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REVIEW PAPER

THE TRIPLE NEXUS APPROACH FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

The triple nexus approach from a gender perspective

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The evolution of contemporary crises - marked by armed conflicts, climate crises and forced displacement - requires multidimensional responses that go beyond isolated action in their traditional spheres. The current complexity demands a coordinated response that eliminates the fragmentation between humanitarian aid, development and peacebuilding (BMZ, 2021). In this context, the triple nexus between humanitarian action, development and peace (HDP) emerges as a necessary paradigm for comprehensively addressing the challenges posed by protracted emergencies. These crises incorporate structural factors such as gender inequality - among others - and highlight the need to break with the duplication of efforts and the creation of gaps in the care of the most vulnerable.

These realities call for an integrated approach that links immediate humanitarian action, sustainable development and peacebuilding, as proposed by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in its Recommendation on the Triple Nexus (OECD, 2019).

The limitations of fragmented approaches make it difficult to ensure the immediate effectiveness of humanitarian assistance and the sustainability of interventions over time. It is therefore essential to coordinate resources, improve planning and prevent long-term risks, while contributing to peace in conflict zones. This approach is becoming increasingly relevant in international cooperation. On April 7, 2025, the European Parliament Research Service published a briefing note that once again highlights the need to coordinate humanitarian and development funds in fragile contexts in order to achieve a comprehensive response and address structural causes, implementing gender- and conflict-sensitive context analyses (Pichon, 2025).

The gender perspective is an essential cross-cutting issue to ensure equity and effectiveness in interventions. Women, girls and other vulnerable groups need an approach that addresses their specific needs and strengthens their role as agents of change in peacebuilding. Integrating this vision allows for a differentiated response and transforms the structures that perpetuate inequalities and violence.

The triple nexus is not a universal solution, but rather an approach under construction, subject to tensions between humanitarian principles, which are neutral by definition, and political objectives, which are inevitable in actions related to reducing inequalities and building resilience.

This note invites an analysis of the progress, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the triple nexus, with special emphasis on the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in its operationalisation.

1.Theoretical framework and evolution of the approach: from the double nexus to the triple nexus

Understanding the triple nexus requires placing it within a theoretical framework that integrates humanitarian action, development and peace in order to respond comprehensively to contemporary crises. Its conceptualisation is complex because it requires the definition of each of its pillars. Its conceptual evolution has been driven by international milestones and recommendations that emphasise coherence, contextual adaptation, local participation and the principle of “do no harm”, which are essential for turning challenges into opportunities for resilience and peace.

The balance between immediate humanitarian needs and long-term development and peace objectives can generate tensions and challenges related to funding and different operating modes and mandates (Hövelmann, 2020; Pichon, 2025).

Humanitarian action, based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (European Commission, 2008), aims to save lives and alleviate suffering in emergencies and prioritises immediate responses, such as food distribution or protection against gender-based violence. On the other hand, development seeks long-term resilience and sustainability strategies through policies that strengthen institutions and reduce structural vulnerabilities, such as infrastructure and governance, and prevent future crises, as indicated in the *2030 Agenda* and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (UN, 2015a, 2015b). Peace involves developing capacities to manage conflicts through negotiation and establishing governance mechanisms that address tensions and ensure security. Integrating the peace dimension broadens the spectrum of action, moving from *ad hoc* responses to preventive and transformative strategies for conflict dynamics, promoting inclusive and stable societies. Incorporating a gender perspective into humanitarian action, development and peace is essential to ensure that people's needs are met and to move towards sustainable peace. This is stated in *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*.

The historical trajectory of the triple nexus shows an evolutionary process that moved from a traditional separation into distinct spheres to an integration of humanitarian action and development, subsequently incorporating the peace dimension.

Initially, the "double nexus" (humanitarian-development) sought to coordinate responses in emergencies; however, the inclusion of the peace component – especially following the impetus of the 2030 Agenda – allowed for a more holistic approach to complex and protracted crises. International milestones, such as the 2016 *World Humanitarian Summit* and the 2019 *OECD-DAC Recommendation*, have promoted the convergence and coordination of these three pillars. Below are some of the main milestones in the evolution of the triple nexus.

Since the mid-1980s, there have been debates on the link between humanitarian aid, rehabilitation aid and development cooperation (Pérez de Armiño, 2002), and in the 1990s, concepts such as *Disaster Risk Reduction* (DRR) and reflections on how to link relief, rehabilitation and development (*Linking Relief, Recovery and Development*, LRRD) paved the way for the concept of resilience and laid the foundations for the "double link" between humanitarian action and development.

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Initiatives such as the Sphere Project emerged at that time with the aim of ensuring humanitarian action that was "principled, quality and accountable". Sphere published the *Humanitarian Charter* (Sphere, 1997), a set of minimum standards applicable to humanitarian crises, described as "an ethical and legal backdrop" for humanitarian action (Sphere, 1997: 1).

Since then, the Sphere handbooks, with several editions (Sphere, 2011, 2018, 2024), have become the reference documents in the humanitarian field, establishing minimum standards for NGOs, United Nations agencies, governments, donors, the private sector and volunteers. Among cross-cutting issues, the gender approach has gained importance over the years.

In the early 2000s, the United Nations system addressed the "aid-development continuum". Fragility became the key concept for encouraging humanitarian and development actors to collaborate more closely. In this context, in 2011, more than 40 countries signed the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States, focusing primarily on the ideas of "nationally owned and managed development plans" and "more effective aid in situations of fragility" (Agenzia per il Peacebuilding, 2023: 10).

In 2003, the *Good Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD) initiative emerged as an informal forum and network of donors that sought to advance principles and good practices, promoting coordination between humanitarian and development actors (principles 9 and 16) (GHD, 2003, 2018). Subsequently, the 2008 *European Consensus* emphasised that humanitarian aid "should take into account, where possible, long-term development objectives", linking it closely to development cooperation (European Commission, 2008: 8).

Following the adoption of the *2030 Agenda* and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* in 2015, the importance of a comprehensive approach to crises and armed conflicts was once again emphasised, incorporating strategies for promoting development, resilience and peace. A key milestone in the conceptualisation of the double link was the first *World Humanitarian Summit* (WHS) held in Istanbul in May 2016. In preparation for this event, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon presented the document *One Humanity: Our Shared Responsibility*, which included an *Agenda for Humanity* proposing priority actions to advance the triple nexus, incorporating a gender perspective, such as the participation of women and girls in promoting "communities of peace and non-violence" (UN, 2016: 56), the eradication of sexual violence (UN, 2016: 62) and the empowerment of women and girls (UN, 2016: 65).

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) concluded with a Commitment to Action entitled *Transcending humanitarian-development divides. Changing Peoples Lives: From Delivering Aid to Ending Need* (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016). The first point of the Commitment established the implementation of a "New Way of Working" (NWOW), which would combine attention to immediate humanitarian needs with the reduction of risks and vulnerabilities.

This reinforced the link between humanitarian action and development, highlighting the 2030 Agenda and its principle of "leaving no one behind" (World Humanitarian Summit, 2016: 1). The NWOW was essentially based on: 1) collective results, 2) comparative advantages of actors, and 3) a multi-year framework. It involved strengthening national and local actors, contributing directly to the SDGs.

The Summit also saw the launch of the *Grand Bargain* (IASC, 2016), a "Grand Pact" between major donors and humanitarian organisations, which aims to channel more resources to people in need, increasing the effectiveness of humanitarian action. Localisation, a key element of the *Grand Bargain*, promotes the leadership of local communities, encouraging their autonomy rather than a welfare-based approach (Abellán & Rey, 2022). In line of action 10, this pact establishes an explicit commitment linking humanitarian action, development and peace.

The gender perspective has also been incorporated into the double nexus, as reflected in the conclusions on how to operationalise the double nexus between humanitarian aid and development of the Council of the European Union, which particularly highlight the role of women as agents of change (Council of the European Union, 2017).

The conceptual advancement of the triple nexus has gradually been consolidated. In 2019, the members of the OECD's DAC adopted the *Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus* (OECD, 2019). This approach formalised the incorporation of the peace pillar into the double nexus, prioritising prevention (OECD, 2019).

Its objective is to "effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need." (OECD, 2019: 3).

This recommendation also acknowledges the importance of context in implementing the triple nexus, together with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, international humanitarian law and the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship. For the first time, it defines the "triple nexus" as "the interrelationships between humanitarian, development and peace actions" (OECD, 2019: 7). It includes 11 principles developed into concrete actions related to coordination, programming and financing.

This process of defining the triple nexus highlights the growing awareness of the importance of coordination between humanitarian action, development and peace as key elements in addressing multidimensional challenges in protracted crises. Support for the triple nexus approach is growing, as the integration of these three components creates synergies: humanitarian action meets immediate needs, development builds long-term resilience, and peace strategies prevent conflict. However, this approach faces challenges such as inter-institutional coordination, the politicisation of humanitarian aid (Hövelmann, 2020) and the efficient allocation of resources, and some authors have criticised this approach (Pedersen, 2016).

Ultimately, the triple nexus is not a closed model, but a dynamic framework that requires flexibility and commitment to humanitarian principles in order to address complex global challenges.

2. Gender perspective in the triple nexus: an essential cross-cutting issue

The integration of a gender perspective into the triple nexus approach is essential to ensure effective and inclusive responses in crisis contexts. Armed conflicts and disasters do not affect the population uniformly, and this approach makes it possible to highlight and address the structural inequalities that reproduce the vulnerability of women and girls. Humanitarian aid is not gender neutral, and the normalisation of gender-based violence is exacerbated in crisis contexts, directly affecting access to fundamental rights and resources. It is essential to incorporate a gender perspective and strategies against gender-based violence into humanitarian action and the triple nexus.

In this regard, in the humanitarian field, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has developed key tools for integrating gender into humanitarian action, including the *Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action* (IASC, 2017) and the *Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Interventions* (IASC, 2015).

The *Gender Handbook*, published in 2017, seeks to ensure that humanitarian interventions address the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys, promoting female participation and leadership. It includes tools for integrating gender into all phases of the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC), from planning to evaluation, and addresses sectors such as education, health, and water, sanitation and hygiene (IASC, 2017).

The 2015 *Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence* provide guidance on preventing and mitigating gender-based violence in humanitarian contexts while promoting recovery. They focus on specific sectors and highlight the role of women in peace and security (IASC, 2015).

Experiences of localising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and human rights are key to prevention strategies, considering the structural causes of conflict.

Along the same lines, the 2019 *Oslo Conference on Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises* highlighted the eradication of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in humanitarian crises as a humanitarian priority (Oslo Conference Outcome Statement, 2019). It promoted a survivor-centred approach and emphasised the key role of local women's organisations, applying legal frameworks and amplifying the voices of women as agents of change. It reaffirmed commitments to United Nations resolutions, in particular United Nations *Security Council Resolution 1325*, and other international initiatives (Oslo Conference Outcome Statement, 2019: 2). The event underscored the importance of including local organisations, especially women's organisations, in decision-making and addressed sexual violence. It also raised the need to improve access to comprehensive health services and to address disability (Oslo Conference Outcome Statement, 2019: 4).

In the field of peacebuilding, documents such as *Pathways for Peace* and the contributions of the Institute for Economics and Peace to the Global Peace Index highlight the relationship between sustainable peace and meaningful participation by women. Likewise, experiences of localising the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and human rights are key to prevention strategies, considering the structural causes of conflict. Some analyses, such as that of Atkinson (2018), agree that empowering displaced women as agents of peace enables the implementation of effective humanitarian policies, reinforcing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

A milestone in the convergence between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and Humanitarian Action is the Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) (Generation Equality, 2021).

The *WPS-HA Compact* seeks to promote a global intergenerational movement to implement existing commitments in both agendas. As stated on its website, "from mediating conflicts and securing support for peace agreements to leading disarmament campaigns and establishing economic empowerment programmes, women are at the forefront of peacekeeping. And when crises erupt, they are on the front lines, providing humanitarian aid and documenting human rights violations".

Since its launch at the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, the WPS-AH Compact has welcomed more than 215 signatories, including countries, regional organisations, United Nations entities and civil society: women's and youth organisations and networks, academic institutions and the private sector, which have come together by committing to a series of measures to achieve transformative change within five years. It aims to achieve the following positive impacts: 1) funding for the WPS programme and gender equality in humanitarian action programming, 2) full, equal and meaningful participation of women and inclusion of provisions on gender inequality in peace processes, 3) women's economic security, access to resources and other essential services, 4) leadership and meaningful, full and equal participation in all sectors seeking peace, security and humanitarian action, and 5) protecting and promoting women's human rights in conflict and crisis contexts.

Among the recommendations of the WPS-HA Compact, in relation to the triple nexus, it is noteworthy that donors should strengthen funding for humanitarian work targeting women's organisations, which are often excluded. Funding should also be provided for coalitions that strengthen the women's movement in crisis contexts, enabling them to learn from each other, collaborate and jointly advocate for greater recognition of their rights and demands.

Although progress has been made in the humanitarian field in incorporating a gender perspective and addressing sexual violence, it is still not possible to speak of feminist humanitarian action.

A feminist humanitarian system seeks to advance gender equality by identifying factors of inequality and using emergencies as catalysts for the rights of women and girls. It analyses the structures and processes that reinforce patriarchal power relations in humanitarian action. Although there has been progress in incorporating a gender perspective, humanitarian action is not yet feminist, as the feminist movement demands a transformation of power structures, something that humanitarian action has not yet achieved due to limited conditions prevailing in humanitarian contexts. This feminist approach requires working on a process of transforming power relations. The *Feminist Humanitarian Network's* (FHN, 2020) 2020-2025 strategy aims to contribute to integrating a gender and feminist perspective into the triple nexus. It promotes the transformation of the current humanitarian system, which reproduces inequalities such as racism, patriarchy and colonialism, into a feminist ecosystem that guarantees the needs of women, girls and gender-diverse people before, during and after crises. It also seeks to recognise and focus on the leadership of women's rights organisations in crisis response.

In the field of development, women's empowerment and access to inclusive services are fundamental pillars for achieving real equity. Development-oriented policies and programmes have focused on institutional strengthening and vulnerability reduction, promoting women's participation in reconstruction processes and in decision-making that affects their communities.

The incorporation of a gender perspective in peacebuilding is key to conflict prevention and the implementation of transformative agreements. UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and other international instruments underscore the need to establish quotas for women's participation in peace negotiations and reconciliation processes, which contribute to building inclusive consensus and promoting profound social and cultural transformations.

3.Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating the Triple Nexus

Sonja Hövelmann (2020) identifies three positions regarding the operationalisation of the triple nexus in practice, each with its own challenges. The first position rejects the nexus on principle, as it is considered that its incorporation threatens humanitarian action and its principles of neutrality and impartiality (Pedersen 2016). The second position criticises specific components, such as the exclusion of civil society actors or the compromise of fundamental principles (Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas 2019). The third adopts a pragmatic and programmatic approach, incorporating the triple nexus with a broad interpretation of the peace component (cf. Plan International 2018; Save the Children 2018; Mercy Corps 2016, cited in Hövelmann, 2020).

The literature highlights several challenges for implementing the HDP nexus:

- **Lack of conceptual clarity and overall coordination:** The absence of a consensus definition and common understanding for integrating the three pillars hinders collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors, highlighting the need for greater conceptual clarity and implementation based on empirical analysis (Pedersen, 2016; Abellán and Rey, 2022; Friesen, Veron, & Mazzara, 2020; Thomas & VOICE, 2019; Laund & Hauck, 2022; Poole & Culbert, 2019).
- **Lack of a common definition of the concept of peace:** The peace component is particularly uncertain, as there is no agreement on its definition - whether in terms of negative peace (absence of war) or positive peace (processes of coexistence, social justice, and peaceful conflict resolution) - nor on the distinction between lowercase "p" and uppercase "P" (IASC, 2020). This ambiguity is a concern for NGOs (Friesen, Veron, & Mazzara, 2020; Agenzia per il Peacebuilding, 2023; IASC, 2020).
- **Concerns about humanitarian independence:** Several authors analyse the tensions between the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian aid and the political objectives linked to the triple nexus. Pedersen points out that when aid is provided in the name of peacebuilding, it loses its purely humanitarian character. There is concern about the loss of access to vulnerable populations (Pedersen, 2016; Hövelmann, 2020; Fanning & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019; Friesen, Veron & Mazzara, 2020).

- **Fragmented organisational structures and strategies:** The fragmented organisational structures of many institutions hinder coordination, leading to duplication of effort and a lack of coherence (IASC, 2020; BMZ, 2021; Kittaneh & Stolk, 2018). This causes consternation among NGOs, UN agencies and others due to the NWOW's "collective results" approach (OCHA, 2017; Thomas & VOICE, 2019). In addition, there is a disconnect between the policies and strategies of different actors (Centre on International Cooperation, 2019; Abellán & Rey, 2022) and a segmented mindset (Spencer Bernard, De Paepe, & Fabre, 2024).
- **Insufficient and fragmented funding:** Current financial mechanisms - divided into strict categories for humanitarian, development or peace - limit flexibility in addressing complex needs, forcing each sector to work independently (Poole & Culbert, 2019; Abellán & Rey, 2022). The lack of integration between collective results orientation and cooperation frameworks hinders the cohesion of the HDP approach (Thomas & VOICE, 2019; Spencer Bernard, De Paepe, & Fabre, 2024).
- **Lack of operational tools:** Translating the triple nexus theory into practical actions is hampered by the absence of operational tools, specific guidelines, and clear institutional capacities, leading to fragmented interventions and inconsistent results (Thomas & VOICE, 2019).
- **Uneven implementation and sustainability:** Despite efforts made, the implementation of the triple nexus is uneven and faces challenges in achieving long-term sustainable results. Coordination and rapid donor engagement are essential to change organisational models and secure the necessary political, institutional and financial commitment, yet many programmes lack long-term vision and effective mechanisms to measure and foster resilience (Spencer Bernard, De Paepe & Fabre, 2024).
- **Limited institutional capacities:** Many organisations lack the technical and operational capacity and resources needed to effectively implement the triple nexus, which affects coordination, planning and monitoring at both headquarters and country levels (Spencer Bernard, De Paepe & Fabre, 2024). Staff shortages, limited experience and high turnover weaken institutional memory and hinder policy dialogue and response to sectoral issues. It is essential to strengthen training in integrated approaches, adopt good practices and develop capacities in the field (Abellán & Rey, 2022; Laund & Hauck, 2022).
- **Context-sensitive approach.** Localisation is essential in the triple nexus, as it requires adapting interventions to the specific social, cultural, economic and political dynamics of each context, avoiding generic solutions (UNDP, 2025; IASC, 2020). Each environment requires tailored approaches that incorporate bottom-up analysis of cultural, linguistic, political and social factors, taking into account the legitimacy that communities grant to authorities. Context analysis is identified, along with a lack of experience and resources, as a challenge (Agencia Vasca de Cooperación, 2018; OECD, 2019; Nguya & Siddiqui, 2020; Spencer Bernard, De Paepe & Fabre, 2024).

- **Incorporating a gender and diversity approach.** Integrating a gender perspective and including marginalised groups are fundamental to the success of the triple nexus, although they are often implemented inadequately (IASC, 2015, 2017; Ensor, 2022; Ediae et al., 2024). An intersectional approach that considers gender, ethnicity, age and disability is needed to address structural inequalities and enhance community resilience - a key aspect according to BMZ (2021) - and move towards a feminist approach.

Beyond the challenges that remain, the triple nexus also opens up various opportunities, such as establishing synergies and coherence in interventions (Centre on International Cooperation, 2019; IASC, 2020), optimising and improving efficiency in the use of financial, technical and human resources (Poole & Culbert, 2019; OECD, 2019), the incorporation of local knowledge and contextual approaches that strengthen resilience (Nguya & Siddiqui, 2020; Basque Agency for Development Cooperation, 2018), the promotion of inclusion and gender perspective (Ensor, 2022; Ediae, Chikwe & Kuteesa, 2024; IASC, 2017; Fanning, & Fullwood-Thomas, 2019), strengthening institutional and operational capacities (Global Alliance for the Intersectoral and Joint Analysis Framework, 2024; OCHA, 2017) and the promotion of policy and strategic innovation favouring more collaborative models adapted to the complex needs of crisis contexts (Council of the European Union, 2017; UN, 2015a).

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