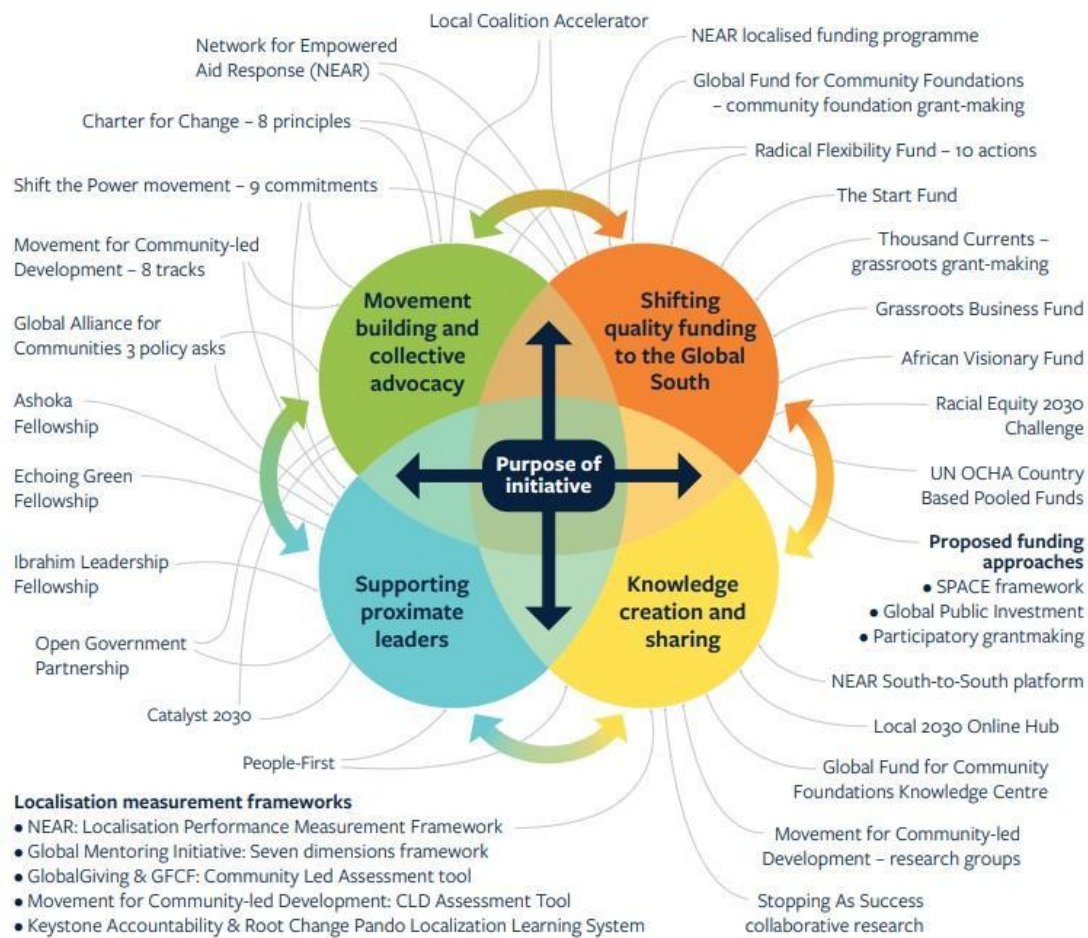
NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS

Networks and platforms for Oxfam GB to work with and enable aid systems change are tied to the tension of how Oxfam GB needs to decentre itself and create space for others. Three key areas were found during this research:
- Research Participants reiterated the importance of Conflict Sensitivity networks and platforms. One Research Participant gave the example of Oxfam's support and successful participation in the growth of a Conflict Sensitivity platform in West Africa and proposed replicating similar networks elsewhere.
- At least one Research Participant mentioned the project 'RINGO' or Re-imagining the role of the INGO'. This project carried out an inquiry into what is happening within the non-profit system and why power is not being shifted.
- Finally, authors of a recent assessment of the localisation agenda collated existing localisation and locally-led movements (see image below)[55]. Localisation movements continue to drive aspects like collective advocacy and knowledge creation as part of the agenda. Oxfam GB and the Rights, Resilience and Response Team may consider assessing their role in enabling or partnering with organisations or movements such as these.

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[53] Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R, "Are we there yet? Localisation as the journey towards locally led practice - initiatives promoting localisation and locally led practice: a multitude of existing efforts"

[54] 4. Achieve by 2020 a global, aggregated target of at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible to improve outcomes for affected people and reduce transactional costs - Localisation workstream

[55] Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R, "Are we there yet? Localisation as the journey towards locally led practice - initiatives promoting localisation and locally led practice: a multitude of existing efforts"

Purpose of initiative

Movement building and collective advocacy

Shifting quality funding to the Global South

Supporting proximate leaders

Knowledge creation and sharing

Local Coalition Accelerator

Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR)

Charter for Change – 8 principles

Shift the Power movement – 9 commitments

Movement for Community-led Development – 8 tracks

Global Alliance for Communities 3 policy asks

Ashoka Fellowship

Echoing Green Fellowship

Ibrahim Leadership Fellowship

Open Government Partnership

Catalyst 2030

People-First

NEAR localised funding programme

Global Fund for Community Foundations – community foundation grant-making

Radical Flexibility Fund – 10 actions

The Start Fund

Thousand Currents – grassroots grant-making

Grassroots Business Fund

African Visionary Fund

Racial Equity 2030 Challenge

UN OCHA Country Based Pooled Funds

Proposed funding approaches
- SPACE framework
- Global Public Investment
- Participatory grantmaking

NEAR South-to-South platform

Local 2030 Online Hub

Global Fund for Community Foundations Knowledge Centre

Movement for Community-led Development – research groups

Stopping As Success collaborative research

Localisation measurement frameworks
- NEAR: Localisation Performance Measurement Framework
- Global Mentoring Initiative: Seven dimensions framework
- GlobalGiving & GFCF: Community Led Assessment tool
- Movement for Community-led Development: CLD Assessment Tool
- Keystone Accountability & Root Change Pando Localization Learning System

5   TRADE-OFFS AND DILEMMAS

Throughout this research process, the researchers uncovered some trade-offs and dilemmas, both in balancing whose knowledge counts but also what that means for the role Oxfam GB might take into the sector:

1. **Carrying the values of whose knowledge counts:** The researchers uncovered a few trade-offs in relation to whose evidence to use, to include and prioritise. By the very nature of researching only in the English language and looking across other organisations that document reports and learnings in English, answering some research questions may have reinforced that the knowledge of these organisations counts. There is a need for Oxfam to assess, from the very beginning of every research or consultancy process, whose knowledge and evidence to prioritise and dismantle the power dynamics by hiring researchers and consultants from the global South. By modelling practices that consider whose knowledge counts and the lens through which knowledge and evidence is viewed, Oxfam GB is better situating itself as an enabler and a meaningful partner.

2. **De-centring Oxfam:** Oxfam GB may want to consider how to decentre itself away from associations with reputation and scale that assume large international Non-Governmental Organisations are fundamental to shaping the aid sector. However, research has shown that multilateral institutions, donors, or global banks from the global North still dictate or at the very least, take the lead in publishing definitions and guidance on approaches and principles that shape the sector, for example, the Triple Nexus approach. Oxfam GB will need to assess the trade-off and tension between using its power and scale to call out large institutions and donors in the global North, and thus centring its voice, whilst also raising the voices of civil society, partners, and rights holders in these spaces.

3. **Breadth vs depth**: Operating in Fragile and Conflict-Affected contexts, and the Triple Nexus approach is not applied as a monolith. Learnings and applications are embedded in types of programming or contexts (for example cash-based programming in Myanmar). Across this research process, the number of questions across significant themes (fragility, conflict, conflict sensitivity, Triple Nexus, peace, power, knowledge, decolonisation, localisation and systems thinking) limited the depth of this research. As these themes are significant to the Rights, Resilience and Response strategy, there may also be a risk that by focusing on the need for change across so many areas, the depth of meaningful change is lost.

4. **Ambition vs control**: When considering what Oxfam says it is doing and what is being done internal processes, partnership models, risk appetite and internal challenges in realising the strategic ambition dominated conversations. As a benchmark, Oxfam GB appears to find itself at the nexus between ambition and control. The ambition to be an enabler, partner and platform for country offices and partners with the need to control and understand how that works in practice. Oxfam GB may need to first address these internal tensions before commencing into an enabler or partner role. It may be that addressing internal processes and their utility is dominating internal conversations to the point that it is limiting the ability to look beyond towards opportunity, innovation, and influence on the wider aid sector.

5. **Decolonisation vs compliance**: There is a tension between decolonising partnership models and donor compliance or due diligence processes which impede the ability to contribute to sector-wide decolonisation. Oxfam GB will need to assess its role in influencing donors to also decolonise their processes or risk remaining bound by compliance and due diligence processes that do not allow for flexibility and trust towards building decolonising partnership models. The team may need to be more realistic about what it can achieve within these constraints.

6   CONCLUSIONS

TOWARDS A NEW OPERATIONAL ROLE

Oxfam should transform its organisational culture to promote greater dialogue and collaboration across existing silos and barriers. The organisation should not assume it will carry out interventions by itself but rather adopt a more coordinated and collaborative approach with other actors.

An honest assessment of Oxfam's capacities and strengths will be key in generating greater impact in programming across the nexus, articulated through the suggested degrees of complementarity, collaboration, and coherence. In line with its commitments on the Charter for Change and Grand Bargain, Oxfam must rethink its current ways of working and consider embracing a new role as a potential convenor of alliances, knowledge broker or hub manager for influencing activities.

Oxfam should be bolder in acknowledging and accepting its current limitations in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work and redefine its role based on comparative advantages that will clearly emerge through collaboration, joint analysis, and a theory of change focused on collective outcomes. Oxfam is not going to deliver everything by itself, but it might drive the creation and facilitation of networks and coalitions with national and local civil society to create the coherence necessary for meaningful sustained change. [56]

Framing of this research against knowledge and evidence availability both internally (within the Oxfam GB's Rights, Response and Resilience approach) and externally (within thematic areas of fragility, conflict, peace and nexus programming) set a benchmark for where Oxfam GB is now and a business case for where Oxfam GB needs to go. In this section, we conclude the research by reflecting on two final research questions *(nine and ten)*, whose knowledge counts and pathways forward.

What is Oxfam's comparative advantage and what should the offer be?

Oxfam GB is accountable for being a role model of decolonised practice by shifting power and resources to local partners and country teams where they will be the decision makers on how resources are distributed and used. In complement to the work of other strategies such as Speaking out, Partnerships and Oxfam GB Racial Justice Framework, Oxfam GB commits resources to mainstreaming an awareness of 'Whiteness' as a political and social construct as it manifests practically within Rights, Resilience, and Response programmatic and operational functions.

Oxfam already believes internally that localisation, decolonisation, and Triple Nexus approaches are worthwhile ambitions but practically, organisational structures are limiting the ability to realise these ambitions. Therefore, at this stage, it may not be Oxfam's role to lead in making the case for localisation, decolonisation, and Triple Nexus in the absence of strong examples where it is realising these values and delivering these approaches internally. More internal learning and

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[56] "Infante, V", Transforming the systems that contribute to fragility and humanitarian crises: Programming across the Triple Nexus, accessed 28th March, 2022, https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/transforming-the-systems-that-contribute-to-fragility-and-humanitarian-crises-p-621203/

improvement in these areas while simultaneously elevating others who are better established with localisation and decolonisation agendas may be where Oxfam's advantage rests. Through modelling how internal ways of working match these values, for example by modelling decolonisation approaches, Oxfam GB may have more influence across the aid sector that is also struggling to define and understand how to realise these values and commitments.

Despite this, across the sector and internally Oxfam GB is still considered to have the scale and reach to elevate lesser heard voices into decision making spaces. More than ever, this advantage should be used to challenge elitist groups that set agendas, definitions, frameworks, policies and principles that continue to shape the sector.

Oxfam appears to be further ahead in its thinking on peace and dilemmas of how to carry out Triple Nexus approaches. Therefore, Oxfam GB also has the comparative advantage of creating platforms to elevate feminist peace approaches and associated women's networks and feminist organisations from the global South into decision making spaces on the Triple Nexus and aid systems change.

In complement, Oxfam GB may also want to consider taking a lead in acknowledging the harm Oxfam GB has caused when approaching partners, platforms, and networks. Starting from a point of humble acknowledgement could lead to more meaningful reparative partnerships.

Where are distinct specialist actors available in the space of RRR, and who should Oxfam partner with instead of developing in-house expertise?

Delivering decolonised, localised, transformative, and feminist ways of working alongside a Triple Nexus approach is challenging. Oxfam and the Rights, Resilience and Response team acknowledges that it cannot achieve aid systems change alone. Oxfam's scale can offer a significant comparative advantage and therefore Oxfam has the opportunity of creating a platform for civil society, partners and rights-holders to voice the realities of change in Fragile and Conflict-Affected contexts cutting across a complex change process in the aid sector.

Considerations for who to partner with include:
- Oxfam GB was reported to have successful support and participation in Conflict Sensitivity platforms, for example in West Africa. Oxfam may want to consider reframing these platforms and networks to not only include conflict sensitivity but through the lens of decolonisation and localisation.
- Platforms such as the RINGO project [57] or Re-imagining the international Non-Governmental Organisation project are leading the way in uncovering what is keeping the aid sector stuck and unable to shift power. Oxfam may want to further engage with this platform and network by adding concrete examples of how Oxfam is approaching aid systems change.
- Localisation platforms and networks have materialised that cover knowledge sharing and movement building. A diagram can be found in the networks and platforms section.[58] Oxfam GB may want to look to consider for example partnering with the Stop for Success research project to also showcase how values of decolonisation and shifting power are carried out internally.
- Finally, within the confines of evidence covered in this paper, feminist peace does not yet appear to have been considered by others across the aid sector within Triple Nexus approaches. There is an opportunity for Oxfam GB to cement its role as an enabler and partner with women's rights and feminist peace networks to propel their voices and experiences into Triple Nexus knowledge and decision-making platforms.

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[57] Rights CoLab - https://rightscolab.org/ringo/

[58] Baguois, A., King, M., Martins, A., and Pinngton R, "Are we there yet? Localisations as the journey towards locally led practice - initiatives promoting localisation and locally led practice: a multitude of existing efforts" accessed April 5th, 2022 https://odi.org/en/publications/are-we-there-yet-localisation-as-the-journey-towards-locally-led-practice/

WHOSE KNOWLEDGE COUNTS?

This research addresses power dynamics that inform what, how and whose knowledge, information and evidence counts:

Oxfam GB commits to *"decolonise research practices by collaborating with and commissioning national and local experts, researchers and institutions to lead on participatory research and policy".*

Create a platform to amplify, support, and promote knowledge production by national and grassroots organisations and groups, particularly of marginalised communities.[59]

Philosophically, the Rights, Resilience and Response team and staff across Oxfam GB would say that everyone's knowledge counts, or that lived experiences of those in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts and tacit knowledge matters. However, minimal documentation was made available for this research which constrained the investigation of internal sources of knowledge and evidence. It is challenging, therefore, to make an evidence-based determination on whose knowledge counts for Oxfam GB. When decision-making is concentrated in one person or one team it may be that this power dynamic limits the wider acknowledgement of whose voices are included or excluded.

Whilst Country Programmes are reported to be at the helm of decision-making this did not always appear to be the case: *"Oxfam's organisational structure needs to better involve Country Directors in decision-making: this needs to be prioritised.- Research Participant"*

For partners alike, adapting to their preferred ways of working and knowledge outputs, and getting comfortable with the time it might take for partners within the realities of fragility and conflict are key steps to drive towards. There needs to be a deeper understanding of the blockages affecting partners, and the array of partners and Civil Society Organisations in each context. Capacity needs to match the depth required to build long-term relationships with partners outside of contract and project timeframes and help to unpack hyper-contextual blockages. This could include supporting partners to find new funding streams for example. Research Participants highlight the steps teams are taking, for example, accompaniment rather than technical support or capacity strengthening. The Rights, Resilience and Response team can play a role in socialising and capturing these examples.

Reframing what knowledge is valuable, to keep questioning whose knowledge is present, what it is useful for and what problems does it solve, are useful questions that Research Participants are asking to guide critical thinking in the right direction.

PATHWAYS FORWARD

- **Create a transition plan to determine Rights, Resilience and Response role in shifting power, decolonisation & localisation:** Research Participants are looking for tangible ways to determine how power is shifted, how work is decolonised or localised, and there is a risk that criteria, checklist, or indicators will be created to measure progress where guidance for transition may be more appropriate. Monitoring and evaluating methods such as outcome harvesting and most significant change may be more beneficial methods of capturing change and what Oxfam GB's contributions were to shifting power, decolonising aid (internally with partners / externally in the sector) and localisation (internally with partners / externally in the sector). Creating a transition plan that indicates tools that will be used to capture signs of power shifting could be a pathway forward to unpack the blockages around internal processes.

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[59] Oxfam GB Rights, Resilience, and Response Strategy

- **Acknowledge harm caused and limitations:** A humble and self-reflective approach to addressing values and commitments is to acknowledge the harm that has been created. One Research Participant stated, *"acknowledge harm before rushing to congratulate ourselves on successful 'models'- working towards redress first...only then proposing 'solutions'".* Being more open about the harm Oxfam GB has caused from the lens of decolonisation could offer a space for reparation and humility missing in the sector's decolonisation discussions.
- **Re-frame the role of groups and networks Oxfam GB is already a part of**: Oxfam should reframe its role in networks and platforms that they are already part of. For example, the Inter-agency standing committee results group four, or conflict sensitivity working groups. These have the potential to become networks and platforms that lobby for decolonisation and localisation within its thematic framing.
- **Review the strategy and operationalisation through the lens of what is realistic and most meaningful to achieve:** Delivering decolonised, localised, transformative, and feminist ways of working alongside Triple Nexus is challenging. Whilst Oxfam and the Rights, Resilience and Response team acknowledges that it cannot achieve aid systems change alone, the strategic direction may be overly ambitious. Reviewing and re-prioritising what the Rights, Resilience and Response team can contribute to in the strategy is a worthwhile exercise when moving into the operationalisation. For example, assessing how to shift power through conflict-sensitive approaches and tools could be a first step. As the box above called 'Towards a new operational role' states, Oxfam, and the Rights, Response and Resilience team "should be bolder in acknowledging and accepting its current limitations."
- **Re-frame the Triple Nexus narrative to focus on elevating civil society, partner-led nexus programming and influencing and how it manifests organically at this level:** There is a risk that the Triple Nexus narrative and frameworks may reinforce the role of global North institutions. Similar to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's evaluation criteria, the UN held international conventions and the humanitarian principles. Whilst conversations on the Triple Nexus may be happening at the national and community level, they are less obvious in the evidence base covered in this report. As an **Enabler**, Oxfam GB needs to create space for voices on how nexus programming has organically manifested within Fragile and Conflict-Affected states with an emphasis on elevating these voices through methods outside of traditional reporting. A focus on oral or indigenous methods of sharing case studies would resonate with the values Oxfam GB is attempting to practice. Furthermore, with Oxfam GB's focus on feminist peace, there is an opportunity to elevate feminist peace approaches from women's rights organisations and feminist peace networks and organisations to further challenge Triple Nexus narratives.

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