

The Final Peace of the Puzzle?

Operationalizing the Peace Pillar in Triple Nexus Approaches: A
Case Study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the operationalization of the peace pillar of the humanitarian-development-peace Triple Nexus in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Through 66 semi-structured interviews with actors from different backgrounds operating in the Triple Nexus, this study identifies several challenges that arose during the implementation of the peace pillar. Three main findings stem from the research. The first finding is that in its current form, the peace pillar is limited to peacebuilding, thus excluding peacekeeping and peacemaking elements. Second, tensions between humanitarian and hard security actors prevent the broadening of this mandate. Third, the study finds that there is discussion around the role of localization in the Triple Nexus approaches in the DRC. Additionally, the study highlights that the role of perceptions of the local population in relation to the Triple Nexus has been largely neglected in existing literature, while this proves to be a critical factor. The thesis concludes that the Triple Nexus in the DRC has yet to realize its full potential, suggesting the need for further research into this new approach.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviation	Definition
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EU	European Union
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FIB	Force Intervention Brigade
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IGO	International Governmental Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organization (LNGO)
LRRD	Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development
M23	March-23 Movement
MONUC	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo
MONUSCO	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo
NCT	Nexus Coordination Team
NDC	Nexus Donor Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWOW	New Way of Working
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PI	Principal Investigator
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

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1. Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faces one of the most complex humanitarian crises in the world (IOM, 2024). Despite the efforts of several humanitarian organizations, two United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions, and the provision of millions of dollars of development aid, the situation in the country continues to worsen. Unfortunately, the DRC is not a stand-alone case. Worldwide, the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance is at a record high (Guterres, 2023). Against this backdrop, the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit was organized to develop new strategies to combat this global issue. One of the main outcomes was a new focus on greater collaboration across humanitarian, development, and peace actors to reduce humanitarian needs. This integrated approach would soon come to be known as the humanitarian-development-peace Nexus, or “Triple Nexus” (Brown & Mena, 2024). Since its theoretical introduction in 2016, the Triple Nexus has been implemented in several countries. The UN selected six official pilot countries (Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq, and Chad), but Triple Nexus projects have also been implemented in non-pilot countries, such as the DRC (Land et al., 2022).

The Triple Nexus builds on experiences from the so-called ‘Double Nexus’ between humanitarian and development aid, but the addition of the peace pillar generated a lot of debate. Some humanitarian organizations, for example, feared that they would no longer be able to uphold their principles of neutrality and independence (Hövelmann, 2020). Both academic and policy actors pointed to the ambiguity of the peace component and questioned the operationalization of this broad concept (Norman & Mikhael, 2023). Finally, questions were raised about how localization would feature in this collaboration between different national and international actors (Barakat & Milton, 2020).

This thesis sets out to address these issues through an analysis of the case of the Triple Nexus in the DRC, with a focus on the peace pillar. Through 66 semi-structured interviews with 49 highly relevant actors in the DRC, insight will be gathered into the inner workings, challenges, and good practices of the Triple Nexus in the DRC.

The DRC is a relevant case as it continues to spiral further into crisis, fueled by humanitarian needs stemming from underdevelopment and violent conflicts (IOM, 2024). In addition, while the UN is withdrawing its peacekeeping mission in the DRC, it has attempted to fill the void it left with Triple Nexus approaches. As clashes with armed rebel groups in eastern DRC continue, this seems not to have had much effect. This is noteworthy, as the inclusion of the peace pillar is one of the defining aspects of the Triple Nexus. This leads to the following research question:

How was the peace component of the Triple Nexus operationalized in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and what challenges arose?

The significance of this thesis is twofold. First, this thesis aims to contribute to the relatively limited existing research on the Triple Nexus. As it is a relatively new policy concept, the academic literature on the Triple Nexus is lacking, not only practical evaluations and insights, but also its position within broader debates of peace and localization. The fact that the UN is implementing it in different countries means that it might have far-reaching consequences.

Careful evaluation of the concept and its strengths and weaknesses is crucial, as the UN might aim to extend the Triple Nexus to other regions, both within and outside of the DRC. Second, the goals of the Triple Nexus of reducing humanitarian needs and improving aid effectiveness are noble and much needed in the DRC, as the country continues to suffer from an immense humanitarian crisis. By assessing the implementation of the Triple Nexus in the DRC, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of any obstacles that might hinder progress and how to overcome them.

This thesis is structured as follows. First, in Chapter 2, the existing literature on the Triple Nexus, peace and peacebuilding, and localization will be carefully examined to pinpoint the assets and weaknesses of this new approach. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the methodology behind the research of this thesis. In Chapter 4, the results of the semi-structured interviews will be presented. Next, these results will be interpreted and discussed within the framework of the Triple Nexus in Chapter 5. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will present the main findings of my research and reflect on its limitations.

2: Theoretical framework

In this theoretical framework, the concept of the Triple Nexus will be further explained and examined against several theoretical perspectives on related fields. First, the Triple Nexus will be compared to earlier integrated approaches. Next, the peace component of the Triple Nexus will be assessed in more depth through a literature review of peace and related concepts. The chapter concludes with an examination of various points of concern raised by academic and policy experts.

2.1: What is the Triple Nexus?

The Triple Nexus is a policy concept that refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian aid, peacebuilding actions, and peace/security actions. It is based on the idea that collaboration between these three pillars could result in better and more sustainable results, and the more efficient use of aid (Howe, 2019). The goal of the Triple Nexus is to reduce needs, risks, and vulnerability in fragile areas. This is not a new objective, as both academics and policymakers have tried to increase the effectiveness of aid for a long time. The Triple Nexus was therefore received with some skepticism regarding the added value of the concept (Hövelmann, 2020). However, two main defining aspects set the Triple Nexus apart from earlier approaches: the incorporation of the peace pillar, and a commitment by donors to change their funding structures. In this section, I will further analyze these two aspects to determine the added value.

2.1.1: Historical overview of the Nexus discourse

To illustrate the historical background of the work done related to humanitarian aid, development, and peace, I will use the four generations of the discourse as developed by Cochrane & Wilson (2023), as the authors clearly describe how thinking about the linkages between humanitarian aid, development aid, and peace and security efforts transformed into the Triple Nexus.

The first generation they identify is characterized by being “primarily concerned with transforming humanitarian assistance into something that was more developmental and sustainable” (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023, p.3). This approach has its roots in post-World War II development but took shape around the 1960s when the topic gained prevalence in UN institutions. One of the first organizations attempting to bridge the divide between humanitarian and developmental aid was UNICEF, which transformed itself from a relief fund into a developmental organization (Shusterman, 2020). During the 1980s, the idea of *Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development*, also known as LRRD, spread. Prompted by famines in Africa, the idea that it was better to prevent disasters by dealing with root causes than to cure the symptoms became more prominent. This idea limited itself to natural disasters and did not yet lead to any operational impact (Lindahl, 1996). The reasoning behind LRRD was a linear one-way transition from a relief phase to a development phase, also known as a ‘continuum’ (Mosel & Levine, 2014).

Another concept associated with this generation is *Disaster Risk Reduction* (DRR). Social scientists concluded that the poorest and most vulnerable people tended to suffer most from natural disasters, due to their exposure to hazards resulting from their living situation. This

combination of exposure to risk and vulnerability is the idea of disaster risk, which should be reduced through humanitarian and development efforts (Macrae, 2019).

The second generation that Cochrane and Wilson identify emerged after the end of the Cold War, and contained the introduction of the peace aspect into the humanitarian-development discourse. Difficult to contain and predict conflict-based disasters, such as those in Eastern Europe, proved to be the new standard. These *permanent emergencies* resulted in a broader repertoire of aid interventions, focusing more on security, foreign policy, and military intervention than the disaster-orientated LRRD and DRR (Lindahl, 1996). This trend continued after the 9/11 attacks, with donors introducing 'whole of government' integrated approaches, "where different departments (political, security, economic), as well as those responsible for development and humanitarian policy, work more closely together" (Mosel & Levine, 2014, p.4). During this time, the idea of the linear LRRD 'continuum' was challenged in literature (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994). Ultimately, it was replaced by the idea of a 'contiguum', which is the understanding that all instruments such as relief, rehabilitation, and development may be happening simultaneously, rather than in the linear phases of a 'continuum' (Mosel & Levine, 2014).

The third generation categorized by Cochrane & Wilson (2023) emerged in the 2000s and can be seen as a shift towards multi-sectoral programming. The authors name resilience and localization as two key concepts of this generation. Localization, meaning integrating local actors and perspectives in peacebuilding initiatives (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013) will be addressed in more depth later on in chapter 2.3.5. The term resilience originated in economic and ecological research (Barett & Conostas, 2014). In the broadest sense, it refers to the capacity to absorb shocks and bounce back from them (Duffield, 2012). Resilience approaches usually are designed "both to enhance measures in the aftermath of a crisis and, crucially, to enable new methods of foresight and preparedness before risks emerge" (Brassett et al., 2013, p. 222). The theoretical ambiguity of the term can lead to problems in the field, as each sector interprets it differently. Peacebuilding actors associate it to managing risks and withstanding conflict situations, whereas for development actors it refers more to livelihoods and climate change (ICVA, 2016, p.3).

However, it is broadly understood that increasing resilience calls for a closer bond between humanitarian aid (which focuses on relief in the aftermath of a crisis) and development (which increases preparedness before risks emerge). Mosel & Levine (2014) identify two opportunities that stem from the focus on resilience. First, they believed development could be reformed to be deployed more frequently during *protracted crises*, meaning complex, prolonged crises. Second, they argued it could be an opportunity to make humanitarian aid more long-term and more compatible with development. The authors see resilience to focus on the way development and emergency aid are linked and coincide. This symbolizes the emergence of what is now known as the humanitarian-development 'double nexus' (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023).

Macrae (2012) also promotes resilience in favor of LRRD. She argues that the challenges that LRRD faced were the logical result of a difference in the design of the humanitarian and development pillars. Since development actors work *through* governments or even strengthen government systems, humanitarians work *around* governments to provide help for the individual, resulting in different goals, institutions, and timeframes. She therefore calls

for an integrated analysis owned both by humanitarians and developmentalists. This analysis should focus on determining vulnerabilities and possible solutions, with the local context providing the best course of action. This description fits perfectly with the idea of the double nexus, which evolved into the Triple Nexus in the fourth generation.

Building on her own previous work, but also that of others, Macrae (2019) concludes that previous iterations of 'linking thinking' (such as LRRD, DRR, and resilience) have resulted in four major takeaways:

1. The problem of problem states remains unsolved
2. The implication of 'linking thinking' on humanitarian principles has also not been resolved
3. There is a need to reform the legal and administrative arrangements governing humanitarian and development aid
4. The feasibility of better linking humanitarian and developmental work varies considerably between contexts

These challenges showcase the need for further reflecting on aid structures and 'linking thinking'. The Triple Nexus can be seen as a response to these identified challenges. As this thesis is focused on the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus, the first two takeaways are most relevant. In Chapter 5, I will analyze if the Triple Nexus has been able to address these first two concerns.

2.1.2: The emergence of the Triple Nexus

During the fourth and current generation, the Triple Nexus was formalized at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS), which was held in Istanbul against the backdrop of "a time of skyrocketing humanitarian needs alongside a historic shortfall in the funding required to meet them" (United Nations Secretary-General, 2016, p.2). The goal of the Summit was "to find ways to better tackle humanitarian needs in a fast-changing world; develop strong partnerships and seek innovative solutions to current and future challenges" (ECHO, 2016, p.1). To achieve this goal, the Summit aimed to change the way the international community prepared for, and reacted to crises (UNESCO, 2016).

The summit was prefaced by a three-year consultation process in which more than 23,000 stakeholders were engaged, resulting in the Secretary General's 'Agenda for Humanity' (United Nations Secretary-General, 2016). In this document, the Secretary-General highlights five core responsibilities, as illustrated by Figure 1 (OCHA, 2017). These responsibilities and the Agenda as a whole sought:

-“to demonstrate that addressing people’s humanitarian needs requires more than increasing levels of assistance. It necessitates a far more decisive and deliberate effort to reduce needs, anchored in political will and leadership to prevent and end conflict, as well as a determined effort across humanitarian, development, human rights and peace and security to save lives, meet humanitarian needs and reduce risk and vulnerability”- (United Nations Secretary-General, 2016, p.2).

The inclusion of peace and security in this sentence showcases that the UN was convinced of the importance of this pillar in aid policy. This new approach is characterized by the term 'new way of working', or NWOW, which was also introduced in the UN Secretary-General's report on the WHS. It can be seen as the UN's way of committing itself to the 2030

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs reflect the UN’s ambitious vision for realizing sustainable development through new and more effective measures (Bexell & Jönsson, 2016). As such, the Triple Nexus can be interpreted as an improved version of previous aid structures.

Figure 1



The 5 core responsibilities outlined by the Agenda for Humanity (Source: OCHA, 2017)

The New Way of Working (NWoW) initially focused on removing unnecessary barriers between humanitarian and development actors, thus formalizing the Double Nexus. However, the WHS was followed by a renewed focus on including peace in this nexus. Shortly after taking the oath of office, the new Secretary-General António Guterres stated, for example, "Humanitarian response, sustainable development and sustaining peace are three sides of the same triangle" (Guterres, 2016, para. 23.). This is seen as the official introduction of the Triple Nexus.

2.1.3: Funding structures

The second defining aspect of the Triple Nexus is the financial commitment that accompanied the NWoW. Following the 2016 WHS, the World Bank pledged 75 billion dollars to the International Development Association, the World Bank’s fund for the poorest countries (ICVA, 2017). In addition, representatives of 18 donor countries and 16 international aid organizations from the United Nations, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement agreed on a ‘Grand Bargain’, which outlined 51 commitments aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of international humanitarian aid (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2021). Through this Grand Bargain, the signatories committed themselves to the NWoW.

A defining moment for the institutionalization of the Triple Nexus came in 2019, when the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) adopted the ‘Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus’, developed by the

OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This Recommendation constitutes a guiding document outlining how adherent parties can and should operationalize the Triple Nexus (OECD, 2019). This included a description of how funding structures could be adapted to be more in line with the Triple Nexus, for example by including more "predictable, flexible, multi-year financing" (OECD, 2019, p.12). The relevance of the Recommendation lies in the fact that the OECD is an organization consisting of the world's leading donors. Nearly thirty of them, including member states such as the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the European Union (EU) and several UN organizations, adopted the Recommendation (Brown & Mena, 2024). This formalization of the Triple Nexus and its funding structures sets the Triple Nexus apart from earlier concepts and strategies aiming to reduce humanitarian needs.

However, the question remains as to whether these newly formalized funding structures have resulted in the desired outcomes. As part of the Grand Bargain, several agreements were reached on increasing localization, such as investments in the capacity of local actors and a goal of providing 25% of funding to local actors by 2021. However, in 2021, only 3% of funding was provided directly to local actors (Robillard et al., 2021). The goal was therefore adjusted in the 2021 renewed version, the 'Grand Bargain 2.0', to an "increase" in the percentage of funding going to local actors, instead of an absolute number (OCHA, n.d.). This exemplifies that commitment on paper is not always enough to bring about absolute change. In this thesis I will therefore take a further look at the operationalization of the Triple Nexus, to analyze whether the theoretical commitment has translated into practical results.

2.2: Peace and security

One of the main defining aspects of the Triple Nexus is the inclusion of the peace pillar. As mentioned, there have been earlier theories linking humanitarian and development aspects, such as LRRD. There have also been instances in which certain aspects of security were included, such as certain conceptions of resilience. The Triple Nexus sets itself apart from these earlier examples by explicitly making peace a priority. However, the inclusion of the peace pillar begs both theoretical and practical questions. In this paragraph, I will therefore take a step back and analyze the academic literature on peace and security to provide a further illustration of the Triple Nexus and its goals.

2.2.1: Peace

"Peace" is a contested concept with a rich academic background of debates and theories. Therefore, even though peace is one of the central aspects of this thesis, I will not be able to include all different aspects of the debate on peace, nor do I aim to. Rather, I will provide an overview of the distinctions and points of contestation most relevant to the Triple Nexus.

Most debates on the meaning of peace ultimately refer to the distinction made by Galtung (1969) between positive and negative peace. In short, negative peace is merely the absence of personal violence, also formulated as 'freedom from'. Positive peace refers to the presence of conditions that allow prosperity, also known as 'freedom to' (Boersema, 2018). The Triple Nexus includes a peace component which can facilitate negative peace, but ultimately aims to reduce humanitarian needs through development. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Triple Nexus aims to achieve positive peace.

Three other recurring concepts in the peace debate are peacemaking ("the process of

bringing parties in conflict to an agreement through peaceful means”), peacekeeping (“the deployment of armed personnel to prevent the resumption of large-scale violence after a peace agreement”) and peacebuilding (“actions to strengthen and solidify peace”) (Autesserre, 2011).

However, these forms of conflict management are contested. For example, within the concept of peacebuilding, some ambiguity can be found. Barnett et al. (2007) raise the salient point that organizations slightly vary in their definitions of peacebuilding, as this is influenced by the organization’s core mandate. This means that actors in Nexus approaches have different ideas about what peacebuilding is and how it works, with their views being determined by individual, organizational, and national interests. Brown and Mena (2024) argue that these are not just conceptual issues, but that they translate into considerable differences in programming as well. De Coning (2018) extends this view, as he states:

-“(t)he era in which peacebuilding was synonymous with pursuing a liberal peace end-state is coming to an end, and the next phase in the transition seems to be characterized by a more open-ended or goal-free approach towards peacebuilding, where the focus is on the means or process, and the end-state is open to context-specific interpretations of peace”- (p. 301).

De Coning concludes that this new approach invests in the resilience of the local context, which is in line with the Triple Nexus approach.

Additionally, Clark (2011) concludes that a more bottom-up and locally supported approach is needed in the DRC. She argues that the peacebuilding mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, better known by its French acronym, MONUSCO, insufficiently addresses local views, needs and concerns. More information about MONUSCO will be provided in Chapter 3, but it is relevant to note here that MONUSCO is a stabilization mission with a peacebuilding mandate (United Nations, 2022).

Brown and Mena (2024) argue that peacekeeping is an elusive term as it can, and has been, interpreted in different ways. They argue that in recent years, the term peacekeeping has evolved from a linear understanding focused on democratic institutions, towards the context-specific, linear, and long-term idea of ‘sustaining peace’. The UN Secretary-General adopted this idea of sustaining peace in his 2018 ‘Report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace’, in which he states the following about the restructuring of the peace and security pillar:

- “[It] is aimed at prioritizing conflict prevention and sustaining peace, enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, overcoming fragmentation by moving towards a single integrated peace and security pillar and aligning the peace and security pillar more closely with the development and human rights pillars so as to foster greater coherence and cross-pillar coordination”- (United Nations Secretary-General, 2018, p.5.).

The UN therefore seems to prioritize peacekeeping but also includes security in the peace pillar. Security is another relevant, but broad concept. It will therefore be addressed in 2.2.2.

The theoretical broadness of the concept of peace is cause for concern among several academic authors (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Howe, 2019; Garcia, 2022), but also among executive actors such as OXFAM (Infante, 2021) and the Danish Red Cross (2020). They expect the ambiguity of the concept of peace to have several negative consequences. Thomas and VOICE (2019) indicate several concerns from NGOs related to the peace pillar in the Triple Nexus. First, they state that “There is neither a common definition or understanding of which elements of ‘peace’ are considered to be part of the triple nexus nor a real consensus on its added-value” (Thomas & VOICE, 2019, p.21). They argue that most NGOs working in developmental or humanitarian spheres generally have a bottom-up, community-based understanding of peace. Contrary, states are often much more focused on security, counter-terrorism and stabilization, which requires completely different measures and methods of operating, while also threatening humanitarian principles. This lack of clarity around the concept of peace therefore causes unease with NGOs, as it leads to questions about how peace will be operationalized. In this thesis, I will attempt to address some of these concerns by highlighting how the peace pillar is operationalized in the DRC.

2.2.2: Security and securitization

In his Agenda for Peace, Boutros-Ghali (1992) makes the following statement: “The concept of peace is easy to grasp; that of international security is more complex” (p. 202). He supports this claim by arguing that security is a broader issue than peace, as security can refer to a range of issues such as nuclear warfare, natural disasters and population growth (p 202-203). This broadness has resulted in a range of fields to be associated with security. For example, in the 1990s, the concept of human security emerged, broadening the traditional notions of security. Human security focuses on the positive link and co-dependence between development and security (King & Murray, 2001). Research has also been done on the relationship between security and several other concepts, such as post-colonialism (Barkawi & Laffey, 2006), resilience (Fjäder, 2014), and regionalism (Kelly, 2007).

An important distinction can be made between hard and soft security. Hard security is the traditional idea of armed security, achieved with military means. It is therefore often associated with military actors, such as the army (Gjörv, 2012). Soft security is non-military and relates more to the individual, for example economic, political, and social security (Vreÿ, 2005). Recently, a shift can be seen in donor security policy, in the form of a growing emphasis on hard security issues (Walton & Johnstone, 2023). Garcia (2022) argues that this is a step in the wrong direction:

-“security can only be achieved if the needs and grievances of communities are addressed by meeting their developmental and political needs while securing law and order within the framework of human rights. For that reason, there is an urgent need to reframe the concept of peace within international development and to steer away from securitised definitions, which in some cases have exacerbated conflict”- (Garcia, 2022, p. 329).

Garcia offers the solution of reframing security towards human security. He argues that this could help practitioners to see security as an organically integrated component within the Triple Nexus. This view is supported by Normal and Mikhael (2023), who conclude that “more consideration should be given to integrative models that embed conflict and peace

components *within* rather than *alongside* humanitarian, development, and resilience programs” (p. 260).

Another important distinction is the one between security and securitization. The term securitization is used by scholars to describe how a security value is added to thus far unrelated fields, allowing the use of extraordinary measures (Brown & Grävingholt, 2016). It therefore is a critical way of assessing any policy that is framed as ‘not normal’. Wilkinson (2015) concludes that “The framing of an issue as a matter of security is always a political choice, and designating something in these terms has significant implications for how the issue is managed” (p. 43).

This is also true for the field of foreign aid. Due to the increase in contracted crises (such as in the Balkan), new approaches to aid operations were necessary. According to Brown and Grävingholt (2016), “aid instruments became increasingly intertwined with complex international operations that addressed development and security simultaneously” (p.1.). This can become problematic when it causes donors to prioritize security and stability over human and sustainable development goals (Olivié & Pérez, 2021). With the combination of the humanitarian, development, and peace pillar in the Triple Nexus, the question arises how this potential pitfall will be avoided. As explained in 2.1.3, the Triple Nexus is largely dependent on donors for funding. Donors have their own interests, and with the ongoing trend of securitization of foreign aid, this makes the Triple Nexus susceptible to being influenced by donor policy.

2.3: Critical considerations

The introduction of the Triple Nexus, New Way of Working and Grand Bargain came with a lot of promises, but also prompted questions. This paragraph contains an overview of the points of concern raised by both academic and policy actors about the Triple Nexus in general, but specifically those related to the security pillar of the Triple Nexus.

2.3.1: Humanitarian principles

One of the main points of concern against the Triple Nexus, as well as earlier integrated approaches, is the fear that humanitarian principles will be compromised. Traditionally, humanitarian actors play an important role in aid and crisis response. Their work is often based on humanitarian principles that serve as the foundation for their way of working. Two such principles are often discussed in relation to the Triple Nexus: neutrality and impartiality (Brown et al., 2024). The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (1986) defines neutrality as follows:

-“It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.”- (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 1986, p.5)

Impartiality is defined in the following way:

-“In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or

ideological nature.”- (International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 1986, p.5)

These principles form the basis of the needs-based “humanitarian space” in which humanitarian actors operate, which is fundamentally different from the long-term, political, rights-based development approaches (Lie, 2020). In integrated approaches, such as the double nexus, these two contrasting ways of working are mixed, which creates tension. With the introduction of the peace pillar in Triple Nexus approaches, another different set of motivations is added to the mix. As the Triple Nexus calls for more collaboration across the three pillars, it is assumed that concessions will have to be made to come to some sort of middle ground. This is a major point of concern for humanitarian actors, who fear that aid becomes more politicized and strays further from the principles it was based on. This becomes a critical problem if it undermines the legitimacy of humanitarian actors.

Tronc et al. (2019) summarize this concern aptly:

“Disaggregating humanitarian action as much as possible from development and peacebuilding work, conceptually and operationally, can be crucial to local acceptance of humanitarian actors, and hence, to programmatic effectiveness. [...] The “triple nexus” can only succeed if peacebuilding-development-humanitarian linkages do not lead to the perception, or the reality, that humanitarian action has been subsumed by a political agenda”. (p. 27)

An important note to make is the role perceptions play here. Guinote (2018) notes that for humanitarian organizations, being perceived as neutral is critical in building trust with local communities. Crucially, the findings of Tronc et al. (2019) confirm the importance of the perceptions of the local population. They argue that in the case of Mali, humanitarian impartiality was questioned, and that there was a sense that the international assistance project was driven by self-interest, rather than local needs.

Brown et al. (2024) also found that neutrality and impartiality are important values for humanitarian actors and that organizations struggle with how to safeguard these values in Triple Nexus approaches. However, they concluded that explicitly defining every Nexus component ensures more clarity on how the organization will stand up for its principles. They also note that most respondents prefer not to compromise on neutrality and impartiality, but also that a principled approach should not stand in the way of helping those in need. Based on this, Brown et al. conclude that actors planning to work in Triple Nexus approaches should define how they are planning to engage in peace activities, as this would allow them to also showcase how they are planning on safeguarding their principles.

An interesting comparison can be made to the view of Macrae (2012), who called for an integrated resilience approach in 2012 before the emergence of the Triple Nexus. She argued that the best course of action in resilience approaches should be determined by the context, with some crises demanding a more humanitarian based approach excluding local governments, while other situations might allow for developmental opportunities. Her claim is that “an integrated, resilience-led approach to vulnerability does not mean dumping humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality. Rather it means protecting them and using them when doing so is in the interests of the most vulnerable and at risk populations”

(Macrae, 2012, p.9). This view is reflected by DuBois (2020), who argues that the Triple Nexus should not be considered as a threat to humanitarian principles, but rather as an opportunity to extend those.

It can thus be concluded that there are two arguments regarding humanitarian principles in integrated approaches. The first is the concern that collaborating with actors who work in different ways would compromise humanitarian principles, thus undermining their legitimacy or their *perceived* legitimacy.

2.3.2: *Functional concerns*

Another reason for actors to be hesitant about collaborating with other pillars is the fact that the different organizations have fundamentally different ways of working. Not only in terms of priorities and principles, but also in terms of timeframes, approaches and funding streams. Humanitarian organizations inherently work in response to disasters. This requires them to work through immediate responses, which do not need to be supported by long-term plans but rather are based on speed and effectiveness. Projects lasting three to six months are therefore the norm. Development projects usually run longer, often several years, while peace projects can have even longer-term goals (Brown & Mena, 2024). This discrepancy can create tension when results are expected or even demanded.

Another point of concern is that several humanitarian and development actors, as well as local actors, lack the mandate and/or expertise to incorporate peace into their work (Norman & Mikhael, 2023). According to Garcia (2022), this creates the risk of overburdening local actors and diminishing the effectiveness of projects, as it would mean that practitioners would have to incorporate more considerations into their already complicated and demanding work.

2.3.3: *Funding*

As mentioned, the Triple Nexus was accompanied by financial promises in the form of the Grand Bargain. Various important donors promised to increase their foreign aid, as well as changing their existing funding structures to become more flexible. However, questions remain about the financial side of the Triple Nexus. Brown and Mena (2024) argue that the existing funding modalities still do not allow the flexibility and time planning required for the Nexus to thrive. The problem that remains is that donors traditionally work in silos, meaning separate departments, for the different areas of aid. When these departments fund a project or organization, the money is often earmarked specifically for this purpose, as there is a certain budget per department. Transferring funds from project to another is often not allowed, if it means that the money funded by department X (for example humanitarian aid) is spent on an area that falls under the responsibilities of department Y (for example development aid).

As the Triple Nexus aims to remove the borders between the different areas of aid, this calls for more flexible funding tools (Howe, 2019). Nguya et al. (2020) argue that “flexible, multi-year, country-level pooled funding should be considered as a means to further break down sector-based silos” (p. 477). Pooled funding is described by the UN as follows:

-“A pooled fund is designed to support a clearly defined programmatic purpose and results framework through contributions received from more than one contributor.

Financing is co-mingled, not earmarked, to a specific UN organization and held by a UN fund administrator”- (UN MPTF Office, n.d, Design and administration section).

This supports the notion that flexibility is possible, but organizations should carefully consider and define how they will incorporate the different pillars of the Nexus.

2.3.4: Localization

Cochrane and Wilson (2023) name localization as a defining part of the third generation of nexus thinking, which started during the 2000s. They state that localization was mainly regarded as a critique of the work and effectiveness of humanitarian and development actors in local contexts, rather than being incorporated into Nexus thinking. However, localization has become a key focus in the Triple Nexus. Barakat and Milton (2020) conclude that concerns about localization are present in all pillars of the Triple Nexus, but differences exist in what is understood with this term. The authors state that therefore, “the knowledge of local context is a crucial aspect of understanding, resolving, and transforming conflict” (p. 159).

Norman and Mikhael (2023) come to a similar conclusion, stating that community-led processes are crucial for improving resilience and peacebuilding across Triple Nexus programming. Brugger et al. (2022) argue that localization is necessary to effectively operationalize the Triple Nexus. Nonetheless, they state that currently, local actors are not able to convey their local knowledge and flexibility, as international actors and donors are often negatively prejudiced towards local actors.

An important factor that partially determines the level of localization, is the attitude of the national government. Brown and Mena (2024) argue that the capability and interest of a national government play a significant part in achieving positive sustainable societal change. This leads to the expectation that the Triple Nexus will be more effective if the national government in the DRC is allowed and able to play a leading role in it.

Another way of looking at localization is by looking at how the local context impacts the work of actors. Local political and security issues can have a massive influence on the degree to which implementing actors can carry out the measures they want. Norman and Mikhael (2023) conclude that in Myanmar peacebuilding activities were virtually impossible, as the government prohibits the discussion of conflict, and movement is highly restricted. Garcia (2022) uses this same case to argue for adaptive programming, meaning context-dependent programming. This means that implementing actors should tailor their approaches to the context. This means that not every context demands the same level of involvement for every pillar. In some cases it might even mean that one pillar should be omitted from an approach if it carries too much risk, such as was the case with peacebuilding in Myanmar. If the context changes at a later stage, then a new assessment can be made. However, this requires donors to provide flexible funding, rather than earmarked funds based upon project descriptions set in stone.

2.4: Conclusion and expectations

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated the theoretical background of the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus. It has shown that the idea of ‘linking thinking’ is not new, as well as explaining how this way of thinking and the related concepts have evolved over time. Next, the emergence of the Triple Nexus was discussed. As one of the key defining features of the

Triple Nexus is the inclusion of the peace pillar, an overview of the academic peace was presented. Finally, I provided an overview of several critical considerations regarding the Triple Nexus.

The theories and debates presented in this theoretical framework help to understand the background of the Triple Nexus, as well as the challenges indicated by academic and policy literature. This will serve as the foundation for the rest of the research, as the theoretical expectations will be weighed against the practical results. As such, this chapter served as a first step towards answering the research question of how the peace pillar was operationalized in the Triple Nexus, and which challenges arose.

3: Methods

In this chapter, I will describe the methods used during the research for this thesis. First, I will further illustrate the case of the DRC, which is central to this thesis. The chapter further contains a research design, information about the data collection procedure and the respondents, the interview design, and the data analysis. As such, the chapter aims to provide a complete overview of the research methodology that this thesis is based on.

3.1: Research design

This thesis takes the form of a case study based on qualitative research. The case is the Triple Nexus approach in the DRC, which I researched through semi-structured interviews with 49 relevant national and international actors.

3.1.1: Case selection

The DRC is an interesting and relevant case for researching the Triple Nexus. The country faces an extremely complex and longstanding history of conflicts with armed groups. This stems from the Second Congo War, also nicknamed 'Africa's First World War', which started in 1997 (Mobekk, 2009) and is widely considered to be the deadliest conflict since the second World War with an estimated three million casualties (Center for Preventive Action, 2024). Supported by neighboring regimes, a rebel group led by Laurent-Desire Kabila overthrew the previous government in a violent manner (Reyntjens, 1999). This prompted the UN to launch a peacekeeping mission in 1999 called MONUC (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo). MONUC initially aimed to ensure that all parties adhered to ceasefire agreements (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-a).

However, after the war ended in 2002, many conflicts with armed groups continued to plague the country. Therefore, the mandate of MONUC was extended to focus on the protection of civilians. MONUC was praised for its role in disarming and demobilizing former combatants and the organization of parliamentary elections, but has also been heavily criticized for failing to protect Congolese citizens (Koko, 2011; Whittle, 2015). In addition, the UN was also condemned for adopting a robust peacekeeping mandate when there was in fact not a clear peace to keep due to the amount of conflict in the DRC (Karlsrud, 2015).

Against a backdrop of persisting rebel violence and pressure from the government to reduce the mission's scale, it was decided in 2010 that MONUC would be succeeded by MONUSCO, with the mandate of the mission changing from peacekeeping to stabilization (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.-b.; Nagel et al., 2021). This change was accompanied by the introduction of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB), which was mandated to actively establish peace and neutralize armed forces (Tull, 2016). The switch from peacekeeping to peacemaking was controversial. As Whittle (2015, p.845) argues: "While stating an intention to avoid any conflict with the "principles of peacekeeping," the Security Council has in fact seriously undermined many of the protections traditionally available to peacekeepers".

This has caused several concerns. First, it is argued that the FIB compromises the neutrality of the UN (Nagel et al., 2021). Second, there is a fear of retaliatory strikes by armed groups

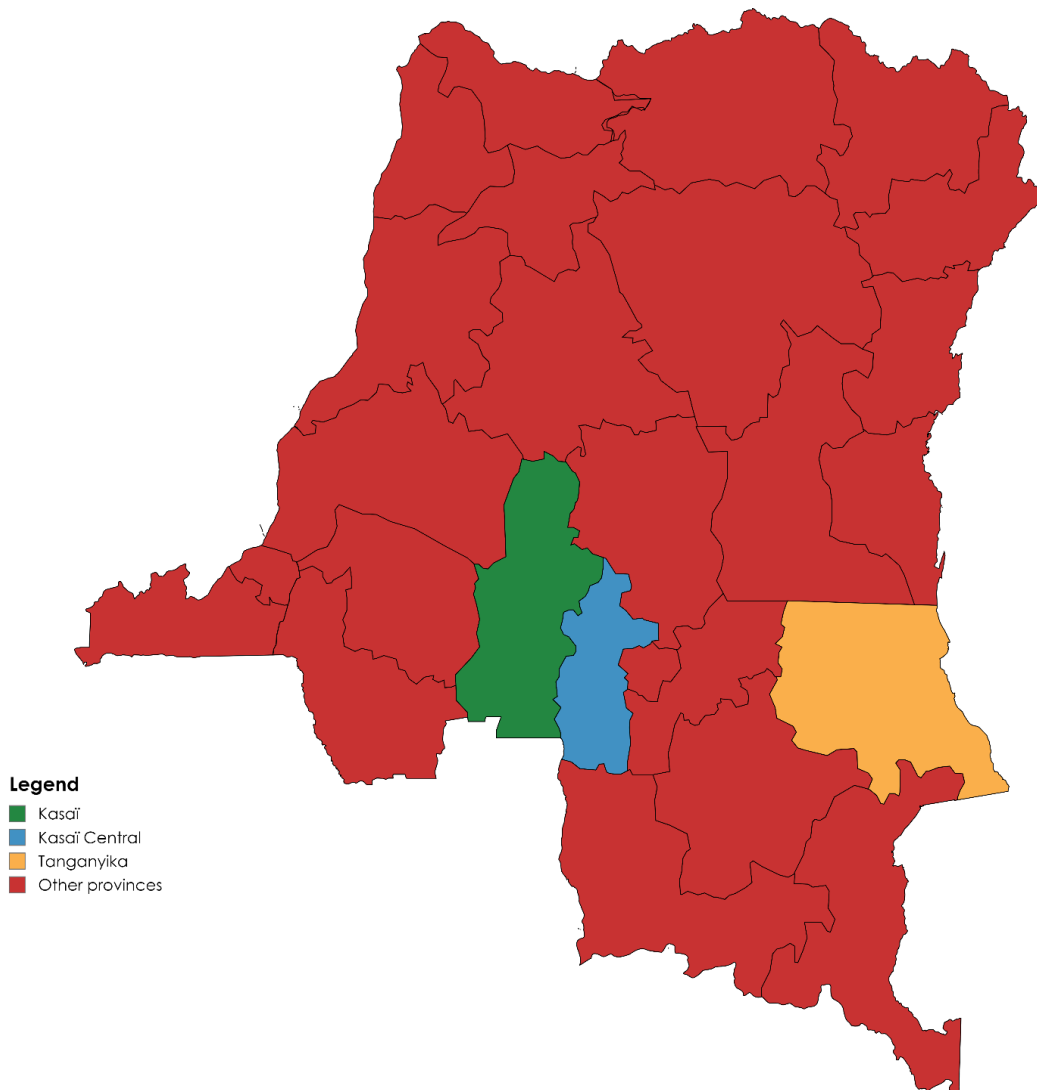
against the brigade or against civilians, and the fear that this approach is not able to address regional issues (Doss, 2014). In addition, it is argued that the FIB monopolizes key resources, while MONUSCO was the largest and most expensive UN mission in the world when it was introduced (Kjeksrud & Ravndal, 2011). Finally, the FIB's collaboration with the Congolese national army (FARDC), which is reported to have been responsible for an estimated 64 percent of human rights abuses in 2016, is likely to have damaged the image of MONUSCO among the local population.

In addition, despite the efforts of both UN missions, the human rights situation in the DRC remains dire. On the 10th of June 2024, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator Bruno Lemarquis released a press release voicing his grave concerns over the escalating violence in eastern DRC that has resulted in 7.3 million displaced people in the country (Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2024). The spike in violence coincides with the withdrawal of MONUSCO in eastern DRC, which was requested by the national government of President Félix Tshisekedi. The government accused MONUSCO of not being aggressive enough in battling the March-23 Movement (M23) rebel group in eastern DRC and therefore requested a takeover of the UN peacekeeping bases in the region (Nantulya, 2024). However, since the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping forces, the military posts have fallen into disarray (Nantulya, 2024).

The fact that the humanitarian situation in the DRC continues to worsen, despite the UN having active missions in the country since 1997, leads me to conclude that the current approach is ineffective in addressing the structural issues in the DRC. This conclusion is shared by other authors. For example, Russo (2021) concludes the following about the UN missions in the DRC: “[T]hey have not been effective overall in consolidating peace because they fail to address drivers of conflict and have not been sufficiently connected to a broader political strategy”. Similarly, Boutellis (2016) argues that a new approach is needed that focuses on long-term governance and collaboration between local and international actors.

As explained in Chapter 2, the Triple Nexus emerged in 2016 as a new theoretical approach aiming to reduce humanitarian needs. Recognizing the complexities that the DRC faced, the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) started discussions on the implementation of the Triple Nexus in the DRC in 2018. Specifically, the provinces of Kasai, Kasai Central, and Tanganyika were selected as pilot zones, due to an improvement in the security situation, and because the withdrawal of the UN peacebuilding mission MONUSCO from these areas meant that the UN had to transfer responsibilities to other actors in the area (IASC Results Group 4, 2021). As can be seen in Figure 2, the pilot provinces are located in the southern and eastern parts of the DRC.

Figure 2



Triple Nexus Pilot Provinces (Source: own creation through Mapchart.net).

Remarkably, little more information can be found online about the Triple Nexus in the DRC. This points towards an extensive gap in both academic and policy research. As the Triple Nexus is a relatively new approach, it is valuable to test its impact. The research in this thesis is exploratory, as it sets out to test this new theory, with several uncertainties that require better understanding before definitive conclusions can be drawn. This thesis adds to this goal by providing insight into the Triple Nexus based on the individual motivations of respondents.

3.1.2: Data description

I was able to use raw data that was gathered as part of a research project on the Triple Nexus by my thesis supervisor, Haley Swedlund. She and Marie-Eve Desrosiers were the Principal Investigators (PI) for a project funded by the Canadian Department of National Defence, assisted by research coordinator and main interviewer Samiratou Dipmama.

Between August and December 2022, they carried out a total of 66 semi-structured interviews with 49 relevant actors in the DRC. Some respondents were interviewed twice, either to ask follow-up questions or when not all questions could be answered in one interview due to time restrictions. I was enlisted to assist with the coding process, and in exchange I was allowed to use the data for this thesis.

Using interviews designed and conducted by other researchers meant I had no say in which questions were asked and who the respondents were. However, the benefits far outweigh these disadvantages. The respondents are all highly relevant actors who at the time were operating at the very heart of Triple Nexus programming in the DRC, which makes their opinions and experiences extremely valuable and crucial for Triple Nexus research. Personally, I probably would not have been able to obtain this information, as it is unlikely that I would have been able to reach these respondents. I also would not have been able to conduct as many interviews, due to a limited time frame. The data I used for this research is therefore of a far higher quality than if I had attempted to collect my own data.

There are several reasons why, if I had not been able to use this data, I still would have selected semi-structured interviews as my data collection method. The Triple Nexus is a new integrated approach, in which actors play a major role. As explained in the theoretical framework, many issues have been theorized and/or found in the field, which need to be addressed. Through semi-structured interviews, it is possible to directly ask actors about their opinions and experiences, while also allowing them the opportunity to share their points of view that are not captured in the questions. This allows for insight into actors' direct experiences in the Nexus, which enables me to draw conclusions on the workings of this new approach.

The theoretical framework in the previous chapter is based on literature research. While this is not the main data collection method, it was still important to familiarize myself with the existing literature on the topics of conflict, aid, peace, and the Triple Nexus itself. This enabled me to have a good understanding of the important themes and points of concern related to the Nexus, therefore enabling me to grasp the context of the interviews.

3.2: Data collection procedure and participants

3.2.1: Data collection procedure

The respondents were chosen based on a combination of snowball sampling and expert selection (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The researchers took different Nexus stakeholder groups as starting points for selecting the relevant actors active in the Triple Nexus approach in the DRC. For example, the Nexus Donor Group (NDG) was one of the stakeholder groups. This group consists of several donors, such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and Norway. Several representatives were chosen from this group and interviewed. Next, it was assessed which other actors within the category, in this case donors, were also relevant. In this case, the US, the UK, and France were indicated as key actors within the donor group and therefore were included in the sampling. In addition, some respondents named individuals they believed to be crucial actors in the Triple Nexus programming in the DRC. The researchers contacted those people to see if they wanted to contribute to the research. Through this form of snowball sampling, the experiences and contacts of the local experts were used to expand the sample with relevant respondents.

All respondents were given an extensive consent form (Appendix B). This form contains information about the purpose of the study, the acknowledgment of risks and benefits, and the data conversation process. In addition, the form contains a confidentiality clause, which reads:

- “I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for academic publications and that only the researchers and research assistants will have access to my interview material. If transcribers are hired to transcribe my interview, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.” The form states that respondents will standardly be treated anonymously unless they choose to be named in reports. Respondents were also given the option to consent to the audio of the interview being recorded.”- (Confidentiality agreement, Appendix B)

The interviews were mostly conducted between August 29 and November 29, 2022. The interviews mostly took place in person, at a location of the respondent’s choice to make sure they were as comfortable as possible. To protect anonymity, the consent form reminds respondents that if the interview is conducted at or near their office, colleagues might be aware of their participation. The interviews that could not take place in person due to scheduling issues were done over the phone. The interviews were mainly conducted in French, as this is the official government language in DRC and the main language of the researcher who conducted the interviews. Eight interviews were conducted in English, per the preference of the respondent. The interviews in French were translated into English by DeepL, as I don’t speak French. Several of these translations were checked for quality by a researcher fluent in both French and English, who concluded the quality of the translations was high. Therefore, I believe little to no information was lost in translation.

Some respondents were selected for follow-up interviews. In some cases, this was to allow them to answer any questions that were skipped in the first interviews due to time limitations. Most cases, however, were respondents who mentioned they were available for follow-up interviews. In this case, several new questions were asked, which are described in 3.3.

3.2.2: Participants

In Table 1 below, the number of respondents per different background is visualized. The table shows that local and government representatives are underrepresented in the data. This can partially be explained by the fact that fewer of these actors are part of the Nexus stakeholder groups. The researchers tried to compensate for this by reaching out to them directly, but this unfortunately did not generate many responses.

Table 1

Background	Number of respondents
<i>International Governmental Organization (IGO)</i>	16
<i>Donors</i>	13
<i>International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO)</i>	11
<i>Government</i>	5
<i>Local Non-Governmental Organization (LNGO)</i>	2
<i>National Civil Society Organization (CSO)</i>	2
<i>Total</i>	49

Number of respondents per type of actor (Source: Interviews with Triple Nexus Actors, Kinshasa, DRC, 2022).

As the Triple Nexus calls for closer collaboration between the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars, it is relevant to note the background of the respondents. In Table 2, an overview is made of the sector type of the respondents. The category 'Mixed' contains both respondents who are from a multi-mandated organization (such as INGO Oxfam, which works in both humanitarian and development sectors, and arguably even in the peace sector) and respondents without a clear sector in their job description (such as head of embassy). The number of respondents working in the development sector is lower than the other two pillars, but this is compensated by the 'mixed' category, which contains many respondents working partially in development.

Table 2

Sector	Number of respondents
<i>Humanitarian</i>	11
<i>Development</i>	8
<i>Peace</i>	14
<i>Mixed</i>	16
<i>Total</i>	49

Number of respondents per sector (Source: Interviews with Triple Nexus Actors, Kinshasa, DRC, 2022).

3.3: Interview design

The interview guide can be found in the Appendix C. As I used existing data, I could not influence the interview design. Within the interview protocol, four questions asked were particularly relevant for my research:

1. From your vantage point, which type of security actors should be involved in Triple Nexus programming and why?
 - a. [Do the types of (security) actors that should be involved vary across the three provinces where the Triple Nexus is being implemented?]
2. Research in other settings has tended to show that security actors are less integrated into Triple Nexus initiatives. Is this the case in DRC? If so, why? If not, why not?
3. What is the greatest contribution security actors can make to Triple Nexus work in DRC and how can it be enhanced?
4. Do you have concerns about the greater integration of security actors in Triple Nexus work?

These questions provide insight into the level of involvement of different types of security actors, as well as possible arguments against their involvement that the respondents might be aware of or might have themselves. This is relevant for my research, as it addresses the distinction between hard and soft security actors to analyze a possible difference in perceptions. My one point of critique is that the second question is somewhat guiding. By stating that research shows that security actors are less integrated, the respondent might search for reasons to conform to this trend that the question introduces. If the question had been asked in a more neutral manner, such as “How do you perceive the level of integration of security actors in the DRC?”, this bias could have been reduced.

In the follow-up interviews, the following questions related to the security pillar of the Triple Nexus were asked:

1. Do you think the security players were consciously or unconsciously sidelined in the programming of the Triple Nexus in the DRC? Why do you think this was the case? Do you think this is specific to the DRC?
2. How do you explain the fears of certain groups of players in the DRC who are unwilling to work with hard security players? Where do these fears come from?
3. In your opinion, should certain types of hard security players be involved in Triple Nexus programming, and under what conditions and/or at what levels?

These questions delve deeper into any objections actors might have against the involvement of security players, as well as respondents’ own opinions on this matter. The researchers responsible for making this interview guide decided to ask these questions after they noticed that the questions asked about security during the original interview were often not answered extensively. This can partially be explained by the fact that the security-related questions were asked at the end of the interview. This meant that respondents were more tired than they were at the start of the interview, and that in some cases there was no time to ask or extensively answer the last questions. This is likely to have negatively affected the data somewhat, due to respondent fatigue effects. However, as the interviews usually were about an hour long, the fatigue effect is likely not to be too severe (Jeong et al., 2023).

3.4: Data analysis methods

The raw data, consisting of transcribed interview recordings or summaries, was put in the coding software program AtlasTI. Due to miscommunication, for some interviews only the summaries were translated when the full transcription of the audio was available. This means that I coded more summaries of interviews than entire interviews, which possibly

caused some interpreter bias. However, the summaries were very extensive and contained a lot of information, which makes them still valuable and reliable.

I coded the interviews based on a codebook that was made in accordance with members of the research team that conducted the interviews, based on their expectations resulting from their knowledge and research into the Triple Nexus. The codebook consisted of six main code groups: province, type of organization, implementation, coordination, localization, and security. I coded the entire documents, so not only the security questions that were most relevant to my own research.

I coded the interviews based on this codebook, so based on selective coding. After I coded five interviews, I asked my supervisor (and PI of the research project that the data was originally collected for) Haley Swedlund to read and check my coding to see if she agreed with my choices. Based on this conversation, we refined the codebook by adding the codes “Comparison to previous projects in DRC” and “Comparison to other country contexts”. I used this updated codebook in the remainder of the selective coding process. During the coding, I kept notes of the most important features of the interview in an Excel sheet. For every coding category, I noted down important or remarkable arguments, quotes, or phrases from every interview. This created a summary of all interviews, which provided me with oversight and allowed me to draw conclusions.

3.5: Limitations and reflexivity

As outlined above, the chosen methodology for this thesis has many advantages, but also several limitations. As the interview data was already collected, I had no say in what questions were asked, how many respondents were selected, and what follow-up questions were asked. However, I believe the data to be of such high quality in terms of the respondents’ level of expertise that it makes for an extremely suitable basis for research. The number and the experience of the respondents on the subject make for robust findings. The questions are based on literature and are fitting to the goals of this research.

When doing research, it is important to reflect on one’s positionality. In the case of the Triple Nexus, or the topic of foreign aid as a whole, a main aspect of positionality is the relation between Western and local actors. Because most donor countries or institutions are Western, their voice in the debate is ever-present. However, the importance of local and regional actors in the process of aid implementation cannot be overstated. This research has taken a step towards including their voices through interviews with local actors. However, as can be seen in Table 1 showing the number of respondents per code category, their number is underrepresented. This means that a slight Western bias may exist in the data. Nonetheless, I believe this research is still relevant and valuable as it contributes to a relatively new field and gathers insight into salient issues such as aid effectiveness.

4: Results and discussion

In this chapter, I will present the results gathered from the semi-structured interview data. The chapter features several findings that are presented in three themes (4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). To illustrate my findings, I used quotes from the interview data. To protect the anonymity of the respondents, I used footnotes that describe the respondent without compromising their identity. Chapter 5 will further reflect on these findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

4.1: Hard and soft security actors

One of the main findings is that the distinction between hard and soft security actors is very important to respondents. In the current situation, primarily soft security actors are involved in Triple Nexus programming in the DRC. This mainly concerns INGOs and CSOs working in local peacebuilding measures, such as mediation and conflict prevention. This can be attributed to the fact that the pilot zones in the DRC were selected because of their post-conflict nature. Conflict resolution and peacemaking were therefore not seen as necessary parts of the Triple Nexus. One respondent explains this as follows: “the peace grand P is not included in the triple nexus because it is a country-level process and involves crises such as armed group crises and no NGO or IGO is going to get involved in such a crisis”¹. This reflects the vision that the current version of the Triple Nexus is not interested in addressing hard security issues. Another respondent reiterates this, stating that “when we talk about peace, it’s peacebuilding, the peacekeeping actually has been put aside. For us, there are no weapons in the Nexus”².

Another reason for not including hard security actors in the Triple Nexus is that hard security actors have a bad reputation in the DRC, as they are reported to face issues such as corruption and a history of human rights violations. Respondents for example mention that “security forces always account for a large percentage of human rights violators”³, that there is “a lot of harassment from the men in uniform”⁴, “there are a lot of structural challenges again within, within the FARDC within the police, [...] there hasn’t been a justice system that works very well. So there are officers who have done damage or abuse”⁵. These quotes show several examples of concerns about hard security actors voiced by respondents.

Crucially, respondents differentiate between state and non-state hard security actors, with the police and the national army which is known as FARDC (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo) belonging to the first group and armed forces such as the rebel M23 movement to the latter. Nearly all respondents argue that non-state hard security actors should not be included in the Triple Nexus. One respondent, for instance, fears that the local population will lose faith in the Nexus if there is collaboration with armed groups: “we must avoid being seen in front of civil society as collaborating with armed groups, especially in programming”⁶. Another raises the point that the government also sees this as a red line: “any attempt to take on armed groups on the discussion table, the

¹ Interview with bilateral donor official, 12-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

² Interview with two INGO officials, 09-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³ Interview with bilateral donor official, 31-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴ Follow-up interview with CSO official, 04-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁵ Interview with INGO official, 18-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁶ Interview with INGO official, 03-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

government will be resistant”⁷. This does not mean that respondents do not want to engage with armed groups at all, but the consensus is that this should be done outside of the Triple Nexus. For example, one respondent argues: “the demobilization and de-radicalization actors responsible for dialogue with armed groups (a government program that reports directly to the presidency) do not have to be involved in the Triple Nexus”⁸.

Respondents are more divided when it comes to state-level hard security actors. On the one hand, a respondent argues that it is reasonable not to include the police and army at this stage, as “they have [a] bad reputation and are not very professional”⁹. On the other hand there are respondents who are in favor of including state-level hard security actors in the Triple Nexus: “The security services, notably the FARDC and the police [...] should also be involved to some extent”¹⁰.

4.2: Should hard security actors be involved in the Triple Nexus approach in the DRC?

While most respondents agree on the fact that the level of involvement of security actors is as described above, there is less unity in their opinions on whether hard security actors should be more involved. Here there are three main views regarding the level to which hard security actors should be involved in the Triple Nexus.

The first group is a group of respondents who argue that hard security actors should not be incorporated into the Triple Nexus. Their main argument here is that the goals of hard security actors do not match Triple Nexus’s goals. They state that hard security actors aim to protect the population from external threats, whereas the Triple Nexus aims to reduce local humanitarian needs. Therefore, they argue that “this mandate is not compatible with the nexus”¹¹. Another argument used by this group of respondents is that the state-level hard security actors will be fed relevant information by representatives of the state who do have a seat at the Triple Nexus discussion table. Therefore, there is simply no need for the hard security actors to be present at the discussion table themselves.

The second point of view is that hard security actors should not be incorporated into the heart of the Triple Nexus approaches because their involvement would be at odds with humanitarian principles. As mentioned in Chapter 2, humanitarian actors often base their work on principles such as neutrality, impartiality, and independence. This is given most often as the reason for the hard security actors not being present in the Triple Nexus. For example, a respondent argues:

-[“W]e still have a tension between the humanitarian community and those working in the security sector because of the risk of humanitarian actors being associated with armed groups, because of the trust they hold with beneficiaries. That is something that can hinder dialogue in the nexus”-¹².

⁷ Interview with INGO official, 10-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁸ Interview with bilateral donor official, 12-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁹ Interview with bilateral donor official, 11-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁰ Interview with international governmental official, 10-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹¹ Follow-up interview with NGO official, 09-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹² Interview with bilateral donor official, 29-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

According to respondents, the role of perceptions is crucial here. A respondent from an international governmental background mentions the following about humanitarian actors: “To gain access to populations, they will work with security actors in the field, but they don't want to be seen as favoring one group over another”¹³. As another respondent puts it:

- “[T]he thing that is, that is, that is fundamental for all actors, whether humanitarian, development or peace, is our reputation with the communities or populations, the citizens with whom we work. So for us, that's the most important thing. And if we lose that trust, we have to leave, there's nothing and there's nothing more”-¹⁴.

In addition, several respondents mention a growing mistrust of the West in Africa, which is strengthened by anti-UN or MONUSCO feelings: “humanitarians do not want MONUSCO to participate in their structure because MONUSCO has particular relations with the police, army, especially in a context of growing anti-MONUSCO sentiment in DRC”¹⁵.

Especially in eastern DRC, negative perceptions of the UN are common, which can have severe consequences:

- “For example, now with all of the anti-MONUSCO sentiments that are moving around in the east, if someone like UNICEF, who provides humanitarian aid is associated with MONUSCO, and therefore no longer can provide humanitarian aid because people have now anti UN sentiments, then they cannot do their job, even though they are not associated with the military. But by being associated with MONUSCO, they get associated with the military or they get associated with the conflict, and they can no longer do their job. So they need to stay away from these security actors to make sure that they are seen as neutral by the population.”-¹⁶

This example shows how crucial it is for humanitarian actors not to be associated with security actors and therefore, how the fear of not being perceived as neutral can impede collaboration with security actors. Another respondent puts it even more concretely: “It is mainly the controversy surrounding MONUSCO in the DRC that could explain this sidelining of security actors in the nexus.”¹⁷

Third and finally, there is a group of actors who acknowledge that there is indeed tension between humanitarian principles and the inclusion of hard security actors into Triple Nexus approaches. Nonetheless, this group is of the opinion that it is worth exploring if there are ways to collaborate because of the potential benefits they see. These benefits include the fact that hard security actors could provide security intelligence, escort aid workers and civilians through unsafe areas, and support stabilizing areas plagued by conflict. Another argument is that the Nexus facilitates a way of collaboration that does not undermine principles: “in the nexus approach, humanitarian action is not systematically diluted. Each pillar works according to its own principles, and then works together”¹⁸.

¹³ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 27-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁴ Follow-up interview with international non-governmental official, 18-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁵ Follow-up interview with bilateral donor official, 08-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁶ Follow-up interview with bilateral donor official, 08-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁷ Follow-up interview with two international non-governmental officials, 15-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

¹⁸ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 04-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

An important note that many respondents make is that the role of the hard security actors does not have to be extensive and should be determined by the local security context. This means that in high-conflict areas, such as certain areas of the Tanganyika province, their role could be more extensive, possibly including peacemaking activities and stabilization. In areas with a lower level of conflict, the engagement of hard security actors should be limited. An example provided by respondents is the province of Kasai, where there is a low level of conflict but there are high humanitarian needs due to a food security crisis. Here, the role of hard security actors should be minimized, to avoid the risk of causing grievances with the local population.

Another condition named by respondents in this group is that investments should be made to address the issues with state-level hard security actors. As one respondent states “the Congolese army and police are part of the violence [...]. As long as the police and army are not paid well, they will continue to be part of the problem”¹⁹. Another respondent states “we can engage with hard-security actors (police, FARDC, MONUSCO) in enhancing their capacity building so that they can engage with the community in a more peaceful way; they should come and learn how to be part of the system in a positive way”. This group of respondents, therefore, sees opportunities for the inclusion of state-level hard security actors, but with the prerequisite of the current structural issues being addressed: “The presence of the security apparatus (especially the police) of the state in the areas must be strengthened”²⁰.

However, there is no clear vision of what these investments would look like. As one respondent notes, donors rarely finance hard security actors.²¹ Some bilateral donors, such as France, Belgium and Great Britain do have Security Sector Reform (SSR) training programs, but they are not in the radar of the Nexus.²² Ensuring donor commitment to hard security reform therefore is a challenge that still needs to be addressed.

4.3: Localization

As explained in Chapter 2, localization is a somewhat awkward aspect of the Triple Nexus. While it is often explained as being a crucial part, it can also be considered more of a logical consequence of the Triple Nexus rather than an absolute goal on its own. However, two main takeaways on localization can be deduced from the interview data: the importance of local context and the question of who takes the lead in the Nexus.

4.3.1: The importance of local context

When looking at localization on a provincial level, several aspects become apparent from the data. First, respondents distinguish different characteristics for each of the three pilot provinces in the DRC (Kasai, Kasai Central, and Tanganyika), which results in different levels of Triple Nexus progress.

Kasai is generally seen as the province in which the circumstances for the Triple Nexus are the best. This is in part thanks to the provincial government, as described by one respondent

¹⁹ Interview with bilateral donor official, 22-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁰ Interview with international governmental official, 30-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²¹ Follow-up interview with bilateral donor official, 08-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²² Interview with international governmental official, 22-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

as “the governor of Kasai has taken ownership of the nexus”²³. Another respondent accurately summarizes the emerging good practices in Kasai: “you have a joint analysis, a coordination mechanism in place, an aligned joint strategy, an increasing in programming as a side-effect of the nexus approach”²⁴. Also, “the coordination structures are functional in Kasai”²⁵, which creates a good environment for working with external partners and actors, such as donors and international organizations.

However, this timid optimism is restricted to Triple Nexus progress. Respondents express concerns about several other issues, for example “at the level of food security, Kasai is not very developed [...]. It is the same for basic services as well”²⁶ and “in Kasai there is very little funding”²⁷. This reiterates that the Triple Nexus is not a solution that ends all issues of poverty and humanitarian needs. Rather, it is a way of working in coordination with different actors.

Kasai Central made less Triple Nexus progress than Kasai, according to the respondents at the time of the interviews. Still, they were generally quite positive. Several respondents note that there is a provincial development plan in place, as well as a peace task force, which helps with effective planning. An impeding factor was a change within the provincial government:

-“But the government in place with which we had started the nexus in Central Kasai was changed during the elections of May 6, 2022, so there was a change of authority (governors, provincial council ministers). It was therefore necessary to re-explain the nexus to the new authorities”²⁸.

However, the issue of staff turnover is not just restricted to Kasai Central. Also the national government, stakeholder groups such as the Nexus Coordination Team (NCT), and the UN suffer from the loss of institutional Nexus knowledge due to staff turnover.²⁹ Respondents stress that personal commitment is crucial for the coordination of the Triple Nexus. One respondent summarizes the crux of the issue as follows: “Another challenge is the fact that the nexus relies more on individuals than on structures.”³⁰. Therefore, the Triple Nexus suffers whenever these individuals leave or are replaced.

Third and final, most respondents believed that progress was lagging in Tanganyika. Conflict in the region was the main impeding factor for Nexus progress: “The dynamics in Tanganyika could be different because there have been armed groups in that area”³¹. This was partially due to the withdrawal of MONUSCO in the region and the conflict between the Twa and Bantu people: “sometimes the Bantu conflict is quite palpable and can at any moment plunge the province into a humanitarian crisis”³². Also in this region, a change of

²³ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 27-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁴ Interview with bilateral donor official, 29-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁵ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 27-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁶ Interview with international governmental official, 10-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁷ Interview with international non-governmental official, 28-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁸ Interview with international governmental official, 10-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

²⁹ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 27-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁰ Interview with international governmental official, 05-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³¹ Interview with international governmental official, 15-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³² Interview with two international non-government officials, 09-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

government has hindered progress: “In Tanganyika there is little government involvement due to the change of authority with a new team that does not know what the nexus is”³³.

4.3.2: Triple Nexus leadership

As the Triple Nexus aims to make three distinctly different pillars of aid collaborate, it can be expected that this will lead to coordination challenges. This is confirmed by the interview data. The main question that originates is which actor should take the lead in Nexus approaches. The three pilot provinces showcase the crucial role of provincial governments in Nexus approaches. In Kasai, the commitment of the provincial government boosted progress, whereas the cases of Kasai Central and Tanganyika show how an uncommitted or uninformed government can impede progress.

Most respondents are in agreement that the provincial governments have a better grip on the Nexus than the national government does: “The nexus as we do it in the DRC is much more advanced at provincial level”³⁴. Respondents mention that a lack of commitment from the national government most likely stems from competition between different ministries resulting in the absence of clear central leadership. Also, they argue that it is more difficult for the national government to map all the different needs and challenges of the entire country than it is for the provincial government to indicate this for their own province³⁵.

Another actor often named as being one of, if not the, most important for the Triple Nexus in the DRC is the UN. The UN plays a central role in coordination and implementation. They also play a major role in security through MONUSCO and the regulation of its withdrawal. Some respondents mention that they experience no great commitment from the government side, but more from the UN: “We don't engage much with the government. We engage more with the UN and some NGOs”³⁶. However, the UN is seen by other respondents (from the UN itself, but also from other code groups) as an actor supporting the government. One respondent describes MONUSCO as: “this actor is there to accompany the government to ensure the security of people and property on its territory and to defend the integrity of the DRC”³⁷. In addition, a respondent from the background of the government describes how they view the relationship between the government and the UN as follows: “The UN is first and foremost a source of technical assistance for the government, but it cannot and must not take the place of the government”³⁸.

At the same time, some respondents voiced concerns about the capacity and capability of the national government as the leading party of the Triple Nexus. For example, one respondent states: “The government does not play the leadership role at the national level at all”³⁹. Interministerial competition⁴⁰, and an over-reliance on donor funding⁴¹ are often named by non-governmental actors as shortcomings of the national government in the DRC.

³³ Follow-up interview with two international non-government officials, 15-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁴ Follow-up interview with international governmental official, 27-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁵ Interview with national government official, 31-08-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁶ Interview with bilateral donor official, 11-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁷ Interview with international governmental official, 09-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁸ Interview with government official, 17-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

³⁹ Interview with international governmental official, 05-10-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴⁰ Follow-up interview with national government official, 24-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴¹ Follow-up interview with bilateral donor official, 08-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

5: Analysis and conclusion

This thesis has set out to contribute to the knowledge on the Triple Nexus. Specifically, the focus of the research is the operationalization of the peace pillar in Triple Nexus approaches in the DRC. In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the 66 semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, I will analyze these results and compare them to the expectations set out in Chapter 2 to ultimately answer the research question, which is: *how was the peace component of the Triple Nexus operationalized in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and what challenges arose?* Finally, this Chapter contains my final conclusions and suggestions for further research.

5.1: The limitations of the current peace pillar

The first main finding in this thesis is the fact that the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus in the DRC, as described by the respondents, is limited to peacebuilding. As explained in the theoretical framework, peace is an extremely broad concept with many related subcategories. For the Triple Nexus, the distinction that for example Autesserre (2011) makes between peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding is crucial. Different actors are responsible for these different notions of peace. Peacemaking and peacekeeping are associated with hard security actors, whereas peacebuilding efforts can also be carried out by soft security actors.

In the DRC, the provinces of Tanganyika, Kasai, and Central Kasai were chosen as pilot zones for the Triple Nexus. One respondent summarizes precisely why this choice was made:

- "This is why Kasai and Central Kasai were chosen as pilot areas because after the 2018 elections, the situation calmed down but the risk of relapsing into violence is still there. So in these kinds of post-conflict areas, it was necessary to develop the Triple Nexus approach and implement projects written with the nexus spirit"⁴².

The goal of the Nexus approach in the DRC, therefore, was to decrease humanitarian needs in three post-conflict areas.

As a result of the Triple Nexus being limited to relatively secure places, the responsibilities of the peace pillar were limited to only include peacebuilding activities when the Triple Nexus was introduced. There are several reasons for why this is undesirable.

First and foremost, not all causes of humanitarian needs can be addressed through peacebuilding. The conflict in eastern DRC is one of the main drivers of humanitarian needs in the country. Peacebuilding efforts can contribute to resolving conflicts, but at the same time, the local population needs protection from armed groups that threaten stable regions. This means that peacekeeping should also be part of the Triple Nexus, both to protect the local population and to facilitate an environment in which peacebuilding is possible. Resolution of the conflicts with armed groups in the DRC would be the ultimate step towards the reduction of humanitarian needs in the country. This requires peacemaking to also be a part of the Triple Nexus.

⁴² Interview with international governmental official, 14-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

Second, the current approach has not realized its peace-related goals. In chapter 2, John Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the presence of conditions that allow prosperity) was introduced. I argued that the Triple Nexus aimed for positive peace through its humanitarian and development components, while the peace pillar could provide the negative peace. The lack of peace in large parts of the DRC, and the humanitarian crisis this resulted in, showcase that neither form of peace has been achieved country-wide so far. There might be individual areas and projects that have achieved success on a community level, but this is not enough to conclude that the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus has been successfully operationalized. Therefore, the mandate of the peace pillar needs to be broadened.

Third, several respondents express the desire to expand the Triple Nexus to other regions and provinces in the DRC. One respondent mentions: "We started with Tanganyika, Kasai, Central Kasai. Do you think it is because the needs are only there? Certainly, there are the same needs in other parts of the DRC"⁴³. To address the needs in other areas, the Nexus needs to be extended. Respondents mentioned the provinces Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu as locations that are potentially suitable for Nexus programming. One respondent states these locations are well suited "because the point of the nexus is to reduce humanitarian aid through peace and stability and these zones in the east are concrete cases where the nexus can be experimented"⁴⁴.

Respondents report security concerns in these provinces, but many of them argue that this should not be a reason not to expand the Triple Nexus there. For example, one respondent argues "Nexus should be able to operate in places like north Kivu where there is a conflict happening. I do not necessarily believe that stability should be a precondition for Nexus implementation"⁴⁵. Moreover, some even argue that the Triple Nexus should be extended to these provinces exactly because of the insecurity, as it has caused considerable humanitarian needs⁴⁶. By excluding these areas, the Triple Nexus is currently prevented from reaching the places where it arguably is needed the most. In addition, others argue that it also provides an opportunity to test the Triple Nexus in areas with large security concerns and/or the absence of MONUSCO to see how the Triple Nexus can facilitate more sustainable development⁴⁷.

One important note to place here is that humanitarian and development actors will only support the expansion of the Triple Nexus to these areas if they can guarantee the safety of their personnel. Including hard security actors in the Triple Nexus would be a step in the right direction here. Hard security actors could support humanitarian and development actors by providing safety in insecure areas. However, there is one major obstacle preventing this, which is the fact that there is widespread opposition against the idea of including hard security actors.

⁴³ Interview with international governmental official, 09-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴⁴ Follow-up interview with bilateral donor official, 08-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴⁵ Interview with international non-governmental official, 23-09, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴⁶ Interview with bilateral donor official, 22-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

⁴⁷ Interview with international governmental official, 14-09-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

5.2: Three perspectives on humanitarian principles versus hard security

The main argument why the Triple Nexus has not been expanded to include hard security actors is the idea that collaborating with hard security actors might compromise humanitarian principles. Several humanitarian actors have been cautiously skeptical of the Triple Nexus since its introduction, as they fear that it may necessitate them to compromise on the principles of neutrality and independence that they deem crucial to their work. This unease was mentioned by nearly all respondents featured in this thesis. Crucially, respondents valued this argument in different ways. I deduced three main points of view regarding the tension between humanitarian principles and collaboration with hard security actors.

The first group of respondents argues that safeguarding humanitarian principles should always be a top priority. Therefore, this group is against collaboration between humanitarian actors and actors that could taint the neutral reputation of humanitarian actors. An example from the DRC is the national army, which is an active party in the conflict. For many humanitarian actors, their involvement in the Triple Nexus is a red line, which explains why the national army currently is not welcome at the Triple Nexus discussion table.

A key finding of this thesis is the crucial role perceptions play. Part of the argument raised by this first group of respondents is that it is not necessarily the fact that hard security actors are not neutral themselves that deter humanitarians from collaborating with them. Humanitarian actors fear that the local population, which can be biased against the army due to its history of human rights violations, will negatively perceive any actor who works with the army. The acceptance or even support from the local population is crucial to the work of many humanitarian and/or development actors. Therefore, they are unlikely to collaborate with an actor that the population views as controversial.

This crucial aspect is largely neglected in academic literature about the Triple Nexus and requires further research. Guinote (2018) and Tronc et al. (2019) do mention the importance of humanitarian organizations being perceived as neutral by the local population. However, most writers from academic and policy backgrounds only state that humanitarian principles are sacred and should be protected, without discussing the implications of not being perceived as neutral by the local population (VOICE, 2019; Hövelmann, 2020). As this research has found that respondents in the field often mention this as a crucial prerequisite for their work, more research is necessary on the topic.

Another crucial element relating to the perceptions of the local population is the role of misinformation. As presented in Chapter 4, several respondents mention that there is an anti-Western sentiment or anti-MONUSCO sentiment in some parts of the DRC. According to the UN Special Representative for the DRC, one explanatory factor could be anti-UN misinformation that is spread in eastern DRC (UN News, 2023). This is not confirmed by respondents in this research, but it could serve as an explanation for the mistrust of the West some respondents report. This therefore needs to be researched more thoroughly.

The second line of reasoning reflected in the data is that collaboration with hard security is worth it to risk compromising humanitarian principles. This group recognizes the tension between humanitarians and hard security actors but argues that the benefits of collaboration outweigh the potential drawbacks. Several key assumptions form the basis of this argument. The first is that collaboration with hard security actors does not necessarily violate

humanitarian principles. If both parties can find a way to collaborate in a way that does not taint the independence of the humanitarian actors, for example by sharing information or asking advice, there is no reason for them not to work together. Second, the role of the hard security actors should be dependent on the context, but generally as small as possible. Third and finally, resources should be spent on strengthening state-level hard security actors.

Even though I think this argument is somewhat optimistic, I am of the opinion that it is valid. Conversing with another party while staying true to your own principles is not impossible. It is crucial to keep in mind the role of perceptions, as even good intentions can be perceived negatively. But, at the same time, if the local population can be influenced *against* the Triple Nexus, who is to say that they can't be persuaded to be *in favor* of it? Investing in state-level hard security might contribute to this goal if it makes the local population feel heard. For example, if the judicial apparatus of the national army would be strengthened, and the local population would see that individuals who violated their rights would be put on trial, this might increase their trust in the capacity of the army and by extension, their trust in the Triple Nexus. This line of reasoning is hopeful and perhaps somewhat naive as it is dependent on good intentions that are perceived in the right way, but it is not entirely without logic. Further research should therefore pay attention not only to the negative role of perceptions, but also to the way perceptions could benefit the Triple Nexus.

Third and finally, a small group of respondents argued that humanitarian actors should not have to risk compromising their principles by collaborating with hard security actors, as the goals and mandates of these groups are so far apart that direct collaboration is unnecessary. I find this argument to be the weakest of the three. It is based on the somewhat naive idea that these groups of actors will never cross paths in the DRC. Reality proves that the high level of violence in the country (particularly in the east) means that situations arise in which humanitarians require security assistance to safely carry out their work. Respondents mention that in extreme cases, humanitarian actors resort to being escorted by the national army through insecure areas. This is not a popular option, exactly because it does taint the neutrality of humanitarian actors. Part of humanitarian work is the fact that in areas with high insecurity due to violence, there is a high demand for humanitarian assistance. However, humanitarian actors need to be able to guarantee the safety of their personnel to carry out their work. Hard security actors can play a role in providing the required level of safety, as long as they do not compromise the neutrality of humanitarian organizations. In turn, supporting a humanitarian mission can also improve the image of hard security actors and help to raise trust among the local population. Collaboration between hard security actors and humanitarian actors has the potential to be beneficial to both parties. I therefore conclude that the argument raised by this group of respondents is too narrow, as it is both unlikely and undesirable that hard security actors and humanitarian actors never collaborate.

5.3: Localization

The results in Chapter 4 show that regarding localization, the main point of contention is about which actor is leading the Triple Nexus approach in the DRC. Nearly all respondents indicate that they believe that ultimately, the Triple Nexus should be centered around the government. This is in line with the OECD-DAC recommendation, which calls for the strengthening of local and national capacities (OECD, 2019). However, several respondents question the current capacity of the national government to fulfill a leading role. Some respondents argue that it also makes sense for the UN to be the leading party in the Triple

Nexus, since they introduced the approach and are in good contact with donors and other actors.

In addition, experiences from the three pilot provinces show that provincial governments play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the Triple Nexus. Provincial governments often are more aware about the specific needs and characteristics of the region than the national government. Some respondents remarked that they experienced competition between different levels of government. This is also reflected in the relationship between the national and provincial governments, as respondents from the background of the government state that they, and not the provincial government, are the leading actors⁴⁸.

The national government in the DRC therefore is a controversial actor. On the one hand, respondents from all backgrounds (so also from the government itself) state their intentions of ensuring that the national government becomes the central actor in the Triple Nexus approach. On the other hand, there are several concerns about the capability of the national government to take ownership of the Triple Nexus. This is an important finding, as it shows that while localization is one of the goals of the Triple Nexus, it requires local capacity and willingness to actually materialize.

This finding is in line with the argument by Brown and Mena (2024) discussed in Chapter 2, which is that the attitude of the government determines the level of localization. In addition, the expectation that localization is important in resolving conflicts and peacebuilding is also supported by this thesis in two ways. First, the finding that the local context determines the level of Triple Nexus implementation in the three pilot provinces. Second, there is the argument raised by the group of respondents who believe that hard security actors should be part of the Triple Nexus, who claim that context should determine the level of their involvement. Both of these findings are based upon the idea that local context is crucial for the Triple Nexus.

5.4: Conclusion

The Triple Nexus should not be considered as a magic solution that can solve all protracted crises. Rather, it's a way of acknowledging that protracted crises often have various complex causes, which are intertwined and require holistic solutions. In addition, it contains the recognition that local context determines what the drivers of a certain conflict are, how these can be addressed, and how various actors can contribute to their resolution.

The DRC, unfortunately, is a textbook example of a protracted crisis. Local tensions and clashes between the government and armed rebel groups have resulted in a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. The international community has long had an active presence in the country, also in the form of two large-scale UN missions, but so far the efforts have been to no avail. Recognizing the ineffectiveness of earlier approaches, the UN has introduced the Triple Nexus in the DRC.

This thesis is concentrated on the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus. Several factors that could potentially impede the successful operationalization of the peace pillar were identified from

⁴⁸ Interview with government official, 04-11-2022, Kinshasa, DRC.

existing academic literature. Next, data gathered from 66 semi-structured interviews was summarized and analyzed. This resulted in three main findings.

The first is that at the time of the interviews, the Triple Nexus was limited to only include peacebuilding, or small p, efforts. This is regarded by several respondents as insufficient, as the Triple Nexus might be extended to regions facing more security issues that also require peacemaking and peacekeeping components.

However, the tension between humanitarian principles and the collaboration with hard security actors is often given as a reason not to extend the Triple Nexus. This relates to my second main finding, which is that from the interview data, I distilled three different lines of reasoning regarding this tension. One group of respondents is in favor of the inclusion of hard security actors in the Triple Nexus, based on the idea that the potential benefits of collaboration make it worth exploring. The other two are against, with one group being of the opinion that hard security actors have mandates that are fundamentally different from those of humanitarian actors which means that collaboration is unnecessary, while the second argues that collaboration with hard security actors is not worth compromising their principles. An additional finding of this thesis is that being perceived in a negative way by the local population is a key factor that may even be more harmful than actually compromising principles.

My third and final main finding is that localization is a crucial part of the Triple Nexus in the DRC, even though there are some doubts about the capability of the central government to take ownership of the Triple Nexus.

Together, these three findings form an answer to my research question, which was:

How was the peace component of the Triple Nexus operationalized in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and what challenges arose?

I found that the peace component of the Triple Nexus was operationalized in a limited way that only included peacebuilding. A first challenge that arose was that this currently prevents the Triple Nexus from addressing peacekeeping or peacemaking issues, which means that in its current form the Triple Nexus can not be expanded to regions facing insecurity. A second challenge is that there is opposition against the idea of including hard security actors due to concerns about the effect this would have on the perceived neutrality of humanitarian actors. This keeps the Triple Nexus limited to its current form. Third and finally, I found that the Triple Nexus was operationalized with the goal of government ownership, but that limitations to the capability of the national government form a challenge to realizing ownership.

These findings have several implications. First and foremost, the tension between humanitarian principles and hard security actors needs to be addressed. The fact that respondents from all backgrounds, not only humanitarians, mentioned this issue shows that it is widespread. At the time of the interviews, it prevented the Triple Nexus from being expanded. If the UN wants the Triple Nexus to develop and cover more regions in the DRC, it is crucial that this issue is resolved. Of course, this is easier said than done. The concerns are valid, as hard security actors in the DRC have a bad reputation due to past misconduct that often went unpunished. This can not be rectified easily, because even if there are

investments in the security apparatus of the national government of the DRC, this does not automatically take away the grievances of the local population.

However, as mentioned, more attention should be paid to the role of perceptions in the context of the Triple Nexus. It would be a major step in the right direction if the UN can relieve some of the concerns that humanitarian actors have about their reputation being tainted by collaboration with hard security actors. Therefore I suggest that further research is done into the perceptions of the local population in the DRC. It would be extremely valuable to gather more insight into the local population's perception of the Triple Nexus, hard security actors and humanitarian neutrality. Interesting subfields to involve in further research would be the role of misinformation and whether investing in the judicial systems would increase support for the Triple Nexus.

A second implication of the finding that there is tension between humanitarian and hard security actors, is that more research into integrated approaches is necessary. Integrated approaches, such as the Triple Nexus, have been indicated to be the best solution for complex crises. The findings in this thesis indicate that while integrated approaches have a lot of potential, there are practical challenges such as tensions caused by different ways of working. Gathering more insight into actors' experiences with integrated approaches can help to find ways of improving them. In addition, this information can prove to be valuable for the involved actors as well and might help them in their practices.

Third, this thesis contributes to research on the Triple Nexus in relation to earlier approaches of 'linking thinking', such as LRRD and DRR (Macrae, 2019). As the Triple Nexus can be seen as the latest installment of many sortlike concepts, many of which have also been introduced at some stage in the DRC, it is important to analyze its added value. To do so, I will compare the results of the interviews with the following two takeaways from earlier instances of 'linking thinking', as listed by Macrae (2019).

1. The problem of problem states remains unsolved.
2. The implication of 'linking thinking' on humanitarian principles has also not been resolved.

Concerning point 1, Macrae defines 'problem states' as "states that are warring parties and/or whose legitimacy is fundamentally challenged" (2019, p. 6). She argues that previous iterations of 'linking thinking' have struggled with the question of if, and how, the governments of 'problem states' should be involved in aid structures. As the national army of the DRC clashes regularly with armed rebel groups in eastern DRC, it can be considered a warring party. The interview data points to unclarity about the role of the national government in the Triple Nexus. Therefore, I conclude that this point remains unsolved. As I distilled three different lines of reasoning concerning the implication of the Triple Nexus on humanitarian principles, I conclude that point 2 remains unresolved too.

The fact that these two concerns remain unresolved suggests that the Triple Nexus is not an improvement on earlier iterations of 'linking thinking'. In addition, I conclude that based on the findings of this thesis, the Triple Nexus did not have a major impact on the reduction of humanitarian needs in the DRC. However, I do believe that if the Triple Nexus incorporates peacemaking and peacekeeping components it can play a role in reducing conflicts and their

impacts. As such, the Triple Nexus has the potential to better address the challenges the DRC faces than its predecessors.

As with every research, it is important to keep in mind that there are several limitations to this thesis. First, there are some limitations regarding the data. Some of these were discussed briefly in the methods chapter. The main limitation is the fact that I used data that was not gathered by me, and not specifically for this research. This meant I had no control over how the questions that were asked were phrased, and which respondents were selected. One limiting factor to the data is that all interviews were conducted in Kinshasa, the capital city of the DRC. This meant that actors from the pilot provinces, such as provincial government actors and CSO that are only active in the provinces, were underrepresented in the sample. Other limitations to the data include the fact that governmental actors were underrepresented, the fact that I coded translations of interview summaries, and the fact that the relevant questions about security were asked last in the interviews.

However, the interviews were a rich source of data as the questions suited my research and the respondents were relevant actors involved in the operationalization of the Triple Nexus in the DRC. Using this data allowed me to analyze 66 highly relevant interviews, and therefore far transcends the quality of data I would have been able to gather myself, but more importantly it creates clear insight into the motivations of various relevant actors.

Another limitation to this research is the scope. The choices to only look at the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus and to focus on the DRC were made with good reason, but they do limit generalizability and external validity of the research. Since one of the main conclusions is that local context is crucial to the Triple Nexus, it would be contradictory to claim that the findings of this research would be the same in other countries with different circumstances. In fact, it would be valuable to perform a similar research in either a country with different or very similar circumstances and see if and how it impacts the results.

In conclusion, this thesis has set out how the peace pillar of the Triple Nexus was operationalized in the DRC and which challenges arose. In doing so, it has contributed to much-needed research on this new integrated approach. Despite the limitations to data collection and scope constraints, the data gathered through semi-structured interviews has proven to be highly relevant. The findings in this research suggest that further research is necessary, especially into the role of perceptions in relation to the Triple Nexus. The resurgence of violence in eastern DRC reconfirms the urgency of finding solutions to the many challenges the country faces. This thesis is the first step towards the realization of the Triple Nexus in the DRC, and I am hopeful that many more will follow.

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Appendix

A: List of respondents

#	Actor Type	Date	Recorded
1	National CSO	29/08/2022	No
2	International Donor	30/08/2022	No
3	National CSO	30/08/2022	Yes
4	International NGO	31/08/2022	Yes
5	Congolese Government	31/08/2022	No
6	International Donor	01/09/2022	Yes
7	International NGO	09/09/2022	Yes
8	Congolese Government	09/09/2022	No
9	UN Agency	09/09/2022	Yes
10	International Donor	12/09/2022	No
11	UN Agency	14/09/2022	No
12	UN Agency	14/09/2022	Yes
13	International Donor	15/09/2022	Yes
14	UN Agency	15/09/2022	Yes
15	International NGO	20/09/2022	Yes
16	International NGO	21/09/2022	Yes
17	UN Agency	22/09/2022	Yes
18	International NGO	23/09/2022	Yes/No
19	UN Agency	23/09/2022	No
20	MONUSCO	28/09/2022	Yes
21	International NGO	28/09/2022	Yes
22	International NGO	29/09/2022	Yes
23	UN Agency	29/09/2022	Yes
24	International Organisation	29/09/2022	No
25	UN Agency	30/09/2022	Yes
26	UN Agency	30/09/2022	Yes
27	International NGO	03/10/2022	Yes

28	International NGO	04/10/2022	Yes
29	UN Agency	05/10/2022	Yes
30	National NGO	05/10/2022	Yes
31	UN Agency	06/10/2022	Yes
32	MONUSCO	10/10/2022	Yes
33	National CSO	11/10/2022	No
34	UN Agency	12/10/2022	No
35	International NGO	12/10/2022	No
36	UN Agency	27/10/2022	Yes
37	National NGO	27/10/2022	Yes
38	International Donor	28/10/2022	Yes
39	International Donor	31/10/2022	No
40	International NGO	03/11/2022	Yes
41	International Donor	04/11/2022	Yes
42	UN Agency	04/11/2022	Yes
43	National CSO	04/11/2022	No
44	Congolese Government	04/11/2022	No
45	International Donor	08/11/2022	
46	UN Agency	09/11/2022	
47	International NGO	09/11/2022	
48	UN Agency	10/11/2022	Yes
49	International NGO	10/11/2022	Yes
50	UN Agency	10/11/2022	Yes
51	International Donor	11/11/2022	Yes
52	National CSO	14/11/2022	
53	International NGO	15/11/2022	
54	International Donor	15/11/2022	No
55	International Donor	16/11/2022	Yes
56	Congolese Government	17/11/2022	No
57	UN Agency	17/11/2022	Yes

58	International Donor	18/11/2022	No
59	International NGO	18/11/2022	
60	UN Agency	21/11/2022	
61	International Donor	22/11/2022	No
62	International Organisation	23/11/2022	
63	Congolese Government	23/11/2022	No
64	Congolese Government	24/11/2022	
65	International Organisation	24/11/2022	
66	International Donor	29/11/2022	Yes

B: Confidentiality agreement

Consent Form Interview

Title of the study: Capacity-Building Across the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus in the DRC: Lessons for Canada and Beyond

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study conducted by Profs. Marie-Eve Desrosiers and Haley J. Swedlund.

Purpose of the Study: The project studies the implementation of the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus or Triple-Nexus in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to better understand integrated capacity-building efforts in challenging contexts, and how to better foster coordination across the different sectors involved.

Participation: My participation will essentially consist of taking part in an interview lasting approximately an hour, with possible follow-up interviews based on my availability. During the interview(s), I will be asked to answer questions about my role in the ongoing Triple Nexus pilot, the implementation process, coordination across actors and sectors involved, as well as about successes and challenges with regards to integrated work in the DRC. The interview has been scheduled for _____ (date and place). The research has not received clearance from my employer or government.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I discuss how my institution and I have engaged with ongoing pilot efforts in DRC. As such, I may express points of view critical of my institution or other actors involved in the implementation process, and this may cause me emotional or psychological discomfort. I have received assurance from the researchers that every effort will be made to minimize this risk. To this end, I can refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any point.

Benefits: My participation in this study will hold no direct benefit for me. It will, however, contribute to the advancement of knowledge on the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC and, more broadly, on integrated capacity building and international cooperation/stabilization.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researchers that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for academic publications and that only the researchers and research assistants will have access to my interview material. If transcribers are hired to transcribe my interview, they will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner: through the use of a pseudonym or code when I am cited in publications, unless I choose not to remain anonymous, as well as through the omission of information that may identify me, such as my specific title or employer. Anonymity will also be protected through the measures used to conserve data listed below. I understand, however, that if I choose to be interviewed at my office or near it, colleagues or acquaintances may be aware of my participation in the research project.

Conservation of data: The data collected, including the audio recording of my interview and notes taken by the researchers, will be kept as encrypted files on the password protected computers of the researchers, as well as uploaded as encrypted files to a password protected Dropbox account shared by the researchers. Written consent forms will be kept on the researchers until they can be safely digitized and encrypted and saved to laptops and the shared Dropbox account. The hard copy will be shredded. Transcripts will be encrypted and saved to password protected computers and the password protected Dropbox account. All documents and data will be kept for a period of 20 years following the completion of the data collection process. Additional copies will be kept on password protected laptop, desktop and/or external hard drive in the locked offices of the two researchers, as well as on a password protected Dropbox or cloud hosted file. Once the conservation period over, all files will be deleted from computers, hard drives and Dropbox, using a secure double deletion process.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. Individuals who may have referred me to the research or researchers will not be made aware of my choice to participate or decline. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be deleted.

Acceptance: I _____ (Name) agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Marie-Eve Desrosiers of the University of Ottawa and Haley J. Swedlund of Radboud University.

I agree to be audio recorded (please circle one): YES NO

I wish to remain anonymous (please circle one): YES NO

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

Tel.: +1(613) 562-5387

Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature:

Date:

Researcher's signature

:

Date:

C: Interview guide

Interview Protocol: Capacity-Building Across the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus in the DRC: Lessons for Canada and Beyond

Marie-Eve Desrosiers (University of Ottawa) and Haley J. Swedlund (Radboud University)

Thank you for your willingness to speak with us today. As we mentioned in our correspondence, we are currently working on a research project about the Humanitarian-Peace-Development Nexus or Triple Nexus pilot in the DRC. In particular, we are interested in the requirements for implementation across different types of insecurity, and how we can best leverage different actors' expertise, particularly the expertise of defense and security actors involved in the pilot.

As such, we have a series of questions we would like to ask you about the modalities being piloted; coordination between actors, and about some of the emerging practices and challenges of working across sectors in DRC. Given that the pilot is currently unfolding in DRC, we would like to make this an ongoing conversation. Depending on your availability, we would like to potentially revisit some of your thoughts and answers over the coming months.

Before we begin, we would like to ensure you understand what your participation entails and your rights with regards to the research process.

[Hand over consent form.]

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

Introduction

We will first ask you a few introductory questions to understand your role in the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC.

Could you briefly introduce yourself? What is your official title and position here in DRC?

[Note: This information will remain confidential: we are only asking to situate you in the Triple Nexus environment in DRC.]

In what capacity are you involved with the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC?

[Follow up: Are there specific functions you perform for your employer or the Donor Nexus Group with regards to the pilot? Are there specific projects or programs you are involved with? Can you tell us when and how you became involved with Triple-Nexus programming in DRC?]

General Pilot Process

This next subset of questions looks at how the Triple Nexus is being piloted in DRC and the most important work, modalities, and practices being developed or used, in your opinion.

What is the goal of the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC in your mind?

[Follow up: Why do you believe the Triple Nexus is being pursued in the DRC?]

From your vantage point, who are the most important actors or players in this pilot? Why?

Are there specific initiatives, practices, or modalities being implemented around the Triple Nexus pilot that you think are particularly important?

In your experience working in [list appropriate: aid, humanitarian, security] sector, is there something new or different about what is being tried in DRC? If so, what is it is?

[Follow up: In your personal opinion, what is the added value of the Triple Nexus initiative?]

Can you recall specific turning points in the process of designing or implementing the pilot in the DRC, or specific changes that occurred in terms of how the work is being undertaken in DRC? [If so, what were they?]

[Follow up: What were they responding to? How did these changes come about?]

What is the status of implementing the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC? And what remains to be done?

Does the pilot face different challenges across the three provinces in which it is being implemented?

Coordination and Relations across Actors

The next subset of questions looks at relations across actors and sectors, and in particular at coordination around the Triple Nexus.

Do you think there is a cohesive vision of what the Triple Nexus means in DRC or how it should be achieved across the sectors involved? If so, what is it and why? If not, why not?

How are decisions made around the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC?

To your mind, how effective has coordination been around the pilot?

[Follow up: Has the Nexus Donor Group been useful in ensuring greater coordination? If so, how? If not, why not?]

What have been some of the greatest challenges to coordinated programming and/or action around the Triple Nexus in DRC?

Involvement of Security Actors

The next set of questions specifically look at the involvement of different types of security actors and their intended role in the Triple Nexus.

From your vantage point, which type of security actors should be involved in Triple Nexus programming and why?

[Do the types of (security) actors that should be involved vary across the three provinces where the Triple Nexus is being implemented?]

Research in other settings has tended to show that security actors are less integrated into Triple Nexus initiatives. Is this the case in DRC? If so, why? If not, why not?

What is the greatest contribution security actors can make to Triple Nexus work in DRC and how can it be enhanced?

Do you have concerns about the greater integration of security actors in Triple Nexus work?

Successes and Challenges of the Pilot

We now have a final set of questions on what you identify as factors supporting or impeding work on the Triple Nexus in DRC, and on integrated support or stabilization work in general.

From the standpoint of fostering coordinated work and programming, what have been some of the greatest successes or most promising practices about the pilot in DRC?

[Follow up: In your opinion, what does the pilot need to accomplish to be seen as a ‘success’? How do we measure that success?]

What have been the greatest challenges to implementing the Triple Nexus pilot in DRC?

[Follow up: Are these challenges specific to the DRC or more widespread, do you think? Do you have thoughts on how to address these challenges?]

Thank you for your time and willingness to answer our questions. Is there anything we have not asked you about the current Triple Nexus pilot in DRC that you think is important for us to know? Is there anything else you would like to share to help us understand Triple Nexus implementation in DRC?

We appreciate your time. We hope you will let us revisit some of these questions and the thoughts you shared in the coming months.

If you have any questions for us, please feel free to contact us.