



TRIPLE NEXUS IN PAKISTAN

**Catering to a governmental
narrative or enabling independent
humanitarian action?**

Sonja Hövelmann

September 2020

Abstract

The policy approach called Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (also known as the Triple Nexus) envisions a closer collaboration and coordination among aid actors of the development, humanitarian, and peace realm to tackle overburdened aid systems more effectively and efficiently. Given the frequent exposure to recurrent climate-related and man-made disasters as well as extensive experience in civil-military cooperation, Pakistan offers an interesting case to study the Triple Nexus approach in practice. This study traces contingencies of previous humanitarian interventions and how they shape today's relations among different stakeholders critical for effective collaboration under a Triple Nexus framework. Interviews conducted in Pakistan, contribute to an understanding of current perceptions, practices and challenges that humanitarian actors face in delivering a Triple Nexus approach. Research findings indicate that due to the restricted and militarised context, a considerable threat exists that principled humanitarian action could be subsumed under a state-led framework and could thus be instrumentalised for political purposes. The vagueness of the peace element in practice results in a blurring of concepts of peace and stabilisation, potentially disfavours positive, bottom-up approaches for peace. Lastly, the study focuses on the role of civil society actors in the United Nations Triple Nexus pilot process in the merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province.

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Introduction

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, or Triple Nexus, is a policy concept that envisions a stronger collaboration and coordination among actors from the fields of development cooperation, humanitarian action, and peacebuilding (OECD 2019). Although this concept is not new – in fact, Triple Nexus builds upon a history of similar approaches – it is currently gaining a lot of momentum. The Triple Nexus is rooted in two policy approaches: the New Way of Working, initiated by the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB), as well as the Grand Bargain, a set of commitments to reform the humanitarian system, emerging from the World Humanitarian Summit 2016.¹

With this approach, the international community has recognised the need for an interlinked, systemic approach to deal with the overburdened aid system. In time of escalating crises, increasingly protracted conflict, and large numbers of people on the move, the pressure to achieve better outcomes by working in a more integrated, effective, and efficient way is high. Recurrent and frequent weather-related disasters, as well as the fact that 80% of humanitarian action is targeted at protracted conflicts, highlight the challenge of dealing simultaneously with development objectives and recurrent humanitarian emergencies, whilst having to deal with instability or insecurity.

Globally, the Triple Nexus approach and its operationalisation are discussed controversially. While some regard it as a long overdue reform to siloed approaches, others see the Triple Nexus as a threat to neutral and independent humanitarian action. They caution that humanitarian assistance could be politicised by peace and security actors, resulting in a loss of independence as well as impartiality. This, alongside compromising adherence to the core humanitarian principles, could negatively affect their ability to negotiate for access. Similarly, subsuming humanitarian action into broader (state-led) frameworks risks undermining humanitarian space and principles in contexts where the state is party or is perceived to be a party to a conflict, or where the UN is siding or is perceived to be siding with a conflicting party.

Most importantly, the implementation and operationalisation of the Triple Nexus in practice as well as the conceptualisation of the peace' element remain far from clear, while some organisations are taking a pragmatic lead to implement Triple Nexus projects. Neither a common definition of what peace means in this context exists, nor of what the added value looks like in detail. Additionally, there is a blurring of concepts between peacebuilding, security, and stabilisation.

Figure A:
Infographic Pakistan.
Source: Centre for Humanitarian Action.

A

PAKISTAN

 216.6 million

 96.28% muslim

 Islamabad



Source: [UN \(2019\)](#), [Pakistan Bureau of Statistics](#)

Humanitarian access: high constraints but stable compared to 2019

Source: [ACAPS \(2020\)](#)

50.8%	152 out of 189	33.5%
of household income is spent on food	Human Development Index 2019	GINI Index

Source: [WFP \(2020\)](#), [UNDP \(2019\)](#), [Worldbank \(2015\)](#)

The UN is pioneering its New Way of Working in seven countries, including Pakistan.

The UN is pioneering its New Way of Working in seven countries, including Pakistan, through the collective outcome process operationalised through joint action in areas such as data collection, assessments, planning processes, and reforming financing modalities (Zamore 2019). In Pakistan, the WB and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiated a joint assessment and collective outcome process for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which have since 2018 merged with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The results are formalised in the Transition Plan 2018-2020. It is a framework for stabilising the merged areas and supporting the resettlement and creation of livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of families which were internally displaced during the 2008-2009 counter-insurgency operation against Islamists by the Pakistani army (OCHA 2019).

Pakistan presents an interesting case study to explore current practices, possibilities, and potential caveats of the Triple Nexus. The country faces continuous development and humanitarian challenges, which require an interlinked response according to each actor's comparative advantages. At the same time, given the strong coordination role that the Pakistani government and military had in earlier interventions, the Pakistani context allows for the study of a controversial aspect of the Triple Nexus: the role of government authorities and civil-military coordination. Therefore, this paper seeks to add to a slowly growing body of evidence on the Triple Nexus in practice.

Methods

The study relies on desk research as well as interviews and direct observations conducted in Islamabad and in Swat district in November 2019. 19 interviews were conducted, mainly with INGO and NGO representatives, as well as with UN agencies and government authorities. Three focus group discussions were facilitated on the Triple Nexus, among them two with (former) recipients of humanitarian assistance and one with staff members of an INGO. Interviews were semi-structured with a set of questions prepared specifically for each group of interviewees. Furthermore, secondary data, including academic research, policy papers and other secondary resources, were consulted to triangulate findings from the in-country research.

The following study is explorative in character because so far there is little research on practicalities and practices of the Triple Nexus in Pakistan. Since the field research was limited to Swat district in KP province, the study focusses more on the complex situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and former FATA. While other provinces also face recurrent disasters as well as other factors contributing to insecurity, the applicability and appropriateness of the Triple Nexus in those areas was less central to the scope of this paper. This constitutes a limitation in terms of a holistic assessment of the Triple Nexus in Pakistan because the complex context in the merged districts presents distinct challenges compared to other provinces. Also, the Triple Nexus approach constitutes and perpetuates a distinct form of humanitarian action which may not necessarily represent the multitude of national and local approaches that are present in Pakistan.

Complex challenges and the legacy of previous humanitarian interventions

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan faces recurring natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts. Due to this high exposure and vulnerability to a variety of shocks, it has received significant emergency funding in the past 15 years. High levels of multi-dimensional inequality with chronic poverty and malnutrition result in complex vulnerabilities.² An estimated three million people in Pakistan are considered in need of assistance, for example, regarding food security, sustained livelihoods, or health care (ACAPS 2019). No Humanitarian Response Plan has been issued for Pakistan because the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) no longer sees the need for an exclusively humanitarian strategy. Instead, there is a Transitional Framework with a total request of US\$202 million to meet those needs (OCHA 2019).

Pakistan is affected by international and non-international armed conflict. Historically and politically, its relationship with neighbouring India, Afghanistan and Iran has been shaped by mistrust and hostilities, which are impacting internal security and resulting in conflict-induced displacement. Internal conflicts due to ethnic strife in several provinces including Balochistan, Karachi, and KP also result in displacement and vulnerabilities.

A volatile security situation in the newly-merged districts (formerly known as Federally Administered Tribal Areas - FATA) as well as previous security operations by the military against non-state armed groups (NSAGs) such as Tehreek-e-Taliban (Taliban Movement of Pakistan) in several districts have led to residents becoming displaced and relocated several times. While military operations are officially over, the security situation in those areas has improved but remains fragile. Since its merger in 2018 with the adjacent province KP, FATA is incorporated into Pakistan's constitutional mainstream, ending previous colonial-era laws and self-administration through jirga systems (International Crisis Group 2018; Yousaf and FurrukhZad 2020). While the number of fatalities due to conflict is decreasing each year, according to the Uppsala database, in 2019, 450 deaths resulted from conflict, most of these in Balochistan and KP (Uppsala Conflict Database 2020).

Both the interviews and the literature elucidate that the response to the large-scale disasters – the 2005 earthquake affecting 3,5 million people, the 2008-2009 insurgency displacing 4,2 million people, and the 2010 floods affecting more than 20 million people – still significantly shapes the perception of humanitarian action today (Pécharre 2011).

Especially the earthquake response in 2005 is still impacting on today's humanitarian architecture in Pakistan. In response to the devastating earthquake, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) established national and provincial disaster management authorities that issue yearly national disaster response plans. They play a central role in coordinating disaster responses with the Pakistani armed forces, UN agencies, NGOs, and donors. Similarly, the international response system also worked on a new coordination system. During the earthquake response, OCHA piloted the Cluster approach, which ultimately became a global practice for most emergencies (Pécharre 2011; Wilder 2008).

During the earthquake response in 2005, humanitarian actors collaborated closely with the Pakistani military, which was later called “one of the largest and most integrated civil-military humanitarian operations ever conducted” (Wilder 2008, 6). The close collaboration built a solid level of trust between both actors but also overrode scepticism regarding neutral and independent humanitarian aid (Pécharre 2011). Similarly, close civil-military coordination continued during the 2008-2010 counter-insurgency operation in former FATA and Swat district, where the Pakistani military was responsible for access approvals and overall security. Despite the Pakistani army being a party to the conflict, humanitarian actors worked alongside the military, even though their ability to, for example, conduct independent assessments was at times compromised, especially in areas with ongoing conflict.



B

Figure B:
A doctor with victims of 2010 floods.
Source: Caritas international.

Triple Nexus discussions are not at the forefront in the Pakistani context. Even though there could be considerable potential to look towards the peace component to address drivers of instability, [...] humanitarian actors voiced their reservations.

With hindsight, humanitarian actors have been criticised for having reacted too hesitantly to the displacement crisis in KP and FATA and to have too readily compromised humanitarian principles by de facto embedding humanitarian action into the GoP's stabilisation strategy (Péchéayre 2011, 6; HPG 2009). This resulted in a negative perception of foreign humanitarian actors, implying that they were pursuing intelligence for the Pakistani government. Shah and Shahbaz (2015) found that during the emergency response in Swat, external agencies unfamiliar with the area struggled to acquire information about the people most affected, let alone reach them with assistance, even when they tried to work through local organisations. Geopolitically motivated funding of post-9/11 interventions and strong working relations with government and military authorities have undermined citizens' trust in foreign intervention in INGO activities (Wilder 2010).

An analysis of Pakistan's humanitarian aid system points to complex challenges and contingencies. A Triple Nexus that facilitates coordination and cooperation among development, humanitarian, and peace actors seems a useful approach to holistically address the volatile security situation and recurrent natural disasters that create the need for humanitarian and development interventions. At the same time, learnings from previous interventions show how a close coordination between the Pakistani military and humanitarian actors impacted on principled humanitarian action and how easily humanitarian activities were incorporated into the GoP's stabilisation efforts.

Triple Nexus in Pakistan: Perception and Politicisation

Although Pakistan is a designated pilot country of the UN's and WB's New Way of Working approach, Triple Nexus discussions are not at the forefront in the Pakistani context. Despite the considerable potential of the peace component for addressing drivers of instability, several humanitarian actors voiced their reservations in the interviews due to the restricted and militarised environment they are operating in. The following part will examine interlinked factors that impact on any Triple Nexus operationalisation in Pakistan.

Securitisation and politicisation

Linking the provision of aid to the promotion of stability has had sobering effects on recent humanitarian responses in Pakistan. As pointed out above, the international response to meet the needs of affected and displaced people in KP had serious implications for humanitarian principles, but also for the acceptance and access that organisations can expect from affected communities. Pakistani authorities and international actors alike drive the strong emphasis on stabilisation and security within the Pakistani context.

The GoP is under enormous pressure to comply with Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations on anti-terror financing and anti-money laundering and was placed on the "grey list" by FATF and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2018, meaning that the country is considered a safe haven for terrorist financing (International Crisis Group 2019). This, in combination with countering the political instability and militancy, led to a restrictive environment that strongly favours short-term stabilisation strategies. Additionally, despite civilian rule, the Pakistani military is still a decisive decision-maker on national security. It is a key political player with large budgetary control and influence over the civil administration, and it has a constitutional obligation to respond to both complex emergencies and natural disasters (Greenwood and Balachandran 2014, 19). Aid agencies struggle to deliver humanitarian action because of restricted government permissions to gain access to crisis-affected citizens, who of course pay the highest price.

Studies demonstrate how funding assigned to Pakistan is driven by geopolitical motives including stability in Afghanistan, the global counter-terrorism agenda, and the security situation in South Asia (Wilder 2008; 2010; Andraabi and Das 2010; Ali 2010). Therefore, interviewees noted that some donor funding is regarded to have "too big a string attached" (sic).⁴ For example, an INGO noted that "we have taken a decision to not accept US funding, which is painful in some ways because the latter usually funds large projects and programmes, but this is helping us with acceptance and access in other regions".⁵

Mistrust of Western agendas and motives and the global war on terror have not positively contributed to a neutral image of humanitarian assistance in Pakistan (Péchéayre 2012). Aid workers have been attacked, kidnapped, or threatened, and organisations are increasing safety and security measures to protect their staff (Omidian, Panter-Brick, and Piot 2015). Bunkerisation is very visible, for example, in Islamabad, where strongly surveilled buildings and fortified aid compounds separate expats from the 'local world', the spatial separation adding to the perceived lack of transparency. Many organisations employ Pakistani ex-military staff as security advisors because their former working relations are regarded as profitable to ease approval processes or administrative hurdles. But, as one interviewee noted, while the opportunistic use of former relations is helping individual organisations, it has not contributed to a systematic improvement of overall civil-military coordination structures.

Pakistan's fragile democratic transition, challenged both by political instability and counter-terrorism strategies, frequently sacrifices long-term peace for short-term security goals (Crisis Group 2020). Previous interventions suggest that a Triple Nexus approach in Pakistan will likely centre around a state-led framework, which most likely will be favouring a Humanitarian-Development-Security Nexus rather than a Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. The former focuses on linking humanitarian and development activities with stabilisation and counterterrorism, while the latter envisions to link these to conflict resolution and transformation. Especially in the Pakistani context it is important to differentiate between the two, as the former will likely leave little room for a more diverse set of actors and could in light of previous interventions potentially contribute to a further squashing of principled humanitarian space.

Civil society, countering terrorism, and the narrative of the strong state

Civil society in Pakistan faces severe restrictions and constraints in the space it operates in. There are several administrative and legal hurdles that hinder freedom of expression and association, NGO registration, or work and travel permits. Especially the strict project approval processes on national, provincial, and district level, which can take up to four months to complete, significantly slow down aid activities⁶ (Mukhtar 2020). The analysis network ACAPS (2019) rates humanitarian access in Pakistan as "highly constrained" and saw a deterioration in 2018 when 18 INGOs were forced by authorities to end their operations in Pakistan (Janjua 2017; Saeed 2018). International, national, and local NGOs alike are affected by the shrinking humanitarian space. Claims of 'anti-state' behaviour and counterterrorism legislation are used as a pretext to limit operational space and deny travel permits, significantly impacting the potential room to manoeuvre for humanitarian actors in a formal Triple Nexus framework.

Some attribute the confinement of operating space for international organisations to previous humanitarian operations: "Things have become more difficult since the 2005 earthquake when Pakistan was so open to international aid, there is a certain hangover from that" said one interviewee.⁷ INGOs are suspected to be spies by some parts of the government and society due to previous experiences with members of foreign intelligence services coming to Pakistan under the pretext of being NGO workers⁸ (Péchyre 2012). Others hinted that since the military operation in Waziristan in 2014, there are even more regulatory steps for humanitarian organisations: "It's like we need to assure that we are not against the state every step of the way".⁹

PAKISTAN



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance.

Figure C:
Provinces Pakistan.
Source: Centre for Humanitarian Action.

"Officially, there is no conflict, we are not allowed to challenge the official narrative. But it is administered peace, not peace of the minds of the people".

Interview NGO worker in Pakistan

Furthermore, the governmental narrative disincentivises actors from having conversations about peace or conflict in favour of a narrative of Pakistan as a strong state that reclaims or holds its territory. Most interviewees were sceptical of integrating peacebuilding into their portfolio of humanitarian and development activities: "Officially, there is no conflict, we are not allowed to challenge the official narrative. But it is administered peace, not peace of the minds of the people".¹⁰ Another interviewee emphasised: "discussing peace is a very sensitive and not obviously a topic in Pakistan".¹¹ Even though the (I) NGOs interviewed for this study were cautious to engage with peacebuilding on internal conflict, they do see the need to design projects according to conflict-sensitive approaches and the Do No Harm principle. These include aspects of sectarianism, economic and gender inequality, child protection, and ethnic strife. There is a need for inclusive, bottom-up approaches which contribute to long term peace and mediate dialogue. For example, there are projects and programmes in KP and the merged district that support local jirgas as an instrument to mediate conflict and foster dialogue among communities and thus contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Counter-terrorism measures and legislation are often vaguely defined so that they can form an instrument to deny humanitarian actors access to some regions (Mohmand 2019). For example, during the interviews an INGO reported that while previously they were able to negotiate with NSAG to gain access to populations in need, now talking to insurgents would be interpreted as supporting terrorism. Paradoxically, despite the improved security situation, there is less access and room to negotiate. According to interviewees, the overall acceptance of international and national NGOs by the communities has increased, while an atmosphere of mistrust prevails between civil society organisations and Pakistani authorities.

Experiences from previous interventions suggest that humanitarian actors are seen as 'force multipliers' in a state-led framework to increase peace and stability. For example, the UN Special Envoy for Assistance to Pakistan made a public statement in 2010 to support the Pakistani military efforts to eradicate terrorism in the FATA, and associate humanitarian actors with 'post-crisis peace-building' (Péchéayre 2011, 7; Georgy 2010). Statements like these undermine a neutral, independent humanitarian action and contribute to a shrinking humanitarian space. Critics thus fear that the Triple Nexus as an approach to closer coordinate collective outcomes in a joint framework could be used as an instrument to further similar trends. Especially, if the Triple Nexus is seen as a global policy approach, favoured by donors, UN agencies, and INGOs, the GoP may feel vindicated in its effort to bring different aid actors together under one framework, potentially side-lining rights-based or social justice approaches over tangible aid.

Examples of previous and current Nexus Approaches in Pakistan

The call for effective collaboration and more coherence among aid actors within and across the silos is not new. Pakistan has been a pilot country for the One UN approach, which has a strong relevance for the Triple Nexus. The current Transitional Framework is also an example of a Triple Nexus approach.

One UN

In 2007, Pakistan among seven other countries volunteered to pilot "Delivering as One", also known as the One UN approach. The aim was "to allow the UN system, in cooperation with pilot country governments, to develop approaches that would enhance the coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of the UN at country level and reduce transaction costs for host countries." (UN 2007). To realise the envisioned outcomes UN agencies were closer integrated to have one leader, one budget, one program and one office.

Yet, when conflict intensified in 2008-2009, the UN had difficulty to remain neutral and deliver swift, principled humanitarian action. The close working relationship with the GoP resulting from the 2005 earthquake is frequently cited as a reason why the UN had little capacity and willingness to assert influence over the humanitarian response in the early stages (HPG 2009, 3). In hindsight, several scholars see the One UN approach as the prime reason for its lack of determination towards the Pakistani government, which impacted heavily on the humanitarian community as a whole to uphold principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, and subsequently jeopardised the primary task of alleviating suffering, especially of marginalised communities (HPG 2009; Péchéayre 2011; Greenwood and Balachandran 2014). This not only compromised the UN's ability to advocate for humanitarian standards but also undermined the trust and support of humanitarian organisations and the communities (HPG 2009, 4).

The lack of leadership within the UN meant that the responsibility to lead was placed on the GoP. For one, within the One UN approach there was ambiguity of responsibility regarding the three UN leadership positions: Humanitarian Coordinator, Resident Coordinator, and Special Envoy for Assistance. These were expected – within the One UN approach – to support Pakistani institutions. At the same time, OCHA piloted the Cluster Approach during the earthquake response in 2005, which foresaw a greater leadership role for OCHA and the humanitarian country team (HCT).

This clash of reforms between the lack of leadership and independence of the UN, including OCHA, “add[ed] to the perceptions that the UN was one-sided” (Péchéayre 2011, 8). Greenwood and Balachandran (2014, 20) conclude: “The UN’s lack of assertiveness towards the Pakistani government is a defining trait of its humanitarian operations in Pakistan. Comparably, another trait of the local context is a near-seamless continuum between counterinsurgency, stabilisation, and substantive recovery, warranting legitimate UN support.”

These findings, which suggest a critical reading of the UN’s independence and its relation to the GoP, may have present day continuations, potentially impacting on a current Triple Nexus framework led by GoP, UN, and WB.

Pakistan’s Transitional Framework 2019-2021

To realise World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain commitments, the current 2018-2020 FATA Transition Plan is a pilot project aimed at bridging the gap between humanitarian and development partners (OCHA 2018a). The FATA Transition Task Force (FTTF) consisting of the UN, the WB, NGOs, donors, and the GoP has developed the Transitional Framework. Within the framework of the FATA Transition Plan, humanitarian and development partners are formulating “collective, quantifiable and multi-year outcomes that consider the comparative advantages of each partner” (OCHA 2018a, 2).

It started in 2017 with a complementary data collection and analyses by UN and WB on household and institutional vulnerability. The main aim of the FATA Transition Plan is to help support IDPs in their return and restore their livelihoods. In 2017, 94% of the displaced (438,657 families) have received facilitation to return and rebuild their lives (OCHA 2018b). The Transition Plan proposes four collective outcomes: (1) livelihoods and economic growth, (2) access to basic services, (3) resilient recovery, and (4) governance and justice (OCHA 2019). According to OCHA, the Transition Plan is aligned with several development frameworks, including the GoP’s 10-year socio-economic development plan, the UN One Plan (III), the World Bank’s Country Partnerships Strategy, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

While such a comprehensive approach to long-term structural development and humanitarian challenges seems highly appropriate to address structural challenges in the merged districts, civil society representatives criticised that the Transitional Framework process lacked voices from a more diverse range of stakeholders. Interviewees stressed that civil society organisations were side-lined, as INGOs and NGOs alike were only allowed to attend one coordination meeting and that only well-resourced organisations were allowed to participate.¹² Similarly, an interviewee criticised that while local organisations’ assessment data were considered in previous Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP) and Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO), this was not the case during the collective outcome data process.¹³



D

Figure D:
Floods in Northwestern Pakistan .
Source: : WFP/ Photolibrary.

Despite its status as an UN-WB pilot country, it is difficult to gauge what the Triple Nexus looks like in Pakistan because of a lack of transparency on the process.

Although there are (I)NGO and UN projects independent from the Transitional Framework, some interviewees saw the Transitional Framework as a potential instrument for authorities to align civil society activities for a governmental trajectory rather than allowing them their own space. An interviewee argued that “within this plan NGOs are service providers and implementing organisations of the government”¹⁴ and that “for the state, the nexus is perfect because this plays into the narrative that humanitarians can contribute to a state narrative, squeezing humanitarian space and any type of action that is not what the state wants”¹⁵. Other interviewees were less critical, seeing the Transitional Framework as a good opportunity to link relief, rehabilitation, and development structurally and thus more effectively.¹⁶ They stressed that many local organisations are working under dual mandate anyhow and even those with a strong humanitarian profile also engage in development. Therefore, the siloed approaches seemed artificial to them, especially as most of them work closely with communities which do not differentiate between humanitarian and development needs.

While the implementation of the framework is well under way, there is little transparency regarding the implementation process, its monitoring or evaluation. Local NGO representatives criticised that they never received a final document as “the plan never left the bureau”, and that they “lost track of what it is”.¹⁷ An interviewee noted that the Transitional Framework “doesn’t serve community needs and expectations” although NGOs had high hopes as “from the perspective of the communities, Triple Nexus makes sense”¹⁸ because their needs do not neatly fit into the siloed response approaches. An NGO representative judged that the framework enforces “power structures where elites are benefiting rather than community priorities, and thus takes an old style of development, which brings no change”.¹⁹

Despite its status as an UN-WB pilot country, it is difficult to gauge what the Triple Nexus looks like in Pakistan because of a lack of transparency on the process. Apart from frequently voiced criticisms regarding the lack of participation of a more diverse set of stakeholders in drafting the Transitional Framework, it is difficult to assess or evaluate the pilot process because hardly any official communication or documentation is publicly available. For example, OCHA cites Pakistan’s transition framework as a country example in the 2020 Global Humanitarian Overview for delivering better humanitarian-development collaboration to end needs (OCHA 2019). UNDP also references the Triple Nexus as important for its work in Pakistan by underlining the respective dependencies of development and peace (UNDP 2019; 2020). For the government authorities in Pakistan, the Triple Nexus seems to be foremost of financial interest as “[the government of KP] province only became actively engaged when the collective outcome plan was (partially) funded” (IASC 2020).

A potential reason for the lack of transparency could be the contested nature of the peace aspect in Pakistan. An interviewee hinted that former Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Neil Buhne, who left his post at the end of 2019, disagreed to present Pakistan as a Triple Nexus case study because of political sensitivities.²⁰ This claim is underlined by the fact that Pakistan’s pilot process hardly features in official communications, nor at the forefront of international discussions compared to Mali or Somalia, for example.

Room for civil society actors in a Triple Nexus approach?

Pakistan could potentially benefit greatly from an interlinked approach of humanitarian, development, and peace actors. It is affected by slow-onset crises, such as drought, which fall between the funding silos and require interlinked responses. Little and even decreasing humanitarian funding could be compensated for with more flexible, multi-year funding, which allows for “crisis modifiers”²¹ (Peters and Pichon 2017) in case there are lapses back to cover emergency humanitarian needs. Interviewees reported that some donors, namely the British and Swedish development ministries, have adapted their funding instruments to match these requirements (Levine and Kusnierek 2019). For instance, the British donor agency DFID has a multi-year humanitarian programme which caters to immediate relief and early recovery interventions, as well as linking them with UN and civil society initiatives. The programme seeks to address underlying vulnerabilities and is thus very much in line with aims and objectives of a Triple Nexus approach, while not necessarily framing it that way. An independent evaluation concludes that it is not necessarily long-term financing but a “significant transformation [...] in how different humanitarian and other interventions are designed to address complex causes of vulnerabilities; and how humanitarian agencies think about their own role in crises” (Levine and Kusnierek 2019, 33) that enables linking-thinking. Similarly, interviewees noted that a programme focussing on building resilience financed by the Swedish donor agency SIDA is allowing to link humanitarian and development programming on a structural level.

Most NGOs, especially local and national ones, report that they are already realising a Dual Nexus approach in their programming. Because levels of food insecurity and malnutrition remain quite high, this could be an obvious thematic choice to operationalise interorganisational cooperation in a Triple Nexus approach based on true civil society participation. The National Humanitarian Network (NHN) could play a facilitating role to ensure a civil society lead. A local NGO representative stressed that a potential way forward could be to increase components such as social cohesion but not prominently frame these peace-building activities, as “inside the professional circles there is more leeway to talk about [peace] but we avoid the big logs with the government”.²²

Decreasing humanitarian funding could be compensated with more flexible, multi-year funding, which allows for “crisis modifiers”.

Conclusion

A protracted refugee situation, large resettlement schemes, slow onset and recurrent natural disasters, political instability, inter-communal violence and inequality, declining humanitarian funding: these complexities of Pakistan's humanitarian and development challenges demonstrate a potential and need for an interlinked, long-term, and sustainable approach, based on the comparative advantages of each aid actor. However, the idea behind the Triple Nexus has several caveats in Pakistan. Not only are conflict mitigation and peacebuilding sensitive topics, even taboo language, in the Pakistani context, but also working on these issues – within or outside of a state-led framework – comes with many strings attached.

Although the Triple Nexus debate is not at the forefront in Pakistan, there is a considerable chance for an instrumentalisation due to the restricted and militarised context. The example of KP province with its strict approval process and travel restrictions demonstrated this. Hence, engaging in a state-led Triple Nexus in Pakistan could bear considerable threats for organisations to become pressured into following a government-imposed trajectory.

Research findings suggest that frequently voiced criticism and scepticism by humanitarians regarding the Triple Nexus holds true for the Pakistani context. For example, side-lining NGO input in the collective outcome processes could be observed in the drafting of the FATA Transitional Framework. Many humanitarians criticise the Triple Nexus for its vagueness of how to operationalise the peace pillar. This is also the case in Pakistan as a lack of conceptual clarity around the aspect of peace is leading to a blurring of concepts, disfavoured positive peace and bottom up approaches. While they also persist without a Triple Nexus rationale, there is a risk that if a Triple Nexus framework becomes the norm, these aspects could exacerbate existing tendencies.

In the merged districts of KP province a strong rationale to stabilise volatility rather than address underlying long-term vulnerabilities and inequalities is prevalent. Hence, furthering a Triple Nexus approach bears potential threats because it further feeds into the narrative of the strong state which may lead to linking assistance more closely with national and international stabilisation efforts. Civil society actors thus fear that strict project approval processes, access grants, registration processes, and travel permits endanger their ability to conduct independent assessments and a delivery of principled humanitarian action may thus be compromised. Additionally, in light of previous interventions, the UN is not necessarily seen as a neutral aid actor as critics question its independence while working with the host government. This suggests a significant threat to needs-based, principled humanitarian assistance, should aid organisations refuse to align within a state-led Triple Nexus framework.

The example of the forced closure of all of Médecins sans Frontières' health activities in FATA in 2017, which came after 14 years of operations in the area (MSF 2018), shows that this is not just a gloomy forecast.

Notwithstanding, there is great need for a holistic, transformative approach to Pakistan's challenges and some examples of transformative programming were briefly touched upon. A thematic cooperation on food security with joint assessments and collective outcomes seems an especially obvious choice for a Triple Nexus approach in Pakistan. For example, conflicts over natural resources, exacerbated by climate change, are an area with much overlap with agrarian and nutritional topics, which impact on short-term humanitarian needs such as food insecurity and malnutrition.

Furthermore, declining humanitarian funding is allowing for a shift towards development programmes and hence leaves more room for 'development as peace' concepts. While not working on peace per se, there are opportunities for aid organisations in Pakistan to consider conflict sensitivity more overtly, while working across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus. There is considerable overlap with topics that (I)NGOs are already working on, which could indirectly contribute to a more peaceful society by addressing gender and economic inequalities, natural resource management, and urbanisation. A more systematic focus on conflict sensitivity could thus mitigate development losses resulting from social tensions or violence.

Pakistan's fragile democratic transition urgently needs long-term peace engagement rather than short-term security strategies that prioritise counterterrorism and stabilisation approaches. A diverse range of stakeholders, including civil society actors, international, national, and local development and humanitarian organisations, should form an important part of an encompassing approach to the challenges that Pakistan is facing. However, at this point, a formal, UN-driven, or state-led Triple Nexus approach does not seem like an appropriate solution for principled humanitarian actors as previous mistakes might be repeated.

List of abbreviations

DFID	Department For International Development
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FTTF	FATA Transition Task Force
GoP	Government of Pakistan
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plans
HCT	Humanitarian country team
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
INGO	International non-governmental organization
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (province)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHN	National Humanitarian Network
NSAGs	Non-state armed groups
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States
WB	World Bank

Glossary

Triple Nexus refers to “the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actions” (OECD 2019).

Peace and Peacebuilding refers to a complex, long-term, and multi-layered aimed at decreasing violence and increasing justice. Peacebuilding can be seen as an inclusive endeavour, aiming at improving relations between societal groups and decreasing violence. It includes work on structural contradictions and constructive changes in attitudes (Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung 2019).

Security is defined in this study as a concept for the defence against threats. Each actor defines the nature and dimensions of threats individually, possibly together in conjunction with allies. Security as defined by a government mostly includes the protection of citizens, sovereignty, and territorial integrity (also of allies) as well as the protection of the national economy. Security or stabilisation approaches tend to defend some groups against specific threats, while potentially excluding others (Plattform Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung 2019).

Stabilisation is a process that – via a political strategy – combines civilian, police, and military means, and aims at quickly reducing violence, improving living conditions, and creating the preconditions for development and peace. Stabilisation practice is at times being criticised for strengthening authoritarian governments (Reder, Schneider, and Schroeder 2017).

Endnotes

1 For more background information on the Triple Nexus see: Hövelmann, Sonja. 2020. ‘Triple Nexus to Go’. Berlin: Centre for Humanitarian Action.

2 Despite steady increase of gross domestic product, Pakistan's ranking in the human development index has remained unchanged for many years at 147 out of 188 countries. On the gender equality index, it ranks as the second lowest country just before Yemen.

3 Jirga is a council of male leaders/elders taking decisions based on the cultural rules known as Pakhtunwali (Levine 2019). In the absence of state law, this was the only justice system in place in KP until 2017.

4 Interview with INGO worker

5 Interview with INGO worker

6 There is a government policy demanding that every relief project be approved beforehand through a No-Objection Certificate (NOC). The NOC is issued by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and officially takes seven days to issue. In practice, this process takes much longer and is used to control access to pressure NGOs to accept certain instructions. For example, working in the newly merged provinces is only possible for a few organisations and even more difficult for international aid workers. Some organisations must accept military escorts when travelling to KP, even though this is against their organisation's mandate.

7 Interview with donor representative

8 Interview with INGO worker

9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Interview with NGO worker

14, 15 Interview with INGO

16, 17, 18 Interview with NGO

19 Interviews with NGO/INGO

20 Interview with NGO worker

21 Crisis modifiers are innovative risk financing options to help deal with small-scale crises that impede development progress (Peters and Pichon 2017).

22 Interview with NGO worker

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