WESTERN CONCEPTS IN NON-WESTERN CONTEXTS

The Triple Nexus in Myanmar

Karl Joel Agyeman Rovasaari Adjei
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Abstract

The concept of integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts, collectively known as the triple nexus, is increasingly prominent in aid forums on the global level. The triple nexus is not a new concept, there has been similar initiatives before, with mixed outcomes. What sets the triple nexus apart from earlier initiatives is its incorporation of peace elements, which span from grassroots peacebuilding efforts to security interventions. Both development and peace work involve aspects of system building and government cooperations and in some cases stabilisation procedures, which would affect humanitarian actors ability to be neutral. The inclusion of the peace pillar is thus not without its challenges, as it raises concerns among humanitarian organisations, particularly regarding its potential impact on the humanitarian principles.

The starting point for the study will be Myanmar, which after the military coup in 2021 has undergone major structural changes where the aid map has been completely redrawn. The new de facto government has placed heavy restrictions on aid organisations in country, limit access to many areas. This has forced the international community to adapt, creating new synergies and potentially changing the way humanitarians work. Local actors have played a key role in this new aid landscape, suggesting that a successful nexus response could be built without government systems. By comparing different humanitarian paradigms, I question whether we are seeing a shift towards a form of resistance humanitarianism, driven by the influence of local actors, challenging established truths in the international aid system.

What does it really mean to be neutral in a context like Myanmar? How much importance is actually placed on the humanitarian principles by the actors who are working with triple nexus concepts? Through interviews with people representing both the local and the international, I intend to explore this further. I intend to examine the interplay between the triple nexus and the humanitarian principles, as well as shed light on the challenges and dynamics of implementing the triple nexus in a politically contentious environment.

Abbreviations

IDP = Internally Displaced People

INGO = International Non-Government Organisations

NGO = Non-Government Organisations

CSO = Civil Society Organisations

UN = United Nations

LRRD = Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

NGCA = Non-Government-Controlled Areas

EAO = Ethnic Armed Organisations

PDF = People's Defence Forces

CDM = Civil Disobedience Movement

HCT = Humanitarian Country Team

SERP = Socio-Economic Response Plan

HRP = Humanitarian Response Plan

MoU = Memorandums of Understanding

NUG = National Unity Government

SDG = Sustainable Development Goals

NWoW = New Ways of Working

OCHA = United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ICVA = The International Council of Voluntary Agencies

PHAP = Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection

UNDP = United Nations Development Programme

ICRC = International Committee of the Red Cross

SIDA = The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

USAID = United States Agency for International Development

NPA = Norwegian People's Aid

1. Introduction

1.1 Relevance

The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, also known as the triple nexus, derives from a number of policy frameworks that aims to provide crisis relief that is both immediate as well as long-term, thus ensuring that vulnerabilities and causes of crisis are counteracted. There have been similar initiatives throughout the past couple of decades, with collaborations between primarily humanitarian and development actors, such as the 'Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development' or the 'Relief to Development Continuum'. These initiatives have received both praise and criticism from the aid community, resulting in numerous revisions and redesigns. It is therefore not surprising that the triple nexus has been met with some scepticism, as people are worried it might turn into a mere buzzword, nothing more than a new spin on an old idea, produced by the liberal Western aid giants – promising more than it can deliver. What distinguishes the triple nexus from some of the previous initiatives is the inclusion of peace components, ranging from grassroots peacebuilding to security interventions. This is not considered entirely unproblematic, especially among humanitarians, who argue that aid risks becoming politicised under nexus approaches as a result (Brown & Mena, 2021). One of the main concerns raised has been about the mixing of different mandates among actors within the different nexus pillars, which has been expressed in several international forums, not least at the European Humanitarian Forum 2022 where it was stated that:

"While the nexus approach offers an opportunity to adopt an operational flexibility to address people's needs in protracted crises in a coordinated manner, the different roles and mandates of all actors involved need to be respected. In the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach, the humanitarian mandate must be protected from politicisation and instrumentalisation. Humanitarian aid is neither a crisis management nor a foreign policy tool and should not be used for accomplishing any objectives other than saving lives and protecting people in a manner consistent with the humanitarian principles.". (VOICE statement ahead of the European Humanitarian Forum, 2022, para. 1).

However, is not humanitarianism already politicised? Answering this question requires you to critically examine the patterns that are consistently reproduced in security and development doctrines and policies. Scholars like Fassin (2007) has long argued that the act of deciding what sort of life is implicitly or explicitly considered is a form of politics in itself and it is

with this in mind that I embark on my analysis of the nexus. I will try to illustrate how no matter how far humanitarians try to distance itself from the nation state it cannot completely abandon the political field, while also examining whether the nexus adds additional layers of politicised decisions. For me, this is where the humanitarian principles become interesting, as they have helped forming a moral international framework of "what is good to do" which can lead to conflict with other international doctrines such as the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention.

While sovereign states are presumed to safeguard their citizens' security, a dilemma arises when these states act oppressively towards their own people, exploiting sovereignty as a justification for violence. This trend can be seen in many countries around the world where democratically elected governments are being overthrown and replaced by authoritarian regimes. This complicates the work with development aid since the involvement of national governments is considered central to successful development practice (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023). This is especially true in a context such as Myanmar, where due to the 2021 military coup d'état, the de facto government is considered as the main actor in the conflict by both international as well as local aid agencies – making any form of engagement highly sensitive. This begs the questions whether it is justified for states to lose their sovereign rights and become subject to legitimate external intervention when they engage in abuse or neglect their duty to protect. Is it reasonable to avoid engagement with a state altogether because of its illegitimate status among the countries in the liberal West? And if so, what are the implications for the implementation of a concept like triple nexus?

The principle of neutrality is often discussed when talking about interactions between the different actors in the nexus. But what does it really mean to be neutral in a context like Myanmar? Furthermore, can the concept of humanitarianism be truly comprehended when it is boiled down to certain laws and mandates or does it risk losing its foundation that is humanity? Through interviews with people from different aid agencies working in the country, I intend to explore this further, in the hope of improving the understanding of triple nexus as a concept while also trying to answer how to overcome these obstacles highlighted by the ICRC and other humanitarian agencies.

1.2 Research Problem

There are several challenges with nexus approaches, varying depending on the geographical context. But what is generally mentioned in reports from different aid organisations is the lack of a clear definition of the nexus concept, as well as the distance between decision makers and the local actors working in the field. As a starting point for this study, I have chosen to focus on possible difficulties highlighted by humanitarians in relation to their work with the nexus. The first question that arose was: why is it that humanitarian actors in particular have expressed concerns about co-operating with the other pillars of the triple nexus, namely development and peace actors?

The answers that came up in my research were often about the humanitarian principles, specifically the principle of neutrality and impartiality. Humanitarian actors work according to these principles and they are seen as the foundation, ensuring both their credibility and legitimacy. These principles define the purpose of humanitarian action, its ethics and operational requirements and are designed to ensure that humanitarian action is always neutral, impartial, independent and guided by humanity (Dubois, 2020). The addition of the peace pillar has made many humanitarian actors raise concerns about the nexus framework, both conceptually and operationally, citing the risk of losing operational access to areas as a consequence of not being considered impartial or neutral among the communities they work in (Brown & Mena, 2021). This notion was reiterated in a statement by the president of ICRC, Peter Maurer:

".. Our experience shows that emergency access to vulnerable populations […] depends on the ability to isolate humanitarian goals from other transformative goals, be they economic, political, social or human rights related." (Cross, 2016, p. 451)

The question posed by humanitarian actors is how to work with the triple nexus without jeopardising their ability to remain neutral and independent. The triple nexus indirectly implies linkage to the state systems, which means cooperation with military or political actors. This linkage creates dilemmas for agencies working within the different nexus pillars, as can be seen in Myanmar where international development agencies stopped their operations in the country after the military coup in 2021. Their reasoning was that they did not want to legitimise the de facto government through collaborations and deliverance of basic services through existing systems (SIDA Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2023). This may complicate triple nexus interactions in Myanmar, which is why I consider it a relevant

choice of context to try to understand the interplay between the concepts of humanitarianism and triple nexus. I believe the question of adhering to the humanitarian principles is particularly relevant in a context such as Myanmar, where both development work and peacebuilding has become more complex post-coup. Dubois (2020) explains how the fact that the main actor of the war is the state itself makes the creation of an overarching national strategy more difficult and in order for humanitarian actors to be able to work in a complementary way with peace actors, a peace strategy must be in place. It will therefore be interesting to explore what a peace strategy might look like in a context like Myanmar and how it affects collaborations with the other nexus pillars. Are there opportunities for synergies that would not have existed otherwise? I also believe it is important to highlight how humanitarian actors are managing potential dilemmas that may emerge due to the humanitarian principles. It is hoped that this study can illustrate problems as well as opportunities with the nexus and provide recommendations for its implementation in similar contexts where the possibilities for a nexus approach involving state actors are difficult.

1.3 Objective

I have gathered my data through interviews with different actors at all levels of the international aid system, to get a clearer picture of the potential challenges with the triple nexus framework. This includes both local and international NGO workers, as well as UN and donor representatives. Different actors have different understandings of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find several different approaches, paradigms or ideological positions within an organisation when it comes to the nexus (Weishaupt, 2020). This means that organisational ideology is changeable and can therefore be influenced by external factors such as donor requirements or through negotiations with other actors. Accepting these ideological differences and instead making them explicit can create a triple nexus debate that focuses on potential synergies and thus allow for better adapted nexus implementation with a variety of customised approaches.

The objective is to investigate how different actors in Myanmar perceive the triple nexus framework. How much importance is actually placed on the humanitarian principles by the actors who are working on implementing the triple nexus? What are the consequences for a concept like the triple nexus when a state is declared "illegal" by the liberal Western world, who also to a large extent holds the power in the international aid system?

1.4 Research Question

By answering my research question, I hope to be able to provide knowledge to the field of aid work, increasing the understanding between humanitarian, development and peace actors. Furthermore, I hope that this study can contribute with knowledge to facilitate the implementation of the nexus in Myanmar, but also in other contexts with similar dynamics. This study is based on the idea that there is no one-size-fits-all nexus model and that it is therefore important to critically analyse different roles and responsibilities of various humanitarian, development and peace actors. Since the triple nexus is a system-wide initiative, I believe it is crucial to also consider what system it is being implemented in. I have thus decided to make a clear demarcation, focusing on Myanmar, to explore how the geographical context has influenced its implementation. Based on previous research in the area of the triple nexus, I believe it is of value to address, what I perceive as one of the biggest concerns being raised by humanitarians and that is, what impact, if any, do the humanitarian principles have on the triple nexus.

I would also like to clarify that the term alignment in this regard refers to a position of agreement. I think the term fits well with the triple nexus and the humanitarian principles, as it reflects what I intend to examine, namely the relationship when these two forces meet.

Q1: How are the humanitarian principles aligned with the triple nexus in Myanmar?

Q2: Have the non-democratic system of governance in Myanmar had any impact on triple nexus interactions?

2. Background

Humanitarian principles are in many ways socially constructed, ethical guidelines, for the humanitarian sphere. Add to this, the triple nexus, which is the conceptual framework on which this study is based, and you suddenly have two concepts that leave a lot of room for personal interpretation. Therefore, I feel it is important to try to clarify these concepts for you, the reader. My intention here is to provide some background to these concepts, as well as the context they operate in, hoping that it will enhance the understanding and thereby facilitate interpretation before we move on to the other parts of this study.

2.1 Contextual Background

When it comes to aid work; civil society, and more specifically development and humanitarian space have historically been constrained, with restricted access especially in conflict-affected areas and non-government-controlled areas. Decades of military control have resulted in widespread poverty and prevalent human rights violations and ever since the independence in 1948, the country has been plagued by ethnic discord and civil strife (Sida Humanitarian Crisis Analysis, 2023). In the early 2000s, a process of democratisation began that finally gave the young population a sense of hope for the future and led to the first democratic elections in 2010. However, the democratisation process was short-lived as the military took control again in 2021. The military coup put Myanmar's humanitarian situation in a sharp decline, marked by re-escalating conflicts, violations of human rights, and targeted abuses against civilians (Karlsson, 2018; Sida HCA, 2023). A multitude of conflicts arose across the country, and some, such as the one in Kachin state, was reignited while new conflicts emerged in areas such as Chin, Magway, Sagaing and Kayah states. These conflicts involve several different groups, including the Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organisations and People's Defence Forces. In response to the military coup, numerous demonstrations were organised across the country, and a massive strike was launched by hundreds of thousands civil servants called the Civil Disobedience Movement. The civil unrest has been met with further repression by the de facto government, resulting in arbitrary arrests, intimidation and violations of the rights of civilians, public officials and representatives of civil society (Sida HCA, 2022).

This severely disrupted health, education and protection services in the country. The healthcare system was particularly affected, primarily due to many of the healthcare workers deciding to join the CDM instead of working for the de facto government. Some hospitals

were eventually able to reopen across the country, but the overall capacity of the healthcare system has remained low post-coup. Furthermore, many development programmes were either suspended or terminated after the military coup, with several of the major donor countries deciding to either stop or redirect development aid to Myanmar. Two such examples are Sida, who withdrew its $30 million in development aid shortly after the military coup, and the USAID who issued a statement saying it was redirecting development aid to the civil society, rather than supporting the military regime (Sida HCA, 2023; USAID press release, 2021, para. 2).

Donor countries had to change their principle of engagement with the de facto government, and thus humanitarian and development strategies had to be adapted. The new strategy focuses on supporting civil society organisations and local actors, with the aim of promoting a triple nexus approach and thus increasing flexibility in the current difficult political situation. Myanmar is lacking a 'Sustainable Development Cooperation Frame'. This has meant that the HCT, consisting of UN agencies and INGOs, is now following the strategy outlined in the 'Socio-Economic Response Plan', emphasising long-term resilience and reducing dependence on emergency aid. Additionally, the HCT is guided by the 'Humanitarian Response Plan', stating that engagement with the de facto government risks politicising the humanitarian response, further restricting humanitarian space (OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan, 2023). A principled humanitarian response is highlighted as crucial to maintain access to the people most in need.

"The humanitarian response will be dependent on approvals of entry visas, travel authorisations, negotiating Memorandums of Understanding and access. There is a need to mitigate such risks through principled humanitarian action, negotiation and advocacy. International actors are dependent on approvals of entry, visas and travel authorisations to fully operate in the country." (Sida HCA, 2022, p. 7)

It is not only donors and INGOs that have had to adapt their aid work, but also local organisations that previously focused on development work have had to shift to humanitarian efforts to meet the new challenges that have arisen. The space for local civil society actors has shrunk since the military coup, leading to some organisations having to close down their operations in certain areas due to access constraints (OCHA HRP, 2023). Furthermore, the de facto government has created a culture of both online social punishment and persecution for those opposing them, affecting the public discourse and attitudes to humanitarian assistance

being delivered as a whole. Any perceived connection or association with either side can result in online exposure or, more seriously, physical threats, imprisonment or violence. In this environment, all factions are increasingly politicising humanitarian efforts, viewing aid as a transaction rather than based on genuine need and humanitarian principles. While aid workers must engage with all factions to safely deliver aid in conflict zones, the ongoing political discourse complicates and endangers their essential work (Sida HCA, 2022; Sida HCA, 2023).

Peacebuilding is also complicated in a context like Myanmar, since the main cause of conflict is the government itself. But despite this, there are a number of international peace actors working closely with the democracy movement, a collective term for groups opposed to the military coup. A prominent entity within this movement is the National Unity Government, which is the democratically elected government that was exiled after the military coup in 2021 (OHCHR, 2023). Peace actors in Myanmar are mainly helping to promote a broad and impartial dialogue on upholding the rule of law and addressing the security concerns of all citizens in a future federal and democratic Myanmar, one example being the Folke Bernadotte Academy who focuses their work on the constitutional process led by the democracy movement (Folke Bernadotte Academy, n.d). According to OCHA's Humanitarian Response Plan (2023) for Myanmar, a clarification of the peace component is an important part of the work ahead, to promote links between the humanitarian, human rights, development and peacebuilding sectors. This work involves development partners, INGOs and UN agencies and aims to ensure compliance with individual mandates while promoting information sharing and a coherent overall strategy. This has been highlighted as a crucial element for a successful triple nexus approach.

2.2 Explanation of Concepts

2.2.1 Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

Nexus is the Latin word for 'to link' or 'to bind together', it is a place where things meet and are linked together. In the field of international development and humanitarian work, the term 'triple nexus' or 'HDP nexus' is used to describe the interrelationship between the humanitarian, development and peace sectors. It is based on the idea that humanitarian aid can help cause development and in turn, development causes peace, making it an effective way to meet the needs of people in conflict areas. The triple nexus framework aims to link and create synergies between these three sectors, or pillars. The concept has gained ground in

both policy discussions and academic contexts during the past couple of years. The idea is to address the complex and intertwined challenges we face today, from climate change to conflict and social inequality, in a holistic way. By seeing these issues in a more interconnected light, solutions can be both more sustainable and effective (Cochrane & Wilson, 2023). Initially, the nexus concept only included humanitarian and development work, but by including peacebuilding, it was recognised that neither development nor humanitarian relief can be sustainable unless a stable foundation is in place. While this may sound abstract, it has very concrete implications. In a conflict zone, an intervention, following the principles of the triple nexus, would not only deliver immediate food and medical assistance, but also focus on creating jobs, improving community structure and strengthening community ties to establish a more long-term stable and resilient society (Howe, 2019; Hövelmann, 2020).

The international community has recognized the need for a more conjoined, systemic approach to the current overburdened aid systems. As a result, two overarching policy frameworks was adopted: The 2030 Transformative Agenda with its 'Sustainable Development Goals', as well as the Agenda for Humanity with its NWOW initiative. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the NWOW initiative has strengthened the arguments of those in favour of the triple nexus approach (Hövelmann, 2020). All these commitments have motivated development actors to engage earlier and to maintain a sustained presence in conflict-affected regions. These efforts have brought many organisations and donors together around the idea that humanitarian work should not only respond to acute needs, but also focus on reducing hardship, risk and vulnerability. This suggests a paradigm shift in the way humanitarianism is viewed. It has also led to reforms within the UN system to ensure a coordinated and comprehensive effort to achieve the goals set up these agendas, including in conflict-affected areas (Guinote & Policy, 2019). It is this strong link to the UN's central processes that sets the triple nexus apart from its predecessor, as it is considered well aligned with the aim to reduce need, vulnerability and risk (Howe, 2019). The UN and its partners hope that these drivers will give momentum to the nexus concept and thus increase the likelihood of a successful implementation (ICVA, 2021)

At the global level, a variety of aid actors are actively supporting and facilitating the triple nexus approach, each with a unique role to play. Prominent actors such as ICVA and PHAP are particularly active in raising awareness and improving aid effectiveness through seminars and conferences. These organisations focus mainly on humanitarian action, but also share

resources with other sectors. The UN has a specific group called the Joint Steering Committee, which includes OCHA and UNDP and focuses on implementing the triple nexus at country level (ICVA, 2021).

2.2.2 Humanitarian Principles

When discussing triple nexus implementation from a humanitarian point of view, it is imperative to mention the humanitarian principles. The humanitarian principles serve as an ethical compass for all those involved in humanitarian action and aim to ensure that aid is delivered in the most effective and equitable way. Originally, the principles derive from the ICRC's so called 'Fundamental Principles' and were formally adopted in 1965. These principles were humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary action, unity. They were reaffirmed in 1986 when they were included in the preamble to the updated statutes of the Red Crescent movement. The reform was completed in 1991 with the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182. This resolution includes a set of 'guiding principles' for the humanitarian work of UN agencies. The second of which clarifies that assistance "shall be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality". The concept of independence was added to the UN's humanitarian principles in 2003 by General Assembly resolution 58/114 (UNHCR, 2023; OCHA, 2012).

HUMANITY Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.	**NEUTRALITY** Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.
IMPARTIALITY Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.	**INDEPENDENCE** Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold in relation to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

Table 1: The Humanitarian Principles. Source: OCHA (2020)

There are many different aspects to the purpose of these principles, addressing different forms of relief. By following them, organisations can build and maintain trust with beneficiaries and other parties, which is particularly important in conflict-affected and complex environments. They also ensure that aid reaches the most vulnerable by emphasising impartiality and neutrality, minimising the impact of political or other external factors. This impartiality, together with the principles of neutrality and independence, helps to maintain the quality of humanitarian assistance and allows organisations to focus on alleviating human suffering. The principles also provide a unifying framework for cooperation between different actors, which is important when many organisations, donors and governments are involved in an emergency response. They are rooted in international law and provide moral and legal guidance on how aid should be organised and distributed. This protects humanitarian actors from external interference and pressure. Finally, by emphasising humanity, the principles underline the importance of respecting and protecting human rights as an integral part of humanitarian action (ICRC, 2015; Sharpe, 2023).

These four core principles are only a small part of all the principles that exist within the humanitarian sector and can sometimes lead to moral dilemmas, particularly when they conflict in specific scenarios. This becomes even more complex if you add principles from other areas such as the development and peace sectors into the mix. Therefore, it is worth noting that principles often require interpretation rather than being straightforwardly directive. Slim (2015) describes principles as “interpretive concepts”, meaning that while they indicate what is good to do, they do not provide you with the best course of action in complex situations. Instead, it is necessary to sometimes give precedence to one principle over another, thus requiring contextual interpretation to be able to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of conflicting principles.

3. Literature Review

The triple nexus is still a relatively new framework, making the collection of information on its implementation in certain geographical contexts rather limited. The information I have gathered mainly comes from the experience of INGOs and data collected from their operations in a variety of countries. The information retrieved comes from both articles and reports, from between 2017-2023. It is worth noting that the majority of assessments I have found comes from humanitarian actors, which tend to be more critical due to the perceived incompatibility with the humanitarian principles.

3.1 Nexus Implementation

Nguya and Siddiqui (2020) talks about triple nexus implementation in relation to internal displacement and the so called 'durable solutions'. They argue that there are both practical and conceptual linkages between the triple nexus and the durable solutions. In the field of development work, durable solutions refer to long-term strategies to address the problem of protracted displacement of people, typically refugees or internally displaced persons. The goal is to help these people rebuild their lives in a sustainable way and increase their resilience (IASC, 2010). Nguya and Siddiqui (2020) highlights several criteria required for a successful nexus implementation from a developmental perspective, such as the need for all nexus strategies to be adapted to specific local dynamics where they are based on a detailed analysis of the social, economic, cultural and political context. They argue that the priorities, structure and funding of these strategies will always vary according to the specific circumstances of the context as well as the timing and purpose of engagement. Their findings show that coordination between sectors is essential, but also that roles within each sector may change as the situation and needs evolve.

Additionally, Nguya and Siddiqui (2020) talk about how government leadership is critical to the success of nexus implementation, by both enacting specific legislation to address protracted humanitarian crises as well as by linking humanitarian assistance to national well-being, either directly or through capacity building. This is particularly interesting in a context such as Myanmar where the authorities are complicit in the causes of the vulnerabilities which shows the governments lack of commitment to the humanitarian principles and rights-based approaches. In addition to coordination and government leadership, the importance of having a common understanding and acceptance of the different components of the nexus is a recurring point in articles and reports I have gathered, dealing with nexus implementation.

It has been reported how the efficiency of humanitarian action and development work can be hindered due to the rigidness of the system, where there are two separate “silos” or aid structure between humanitarian and development aid. Tronc et al. (2019, p. 25) describes it as "the humanitarian-development aid framework is strictly divided, governed by mandates and regulations initially intended for distinct types of needs,", highlighting how this limits the system’s capacity and thus also its effectiveness to quickly respond to sudden shocks and stresses.

Joireman and Haddad (2023) raises several interesting points in “The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus in practice: building climate and conflict sensitivity into humanitarian projects”: one of which are potential synergies between humanitarian work and peacebuilding, from a climate perspective. They suggest that efforts to cultivate peace and mitigate conflict in humanitarian areas can be effective regardless of whether they are explicitly part of a project's peace component. There are therefore several different solutions for the integration of peace aspects into humanitarian operations. According to Joireman and Haddad (2023), its effectiveness hinges on humanitarian workers' contextual knowledge as well as the conflict situation. A case in point is the Diffa commune in Niger, where the local communities initially responded negatively to the arrival of displaced people, fearing the effects on their forests, grazing lands, and farms. This adverse reaction ultimately led to violent outcomes. This kind of synergy becomes particularly important in a country like Myanmar, which is home to numerous ethnic groups. Besides internal conflicts, the country has also suffered from several natural disasters in recent years, leading to the displacement of a large portion of the population from their original home regions (Sida HCA, 2023).

3.2 Conflicting with the Principles

A major obstacle to the triple nexus is the unclear definition of 'peace', particularly in the humanitarian sector. The concept of peace is broad and involves a variety of global, regional and local actors and structures. It includes subtle aspects such as peacebuilding, conflict resolution and the global diplomacy system, as well as more direct elements related to security, stabilisation and peacekeeping. Brown and Mena (2021) write how these concepts are often referred to as 'soft' and 'hard' peace.

Brown and Menas (2021) review of Islamic Reliefs nexus programme has shown that introducing the peace aspect into the nexus emphasises the tension between political security agendas and the needs-based humanitarian principles. Many in the aid community,

particularly in the humanitarian sector, are concerned as they fear that the nexus risks politicising humanitarian action for military purposes. Some peacebuilding methods conflict with humanitarian ideals, an example being military action against armed groups, actions that needs to be kept separate from humanitarian interventions (Brown & Mena, 2021). Furthermore, it is noted how weak national leadership and high levels of corruption often leads to governments being bypassed by donors and implementing partners (Brown & Mena, 2021). The situation becomes more complex when an unclear definition of roles coincides with security issues and another loosely defined concept: stabilisation. Although the UN lacks a precise definition of stabilisation, it is generally seen as a combination of civil and military strategies to restore state authority. This includes the establishment of recognised government authority, institution building and the provision of essential government services. This strategy is supported by military operations bordering on counter-insurgency and is primarily directed against non-state actors (Nguya & Siddiqui, 2020). Hence, stabilisation and the principle of neutrality are often seen as incompatible, which affects potential collaborations between peace and humanitarian actors in various contexts. Neutrality as a concept became a key aspect of UN policy in the 1990s in relation to the UN agencies humanitarian activities. This emphasis was strategically implemented to minimise international political involvement in the internal affairs of states receiving aid (Kamal, 2023).

However, some argue that neutral humanitarianism is not the only way to respond to conflicts, as it can prevent humanitarians from addressing root causes as well as fundamental political issues. For instance, Khanna (2022) writes about how democracy advocates in Myanmar have called out international organisations for their lack of support towards the Myanmar populace, where they fail to see the primary source of the unrest – the unauthorised seizure of power by the military. Typical remarks from aid professionals in Myanmar is that "it is simpler to stay neutral when you are untouched by the injustice". This is critique to INGOs and the UN who are attempting to liaise with military leaders responsible for significant human rights violations. Their rationale for remaining neutral is often based on the necessity of travel authorisation to enter Myanmar, with the military often limiting aid access, especially in regions where pro-democracy protests has or is occuring. Khanna (2022) argues that it is vital to recognise that this stance of neutrality hinders humanitarian efforts from critiquing a state's deeds or lack thereof.

Tronc et al. (2019) argues how the triple nexus has had a negative impact on humanitarian efforts in contexts such as Mali where their guiding principles, and methodologies have been overshadowed and utilised for security goals and global military objectives, endangering crucial support and protection for communities. This has prompted Tronc et al. (2019) to highlight Mali as an example where international players need to move away from the triple nexus strategy, further arguing that humanitarian groups should speak out against civilian abuses, the politicisation of aid, and actively avoid anything that risks confusing and damaging relationships with local stakeholders.

In Myanmar local peacebuilders have leveraged their deep understanding of the context, trust within communities, and extensive connections to facilitate discussions and foster lasting peace. Over time, the principle of neutrality has faced growing scrutiny. It has shifted from being a means to reach those in need to seemingly becoming a barrier preventing local peace efforts. Moreover, the idea that humanitarian aid can be wholly neutral has been challenged. Khanna (2022) poses the question if not the mere act of delivering aid and protection inherently signifies opposition to the perpetrator. Slim (2015, p. 43) notes that since most principles are not absolute in the strictest sense, they need contextual interpretation for two reasons:

"either because they are relative principles, such as fairness and proportionality, that need to be specified in a particular situation; or because principles can compete with each other to create moral conflicts, or even a moral paradox, where if I do one thing right according to the principle, I do something else wrong.".

Therefore, any ethical framework encompassing multiple principles is inevitably prone to tensions between these competing principles. This is particularly evident in the realm of humanitarian action and becomes even more complex when you add development and peace doctrines, as is the case with the triple nexus framework.

The humanitarian principles are not only conflicting with each other but also with international doctrines such as the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. When states fail in their duty to protect their citizens from abuse, or they themselves engage in abuse, it sometimes results in states losing their sovereign rights and becoming subject to legitimate external intervention. This means the liberal international order remains conveniently favourable to the most powerful states in the system, a concern often raised by those in the global South. Baylis et al. (2019) problematises this by asking the question

whether the concept of humanitarian intervention is used as a pretext for powerful countries to justify their forceful meddling in the internal matters of weaker nations.

3.3 Politics, Funding and Centralisation

Even post-coup, Myanmar's aid landscape was intricate. The addition of a highly bureaucratic humanitarian system introduced further complications, exacerbating the already delicate and complex scenario. The international aid community's handling of the Myanmar crisis was initially a big failure as most UN agencies, donors and INGOs struggled to modify their humanitarian strategies swiftly enough to address the distinct characteristics of the context (Kamal, 2023). She describes how the international community's failure was due to the fact they persisted in their efforts to gain access through the de facto government, which were the actual perpetrators. By following traditional humanitarian methods of neutrality and engaging with the perpetrators, the delivery of aid was both ineffective and managed to alienate the Myanmar people's pursuit of systematic resolution to the injustice. It also worked to legitimise the de facto government control of the country. Kamal (2023, p.7) argues that the insistence on working with the de facto government was a "fetishised notion of humanitarian neutrality". Myanmar is not the only crisis where humanitarian aid is utilised as a means of political influence. There are numerous contexts with similar problems, and what usually characterises them is how, rather than tackling the underlying issues, the distribution of aid gets employed as a political gesture or a symbol of support.

According to Kamal (2023), this highlights a systemic issue where the strategic power is held by the decision-makers in the global North, who also determine the management of resources through their own set of indicators and parameters. The international aid system is hierarchical and operates through a top-down structure based on supply, where the majority of resources are found at the top of the pyramid while the bottom must wait for resources to filter down through the distribution chain. However, there is a positive trend in direct funding to local and national actors. Case studies from South Sudan and Somalia show a rise in direct funding to local NGOs. But despite this, UN agencies and INGOs continue to be the major players in the humanitarian field. In the case of increased national funding, this can to some degree be explained by the growing trend among INGOs to transfer more influence to their national branches in the global South. This is to get closer to the people receiving aid, but also to get closer to those in power in these countries and thus have a greater chance to influence policies (Ismael, 2019). INGOs also often serve as intermediaries, facilitating the flow of funds from donors to local NGOs. This means that they also have to take the risk if

something goes wrong. However, by simply subcontracting local organisations for implementation, there is a risk that you miss out on their knowledge of the local context and ability to adapt. This is in many ways a consequence of the risk-averse nature of many donor countries (Brugger et al., 2022).

Cochrane and Wilson (2023) mention how a concept such as triple nexus could lead to further centralisation of decision-making, moving it away from local actors. A clear example of this is when the nexus is mandated by donors as a criterion for design, implementation, success measurement, coordination, or as a presumed method for cost-saving. These are requirements that would work to perpetuate forms of power and control embedded in technocratic and administrative processes, which is counterproductive and leads to the undermining of initiatives such as the Grand Bargain.

The root of Myanmar's problems lies largely in the military regime's illegal seizure of power, and many stakeholders say the only long-term solution to the problems is peace. Brugger et al. (2023) describes peace as a continuous process rather a collection of tasks, and that it is thus a multi-dimensional effort that requires long-term commitments and visions. Despite this, peace is usually the least funded area of the triple nexus, especially in unstable contexts such as the one in Myanmar. Peace funding is typically allocated with short to medium-term goals in mind, which hampers longer processes. By contrast, development funding is typically spread over several years and aligned with both national and international development strategies. This usually involves direct funding of government institutions and partners and is typically based on mutual values, trust and transparency.

The very differences in structure of the three nexus pillars highlight the need for flexibility regarding its implementation. Garcias (2023) study about the triple nexus concludes that the decision to adjust the emphasis on any of the three pillars of the nexus should not be viewed as detracting from its overall rationale, as long as program adaption is likely to lead to improved outcomes for people in need. Furthermore, he believes the triple nexus offers a unique opportunity to redefine peace in terms of human security and thus place the rights of individuals at the forefront. This turned out to be particularly true in Myanmar, where Garcia (2023) was able to see, through his conflict analysis, that the military coup unintentionally united young people from different ethnic groups in their resistance against the military regime, indicating the possibilities of uniting individuals in addressing common issues even in some of the most complex settings. In Myanmar, the common issue is very much the

military regime. Kamal (2023) thus argues that by decentralising the international aid system you leave room for increased self-determination among communities, thereby improving their chances to fulfil their desire of an actual systematic resolution to the injustice.

4. Theoretical Framework

In the initial stage of this study, I wanted a clear and explicit connection between theory, earlier findings and purpose. Thus, I selected the concept of humanitarianism as I believe that the underlying knowledge behind this concept is a prerequisite for exploring the relationship between the triple nexus and the humanitarian principles. Additionally, to be able to answer my research question, I believe it is important to critically examine the patterns that are consistently reproduced in security and development doctrines and policies. I have therefore decided to use the theory of liberal internationalism as a starting point for my analysis. The reason I have chosen to use both liberalism and humanitarianism for this study is because I think there is an interesting connection between the two, which will be further explained below. I firmly believe these theories become particularly useful when one attempts to analyse a Western-made concept such as the triple nexus and the discourse surrounding it, as it encourages us to explore the context in which it was created.

I have used my theoretical framework to provide a better overview and structure to my research. It has helped me map out relevant variables and how they might relate to each other, and additionally, shaping my research question. Consequently, my theoretical framework serves as a method for modelling potential patterns and relationships. I have taken account of Leshem and Traffords (2007) ideas of paradigmatic thinking; meaning the changes in how something is perceived, shifting one's perspective from one worldview to another. This paradigmatic thinking is something that I intend to consider in my analysis, particularly when looking at the relationship between the contextual changes, the triple nexus framework and the humanitarian principles.

4.1 Humanitarianism

In his widely acclaimed book "Solferino 21: Warfare, Civilians and Humanitarians in the Twenty-First Century", Professor Hugo Slim states that "being humanitarian is universal but not uniform" (Slim, 2022, p. 238). I believe this quote says something important and so in this section I have chosen to highlight some of the different paradigms that exist within the concept of humanitarianism.

4.1.1 Humanity and Politics of Life

Humanitarianism is very much rooted in ‘humanity’ and was developed as a reaction to the inhumanity seen in warfare, as a means to re-establish the fundamental principles of humanity (Fassin, 2007). The concept of humanity is a social construct that emerged in a

specific historical context, meaning it will always be subject to change in line with the shifting politics and power dynamics of different eras. Metaphysically, humanity might have always been inherent, but it was only in the 18th century that humans started to actively recognise and cultivate their sense of humanity (Barnett, 2018). Wilson and Brown (2008) explains how the notion of humanity in recent times has been closely linked to the assertion that all individuals are human, equal, capable of reason, and bound to respect each other's dignity, treating one another as part of a global family. The concept of humanity includes both belief and action, with the latter often serving a dual purpose: not only restoring humanity in others but also allowing oneself to fulfil our own humanity (Barnett, 2018). It is from such actions the idea of duty originates. It has allowed humanity to give rise to both negative duties, which involve "refraining from actions that cause unnecessary and foreseeable harm" and positive duties, such as preventing and reducing unnecessary suffering (Barnett, 2018, p. 333)

It is important to acknowledge the power relations within humanitarian aid. Aloudat and Khan (2022) describe how it is crucial to differentiate between the concept of humanitarianism and the present structure of humanitarian aid. This is because the structure is a formal system predominantly driven by governments and organisations rooted in the global North. Most humanitarian organisations claim to be apolitical and instead governed by ethics, thus positioning ethics as an arena devoid of political influences. Barnett (2018) talks about the essence of humanitarianism and how being apolitical is not just about being non-partisan or ignoring political implications of aid, rather it is about an act of humanity, that of addressing immediate needs and thereby sustaining lives.

However, Fassin (2007) introduces a new paradigm in understanding life, life that is not merely biological but also biographical, meaning the life that is experienced but narrated by others. This is the result of humanitarian testimonies that creates a clear distinction between those who have the ability to share their own stories and those whose stories are only told by others. Fassin (2007) therefore argues that humanitarian intervention is a form of 'politics of life' as it focuses on the rescue of individuals which often times involves not just risking the lives of others but also making choices about which lives are possible or justifiable to save. That raises interesting questions regarding what kind of life is implicitly or explicitly considered in the political aspect of the humanitarian arena.

4.1.2 Classic Dunantist Humanitarianism

To understand the classic branch of humanitarianism and the prevailing narrative that has defined humanitarian aid for many years, we have to go back to Henri Dunant's experience at the Battlefield of Solferino in 1859. This event catalysed the development of International Humanitarian Law and shaped the modern concept of humanitarianism as a principled effort. The Geneva Conventions in the 1860s, aimed to regulate armed conflict and mitigate its impact. The ICRC were considered as the overseers of the conventions and following this, the Red Cross Red Crescent movement emerged to offer protection and assistance to those affected by war. The classic framework of humanitarianism is grounded on the fundamental principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Hilhorst, 2016). These principles are intended to guarantee that humanitarian aid is distributed solely based on need, without influence from political agendas or any form of discrimination (Hilhorst, 2018). However, Hilhorst (2018) argues that, at the core of this paradigm is an exceptionalism that perhaps surpasses the importance of these principles. This is based on the notion that there is a widespread adherence to a rigid distinction between times of crisis and normality in both legal and cultural norms around the world. Humanitarian aid is firmly situated within the sphere of crisis, acting as a provisional response to the needs created by a particular emergency.

In this paradigm, various aspects of humanitarian aid are based on the guiding principle of exceptionalism, such as its short-term funding methods and costly operational processes. This exceptionalism has created a structure of short, finite interventions, which in turn also has defined what is characterised as a humanitarian crisis, rather than vice versa. A simple way to define a humanitarian crisis is to understand that the cessation of aid would lead to a rapid increase in death and disease (Hilhorst, 2018). What if the humanitarian structure was reversed, broadening the notion of what is considered a humanitarian crisis and therefore not only limiting it to those events triggered by natural disasters and conflicts. This is a question raised by Hilhorst (2018), further explaining that in such scenario, regions where people reside in slums or lack access to safe drinking water would be framed as a humanitarian crisis.

Predominantly, Western humanitarian efforts adhere to a strict model of principled action. This model is characterised by a strong commitment to the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (Kamal 2023). In the classic Dunantist paradigm the emphasis on humanitarian principles is seen as a tool for securing access to those in need.

This can result in the disregard of alternative trust-building factors that can facilitate access, such as accountability, reliability, or, in certain instances, a history of solidarity (Hilhorst, 2005). In certain contexts, it might be more beneficial to build a positive relationship with partner organisations, showing trust in local staff, ensuring accountability rather than strict adherence to humanitarian principles. This singular focus on principles further reinforces the perception of international actors as disconnected from the societies they serve. This is why national authorities and local institutions are often overlooked within classic humanitarianism, often perceived as lacking capacities and therefore ignored when the international humanitarian system mobilises during a crisis (Hilhorst, 2018).

4.1.3 Resilience Humanitarianism

In recent years, a new narrative centred on resilience has gained traction. This shift reflects changes in aid delivery facilitated by technological advances within the aid sector, with a prime example being the digital payment systems used in various contexts. This in turn has led to a significant shift in the discourse international actors use to describe crises, the communities and societies affected by them. Unlike classic humanitarianism, the idea of localisation is at the core of resilience humanitarianism, meaning it focuses on the belief that individuals, communities, and societies possess or can develop the ability to adjust or recover from devastating life events and disasters. Instead of a clear demarcation between crisis and normalcy, viewing disaster as a completely paralysing interruption, it is seen as a situation where people strive for continuity by utilising their resources to adapt (Hilhorst, 2018).

Hilhorst (2018) describes the origin story of resilience humanitarianism as a product of disaster relief efforts, where the resilience of local individuals and communities as well as the importance of local response systems became central to the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2004. As a result, national authorities started to play a more prominent role in managing disaster response which was also needed given the increasing number of climate change related natural disasters. Rodin (2014) argues that crisis response becomes significantly more efficient and cost-effective when it considers people's ability to react, adapt, and recover, something that has come to be referred to as the ‘resilience dividend’.

The resilience humanitarianism paradigm has altered the fundamental understanding of humanitarian aid. Instead of looking at disaster-affected people as victims, as first responders they are seen as an important part of the emergency response. Perhaps even more important is the fact that humanitarianism is no longer considered an isolated intervention, as during the

2016 World Humanitarian Summit it was advocated for integrating humanitarian efforts with development and peacebuilding. Chandler (2014) talks about how the discourse surrounding resilience is well aligned with the complexities of typical neoliberal governance models in the sense that the state's role of governing is being shifted to non-state or private entities, with the aim of empowering crisis-affected populations. One result of this shift is the increasingly ambiguous and diminished role of the state in protecting its citizens.

Hilhorst (2018) highlights how the resilience paradigm has significantly influenced the language and practices of humanitarian aid and in turn, impacted governance relationships on a broader scale. She argues that, as the distinction between crisis and normality becomes less distinct, the way the humanitarian field is conceptualized also shifts. What used to be considered a 'humanitarian system' is now often referred to as a 'humanitarian ecosystem', one that is less centred around international humanitarian agencies and acknowledges a diverse array of service providers: national, local and often times also encompassing the private sector. This new paradigm raises a lot of questions regarding the identity and legitimacy of humanitarian agencies, particularly the big INGOs and the operational divisions of the UN, and thus also what role, if any, the humanitarian principles will play.

4.1.4 Resistance Humanitarianism

Resistance humanitarianism is a form of humanitarianism based on civilian rescue and relief efforts. These efforts are typically coordinated by resistance groups that are equally fighting for victory and humanity, thus advocating for both human life and freedom. What particularly distinguishes resistance humanitarianism from other approaches is the fact that it is not neutral, yet still embody humanitarian values. This has in many cases meant that resistance humanitarians have been able to provide assistance to people more quickly and effectively than humanitarian organisations with a classical principled approach (Slim, 2022; Kamal, 2023).

Resistance humanitarianism is not a new concept, it has been around since the 1980s and early 1990s. Aid organisations such as Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) were recognised for not cooperating with UN-led projects or other neutral international aid initiatives during the Sudanese civil wars in the 1980s. Instead, they worked exclusively with the Relief and Development Department of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, the political arm of the Sudan People's Liberation Army, effectively taking sides in the war for an independent South Sudan (NPA, 1999). It can be said that resistance humanitarianism was born out of

frustration with classical principled humanitarianism, which was considered too passive in certain contexts that required a bolder approach. Particularly local humanitarian activists often become disillusioned with established aid models, leading them to reject these approaches and pursue independent action, free from the constraints of neutrality and what they see as excessive bureaucracy and management (Slim, 2022). Civil defiance characterises resistance humanitarianism and this is due to how resistance movements typically boycott government-controlled institutions to form their own parallel rescue and relief systems. Operating without consent in this way often means they are forced to conduct their work in secrecy (Slim, 2022).

The moral obligation of battling injustice goes against classical humanitarianism and its focus on neutrality. While classical humanitarian organisation intentionally ignores differences between aggression and self-defence in an attempt to remain apolitical, resistance humanitarianism focuses on both aiding victims while also recognising and confronting injustices. Furthermore, resistance humanitarianism tends to be more locally driven and thus in a better position to promote political self-determination (Slim, 2022). There are however some concerns that a formal recognition of humanitarian resistance in aid policies could have a negative impact on the general perception of humanitarianism and thus creating a situation where all humanitarian actors risk being treated with suspicion. But according to Slim (2022) this fear is unjustified. This is partly because Western humanitarian actors are already seen by people in the global South as biased and non-neutral, and as liberal-leaning agencies that are mainly used to serve Western interventionism. Kamal (2023) writes how the principle of neutrality is seldom taken at face value by authoritarian regimes and how this contributes to frequent hindrances for Western organisations, as they are perceived as representatives of Western interests and perspectives.

4.2 Liberal Internationalism

Baylis, Smith and Owens (2019) describe the fundamental nature of liberalism as being about self-control, moderation, peace and the willingness to make compromises. But to understand its foundations, what it is and how it came about in the context of international relations, we need to go back in time. As a response to what they perceived as “barbarity within international relations”, both Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham developed proposals aimed at establishing regulatory frameworks for war and peace. They were both considered prominent liberal thinkers of their time. This happened during the enlightenment, a time marked by significant advancements in domestic politics, characterised by the emergence of

rights, citizenship, and constitutionalism. Despite being conceived over two centuries ago, their ethical and political theories laid the groundwork for fundamental liberal internationalist concepts, particularly the idea that “reason and rationality could lead to freedom and justice in international relations” (Baylis et al., 2019, p.105).

Through the belief that you could limit the self-interest of states through international regulations and laws, the idea of an international body was born. Furthermore, it was believed that trade and other forms of cross-border exchanges would address the problems of war. This first led to the creation of the League of Nations, which, after its failure, was replaced by the UN. Critical voices have been raised, pointing out how liberalism has resulted in significantly uneven benefits between the global north and the others and how this international body of laws and regulations are helping maintain the current global order instead of reshaping it to adhere to fairer distribution principles. When the dominant liberal order faces threats, the reaction tends to be uncompromising and upheld through persuasion or force as needed (Baylis et al., 2019; Carr & Cox, 2016). The liberal vision of a rational and moral world order can be linked to the interests of the most powerful states, with the most recent example being how the principles of democracy, self-determination and collective security became the moral standard in conjunction with Americas rise to power (Carr & Cox, 2016). This leads us to what Reid-Henry (2014) defines as liberal approaches to care, which has helped forming the “humanitarian reason” as well as establishing what Didier Fassin calls the moral economy.

Henri Dunant's experience at the Battlefield of Solferino in 1859 was not only an event that catalysed the development of international humanitarian law, it was also significant in establishing a compassionate political morality. When talking about liberalism and humanitarianism it is important to not neglect the politics and self-interest of states, or as Reid-Henry (2014, p.422) describes it: “the rise of humanitarianism is a component of the modern liberal state's focus on its own security within the context of emerging forms of biopower”. This highlights humanitarianism as a tool for liberal power structures, as it defines what is deficient and incomplete and thus in need of liberal development. As the evolution of humanitarianism has moved from neutrality-based approaches to strategies of “integrated responses” and protection mandates, the idea of ‘selective withdrawal’ has at the same time been facilitated. This demonstrates how humanitarianism has always been influenced by both ethical obligations and political biases. Reid-Henry (2014) argues that by debating the principle of neutrality in humanitarian action, we risk overlooking the

opportunity to analyse how its ethical mandates have manifested as a form of politics globally, establishing biopolitical forms of government. In this context geography plays a big role, as the liberal approach to care penetrates more profoundly into the humanitarian arena globally and may thus influence what kind of life is implicitly or explicitly considered in the political aspect of Western humanitarianism. This form of humanitarianism that is increasingly more institutionalised and systematised, represents a formalised expression of liberal morality (Fassin, 2007; Reid-Henry, 2014).

4.2.1 Democratic Peace

Another topic that is often touched upon in regard to liberalism is the concept of democratic peace. A well-known quote from President Clinton that summarizes the concept is "democracies do not fight each other" (Franceschet, 2000, p.280). To clarify what is meant by this, one can look at Immanuel Kant's ideas on political philosophy regarding the causal relationship between democracy and peace. In line with liberal internationalists, democratic peace theorists value a country's external sovereignty and sees it as a precondition for internal sovereignty to be located in the people. This means that democracy is promoted when states avoid challenging other states' authority through external influence, while simultaneously the authority of states is not internally challenged by, for example, the military or monarchs (Franceschet, 2000). This perspective has influenced liberalism for several decades, and the idea that the democratization of states in the international system will lead to peace has been evident in the speeches of numerous Western leaders. The goal of having as many democracies as possible in the international system has thus been an objective in the Western world, with the motto of many democratic peace theorists being "making the world safe through democracy" (Franceschet, 2000, p.281). Liberal ideology and institutions play a crucial role in fostering democratic peace. Liberals believe that people worldwide share fundamental similarities and goals of self-preservation and material well-being, which requires both freedom and peace. Coercion and violence are therefore seen as harmful to these aims. According to this view, democracies are peaceful and trustworthy as they align with their citizens' interests, while non-democracies are considered potentially dangerous due to their different motives, such as conquest or plunder (Owen, 1994).

5. Methodology

The subsequent section outlines the methodological framework and characteristics of the study, including a detailed account of how the research was conducted. It also provides a concise overview of the participants' backgrounds, roles, and geographical settings.

The research approach adopted for this study was to conduct remote interviews with professionals in the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors, or those associated with donor organizations, at headquarter level. The remote nature of the research afforded the opportunity to engage with individuals across various regions, encompassing Europe, Asia and North America. I do acknowledge my lack of fieldwork as a limitation in this study, as it could have improved the quality of the interviews and provided a broader perspective by more accurately reflecting the current context.

This study focuses on Myanmar, which represents the 'field' level, where operations are conducted at the local or national level. Myanmar faces several challenges, including ethnic conflict, fragile governance, internally displaced persons and the presence of armed groups. These issues are not unique to Myanmar but are also prevalent in other countries that are experiencing conflict situations, making Myanmar an appropriate representative case study. Bryman (2016) suggests that a case study can be selected not necessarily because of its extreme or unique nature, but because it has characteristics that can be observed in other contexts. Consequently, the findings from this study, focusing on Myanmar, may be applicable to similar situations elsewhere (Bryman, 2016). However, as noted by Howe (2019), it's important to recognise that the application of the nexus approach must be tailored to the specific context.

5.1 Qualitative Method

The intent behind this study is to gain a deeper understanding rather than to provide an explanation, which is why I have opted for a qualitative research method. This approach is particularly focused on the examination of language and meaning, seeking to uncover patterns and connections. An underlying principle of qualitative inquiry, and one that is fundamental to this research, is the notion that our human perspectives on what is significant warrant attention and study, as it is we, the participants in reality, who construct it (Alvehus, 2013). Moreover, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory posits that various actors shape the dynamics within the networks they belong to. Consequently, it falls upon the researcher to unravel the dynamics at play within these networks. Engaging with and interpreting various

social contexts is, therefore, a key methodological tool in qualitative research (Alvehus, 2013).

I would also like to touch upon the role of interpretation, as it is a significant and sizable aspect of the qualitative research process and may be seen as a rather subjective foundation for establishing scientific knowledge. Interpretation varies in its significance across various scientific theoretical traditions (Alvehus, 2013). The aim of this study is to contribute to a more general understanding of the triple nexus and how it is being operated in a context such as Myanmar, thus expanding the existing range of knowledge within the field. Qualitative method is a concept that encompasses a number of different variants, I will thus try to further nuance my research method in order to create greater understanding and credibility for the study.

5.2 Selection

The selection of participants for the interviews was strategically made to address the research question effectively. Considering the vast scope of aid projects with a triple nexus focus around the world, I choose to limit myself to Myanmar. In qualitative research, unlike quantitative studies, the goal is not to achieve statistical generalisability; therefore, the need for a random sample is less critical (Larsen, 2018). I intentionally chose to not utilise randomness in choosing my interview participants, which implies that I cannot ascertain if my sample is fully representative.

In this study I have adopted what Larsen (2018) defines as a strategic selection approach. With this approach it is up to the researchers to choose participants based on specific criteria like age, occupation or residency. For this study, I determined my participant selection using two primary criteria: firstly, participants needed to be working within either humanitarian, development or peace sectors of aid work, to address the research question effectively; secondly, I aimed for a balanced representation of employees working for both donors as well as INGOs and local organisations. Ensuring a diverse sample group aids in enhancing the study's transferability - the potential for the findings to be applicable to settings beyond this study, a key consideration in qualitative research (Larsen, 2018). Keeping these criteria at the forefront, I have sought to include individuals working at both field level and headquarter level, with the hope of uncovering insights that can be useful for aid workers at all levels of the system.

The initial point of contact with potential participants was made via e-mail, where I provided a concise overview of the study and its objectives. My initial contacts, through their professional networks, led to further participants. Thus, the sampling strategy began as purposive and naturally evolved into a snowball sampling technique. While the inclusion of the donor viewpoint was not initially planned, the preliminary review of literature and early interviews highlighted its importance, leading to its integration into the study. Out of the 10 individuals I reached out to, five expressed interest in participating.

Two were interviewed when infield, working for INGOs in Myanmar. Two of the respondents were locals, generally working at field level but currently from the offices of neighbouring countries due to the threat posed to them by the de facto government. I also interview one working at headquarter level, representing a donor country. Former experience and current positions include embassy staff, NGO country director, program officer and senior advisor, with at least two of the respondents having experience of working in a UN agency. Since the goal is to see the implementation of the triple nexus concept in Myanmar from the respondents' perspectives and further be analysed through the humanitarian lens, an abductive research method has been selected as the fittest (Bryman, 2016). To compensate for my small sample, I have tried to make my interviews as comprehensive as possible.

5.3 Data Collection

Data collection, as described by Larsen (2018), is the process of gathering information about reality that is relevant to the research question. Data can be categorised into two types: primary and secondary. Primary data refers to information gathered directly by the researcher, while secondary data refers to information gathered by other researchers. This study uses both types with the purpose to formulate the research problem and interpret and discuss the findings of the study. My secondary data mainly consists of reports from various NGOs as well as articles and research papers from scholars, which I have summarised in my literature review. But I have also looked at including public documents and evaluations from donor agencies, as it became clear during the course of the study that a donor perspective would add another dimension and thus contribute to a deeper analysis. My primary data consists of five interviews, with four male and one female participants. These interviews were conducted in two stages, using telephone calls and video calls. The interviews lasted about thirty minutes to an hour each, exploring three key themes related to the triple nexus in Myanmar: implementation, humanitarian principles and alignment.

I have used semi-structured interviews, guided by a flexible interview framework. This approach involved preparing pre-determined questions for the interviews, while also allowing space for spontaneous follow-up questions whenever it seemed relevant. The main purpose of these additional questions was to encourage respondents to expand or clarify their answers. A key advantage of this method is that it gives respondents the freedom to elaborate on their thoughts or introduce issues that they consider important. However, due to my limit number of participants it was important for me, as the interviewer, to ensure that the dialogue remained relevant to the research question, which is why I during the interviews shared the questions with the respondents to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings.

In developing my interview questions, I drew primarily on existing theory and research and aligned it with my specific research question. My aim was to construct a comprehensive interview guide, using open-ended questions and follow-up questions to gain an in-depth understanding of my respondents' experiences and perspectives. In addition, I made a concerted effort to gather extensive background information on the respondent's organisation and role within the international aid system, in the belief that such context enriches the overall picture and greatly aids the subsequent discussion and interpretation of the interview data. In order to maintain the reliability of the study, I followed the interview guide consistently throughout all five interviews. Conducting the interviews on an individual basis fostered a relaxed and safe environment, encouraging the respondents to provide detailed and nuanced accounts.

5.4 Analytical Method

Typically, analysing qualitative data involves sifting through a significant amount of text, distilling it and discarding parts that are not relevant to the research question, as noted by Larsen (2018). There are numerous methods for undertaking this task, for this study I have decided to use content analysis. Following the transcription of the initial interviews, I examined the summarised text and selected quotes that were relevant to the research question. I then assigned codes to each quote – words or phrases that succinctly capture the essence of the discussion. By organising these codes into categories, I gained a clearer understanding of the emerging patterns and trends in the quotes. As one of the interviews were conducted in Swedish and the rest in English, this method was not completely flawless and required me to translate everything to English before organising the data. During this phase, I encountered new insights that led me to collect additional data, as I wanted to include information from people working for donor agencies as well. This iterative process is often referred to as the

hermeneutic circle, as described by Patel & Davidson (2011). It emphasises that the hermeneutic process has no definitive beginning or end, but that all stages are interconnected and continually evolving.

In order to focus on what I considered to be significant, I identified key themes within these categories and linked them to my secondary data which consisted of existing research and theory. This approach allowed me to uncover connections within my data, facilitating more in-depth analysis and, consequently, more comprehensive conclusions.

5.5 Literature Search

The databases used for this study were the Aalborg University Library database and Google Scholar to find relevant articles and research papers. Depending on my needs, I have used keywords in both Swedish and English. The most frequently used search terms during my literature review included 'triple nexus', ‘challenges’, 'humanitarian principles' and 'Myanmar'. In addition, I have included articles, literature from previous university courses and sources cited in other studies to enrich my research material.

There were some limitations to my literature search. Firstly, I have decided to focus exclusively on literature and research related to the relatively new concept of the triple nexus. This is despite the existence of older, similar concepts such as the LRRD. This was done because I wanted to limit the study to get a clearer focus. My literature review was also limited due to language constraints, as I restricted my scope to English language literature, as it was difficult to assess the relevance of existing German and French research due to language barriers.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

According to the Swedish Research Council (2017), researchers have responsibilities both to their study participants and to those indirectly affected by their research. Consequently, I have considered the four ethical principles outlined by the Council: the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the usage requirement. The information requirement is essential to achieve informed consent. This means that participants must be fully informed about the purpose of the study and their expected involvement before they can agree to participate. They should also be made aware of how data will be collected, used, and stored, as well as their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time (Kalman & Lövgren, 2012). I ensured that all of these details were communicated to my respondents before they agreed to participate in this study.

Kalman and Lövgren (2012) further discuss the requirement of confidentiality, which relates to the handling of data obtained from research participants. In order to maintain the integrity of participants, all audio recordings and interview notes that could reveal their identity must be securely stored and inaccessible to unauthorised persons. In this study, I have secured all interview materials and anonymised my respondents from the outset by not including their names in any documents, thus preventing information from being traced back to any individual. Ensuring confidentiality encourages more honest and open interviews as participants feel secure about their privacy. Anonymity is something that is particularly important in this context, where some of the work carried out is so-called low-profile operations. Therefore, it was important for me to reassure my participants that their name or the name of the organisation they represented would not be included in the study.

Finally, the usage requirement, as described by Kalman and Lövgren (2012), dictates that information collected during interviews should only be used for research purposes. This principle also serves to protect the integrity of participants. It's important for respondents to trust that the information they provide will not be misused or used inappropriately. Perceptions of what is most beneficial to the organisation and its beneficiaries can vary in different environments. Therefore, before interviewing head office and field staff, I ensured them that the aim of the study is to highlight the complex challenges involved in the implementing procedures and not to point finger at staff who may not be following head office and donor guidelines.

6. Analysis

In this section, the study's key findings will be presented. They will be organized under subheadings, which represent significant insights identified through keyword coding of the transcribed interviews. First off, it is important to acknowledge the very different situations in pre- and post-coup Myanmar. My findings mainly reflect the situation after the military coup, but also with some references to how the situation differs from before. Through my coding, three themes emerged that I have chosen to use in this analysis. The following themes have been chosen as they best represent the findings from my interviews and are best suited to answer my research questions.

6.1 Politicisation of aid

The politicisation of aid is a sensitive issue in the aid sector, especially for humanitarian actors who are expected to adhere to humanitarian principles. Moreover, the idea that humanitarian aid can be wholly neutral is being challenged on many fronts. Khanna (2022) raises the question of whether the simple act of providing aid and protection is in itself a stance against the perpetrator and I think that is an interesting starting point for this part of the analysis. Since the military coup in 2021, Myanmar has become a much more difficult country to operate in, as all of my respondents attest to. This is true at all levels: the local, national and international. All respondents testify that the military coup has created a climate of suspicion, in which actors have to walk a fine line between whether or not to engage, as well as when, where and with whom to engage. One respondent describes how the current situation is limiting the possibilities of coordination between actors, which makes implementing a concept such as nexus much more difficult:

"On top of that, the coup has created a lot of mistrust and sensitivities about security, which also then limits information sharing and coordination. Nobody wants to talk about what kind of programs they're doing in certain parts of the country, because it will put them at risk. It will put their partners at risk."

This reinforces Nguya and Siddiqui (2020) argument about how the government plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of the nexus approach. They emphasize the importance of governments enacting targeted legislation to tackle prolonged humanitarian crises and connecting humanitarian aid to national welfare, either directly or via capacity building efforts. The opposite has happened in Myanmar, where the de facto government has instead done everything possible to discourage aid agencies from working in the country. The

respondents representing INGOs testify how certain staff members have been denied entry visas and that the de facto government has either denied or severely restricted access to certain areas of the country, making it difficult for organisations to reach people in need.

The humanitarian community's scepticism towards triple nexus cooperation is often claimed to be based on the notion that development and peace actors are politicised. This politicisation is seen as contrary to the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality towards parties in a conflict. All my respondents agreed that the situation in Myanmar is politicised and that it is impossible to avoid this if you want to work in the country. One of my respondents argued that any situation involving financial support or contributions to either party of the conflict inherently leads to politicisation. Another respondent talked about how the classical interpretation of the principles of neutrality and impartiality were especially difficult to adhere to in a context such as Myanmar, where almost exclusively local actors or organisations linked to the de facto government have access to certain areas.

"Like if you've taken a side, like let's say we're working quite closely with civil society here. Civil society has taken quite an intentional stance against the military. Does that mean that you're now violating humanitarian principles because you're backing civil society? And that approach, I think, is not disregarding the humanitarian principles. It's just saying that the concepts of impartiality, the kind of Geneva and historical cold war type humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality ... you can't just go in with your red cross flag and pretend like everybody's just going to let you go in and collect the wounded. It's different. You have to operate different in a different context. And we're all political actors here. So let's recognize that."

This quote highlights one of the problems regarding the approach of classical humanitarianism in highly politicised contexts such as the one in Myanmar. It raises the question of what is means to be neutral and impartial. During the interviews, there were differences of opinion on the importance of adhering to humanitarian principles, but all respondents agreed that interpretation plays an important role in how one chooses to relate to them. However, this lack of clarity made it easy to "hide" behind the principles, which hampers cooperation between organisations and thus the possibility of successful nexus integration.

"But yeah, I think that the humanitarian neutrality is a guideline. In fact, I think one of the central issues in Myanmar is way too many people hiding behind the neutrality argument,

and essentially de facto allowing the government of Myanmar to dictate how this response functions."

This is in line with Hilhorsts (2018) argument about how fostering a good relationship with partner organisations and placing trust in local organisations may be more advantageous than strictly adhering to humanitarian principles. In Myanmar, the opposite happened, and the international community was criticised for being too soft on the de facto government. This suggests how the international agencies, at least initially, approached the situation in Myanmar from a classical humanitarianism point of view. This explains why local institutions were sidelined in some regards. This was something that one of the respondents, who works for a local organisation, wanted to highlight as key to working in a context like Myanmar:

"So, the internationals coming.. mostly, you know, the traditional way of doing things is they will fund the UN, they will fund the INGOs, they will fund bigger actors, bigger NGOs. The smaller local actors hardly get it because they are small, their capacity is limited, their coverage is limited, they are not also well represented, they are not also well, you know, visible. So, you know, several things. But what is clear for them is they (LNGOs) are the ones who have access to the local community, and they are the ones who can talk to and deliver services to the local community in a very culturally competent and acceptable manner. So, in that, you know, there is a need from international actors and also there is a call from local community to be in partnership with them."

Again, the notion that some humanitarian actors are hiding behind the principle of neutrality is troublesome in many ways when working between the nexus pillars and instead of being a means to reach people in need, it risks becoming a barrier that prevents local peace efforts. This is why Slims (2015) article about contextual interpretation is so important when talking about nexus cooperation. The word interpretation came up several times during the interviews, particularly in relation to the humanitarian principles. One of the respondents working for one of the bigger INGOs explained how they were constantly forced to interpret and weigh up the various humanitarian principles against each other:

"And in a lot of cases in Myanmar, you have to kind of decide which one you're going to lean on more heavily, because this is an interpretation. And so, I think, again, that the principle that's been violated the most in Myanmar is not the neutrality principle, it's the humanitarian imperative. It's the need to reach people that need assistance"

This highlights the moral paradox created by competing principles, where if you lean too heavily on one principle you may do something else wrong. These conflicts become even more complex when you consider the nexus framework and the idea of cooperation between the peace, development and humanitarian pillars, with its different mandates. This places even greater demands on aid actors to constantly balance not only humanitarian principles but also peace and development principles in order to arrive at the best solution for the specific context. I would argue that this risks turning nexus co-operation into both inefficient and frustrating processes for those involved, as confirmed by one of the respondents:

"So, if we must apply the principle of neutrality, that means everything, including the government, which is one of the triggers of conflict. My frustration with the humanitarian neutrality kind of language that gets used does originate with my time in Syria, Libya especially, where in a nasty civil war, principles like neutrality always have to be interrogated, examined, and interpreted. There's no right answer."

The general picture, as mentioned by Aloudat and Khan (2022), that humanitarian organisations are expected to be apolitical and instead guided by ethics is not grounded in reality in the case of Myanmar, as ethics cannot be considered an arena free from political influences. The many different principles have to be weighed against each other in each scenario. In Myanmar, this means sometimes working against the government or with organisations that are considered illegal. Interestingly, particularly the respondents representing the INGOs talks about the struggles of balancing the humanitarian principles and their perception that the humanitarian imperative of saving lives is abandoned in favour of neutrality. This shows how prioritising different principles may turn humanitarian organisations into political actors. By placing more emphasis on one principle, there is a risk that other people in need will be neglected, leading to what Fassin (2007) calls the politics of life. All respondents mention how reducing suffering and saving lives is the essence of their work in Myanmar and thus the idea of being non-partisan is not always feasible. One respondent representing an INGO talks about how they have partnered up with organisations that are considered illegal in order to best carry out their work:

"So, I think that we've got to remember that there's multiple principles here. And one is the humanitarian imperative as well. And I think that especially in cases like in Rakhine, where the government of Myanmar is the central impediment to access. In a recent situation in Sagaing, is a perfect example of this, where the government of Myanmar is actively impeding

work, actively impeding access for international organizations. There is still ways to reach people, but they do involve working with actors like the Arakan army. It involve working with local organizations that are willing to circumvent the government that are actively against the government or which are considered illegal organizations."

I believe that the form of resistance humanitarianism being mentioned here is generally more difficult to adhere to from a donor perspective. As donor countries are usually beholden to their taxpayers, this means that they are much more risk-averse in order to avoid cooperations that could potentially lead to a media disaster which could have a spiralling effect and negatively impact the confidence in the aid system, domestically. These rules of engagement also apply for cooperation with military regimes and the like, which, in the worst case, could lead to a total blockage of aid, ultimately affecting people in need. One respondent representing one of the major donors in Myanmar mentioned the deadlocked situation that emerged in Myanmar post-coup:

"The UN tried to have meetings with the regime. Sometimes to discuss and find solutions. It was controversial. Several donors said that we shouldn't have meetings with the military regime. We definitely didn't have any meetings with the military regime. So we ended up in a lock-down. We didn't give a penny to the military regime. At the same time, FN tried to say "well, you need to help the people somehow.""

From a donor perspective, the situation in post-coup Myanmar was a nightmare. The situation became particularly problematic in relation to the triple nexus: where development actors had previously worked with the state, this became impossible overnight. This created a dilemma: donors still wanted to work with the nexus, but at the same time they did not want to be associated with the de facto government. One respondent described how the very strict rules of engagement by the international aid community contributed to reducing the tensions with the humanitarian principles, mostly by ignoring the role of the government in relation to the nexus. It can be argued that the price for this was that aid actors instead became passive and thus indirectly legitimised the de facto government. As noted in Kamals (2023) criticism of the international aid community's handling of the Myanmar crisis: by adhering to classical, neutral humanitarian practices, the international aid community alienated the people of Myanmar who were fighting against the injustice of the military coup. The data from the interview shows that my respondents are political and see it as a necessity to take sides in a context like Myanmar. One respondent representing a donor country were the only one who

emphasised the importance of neutrality at all times. This is reasonable when you look at the risk averse nature among donors where, according to Brugger et al. (2023), security and financial risks are often outsourced to intermediaries, often INGOs that then pass on the funds down the funding pyramid. Kamal (2023) criticizes this as an overemphasis on humanitarian neutrality and argues that this creates a situation where aid reaching vulnerable populations becomes more symbolic rather than actually addressing the root problem. This is an example of how humanitarian aid becomes a tool used for political influence, focusing more on symbolic support than addressing root causes.

When asked about the root causes in Myanmar, all respondents agree that the military regime is the main actor. This suggests that if one is serious about trying to improve the situation from a nexus point-of-view, working towards long-term peace is a prerequisite and if we refer to Bruggers et al. (2023) notion of peace, a dialogue between different actors is needed to start the process. One respondent mentioned how a true theory of change should focus on transforming the military regime, which in turn would entail taking a certain political position, thus conflicting with the notion that humanitarianism is apolitical:

".. A true theory of change that is trying to work on peace writ large would try to transform the role of the military, and that entails taking a certain political position, right? And then that political position naturally then puts you in conflict with at least the very kind of ICRC way of interpreting humanitarian principles.."

But when asked, all respondents said that this was not realistic at the moment and that the focus should be on working for peace at the community level. As observed by Kamal (2023), working with the nexus in Myanmar is difficult if the peace component is intended to be what Brown and Mena (2021) define as "hard peace". This is due to the fact that "hard peace" often involves stabilisation which conflicts with the principle of neutrality whose purpose, among other things, is that of reducing international political interference in the domestic matters of aid-receiving states.

Based on the data, a major dilemma for many actors seems to be choosing who to work with and when. Highlighting this dilemma, one respondent mentions how the principles of neutrality and impartiality means they either work with everyone or with no one. This becomes even more complex when working across the nexus, as there are multiple governance systems and actors that are all parties to the conflict which specifically affects the development pillar of the nexus:

"But in Myanmar, there is multiple governance systems and governing actors that are also parties to the conflict that are more or less excluded because it is considered that working with them would not be neutral. So, when I look at the principle, again, you can still work with governing authorities and in areas of governance, livelihoods, economic development, stuff like that, just not necessarily everywhere ... But it's about making conscious choices about when you're engaging and why you're engaging and how are you engaging with other actors as well."

What all respondents mention is the importance of local actors. One respondent explains how implementing nexus on a community level is easier as it is less politically charged. The disadvantage of this approach is that you don't reach as many people as you would if you did it on a national level. However, the respondent goes on to explain that this may still be worthwhile in order to maintain a principled stance.

In summary, the majority of respondents have expressed a willingness to overlook humanitarian principles if it means they can work more effectively. However, they all made sure to emphasise the importance and significant role of these principles in general. Ultimately, humanitarian principles are not laws, and in a context such as Myanmar they need to be constantly analysed and interpreted and weighed against each other to determine the best way to deliver aid to those in need. Aid has become politicised in Myanmar, with the military regime using various tactics to restrict the work of the international aid community in the country. This has led to a paradigm shift where many Western INGOs have moved from classic humanitarianism to a more resistance-focused approach, decentralising aid and relying more on local actors, as one respondent is careful to add:

"I ascribe much, much more to a kind of resistance humanitarianism ethos, especially in a conflict like this. And I think that there's different conflicts where I would not necessarily feel that way. Syria is a good example."

I believe the increased reliance on local actors has forced the international aid community to adapt and to adopt a more activist approach that is less constrained by the humanitarian principles. In turn, this has decreased the tensions that might otherwise has been there, between actors of the different nexus pillar. This is very much in line with what Slim (2022) describes, how resistance humanitarianism typically is born out of frustration with classical principled humanitarianism and what is perceived as passivity.

Western humanitarian actors are often perceived in the global South as biased, non-neutral, and serving Western interventionism. Kamal (2023) notes that authoritarian regimes rarely accept the principle of neutrality at face value, leading to frequent obstacles for Western organisations viewed as embodying Western interests and perspectives. However, it is difficult to determine whether it is the moral obligation to fight injustice that has made international actors more politicised or whether it is the fact that they were more or less forced to do so in order to operate in the country due to the revoked travel authorisations. Not taking anyone's side meant that the situation was completely frozen and supplies did not reach the people they were intended for. So, they chose to work with both sides instead and while both sides were chosen to some extent, several respondents testified that their support went mainly to the NGCAs where they could better guarantee the principles of impartiality, independence and humanity.

Donors, however, found this shift from classical humanitarianism more problematic as the principle of neutrality is particularly important in international relations. This is something that Slim (2022) questions as he argues that Western humanitarian actors are already often perceived in the global South as biased, non-neutral and serving Western interventionism. If this is to be taken as truth, what has happened in Myanmar is a logical outcome, as the only choice for international actors in Myanmar was to compromise the principle of neutrality and move away from the paradigm of classical humanitarianism. By supporting and working through local organisations, the international aid community acknowledged, directly or indirectly, the injustices of the de facto government and their illegal seizure of power which in itself should be understood as a departure from the apolitical approach that is the hallmark of classical humanitarianism.

6.2 Shifting power

After the military coup in 2021, the aid landscape changed considerably and involved major adjustments for a range of actors. One respondent explains how all the new actors coming in added another layer on top of the old “aid map”, which made things very messy. The coup essentially froze all previous projects and forced the international community to change their strategies. As a response to the coup, many international donor agencies decided to withdraw their support to the country and those who stayed, as previously mentioned, were confronted with a number of dilemmas in deciding with whom, when and to what extent cooperation should take place. Respondents described how structures that had been built up over several

years were torn apart, making it very difficult for organisations to work together, and even more so in relation to the nexus, which in most cases was deprioritised.

"I mean take the work with human rights, democracy and media as an example. The whole thing was completely broken up. All the actors were either on the run or had left the country. So, the whole sector got completely broken up. The healthcare sector was the same. A lot of staff got arrested and stopped working in healthcare. The staff in healthcare were the ones who really stood on the barricades in the protests against the regime. So the regime hit the healthcare sector extremely hard ... So, the only exception is the civil society in the non-government-controlled areas."

As noted in quote above, many international agencies decided to leave the country. This highlights a very typical response from Western aid organisations in situations such as the one in Myanmar, something that Reid-Henry (2014) refers to as 'selective withdrawal'. According to his theories, humanitarian efforts have always been shaped by both ethical obligations and political biases, which fits in well with the developments that the respondents described happened in the aftermath of the military coup.

But to better understand what happened to the aid system after the military coup, we need to look back at how things were before. One respondent representing an INGO, described how in early 2019 there was a significant lack of local engagement in the humanitarian response in Myanmar. Coming from Syria, where the humanitarian response was remarkably localised, this came as a surprise. Another respondent also confirmed the minimal role of local actors in the response, adding that the attitude of the international community towards these local organisations was not only dismissive, but often openly racist:

"And moving to Myanmar, I was shocked at how, not only how little localization was taking place, but also how the international scope of that Myanmar organisation was extremely dismissive, verging on, I mean, not verging, openly racist in a lot of cases, honestly. And so, I think that was really the situation pre-coup."

This observation highlights a pre-coup situation in Myanmar where the international approach to aid was largely disconnected from local participation and marred by problematic attitudes towards local organisations. This is a clear example of exceptionalism, which according to Hilhorsts (2018) critiques, is one of the cores of the classical humanitarianism paradigm. This helps us understand why national authorities and local institutions are often undervalued in classical humanitarian approaches, as they are often seen as lacking in

capacity, leading to their exclusion when the international aid system activates in times of crisis. One of the risks of this, according to Hilhorst (2018), is that international actors become very out of touch with the communities they are trying to help.

However, after the military coup, this approach changed. One respondent describes how local actors were given more recognition, more space and more responsibility. At the same time, he emphasises that the motives behind this change were probably driven largely by self-interest, rather than goodwill:

"I think there is a recognition of the need for localisation, and I think that that agenda has advanced significantly since the coup. Mostly for practical reasons, not because of the principle of localisation, but because CSOs have more access, and therefore let's work with them. But still, it's a good thing, and taking a more localised approach enables a greater nexus response."

Despite the motivation behind this change, the respondent viewed it positively, suggesting that a more localised approach is beneficial and facilitates a more effective nexus response that integrates all pillars of the nexus. One of the advantages of working with local actors in relation to a concept such as nexus is that, unlike the international aid actors, they do not see the system in terms of nexus pillars and silos. One respondent described how local actors rarely divide problems into development, humanitarian or peace. Instead, they deal with the crises that arise based on what the communities perceive to be the most urgent needs, which then in many cases leads to what the international aid system refers to as triple nexus:

"Because again, if you let local organizations dictate what they want to do, they will give you the nexus. They'll give you nexus objectives and nexus activities, and then it's your job to kind of drive that along, provide best practices, give support where necessary, etc. But dictating to them what is, you know, what is and is not nexus programming is doing it backwards"

A recurring word in my interviews is 'sustainability', with the majority of my respondents describing how localisation is a prerequisite for being able to work in a long-term and sustainable way. This can be linked to what is described by Chandler (2014) as a paradigm shift in the humanitarian field, how the resilience discourse aligns with the intricacies of typical neoliberal governance models, in that it transfers the state's governing responsibilities to non-state or private entities, aiming to empower populations affected by crises. He further declares that a consequence of this transition is the growing ambiguousness and reduced role

of the state in safeguarding its citizens, something that has become evident in Myanmar in particular.

One respondent clearly adds that in Myanmar this shift is not about following the trend of localisation, which has become something of a buzzword in recent years. Rather, he argues that the shift to a more locally-led response is due to access:

"The people who have access to the ground, who have access to those IDPs, who have access to those who are in need of humanitarian assistance are the local community. So, if you want to deliver humanitarian assistance, if you want to deliver development assistance, you have to partnership, you have to go through with the local community"

This raises the question of whether the paradigm of classical humanitarianism is best suited to a context such as Myanmar, focusing on humanitarian principles as a means to secure access to those in need. Myanmar is an example that shows that a different approach, working together and through communities, can enable access to crisis areas that would otherwise not be possible. Hilhorst (2005) argues that in addition to this, there is further added value to taking this approach, as it helps to build trust and fosters more sustainable solutions to problems faced by communities. The respondents from INGOs particularly highlighted the expertise and capability of local actors in navigating high-risk and volatile contexts to deliver aid effectively and emphasised their deep understanding of reaching out to people, providing care, and managing operations discreetly and efficiently. All respondents advocated for a greater emphasis on local-led responses in both humanitarian and development sectors, emphasising the need to empower and support local actors and communities in delivering both humanitarian and development assistance. This approach aligns with the broader localisation agenda of the Grand Bargain, suggesting a shift towards more community-driven and locally informed initiatives in these fields. What is happening in Myanmar in relation to localisation goes against Cochrane and Wilson (2023) idea that the nexus concept may centralise decision-making and distance it from local actors, instead, we can see that in these cases it has actually contributed to the weakening of established power dynamics and bureaucratic control.

Thus, I would argue that this paradigm shift is very favourable for concepts like nexus, as it is increasingly recognised that humanitarianism should not be seen as a standalone effort. The focus on increased localisation is very much in line with what Reid-Henry (2014) refers to as the evolution of humanitarianism, arguing that we are moving from neutrality-based

approaches to strategies of integrated responses and protection mandates. This is particularly true for peace efforts in Myanmar. A majority of respondents mentions the need to localise the work of the peace pillar in a context like Myanmar. They make sure to emphasise that the concept of peace cannot be imposed from the top down, but must instead be built from the ground up, starting within the community. It is underscored how community level peace work creates a better understanding of the nuances of conflict and the perspectives of various groups. But one respondent from a local organisation also pointed out the importance of clarifying what peace means when talking about concepts such as nexus:

"But you know, the risk, there is a huge risk, I would say. When we explained (nexus) to our local partners at one point, I witnessed that this idea of 'hard' peace may be there. So, what kind of peace you are bringing to us? Are you going to bring us to talk with the military regime? Are you pushing for the peace dialogue? The concept might easily get misunderstood."

This shows that if you are not careful and clear in your communication, you risk creating scepticism among local stakeholders who are not familiar with the concept. In this respect, the principle of neutrality becomes an obstacle that prevents local peace efforts and thus also nexus interactions. Tronc et al. (2019) argues that in some cases it may even be wise for international actors to abandon the concept of nexus, as misunderstandings can lead to a loss of trust in aid actors. This is mentioned by several respondents who believe that the international aid community needs to actively avoid anything that risks confusing and damaging relationships with local stakeholders. Brown and Mena (2021) specifically highlight the peace concept as a significant challenge facing the triple nexus, as it is a comprehensive concept encompassing numerous actors and structures at global, regional, and local levels. However, I would argue that in Myanmar, it has been shown that the nexus can lead to peace being redefined as something that originates from the individual and the community, and that this view of peace has enabled collaborations and acted as a unifying force in the country.

While much of the work in Myanmar requires local cooperation, it is not always easy for international actors to determine with whom they can and should work. Localisation has thus meant taking a stance that in many cases goes against the principle of neutrality. This is because local actors are in some cases unaware of humanitarian principles, which is

understandable as they are largely ethical rules created by Western countries. One respondent confirms this as he expresses his belief that certain groups are not familiar with humanitarian principles, particularly the idea of remaining neutral and not taking sides in conflicts. Another respondent notes how local actors are first and foremost focused on helping those in need, regardless of any existing biases or affiliations, further adding to the notion how it is unrealistic to expect local communities to fully comply with humanitarian principles, as they are not formally trained as humanitarian responders. This creates a situation where it is up to each organisation to make assessments, as one respondent describes:

"These civil society actors are aligned with the opposition movement, not just aligned, but actively coordinating, actively participating in opposition movements. They're not necessarily armed themselves, but they are in close contact with and allied with armed groups that are fighting. And therefore, it's a violation of humanitarian principle to work with these types of organisations. Therefore, you should take a stand by supporting, by actively supporting organisations that are not aligned with the military. So, in this case, it would be, for example, working with not just CSOs, but ethnic armed organizations that are considered more legitimate, which have more active service delivery wings, for example, that are responding to the humanitarian crisis. "

Based on this I would argue that by giving more power to local actors and thus increasing their self-determination, it also decentralises the aid system in some respects. In accordance with Kamal (2023), this is a prerequisite for them to be able to fulfil their aspiration for a genuine, systematic solution to the injustice, which according to my respondents is the only long-term and sustainable solution in Myanmar. Hilhorst (2018) describes how the term 'humanitarian system' is now often referred to as an ecosystem, moving away from primarily focusing on international humanitarian organisations, instead recognising a wider range of service providers, including national, local and even private sector entities. This fits well with the respondents' description of the new aid map in Myanmar, post-coup.

One can read between the lines that a major reason for successful nexus interaction is to ignore the classic structures of the international aid system, something that local actors are often good at, even if done unconsciously. One respondent state how there needs to be a shared understanding of what the triple nexus is for it to function and points out how the international aid system is lacking that. This international aid system is very established and has created a certain way of thinking for many INGOs. Henry-Reid (2014) derives this way

of thinking from the liberal state's focus on its on security and therefore its willingness to define what is deficient and incomplete, in this way, humanitarianism in particular becomes a tool for liberal power structures. One respondent explains how Western agencies are very much conditioned to these Western-made structures:

"These are Western aid structures. Basically, we have created these things, but they're not real. They're just artificial structures which the aid industry has built on. People are very conditioned to, people are very conditioned to these silos, which again, we have artificially created."

Based on my data, I would argue that Myanmar is a good example of how international laws and regulations have hampered potential triple nexus synergies. One respondent notes how individuals and organisations within the humanitarian and development sectors have their distinct viewpoints and interests. This suggests that while many pay lip service to the concept of the triple nexus approach, there is a reluctance to fully embrace it. This hesitance may be attributed to a perceived threat to funding and focus areas; funds directed towards nexus initiatives might detract from purely humanitarian or development-oriented projects. One respondent describes the territorial nature of the international aid system and how if complicates cooperation between the different nexus pillars:

"Like, if you are a long-term, you know, you are a humanitarian, say, like, from ECHO, you're not interested in the nexus necessarily, because that's not your, that's not your result objective. So, I think that a lot of the resistance to nexus comes from essentially a turf war kind of stuff."

But there may be a positive outcome of this is as we are seeing international actors putting more faith in local actors who, as previously mentioned, already work from a triple nexus perspective in many cases. One respondent states how local actors, despite not believing or understanding the concept of nexus, plays along just to ensure funding. This comment reveals a very clear hierarchy within the international aid system. This is in line with Kamals (2023) description of the structural problems that can arise due to clear power imbalances, where strategic power is held by the decision-makers in the global North, who also determine the management of resources through their own set of indicators and parameters. Based on my interviews, I would argue this becomes particularly problematic when implementing the triple nexus, as it is a concept best suited to a bottom-up approach, whereas the international aid system is organised with a top-down approach. Kamal (2023) describes the international aid

system as a pyramid-like structure, with most resources at the top, leaving those at the bottom to depend on the gradual distribution of resources down the distribution chain.

One respondent representing an INGO mentions how the majority of their funding goes directly to local partners. This may be more difficult for donor agencies, as circumventing the de facto government can create backlash and lead to them being thrown out of the country. At the same time, they don't want to be at risk of being associated with illegal resistance movements either, so there is a lot of pressure on the donor countries in this regard. Brugger et al. (2022) explains how donor countries often solves this through intermediaries, oftentimes INGOs, who then also takes the risk if something goes wrong. This is confirmed by one respondent:

"I think the limitation is mostly seen in the level of senior people at headquarter level. At country level, people know about the situation and even UN organisations and big NGOs, they always have a.. how to say.. a hidden card, you know, in their hand. They show something to the military regime, but then they always have the alternative solution trying to continue supporting the unregistered or ethnic or politically sensitive organisations who are really working on ground. So, this is the way many NGOs, donors, development partners are working."

In summary, most local actors are already effectively responding to people needs and emergencies, and are considering political issues, including peace, especially in ethnic areas. Even if the local actors are not familiar with the triple nexus concept, their work is very much aligned with the triple nexus approach. This suggests that the triple nexus as a concept is a process that happens naturally in many cases as long as funding and control is handed over from the international aid community to local actors who typically have a good understanding of a community wants and needs. The nexus work in Myanmar is largely characterised by resistance humanitarianism and resilience discourse. This is the result of a process of localisation that has intensified since the military coup in 2021. Respondents tell us that most nexus projects take place in mainly NGCAs and this has created parallel systems within the country, in areas such as health care. This kind of civil defiance is typical for resistance humanitarianism, as resistance movements typically boycott government-controlled institutions and instead form parallel rescue and relief systems to achieve similar outcomes. This often means working in secrecy, since these movements typically operate without consent and that is exactly what we can see is happening in Myanmar right now.

It is also clear that Western aid structures are very inflexible and poorly adapted to contexts like Myanmar, which require a localisation agenda with clear strategies to best implement a concept like nexus. This may be one reason for what Slim (2022) describes as a distrust of the traditional aid models by local actors, who instead pursue independent action free from the constraints of neutrality and what they see as excessive bureaucracy and management. However, I also want to underline some disadvantages of the increased reliance on local actors that has emerged during the interviews. One such disadvantage being the lack of visibility of local actors, compared to bigger INGOs. This is highlighted by one respondent who expressed how the crisis in Myanmar has been overshadowed by other crises, which in turn has affected funding. The respondent notes that whether donors decide to continue funding a crisis depends a lot on how the international aid actors are doing:

"But the problem is people in the headquarters, I would say, those people are a million miles away. And there are a lot of other famous, you know, political news around the world and Myanmar's condition is somehow hidden by all these emerging, you know, rising news. So, people out there think like, we don't want to fund, we don't want to give much funding because you said the operation is not properly going well and also there is a regime."

This exemplifies what Fassin (2007) refers to as a formalised manifestation of liberal moral principles, where the political dimension of Western humanitarianism impacts what type of life is implicitly or explicitly considered. This brings me to my other point, as one respondent describes how funding is a major issue in Myanmar and that the short-term and uncertain funding model makes it more difficult to do any long-term operations in the country. This is likely to affect nexus programming, as it risks being deprioritised when humanitarian, development and peace actors choose to put their own interests ahead of collaboration – especially if cooperation would mean sharing the pot of money. Lastly, it is worth pointing out the international aid community's ability to influence policy change, so without them, outcomes may be more limited.

6.3 Nexus Synergies

In the previous section it was described how the military coup in Myanmar 2021 dramatically changed the aid landscape, bringing in new aid organisations as well as new partnerships. However, this change also meant a rethinking of old strategies. A greater need for local partnerships meant that old power structures were challenged (Kamal, 2023). I therefore find

it interesting to analyse what possible obstacles as well as opportunities this led to. One question that was raised during my interviews was how to work with a concept like the triple nexus, with all pillars included, when the main actor in the conflict is not interested in peace.

The main perspective among my respondents on peace-building programming in Myanmar is based on the premise that peace-building efforts should focus on collaborating with all parties other than the de facto government of Myanmar. One respondent mentions how peace programming in Myanmar is about preparing the population, the different ethnic groups, of a future where the de facto government no longer exists in its current form. Therefore, peacebuilding in Myanmar, as seen by the respondent, should primarily involve working with various opposition and revolutionary groups. The objective is to prepare these groups for a time when they might negotiate at a table with each other and with representatives of the Myanmar military. This suggests a lack of faith in the existing government's role in peacebuilding, or a belief that the government may not be a viable or desirable partner in these efforts. The fact that they aim to ready them for governance roles, suggests a long-term view where these groups are seen as potential future leaders of the country. This approach is very much in line with the kind of resilience discourse Chandler (2014) describes, as it reflects a nuanced understanding of peace-building that goes beyond immediate conflict resolution and aims to shape the political future of the country. Brown and Mena (2021) describe how the introduction of peace aspects into the nexus can create tensions with the humanitarian principles, however, one respondent denies this, saying that it depends on how you look at the situation, suggesting that collaborations can work if you accept certain truths in Myanmar:

"But in Myanmar, I don't see peace-building and humanitarian action as being in conflict. I see them as being very much in unison. You just have to accept that that peace-building does, in a sense.. Or doesn't mean taking a side.. but it does mean accepting that in this particular case, one of the parties to the conflict is not interested in peace and is the obstacle."

Nguya and Siddiqui (2020) highlights how coordination between sectors is essential for implementation of the nexus, as well as having a common understanding and acceptance of its different components. Prior to the military coup, there were some tensions between humanitarian and development actors in particular. One respondent described how much of

this was due to the situation with the Rohingya population and how it was handled by the government, with whom development actors worked closely:

"No. There was a lot of government interaction with the Rohingya crisis, for example, where, again, you had the humanitarian actors saying, you guys are working with this government that is murdering these Rohingya and driving them out of the country. And you had development actors on the other side saying, well, we're trying to change things from the inside, blah, blah, blah."

The quote highlights a fundamental disagreement between humanitarian actors and development actors which can be derived from the humanitarian principles. These are differences that can complicate triple nexus interactions, as development actors have, to a greater extent, the possibility of a more pragmatic approach that is less governed by ethical rules. In this case illustrated by the acknowledgement that meaningful change often requires engagement with existing power structures, even if they are flawed.

Several respondents described how cooperation between humanitarian and development actors changed after the military coup, with many development actors ending or completely redesigning their programmes outside the state system. One respondent describes how the poor conditions of the aid system in the country forced collaboration. Those development actors that decided to stay started working with a humanitarian approach that was faster and less connected to structures. This suggests that the adaptations that needed to be made within the aid system in response of the coup, resulted in better communications and created different, in some ways better, conditions for triple nexus. However, from a donor point of view, the triple nexus framework was not considered important in the beginning:

"It wasn't like we were just working with nexus. It was a storm. We had to reorganise the whole aid strategy. It was more like, how can we continue? What programs can we continue? How do we do that? We had to do a lot of things. It wasn't like we sat down and talked about nexus. It was much more basic. Can the organisation have staff in the country? Can we get money to the organisation? The banking system didn't work. It was on a completely different level. I don't think we talked about nexus."

This highlights how in a time of crisis, strategic discussions such as those about the triple nexus approach are deprioritised by those at the top of the international aid system. Instead, focus is on a return to basic, essential operational concerns such as funding and staff

retention. This is not something that stands out for Myanmar per se, as according to Nguya and Siddiqui (2020), it is normal for structures, funding and priorities to change in relation to the context. In Myanmar's case, this has led to donors bypassing the de facto government, which Brown and Mena (2021) argue is a common response when there is corruption or a lack of strong national leadership.

A benefit mentioned by several respondents was how funding for their humanitarian and development programs often came from the same donors. This created a greater understanding and made the support more aligned and easier to adjust in accordance to the needs. However, a number of respondents were careful to add that the separate silos that exist for humanitarian, development and peace actors are problematic and makes nexus collaborations more difficult. This is in line with the report from Tronc et al. (2019) description of a divided system, governed by mandates and regulations initially intended for distinct types of needs. I would add that the silos created by the international aid system lead to inflexibility and reinforce differences between actors on different sides, which goes against the very concept of nexus. One respondent explains how this is perceived, from those working on the ground:

"The weakness for nexus is when we are pushing for nexus in practice, but still the funding streams are still separated. They are still the different funding streams, even in one entity (donor), they still keep the humanitarian fund and development fund separated, but then they push the nexus on the other hand. So, it's always a bit disengaged."

The international aid system is very much part of what Baylis et al. (2019) refers to as the current global order. A vertical aid system with separate funding streams conflicts with concepts like nexus. It reinforces the impression that the system is run by states with their own interests, as suggested by Carr and Cox (2016), therefore creating a clear disconnect between headquarters and the organisations working on the ground. One respondent describes how these silos creates opportunity costs for the organisations that are in charge of implementation, whereas nexus does the opposite since it allows you to work in more ways than one:

"So, I don't see there as being an opportunity cost with Nexus, because I see much greater opportunity costs than saying, oh, well, we will only do humanitarian, or we will only do development programming, because you're doing these things at the expense of other funding

opportunities, whereas Nexus actually grants you the flexibility to do what communities want, what communities need. So, I see much more opportunity costs in being constrained to one kind of ethos or one way of work."

The importance of flexible funding is clear and appears to be the best way to increase nexus interaction, as it lets organisation adapt their programming more to the community's wants and needs.

My data suggest that the post-coup situation in Myanmar created new synergies between humanitarian, development and peace actors. One respondent described it as a greater mutual understanding and thus also a better ability to reach consensus. This supports Nguya and Siddiqui's (2020) argument that consensus is an important aspect of successful nexus implementation. However, the aforementioned disconnect between the international and the local suggests there is a lack of universal understanding on what the nexus concept means. While local organisations may have a definition and approach within a program, the nexus requires consensus across the entire system to be successful. In Myanmar, consensus has meant a shared understanding of the drivers of the conflict, the humanitarian needs and development strategies. The result was the emergence of new initiatives in which funding for humanitarian actors has in some cases come from the development side, in many cases due to either funding constraints or government restrictions. Respondents highlights how the health fund in Myanmar is a development initiative but since the coup, the money mainly goes to projects in conflict zones. Thus, it can be argued that the aid system in Myanmar adapted and found new solutions that were aligned with the triple nexus. This suggests that nexus interaction is something that can happen naturally when the established aid system is disregarded.

A number of respondents mention how a combination of humanitarian, development and peace efforts are seen as necessary to address the root of the problem. The interviews illustrate how, for example, development actors are working with social cohesion, which can be seen as a peace effort as it aims to reduce ethnic and religious conflict. The fact that humanitarian actors receive funding from development funds also means more long-term funding, thus creating the possibility of longer-term projects. This could indicate a paradigm shift in which the resilience discourse influences the practices of humanitarian actors. Several respondents mention how the lines became blurred between development and humanitarian efforts post-coup, which fits well with the process described by Hilhorst (2018) on how the

difference between crisis and normality becomes less distinct in the perspective of resilience humanitarianism. This point is reinforced by one respondent claiming:

"... Humanitarian actors nowadays also always think about how to support the system level strengthening as well, because we now have a collapsed national health system."

In summary, the conflicts that followed the military coup changed the aid climate in the country, making it particularly more difficult for international actors to operate thus creating a bigger reliance on local actors. I have tried to illustrate how the vertical aid system creates a disconnect between theory and practice regarding the triple nexus, where some local actors described what they perceive as double messages from those setting the agenda, those at the top of the aid pyramid, usually based in offices in the global North.

At the same time, some of these changes have created new synergies between humanitarian, development and peace actors who were forced to adapt to the new reality following the coup. I have argued how this represents a paradigm shift for humanitarian actors, who seem to have adopted a more pragmatic approach, more akin to a development approach. The work is still largely informed by humanitarian principles, but humanitarian actors have increasingly prioritised the principle of humanity over the others. Barnett (2018) explains how this is the essence of humanitarianism, how being apolitical goes beyond simply being non-partisan or overlooking the political ramifications of aid; it's fundamentally an act of humanity, focused on meeting immediate needs to preserve and sustain lives.

Nexus synergies in Myanmar is far from optimal. But based on what many respondents told me, the potential is great provided there is a willingness to adapt. The risk of conflict with the principles, which is often cited as a problem when humanitarian and peace actors work together, was not something my respondents experienced. Instead, they saw opportunities for synergies between the two pillars. I believe this is because much of the peace work considered was based on long-term projects with a bottom-up approach, where the focus was on promoting community empowerment. An important prerequisite being cited, was the need for a shared understanding of the context, the drivers of conflict, humanitarian needs, and the development approach. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for effectively integrating humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts under the triple nexus framework.

7. Discussion

Over the course of this study, it became clear how much of the literature talking about the conflict between triple nexus cooperation and humanitarian principles often is produced by the humanitarian side. In response to this I chose to focus on exploring what is possible when humanitarianism is approached as a concept with several different paradigms, to deduct whether this was simply a misconception based on a lack of understanding of the triple nexus framework.

I would consider many of the opinions expressed in the interviews as leaning more towards a form of resistance humanitarianism, which then naturally means that much of my material is characterised by a scepticism towards what is often referred to as the classical school of humanitarianism. This may be a product of the context in which these respondents operate and is thus not necessarily representative of how they reason in other contexts. However, in this section I will therefore try to nuance the picture by discussing the many differences that I perceived during my conversations with the participants. Each respondent came from very different backgrounds, which provides an interesting starting point for this section.

7.1 Legitimacy

My final interview conducted was with a person representing a donor agency, which was interesting from several perspectives as it gave me an insight into the processes at the top of the aid pyramid. What became clear is how these actors need to manage a completely different balancing act where legitimacy is at stake. In a context like Myanmar, the legitimacy of humanitarian actors is very fragile since both political dynamics and local perceptions need to be taken into account. Thus, the triple nexus approach requires careful management to avoid the perception that humanitarian efforts are being politicised, which could undermine their neutrality and impartiality.

In my interviews, I found that humanitarian principles were given a higher priority by donors. This may be explained by the considerable distance between donors and those working on the ground with implementation. According to Tronc et al. (2019) this can become a barrier as donors might lack contextual knowledge and therefore have unrealistic expectations on outcomes. Based on this, I believe that the triple nexus framework would work better in a system that encourages decision-making at the local level. In the case of the triple nexus, it is clear why top-down approaches continue to fail: there is no system-wide consensus on how best to take the concept from theory to practice. Additionally, the triple nexus framework,

despite being a common topic at strategic and policy meetings among big INGOs, UN and donor agencies, has not effectively reached or been adapted for those working at the frontline.

This suggests a disinterest in the concept by the international aid community. Which begs the question if this is simply due to a reluctance to decentralise the system and thus relinquish power and resources? Baylis et al. (2019) believes that it is in the nature of liberalism to maintain the order of power in the system, and that humanitarianism is just a tool to do so. If this is the case, I would argue that this poses a threat to the legitimacy of the international aid community, as it confirms Kamals (2023) notion that Western liberal-leaning agencies are biased and non-neutral. This would help to undermine the humanitarian principles and make them appear to be something that Western humanitarian organisations will adhere to as long as it suits their own interests. This could also explain what Slim (2022) suggests about local actors and how they often become disenchanted with traditional models of aid, prompting them to abandon these methods in favor of independent initiatives, free from the constraints of neutrality and what they see as excessive bureaucracy and management.

7.2 Paradigms

I believe the nexus concept provides essential perspectives for both diagnosis and practice and has the potential to help drive forward the decentralisation agenda often discussed in the context of policy initiatives such as the Grand Bargain. In the case of Myanmar, it was interesting to see how the political disruptions created new nexus synergies and helped facilitate increased localisation to the benefit of nexus cooperations.

All the interviews emphasise the fact that the principles can be interpreted in different ways and that they have to be weighed up against each other. This is not necessarily remarkable in itself, but it does show a flexibility among actors that somewhat surprised me. One explanation could be that there has been a shift in the way humanitarianism is viewed. I would argue that a concept like the triple nexus is helping to drive this paradigm shift in Myanmar. My reasoning is that the collaboration that triple nexus promotes leads to greater understanding between the different pillars. This interplay also means that humanitarian actors are exposed to different organisational cultures that can influence their perspectives and, in turn, the way they work.

At the same time, I am not sure that the nexus is a concept that is needed, as I believe it is something that would have largely come about naturally if the system were decentralized and decision-making moved to the local level. Several respondents testify that local actors work according to a triple nexus approach unconsciously, and that their own needs analyses often result in an integrated response. If you look at the triple nexus from this perspective, it appears more as a tool used to maintain the current power structures: another concept that must be measured and reported on, requiring more resources and thus excluding many small organisations.

One observation I made among my respondents was that donors' views were perceived to lean more towards classical humanitarianism while local actors were more focused on resistance humanitarianism. The INGOs I interviewed became a kind of intermediary, which Brugger et al. (2022) explain is not uncommon in this system. They were expected to balance donor requirements while maintaining the trust of local actors, which meant they faced many ethical dilemmas.

Myanmar presents a fascinating case to examine through this lens. I have observed a dynamic where the crisis in Myanmar has driven various actors towards adopting a more resistance-oriented humanitarian approach. Numerous respondents contend that this perspective is essential for the nexus concept to be effective. In a situation like Myanmar's, addressing the fundamental causes is imperative, and this demands a holistic approach.

I believe the limited international recognition for humanitarian resistance is primarily due to its inability to present a compelling alternative to the current aid system, which is heavily inclined towards government and state-centric organisations with formal, vertical structures. Slim (2022) describes how resistance humanitarians are challenging the international aid structures due to their ability to operate extensively in the most severely affected regions, while in many cases also having an easier time to gain legitimacy.

I would like to conclude this by reiterating what Slim (2022) writes in his article. Based on my interviews, I believe that it is clear how the situation in Myanmar requires a restructuring of the aid system, a new approach that is driven by local leadership and built on a horizontal framework where emphasis is put on the development and support of individuals and organisations at the grassroots level. To effectively build resilience, external international

actors need to revise their methods and back a form of resistance humanitarianism that consciously avoids military involvement (Slim, 2022).

8. Conclusion

Throughout this study I have tried to outline the intricate nature of the triple nexus framework and how it relates to the humanitarian principles in Myanmar. I have brought you through the process of my methodology as well as the analytical framework employed, alongside justifications drawn from relevant literature. The interpretative nature of the triple framework necessitated conducting interviews with individuals knowledgeable about and involved in the triple nexus processes to deepen the understanding and gain insights into its interaction with the humanitarian principles. These interviews, held remotely, involved participants from various sectors, including headquarters, field offices, and donor organisations in Myanmar, as well as North America and Europe. By interviewing five individuals across these entities, the study incorporated diverse perspectives and partially bridged the identified research gap. My aim was to do a case study on the triple nexus framework in Myanmar, exploring the challenges, obstacles, and opportunities encountered in relation to the humanitarian principles. Additionally, due to the complexity of the situation in Myanmar post-coup, I wanted to look at whether the non-democratic system of governance had any impact on nexus implementation. The insights gained from the interviewees has led to a compilation of findings that I have chosen to present below, together with my research questions.

8.1 Research Question 1

How are the humanitarian principles aligned with the triple nexus in Myanmar:

Based on my data, it can be concluded that there is some flexibility in the approach to the humanitarian principles in Myanmar. The general view was that humanitarian principles are not rules but guidelines and that they need to be interpreted differently depending on the situation. The principle of neutrality was most frequently mentioned as a potential obstacle to nexus cooperation. However, it was generally felt that there was no major conflict between the humanitarian principles and the triple nexus framework in Myanmar. Rather, the most frequent conflict mentioned was the one between the principles themselves, in particular between the principle of humanity and the principle of neutrality, which created a dilemma for aid actors.

This does not necessarily mean that the triple nexus and the humanitarian principles are well aligned, but it does suggest that the concern often mentioned among humanitarian actors is exaggerated in a context of Myanmar. The geographical context may be a reason as to why the humanitarian principles are not considered a major obstacle. This is because the aid in

Myanmar is largely driven by local actors and resistance movements, which in some cases might not value the humanitarian principles as highly and in other cases are not even aware of their existence. This form of resistance humanitarianism is generally better aligned with triple nexus, as it pays less attention to the principle of neutrality in comparison to its counterpart, the classical Dunantist humanitarianism. My data suggests that a strict adherence to the principle of neutrality would, in the case of Myanmar, hinder an effective implementation of the triple nexus framework. I would like to point out that this is not representative of all actors working in Myanmar as my data for the study has been limited, but this is as far as I got in answering my research question.

8.2 Research Question 2

Have the non-democratic system of governance in Myanmar had any impact on triple nexus interactions:

My data suggests that there has been a shift in the dynamics of aid delivery in Myanmar, influenced by the actions of the de facto government. It was generally felt that the aid in Myanmar had been politicised and that aid distribution and access were being influenced or controlled by political factors. In response to these challenges, there was a noted change in how organisations were approaching humanitarian aid, by INGOs in particular. Moving away from classic humanitarianism and shifting to a more resistance-focused approach in order to circumvent some of the restrictions imposed by the de facto government.

A significant change was noted in post-coup Myanmar, with an increased reliance on local actors for aid delivery. This has facilitated the triple nexus as the traditional distinctions and potential conflicts between the nexus pillars became less pronounced when the approach got more aligned with local realities and less bound by strict adherence to traditional humanitarian principles.

To conclude, I would say that there is no evidence that the non-democratic system of governance directly impacted nexus synergies, rather, it was the restrictions imposed by the de facto government that forced the actors to find new solutions and thus changed the conditions for the implementation of the triple nexus.

9. Perspectives

What happens if a donor provides funding to an organisation where it turns out that there are people who have done something illegal? A recent example is the situation with UNRWA and its staff members, who were found to conspire with Hamas in the attack on Israel that killed at least 1,200 people and took around 250 hostages. The accused staff members were dismissed and no longer represent UNRWA, but several donors have nevertheless decided to withdraw their support. This now threatens to have devastating consequences for the population of Gaza, which is in dire need of humanitarian support.

I believe that this reaction among donors is an example of the political nature of the international aid system, This risks discouraging international organisations from relying on local actors, which goes against initiatives such as the Grand Bargain and triple nexus.

Much of my study has focused on the decentralisation of aid and how power should be distributed more evenly with the local actors who are often first responders in a conflict, in order to make the system more effective and create a stronger link between theory and practice. Implementing a concept like nexus in a context like Myanmar clearly requires localisation to best reach the population. At the same time, it is impossible to guarantee the neutrality of all these local actors who, in addition to their work, are also citizens with their own dreams of a liberated Myanmar.

What would happen to aid in Myanmar if the resistance movement was labelled a terrorist organisation tomorrow? I believe this highlights a problem with the current power imbalance in the aid system, where liberal powers (and values) determine what is good and bad and thus which lives are worth saving. I would therefore argue that, in the contexts of these power structures, the principle of neutrality has the ability of becoming the ultimate example of 'politics of life', in turn overshadowing the very essence of humanitarianism, the humanity.

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