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Enhanced programme of development cooperation for the occupied Arab territories

Purpose of the document

This document provides an update on the progress made within the framework of the ILO programme of development cooperation in the occupied Arab territories. Amid the unprecedented crisis affecting the Palestinian labour market, due to the ongoing war in Gaza and escalating violence in the West Bank, the Governing Body is invited to: (i) take note of the information provided in this document; (ii) take note of the progress made under the Office's emergency response plan to address the urgent needs of Palestinian workers and employers; and (iii) acknowledge the financial support already provided to the ILO programme by several Member States and call upon others to contribute towards the full implementation of the emergency response plan recovery programme, in close coordination with the ILO constituents, to promote decent work and social justice for all Palestinians, thereby contributing to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (see the draft decision in paragraph 40).

Relevant strategic objective: None.

Main relevant outcome: None.

Policy implications: None.

Legal implications: None.

Financial implications: None.

Follow-up action required: None.

Author unit: ILO Regional Office for the Arab States (RO-Arab States).

Related documents: GB.350/POL/4(Rev.1), GB.350/POL/4(Rev.1)/Decision, ILC.112/DG/APP.

► I. Background

1. This document reports on progress made on the ILO programme of development cooperation in the occupied Arab territories. It takes account of the main achievements of the ILO's work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory under the third Decent Work Programme for the Occupied Palestinian Territory for the period 2023–25, and the subsequent emergency response plan launched in November 2023. The report highlights the major developments and challenges in the Palestinian labour market since the previous reporting period. In addition, it presents the ILO's concerted work both in the broader framework of the early recovery and reconstruction efforts of the United Nations (UN) and within the UN country team.
2. The war in Gaza and growing violence in the West Bank are devastating lives, livelihoods and the economy throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The escalation of hostilities has been an indiscriminate leveller across the Gaza Strip: businesspeople and self-employed, public and private sector workers have all been reduced to poverty and labour market institutions destroyed. With heads of households dead or injured, children roam the streets begging or working for food. The 2024 Report of the ILO Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories notes the widespread destruction of workplaces and mass displacement of ILO constituents. All workers and employers are at great physical and mental health risk, with women particularly affected as they bear the practical and emotional burden of the current lack of healthcare, childcare and education for children in Gaza. ¹ An estimated US\$18.5 billion in direct damages had been caused to Gaza's built infrastructure as at the end of January 2024, equivalent to 97 per cent of the total gross domestic product of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2022. ²
3. The severity of the crisis will have grave and lasting repercussions on the Palestinian labour market and the well-being of Palestinian workers and their families – especially in Gaza, but also in the West Bank – including through the loss of jobs and incomes and the closure of businesses, as well as the inability of workers to access education and training opportunities. The ILO estimates that more than 507,000 jobs have been lost across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including 201,000 in Gaza and 306,000 in the West Bank. These job losses equate to daily labour income losses of US\$21.7 million, rising to US\$25.5 million per day when considering partial payment of wages to civil servants and the reduced incomes of private sector workers across the Occupied Palestinian Territory. ³
4. The escalation of hostilities in Gaza has aggravated the crisis in the labour market. The adverse impact of the conflict on people's employment prospects and livelihoods is not confined to Gaza but extends to the West Bank, where violence has escalated and increasing restrictions have been imposed on movement between and within Palestinian governorates since October 2023. In late August, Israeli forces initiated a wide-scale operation in the northern West Bank,

¹ ILO, *The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories: Report of the Director-General – Appendix*, ILC.112/DG/APP, 2024, paras 95 and 97.

² World Bank, European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN), *Gaza Strip Interim Damage Assessment: Summary Note*, 29 March 2024, 1.

³ ILO and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), *“Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 3”*, ILO Brief, 18 March 2024, 4–5.

resulting in casualties and the destruction of infrastructure, further deepening humanitarian needs.⁴

5. According to the ILO survey of employers and workers in the West Bank, private sector workers are bearing the brunt of the crisis, experiencing substantial job losses alongside reductions in full-time employment and wages. A gender-based analysis of the findings indicates that men have experienced a larger share of job losses and transitions to part-time work than women. An overwhelming 98.8 per cent of enterprises surveyed in the West Bank report experiencing challenges that have impacted their operations, production capacity and, ultimately, sales and profits. Businesses are left with no choice but to cut costs including by downsizing their workforce, reducing working hours and working days and curbing overtime and annual leave benefits, with many resorting to permanent and/or temporary lay-offs.⁵
6. The Palestinian economy is projected to contract by between 6.5 and 9.4 per cent during 2024; the economic outlook for the full year remains highly uncertain and will depend on the severity and duration of the conflict, as well as changes in Israeli policies in the West Bank, including those related to access to the Israeli labour market and the withholding of Palestinian clearance revenues by Israel.⁶ The unemployment rate surged to 50.8 per cent during the first eight months of the war, with a rate of 31.9 per cent in the West Bank and a staggering 79.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip. As the war continues, no sector appears poised to offer a cushioning effect to mitigate the impact of the crisis on workers' livelihoods,⁷ although agriculture in the West Bank is expected to remain relatively stable. However, a replacement process whereby men take over women's agricultural jobs is predicted to take place in this sector.
7. As noted in the Report of the Director-General, in conditions of humanitarian catastrophe, entrenched occupation and mounting fiscal crisis, the ability of the Palestinian Authority to ensure effective governance, including for protecting labour rights, is more constrained than ever. Policy and legal reforms are stalled, with humanitarian relief efforts assuming priority for the new Palestinian administration appointed in late March 2024.

► II. Overall progress in programme and partnership development

8. The reporting period falls within the second year of implementation of the third Decent Work Programme for the Occupied Palestinian Territory for the period 2023–25, signed in February 2023. It also comes over a year after the events of 7 October 2023 and the outbreak of war in Gaza, which prompted the ILO to launch its emergency response plan and prioritize its efforts under the Decent Work Programme to respond to the urgent needs of Palestinian workers and employers impacted by the worsening crisis.
9. Since the launch of the emergency response plan, the ILO's programme in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has expanded significantly. The allocation of emergency relief funds from

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "[Humanitarian Situation Update #213: West Bank](#)", 4 September 2024.

⁵ ILO, *Impact of the War in Gaza on Private Sector Workers and Businesses in the West Bank*, 2024.

⁶ World Bank, *Impacts of the Conflict in the Middle East on the Palestinian Economy*, May 2024, 2.

⁷ ILO and PCBS, "[Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 4](#)", ILO Brief, 7 June 2024.

internal ILO resources in November and December 2023, totalling over US\$1.4 million, and the parallel reprogramming of existing development cooperation funds of US\$700,000, were critical to support the ILO's relief assistance for over 9,000 workers from Gaza stranded in the West Bank and to facilitate the transportation of 130 containers, owned by businesses in Gaza and held at Israeli ports since October, to the West Bank. These funds have also supported vital data collection and analysis focused on the impact of the crisis on the Palestinian labour market, as well as the piloting of an emergency employment scheme in Gaza.⁸

10. On 10 June 2024, a meeting was held on the sidelines of the International Labour Conference to launch a funding appeal for US\$20 million for the emergency response plan recovery programme. The Governments of Belgium and Kuwait, who co-convened the meeting with the ILO Director-General, alongside the Governments of the Netherlands and Indonesia as well as the Government of the Walloon Region (Belgium) and others announced substantial pledges, including US\$4.3 million pledged by the Netherlands alone.⁹
11. Implementation of the ILO's emergency response plan recovery phase is currently commencing in Gaza and the West Bank, focusing on workers, employers, businesses and key stakeholders most affected by the crisis. The programme has three outcomes: employment promotion, social protection and business recovery. Areas of work will concentrate on employment promotion through employment-intensive investment programmes, job placements and accelerated apprenticeships to restore jobs and create new employment opportunities, in addition to support for workers' apex organizations; the implementation of social protection measures to facilitate recovery and stabilization by supporting coherence across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, social allowances for vulnerable groups and a temporary employment benefits scheme; and business recovery, including support for businesses and social enterprises, support for employers' organizations and the development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and value chains.
12. In early September, US\$5.4 million of funding pledged during the June funding appeal and subsequently received under a multi-donor pooled funding modality has been geared towards accelerating the implementation of early recovery interventions under the emergency response plan in order to mitigate the adverse impacts of the crisis on Palestinian workers and employers while fostering resilience among the population, particularly in Gaza. Further support to the emergency response plan from a range of donors is currently under discussion or being finalized, in addition to other interventions supported in parallel to the emergency response plan as set out below.
13. In addition to the funds initially pledged, in July 2024 the ILO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the European Union (EU) signed a new development cooperation project with funding of €2 million. The project, due to run for three years, aims to improve access to rights-based social assistance for all Palestinians by strengthening the ability of the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development to lead, coordinate and deliver a coherent national social protection system across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
14. In addition, the Government of Spain, through its Ministry of Labour and Social Economy, has contributed an additional US\$107,000 to support improved market access for agricultural cooperatives in the West Bank.

⁸ GB.350/POL/4(Rev.1).

⁹ ILO, "Press Release on Partners Pledge Support to ILO's Palestinian Labour Market Recovery Programme", 11 June 2024.

15. The ILO's recovery efforts will focus to the maximum extent possible on reinforcing national mechanisms for planning and delivering recovery interventions. This will be achieved by enhancing the capacity of agencies involved in the design and implementation of emergency employment and social protection programmes to integrate decent work principles and align with international labour standards. Building on its experience in crisis and conflict settings, the ILO will provide technical assistance to national and international partners to establish coordination mechanisms for setting essential benchmarks, harmonizing systems and ensuring coherence across the triple nexus by linking the humanitarian, development and peace sectors, while simultaneously ensuring effective monitoring and compliance with global standards and best practices.
16. Representatives of the Palestinian tripartite partners, UN agencies, bilateral donors and key stakeholders participated in a regional workshop entitled "Decent Work across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace Nexus in the Arab Region", held in Amman in September. With over 100 participants, the workshop provided a platform to highlight the critical importance of integrating decent work principles from the humanitarian phase onwards, with particular emphasis on employment and social protection programmes. The workshop fostered the development of engagement principles among partners, which will guide recovery efforts in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
17. Furthermore, as a specialized agency within the UN country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the lead agency for employment, labour governance and social protection, the ILO remains an active member of the UN Programme Management Team and the UN assessments and recovery planning task force, which plays a key role in shaping the UN early recovery framework for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and remains actively involved in the rapid damage and needs assessment and conflict recovery framework spearheaded by the World Bank, the EU and the UN.

► III. Review of progress and achievements in key areas of work

18. This section pulls together under each heading both work under the emergency response plan and interventions already agreed or planned under the third Decent Work Programme for the Occupied Palestinian Territory before the current crisis. Every effort is made to ensure the coherence and complementarity of these workstreams.

1. Employment promotion and business recovery

19. The ILO remains dedicated to supporting constituents in the restoration of jobs and income and supporting business recovery. In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Palestinian Employment Fund (PEF) and the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), the ILO launched a first pilot emergency employment scheme in Gaza, offering short-term employment to 150 women and men. Now nearing completion, the programme not only provided crucial income to these individuals, it also showcased decent work principles to other partners, offering onsite orientation sessions on decent work principles and occupational safety and health.
20. Drawing on lessons learned from the pilot scheme in Gaza, the ILO launched a comprehensive employment programme in September 2024 to stabilize livelihoods and build resilience within affected communities in the immediate term. This programme aims to reach over 1,500 vulnerable workers in Gaza and the West Bank, with particular emphasis on young

people who are most at risk. It is designed to address the urgent needs of displaced communities in Gaza by providing essential services, such as solid waste management and the rehabilitation of social services infrastructure. The programme supports the recovery of jobs and businesses in critical sectors simultaneously through targeted interventions, including job placements and apprenticeships, across the West Bank and Gaza. In the long term, the ILO aims to transfer its technical expertise to the PEF, an executive arm of the Palestinian Ministry of Labour and the ILO's main implementing partner, in the design and execution of a Public Employment Programme for similar employment schemes. The Programme is expected to act as an autonomous institutional instrument to streamline employment schemes as a complement to social protection measures. The process has been initiated through introductory training sessions, while the organizational and financial structure of the PEF has been assessed to ensure the provision of tailored technical advisory support.

21. To ensure full coordination of the ILO recovery interventions, a tripartite committee was formed, chaired by the Minister of Labour and comprising the Secretary-General of the PGFTU, the Chairperson of the FPCCIA Board of Directors and the ILO. A first meeting in September established priorities for addressing the workers, sectors, and localities most impacted by the war in Gaza and the escalation of hostilities in the West Bank.
22. In parallel, the ILO is engaging with the Ministry of Labour, international partners and UN agencies to enhance coordination for employment promotion initiatives in the West Bank and Gaza while advocating for setting benchmarks for fair working conditions and appropriate wage levels. The ILO also seeks to promote the use of labour-intensive methods and the implementation of social and environmental safeguards with the goal of ensuring that such initiatives create meaningful, long-term impacts rather than merely offering temporary cash for menial tasks that do not contribute to personal development or broader recovery efforts.
23. Beyond the emergency response plan are projects agreed before October 2023 that contribute to the overall work of the ILO in the area of employment. For instance, the regional project on youth not in education, employment or training (NEETs) in the southern Mediterranean, "Youth NEETS in the Southern Neighbourhood", funded by the EU and officially launched in July 2024, began its first activity in August. The project aims to create a statistical profile of youth NEETs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as one of six Middle East and North Africa country profiles. These profiles will provide an understanding of the scope, characteristics and driving factors of NEET status among youth and thereby serve as a basis for mapping targeted and effective policy interventions.
24. Also, under the ongoing project entitled "Promotion of an Enabling Environment for Sustainable Enterprises and Decent Jobs for Women and Youth in the Agricultural Sector", funded by the Government of Japan, the ILO has implemented targeted interventions in Jericho and the Jordan Valley based on a thorough value chain analysis of the dairy and honey sectors. In the dairy sector, a pilot maize/corn silage unit has been introduced to convert corn waste into livestock feed, tapping into a previously unused source of fodder for the first time and cutting fodder costs by up to 30 per cent. Other modernization efforts include the introduction of automated equipment and solar systems to reduce production losses, alongside a vaccination campaign that is saving farmers approximately US\$360,000 annually by preventing livestock losses and low productivity. In the honey sector, a queen honeybee production centre has been established and is expected to double honey yields. Beekeepers have received training and resources to diversify their products and expand their market reach. Additionally, 13 local trainers received training on the ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) toolkit, enabling them to train 444 women and young farmers and enhance their business skills.

25. Under the Cooperative Support Programme, funded by the Government of Italy, the ILO has provided crucial technical support and facilitated dialogue among social partners in the West Bank and Gaza, leading to the finalization of the Cooperative Sector Strategy (2024–29), based on the Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193). The ILO has also supported the development of an audit and control manual for cooperatives, published in Arabic, and completed a capacity needs assessment for the establishment of a cooperative development institute and cooperative development fund, with draft by-laws pending cabinet approval. In its final year, the Programme will focus on supporting primary cooperatives, utilizing ILO tools and the enhanced capacities of the staff of the Cooperative Work Agency, and operationalize a business plan for a childcare social enterprise in partnership with the PGFTU.

2. Labour market governance, tripartism and labour protection

26. Assessing the impact of the crisis on Gaza and the West Bank remains vital for designing and implementing effective, evidence-based policies and recovery strategies. Based on the collection of primary data and surveys, as well as on secondary data-modelling exercises conducted in partnership with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the ILO has published four bulletins to date on the impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.¹⁰
27. In April 2024, the ILO published a rapid assessment of the impact of the escalating conflict in Gaza on the economic and labour market situation of private sector, workers and businesses in the West Bank.¹¹ The assessment is based on interviews and surveys conducted between December 2023 and January 2024, in partnership with the PGFTU for the workers' survey and with the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (FPCCIA) for the employers' survey. The rapid assessment identifies major challenges confronted by workers and businesses, as well as their specific needs amid supply chain disruptions, restrictions on the movement of individuals, goods and services and a lack of access to the Israeli labour market. Based on these findings, the assessment provides valuable insights to inform policy decisions and interventions to support workers and businesses in the West Bank.
28. From September 2024, the ILO, in collaboration with UNDP, the Ministry of Labour, the PCBS and the Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute is testing a rapid assessment survey to be launched to evaluate the impacts of the crisis on the labour market of the West Bank. The aim of this assessment is to understand the current conditions and challenges facing workers and employers in the West Bank, as well as to provide actionable recommendations for addressing the skills needs of Palestinian workers from the West Bank who have lost their jobs in Israel or been impacted by increased closures and disrupted economic activities within the West Bank. The report is expected to be completed by the end of December 2024.
29. Despite the severe challenges posed by the lack of operational survey infrastructure and probabilistic sampling methods in Gaza, the ILO is supporting the PCBS to conduct a rapid telephone-based labour force survey in Gaza under war conditions, by applying modifications

¹⁰ ILO and PCBS, "Impact of the Israel-Hamas conflict on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 1", ILO Brief, 6 November 2023; ILO and PCBS, "Impact of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 2", ILO Brief, 20 December 2023; ILO and PCBS, "Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 3", ILO Brief, 18 March 2024; ILO and PCBS, "Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Bulletin No. 4", ILO Brief, 7 June 2024.

¹¹ ILO, *Impact of the War in Gaza on Private Sector Workers and Businesses in the West Bank*, 2024.

to the standard labour force survey questionnaire and employing non-traditional sampling and data collection methods. It is anticipated that the data collection process will be completed during the fourth quarter of 2024.

30. As part of the EU-funded regional project entitled “Social Dialogue for Formalization and Employability in the Southern Neighbourhoods” (SOLIFEM), the ILO facilitated a hybrid meeting in December 2023 to enable the exchange of experiences on informal economy diagnostics and recommendations for formalization, involving participants from Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Additionally, in September–October 2024, a training session on using the ILO SIYB tools was conducted, targeting key personnel from chambers of commerce in the West Bank, with an emphasis on promoting formalization.
31. Amid the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the ILO has continued to strengthen workers’ voices and promote gender equality in workplaces. The ILO supported the PGFTU to launch its five-year gender equality strategy in May 2024. The strategy seeks to tackle gender disparities, strengthen women’s roles within unions and enhance economic opportunities through skills development. The ILO has also supported the complaint mechanism established at the PGFTU by providing a training programme on mediation in labour disputes. Delivered in March and April 2024 to 17 trade unionists, the training programme has significantly improved participants’ mediation skills. This has contributed to the resolution of 320 of the 828 complaints received by the PGFTU’s complaint units in 2024.
32. Building on a feasibility study and the resultant business plan for setting up a social enterprise to provide childcare services in the West Bank, the ILO is currently assisting the establishment of a childcare social enterprise and nursery in Nablus city. The ILO has also supported the elaboration of training modules for the professional development of individuals operating childcare nurseries for children between the ages of 3 months and 4 years. In July and August 2024, a 60-hour foundational training programme on childcare and nursery management was delivered to 18 young women graduates. The participants are expected to be hired on full-time basis by the social enterprise to deliver high-quality childcare services.
33. Consistent with the way forward outlined in its report on crisis-related ILO work in the Occupied Palestinian Territory presented to the Governing Body at its 350th Session in March 2024,¹² the ILO supported social partners to more effectively represent the needs and interests of the most affected Palestinian workers and employers. This intervention was designed to meet the needs expressed by the social partners, both through the establishment of the Enterprise Support and Advocacy Unit within the FPCCIA to provide tailored technical assistance to enterprises and advocate for policy reforms and through the creation of the Workers’ Protection and Advocacy Unit within the PGFTU to enhance its capacity to protect workers’ rights, offer legal aid and improve data management and policy analysis capabilities.

3. Social protection for vulnerable groups

34. The ILO continues to support the Palestinian Authority in implementing a reconfigured social assistance programme and fostering effective coordination and alignment between humanitarian cash transfer programmes and the national social protection system. The goal is to deliver rights-based social allowances to the most vulnerable groups, including older

¹² GB.350/POL/4(Rev.1), para. 31.

persons, persons with disabilities, women and children, while simultaneously strengthening national systems.

35. With the ILO's essential technical support for the design of eligibility criteria, operational modalities and the costing of social allowances for older persons and persons with disabilities in line with international social security standards, the Ministry of Social Development disbursed the first payments for these allowances in August 2024. These payments benefited over 13,000 individuals with severe disabilities and nearly 10,000 older persons in the West Bank, each of whom received 250 new Israeli shekels (equivalent to US\$70) per month for the first six months of 2024 (January to June). Discussions are ongoing to extend these allowances to Gaza as soon as conditions allow.
36. Furthermore, the ILO is advising the Palestinian Authority and the EU on the implementation of digital payment methods for the national social protection system in both the West Bank and Gaza and has submitted a guidance note ¹³ for their consideration. This is a matter of crucial importance due to the extensive destruction of banks and automated teller machines in Gaza, which hinders beneficiaries' access to social assistance payments. Once implemented, all beneficiaries, including those in Gaza, will receive their payments securely.
37. Within the framework of the Social Protection Cash and Voucher Assistance Thematic Working Group (SPCVA TWG), the ILO facilitated a series of virtual workshops in August 2024 to enhance the coordinated delivery of social protection and emergency cash assistance across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, in order to better address the growing needs of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza. ¹⁴

► IV. Situation of ILO staff in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

38. The ILO currently employs 15 staff members in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Of these, four are funded through the regular budget, including two international staff members. The remaining 11 staff members are funded through development cooperation projects, two of whom are international staff members. A further expansion of the team is foreseen as especially under the emergency response plan, new interventions are rolled out, including in Gaza.
39. Movement restrictions continue to affect all staff. There is no clear indication of when permits will be granted to UN staff members who hold West Bank identity cards, for instance to move between the ILO offices in Ramallah and Jerusalem. There are also persistent delays in obtaining visas for newly recruited international staff. It has also not been possible for Decent Work Team specialists or for the ILO Regional Management to secure visas to travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territory on essential missions of support and oversight.

► Draft decision

40. The Governing Body:

¹³ ILO, *Assessment and Mapping of Cash Transfer Payment Modalities and Frequencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2024.

¹⁴ ILO, "Press Release on Humanitarian and Development Partners Set Joint Priorities for Cash Assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", 6 August 2024.

- (a) took note of the information provided in document GB.352/POL/3 and the progress made under the Office's emergency response plan recovery programme to address the urgent needs of Palestinian workers and employers;**
- (b) acknowledged the financial support already provided to the ILO programme by several Member States;**
- (c) called upon other Member States to contribute towards the full implementation of the emergency response plan recovery programme, in close coordination with the ILO constituents, to promote decent work and social justice for all Palestinians, thereby contributing to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.**